FISH OUT OF THE WATER? A COLLECTIVE CASE STUDY ON IDENTITY

NEGOTIATION OF RURAL STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

By

A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in partial fulfilment of

requirements for the degree of

Master of Education

Faculty of Education

Memorial University of Newfoundland

September 2020

St. John's   Newfoundland

Abstract

Students from rural background are more likely to become the first generation in their families to attend higher education. Growing up in an environment where the geographical and cultural features are hugely contrasted with that of urban areas, rural students will come across more challenges and difficulties when they arrive in university, where they would meet students and faculty with different social class backgrounds and experience a diversity of cultures. The upward social mobility university brings will push for a transformation of identity, which can be a challenge to the rural students as they often lack the economic and cultural assets that are usually possessed by those students coming from well-off families.

This research adopted the qualitative research method and chose a collective case study research design to investigate the identity negotiation issues of rural students in higher education. Through interviewing ten participants who are currently studying at the Memorial University of Newfoundland, this research reveals some insights into the lives of rural students in a new social context, one that is largely different from where they came from. Drawn on Bourdieu's sociological perspective, this research has found that since they were back in the rural community, these participants have started to "think outside the box" and have developed a reflexive habitus, which helps the participants to plan for higher education since they were young and decide to follow a different life path as most rural people. After they have entered university, they kept on modifying themselves to adjust to the lives in a different social context and conquer various academic and non-academic challenges brought by symbolic violence and social reproduction. In the end, they are able to develop a dual identity, which is consisted of their old rural identity and the new identity they have acquired in the university. This dual identity not

only helps them to fit in the field of the university but to balance their lives between the rural

context and the urban context.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank my supervisor, professor Dr. Dennis Mulcahy. Thank you so much for taking me as your student. Your abundant and professional knowledge in rural education has lightened my way and helped me to find my research interest. Without your guidance and support, I would never be able to complete the thesis.

I would also like to thank Dr. Barbara Gilbert Mulcahy, who gave me so many valuable suggestions on the research proposal and the thesis.

Millions of thanks to the ten participants. Thank you for accepting my invitation to join the research and sharing your stories with me. Your unique life experience is the foundation of this thesis.

Many thanks to the staffs from the Faculty of Education. Thank you for answering various of my questions over and over again.

Great thanks to my bible study friends Kitty and Indrek, who had helped me millions of times during my stay in the lovely city of St. John's. May God bless you and your family.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my parents, especially my mum, who not only supported my study in Canada, but helped me to take care of my daughter Laura and never complained a word. Your encouragement and support during all these years made me who I am today.

And finally, I would like to thank the Memorial University of Newfoundland. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to study in one of the best countries in the whole world.

Thank you all!

To my one year old daughter Laura, whose innocent and pure smile

cheers and inspires me in every way.

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FGCs   First generation college students

MUN   Memorial University of Newfoundland

NL   Newfoundland and Labrador

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Background of Study

Years ago, I spent a short time as an undergraduate student at Harbin Normal University in Harbin, China. During my short stay there, I noticed an interesting phenomenon, which is quite normal in many universities and urban schools. Students tended to stay in groups wherever they went. Whether it is in the classroom, dining hall, dormitory, or gym, you can find boys or girls gathered in separate small groups, each of which usually consisted of no more than four people. If you examined these students in the groups carefully as an anthropologist does, you would find that these social groups are not formed randomly. Based on my observation and personal experience, these students, when they were searching for potential suitable group members to accompany them spending four years in university studying and living together, not only were they looking for someone who shares the same temperament, interests and tastes, but they were carefully scrutinizing each person's family and educational background before welcoming the person into the group. For example, in many but not all cases, those students with high academic achievement don't tend to associate with students with low academic achievement; rich students do not tend to associate with poor students, and urban students do not associate with rural students.

Sometimes, especially in a country like China, one can tell a rural person from a city person easily from his or her dark complexion (being exposed to sunshine all year round because of farming activities), regional dialects, style of dress, and frugal lifestyle. I noticed that in the university, those urban students tended to avoid contact with these groups of rural students, not to mention making friends with them. Nobody brought this issue to light, but it became a hidden social rule which guided many urban students in the university. Once, I tried to ask one urban

student why she would not talk to a student who was from rural area, she said: "We have nothing in common in our life and therefore could not find the things to talk about. We usually go out for shopping on weekends, but she works part-time instead. We often go to the fancy restaurant together, but she would not go because it is too expensive for her. It is not that we look down upon her or something, but it is just we have a very different life." Those rural students, being alienated from urban students, usually ended up being alone or forming groups among themselves.

This issue reminds me of a notorious crime that happened around fifteen years ago in Yunnan university in China (Wikipedia, n.d.). A rural student murdered his four roommates out of hatred and jealousy. In the interview after he was captured, he said his roommates often laughed at him for being poor and accused him of cheating in the card games. This crime turned out to be a huge tragedy for both the victims and the murderer. The murderer, who was in his parents and local people's accounts, a very "hard-working" and "devoted" student and son, took a great deal to uplift himself from an extremely poor rural home to university. His life should finally begin to thrive when it is abruptly closed forever because of his impetuosity and feeling of inferiority.

The experiences I have seen back in the university and the famous crime filled my head full of questions: what kinds of experience rural students have when they enter university? Why are there so many unhappy and unsuccessful university experiences, especially for rural students? How do these rural students negotiate between their rural identity and the urban university experience? What are the strategies that can help these rural students to make a successful transition from their rural background to urban life? These questions motivated me to conduct research on the subject of identity negotiation issue of rural students.

1.2 Research problem

Higher education experience plays a vital role in a person's life, as it not only presents more employment possibilities, but it provides the chance for personal development, including earning independence from the family and forming new identities (Aries & Seider, 2005; Baxter & Britton, 2001; Karp, Holmstrom, & Grey, 1998). Wiborg (2001) also noted that higher education serves as a transitional tool to transform people's life, which involve detachment with one's formal social structure and connection with a new social setting, during which process new individual identity may evolve. Despite the various benefits of higher education, some research pointed out that the higher education enrollment rate from rural areas is lower than that of the urban area (Fleming & Grace; 2017; Finnie, Childs, & Wismer, 2011; Friesen & Stephenson, 2016). Thiele, Pope, Singleton, Snape and Stanistreet (2017) identified that identity-related elements could influence a student's decision on whether or not to continue post-secondary studies. Generally speaking, new students often feel frightened and uncertain about their university life (Aries & Seider, 2005). Moreover, their relationship with their family and old friends change due to their exposure to the new environment that transforms their identity (Karp et al., 1998). The different practices and experiences in university eventually may lead to identity conflict between one's building of a new identity and adjusting to an old one (Baxter & Britton, 2001). Furthermore, such identity conflict seems to appear more frequently among students from a lower socioeconomic background (Aries & Seider, 2005), including those coming from rural areas (Friesen & Stephenson, 2016).

Students from rural areas, aside from their lower socioeconomic background, grow up in an environment where the geographical and cultural features are hugely contrasted with that of

urban areas. Many of the rural university students are the first in their family history to enter higher education (Provasnik et al., 2007); therefore, they will come across students and faculty with different social class backgrounds and encounter whole new and different cultures (Aries & Seider, 2005; Karp et al., 1998). The upward social mobility university brings will push for a transformation of identity (Baxton & Britton, 2001) and a change in "judgement, taste, opinions, preferences and practices" (Aries & Seider, 2007, p. 140), which can be a challenge to the rural students as they often lack the economic and cultural assets that are usually possessed by those students coming from well-off families (Aries & Seider, 2005). These rural students, like other groups of disadvantaged students, struggle to connect their past self and future self and face various problems, including detachment from their family and old cultural background, and not being accepted into the world of higher class they enter (Aries & Seider, 2007; Lawler, 1999; Wentworth & Peterson, 2001; Wiborg, 2001). The identity-related struggle can affect students' performance in academic and social life in university (Thiele et al., 2017). As students' healthy self-identity recognition plays an important role in preparing them for planning for the future, including making decisions about pursuing higher education and helping them adapt themselves to the university life (Thiele et al., 2017), therefore, if university administrations wish to recruit more rural students, attention must be given to the identity negotiation problem those rural students encounter during their stay in university.

1.3 Research Purpose

Most current related research focuses on the identity negotiation issue of disadvantaged students in higher education from a social class perspective. However, only a few research studies have been focusing on the subject specifically from a rural perspective and exploring how

the urban university life affects the identity of those students with a rural background (Friesen & Stephenson, 2016). This research aims to make a response to the suggestion made by Friesen and Stephenson, who called for future study on exploring the identity negotiation process of rural students between their rural experience and university experience.

1.4 Significance of Research

By understanding how the identities of rural university students are renegotiated when they start a new life in universities, this research could help the university officials to prepare strategies to ensure a successful transition to university for rural students. This study also could guide the university and department of education in the local government on planning future rural student recruitment strategies to attract more rural students to continue higher education, which eventually could enhance both personal development and whole communities (Friesen & Stephenson, 2016). Furthermore, to date, similar studies regarding the experience and transition of rural university students have little been explored in the context of Canada, especially in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador (NL). This proposed research regarding the identity transformation of rural university students is the first ever conducted in the province of NL, although the focus of the research is not solely on NL. The findings of the research would have an implication on the recruitment of rural students and the transition of new rural university students not only in the province of NL but in other parts of Canada.

1.5 Research Questions

This research is going to address the following research questions:

1. How do rural students' backgrounds influence their university experiences?

2. How do the university experiences of rural students influence their perception of their backgrounds?

3. How do rural students' backgrounds and university experiences shape their identity?

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

In this chapter, related to the topic regarding the transition of rural university students has been explored. In order to understand the identity negotiation issues of rural students in higher education, it is vital to first understand their rural upbringing, the rural values and their experience in higher education. Moreover, since rural students also are more likely to come from a lower socioeconomic background, research on university students who come from a lower socioeconomic background, such as those working-class and first-generation university students, will also throw essential light on the experience of rural students.

This chapter investigates four main topics, which are the life in rural communities; rural students' entry to higher educational institutions; the experience of rural students in higher education, and the identity issues related to students from a lower socioeconomic background.

2.1 Rural Life

2.1.1 Definition of rurality

Pizzoli and Gong (2007) pointed out that there is no universal standard definition of rurality. Instead, the definition in each country is based on the local context and can be different in criteria such as population size and density (Plessis, Beshiri, Bollman, & Clemenson, 2002).

In Canada, Plessis et al. (2002) recommended the rural area be referred to "rural and small town", which means " the population living in towns and municipalities outside the commuting zone of larger urban centres (i.e. outside the commuting zone of centres with population of 10,000 or more) (p. 35). In a longitudinal survey of low-income students, which investigated postsecondary education experience of three different groups of low-income students in Canada, Finnie, Childs and Wismer (2012) also defined rural areas as places with less

than 10000 people. Moreover, Plessis et al. (2002) suggested that the definition of rural should

be based on different questions, which focused on different perspectives, and the given definition

only serves as "a starting-point and benchmark" (p. 1). The definition of rural has been

interpreted differently in other research based on different contexts. For example, Statistics

Canada (2017) offered a narrower approach to define the rural area as places with a population of

less than 1000 people and a population density of less than 400 people per square kilometer

according to the 2011 Census. In the context of NL, the government of Newfoundland and

Labrador defines rural as areas with population of under 5000 (Government of NL, 2019).

In developing countries like China, the government separates the urban and rural

populations by developing the household registration system (Wang, 2017). It aims to curb rural

out-migration and control the urban-rural population (Chan, 2010). The creation of urban and

rural household systems not only has geographical implications, but it serves as a benchmark of

the different levels of access to rights and benefits in terms of social, economic, educational and

political aspects among rural and urban citizens (Chan, 2010). Chan (2010) highlighted that,

under the administration of the household system, Chinese people are unable to migrate and

reside freely as they wish as they are deprived of the access to social welfare provided in the city,

which are enjoyed by urban people, including advanced healthcare, education and social

insurance system.

As the situation in each country is different, it is impossible to find a standard definition of

rurality that applies in all countries. However, some common characteristics are shared by rural

areas in most countries. Atkin (2003) listed six general characteristics of rurality, which are:

    1. Small scale—small schools, small villages, small churches, small communities.

2. Isolated-----separated from services and amenities (also safer by dislocation from urban settings).

3. A product of agriculture and its environmental activity (Note: In the case of NL, the province is distinguished by resource-based industry such as fishery and mining).

4. Strong community feeling, friendlier than urban communities, more tightly knit.

5. Conservative and traditional values.

6. A slower, less pressurized way of life. (p. 511)

Aside from the above, Pizzoli and Gong (2007) noted that human capital, such as the educational level of the rural population is lower than that of urban areas. The geographical image of the rural area is also distinct, with its natural landscape such as mountains and forests, and in some areas which are marked by the extreme weather (Pizzoli & Gong, 2007). Pizzoli and Gong (2007) highlighted that population density should not be considered as the single variable to define the rural and urban setting. Instead, a multidimensional perspective should be taken and put other variables such as economic resources and human capital into consideration when defining rural areas.

2.1.2 Rural attachment and rural identity

"The place as a specific and material geographical location, framing people's lives, has less primary importance than place as a cultural construction which is shaped and maintained through social relations and within people's minds" (Appadurai, 1990, as cited in Wiborg, 2004, p. 418). A place, sometimes occupied by the inhabitants for years, or in some cases even for generations (Durkheim, 1964), could help the local people generate a sense of belonging to the place. The aboriginal people ascribe cultural and spiritual meaning to their land, which they have

occupied for thousands of years (Lehman, 2008). Such feeling of attachment is also felt by the rural people who live in remote areas (Stewart & Abbott-Chapman, 2011). Such feeling is not only related to the physical familiarity with the environment but is demonstrated through the knowledge of, and the involvement with the place (Gieryn, 2000; Woods, 2011). The sense of attachment and belonging is also fortified through shared beliefs and practices in the local community (Abbott-Chapman, Johnston, & Jetson, 2014). Abbott-Chapman et al. (2014) identified two types of belonging felt by the rural people. The first type refers to the "emotional belonging" (p. 306) which is usually felt by farmers who make a living out of farming, whereas "functional belonging" (p. 306) is expressed by those who work in the nearby community, where they are attached to the place out of working necessity. Both of these two groups of people share the feeling of attachment to the place in terms of family and community support, especially in the face of difficulties (Abbott-Chapman et al., 2014).

The sense of belonging to a place is also related to a person's identity (Gieryn, 2000; Stewart & Abbott-Chapman, 2011; Wiborg, 2004). Acquiring an identity through connection with a place is most apparent in the traditional area where people live close (Abbott-Chapman et al., 2014). The way people perceive their homeplace, and how they believe themselves are connected to the place form important parts of a person's identity (Gieryn, 2000). In the study of Wiborg (2004), a rural student who went on to higher education in the urban area expressed a strong connection to his rural past. He believed nature and the farm in his hometown served as a strong link between his present self and his family and past background. He also believed the social and cultural dispositions he acquired through his rural childhood could help him in his pursuing future employment. Moreover, the students in Wiborg's study shared the common belief that growing up in rural areas makes them feel more like "grassroots" and closer to nature,

which they believed have constituted a vital part of their identity. This side of their identity made them feel unique in the way of thinking compared to those university students from urban areas (Wiborg, 2004).

2.1.3 Out-migration: Rural youth

Out-migration of rural populations dated back to centuries ago, and it is a familiar experience for many rural people (Jamieson, 2000). Various reasons cause out-migration for rural youth. Wiborg (2004) noted that the traditional stereotype of the domestic role of women prevents them from achieving a professional goal. Rye (2006) pointed out that a majority of rural youth in his study perceived rural life as boring. Some rural young people leave home as they perceive little attachment to the place and have little support from the family (Johnson, Elder, & Stern, 2005). Jones (1999) pointed out that although the close ties in the small rural communities increase the feeling of attachment among rural people, in other cases, especially for some young people, the close environment also makes people feel too limited or confined because of the tight scrutiny imposed upon them by fellow rural people due to the proximity. More social restrictions are imposed on the local people in rural communities, where local culture strives for uniformity (Rye, 2006). In Jones's (1999) study, living in a close environment for some people means putting people's privacy at risk and left people exposed to gossip and disruption, which caused some people to leave as a means of escape. Moreover, due to the nature of the rural area, the potential for individual development is limited, and several problems are common in rural areas, including lack of jobs or inable to get access to various public services (Woods, 2011). More rural students migrate to cities for better employment opportunities or to continue higher

education (Jones, 1999). Johnson et al. (2005) also noted that greater ambition and higher personal abilities could motivate people to migrate to more urban places to achieve success.

Ni Laoire (2001) noted that in rural Ireland, out-migration is embedded in traditional cultural expectations, which relates the idea of out-migration with heroism and underrates staying. "To stay behind implies being left behind" (Ni Laoire, 2001, p. 224). The high cultural expectations imposed on migration might be a result of the media propaganda, which related migration to higher chances of employment and personal development (MacLaughlin, 1997).

In the study conducted by Jamieson (2000), the researcher found that rural out-migration is also related to social class background. Those rural students who came from a middle-class family are more likely to consider migration at an early stage due to their parents' higher expectations and the various resources provided for them. As for those working-class students, many of them did not think of the idea until later in their life.

Rural schools sometimes play a role in motivating students to pursue better development opportunities elsewhere. Jamieson (2000) highlighted that high academic performance in school usually triggers those rural working-class students' motivation to go out and gain more opportunities despite their low social class background and a lack of family support. In a study conducted in Nova Scotia, Canada, Corbett (2007a) documented that some rural schools taught students the importance of leaving the local communities and finding opportunities outside the rural homeplace. In another study by Corbett (2005), he examined the relationship between education and rural out-migration in Digby Neck, Nova Scotia, Canada, between the period of the 1960s and 1990s. Corbett found that young people in Digby Neck showed fewer migration trends as time went by, which might be the result of higher education cost and the misrecognition of the value of formal education among young people. Formal education, in rural people's eyes,

as Corbett stated, could disrupt the traditional rural life. As a result, many rural people resist

education, which could be reflected in the high school attrition rate and low higher education

enrollment rate. Corbett stressed the important role formal rural education plays in helping young

people move away and settle elsewhere. He suggested the policymakers implement context-

based education in rural areas to help develop the local rural communities instead of

destabilizing it.

2.1.4 Out-migration: Rural Canada

Canada, like other developed countries, also experiences rural out-migration, and the

reasons which lead to out-migration are also similar to other countries. Clemenson and Pitblado

(2007) pointed out that advanced technology has replaced manual labor in many rural working

areas, including fishing, mining, farming, which leads to unemployment of local people.

Moreover, education is closely correlated with rural out-migration. Among the people who

moved to urban areas, young people aged between 20-24 took up the highest percentage in the

period between 1976 and 1996. Many young people left for cities to pursue higher education or

employment opportunities (Clemenson & Pitblado, 2007).

Corbett (2007b) analyzed the rural women's out-migration in Atlantic Canada, and he

made several discoveries. Drawing data from the two surveys which covered over 700 people

from Digby Neck, Nova Scotia, he focused on the educational and migration background of the

rural young people from the 1950s to the late 1990s. The researcher explained that since fishing,

which is the primary local employment resource for the coastal community, could provide little

financial advancement for women, women were more likely to leave. However, these women did

not tend to move far as they wished to keep the connection with their community and maintain the family relationship by living close to home. Moreover, most of the jobs offered nearby do not require higher education. Moreover, local women's high school completion rate was much higher than the local male. However, they earned only half of what the men earned in the area, which reinforced the common belief that education is a waste of time. The researcher pointed out that although the women may achieve higher educational credentials than men, their choice of staying in the local community or only moving to the nearby community restricts their financial development. Furthermore, Corbett (2007b) also highlighted that those who moved far away were much more likely to have higher education than those who stayed. He pointed out that although some local people with low educational level may find a well-paid job in Ontario or Alberta, however, in most cases, these good jobs require higher education credentials, "in other words, a successful long-term migrant now needs a post-secondary education." (p. 439). Corbett described Atlantic Canadian migrants as "a well-educated young woman as opposed to an uneducated, independent, young manual labourer" (p. 440).

In another Atlantic Canada province, Newfoundland and Labrador (NL), where this research is based, Lynch (2007) showed that despite the effort made by local government to retain the rural population, many rural areas in the province experienced a decrease of population since 2001, which was related to the decline of fishing industries. In fact, long before that, the population had already started to decline, followed by the government's move to ban cod fishing in 1992 (Atkin, 2003). Until the year 2001, the number of young people age between 15 to 24 dramatically declined by nearly 10% since the 1980s (Lynch, 2007). Lynch suggested that the local government must make policies that could sustain the local economics to retain rural people in the province. Aside from the decline of employment opportunities, MacDonald, Sinclair and

Walsh (2002) pointed out that the diverse urban life portrayed by the media nowadays stimulates young people to have higher aspirations for their life. Unlike previous generations, they are no longer content with working in the fishery. Many of them continued higher education to earn themselves a better future and those who did not have higher education credentials left for other provinces, where higher-paid blue-collar jobs existed (MacDonald et al., 2002). MacDonald et al. (2002) also addressed different patterns of migration in rural Newfoundland such as short-term migration, which either refers to people relocating their whole family temporarily only for specific working seasons or individuals going out for short-term work, leaving families behind.

2.1.5 Out-migration and identity

The global issue of rural out-migration triggers research discussion about identity issues. Bauman (1992) believed that spatial mobility in modern society deprives the chances for people to nurture an attachment to any place since any place becomes only "temporary stations" (p. 695). Furthermore, he used two metaphors to describe the current status of the migration. "Vagabond" refers to those people who go between places with no aim about where to settle. These groups of people are in local people's eyes always an outsider, as "too fresh is the memory of his arrival-, that is, of his being elsewhere before; he still smells of other places, of that beyond against which the homestead of the natives has been built" (Bauman, 1995, p. 94). "Tourists" are those people who have a home in mind during their move. However, as they move between places to places, the notion of home becomes blurry. Rather than looking for a real home, the "tourists" are really looking for a sense of belonging (Bauman, 1995). These two notions present the identity crisis that happens nowadays to many migrants, including those rural migrants who pursue their future aspirations in cities. Rural students who go to cities to continue higher education also experience change in their sense of belonging and identity attached to their

rural home (Friesen & Stephenson, 2016; Qing, 2017). The rural youth usually feel disturbed by the feeling between their attachment to the rural home and the aspirations for opportunities for future development (Johnson et al., 2005).

Rapport and Dawson (1998) highlighted the influence of home on a person caused by place mobility that the meaning a person ascribes to the home place might change, followed by that person's leaving. In the study of Wiborg (2004), some students reported feeling more attached to the rural community after leaving. However, some other students are found to have a less emotional connection to the place. The feeling of detachment from the rural place is most keenly felt by the children of incomers who migrated to rural areas instead of being born there. In fact, the young people from middle-class incomer backgrounds showed the most out-migration trend compared with middle-class local and working-class families (Jamieson, 2000). These children of incomers found it hard to be accepted and involved in the local communities, which caused difficulties in forming local identities (Jones, 1999). For example, in the study of Wiborg (2004), Tina, a student who moved into the rural area with her parents when she was a child, felt like a newcomer instead of a local because she did not have relatives living in the same area as other local people did. For Tina, her sense of belonging to the place is not so strong as those who had more social connections there. She believed that nature, which the rural place implies, means more to her than the place itself did. This case is aligned with Bauman's (1992) belief about the effect of detachment that mobility brings.

In contrast, Friedman (1977) believed that mobility in modern society increases people's attachment to the place. Another participant, Susan, in Wiborg's (2004) study demonstrated that some parts of her rural background which she used to perceive as negative experience turned into positive memory once she left for university, and she became proud of her rural identity and used

that to distinguish herself from her urban friends. Some rural migrants in Jamieson's (2000) study reported wishing to come back to their rural place under the influence of their strong attachment to the community and their perceived rural identity. Similarly, in the study of MacDonald et al. (2002), the researchers found that some Newfoundlanders and Labradorians returned to their rural community after finishing post-secondary education. The reasons for returning were multiple, such as attachment to their family and the local community, and the high expense of living in the urban area. MacDonald et al. (2002) also pointed out that in a survey of those who worked outside Newfoundland and Labrador, 60% of participants expressed willingness to come home if conditions allowed.

2.2 Rural Students' Entry to Higher Educational Institution

2.2.1 Higher education enrollment rate for rural students

Numerous studies have highlighted the fact that the higher education enrollment rate for rural students is lower than that for urban students, and the problem of unequal access to higher education between rural and urban students is prevalent in many countries (Fleming & Grace; 2017; Finnie, Childs, & Wismer, 2011; Friesen & Stephenson, 2016).

For example, Fleming and Grace (2017) pointed out that despite the steady increase of the enrollment rate in higher education institutions nationwide, in Australia, three groups of people show no improvement in their participation in higher education. They are students from remote rural areas, those from the low socioeconomic background, and Indigenous people.

Similarly, in Canada, based on the data collected from the longitudinal Youth in Transition Survey (Finnie et al., 2011), students from higher socioeconomic families and with

higher educated parents are more likely to go to higher education. In Canada, rural students are more than 10% less likely to enter university than students from urban areas (Finnie et al., 2011).

The problem of inequality in education is more severe in developing countries like China. Li, Loyalka, Rozelle, Wu and Xie (2015) drew data from a 2003 database, which contained the information of every student who took part in the College Entrance Exam. Among nearly six million students nationwide who took part in the exam in 2003, the researchers found a huge rural-urban gap. Only 12% of rural youth from poor counties took part in the exam compared to 67% urban high school students. This means that 88% of rural youth gave up the chance of continuing higher education after high school. The admission rate is even lower for rural students. Only 7% of rural students were admitted to the university in 2003, while nearly 48% of urban students were admitted. Furthermore, the rural students' chance of enrollment into a prestigious university is over 10 times less likely than urban students (Li et al., 2015). The data of the research was drawn after the move of the mass expansion of higher education enrollment in China, which started in 1998. One can imagine, before the mass expansion in 1998, the gap of access to higher education was even wider between rural and urban students (Li et al., 2015).

2.2.2 Rural students' higher education aspiration

A large body of research focused on rural students' higher educational aspirations (Byun, Meece, Irvin, & Hutchins, 2012c; Chenoweth & Galliher, 2004; Griffin, Hutchins, Meece, 2011; Howley, 2006). Research indicated several factors which could influence rural students' educational aspirations. This includes cultural constraint, family support, financial constraint and students' own preparation for higher education.

2.2.2.1 Cultural constraint

Stone (2018) highlighted the traditional value rural people usually hold against pursuing higher education. Rural people tend to have a strong attachment to rural homes and put more emphasis on farming or other employment-related technical training (Howley, 2006). Atkin (2003) conducted research exploring the value and perception of rural communities regarding rurality and formal education. Most of the participants in the study perceived the benefits of higher education only from a financial perspective and hoped that education would bring future employment opportunities and stable life, but few of them realized the benefits of education from an internal self-enhancement aspect (Aktin, 2003). The young people are pressured by other members in the local community in terms of following the social values, which places more emphasis on labour work and considers education as unnecessary or even something bad (Friesen & Stephenon, 2016). Some rural communities do not have a college-going background; students who wish to go to university might take the risk of becoming a social outcast (Pizzolato, 2003). Therefore, pursuing higher education can be a stressful and painful negotiation process between young people and other local people (Friesen & Stephenson, 2016).

Moreover, the traditional rural culture sets a clear boundary between the role of males and females (Friesen & Stephenson, 2016). According to Chenoweth and Galliher (2004), working-class males are less likely to attend higher education as various local manual labour opportunities are presented. However, such working opportunities are not suitable for females. Therefore, females are more likely to pursue higher education if financial and personal ability conditions permitted (Chenoweth & Galliher, 2004). Moreover, some rural parents believe that if their sons leave home for higher education, they might get attracted by the job offered in the cities and may not come back. However, if girls went to college, they might still return because

of the existence of local employment opportunities for women such as nurses, teachers, which

requires post-secondary credentials (Blackwell & Maclaughlin, 1998). However, the participants

from Canada in Friesen and Stephenson's study stated that the community expected females to

take on a domestic role as housewife and put aside their personal aspirations.

 In some cases, the traditional cultural constraint could motivate young people to go for

education. In a study based in the context of China, Wang (2017) took a feminist approach to

access the perspective of female rural university students. The women in her study expressed the

idea that going to university is their only hope to get out of their current inferior social status as a

rural woman. Wang pointed out that traditional Chinese rural belief holds contempt for women

and saves little opportunities for women. Therefore, some women strived to attend higher

education to have a better life in the cities. In her study, Wang also indicated that the Chinese

household system also acts as a barrier to distance rural Chinese from higher education. The

urban and rural household division separate rural students from benefiting the urban advanced

pre-secondary education system and confined them within the rural pre-secondary educational

system, which lacks educational resources and leads to lower university admission chances

(Wang, 2017).

Aside from the influence of traditional values, the rural students have few role models in

their surrounding area whom they can follow (Heinisch, 2018). Many of the rural students are

the first in their family to enter higher education, resulting in a lack of knowledge about higher

education (Hardre, 2007). Most country people who went on to higher education did not return

after they graduate, which is referred to as "academic run-off" (Rubisch, 1995, p. 405). A lack of

role models negatively affects rural youth's faith in their potential urban future (Rubisch, 1995).

Battle, Grant and Heggoy (1995) have conducted a multiple case study on three gifted rural

females on their college decision, and the researchers found that their college-going decisions are shaped by their family, experiences and self-perception (p. 38). The researchers suggested that these rural gifted women would benefit more from broadening their vision on future education and employment opportunities and enhancing their understanding of their rural identity and traditional rural values. Just as Howley (2006) put it: "The implication is that rural youth are, to some degree, 'settling' for poverty because they do not properly perceive the influence of education on career options" (p. 64). Blackwell and MacLaughlin (1998) suggested that those community members who have received college degrees should actively engage in school activities and to provide knowledge to those rural students about the benefits of higher education, and even help those disadvantaged students to complete the application for college scholarship or funding.

The feeling of attachment to the rural home also might prevent many rural students from continuing higher education in cities (Howley, 2006). According to Hektner (1995), "rural community ties are notoriously strong," (p. 4). Howley (2006) suggested, "Place, for rural people, involves the meanings and relationships associated with land, nature, and local history and knowledge" (p. 65). Elder and Conger (2000) highlighted that the proximity of people helps to form a strong bond between people in the same communities. The rural young people might have absorbed the community values and are more used to the small community environment (Hektner, 1995). Participants in Friesen and Stephenson (2016)'s study expressed their fear that going to university would isolate them from rural family and friends.

2.2.2.2 Family support

Family plays an essential role in aspiring children's future educational attainment (Brown, Copeland, Costello, Erkanliand, & Worthman, 2009; Smith, Beaulieu, & Seraphine, 1995). Brown et al. (2009) found that family plays a more vital role than the community does in providing various resources and support for students to achieve their educational aspirations. Legutko (2008) conducted a quantitative research in rural Pennsylvania about the influence of family members' educational level on senior rural students' plan about postsecondary education. They found that the educational level of older siblings has little impact on the students' educational plan, but students with parents who have attained higher education degree are more likely to have higher educational aspirations (Legutko, 2008), since parents who have attended higher education before will be able to guide children regarding higher education transition (Chenoweth & Galliher, 2004). However, rural students are more likely to have non-college-educated parents than urban students (Smith et al., 1995). Parents lack of experience in higher education causes a lack of understanding of higher education for rural students. These students will be facing more challenges and be less prepared when they go to university than non-first-generation university students (Schultz, 2004). For example, Schultz (2004) documented the challenges rural first-generation university students faced in their first semester in university, which includes being unfamiliar with the course structure and not knowing how to form new friendships out of a strange environment, which brought the feeling of anxiety to many students (Schultz, 2004). "Fear of the unknown" influenced many rural students' decision about continuing higher education (Friesen & Stephenson, 2016).

Stone (2018) suggested that family plays a significant role in shaping people's value, and many students' educational aspiration is deeply influenced by the family value. Smith et al. (1995) highlighted that parents' expectation is the most important indicator of children's college attendance. Highly educated parents usually have a higher educational expectation for their children and convince their children of the importance of higher education (Chenoweth & Galliher, 2004). On the contrary, rural parents are less likely to encourage students to attend higher education (Smith et al., 1995). For example, the statistics in the study of Blackwell and MacLaughlin (1998) demonstrated that nearly 25% of rural boys had experienced discouragement from one parent regarding their educational aspiration, while in the urban area, only 16% of girls and 18% of both genders reported having such experience.

According to Blackwell and MacLaughlin (1998), rural parents equipped with better financial situations may provide more financial and moral support for children to attend higher education. Family income also contributes greatly to children's educational aspirations (Smith et al., 1995). Byun, Meece and Irvin (2012b) stated that the rural-urban gap in terms of college enrollment and degree completion was mainly because of rural students' lower socioeconomic status. As Johnson and Strange (2005) cited, "poverty is the single strongest and most persistent threat to high student achievement" (p. 6). Poverty places great pressure on rural students in terms of their educational aspirations. Rural students who wish to enroll in university must pay the educational expenses themselves and many of them either struggle for the scholarship or give up the idea (Ast, 2014). Kirby (2003) conducted a quantitative research to compare the difference between rural and urban students who studied at Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN). In the research, he mainly focused on three aspects, which were background characteristics, financial support and expenditure. He found that many rural people in rural NL were unemployed and relied

on employment insurance benefits to compensate for their lack of income. Due to the financial barrier, less rural students than urban students in his study had plans to continue graduate studies.

Byun et al. (2012c) found that family structure is related to children's educational aspirations. Students coming from single-parent families are less likely to attend college since a two-parent family usually could provide more emotional and financial support for the children (McLanahan & Percheski, 2008). Blackwell and MacLaughlin (1998) addressed the correlation between domestic hierarchy and college aspiration. They found that the female-dominant family posed negative influence on children's higher educational aspirations. Chenoweth and Galliher (2004) found a strong positive relationship between the father's occupation and children's pursuit of college education. Children are more likely to continue higher education if their fathers are working in a professional area, while for those fathers who are unemployed or work in an unskilled area, many of their children are not pursuing higher education (Chenoweth & Galliher, 2004).

Although the previous literature mainly found the disadvantages of rural students in terms of family support for their higher educational aspirations, some most recent studies have voiced a different view. For example, Li (2019) conducted a quantitative research study to investigate the different role played by family factors regarding rural-urban post-secondary education aspiration in America. She argued that, based on the previous literature, the close relationship and attachment in rural homes and communities might generate larger financial and moral support for rural students' higher educational aspirations. Moreover, Li (2019) pointed out that rural students were less likely to come from a single-parent family. Based on the data drawn from the 2009 American High School Longitudinal Study, Li used logistic regression models and interaction terms to analyze the data, and she has concluded that the role played by the family in terms of rural-urban students' higher educational aspiration is more complicated than previously

discussed and believed. In terms of socioeconomic status, the research finding showed that the family income of rural students was of little difference to that of non-rural students, which challenges the previous belief that rural areas had low economic status (Li, 2019). However, in terms of social and cultural capital, Li (2019) agreed with the previous research and pointed out that the finding of the study proved that rural parents had lower educational levels than urban parents, which led to their low socioeconomic status. Moreover, such low parental education might also serve as the cause of closer family-school connection in the rural area than in the suburban area, which could increase the educational achievement of rural students. However, such benefit for rural students would be limited due to low parental education.

2.2.2.3 Local employment opportunities

Tieken (2016) highlighted that the economy serves as an important factor that drives rural students to go on higher education. Students are attracted to the cities by more employment opportunities, education and advanced healthcare services (Lynch, 2005). Rural areas worldwide usually suffer from common problems such as the decline of employment and limited access to public services (Woods, 2011). For example, according to Tiekens (2016), in the US, after the recession period between 2008-2009, the unemployment rate in the rural area reached nearly 10%. In the province of NL, the rural unemployment rate in 2018 is 23%, almost 10% higher compared to the average unemployment rate in the whole province (Statistics Canada, 2019). The situation makes it difficult for rural young people to find a job without an university degree as opposed to what their parents used to experience (Heinisch, 2018).

Due to the nature of rural areas, most of the local employment opportunities are related to farming, fishing, mining, construction and other heavy manual labour jobs (Stone, 2018). Jobs

available to high school graduates are limited in financial rewards and are unstable (Carr &

Kefalas, 2009). When many students are leaving the rural areas to search for financial security,

many of them choose higher education because of their wish to find a satisfying and fulfilling

career instead of making a living randomly (Stone, 2018).

2.2.2.4 Students' preparation for higher education

      Hardre (2007) addressed the ill-preparedness of some rural schools for helping students

to pursue higher education. He pointed out that not only do some small rural schools find hard to

recruit teachers (Monk, 2007; Stern, 1994), but rural schools could offer few college preparatory

courses compared with urban and suburban schools (Stern, 1994). Chenoweth and Galliher

(2004) conducted a quantitative study about the factors influencing college attendance for rural

high school students from West Virginia. Two hundred and forty-two senior high school students

completed the survey and questionnaires. The result showed that the academic preparation

served as the most important factor in influencing rural students' post-secondary education

decision. In detail, students' GPA, and their participation in college preparatory courses serve as

important influencers. Moreover, students' self-awareness about their ability and their

contentment about being in college also plays a part in the decision-making process. Rural

students who are usually less prepared academically than urban students often consider higher

education with care, and even refrain from going (Means, Clayton, Conzelmann, Baynes, &

Umbach, 2016). Blackwell and MacLaughlin (1998) addressed the issue that students' self-

confidence and self-esteem also affect their choice of the future education plan.

Means et al. (2016) conducted a qualitative case study with 26 African American rural high school students to explore the college-going process of these groups of students. The research found that although the participants had family and community support regarding their post-secondary education plan, they lacked proper guidance navigating the college application process. Their schools only had one full-time school counsellor and a college coach who worked for two schools. The researchers suggested that since most of the students have no family members attending higher education before, more resources are needed in the local school and community to offer knowledge regarding the college application plan.

Moreover, schools with high attrition and absence rates discouraged the creation of a learning-welcome environment (Blackwell & MacLaughlin, 1998). This creates a painful learning experience, especially for those highly academically talented students who might encounter discouragement of their educational pursuit (Hardre, 2007). "The more isolated a school is, the more students will tend toward uniformity even to the point of limiting their accomplishments to the level of the group norm, especially given the intense social pressure of the high school years" (Quaglia & Cobb, 1996, cited in Hardre, 2007, p. 233).

2.3 Rural University Students

2.3.1 First generation college students (FGCs)

First generation college students (FGCs) refers to those college students who are the first in their family to attend higher education (Engle, 2007). A large body of literature could be found about FGCs (e.g. Bui, 2002; London, 1992; Inman & Mayes, 1999; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004; Ramos-Sanchez & Nichols, 2007). According to Choy (2001), FGCs are more likely to be older, ethnic minorities, and come from a lower socioeconomic

family background than non-first-generation students. These groups of students usually will face

more challenges in their transition to college life (Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, &

Nora, 1996). FGCs are more likely to postpone college attendance, to enroll in a two-year higher

education program, and to drop out of the college or take longer time to complete the degree

(Engle, 2007; Terenzini et al., 1996). The review of the literature below shows, in the higher

education experience of FGCs, they tend to encounter problems in academic and social aspects.

Although a large body of literature could be found regarding FGCs, little focus

specifically on FGCs from rural areas (Heinisch, 2018). However, research about FGCs could

throw some light on the understanding of the experience of rural students, since many of them

are also FGCs (Byun et al., 2012a).

2.3.1.1 College academic experience

In many cases, FGCs are less prepared academically when they go to college (Inman &

Mayes, 1999). Upon entering college, due to a lack of knowledge about college, they may have

trouble registering for courses and arranging meetings with the advisor (Engle, 2007). Terenzini

et al. (1996) took a quantitative study with over 3500 students in 1992 to find out the difference

between FGCs and traditional students in their characteristics before they attend college and

college experience. They found that those FGCs are more likely to lag in cognitive thinking

skills, which is reflected in their reading, math and critical thinking. Moreover, they are less

likely to take courses in humanities and arts compared with traditional students, and they are

inclined to take fewer academic challenging courses, spend less time on study and are less likely

to enroll in an honors degree or enter a graduate program (Terenzini et al., 1996). They also tend

to achieve lower scores, drop or repeat the courses, have fewer academic interactions with

classmates in group discussions and experience various academic failures in college even after

controlling their previous academic preparation experience (Engle, 2007; Terenzini et al., 1996).

Research also found that FGCs have less confidence regarding their ability to thrive on

campus (Pratt, Harwood, Cavazos, & Ditzfeld, 2017; Ramos-Sanchez & Nichols, 2007). Ramos-

Sanchez and Nichols (2007) conducted research about the influence of self-efficacy on the

relationship between academic achievement and college adjustment. The study found that non-

first-generation students have higher academic achievement than FGCs, and the level of self-

efficacy for non-first-generation students is also much higher than FGCs. However, the

researchers argued that a high level of self-efficacy might not be the only reason that contributes

to higher achievement. Moreover, the research addressed that a high level of self-efficacy could

better help the first-year college students adapt themselves to college life since students could

handle the challenges encountered in their first year more with ease (Ramos-Sanchez & Nichols,

2007). The researchers also perceived that due to the low level of self-efficacy among FGCs,

they are more likely to have a higher rate of attrition since one's level of efficacy could affect the

amount of effort one will spend in the face of difficulty (Bandura, 1997).

2.3.1.2 College non-academic experience

In terms of social interaction on campus, FGCs are less likely to get involved in activities

on campus, and they find it hard to form close friendships with students from the university

(Billson & Terry, 1982). Some of them put studying as their priority and did not spare time for

recreational purposes until they managed their academic performance (Terenzini et al., 1994).

Their isolation from social life in university is partly caused by their financial burden

(Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005; Pratt et al., 2017). Many FGCs are from lower socioeconomic

families (Engle, 2007), and they have to work to cover their continuously rising university fees (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005). Research has found that FGCs are more likely to work more hours for part-time and some even work full time while attending classes on a discontinued basis (Billson & Terry, 1982; Choy, 2001; Inman & Mayes, 1999; Terenzini et al., 1996). They are more likely to put more emphasis on their work instead of study (Billson & Terry, 1982). The working responsibilities they held deprived them of getting various benefits by joining on-campus extra-curricular activities or academic activities, from which they could gain more benefits than their non-first-generation peers (Pascarella et al., 2004). The working responsibilities also ultimately prevent them from getting a higher GPA than traditional students (Pascarella et al., 2004). Moreover, numerous studies documented the relationship between college graduation rates and students working off-campus (e.g. Billson & Terry, 1982; Eitel & Martin, 2009; Inman & Mayes, 1999). Based on the result of the 2006 cohort from the Community College Survey of Student Engagement, Eitel and Martin (2009) found that over 50% of the FGCs reported dropping out of college because of financial deficiency. Billson and Terry (1982) also found that financial pressure is more likely to lead to attrition among FGCs, whereas other traditional students leave higher education due to their displeasure with the university, some of them transferred to another university. However, in the study of Inman and Mayes (1999), more FGCs (67.6%) than non-first-generation students (55.9%) reported they would remain in college until they have completed the degree, although 27.2% of FGCs compared with 14.9% of traditional students named a two-year degree as their final goal.

In terms of the relationship of FGCs with their family, Covarrubias and Fryberg (2015) pointed out that first-generation students feel more guilt from being the only person in the family who was offered the opportunities to pursue the academic dream and climb up the social class.

Such guilt is accompanied by stress, which throws an impact on their transition to college life. Jenkins, Belanger, Londono Connally, Boals and Duron (2013) highlighted that FGCs receive less support from family and friends, which creates a stressful college experience. However, even if their family members wish to support their college experience, lack of understanding about college prevents the family people from doing so (York-Anderson & Bowman, 1991). Furthermore, Jenkins et al. (2013) discovered that FGCs suffered more from PTSD symptoms and are less satisfied with life than the non-FGCs.

The FGCs also find it hard to seek support from their college peers due to their difference in the background (Jenkins et al., 2013). The researchers suggested that they need to develop some strategies to help them succeed in the academic competition with their peers who are more likely to ask for help from faculty staff. The FGCs in the study of Collier and Morgan (2008) have little understanding of the role faculty members play in terms of offering support for the students. For example, one student was quoted,

> "I didn't understand what office hours were all about... I mean, the office hours are there on the syllabus, ''Ok, what's that got to do with anything?'' What am I supposed to do with ''office hours?'' I didn't know that a teacher was available at a certain time for me to come and talk to if I had a problem. I didn't know that as a freshman or a sophomore, even though it is right there on the damn syllabus, I didn't know it (p. 439).

The ignorance about college life comes from the little advice or guidance they could receive from their parents (Collier & Morgan, 2008). Those traditional students who come from the well-educated family will carry and implement the advanced knowledge and capacity to secure their privileged position in the long run (Collier & Morgan, 2008).

2.3.2 Rural students' experience in higher education

When rural students arrive on campus, they first need to adjust to the city demographics, which is marked by busy streets, complicated transportation system and competitive lifestyle (Griffrida, 2008). The city is described as "hurried, harried and cold," whereas rural life is "relaxed, friendly and warm" (Swift, 1988, p.2). "The stress experienced during the rites of the passage can be severely exacerbated for persons who must simultaneously make the transition from a rural to an urban environment" (Swift, 1988, p.1).

Schultz (2004) addressed fear felt among some rural students when they were shocked by the large size of the campus. They also were surprised at the expanded size of the classroom, a vast number of curricula and the large expenses needed to spend to support their lives in the university and the city (Schultz, 2004). Rural students found it harder to adjust to the large dimension of university life than urban students (Maltzan, 2016).

Kirby (2003) conducted telephone interviews with 439 rural students and found that the university students from rural NL could not live with their parents who lived in rural areas. It caused the rural students to have higher expenditure on rent, public transportation during their university time. Moreover, a significant difference was found between the origin of the financial support of rural and urban students. Urban students (64.5%), in contrast to rural students (38.2%), were more likely to work off-campus to cover their university fees, whereas rural students (73.9%) more relied on various financial funding or scholarship from government and university than urban students (43.9%). Kirby explained the possible reason that causes such difference in financial support that rural students in many cases were more qualified to apply for government or university financial support due to their lower economic status.

Rumbolt (1992) investigated the factors which lead to rural post-secondary students stay or leave the higher education institutions in NL. Data collected from three higher education institutions

demonstrated that those students who persist in their enrollment had different experiences in post-secondary institutions than those who dropped out, including that those who stayed participated more in extra-curricular activities, and they also had more family support and were more connected with faculty. Moreover, they were more financially secure and experienced less stress on-campus. Overall, those who stayed had a more positive post-secondary education experience than those who left (Rumbolt, 1992). Rumbolt (1992) pointed out that rural students felt that rural high schools should provide more information on how to prepare them for higher education in terms of academic and non-academic aspects, which is consistent with previous research regarding the ill-preparedness of rural high school for higher education (Hardre, 2007; Means et al., 2016).

Ast (2014) interviewed ten rural university students from rural Oregon in the US about their experience during their first year in the university. Several themes emerged regarding the topic. First of all, participants in their first term had trouble forming new friendships and getting involved in college activities; therefore, a feeling of loneliness and disconnection is reflected in the experience of several participants. This is similar to the experience of some FGCs who also found it hard to get involved in college life (Billson & Terry, 1982; Terenzini et al., 1994). Some students in Ast's study identified the expanded environment, and the large population of students prevented them from forming friendships. Most of the students came from small rural schools where everyone knows each other. However, when entering into a large and strange environment, they need to purposely search and pick friends, which many of them found difficult (Ast, 2014).

Regarding their low involvement in various extra-curricular activities on campus, many of them highlighted more involvement during their stay in rural high school. In a small environment, these students have more opportunities to join in activities and take the role of a leader (Ast, 2014). Moreover, some of them named lack of friendship and confidence also acted as potential reasons that lead to inactivity in university. Ast (2014) pointed out that the inactivity

in college life serves as a risk factor leading to university attrition later, and active participation in social events in university leads to a higher persistence rate (Downey, 1980).

Rural university students also witness and experience diverse cultures when they arrive on campus (Ast, 2014). Usually, rural communities tend to be homogenous in several aspects, including ethnicity, religion and politics (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). The participants in Ast's study experienced differences in race, politics, religion, sexual orientation and dress style in university (p. 73). Moreover, unlike people in their communities who shared common values, they also encountered diverse values on campus. Some students reflected that assimilating into a world of diverse values made it hard for them to go back to their old world.

Starting a new life in university also provides an opportunity to form a new identity (Heinisch, 2016). However, the diverse university environment might not always bring pleasant experiences to rural students. Parson (1992) found that several rural students were intimidated by the diverse ethnic, cultural environment of the university and reported feeling uncomfortable interacting in such an environment.

Rural students noticed the difference between themselves and those from urban areas. For example, Swift (1988) noted the difference in language styles and personal characteristics between rural and urban areas. Coming into the university and having interaction with urban people makes their rural identity stand out more than before (Ast, 2014). Such differences brought negative experiences for some and positive experiences for others. For example, one student recalled being discriminated against for her rural background by her roommate, who is from the city (Ast, 2014). Some students tried to solve the identity conflict by associating more with students from a similarly rural background like themselves (Ast, 2014). In the study of Schultz (2004), some rural students realized the unique experience their rural background brought them and believed that this unique trait would help them to have a successful transition to university life.

The study of Heinisch (2016) of eight rural FGCs from Midwestern University in the US provided some new perspective into the university life of rural students. Unlike what the previous research found out that rural students usually lack family and community support for continuing higher education (Blackwell & MacLaughlin, 1998), the participants in Heinisch's study reported having family support in their college-going decision because the parents believed it would present more opportunities for their children. Moreover, they received support in their college application while they were in high school. They also reported having strong community support due to the close relationship within the community. People in the community helped each other to ensure the success of others, which would support the whole community (Heinisch, 2016). These rural FGCs also tended to choose large universities as they strived for a change and believed that a large university could offer more opportunities and new experiences for them.

In terms of support seeking, in contrast to the finding of Jenkins et al. (2013) which believed that FGCs have trouble seeking support from their peers, the rural FGCs in Heinisch (2016) sought support through making friends with their roommates and people around them, or through joining in various organization and support programs. They also used social media to help them connect with more people. Moreover, the students learned to seek help through interacting with faculty members, although initially, they found it intimidating to approach the professor, gradually they realized the importance of faculty members as a resource of support (Heinisch, 2016).

The findings in Heinisch (2016) provided some unique insight into the experience of rural FGCs. However, due to the small data size, the result could not be generalized to all rural FGCs.

Some studies also tended to look at the health condition of rural university students. Hussain, Guppy, Robertson and Temple (2013) have adopted a quantitative method to look into

the physical and mental health of the first-year rural students in the university. In their study, 8% of students are diagnosed with depression or anxiety. Aylesworth and Bloom (1976) also found that rural students are more likely to have issues with mental health, which includes the feeling of loneliness. Pillay and Ngcobo (2010) conducted research to identify the factors that lead to stress and anxiety found in first-year rural university students. The finding shows that academic pressure is the most indicator of the resource of stress. This might be caused by ill-preparedness for the new and challenging curricula in university compared to the rural high school (Pillay & Ngcobo, 2010). Furthermore, a lack of enough financial support, part-time job pressure, the death of significant ones, and the tension with parents all contribute to stress. Wilbourn (1987) found that rural college students were less likely to seek counselling support offered by the counselling services, and those who did tend to emphasize academic counselling instead of mental health.

In the context of developing countries, this issue has been widely explored by some Chinese researchers. For example, Hui and Min (2017) indicated that the perceived social, financial and cultural gap, including the family income and parental education between rural and urban students, caused rural students to have a significantly lower participation rate in university activities. Yu (2015) pointed out that a majority of Chinese rural university students in her study (73.5%) demonstrated a willingness to adjust themselves to urban life, although over 65% of students still perceived differences between rural students and urban students. The researcher concluded that although most of the rural students wish to become urban people, there are still barriers and gaps that exist between these two groups of people. From the review, we could perceive that the rural university students in developing countries face similar difficulties as those rural university students in developed countries. Although one interesting thing worth

noting, which is pointed out by Wang (2017), is that not only rural students are regarded as a group of people being marginalized like in many cultures, but they are blamed for their perceived deficit, as rural people in Chinese culture are perceived as lacking "Suzhi" (素质 in Chinese, meaning good breeding and manner). Using Wang's words, that people are "blaming the victim" (p. 647).

2.3.3 College experience of different institutions

Although rural students generally encounter more challenges in university, their experience is also affected by the type of institutions they attend. Based on the data drawn from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, Gibbs (1989) compared the college attendance and persistence rate among 12000 urban and rural students. He found that rural students are more likely to graduate from less competitive colleges, and they also tend to enroll in colleges located in rural areas. This might be due to the fact that college located in rural areas is closer to home for rural students.

Ames et al. (2014) conducted a longitudinal study with 2823 first-year students cross six universities in Canada to analyze the difference between rural and urban students' adjustment to university life. They reported that rural students tend to choose small scale universities, and they are more adaptable to university life at the beginning than their urban counterparts. This result is in contrast to some of the previous research, which indicated that rural students usually experience more tension in terms of academic preparedness and social interaction in the university than urban students (Hardre, 2007; Heinisch, 2016). The reason for this might be that the environment in small institutions feels more like the small rural communities where these rural students come from (Heinisch, 2018).

In the study of Aylesworth and Bloom (1976), 418 freshmen at a large state university from rural and urban areas were studied over four years. The researchers found that rural students are more likely to leave university before finishing the program. Most importantly, the urban students who left the university because they wished to start a new life path, whereas some of the rural students tended to continue their post-secondary education in other institutions. This is consistent with the result in the study of Schonert et al. (1991), who studied postsecondary persistence among rural students. Schonert et al. (1991) found that 26% of rural students dropped out of a four-year institution before earning a degree, among whom 71% returned to higher education and finished the degree. Furthermore, among those drop-outs who transfer to another institution, many of them held leadership roles during high school time. Schonert et al. (1991) assumed that these students failed to maintain their position as leaders in large university. Therefore, they transferred to a small institution to resume this role, "for many students, 'dropping out' of college may be a positive step toward their goal" (Schonert et al., 1991, p. 284). Downey (1980) indicated the difference between large urban university and state university, which mostly located in smaller centers. He highlighted that unlike a large urban university, state university provides the rural students more opportunities to use their social skills to engage in various activities. However, participation in social events in large urban university takes more of a passive form, which brings unpleasant experiences (Downey, 1980). Aylesworth and Bloom (1976) also concluded that a large university could not provide the needs of rural students. Similarly, Maple (2000) concluded that rural students find it more comfortable studying at small institutions rather than in large ones.

To investigate into the preparedness and aspiration of postsecondary education of rural youth, Byun, Meece and Agger (2017) took the data of 7779 students from Rural High School

Aspiration Study and found that 64.5% of rural youth attended a two-year postsecondary institution, among whom 24.2% of them transferred to a four-year college later. The researchers suggested that some students used community college as one way leading to a four-year bachelor's degree, although the number of such students is few. Schonert et al. (1991) pointed out that compared with 26% of rural youth who dropped out of a four-year institution, 32% of rural youth left a two-year program, among whom only 38% returned to earn a degree. It is suggested a higher attrition rate among two-year program attenders.

2.4 Identity

2.4.1 Definition of identity

Identity is a notion first introduced by Erikson (1951, 1968), and since then, countless research has begun exploring the idea from different perspectives. For this study, I am going to adopt Chryssochoou's (2003) concept of identity from a social psychological perspective. Like many other social psychologists, Chryssochoou referred to identity as the relationship between oneself and the world. The idea of identity could answer three questions regarding this relationship. First, the question of "who am I" entails one's knowledge about one's personal characteristics and some shared features. Second, the question of "who are they". "They" refers to those people who have any relationship with oneself, such as "people similar or dissimilar to oneself, to people before oneself (ancestors), contemporary to oneself or after oneself (future generations)……people close to oneself or distant from oneself, to people that share or not the same fate with oneself, to people that have good or bad intentions towards oneself etc" (Chryssochoou, p. 229). Third, the question of "what is our relationship" between "I" and "they". The relationship could be either opposition or support.

According to Chryssochoou (2003), Identity consists of three components. Namely, self-cognition, claims and recognition. Self-cognition involves one's understanding of oneself based on one's interaction with the social environment. Claims include the self-action in which one tries to demonstrate who they are and who they want to be. Recognition refers to the others' actions that guide on who I am or who I wish to become. Three of these components are interrelated to demonstrate the relationship between oneself and the social world. Chryssochoou (2003) made a clear statement of the relationship between these three components:

> It represents the claims one is allowed to make about his/her relationship to this world and constitutes the outcome of negotiations in order to be recognized. It is generated through processes of socialization, communication and social influence and justifies people's attempts to reproduce or change the world. (p.235)

Wiborg (2001) pointed out that people's choices and decisions could reflect people's personalities and identities. Chryssochoou (2003) also highlighted the important fact that identity is related to one's action and behavior. She explained, "Identity is understood to be the point from where actions and behaviors originate and people seem to explain their actions 'in the name of identity' (p. 235). She concluded that people act for their identity when they perceive that their view of world is challenged. Normally, people defend their identity when they experience social discrimination, or when they wish to act to push for social changes. In some other cases, people act to guard their privileged social status (Chryssochoou, 2003). She further explained that since people belong to a particular social group, if the social condition to which the social group entails is changed, people will need to adjust their knowledge and assimilate to the new social situation. In this process, people will try to protect and maintain their identities, and this is when identity conflict arises. According to Baumeister, Shapiro and Tice (1985), identity conflict

refers to the "problem of the multiple defined self whose definitions have become incompatible" (p. 408). People who experience identity conflict try to make commitments for different situations which are incompatible with each other. Furthermore, identity conflict is a conflict between "socialized value or motivation" and "individual aspirations" (Baumeister et al., 1985).

People also act when they wish to claim their identity (Chryssochoou, 2003, p. 236). The claim they try to declare contains the desired positions that one is trying to get. However, if their claim of identity is challenged by others through rejection of that identity, people will act to defend, for example, the immigrants who try to claim that they are full citizens (Chryssochoou, 2003). In other cases, people will act when they feel they are ignored or not accepted by others in a social setting (Lind & Tyler, 1988, cited in Chryssochoou, 2003). The ignorance that other people display excludes them from the social circle in which contains the capital one wishes to get. Therefore, one will adjust their identity to restore that relationship with the environment and the people in it to gain benefits. In the context of disadvantaged university students, some assimilate the behavior and language of students from higher social class in order to be accepted in the new setting (Aries & Seider, 2005). Lastly, when a new identity is evolved under the changed circumstances such as one taking on a new social role, one will act accordingly to adapt oneself to the changes (Chryssochoou, 2003).

Chryssochoou (2003) concluded, "acting in the name of identity is the outcome of people's attempt to incorporate novelty into existing frameworks, to communicate their position in the world, to establish a relationship with it, and to become active participants in their environment" (p. 237).

2.4.2 Identity issues of working-class university students

Research well documented the identity conflict that exists in university students who come from a lower socioeconomic background. This conflict is usually reflected in the class-based gap between themselves and those who are from higher socioeconomic families (Aries & Seider, 2005; 2007) Moreover, such conflicts are more apparent in elite universities where the social class gap is wider than state universities (Aries & Seider, 2005).

Baxter and Britton (2001) described this conflict as "sets them on a trajectory of class mobility, which is experienced as a painful dislocation between an old and newly developing habitus, which are ranked hierarchically and carry connotations of inferiority and superiority" (p. 99). The sense of dislocation is felt by some working-class students encountered in terms of the academic experience in Reay, Crozler and Clayton's (2009) study. Although the students in Reay et al.'s study have been valued and acknowledged for their outstanding academic performance in high school, they still experienced challenges academically at the beginning of their post-secondary study.

Some other students experienced the sense of dislocation socially. For example, working-class women in Stewart and Ostrove's (1993) study who studied in an elite liberal arts college are reported as having been alienated by other students in the college. The alienation feeling is shared by the boys in an elite private preparatory school in the study by Kuriloff and Reichert (2003). Those boys from working-class families were ignored or excluded by the school and experienced stereotyped low expectations about their abilities. Such exclusion among disadvantaged students is often caused by a lack of social capital (Aries & Seider, 2005). The students from a disadvantaged background not only lack in economic capital but also cultural capital, including low parental education (Aries & Seider, 2005). Surrounded by affluent

students who are different from them in dress, language, preferences and lifestyle makes the working-class student feel like an outsider and excluded them from the mainstream university culture, especially in elite universities (Aries & Seider, 2005).

The conflict not only happens between working-class students and those affluent students but extends to the working-class students and their families and friends back home. Some students found a problem among their evolving new identities and their old identities (Baxter & Britton, 2001). For example, one student who went to university in Baxter and Britton's (2001) study experienced the detachment from his old friends as they began to lack common life experience and therefore lose discussion topics now.

The identity conflict could easily cause one to form negative emotions about oneself. Like the boys in Kueiloff and Reichert's (2003) study who blamed themselves for being alienated. The women in Stewart and Ostrove's (1993) study reported feeling pain as they considered themselves "a poverty case" (p. 490), which caused them to lose self-confidence. In the study conducted by Aries and Seider (2005), working-class students in the elite university are made to feel "inadequacy, inferiority and intimidation" (p. 426) by the lack of cultural capital (e.g. acquisition of foreign language, advanced learning equipment, chances to have a vacation abroad). In Qing's (2017) study, the rural Chinese students who went to some top universities which are mostly located in metropolitan cities in China found themselves different from those students from urban areas in many aspects, and they feel that they are "Country Bumpkin" living in the city, which cause them to feel downcast. In some students' eyes, their rural family background becomes a "serious issue"(Qing, 2017). Stewart and Ostrove (1993) addressed the issue that college women students would experience stress at their moving up to a higher class through attending higher education, and such tension would cause harm in the long run,

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including deteriorating physical health later in their life. Similarly, Lawler (1999) documented the experience of women who became middle-class either through marriage or educational attainment. He wrote, " 'upward class mobility' , however achieved, is a story of success in which working-class women walk a happy road to middle-class status……however, such a characterization obscures the pain, the sense of displacement, and the shame which accompany such a move" (Lawler,1999, p. 7). In the study of Baxter and Britton (2001), the working-class university students reported feeling anxiety after being perceived by their old friends as superior, which reflected the fact that the painful experiences of those working-class students in university are not only coming from their dislocation in the university but their detachment from their old friends and family people.

Despite the identity conflict that exists when disadvantaged students go to university, it does not mean they could not make a success out of it. Many students develop strategies to assert positive identities to preserve self-respect (Aries & Seider, 2005). Aries and Seider (2005) pointed out that some working-class students gradually nurtured qualities such as self-confidence out of their outstanding academic achievement, which made them realize their ability was no less than other students. In other cases, identity-related factors can sometimes serve as the motivation for students from disadvantaged background to continue their higher education as a way to escape from their unsatisfactory present, which sometimes is caused by domestic reason, or as a result of wanting to do better to show others that they are not the "stereotype" and prove them wrong (Stewart & Ostrove, 1993; Thiele et al., 2017; Wentworth & Peterson, 2001). For example, the women from working-class backgrounds rejected the idea of male domination at home, which their mother followed, and therefore these women chose to go to university to escape from their father-headed family (Stewart & Ostrove, 1993). The working-class boys in

Kuriloff and Reichert's (2003) study developed strategies to cope with the stereotypical impression people had of them. The strategies include explaining the difference directly to the people, achieving high academic success or hiding the difference between them and those wealthy boys. Hiding one's identity is also addressed in Thiele et al.'s (2017) study as one of the common strategies adopted by working-class students to cope with other people's stereotype impression. By acquiring the cultural capital in terms of language, dress and behaviour, these working-class students were able to transform themselves into those affluent students and increase their self-respect and confidence (Aries & Seider, 2005). However, such transformation also faces a risk of disconnecting oneself from old friends and family as one acquires more knowledge and different taste, and some students are struggling between the new self and the world they used to belong (Aries & Seider, 2005). Furthermore, there are some aspects of identity which they could not change, for example, one working-class student in Thiele et al.'s (2017) study found the trouble that affluent students face as trivial: "Their family problems seemed so menial. I was like why is that even a problem? They were generally happier as well" (p. 57). The experience of these students reflects that some of the inner sides of identity could never be transformed and hidden.

Some students were proud of some assets which their working-class background has imprinted on them (Aries & Seider, 2005). The university experience makes these working-class students see the class-based advantages they hold over others, such as "independence, understanding and empathy", and these unique traits have helped to affirm their self-respect (Aries & Seider, 2005). People usually have the common belief that working-class students only have common and mediocre abilities (Weis, 1990), however, in the study of Reay et al. (2009), nine students who come from working-class families all achieved high academic success in an

elite university. These groups of students in Reay et al.'s study even have fitted in a higher

mobility environment better than they did in high school, as they hold academic disposition that

most working-class students in their schools lacked. These students developed assets such as

"resilience" and "ability to cope with adversity" back in their secondary school and brought them

into the university, which serves as an essential contribution to their successful adaptation in

there (Reay et al., 2009, p. 1107). Reay et al. (2009) concluded that students should not be

stereotyped based on their social identity. Many of them could easily manage such identity

shifting between their new role in universities and old role back in their families and

communities because students have developed "reflexive habitus" which allows them to fit in

different situations easily and quickly (Reay et al., 2009).

Some students solved this disconnection by adopting the strategy of compartmentalization,

which refers to the ability to "maintain the different components in enforcedly separate spheres

of his or her life" (Baumeister et al., 1985). For example, a student in Baxter and Britton (2001)

described the method of compartmentalization as "putting different hats on" in different

situations.

2.4.3 Identity issues in rural university students

According to Wiborg (2001), for rural students, attending higher education implies a

change of identity in social and cultural aspects. So far, only a few research studies can be found

about identity issues of rural university students. Christiaens (2015) pointed out that the most

noticeable features reflected in rural university students are their sense of disconnectedness and

diminishment. Christiaens (2015) recalled his own story and described the difference he

experienced between his rural home and university experience. He highlighted that his rural

identity stood out when he started university life. He craved for an intimate relationship with

people as he did back in the rural community, although he experienced alienation and being misunderstood at the beginning. His worldview was quite narrow, and he struggled over his lack of confidence and determination about his life in university. He made it through after the first several months, mainly relying on his white identity and the role of being a student leader. He pointed out that his white identity made people assume that he would have no trouble fitting in a white-mainstream environment. However, the truth is, as he stated, "my white identity disguised the obstacles I faced and the needs I had as someone of a rural upbringing" (p. 45). The rural identity gradually diminished with the participation of university activities, but it still served as an essential factor in determining the researcher's plan about the future (Christiaens, 2015). The researcher concluded that one's rural identity is most salient when interacting with someone from different backgrounds.

Handke (2012) interviewed nine freshmen and ten seniors in university who came from rural areas about their identity transformation in university. Comparing their experiences in the rural communities and the university, most of them were similar to that of first-generation students, students from a working-class background and the rural students in Schutlz (2004)'s and Ast (2014)'s study. However, Handke (2012) also addressed some new perspectives. The researcher raised the important issue of the identity transformation of rural students. Among first-year students, 50% of students believed that they felt they had changed a little bit by meeting new people and settling down in the urban area. They believed that their rural identity would become even more salient the longer they stayed in the university. For seniors, nearly all of them witnessed some transformation about their identity. Some seniors felt urban life has made them more open and have broadened their vision on many subjects, including politics, society and their rural community. Overall speaking, most seniors enjoyed being urbanized in

terms of their lifestyle, appearance and values. However, Handke (2012) also addressed some negative experiences some of the changes in identity brought to the seniors. Some struggled over the free urban lifestyle, such as consistent partying and drug use. Some others changed their majors repeatedly because they were at a loss of what was suitable for them. One student reported having left a university organization that she found unsuitable for her, left the campus residence, changed her major and had a new boyfriend all at the same time in the hope of overcoming identity struggle. Another student faced discrimination due to her sexual orientation. These students took different strategies to overcome identity challenges. Some went to the counselling center; some talked with their close friends, while some others chose to use drugs and alcohol to take their minds off the problems.

In this study, Handke (2012) also found that, unlike other research addressed, that tension between FGCs or working-class students and their families rose since they came to university (Aries & Seider, 2005), students in Handke's study saw the relationship with their family improved. Several students in Handke's study reported that their parents treated them more seriously, and they had less conflict with parents than before since they had fewer chances to interact with each other. Some freshmen said their parents were curious about their life in university and were interested in the story students had in university. This is in contrast with what Aries and Seider (2005) have found that some parents of first-generation students showed a lack of interest regarding the topic of the academy. Three of the seniors in Handke's study said they had parents' support regarding their higher education. Similarly, Heinisch (2016) also found that the parents of rural students expected them to attend higher education to have more opportunities. However, due to the limited amount of data collected in these two studies, their

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findings regarding parental support from parents who have no higher education credentials cannot be generalized.

Drawing from the theory of intersectionality developed by Kimberle Williams Crenshaw (1991), who advocated viewing identity from multi-dimension instead of focusing on just one aspect, Wang (2017) conducted in-depth interviews with 54 rural university female students across six different types of universities in China to analyze their rural and female identity. One female participant experienced various aspects of discrimination regarding her identity. First, at the rural home, she was discriminated against by her parents because of her female identity since her parents wanted a son instead of a daughter. In front of her urban relatives, she was again discriminated against because of her rural background, and they considered her as inferior and dirty. Luckily, the participants in Wang's study recognized such discrimination and strived to fight against such oppression through higher education. In the end, they all entered higher education, which entails higher social mobility. These women, through their continuously fighting, all developed traits such as resilience, ambition and independence, which allowed them to gain success academically in the urban university setting. However, their unique characteristics were not accepted in the urban context, as male students described them as "behaves unlike a woman" and "a strong woman" (p. 659). Wang pointed out that in Chinese urban culture, women are not encouraged to be too ambitious or strong to compete with men. As a result, some rejected to become a strong woman as they were afraid that it would affect their future partner searching, some others welcomed such notion and insisted on being themselves. Some of the participants developed a dual identity, which allowed them to hide their strong woman traits in front of the men while keeping those traits inside to win their success in the university. This finding is in contrast with what many western scholars have found in rural

students' perspective, as many rural university students in western culture are proud of their unique rural traits and are not afraid to show it (e.g. Aries & Seider, 2005; Reay et al., 2009). Through this research, Wang presented the values of both rural and urban settings regarding the role of women. The researcher pictured an urban-rural gap in which the female rural university students struggled to bridge, which has significant implications on the identity issue related to rural university students, especially in the context of developing countries.

2.5 Conceptual Framework

This study is based on a sociological perspective and drawn on the theory of capital, habitus and field proposed by Pierre Bourdieu. Habitus is a word derived from Latin and means "habitual or typical condition, state or appearance, particularly of the body" (Jenkins, 1992, p. 45). The notion not only applies in a sociological context, but it is widely accepted and used in the educational setting. Bourdieu (1990) formally defined habitus as:

> Structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures that is as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. (p. 53)

Habitus is developed through socialization (Navarro, 2006). One's past experience plays a vital role in the formation of habitus, especially one's childhood socialization with family (Di Maggio, 1979), and habitus, in turn, serves as the fundamental basis for one's future practice (Bourdieu, 1990). This structure entails a group of dispositions that are "durable" and "transposable" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 53). The habitus generates "practices, beliefs, perceptions, feelings and so forth" based on its structure (Maton, 2008, p. 51). Moreover, habitus is not

immutable, it is evolving (Maton, 2008) and continually adapting itself to the external world (Di Maggio, 1979) and assimilating those new situations into its existing structure (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). However, the speed of change of habitus sometimes is too slow to catch up with the pace of change of the field, which causes unease behavior of the agents (Maton, 2008).

Bourdieu (2011) defines the idea of field as:

a structured social space, a field of forces, a force field. It contains people who dominate and people who are dominated. Constant, permanent relationships of inequality operate inside this space, which at the same time becomes a space in which various actors struggle for the transformation or preservation of the field. All the individuals in this universe bring to the competition all the (relative) power at their disposal. It is this power that defines their position in the field and, as a result, their strategies. (p. 40–41)

There are all kinds of fields, such as fields of academics, religion, culture (Navarro, 2006). According to Qing (2017), the university is where both fields of academic and field of power reside. Bourdieu (2011) pointed out that, just like a football field in which players play in different positions, the social field is occupied by agents who hold different positions. All of them are trying to "maintain or improve their position" in the field (Thomson, 2008, p. 69). Within a field, various agents are competing for capital (Di Maggio, 1979), which are the "process within and the product of a field" (Thomson, 2008, p. 69). Bourdieu (1986b) extended the theory of capital to include not only economic capital (money and assets) but cultural (e.g. cultural goods, including arts, literature, music, language, and education credentials), social (e.g. social network, family) and symbolic capital. He argued that capital, as assets for exchange, should be considered in a broader sense than merely from an economic perspective (Bourdieu, 2006). He believed that any resources could be treated as capital as long as it serves as "a social

relation of power" (Navarro, 2006, p. 16) and the worth of capital depends on how much people value it (Crossley, 2008). He also rejected the idea of the superiority of economic capital over the others, these capitals, which are consisted of resources, are the aim of "social struggle" (Navarro, 2006).

Bourdieu believed that social practice exists in "an obscure and double relation" and is the result of the work of his three most powerful notions, habitus, capital and field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). He summed up an equation indicating the relationship between habitus, capital and field: **[(habitus)(capital)] + field = practice** (Bourdieu, 1986a, p. 101)

Bourdieu used the metaphor of "games" to describe social practice (Bourdieu, 1990). In his view, the practice in each social field can be considered as a game in which the social agents strive to play. He describes habitus as the "feel for the game" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 66). In the game, those who hold capital at the beginning will have advantageous position and therefore will help them to acquire more capital (Thomson, 2008), in other words, capital serves both as "weapon" and as "a stake of struggle" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 98). This theory is called "reproduction" in the educational context (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). According to Bourdieu and Passeron, in the context of education, those students from higher social class families, who are rich not only in economic capital but cultural capital, could apply the cultural capital they inherit from their parents to accumulate more capital through formal education, which itself serves as "as a fundamental institution in the reproduction of class inequality from generation to generation" (Di Maggio, 1979, p. 1463) since the cultural capital those affluent students acquired at home are precisely what these educational institutions emphasize and deliver (Crossley, 2008). This puts other students such as those from the lower socioeconomic family in a disadvantaged position, since upon entering higher education, they lack the cultural and economic capital which

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those affluent students inherit from their family (Aries & Seider, 2005), and therefore they would face more difficulties trying to achieve success in university. As a result, Di Maggio (1979) pointed out the critical fact that the low educational aspiration among working-class students is the result instead of the cause of their less academic success.

If habitus is living in an environment in which it is generated, habitus could perform naturally and smoothly, like a "fish in the water" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.127). However, if habitus finds itself in a strange field, then it will be modified, followed by feelings of "disquiet, ambivalence, insecurity and uncertainty" (Reay et al., 2009, p.1105). According to Qing (2017), the rural students in an elite university in China brought their rural habitus to an elite urban university. They found themselves as "Country Bumpkins" in the way of their dress, interaction and learning. They are reported to have negative feelings towards their rural identity, and it also pushed them to renegotiate their identity to adapt themselves to the new environment (Qing, 2017).

Such misfit between habitus and field is what causes symbolic violence, which is a notion developed by Bourdieu. Social agents who enter the field of the dominant power will feel uncomfortable because of their lack of proper habitus, which causes them to recognize their own deficit and avoid an encounter with that field in the future, which in the end, legitimates the social hierarchy (Schubert, 2008). Moreover, according to Schubert, many people try to deny the existence of such violence because of its invisibility. However, denial of the existence of symbolic violence is in itself a form of symbolic violence, since it leads the sufferers to blame themselves for their suffering (Schubert, 2008). The theory explains why working-class university students formed various negative emotions, including lack of confidence and a feeling of self-deficiency (Kueiloff & Reichert, 2003; Stewart & Ostrove, 1993).

Grounded in Bourdieu's sociology theory, the proposed study will focus on how the identity of rural university students is affected and shaped by two different social fields. One is based in rural family and educational background, the other is an urban university environment, which holds cultural and economic capital and higher social mobility (Aries & Seider, 2005; Qing, 2017). A conceptual framework is demonstrated in figure 1.
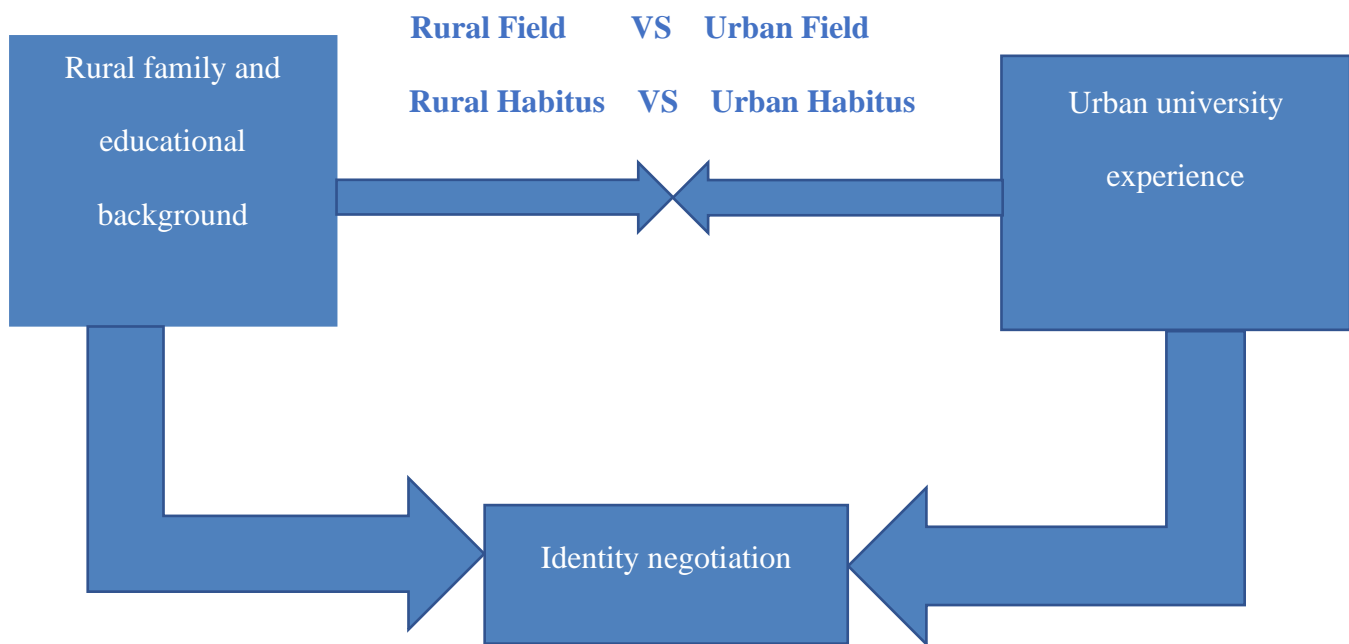
Figure 1: Rural students' identity negotiation process

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Research Design

In this study, I employed a qualitative research method to gain detailed insights into the central phenomenon, which is the identity negotiation process of rural university students. Creswell and Guetterman (2019) highlight that the qualitative research method is the most suitable when researchers could gather little needed information from the literature review and need to learn more about the central phenomenon from the participants' perspective. In this study, although some research could be found about identity issues related to working-class students studying in university (e.g. Aries & Seider, 2005; Reay, Crozier, Clayton, 2009; Wentworth & Peterson, 2001), little has been found about the issue related to rural students. Furthermore, qualitative researchers are interested in discovering the meaning hidden in the experience participants have through their interaction with the world of which the researchers interpret based on their own knowledge (Merriam, 1998). Moreover, instead of controlling the context in which participants live as in quantitative research, qualitative research aims to understand the participants in their natural setting (Hatch, 2002). The students' real-life experiences in the university bring meaningful information to the insights of the central phenomenon, which depends on the researcher to gather from participants. And it relies on the researcher to search for the themes that emerge from those experiences, which could be added to the existing knowledge about the phenomenon. Building on the experiences of participants and

the interpretations of the researcher, this study is subjective and interpretive, which determines the fact that the sample size has to be small-scale. Furthermore, due to the complexity of the research phenomenon, which involves human opinions and social interaction, the qualitative research method is the most appropriate for this study (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

I adopted a case study design and, specifically, a collective case study in the study. Defined by Eisenhardt (1989) as "a research strategy which focuses on understanding the dynamics present within single settings," case study aims to deepen our understanding of certain people and situations (Hamilton & Whittier, 2013). Holding several advantages such as being "strong in reality," "a step to action," and easier to "catch unique features that may otherwise be lost in larger scale data" (Adelman et al., 1980; Nisbet & Watt, 1984, cited in Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p. 256), it is the most suitable research design to fulfill my research purpose. Collective case study is a type of case study first identified by Stake (1994) as several cases being studied and analyzed comparatively to capture the full picture of the issues (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). It not only inherits the feature of a single case study, which helps to understand the complicated and multi-layer social issues in a rich and meaningful way, but the more cases researchers include in their studies, the more convincing the research will be since it strengthens the generalizability of the finding (Merriam, 1998). In this study, the story of each participant is seen as an independent case. Since although they all shared a similarly rural background, each of them has a different cultural and family background, which will affect the formation of their habitus and in turn, will influence their ability on the adaptation to the new urban environment. By comparing their stories and finding the similarities and differences among them, the findings of the study could be more reliable than a single case study.

3.2 Data Collection

3.2.1 Sampling

Like most of the qualitative research, both purposeful and snowball sampling (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019) were used to recruit potential participants from rural areas. According to Creswell and Guetterman (2019), purposeful sampling method means the researcher seeks out those suitable candidates whose life experience might threw important light on the central phenomenon. Snowball sampling, as a form of purposeful sampling, could help the researcher to recruit more potential participants through the recommendation from participants themselves (Crewell & Guetterman, 2019).

I chose Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN) as the research site to recruit post-secondary students with a rural background for participants in this study. The reasons why I chose MUN as the research site is that MUN as the largest university in Atlantic Canada and the only university in NL, has an enrollment of over 18000 students, among which about 85% are from NL (MUN, n.d.). Moreover, about 60% the population in NL were living in rural areas (Simms & Greenwood, 2017). Considering the fact that most of the students at MUN are from within the province, many of whom could be from a rural area, which made it easier to locate and contact the potentially suitable participants. Moreover, more than 2700 international students were studying at MUN, which makes up about 15% of the total student population (MUN, n.d.). The vast number of international students offered opportunities to recruit potential international students with a rural background. Their different cultural, religious, and social backgrounds form a unique habitus different from those growing up in rural Canada.

To define the rural area, I took the definition of rural area offered by Statistics Canada (2018) which defines a rural area as

1. small towns, villages and other populated places with less than 1,000 population.

2. rural areas of census metropolitan areas and census agglomerations that may contain estate lots, as well as agricultural, undeveloped and non-developable lands

3. agricultural lands

4. remote and wilderness areas.

The definition offered by Statistics Canada suggested that the definition of the rural area could be determined based on different criteria such as population, remoteness and the type of human activities. Since the participants in this research are from both within and outside Canada, I could not take any standard criteria which only apply to specific countries or regions. The definition above only serves as a reference. Instead, I have adopted a multidimensional approach, as suggested by Pizzoli and Gong (2007), to evaluate students' rural backgrounds from several perspectives, including population, remoteness and years spent in the rural community. Therefore, I focused on seeking out full-time students at MUN, who grew up in rural and remote areas either in Canada or outside Canada and had rural k-12 educational experience. In the recruitment letter, I provided the definition of rural areas offered by Statistics Canada, which served as the purpose of selecting the participants who were from the remotest and most underpopulated rural place and eliminated those who were from suburban areas.

Due to time and labor restraints, ten students were recruited. Generally, in qualitative research, the sample tends to be relatively small (Merriam, 1998). For the recruitment method, I used social media Facebook to find potential participants. After getting the ethics approval from the Memorial University Research Ethics Board, I posted the recruitment letter on a Facebook

group called "MUN course review/advice". It is a Facebook group developed for students of MUN to post any questions or statements regarding their study at MUN. The group has nearly 5000 MUN students. Therefore, it was a very good site to find and locate potential rural students. Moreover, due to the convenient function of sharing the posted information and allowing for personal chatting on Facebook, it is easier for any students to share the recruitment information to potential participants they know or contact me personally for further information. In the recruitment letter, I described the research purpose, the criteria to join the research, the definition of rural area, what the participants were expected to do and compensation details. In this way, I successfully recruited eight Canadian students who are from rural areas in Canada. Then I asked my friends to help me to introduce the recruitment information to some international students they know who are from the rural area. In this way, several international students approached me through email and expressed their interests in the research. In the end, another two international students were selected to join the study based on their age and program.

The 10 participants were all from isolated and underpopulated places within and outside Canada. Regarding their demographic information, four are male, and six are female. Two are international students from China, and the rest are all Canadian. Among the eight Canadian participants, seven of them are from Newfoundland and Labrador, one is from New Brunswick, and all of them are currently undergraduate students. The two international students are doing their Ph.D. program at the moment. Nine of the participants are from a rural community with less than 1000 people, among whom five of them are from a community with a population under 500. There is one international participant whose rural community falls into the range of 1000 to 3000 people, but the community is above 100 km from the nearest suburban areas, and he specified that he had k-12 education there, and his father worked as a farmer, so I included him in the

research based on the multidimensional perspective, followed by the suggestion of Pizzoli and

Gong (2007). The majority of participants range from the age of 19-24 years old, except for the

two international students who are aged between 25-30 years old and one Canadian student

under 19 years of age. The purpose of including students from several age groups is to get a

different perspective on the research issue since students of various ages might have different

reflections of their rural background because of varying life experiences. Regarding their family

background, except for the two international students whose parents have no post-secondary

education degree and whose family income were less than 23000 Canadian dollars annually, rest

of the Canadian participants have at least one parent who has received post-secondary education

and all of their annual family income are above 60000 dollars, among whom six of them have an

annual income above 80000 dollars. Regarding their father's occupation, seven participants'

fathers work in the field of farming, fishing, construction and other blue-collar related

professions. The other three work in a professional area.

3.2.2 Data collection method

I conducted semi-structured interviews to collect the data. According to Merriam (1998),

an interview is the best way to collect qualitative data when researchers focus on learning

people's minds, which cannot be derived from observation and when things researchers aim to

study happen in the past that cannot be reproduced. The semi-structured interview usually

consists of questions that aim to stimulate specific answers from the participants while not

restricting any new and emerging topics raised during the interview (Merriam, 1998). Most of

the questions asked during the interview were open-ended questions, which gave participants

enough freedom to voice out their opinions and share their stories related to the central

phenomenon without the constraint from the researcher (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). The interview questions were designed to answer the research questions. During the interview, participants were asked to tell the researcher about their past rural educational experience and share the story of their lives back in the rural communities, including their childhood upbringing and life with their family and friends, and to reflect on their new experience since they came to university.

Several days before the interview, I sent a response email to each participant, in which time and place of the interview and other details regarding the research were explained. The interview questions and informed consent form were attached in the response email to give participants time to review the interview questions and understand more details about the research before the interview. Six interviews were conducted at a group study room at Queen Elizabeth 2 library on campus, the rest of the interviews were conducted through Skype video call in response to the abrupt campus shut down due to a Global Pandemic as a result of the COVID-19. Each interview lasted around 60 to 90 minutes. Before the interview, a demographic questionnaire was filled out by each participant, in which their age, marital status, program, and some information regarding their family background, rural community and secondary educational experience were collected. This questionnaire aimed to collect some of the necessary background information about the participants to assist in understanding their unique life experience. After the interview, each participant was given 10 dollars as compensation for their contribution to the research. Each interview was recorded using the researcher's phone and laptop and safely stored in a password-required file on the laptop.

3.3 Data Analysis

Based on the suggestion made by Merriam (1998) and Hatch (2002), the analysis of the data was conducted in two stages, namely, within-case analysis and cross-case analysis. And the analysis was guided by an inductive thinking approach (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). The interview content of every participant was considered as a single case. Each participant was assigned with a pseudonym, and the recording of every interview was saved in separate computer folders and named after the pseudonym of each participant. After initial organizing of the raw data into separate folders, I started to transcribe the interview recordings into texts. Instead of waiting until I finished all the interviews before I began transcribing, I started transcribing the recording right after each interview before my memory of the conversation with the participants decayed. Two interviews with the international students were conducted in Chinese, therefore, I translated the recordings from Chinese into English. During the transcribing process, if I encountered some confusing response from the participants or come up with new questions from reading the transcript, I would write down the reminder notes beside the related transcription.

After finishing the initial transcription, I adopted the method of member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and sent the transcript to the participant concerned for verification of those confusing points. It was also a good way for the participant to check if the transcript expressed their ideas correctly. Adjustments were made based on the feedback from each participant. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), member checking is useful to ensure the trustworthiness of the qualitative data.

The second stage involved analyzing the transcription. Since this is a collective case study, I analyzed every single case independently first before I compared all cases as a whole. To

begin with, I picked one case, read through the transcript to gain a general knowledge of the case

(Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Then I read the transcript carefully again, this time to catch

every word and sentence that was important and related to my research focus, I wrote memos

beside the related and essential text. Before I moved on to code the data, I highlighted important

texts by marker pen with different colors. Those texts with similar ideas will be highlighted using

the marker pen of the same color. These segments of texts then were coded using words of my

own or that of the participants' depending on the content. Then, I reviewed the codes, the similar

codes would be combined and those codes which were unrelated to the research would be

discarded. The same method was employed to code every other single case. After finishing

coding all cases, cross-case analysis was conducted to compare the codes between cases, group

the similar codes, reduce the overlap codes, and to collapse the codes into final themes. In the

final analyzing process, constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was been

adopted to enhance the accuracy of the final emerging themes. Followed by the instruction of

Creswell and Guetterman (2019), I compared code to code, theme to theme, and come back to

the raw data every time I needed in order to avoid redundancy and confirm the evidence of the

codes and themes. I tried to make sure that the final emerging themes that contain all the central

information can be reflected in every case (Merriam, 1998). The overlap and surplus themes that

were only reflected in one or two single cases were discarded.

Chapter Four: Finding

4.1 Impression about rural communities

4.1.1 Life in rural communities

Even though the participants come from different rural communities, not only across Atlantic Canada but also China, nearly all the participants noted some common characteristics in their rural community.

All the participants highlighted that there is no opportunity back home. Such opportunities included employment, education, and health care. Several participants commented that people back home either migrate to cities for work or did not work at all. Mia and Mark, who are from a boat building community and a mining community respectively, noted that since the decline of the fishing industry and shut down of the mine back in the last century, their communities are on the edge of dying. The educational and health care resources in the community are quite limited due to a lack of population. Sofia mentioned that there isn't a school in her rural community, and she had to take a school bus to go to a consolidated school in another community. The ride took about half an hour to forty minutes. As for health care, all of the ten participants said there was no hospital back home. Only some small clinics are running, which are not enough to provide operations or emergency services.

There is also a shortage of public services like grocery stores in the rural communities. Yang said he had to walk for one hour to the nearest small shop to get some basic necessities. Grace, who was from Labrador, said, "I experienced, not being able to get fresh vegetables and dairy products and I experienced not being able to get to where I need to go because of the weather and the road. That's a big deal in here and back home, that's every winter."

Due to a lack of opportunities and services, many young people left the rural community, and the majority of the rural population consisted of older people. All of the participants described life in their rural communities as dull because there were no entertainment facilities, such as shopping centers or cinemas (Rye, 2006). Ann and Sofia mentioned that many rural people liked to drink alcohol to spend time, and both of them believed that alcoholism almost became a problem in their rural communities. When being asked how they spend their time there, the participants described various outdoor activities they did, such as hunting, fishing, hiking, swimming in the sea, skidooing, and biking in the woods. Some participants also enjoyed various extra-curricular activities such as drama clubs or sports events. Mark said he joined the drama clubs and several sports clubs. Emma mentioned her passion for learning piano, which required her to drive an hour to a larger community center to take her lessons because there aren't any piano lessons offered in her small community. A few of them mentioned that they worked in the local shops. Yang and Ming said most of the time they needed to help their parents with farming or taking care of younger siblings. Although participants believed life was relatively dull in their home communities, all the participants believed that country and nature life is quiet and brought them peace and made them relax. All the participants said that rural life was less stressful than urban life. Sofia commented that although she found city life more convenient, she still missed the simplicity of country life as she described:

> You feel like you don't hear as much noise from your house and there's a lot less pressure and things like that and a lot of things are less expensive because a lot of people own their houses there's not a lot of mortgages. yeah, there's not many people order takeout and things like that because service is none within the area.

4.1.2 Rural educational experience

All of the participants highlighted that their rural schools were quite small. The enrollment of their high schools ranged from 50 to 300 students, and among these participants, three students graduated from a high school with less than 100 students.

Except for Yang and Ming, all the Canadian participants experienced distance learning through the Centre for Distance Learning and Innovation (CDLI) in their high schools due to a shortage of qualified teachers in some subjects. Several participants said they took five or six courses online, including some basic courses such as French and English. Mia mentioned that her chemistry teacher did not have a chemistry degree but held a biology degree in education. And she shared the experience of her friend, "my friend, her chemistry teacher was a math teacher. That's even worse than a biology teacher. He didn't know anything. He was learning as they were learning. It was awful." Yang and Ming mentioned that their English and math teachers were teaching several grades because there were not enough English teachers in their high schools.

All of the participants mentioned that there were not enough courses offered in high schools. Only the basic courses were offered. There was a lack of advanced, elective and college preparatory courses in their rural high schools. For example, Ann expressed her frustration because of lack of knowledge in psychology: "I love psychology, I always wanted to do it, but I never got any experience because we didn't have enough teachers to have any other courses besides the core courses like chemistry, physics, math and English and stuff like that." Mark, Ming and Yang also experienced a shortage of extra-curricular activities in rural schools. Ming and Yang said they never had any extra-curricular activities in schools. The only "extra-curricular" activity Ming experienced was helping the school to cut and clean the grass on the

field after every summer holiday. Yang's school organized a whole-class activity called "morning run", which he considered was the only thing he did in school that resembled an extra-curricular activity. Mark said he had to play curling with adults because there was no organized sports team in his school.

4.1.3 Rural community values

All of the participants highlighted that rural people are very friendly and warm towards neighbors and strangers. Several participants mentioned that the rural community was a close-knit community. Mia believed rural people are very helpful and like to share things because "nobody has enough money to get everything", and she said, "there's always going to be pre-emptive offers for help. When I was sick with a fever, there were people bringing like cookies and cakes and bread and fish and pickled stuff." Ann believed that there was more trusting going on between rural people as she recalled, "when it comes to like helping people out, they're the kindest people you ever meet. Like, I was never scared if something happened in my house because I know I have neighbors who would help, and that's always something out there." Grace said, "the sense of community feeling back home is unlike anything I've ever felt, that's the reason I keep going back."

All of the participants felt such a warm and friendly atmosphere in the rural community, and they all felt proud and blessed surrounded by such friendly people. However, they all, at the same time, expressed concern over such closeness and lack of anonymity in the rural community. Mia described such experience as "suffocating" as everybody knows your business, "sometimes even before yourself does." Sofia called it as if "having someone stand outside your window and watching your every move for 24 hours". Followed by such proximity, sometimes also someone

will come gossiping and judging (Jones, 1999). None of the participants enjoy gossiping, and several of them clearly stated that they hate it. The rest said they don't mind gossiping but don't like it either. More than half of the participants noted that back home, everybody has to behave and dress like the same, or else you would face the risk of being judged and become a social outcast. For example, Mark said for a long time, he hated himself because he belonged to the LGBT group, which is unacceptable and intolerable in his rural community. Ann was afraid to wear skirts in high school because that would be considered "weird". Grace joked that she never dared to get piercings back in high school because she would become the "headline of the local news". As Rye (2006) pointed out, unlike city people who embrace diversity, rural people strive for uniformity. When someone is striving to assert one's individuality while trying to fit in the social group at the same time, conflict would rise (Wiborg, 2001). It sometimes caused people to lose their sense of self, as highlighted by several participants.

All of the participants noted that the people in the rural community tend to be homogenous in terms of ethnicity and sexual orientation. Participants highlighted that there are either none or only one or two people of different races in their community. Mark used the word "whitewash" to describe the homogeneity of his community. It caused the rural community to be close-minded and conservative, as all of the participants highlighted. Their close-mindedness is reflected in their cynical and sometimes even hostile attitude towards people of different races, religions, political beliefs and sexual orientations. For example, Hazel recalled that once in her community, the LGBTQ flags painted on the sidewalk were destroyed by local people several times by skidding their tires on it. All the participants attributed the close-mindedness to the lack of exposure to diverse cultures. Mia recalled that her father was once shocked by the sight of a black man whom he saw in the hospital in St. John's because her father had never seen a black

man before and he thought the man was burnt. Sofia and Grace noted that the lack of contact with the outside world also prevented rural people from showing any interest in issues that are unrelated to them, such as global and international affairs.

Regarding rural people's opinions about post-secondary education, all of the Canadian participants highlighted that in general, they felt that rural people do not value higher education as much as city people do. Many rural people think the best way after graduation from high school is to get into trades or get a diploma, which are faster and easier than getting a bachelor's degree. All of the participants remarked that they know someone from high school who either dropped out and took a minimum wage job in their community or got into trades schools. A few said the majority of people back home didn't go to university.

All the participants believed that rural people tend to disregard the cultural and academic side of benefits from post-secondary education, but only approach it from the perspective of financial advancement, which is aligned with the finding of Atkin (2003). Sofia believed that such attitudes could be "discouraging" for many young people since "they aren't told of any other opportunities besides nursing and being a doctor or like, any type of diploma… they're not understanding at all about the different opportunities out there and what this leads to different careers and stuff."

Mia's parents insisted that Mia should get into a program like nursing or engineering so that she could find a "respectable" job after university. Mia said: "My mum truly believed the artists' stereotypes. Anyone who does art, are going to be ended up living on the street." Mia originally planned to do a fine arts degree, but her mum threatened her that if she chose any arts program, her mum would not pay for her tuition fees. In the end, Mia chose chemistry as her major. However, she still had to lie to her parents when she decided to choose an arts program as

her minor so that they would continue supporting her financially. Mia said in her mum's opinion, it is "doctor, engineer, or get out of my house." A majority of the participants were either major in the medical or science field, except Robert and Sofia, who was in the art-related program, and Robert was actually doing education. When asked for the reasons for choosing their majors, Sofia, who was doing linguistics, said she chose the program because she liked it. But Sofia also expressed concern over her future career after she graduates. The rest of the participants all expressed their hope and belief to some extent that their major would bring them a fulfilling job such as doctors or teachers. For example, Yang, who was doing computer science, said: "we rural students could not afford to do arts, because that is hard to find jobs. I must do a program that could help me to find jobs as soon as possible so that I didn't need to rely on my parents to support me."

Unlike rural Canadians who sometimes devalue post-secondary education, the rural community of two Chinese students highly value the merit of post-secondary education. As Ming remarked, "Back home, only those who were not good at study didn't go to university because everyone knew that education is the only way out. If we didn't go to university, we would be stuck up in the rural community and be a farmer forever." However, due to the financial restriction, Ming's family could only afford his brother and him to continue education, and his two sisters were forced to drop out of school after grade 9. Overall speaking, from the feedback of ten participants, rural people, generally tend to disregard higher education unless it is work-oriented and financially beneficial.

4.2 Rural identity of university students

All participants believed that they have a rural identity, which makes them unique and special among their university peers. However, there was no standard rural identity. Instead, a mixture of opinions was given by participants regarding their rural identity.

Nearly all of the participants believed that a regional dialect is a distinct feature of their rural identity. Back home, they all spoke in their regional dialect. Several Canadian participants mentioned that they tried to speak formal English when they came to St. John's so that others can understand them. Robert said his university peers instantly knew he was from the bay when he started to talk. Ann, Emma, Hazel said their friends in university considered their accents funny and sometimes made harmless jokes about their accents.

All of the participants noticed that their tastes were somewhat old-fashioned and conservative. Half of the participants said they had never listened to pop music before they came to university. Participants believed it is a result of a lack of exposure and influence of the surrounding because everybody back home only listens to country music, Newfoundland music or Irish music. In terms of clothing, Mia said she dressed more practical, and she chose clothing which was more comfortable and durable because she spent a lot of time outdoors so that such clothing would be more useful and easier to repair if broken. All participants said that they were not into fashion and brands because back home, there is no shopping malls.

A few participants pointed out that their rural culture shaped them into a thrift person. Nearly all the participants mentioned that they are not into expensive brand name items, even after they came to university. When asked if it is because of a lack of money that leads them to such a thrifty lifestyle, different opinions were given between international students and local students. Ming believed that it is his parents' money he is spending, so he could not spend it the way he likes. Moreover, it is a culture and tradition in rural China to be thrift in everything, of

which they believe is a merit and value. On the other hand, Mia said rural people would spend large sum of money on something which they find useful and practical, but would not spend money on something which is not useful, and she said:

> I have $400 down insulated snowboots, so I could go outside and do something …. but if it's not making you happy and it's not useful, then why did you spend the money…they (urban people) have this dress code that if you don't wear brands here, you get shot. Back home, nobody cared where stuff is from Walmart or were hand-me-downs. As long as you were clean, nobody cared…there's no point wearing expensive clothing for the sake of expensive clothing. So it's not really a problem of money, rather a problem of use, you know?... Just the brand adds no value to someone who looks for usefulness.

Grace and Mia also mentioned that their lifestyle has been influenced by indigenous culture, that they should protect the land, cherish food and be environmentally friendly. When they hunt a moose, they used every part of the moose. Mia recalled that she was appalled to find urban people throwing away the clothes which they thought were out of fashion. She believed that city people do not know how to cherish because they do not know the effort people made to create something and city people are given much more than those people in rural areas.

All of them said that they all inherited friendliness from the rural community. Several participants used the words "down to earth", "kind", "helpful", "warm" to describe themselves. Ming remarked: "I was considered as the most friendly and helpful man in the class when I was in university. No matter what happened, I was always the first to raise my hand and offered my help." Grace said she still would offer a drive for some stranger if they needed, although everybody believed it is not safe to do so in the city.

Three participants said that their unique physical outlook and lifestyle form part of their rural identity. Ming believed he is physically much stronger than urban people because he used to farm and helped his family to do some manual work all year round. Mark used the word "townie" and "bay-men" to describe the difference between people from St. John's and those from other places in NL. He described bay-men as "rough around the edges" and wild, who enjoy outdoor activities and who drink beer in the shed. Robert used the word "laid back and free" to describe his life in the countryside and he said,

> I grew up somewhere where being outside was such a big part of everybody. I feel we had so much freedom in my town. I am able to go outside and not worrying about being hit by a car or not being worried about someone trying to take me or not being worried about pollution.

In terms of personality, several personal qualities were highlighted by different participants. Half of the participants pointed out that they are hard workers. They believed that in order to earn the same opportunities as city people, they had to work harder because of the lack of resources and support in the rural community. Robert said in his childhood, instead of watching TV and playing computer games, he had to help his father cut the wood, which made him a hard worker today. Yang also believed that his hard-working asset helped him to study hard and get into university successfully and made him become a Ph.D. student today.

Independence and self-reliance were also frequently mentioned by several participants. Grace said she learnt independence since she was little because her parents were busy with work, so she learnt almost everything on her own, including cooking, shooting, hunting and various sports. Ming said that since he was seven, he had to take care of his younger brother and sister alone at home while his parents were working in the field.

Ming and Yang highlighted that resilience is their one distinctive merit. Ming explained that it was formed through the hard-living conditions he had been through all those years in the rural community, which shaped him into someone who could face and conquer any hardship. Urban people, he explained,

> Lived all their life in comfort, they didn't need to bend themselves all days in the field and farm, they didn't need to cook for their whole family at the age of ten, and they never knew what hardship is. And the hardship they thought they have means nothing to us.

Similarly, Grace, who is from Labrador, pointed out that she copes with adversity better than urban people because "we don't get the best transportation, we don't get this and that, so I think I've learned to cope with that a little bit better and accepted it."

Ming and Yang said that their rural background also made them lack self-confidence, which has formed part of their identity. They believed that a lack of various cultural and financial support either from the rural community or their parents caused their sense of inferiority. Yang pointed out:

> Urban parents had higher expectation for their children, they expected them to become doctors, professors, and they would spend money for extra tutoring for their kids. But we rural kids didn't have these resources. When we went to universities and interact with these people, we realized how much we lacked in ourself to catch up with them. So we are kind of lack self-confidence, especially when we are interacting with students from large city and some rich students, we would be pretty shy and nervous, because I think they are better than us because they are richer and know more things.

4.3 Reasons to leave rural community and go to university

Several common reasons were highlighted by nearly all the participants regarding their decision to leave the rural community and go to university.

The primary reason that drove all the participants to leave is the lack of various opportunities and resources in the rural community, such as employment, education and health care (Lynch, 2005). Since the closure of the cod fishery in 1992 which was the primary economic source of many NL communities, many of the communities are dying (Atkin, 2003; Lynch, 2007). Moreover, as Stone (2018) and MacDonald et al. (2002) pointed out, many participants had higher ambition for their future rather than merely being a fisherman or other blue-collar workers. Hazel used the phrase "never crossed my mind of doing a trade" and Ann said that "I don't want to work with my hands". Mark said trade jobs are unstable because they are "project-based", which supports Carr and Kefalas's (2009) highlight that many rural jobs are short-term and unstable and therefore are limited in financial advancement. High academic achievement could also motivate rural students to go to university (Jamieson, 2000). Robert remarked: "I graduated high school with a 93 overall average, so I knew that I am smart enough and I could put my mind, in a better place and get a better education than just doing a trade." All the participants either expressed explicitly or implicitly their ambition to get a fulfilling job. Emma said she just "love learning and studying" and Kellee "always wanted to become a doctor". Mia noted her interest, which is Classic Roman, could only be found in the university. She said, "Like I remember doing Latin and we were translating. I never get to do those at home. Everyone would look at me like I was stupid, but here I am. There's a group of people sharing the same interests with you. It is a really nice thing."

A few participants mentioned that there are some professional jobs offered in the rural community, such as nurses, physicians and teachers. However, such opportunities are rare and mostly require post-secondary education. All of them believed that larger opportunities and resources such as white-collar jobs, quality education, advanced health care, public services lay in the urban area. Emma and Robert expressed a strong attachment to the rural community; however, they still decided to pursue the chance of self-development and better living conditions in the university.

The second biggest reason that motivated these participants to leave is that they all found it too dull to stay in the rural community. Based on the feedback of all participants, there were no entertainment facilities in their rural communities, and the population mostly consisted of older people. Participants noted the gossiping atmosphere was suffocating. Moreover, all of the participants said they wished to explore the outside world as they got "fed up" staying in the same place for such a long time.

Parental attitude also played a significant role in motivating students to continue post-secondary education. The parents of every participant supported their decision to go on to post-secondary education. Ann, Mia and Sofia mentioned that since they were babies, their parents started an educational fund for them to go to university in the future. Over half of the participants highlighted that their parents hoped for more opportunities for their children. Mark, who is doing a nursing degree, described his mum's attitude:

My mother, she has very much an empty nest syndrome, she's always calling me and stuff like that, but she knows that there's nothing for me at home because the industry isn't there anymore, and she doesn't want me to go back once I get my nursing degree,

she's like, no, don't come back, it's a long term care, go work in a unit, get your nursing specialty.

One thing worth noting is that a majority of participants (except for Ming and Yang) have at least one parent who had post-secondary education. Five of them have parents who both have post-secondary education. Higher parental education might be the motivator that drove their children to go to university. Based on previous research (e.g. Chenoweth & Galliher, 2004; Choy, 2001; Blackwell & McLaughlin, 1999; Byun et al., 2012c), parents with higher education credentials usually have a higher expectation for their children, and they could provide more financial and moral support for their children to continue higher education. Furthermore, parents with higher educational levels could serve as a role model for children, as sometimes children like to follow their parents' path. Grace said her mum, who has achieved a diploma in nursing, greatly influenced her decision to go to university. She explained,

As a child, I saw the opportunities that my mother had by getting advanced education. My father who didn't finish high school still got a great paying job, but he didn't have the opportunities to work anywhere like my mother could have. She was all over the north coast of Labrador, and she did some work all across Newfoundland. So I've seen the opportunities she got. That kind of motivated me to advance my own education.

Interestingly, Ming and Yang's parents, who didn't have post-secondary education, also supported their children to go to university, because they wished their children to have the opportunities which they didn't have. This is what Heinisch (2016) has discovered in the experiences of eight first-generation rural students from Midwestern University in US. Yang said his parents felt thrilled and proud of him because only a few people could get into university in his village. Yang said, "Usually, it means you will have a bright and successful future. I became

the pride of the whole village". Ming's parents asked him to study hard since he was a kid. As he stated, "my father told me unless I wished to become a farmer like him when I grow up, I had to study hard and get into university." When he started high school, his parents did not give him any farm work to do so that he could focus on his studies.

Four participants mentioned that their high school teachers played a role in motivating them to get into university. Hazel said, "in all my courses, my teachers would tell us, well, this is what you need to know for university and kind of hinting that we should carry on to university." Mia believed that her excellent chemistry teacher triggered her interests in chemistry and motivated her to continue post-secondary education in chemistry. Ming and Yang said their high school teachers told them every day the importance of getting into university. Yang recalled his teacher using a joke to express the importance of higher education, "boys, you cannot use your pretty face to pay for the dinner bill when you hang out with girls. Only when you get into university and find a good job later will you be able to marry a beautiful wife."

Mark chose to go to university because he was bullied back home by his school peers. To him, the university was his second chance to enjoy a good life being a student. For Mark, his experience back in the rural community was not enjoyable because he was homosexual, and he was afraid to "come out" as he knew his sexual orientation would not be accepted in the rural community. He remarked, "I know it was my chance to fly away and have a lot of friends and be able to study what I want to study and to actually enjoy life versus feeling like I was trapped in a place I wasn't accepted."

As for the reasons that they chose MUN, all of them mentioned that it is one of the cheapest universities in Canada. "nobody really has enough money to go elsewhere unless they get a scholarship", Mia said. Emma said she had applied for the University of British Columbia and

got admitted. However, her parents didn't allow her to go, not only because they could not afford the high tuition fees, but she got herself 25000 dollars scholarship to study at MUN. All the participants believed that MUN could offer them the program they wished to study at the cheapest cost. Moreover, all the Canadian participants said it is closer to home so that they would face fewer difficulties in the transition phase, such as culture shock. Robert, who has a strong attachment to his rural community, said, "I think it was hard enough for me to leave my small town to come in here to go to school, so to leave Newfoundland altogether I think would have been a lot more of an adjustment for me." Grace said that she knew several seniors studying at MUN, who are from the same rural community. If she encountered any difficulties in university, she would at least have someone to turn to for help. Some participants pointed out that they didn't give much thought about which university to choose because MUN was always their first choice, and it is the university "that everyone goes to" and the university their parents went to. Sofia said, "I have never heard of anyone in my community who went to another university." Mia noted, "When you're in Newfoundland when somebody says, I am going to university. What they actually mean is I'm going to MUN." A few participants said they didn't know much about the universities elsewhere since their high school had only introduced MUN to them, and Sofia commented, "they are acting like the other universities don't exist." Emma pointed out that her high school teacher never encouraged them to go to any other universities in Canada. Yang and Ming completed their bachelor's degree in their home country. The university they chose is also located within the province where they are from. The reasons were similar to what the Canadian participants had given that they would feel safer studying in a university that is closer to home, and it would be easy for their parents to visit them.

4.4. Impression about the city

The participants' first impressions of the city were very much similar to the finding in Ast's (2014) and Handke's (2012) studies. All the participants expressed their shock about the multiculturalism in St. John's when they first got here since their home communities are primarily homogeneous in terms of race and culture. Here in St. John's, they saw people of different colours and races every day and everywhere. They enjoyed such experiences of multiculturalism. Mia recalled the lovely multicultural experience she had,

One of my friends from Bangladesh said, let's go get some biryani. And I was like, where the hell are you going to get that here? Cause all I expected was like fish and chips, just like at home. She was like, yeah, there's an Indian place down the road. I was like, what do you mean there's an Indian place down there? Does that exist? And we went there and got the food, and it was delicious. But like I didn't know that we could find such a thing here.

The city of St. John's also embraces diverse values and cultures. All of the participants found that people in the city are much more open-minded than rural people. People with different interests, political views, religions and sexual orientations are accepted and welcomed in the city. Mark felt like he was a fish out of the water back home, but here he could finally accept himself and not afraid of being judged for his sexual orientation. He described St. John's as a "vibrant" city and "wish to be a part of it". Grace and Ann said in here they did not need to act the same as everyone else as they did back home, and they could do whatever they wanted without getting any criticism or comments. Grace got two piercings and has dyed her hair, which she believed would be "unimaginable" back home. A few participants believed that city people care more

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about those global and national issues than rural people, while back home, like Sofia noticed, "everyone just cared about themselves and what had happened to their neighbors".

Another thing that made all the participants feel relieved is that city people do not like to gossip and mind about other people's business. They felt that everybody in the city is living their own life. Sofia did not even know who her neighbor is after living here for three years. However, the city also has its shortcomings. All the participants said they felt city people are colder and more arrogant towards each other and not as friendly and helpful as people back home. Back home, they know everybody and could talk to everybody, but here many of them felt a bit lonely. As Mia said, "I can't just go up the street and chat with someone. They would think I was crazy. You know what I mean? I can't just go and talk to them about whatever the heck. And it makes me feel lonely sometimes." Mia noticed that there was a lack of trust between city people, as "back home people leave their door unlocked, but people here was like, why do you even do that? That makes no sense. Well, it makes sense to me". Mia pointed out that such coldness towards people sometimes could bring peace of mind to oneself. Back in the rural community, she got over-worried for everyone's business in the community, and here some of her urban friends believed her "rustic" friendliness sometimes was too "nosy". She believed that city people know how to "let things pass by".

The outlook of the city also made a distinctive difference compared to the rural community. They noticed that the city is more crowded, with more traffic lights and traffic lanes. Four participants said the city is more polluted. City life is much more convenient for residents, with many grocery stores, various shopping malls and all kinds of entertainment stalls like bars or clubs. Robert found it amazing to have shops open at seven pm in the city when most of the shops back home would be closed. The presence of various malls and stores expose city people

to various items, and all the participants found that city people are more into fashion and brand name stuff. Ann commented, "it was very weird because out there everybody wears the same piece of clothing, but coming in here, they have Champion and all the Gucci stuff. I never knew regular people wear Gucci until I came here. I thought it was just billionaires." A few participants noted that the living expense in the city is higher since they needed to pay for rent and public transportation. Grace said she found the groceries in St. John's are cheaper because back in Labrador, everything is "ridiculously priced".

Mia, Grace and Robert pointed out that the convenience of life in the city made city people lack awareness of savings and appreciation. Mia and Grace said city people like to waste food. Mia said her urban friends were curious when she told them that she kept the moose heart in a jar for future cooking. "They were like, why don't you just throw it out? And I said, because it is useful." Robert gave an example of waiting to be served in the restaurant:

> They get annoyed because it would be busy at a restaurant or something, but I didn't have the opportunity to go to a restaurant back home, so for me to go to a restaurant and wait for an hour doesn't bother me. But for them, when they're so used to going to restaurants all the time, it's like, oh, we gotta wait for so long and to me it's like, I don't care.

4.5 Life in university

4.5.1 Academic life

Their experiences upon arrival at university was similar to the rural first-generation students described in Schultz's (2004) study. Upon arriving at campus, all of the participants said that they were shocked by the large size of the campus and a large number of students. Over half

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of the participants noted that they had a class of about 200 students, which is about the size of some participants' whole high school. Yang was shocked to find that there are five dining halls in his university, and each could contain more than 1000 students. Many participants found the size of classes and campus intimidating, and Grace said, "just the change from everybody around me knowing me personally to all of a sudden I was just a face in the crowd, that was a really hard adjustment for me. Sudden I'm a nobody, and it was really different." They were also amazed by the sight of so many international students at MUN. Grace remarked, "I didn't realize so many diverse cultures were in the university, like all the international students, it feels like Newfoundland students and international students are almost at a one to one ratio, which is incredible."

All the participants also noticed the fast pace of teaching. Several participants said their lecturers would finish explaining one whole chapter of a book within 45 minutes. Many of them found such an instructional style stressful. A few participants noted that such teaching style required and expected students to have self-learning ability as the lecturer will not be able to give students all the details.

All of the participants also remarked that they had a large volume of things to learn in university. Ann said back in high school, they would use one semester to finish three or four chapters of a book, but in university, one book would be finished within one semester. Grace said she did not realize that she had to put so many hours in the study in order to catch up. Mia gave an example of a large sum of work to be done in her Latin class:

> We finished translating like three chapters of Julius Caesar's works from Latin to
> English, and we asked professor, what do you want us to translate next? And he just took
> out this stack of paper; I'm going to say it was like 40 sheets of paper, all in Latin, he had

them bound with a binder clip because it is too thick for staples. And he just smacked it

in front of every one of us and said, translate this.

A few participants discovered that the same subjects offered in the university are much

harder to learn than in high school. Sofia failed the maths exam, of which she always achieved

high grades in high school. As Sofia commented, "The subject is the same subject, but the

knowledge offered is deeper and harder". However, several participants mentioned that it was

not the content that was hard, but to keep up with the lecturer and deal with a large sum of

knowledge was hard.

Robert, Hazel and Ann complained that such a large number of students in the class caused

the lecturer to pay less attention to each student, and it was hard for students to have interaction

with the lecturer. Ann remarked:

Out there, there was a lot of one on one with the teachers if you had a question. I wasn't

afraid to ask. I drank with half the teachers, to be quite honest with you, because they

were like my family members. When you come in here, and there's a class of probably

200, 250 in some cases. It's a big leap because like you have to get used being a lot more

self-reliant kind of thing. I know plenty of people came in here, and they dropped out

because their study habits could not match.

Such a learning environment expects self-learning skills from the students, as pointed out by

several participants, which several of them found challenging. For example, Sofia and Robert felt

quite uneasy about being left to study independently. Sofia said she felt the need to have positive

reinforcement to study as she did in high school:

When I was living there, I had a lot of people to look up to and be motivated by role

models and things like that. But in here I didn't know anyone, and it was hard for me to

get a closer relationship with profs and teachers, which was a big motivator for me in high school. There is no one here to motivate you to learn. Even if I did good, there was nothing positive I could get out of it, if I did bad, there was nothing negative to punish me either. So I would just get a 50-50.

In university, there are various courses and programs, which made several participants excited. They noted that back in high school, only the basic courses were offered. Mia, who is doing Roman classics, was excited because she could take the classic Roman course in university. However, such diversity also made a few participants confused when they first got here. Sofia and Mark have changed their major since they came here, and Sofia changed her major four times.

A few participants found that it was hard to form any close relationship with faculty members. Several participants said, back in rural high school, they and their teachers were also friends with whom they sometimes socialized with. Yang said his high school teacher often invited him to dine with his family. However, since coming to university, he found that the professor is someone who can only be seen in class, it was hard even to find any faculty members in the office. Emma found it intimidating to approach faculty because "they are so smart, and I am only a first-year student".

4.5.2 Non-academic life

Upon their first year in university, all of the participants lived in the residence, except for Emma who lived in the house which her parents bought in St. John's as an investment. Several participants believed that living on campus was the best way to ease the transition as they did not

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need to cook or worry about all kinds of bills. Moreover, they also could make many friends in residence.

Despite the heavy study regime in university, nearly all of the participants (except for Yang and Ming) joined some clubs and organizations. Seven participants said they had joined various volunteer organizations in or outside the university. Some of them said they wished to give back to the community, and a few said it was done for their resume.

Half of the participants said they worked either full time or part-time while they were in university, two worked both full time and part-time. Most participants worked off-campus, and they either worked in government sectors or in various service sectors. Mark worked as a resident assistant at MUN. The primary reason for taking part-time jobs for most of them was to pay for the tuition fees and high living expenses in the city. Sofia, who takes both a full-time job and two part-time job even bought a house and a car, using the money she earned. Mark and Robert said the hardest part of working was to balance their life and distribute their time properly among study, working and socializing. Grace was planning to give up her work temporarily because of her heavy study duty. Mark, Emma and Ann mentioned that they were also partially or fully funded by the scholarship.

Yang and Ming did not work or join any clubs in university. Both of them joined some clubs in their first year, but soon they quit because they thought it was "a waste of time". Besides, they found that they could never take an important position in the organization because they lacked enough interpersonal skills and they did not have the powerful social networking which urban students have. Ming said, "In most cases, they (urban students) have both". This supported Hui and Min's (2017) finding that urban students are more likely to participate in school organizations and become leaders. Both of them believed that it would be a waste of time

to work part-time unless it is a future career and academically related. Yang said, "I tried to work in a restaurant one time, but soon my parents asked me to stop because they wanted me to put my focus on the study". Yang and Ming's intense focus on study supported Terenzini et al's (1994) finding that first generation university students like to put their studies first and would not spare time for recreational purposes until they could manage their study. However, it did not support Billson and Terry's (1982) finding that first generation students are more likely to put emphasis on part-time work than study.

All of the participants have made some friends since they came to university, either through taking classes, participating in various social events or through work. Yang and Ming said they did not have the chance to make many friends because they did not join any organization or clubs, and the only few friends they knew were either met though class or residence. Mia, Mark and Hazel mentioned that due to a large number of students in the classroom, it was easier to make friends in residence than in class. Mark said he made many friends by working as the resident assistant. Mia made friends through "making trades" with other students in residence. She described such an interesting way of making friends in residence:

> Since in residence, nobody has much money. Everybody has to share to get along. Like if you want to make cookies, but you don't have enough room or enough money to buy a cookie sheet. And somebody else has a cookie sheet, but you have a bottle of soy sauce, so you trade your soy sauce for their cookie sheet. It is really fun. And I made a lot of friends through that.

However, not all the participants enjoyed their experience living on campus. Sofia moved out of residence because she could not get along with her roommate, and she hated having people around her all the time and being forced to interact with people against her will.

Four participants noticed that it was harder to make friends in university than back home, as Sofia explained: "Back home, everyone knows each other. Here you need the skills to make friends." A few other participants also shared this opinion. However, few participants were bothered by this issue. Most of them felt satisfied with the friends they made and had no intention to make more friends purposely. Only Sofia mentioned that when she was single, she felt that it would be better if she could make more friends, but ever since she met her fiancé, she did not mind having so few friends anymore. Hazel said she found it easy to make friends in university because everybody is lonely and wish to make friends.

4.6 Rural background influences university life

4.6.1 Academic influence

All the participants said their rural high schools did not prepare them enough for post-secondary education, which is consistent with several studies (Hardre, 2007; Means et al., 2016; Monk, 2007; Rumbolt, 1992). They said rural high schools lacked quality education due to a shortage of resources such as quality teachers or various teaching facilities. Over half of the participants said rural high schools only offered the most basic courses and did not provide some elective courses such as psychology. It set them back when they came to the university as they found it harder to learn subjects such as psychology compared with urban students who have taken psychology preparatory courses in high school. Grace, who majored in biology, said she

suffered in university because some of her courses required her to have a chemistry background, which she did not have since there were no chemistry courses offered in her high school.

Lack of elective courses also affected participants choice of program in university. Emma and Sofia felt that the limited number of courses offered in high school deprived them of the opportunities of getting exposed to various subjects and prevented them from finding out their interests when they came to university. Emma said she chose her major, which is kinesiology only because in high school, she went to a workshop in Calgary, where she found her interest. Emma said:

There's not enough opportunity to do courses that you know we could potentially be interested in, I think, because like just two basic sciences and math and stuff doesn't really open you up to like to do stuff like psychology… most people don't know what they want to do when they came in here. They do a general year first.

Similarly, Sofia was quite confused about what she wished to study when she first arrived at MUN. As she stated,

At the time, I didn't know what psychology was. I didn't know what linguistics was. There were a lot of different subjects and fields that I didn't know of, and it was just because like we're so far away from everything that it seems like you don't know how to get there with your career. So, I came in here and unlike some people who don't like anything. I ended up liking too many things. I changed my major about four times.

Not only the rural school, but sometimes the rural community could also affect the choice of program in university. Sofia said the culture of the rural community, which valued certain careers such as doctor and engineering, prevented her from finding her real interest, which caused her to feel lost at the beginning. She experienced a long period of confusion about her

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post-secondary education. "A lot of people just belittled any other type of degree or didn't talk about it or just didn't know about it. I ended up going to college and coming back to university." When she finally settled in the program she liked, her mum asked her what she could get out of a program like linguistics, she said, "nothing really. But it is what I like."

Sofia said that only after she came to university when she found that her urban friends all had taken advanced math before, but she did not have the chance to do that back home. She was first major in math when she arrived in university because she was a top student in math back in rural high school, but after she failed the first math exam in university, she realized the huge gap and difference between the math taught in high school and those offered in the university. She changed her major shortly after that, and she said it changed her whole conception of herself of being good at math. What's worse, the initial failure challenged her previously assumed self-identity of "being a good student" and made her lose self-confidence. Since that, she began to feel confused about her academic goal and direction in university. She changed her major four times before finally settling on linguistics. Similarly, Ann thought she was fully prepared for French courses in university because of her high score in French in high school, but she almost failed French when she came to MUN. She explained, "there was such a big gap in what they taught us and what they didn't teach us, and a lot of other subjects like maths and sciences and stuff like that, I found them really hard because I didn't have enough background knowledge."

Over half of the participants said online learning in high school resulted in a lack of in-class learning experience. Mia, who is majoring in chemistry, used the word "awful" to describe her first lab practice experience in university. She remarked,

> We didn't have a lab in high school. Even if we had, for one or two a year maybe, they
> were mostly just watching the prof do something because we didn't have enough

equipment. When I came in here, and they expected me to know how to do titrations in

the lab with all the equipment. I don't even know what titration is. Sounds like a disease

to me.

Many of them mentioned that the fast-pace teaching style in university made them feel

stressful. Mia and Sofia's schools did not follow the semester system. Instead, they had a few

courses which were taught for a whole year. The slow pace of teaching and learning back home

made them feel unprepared for the fast pace learning speed in university.

All of the participants felt that rural high schools did not provide enough guidance on their

future life in university, including the choice of different universities across Canada, how to

apply for university, how to apply for a scholarship and student loans. Half of the participants

said their school had to share a guidance counsellor between several schools. Over half of the

participants said they completed most of the university application, including the scholarship

application themselves.

Despite various shortcomings and negative influence of rural education, Grace found the

mode of online learning in high school set her up for success of self-learning in university. She

said,

> There was no one in the CDLI room, so there was no one supervising you, so it was kind
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> of up to us whether we wanted to sign in, pay attention to the classwork or not. There's no
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> one behind you, making sure you get your assignments done and stuff like that. So, I
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> think that was a big part of what prepared me for university education.

4.6.2 Non-academic influence

Their rural background not only influences the academic life of participants, but also other

aspects of university life.

The majority of participants highlighted that they tended to make friends who share a similarly rural background (Ast, 2014). Robert, Mark and Mia said they found themselves and other rural students "clicked" because they share similar tastes, values and life experiences. Sofia said it was hard to be friends with urban students because their styles and tastes did not fit. Once she was teased by her urban friend for listening to Irish music, and she said, "I don't really enjoy their lifestyle. I'm pretty particular about whom I chose as my friend. If they don't have roughly the same activities as I do, or the same values, I can't really see myself being their friend." Robert, Grace and Emma said they had several good friends in university who were from the same rural community. Yang and Ming said they cannot afford to be friends with urban students. Ming explained, "they (urban students) always go shopping or dine at the restaurant, and we found that too expensive. In the beginning, they asked us to join them. But we always found some excuse not to go. Later, they just didn't ask us anymore." Yang believed that his rural identity made him lack self-confidence, and he was afraid to approach urban students.

This is similar to what Ast (2014) found in first year rural students from Oregon, US. In this study, a few participants said it was hard to find friends because they were afraid to approach strangers and make friends with them, especially in their first year; moreover, the large size of the classroom and the large number of students intimidated them. The participants said they were used to knowing everybody back home, and Ann described the feeling of making friends with someone they knew nothing about. She noted, "It's nice to have a fresh start with people, but it's intimidating at the same time." Sofia said she lacked the skills to make friends, and she changed from being a social person back home to becoming self-isolated in university. Emma pointed out that it was hard to make friends with urban students because most of them have already formed

their circle of friends from someone they knew before university, thus approaching these people would look like "intruding".

In the studies of Stewart and Ostrove (1993) and Kuriloff and Reichert (2003), the students from a lower socioeconomic background felt alienated and excluded by their urban counterparts. In this study, all the Canadian participants said their urban friends were inquisitive about their rural background but appreciated the difference between each other. And although most of them felt a tendency to approach and make friends with rural students, none of them reported feeling of exclusion. However, Ming and Yang experienced a certain extent of judgement and sometimes even discrimination from their urban counterparts. Ming recalled once he was invited to dine at an urban classmate's home. He said, "His mum just kept on reminding me to wash my hands before we started dinner. It was as if I was dirty or something." And Yang stated,

> They won't say something in front of your face. After all, we are all adults now. But I could still feel that they treated us differently, like they always asked where you are from before they made friends with you. And every time after they heard that I was from the rural area, they would not make good friends with you or introduce you to their social group or something. Just merely said hi every time they saw you.

Not everyone found it hard to socialize because of their rural background. Several participants found quite the opposite. Four participants said their rural identity made them feel it was easier to make friends with everybody because they are easy going and helpful. Mia said sometimes she exchanged experience and culture with urban students because her urban friends were curious about her rural background. And she said,

> Students from big cities are less likely to be friends with someone just because they're nice. They tended to hang out with people who shared the same interests. But in a rural

community, you don't have that opportunity when you could have a group of friends who already liked the same thing because there were so few people back home. But I shared my interests with their (urban students) interests, so we began to like each other's interests, and then we become friends.

Like the rural Californians in Parson's (1992) study, Grace said the homogeneous feature of the rural community made her afraid to approach and talk to people of different races and colours. Grace commented, "It is not that I am racist or anything. It is just I don't know their culture, and I am afraid that I might offend them." She believed that urban students had that advantage in this regard since they were used to multiculturalism when they were kids, while she never had opportunities to interact with people of different races in the rural community.

Half of the participants mentioned that their rural experience made them nervous and they lacked confidence in their life in university before they came. Robert was nervous because he heard rural people said the university is hard, and he was worried that his ill preparation of study in high school might influence his performance in university. Grace, who was doing a dual degree in the medical field, said she was nervous because nobody back home has done a similar professional degree like her. Grace had no guidance and suggestions, and she felt that she was "fighting this alone", which made her frightened at the beginning. Mark was afraid that other students would not accept him because of his sexual orientation at university. Ann was terrified because she knew no one in this strange environment, and she was not familiar with the geography of St. John's.

Yang and Ming pointed out that they lacked communication, public speaking and other interpersonal skills compared to those urban students. Such deficit was aggravated by their lack of confidence and feeling of inferiority about themselves, which caused them to be inactive and

silent in many social events and organizations. Yang pointed out that he lacked leadership skills because he felt "shy and could not even speak clearly". He said, "Most of the time, I found myself isolated, but I was not isolated by others, but by myself." On the contrary, urban students are more confident in every aspect because "they had chances to join in many social events in schools and are more experienced." Ming mentioned that city students have larger social net-working support from their parents:

> They didn't need to worry about finding a job after they graduate because many of them could rely on their parents to find them a job. Their parents knew many people. But we rural students had nobody to rely on. My parents are farmers. So, we have to work much harder in university, which is also one of the reasons that we rural students don't like to join any clubs because we don't have time. We need to study.

The experience of Yang and Ming supported Hui and Min's (2017) finding that students from rural backgrounds are less likely to join in students' organizations because they dare not waste time on personal interests. Instead, they would spend more time studying because it is their only chance. Furthermore, according to Ming and Yang, urban students are more versatile in skills in many non-academic fields, such as sports, arts and music because "their parents sent their children to the piano and dance lessons", while "the only thing I knew outside of study is farming and catching a fish with bare hands", said Ming. Their lack of talent also made Yang and Ming "dull" people. During every big celebration event, they could only watch their urban friends performing onstage. This is aligned with the findings of Reay et al. (2009), in which the researchers pointed out that the working-class students "focus so intently on achieving academic success in their chosen field that they have foregone wider cultural accomplishments and they are open about their efforts. What they do is work and work extremely hard" (p. 1109).

Ming also noticed his narrow-mindedness in university compared with urban students. When he found that one of his roommates, who is from the urban area, moved out of the residence to live with his girlfriend, he had some opinions about it. He said, "I thought a man and woman living together before marriage is not good. I am very traditional." He believed that his narrow-mindedness was also one of the reasons that stopped him from making any friends from the city because he found that they could never agree on many issues.

Some of the participants highlighted the positive influence of rural background and rural identity. Grace and Sofia mentioned that since they left the rural community and came to university, they started to care about the welfare of the rural community and tried to change it for the better. Sofia said she has joined a social organization, which aims to provide more information to the rural high school graduates about the application to various universities across Canada. Nearly all the participants said they always supported the rural community and wished to be a good representative of rural people.

Ming and Yang said some parts of the rural identity, such as resilience could help them to adjust to a strange environment quicker and adapt to hardship better than those from the cities. For example, when it comes to some problems which nearly all university freshmen face, such as homesickness, they could recover from the misery faster. Ming said his urban classmates could not stand the suffering of standing for long hours under the sun when they went out to the open field to collect data for one research project, and these urban students quit the project shortly after that. Yang and Ming also felt that they studied much harder than those from the cities, which sometimes helped them to achieve higher grades than their urban counterparts.

4.7 University life influences the perception of rural background

4.7.1 Rural attachment

All of the participants highlighted that since they came to university, the biggest thing they noticed and reflected was the narrow-mindedness and conservative side of the rural community. Ann explained,

It was weird because you barely even noticed when you're out there, you're just so caught up in like I want to be accepted, I want to have friends, like the typical high school experience but when you came in here and met different people of different values, then you started to question, why was I like that before.

Grace commented, "back then, I felt nothing. However, since coming here and seeing all these people, every time I came back, I felt very comfortable." Emma said she used to feel nothing when she heard rural people joke about homosexual people, but the last time when she went back, she had a quarrel with one of her high school friends over the issue. She said, "I found one of the biggest things university has brought me is that it opened my eyes and see how ignorant I was in the past."

Half of the participants said the way they found rural people are narrow-minded is their resistance to change themselves. Emma said: "I just could not understand how come they are not willing to leave the place, especially those who don't have a job there. They would rather live on employment insurance than go out to work. It just confused me." Yang believed rural people's backward attitude was irresponsible for their future generation, he said,

It is not that I looked down upon the place, it is just that I think these groups of people should strive to make their life better, not just staying there farming generation after generation, which is quite irresponsible for their children because they could not support

their children enough to help them to achieve their dream. I used to have quite a few good

friends back in the rural community, but now we contacted no more with each other,

because I felt that I moved on, but they stayed the same because they didn't want to

change.

Ann expressed her frustration over the problems facing her rural community, as she noted, "you

see various problems back there, like children don't go to school, like alcoholism. I want to

change them, but I know I can't; it's set in tradition out there. If they don't want to change, there's

nothing you can do about it."

The awakening of these participants pushed some of them to alienate themselves from their

rural community. Over half of the participants said their attachment to the rural community

decreased since they came to university. Yang said that if it were not to visit his parents back

home, he would never want to go back to his village. He stated, "Just seeing these people stuck

there forever and never wanted to change themselves made me realize I could never go back. It

was not the place for me anymore. It belonged to my past, my present and future lay in the city."

Hazel believed that she did not need her rural community anymore because she could find

everything she needs in the city. She said, "I know my home will always be there whenever I

needed it. I think that it would be nice to come back every now and then, but I'm okay without it

as well". Sofia said every time she went back, she would avoid talking to rural people because

she knew their values would clash and they would judge her behind her back, so she would keep

at arm's length.

Some participants said their attachment to the rural community increased since they came

to the city. Living in the city made several participants cherish some aspects of their rural values

and identities more, such as being helpful towards people and being hard-working and resilient.

Mia, Mark and Robert said coming to the polluted city made them value the cleanliness and beautiful nature of the rural community. Mark said: "I am proud that I am from this beautiful and unique rural community. I would not trade my rural community with any big cities in the world. My hometown is unique. It is one in a million." Robert highlighted that St. John's to him is just another city he happened to live in, but the rural community is his home, which is irreplaceable. Robert and Grace said the presence of the rural community made them feel proud of their dual identity of being a highly educated university student who is also a rural person. Robert remarked: "I want to change the stereotype opinion about us rural people that we are all ignorant and stupid."

Christiaens (2015) pointed out that the rural background would have influence on one's plan about the future after university. In this research, two participants said they had plans to go back to the rural community after they graduated from university. Robert explicitly expressed his passion for being a teacher in his rural community after he graduated. "I would only stay in St. John's unless there was no job available for me back home." When asked if he could accept the narrow-mindedness of the rural community, he hoped that he would change that aspect of the rural community gradually by educating the children in the school. But he insisted that he would not be bothered by any negative aspects of living in a rural community. Emma said she wished to become a family doctor in her home community.

The other eight participants all decided to stay in the city. The primary reason given was almost the same for everybody and that was that there are more employment opportunities and public services in urban areas. Ann and Mia mentioned that they loved the nature side of the rural community, but for the sake of future generations, they would live in the city as there are no academic advancement opportunities back home. A few participants believed that the gossiping

atmosphere was also one of the reasons that drove them away. The fact that only two participants have plans to go back to the rural community reflects that most rural people regards post-secondary education as a way to leave the rural community rather than a chance to improve themselves and go back and serve the community (Atkin, 2002).

Although most participants chose the city over the rural community, nearly all of them said they did not wish to go to metropolitan cities like Toronto or Vancouver, except for the two international students. Some participants said they could not stand the fast pace lifestyle in those big cities. Some others said they did not wish to leave Newfoundland because they found St. John's the perfect size of a city. Robert commented: "I often travelled to those cities, but I would never move there." Yang and Ming said they loved St. John's, but they wished to go to bigger cities where there are more highly paid jobs and more public services.

4.7.2 Relationship with family members and old friends

Eight participants believed they and their parents had no major conflict, and they were very close with at least one of their parents. Sofia and Mia said they were not on good terms with their parents, and Mia had lifelong mental issues because of the mental abuse from her mum.

Most of the participants witnessed a certain extent of improvement in their relationship with their family members since coming to university, which supported Handke's (2012) finding on the identity development of 19 rural students in the US. Mia said she saw improvement in the relationship with her parents because she has learnt the coping strategies to deal with any further tension with parents. The rest of the participants said they had a close relationship with their parents before they left the rural community, and the separation only made their ties grow stronger since they could not see each other every day. Half of the participants mentioned that

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they called and chatted with their parents every day, sometimes multiple times a day. Similar to Handke's study, some parents of the participants were happy to hear about their children's experience in the university. Nearly half of the participants highlighted that the most challenging part of the transition was missing family.

Sofia said her relationship with her relatives back in the rural community got worse since her dad passed away. She explained that her dad served as a tie to connect her with her rural relatives. However, since her dad passed away, she found nothing in common with her relatives anymore. Sofia found that her rural relatives liked to talk behind her back about her decision to go to university. "They just didn't understand why I should go to university instead of going into trades or something", she said. She said that her attachment to the rural community also decreased since her dad passed away. "Sometimes, when I started to miss the rural community, I don't even know whether it is the rural community or my dad that I missed."

Nearly all of the participants said their parents noticed some change in them since they went to university, and most of the parents felt proud of the change in their children, as they considered it as the symbol of becoming mature and highly educated. Mark's parents noticed that their son became much happier since he came to university because he finally could "come out" and be himself. Sofia said her mum was very proud to see her becoming financially independent when she bought a house and a car on her own. Ming and Yang said their parents described them as "getting high-ended". Ann's parents joked and called her "Miss Smarty-Pants" whenever Ann used some big words.

However, not all the changes were happily accepted by the parents. A few participants noted that their parents scorned their change as "showing off". Sofia said her mum hated it whenever she used some "big" words, which her mum didn't understand. Mia said her parents

just felt "confused" about her change and "don't know what is going on". Ann mentioned that her parents are reluctant to accept her opinions when she exchanged ideas with their parents on certain issues. Despite the value conflict, most of them said they did not let the clash of values influence the relationship between them and their parents, and many of them chose to avoid talking about topics which would raise conflict and they would hide their true opinions on many issues. Ming said, "Once my brother was saying something. I knew he was wrong, but I didn't correct him, because I knew he would be offended and think I am laughing at him".

As with the participants in Wiborg's (2001) study, all of the participants noticed that they and their old friends who did not go to university were driven further apart due to their differences as people and the geographical distance. Yang believed he and those who stayed behind lacked "common language" because he has moved on and they did not. Hazel said drifting apart from old friends is "just part of growing up", and Ann believed that they "just shared different lives now". However, not all participants attributed the detachment from old friends to university. Grace pointed out that she stopped hanging out with some of her old friends from the rural community because they were "fake friendships from the beginning", which was formed out of necessity rather than real attachment back in high school. Despite the change in relationships with old friends, most of them said such change is subtle and trivial. Some of them also said if their old friends asked them to hang out together, they still would do it. Ann noted, "I just need to avoid talking about university because they are not interested. We can just talk about the people in our community, like in the old days", Hazel said, "I still would, you know, be there for them if they needed me. But it just isn't the same as it was I guess".

4.8 Identity negotiation

4.8.1 New identity

All the participants highlighted that they had been urbanized to a certain extent. First of all, a change in tastes and the physical look was highlighted by all the participants. Half of them said they started to pay more attention to fashion and were more into brand name items than before. While most of them said the change of style was under the influence of friends or the general city culture, Robert and Sofia noted that part of the reasons that tempted them to buy more brand name and fashion stuff was that they wished to be socially accepted by other friends in university, and did not wish to be labelled as "old school" or "dumb bay-man". Hazel and Sofia said the initial change was trying to fit in, but later it became part of themselves. Four participants noted that they started to love ethnic cuisine such as sushi and Chinese food. Two international students said that since they came to St. John's, they fell in love with Newfoundland food and found it more healthy than Chinese stir-fry. All the Canadian participants said they changed their accent so that people from the city could understand them. Robert said he changed his accent because city people considered people speaking with an accent as "dumb bay-man". "I don't want them to think that I am a dumb bay-man. I want to show them I am educated as much as any of them."

The participants have not only witnessed some external changes in themselves, but they also noticed some internal changes. All of them noticed that the multicultural environment in the city of St. John's and at MUN exposed them to different cultures. The culture of embracing different sexual orientations, political beliefs and religions on campus made them more open-minded. Robert noticed that when he went back to his rural community, he started to feel weird having only white people around him. Grace and Sofia mentioned that coming to live in the city

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has broadened their vision and made them realize that the world was more than just their rural communities, and the exposure to different cultures and values made them start to care about the global issues such as the welfare of those immigrants and refugees in Canada. Since they came to St. John's, Grace and Sofia have joined some social campaigns and have become social activists. Grace said,

I didn't know anything about the world when I was living in Labrador, and now I have this wealth of information from speaking to people of different cultures and seeing what students, the clubs and the universities are saying about these issues, which made me realize how much work needs to be done to make the society fair for everybody.

Being open-minded also entails doing what one wishes to do. Four participants mentioned that they could be the person they wished to become in the city. Mark finally "came out" and embraced his homosexuality. Ann, Grace and Hazel said they finally did not need to act like everybody else as they did in the rural community. They embraced and cherished the opportunity of exploring their real and unique selves, of doing what they wanted to do. As Hazel said: "I think living in the city just kind of brought out what I always wanted to be, more than anything". Gullestad (1996) addressed that for those people who strived for individuality, they must move between different social contexts so that their multiple identities could be kept. Back in rural community, these participants did not have the opportunity to assert individuality. "By their choice of higher education, the students are now more dependent on other social arenas for confirmation of important aspects of their identity than their home community" (Wiborg, 2001, p. 37).

All of the participants said they had grown more in their knowledge, which not only includes academic knowledge. They believed that the people and things they have met and seen,

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those part-time jobs or volunteering experience they had, and even those difficulties they encountered all had turned into their knowledge about society and life. Mia said that the stories told by her Muslim friends about Muslim culture changed her previous biased conception about the Islamic religion. The knowledge she gained, she believed, also helped her to become more open-minded. Ming felt he had become "cleverer" and "more logical" than before. He used the example of the latest global outbreak of COVID-19 to demonstrate his change:

> My mind and thoughts are more logical, and I had more critical thinking skills after spending so many years in university. And now, when I looked at those rural people back home, I found them ridiculous sometimes because they would easily get nervous and frightened over some news, such as this coronavirus issue. Many of them, including my parents, started to get panic right after the news came out. And they started to stock up things, which is quite unnecessary in my opinion. But they don't believe me, because they don't know which is right and which is wrong.

Several participants noticed that they were more inclined to use more "educated" and "big" words in their speech. A few of them said the change happened subconsciously as it was the natural process of becoming more knowledgeable. However, Ming also commented that "it shows that I am a university student. I want people to see the change in me. I don't want them to think that I have learnt nothing here."

Growing in confidence was one significant change every participant noticed. Based on the reflection of several participants, the confidence mainly came from the knowledge and experience they gained from university, and the upward social mobility university brings. Mia said the successful transition she made, made her see her potential of being able to adjust to any other stressful situations. Emma proudly said that after she graduated, she would become a

doctor, and the thought of being able to cure patients in the future made her became confident. Ming said that when he returned to his village, many of his neighbours came to visit him. He stated, "Being admired by everyone feels good. It also increased my confidence and made me feel that I have turned into a better person, and I am closer to success." Yang said he has gained more advantage than other rural people because he felt that he knew more and had seen more.

The stressful life in the city also made all participants more independent. Aligned with the finding of Maunder et al. (2013), the independence they developed was evident in various ways. Half of them mentioned that living alone, away from the care of parents, made them learn to cook, clean the room and face many difficulties alone. Those participants who worked full time or part-time said they have learnt to be financially independent, which also made them feel proud about themselves and grew more confident. Emma and Robert said the university has taught them the skills of self-learning.

Mia and Grace said the new environment taught them adaptability, resilience and the ability to cope with adversity. Grace said she had a severe mental health problem in her first year, and later she was diagnosed with a physical disease, which required her to have surgery every few months. However, she did not let the difficulties defeat her, and she said,

> I could have gotten a psychologist note to drop my winter semester last year and go home, but I decided not to. I hoped that through this difficulty, it could make me a better person. It was really difficult at the time, but now that it's part of my life and it's not controlling my life.

Amid the many obstacles they fought and conquered, these participants started to "calm down" and realized that there will always be more solutions than difficulties. Mia stated,

It's like you learn new ways to consider a problem and learn to work around it. Now I look at a thing, and I think about all the different ways that I can go around this problem or do I have to address it directly? There are more than one or two methods which could address the problem head-on. If it doesn't matter to me, if it's not going to affect anyone or hurt anyone, then I know I can just leave the problem be. There are lots of approaches that the university has taught me to solve difficulties.

The various opportunities presented in urban areas made many of the participants excited and feel hopeful about their future. Ann realized that she had to work harder, and she noticed,

You need to work hard for these opportunities, because there are so many people out there, and it is so competitive. Back home, you didn't even need audition for drama clubs, because they're so few people, they just took anybody who wants to get on.

Yang and Ming highlighted that they were more ambitious than before. They said all these opportunities tempted them to work harder and get the same thing as every city person has, which includes but not limited to "a decent job, an apartment, a car", the possession of all of which in Yang's opinion, symbolizes the "success of a modern person".

Half of the participants said the diverse culture and various activities have made them more outgoing than before. Hazel, who was from New Brunswick, said she was quite shy back in high school, but the famous "Newfoundland friendliness" influenced her since the first day she arrived in St. John's when she met a friendly and talkative taxi driver, and the friendly environment made her feel welcome and excited. However, Sofia said that the university has turned her into a less social person because she did not have the skills to make friends, and the large size of the university "intimidated" her. Yang and Ming also said their rural background made them feel timid to make friends.

4.8.2 Identity struggle

The movement between two different social contexts caused several participants a struggle between their old and new identities, and "a sense of personal dislocation arose from a decrease in the number of coherent, predictable, and ritualized status passages built into the fabric of identity and culture" (Karp et al., 1998, p. 272).

The two international students Yang and Ming said they felt the existence of their rural identity standing in their way between them and successful university experience. Both of them thought that their low socioeconomic status prevented them from making friends from urban areas. And their lack of particular cultural and financial assets deprived them of the opportunities to join in any clubs and organizations or take on a prominent position. Their incompetence in certain aspects reminded them every day that they were from rural areas.

Four participants said they had identity struggle while they were back in the rural community because they could not be themselves while they were there. Mark said he felt like a "fish out of the water" back home because of his sexual orientation. He added, "Coming here was the best choice I have ever made. I finally didn't need to hide who I really was and wanted to be."

A few of the participants encountered identity struggle since they came to university. Sofia, who lost her father and who has some conflicts with her rural relatives, said she still loved her rural community and wished to be considered as part of it. However, her newly acquired urban values and identity conflicted with the conservative and traditional rural values, which made her struggle and felt that she didn't fit in there anymore. As she stated, "I just don't know how to communicate with them anymore, I knew they would not agree with my opinions now, and I would not agree with them." What aggravated the situation was the fact that she lost support from her rural relatives who judged her behind her back since her father died. She believed that

her father was the tie that connected her with her relatives and the rest of the community. She said,

> Back then, I could talk to you about something like, you know, like, how's your dad doing or something like that, we can make a conversation. Or like, when's the next concert at your school or something like that? But now, since I left there, there's not much really for me to talk about that makes me anxious and makes me struggle. I don't know if I really can identify with many people from there anymore.

Sofia tried to stay connected with the rural community. Still, lack of shared values and common interests, combined with the lack of support from relatives, forced her to become detached from it. She was caught up in such a dilemma of not fitting in the rural community and yet still wished to be accepted back there. Similarly, Ann and Mark said they struggled over the fact that they loved their rural communities, but they found their values clashed, which made them feel lonely sometimes.

Sofia also said while she was within the province of NL, she would not try to hide her rural identity. However, when she was in a larger city such as Toronto, she would try to avoid talking about rural life such as hunting or fishing, and she would "mask" her slang because "I don't want people to think of me as a country girl." It was also one of the reasons which restricted her from living in a larger city. As she said, "Here in Newfoundland I feel that I am the same as everyone else, but out there, my rural identity stood out, and it reminds me every day that I am different, I am from an undeveloped rural community."

While most of the participants were pleased with being urbanized, Robert, who holds his rural community "close to his heart", struggled over "being urbanized". While he embraced the fact that he became more open-minded, he was forced to change his dress and language style to

be socially accepted in the university, in which process, he found himself had turned into a "townie" whom he used to hate. He said, "That is where the struggle comes in." He elaborated,

> I feel the struggle was that I changed myself to be accepted by the people but not changing to what I feel as my own identity. I didn't want to change who I am, and the background I came from, but I wanted to change the way I was presenting myself… it (university) gave me more of the worldview and more of a better understanding of certain things, but it also changed some of my roles away so that I could fit in here. So sometimes I'm not myself and sometimes I am myself.

Ming said he struggled over some of his new urban identity, such as his growing craving for fancy and expensive items. He remarked:

> I have started to chase something like brand name clothes, or iPhone, and stuff like that. I could not help it; maybe I did that because I wished to be accepted because everyone in university used that kind of stuff, or because my taste has changed because of these people. But sometimes when I looked at these things, I found them completely useless. I mean, what is the point of spending so much money on a cellphone when you could use that money to do something more important? Besides, I blamed myself for using the money my parents gave me on stuff like that. But when the advertisement came out, you just could not resist it, because you think, oh, everybody got one, why can't I buy it?

Both Ming and Yang felt that they have not been completely urbanized. As Ming said: "I still lack a lot of things which city persons have, like an apartment of my own and a car". Yang experienced a somewhat deeper identity struggle than Ming. Yang struggled because he has detached from the rural community in every aspect, and he wished to become a complete city person. However, he felt that he was not completely urbanized and other city persons could not

totally accept him and they still regarded him as a "rural person in the city". The experience of Yang and Ming supported Yu's (2015) finding that rural Chinese university students still perceived gap between themselves and urban counterparts despite the fact that most of them wish to become a city person. Since Yang came to the city, he became alienated from his rural home, and he tried to hide his rural identity in front of the other city people, and yet he still felt he was a stranger in the city. At the same time, he gradually started to lose the ties with the rural community because their values clashed. He gave a clear explanation of his struggle and suffering:

> I do feel more lonely than ever because I felt that I was standing in the middle of the rural and urban area, where I found uncomfortable on both sides. Some urban people still judged me and isolated me. So sometimes I did feel upset like suddenly I have lost a place to belong. I am neither a rural person nor an urban person, but at the same time, I am both. But I hated this, and I wished to become entirely urban, because I cannot see the good side of being rural, well, except for the nature part of rural life, which I found relaxing and peaceful. As for the other side, like opportunities and values and stuff, I am completely detached from it.

Yang is a "tourist" in Bauman's (1992) words. He is trying to find a place called home, but among his movement in several social contexts, he lost home and therefore lost the feeling of belonging. Despite his passion and ambition for success, Yang struggled over the fact that in the process of his hard-working and fighting towards becoming "a real city person", he lost the relaxed and laid-back life, which can only be found back in the rural community. Sadly, he said, "those days are gone forever, but it can't be helped."

4.8.3 Identity negotiation

All the participants took some time and it was somewhat painful to get adjusted to university, and some of them reported feeling like a fish out of water in their first year. However, nearly all of them believed that they had conquered various problems and difficulties, such as finding friends, having trouble with study or missing family, and most of them have successfully become a part of the city and the university.

Most of the participants believed that overall they could balance their rural identity and the new identity. Despite some of the negative aspects of the rural community and rural values, they believed that they still considered the rural community as their roots and home, and they still wished to be considered as a rural person. Mark said he would be offended if someone called him a "townie", and Emma said she was proud of her rural identity, which made her unique in the city. Most of the participants preferred to discard the negative influence of both rural community and urban area and embrace the positive aspects from both sides. The perfect description for them, they believed, would be that they are a combination of "half rural and half urban". This supported Wiborg's (2001) idea that rural students in higher education are in an ambivalent position since they felt that they belong to neither social contexts and yet they belong to both. Such a dual identity made them feel unique and proud. Ming said he did not mind being called a rural person because that made his Ph.D. title even more precious, considering he was from a small place. As he remarked, "It proved that I am a highly talented and hard-working man to be able to work my way from a rural village to becoming a Ph.D. student".

Emma said one time when she came back from a conference in Calgary where she met people from all over Canada, she felt ashamed of her rural identity and admired those who are from large cities because she felt they were "smart" since they knew much information of which

she did not know. However, soon, she recovered from such a dislike against her rural identity by looking at the good side of her rural community. She stated, "Even though I'm from a rural area, I still did lots of extracurricular activities. I still got to do the things that I wanted to do. And here in Newfoundland, we also have something which those city people don't have, like beautiful scenery."

Robert used the coping strategy of "compartmentalization" to make peace with his rural and urban identities, and he was not alone. Even if the two identities could never involve with one another, the participants would always keep them in two parallel spaces, without crashing into each other. Ann and Robert said they would jump right back to their regional accent once they were home, and they would not discuss their lives in the city if they hang out with their old friends. Similarly, several participants said back home, they tried to hide their urban identity and appear more down to earth and rustic, especially in front of those conservative people. Grace said she would not bring back the clothes which she bought in St. John's. Sofia and Ann said they would not use big words in front of rural people because they would be "pretty offended". Sofia messaged her relatives several times in the hope of restoring their broken relationship. By repairing her relationship with her rural relatives, she hoped that she could shorten the distance between her and the rural community. Despite her settlement in the city and the mismatch of values, she still did not wish to lose the connection with the rural community, which she believed, formed part of her identity.

Chapter Five: Discussion and Implications

5.1 Discussion of finding

5.1.1 Rural habitus

Bourdieu describes habitus as the "feel for the game", which the social agents use to play in the field and accumulate capital (1990). As pointed out by Adams (2006), habitus is formed out of the necessity to help the social agents fit in the field. According to Bourdieu (1990), an individual's past educational and family background have a huge influence on the formation of habitus, which entails one's "acting, feeling, thinking and beings" (Maton, 2008, p. 52). Thus, from a sociological perspective, one's identity is one of the many products of habitus. In this research, supported by Atkin (2003), all of the students believed that their rural background has a significant influence on the formation of their self-identities. The rural identity, of which whether they liked or not, was formed unconsciously and was formed through trying to grasp "a sense of ease" in the field (Adams, 2006, p. 514). In other words, the rural identity was formed as a result of trying to fit in the rural community (field). Externally, as reflected by some participants in the previous chapter, the rural identity may entail a rustic outlook, their regional accent and use of slang, and their unique country tastes and interests. The internal rural identity was referring to their frugal lifestyle, hard-working, friendly and helpful, appreciation, independence and resilience. The rural identity though seems "individualized", is actually part of the "shared cultural contexts" (Adams, 2006). In other words, the rural identity which is displayed in the individual is the reflection of the general identity of the whole rural community.

5.1.2 Cultural capital

Based on the theory of identity from a social psychological perspective, one would negotiate one's identity when he or she perceives challenges about his or her identity (Chryssochoou, 2003; Deaux & Ethier, 1998). In the present research, which investigates how rural university students negotiate their rural identity and evolving urban identity, the challenge those participants faced when they first came to university mainly came from two sides, namely, academic and social sides.

All of the participants pointed out various academic difficulties when they first arrived at university. Such difficulties include lack of enough and comprehensive academic background knowledge, could not catch up with the style of fast pace and heavy-duty of learning and lack in-class experience. All of the participants highlighted that such academic obstacles were caused by their inadequate accumulation of cultural capital in their rural k-12 educational experience. The participants pointed out the challenges facing rural education, which include a shortage of qualified teachers and a lack of elective and advanced courses.

Academic knowledge is not the only cultural capital that these rural students lacked. According to Laureau and Weininger (2003), the concept of cultural capital, which was first adopted by Pierre Bourdieu, should extend from merely "knowledge of or competence with 'highbrow' cultural activities" to include human capital and skills. In this research, the participants noticed that they also lacked in skills to socialize, skills to communicate, and the urban social manner such as fashionable dressing or taste. These were important aspects of cultural capital which these participants lacked compared with their urban counterparts, and which were also the crucial reasons which caused some of them felt like "fish out of the water" at the beginning.

According to Moore (2008), the acquired cultural capital is formed out of long-term exposure to a particular habitus. In rural communities, the participants were exposed to people who do not value higher education and who do not know enough about higher education. In rural schools, these participants were surrounded by students who planned to go to trades schools or work in the local convenience store at a minimum wage or work in fishery or mining industry after they graduated. They were also sometimes taught by unqualified teachers, whom themselves in many cases have not acquired enough required cultural capital. Even though most of the participants are from a middle-class family, they were living in a rural community that carries rural habitus, and they were surrounded by working-class people who carry the working-class habitus. The prolonged exposure to working-class and rural habitus made these participants become a middle-class person who has working-class habitus, which directly prevented them from accumulating enough required cultural capital, which is needed in university.

The parents of these participants also could not help the participants in gathering enough cultural capital. The cases of eight Canadian participants strongly supported Li's (2019) finding, who drew data from the 2009 American High School Longitudinal Study to investigate the role played by the family in children's post-secondary education aspiration. Li (2019) pointed out that unlike what previous research found, the family income of rural families was, in fact, of little difference to that of non-rural families. However, there was a difference in terms of social and cultural capital, since fewer rural parents have been to post-secondary education. As highlighted by Aries and Seider (2005), students who are from similar family income backgrounds might not share similar interests, tastes and skills. Although most of the participants come from a middle-class family judging by their family income, most of their parents are working in the blue-collar field. Furthermore, half of the participants have only one parent or none who has attended post-

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secondary education and most of their parents who have achieved post-secondary education only

achieved a diploma as their highest degree. Therefore, combined with their rural background,

these rural participants might still be different in terms of their habitus from other non-first-

generation university students from the white-collar middle class or upper-middle-class family,

whose parents work as doctors, professors, engineers, or lawyers. Some parents of these

participants have been to post-secondary education; therefore, they may have a higher

educational aspiration for their children (Legutko, 2008). Their higher income could also provide

more financial support (Blackwell & MacLaughlin, 1998; Smith et al., 1995). However, their low

level of post-secondary education credentials and lack of experience in university settings

prevented them from providing useful guidance and strategies to their children on a university

application, program selection or academic supervision.

Moore (2008) noted that any other form of capital, such as cultural or social capital is

transformed from economic capital. In the case of rural schools, their lack of various cultural

capital, such as shortage of quality teachers and lack of elective and advanced courses can be

seen as another form of lack of financial capital. The shortage of cultural capital in rural high

schools directly caused the ill-preparedness of many participants for the fast-paced and

challenging program in university.

5.1.3 Symbolic violence and social reproduction

Bourdieu believes that formal education is the "accomplice" of "social reproduction" and

"symbolic violence" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). According to Bourdieu, educational

institutions only teach certain types of knowledge and promote certain kinds of values. Bourdieu

questions such a way of teaching as he called it "an imposition of a cultural arbitrary by an

arbitrary power" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p.5). In the case of this research, based on the reflection of several participants, urban schools prepare students with enough background knowledge and provide similar resources as in university. In detail, urban students have the opportunity to take Advanced Placement (AP) and elective courses that prepare them for university. Urban high schools have various extra-curricular activities, which help students build social and communication skills that these rural students lack. All of the cultural capital provided in urban schools is the cultural capital that the universities require and deliver. Maton (2008) pointed out that the "rule of the game" of the university matches the habitus of the privileged social groups. Therefore, generally speaking, most urban students feel quite at ease being in university since their habitus matches the field of the university. In contrast, the rural participants all highlighted various difficulties they encountered in the process of adjusting to a field that mismatches their habitus. Due to a lack of required cultural capital, several of them described the study at university as stressful and hard.

Ming and Yang pointed out that they had to study much harder than those city students. Ming explained that the city students have "resources," which they did not have. This is aligned with Bourdieu's theory of symbolic violence and social reproduction, as Bourdieu believes that those with particular resources and privileges helps them from working hard, instead of the common belief that these people are born superior (Schubert, 2008).

Symbolic violence not only explains the difficulties of rural students in the university, but it also explains if not wholly, at least partially, why some rural people are deterred from coming to university. Part of the reason that cause many rural people to disvalue higher education is that of the influence of their rural habitus and rural field since few of the employment opportunities in rural communities require higher education credentials, especially those degrees above a

diploma. The other part of the reasons is related to higher education itself, and the social effects

which it entails. Maunder et al. (2013) pointed out that prior to coming to university, students

would have a vision about the university, which shapes their expectation about the university and

the way they understand their university life. Moreover, such vision mostly came from the

influences of others. Robert said he was nervous before he came to university because he heard

some rural people said that university is hard. Some rural students' unhappy and unsuccessful

stories in university made rural people believe that university is difficult. Therefore, low

educational aspiration among rural students is the result instead of the cause of their less

academic success (Di Maggio, 1979). Many rural students who lack the required cultural capital

are more likely to form a negative impression about university because they know that they

would suffer in a place like the university. Instead of blaming the whole unfair social and

educational system, which causes the mismatch of their habitus and new field, they blame

themselves for not being smart enough and consider the university a place that they don't belong.

Schubert (2008) highlighted that blaming students for their low academic achievement and

denying the negative role played by the whole educational system is a sign of symbolic violence.

To avoid habitus conflict, these rural students would choose to avoid university and select a field

that matches their habitus, such as a diploma degree or apprenticeship, and which is the result of

the reinforcement of their old habitus and a demonstration of their identity searching (Lehmann,

2007). In such a way, symbolic violence is formed by crashing the confidence of many rural

students of their academic abilities through creating the knowledge gap and making them believe

that they are stupid or not the university type. Social reproduction is generated afterwards by

leading many rural students, especially those who lack the required cultural capital, to trade

schools or diplomas, which designate them mostly for blue-collar jobs. In contrast, most of the

city students go to university, where it implies higher social mobility. For those rural students who chose to go to university, some of them gave up and dropped out in the middle of their journey. As for those who persisted, such as the ten participants in this research, their path to success was covered with their blood and tears as they fought with various difficulties and adapted themselves to the university.

Thus, from the perspective of symbolic violence and social reproduction, we should not blame rural people for devaluing higher education, since all they want to do is no more than avoiding the pain caused by a mismatch of their habitus and the field of the university, without realizing that they become the victim of social reproduction and symbolic violence. As Maton (2008) explained,

Our aspirations and expectations, our sense of what is reasonable or unreasonable, likely or unlikely, our beliefs about what are the obvious actions to take and the natural way of doing them, are all for Bourdieu neither essential nor natural but rather conditioned by our habituses and are thereby a mediated form of arbitrary social structure. (p. 58)

Social reproduction and symbolic violence not only exist in the academic field but in the social field in university. The rural habitus of these participants shapes their unique tastes and interests. These participants said they love country and Newfoundland music. They prefer clothes that are tough and comfortable instead of fashionable and fragile. They love outdoor activities more than they enjoy watching TV and playing computer games. These interests and tastes are a reflection of their rural habitus. According to the theory of distinction (Bourdieu, 1984), one's taste is actually a reflection of social selection instead of personal preference. The symbolic violence is created by claiming the superiority of a particular type of taste and behaviour and disvaluing the other types of taste and behaviour (Schubert, 2008). Just as Lury

(1996) suggests, "taste not only provides a means of defining why some goods are better than the others, but also a means of defining the people who uses such definitions, and why they are better or worse than others" (p. 93). Lawler (1999) said, "it is this cultural configuration of class which can enable middle-class observers to despise and ridicule the aspiration of working-class people" (p.19). In the case of these rural students, their tastes were teased and even discriminated by urban counterparts, which could be reflected in city people's opinion of rural people as "bay-man". The notion of "bay-man", sounds like a joke to many participants, is a proof of the existence of symbolic violence, as these urban people are trying to claim their superiority in the aspect of language, behaviour, dress and values. From the feedback of the ten participants, some urban people would call a person who speaks with an accent "dumb" because that person is not speaking the standard language that these city people speak. They would call rural people "old-fashioned" because rural people buy clothes from Walmart and enjoy Irish music. While in fact, these tastes shared by rural people are no more than their personal preferences and cultural heritage. To prevent hurting by symbolic violence, many of these rural participants, avoided further contact with city students, which ended up in only seeking out friends who share a rural background. It can be seen as a form of protection and reinforcement of one's old identity (Maunder et al., 2013).

The existence of symbolic violence and social reproduction, in many cases, serve as the root of identity struggle. The lack of legitimate cultural capital and particular habitus made some of these participants to question their rural identities and even generated a feeling of shame and inferiority because of it (Lawler, 1999). Such as Yang, who struggled over his wish to become a complete urban person but still felt the gap between himself and a real city person. He saw his rural community as backward and poor, and he desperately wished to get rid of his rural identity,

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which aligned with Lawler (1999), who noted that a sense of shame in oneself is generated out of the belief of inadequacy in oneself. What's worse, Yang felt that his newly acquired urban identity was often rejected by his urban counterparts, which is reflected in their exclusion and discrimination against him. His giving up of his old identity and receiving rejections of his new identity from others shows that the privileged social group is creating the symbolic violence to protect their privileged social status. Unlike Yang, who struggled because he was unaware of the existence of symbolic violence, another participant, Robert, struggled because of his awareness of such repression. Robert struggled over the fact that he has turned into a "townie" whom he hates. He is proud of his rural identity, and he had decided to go back to the rural community after he graduates. By feeling proud of his rural identity and deciding to go back, Robert is placing the value of the rural community above that of the city, which means he is giving up and asserting his contempt for the game of which many people strive to enter the field to play. By withdrawing from the battlefield, he would successfully avoid being hurt further by symbolic violence and social reproduction. However, Yang, who stayed in the field, would remain as the victim, possibly forever, if he did not learn the strategy of identity negotiation.

5.1.4 Reflexive habitus

While Bourdieu believes that habitus is "durable", "transposable" and "embodied" (1990), researchers such as Alexander (1994) and Jenkins (1992) criticized Bourdieu's habitus as "deterministic", which submits itself to the confinement of social structure and allows for no personal modification and reflexivity.

Adams (2006) called reflexive habitus as "a hybridization of reflexivity and habitus". Di Maggio (1979) highlighted that habitus is consistently modifying itself to match the changing social context. Several researchers, such as Sweetman (2003) and Karp et al. (1998), pointed out that the concept of self-identity is subject to constant change and modification based on the changing social context in the post-modern era. Sweetman said, "for some, reflexivity itself is now habitual in turn suggests that certain contemporary individuals or groups may easily and largely unquestioningly engage in reflexive projects of self (re)construction as a matter of course" (p. 542).

Coming to university and meeting students with diverse backgrounds would raise students' awareness of the difference between themselves and others (Brooks, 2007). After the initial unease and unpreparedness, all of the participants highlighted that they have changed and adapted themselves gradually to the university. The reason for the change is none other than trying to fit in and make a success out of university. Just as Chryssochoou (2003) pointed out, one would act to defend or change one's identity when that person received social discrimination or being rejected from particular social groups. The participants in this study felt that some aspects of their rural identities could not support their life in the university. Therefore, most of them chose to change themselves to fit in the new field.

Externally, some of the participants have started to pay attention to the brand name and fashionable items, and their tastes have diversified. Internally, they have become more open-minded, sensitive about global issues, confident, resilient and adaptable, outgoing, knowledgeable, wise and ambitious. The finding shared a similar result with Handke (2012), who also found that rural students assimilated the city lifestyle and found themselves being urbanized in various aspects.

This finding supported Bourdieu's opinion that reflexive habitus will emerge during a crisis when one must make a "rational choice" to face the disruption of one's social structure (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Similarly, Sweetman (2003) suggested that under three circumstances, one needs to adopt a reflexive habitus. One of which is the "changing forms of community and relationship." Sweetman explained that the movement of young people between different social situation requires them to be reflexive in order not to feel like a fish out of the water. The new urban identities these participants acquired allowed them to become part of the city and university successfully.

5.1.5 Fish out of the water?

Based on the findings, one could see that despite the initial difficulties these participants faced, and despite their lower social, if not economic status, all of them were able to tackle various problems and managed their life in university smoothly, and some of them successfully.

Bourdieu (1998) compared two types of future, one of which refers to the normal future, which is unpredictable. The other type of future is, in Bourdieu's opinion, predictable, and it is based on one's present status and inherited habitus. Most rural people could "read" their future based on their present status, that they would be a farmer or fisherman or work in a blue-collar field like their parents. In the case of these participants, they wished to "create" a new future for themselves. What seems to have even gone out of the imagination of these participants themselves was the fact that the reflexive habitus which they believed that they have picked up in university may have accompanied them long before they went to university. Bourdieu (1977a) believed that the formation of habitus is an unconscious process, and he said which "are placed

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beyond the grasp of consciousness and hence cannot be touched by voluntary deliberate transformation, cannot even be made explicit" (p.94). However, many of these participants have plans to go to university since they were little, and they realized they did not wish to "work with their hands", which proved the fact that they were not only conscious of their rural habitus but have tried to break free from it and from the social structure of which the habitus entails (Lehmann, 2007), because they would not think of changing their status if they were unconscious about their rural habitus. Instead, they would follow the footsteps of other rural people (Reay et al., 2009). At the same time, they started to develop the reflexive habitus in which "self-awareness and a propensity for self-improvement become incorporated into the habitus" (Reay et al., 2009, p.1105). Such reflexive habitus is also found in the working-class women who strived to go to university instead of leading a domestic life as their mothers did (Stewart & Ostrove, 1993). The early development of reflexive habitus in these participants might be greatly influenced by their parents. As Jamieson (2000) discovered, rural students coming from middle-class families are more likely to think of out-migration earlier than working-class rural students. In this research, all of the parents had a high educational expectation for their children and the comfortable middle-class life condition built by the parents of some of the participants motivated them to follow their parents' path and plan for a better life since they were young. This supported the finding of previous research that children with highly educated parents are more likely to have higher education aspirations (Chenoweth & Galliher, 2004), and they are more likely to develop reflexive habitus.

According to Reay et al. (2009), unlike the middle-class students who were unaware of the mismatch between their habitus and field of the university, the working-class students were fully aware of the difference between their working-class habitus and the new field they were about to

enter. Therefore, in order to fit in the university, they consciously engaged in "constant fashioning and refashioning of self" (Reay et al., 2009, p. 1111) and carefully prepared themselves for the university. Under the force of lack of enough financial and cultural support in the family and rural community, the participants in this research developed qualities such as self-reliance and hard-working to help them achieve their dream. Mark joined many extra-curricular activities in high school to have a good-looking resume to apply for university. Yang and Ming studied extremely hard from high school to university in order to compensate for their lack of economic and cultural capital compared to city students. Emma searched for various information about scholarship on her own and won herself 25000 dollars to support her future university study.

For those participants who never truly fit in the rural community from the beginning, such as Mark, who was always bullied in schools, the more substantial mismatch of habitus and field pushed him to develop reflexive habitus even further and earlier. Despite the discouragement he faced in the past educational experience, Mark managed to handle the tension in school and successfully got himself into university, during which process, Mark has developed more reflexive habitus such as the ability to deal with adversity, resilience and self-confidence without even realizing it. All of these qualities were vital resources needed to achieve success in a new and unfamiliar environment (Reay et al., 2009). Mark's experience is similar to the experience of the Chinese rural university female students in Wang's (2017) study, who were discriminated in their rural community because of their female gender, and therefore developed various personal traits and strived to get into university to fight against such repression.

However, the development of reflexive habitus beforehand does not guarantee success in the university, especially at the transitional phase. After they arrived in university, some of them,

who were more prepared and more conscious of the gap between the old field and the new field, adjusted themselves quicker than those who were less prepared and less sensitive. As Reay et al. (2009) pointed out, most of the participants "repositioned" themselves by studying extremely hard and continuing to be reflexive about themselves. The change and growth they noticed in themselves, such as self-reliance and resilience and confidence, are all the qualities they knew that are needed to become successful in university. Some of them who had already developed these qualities before they came found the transition easier and quicker. All of them were working hard on their reflexive habitus to make it more reflexive in order to win the game.

Another critical point that helps with the successful university transition for most of the participants is that these participants did not discard their old habitus completely (Wiborg, 2001). On the contrary, just like the working-class and rural participants in the study of Aries and Seider (2005) and Wiborg (2004), who felt proud and kept some of their old identities, the participants in this study retained part of their old habitus, which they considered valuable and advantageous (Reay et al., 2009), which in itself is a reflection of their possession of reflexive habitus. For example, Mia said her friendliness, which she acquired back home, helped her to make many friends in university. Ming believed that several personal qualities such as being hard-working and resilient, which were part of the traits for some participants to develop only after they entered university, have always been part of his old identity back home. This highlighted that some of the rural identities in these rural participants could be used as a strength to compensate for the gap and loss brought by social reproduction and symbolic violence in higher education. For example, the knowledge (cultural capital) gap which all of the participants encountered in the university has successfully been bridged by their persistent hard-working. In the case of Yang and Ming, their hard-working trait even helped them to continue all the way to becoming

Ph.D. students, and their high academic success has compensated for their losses in other aspects of cultural capital such as social and communication skills.

The urban habitus these participants acquired, to some extent, changed their perception about their rural background. Since they have left the rural "field" in which they used to "play the game," all of them saw some negative sides of their rural community when comparing it to the "new field". Nearly all of them have found that people in rural communities are narrow-minded and homogeneous, which mismatch their newly acquired urban habitus. Over half of the participants said their attachment to the rural community decreased. Several participants experienced identity struggle due to the value clash that they felt like a "fish out of the water" when they went back to the rural community.

Luckily, most of the participants have learned to adopt some strategies to conquer such discomfort of mismatch of habitus-field; only this time, it was the urban habitus against the rural field. One of the most commonly used strategies is "compartmentalization," such as avoiding wearing the fashionable clothes bought in the city and reverting back to their regional accent when they were back home. Emma solved her dislike against her rural community by learning to appreciate the positive side of the rural community and her rural identity. All of these strategies help the participants to take on a dual identity and move between two different social contexts with ease. Some studies (e.g. Aries & Seider, 2005; Baxter & Britton, 2001; Jetten, Iyer, Tsivrikos, & Young, 2008) found that students with lower socioeconomic backgrounds have detached from their family and old friends since going to university. In this research, a majority of students saw improvement in their relationship with parents, and Mia has learnt "coping strategy" to deal with the conflict with her parents. Moreover, based on the feedback of some participants, despite some value clashes with their parents or old friends, most of them could at

least maintain the relationships by avoiding talking about university life or the conflicted topics and remaining their old selves. Their use of dual identity showed that the reflexive habitus not only taught them to fit in the university but taught them to become identity mobile as those female rural participants in Wang's (2017) study, which helped them to successfully solve the identity negotiation problem and manage to move between two different worlds. The development of dual identity is aligned with Bourdieu's opinion of the effect of constant movement between different social contexts:

> Such experiences tend to produce a habitus divided against itself, in constant negotiation with itself and with its ambivalence, and therefore doomed to a kind of duplication, to a double perception of self, to successive allegiances and multiple identities. (Bourdieu, Accardo, & Emanel, 1999, p. 511)

Based on the above analysis of the research finding, the formation of their evolving new identity and new habitus can be concluded into one equation:

Rural habitus (Rural identity) + Reflexive habitus = Dual habitus (Dual identity)

Overall, these participants felt like a "fish out of the water" when they first arrived in university because of the mismatch between their habitus and the new field. And they all took some great pain to adapt to this "new pond of water". They were as much the victim of symbolic violence and social reproduction as those rural people who stayed behind, only they suffered because they wished to win the game, but those who stayed behind suffered because they were not allowed to play the game. Luckily, unlike those who stayed behind, the pain was only temporary for the participants. Through the reflexive habitus which they adopted since in rural communities, they kept on modifying themselves constantly to match the changing social context while still retaining part of their old identities "even if some of these (old identities) have been

contested and have changed from doxa to opinion in the process of education" (Wiborg, 2001, p. 36). Finally, a majority of the participants were able to hold a dual identity, which allowed them to keep a balance between their rural home and university. They still may have various difficulties in the future, but as long as they hold the reflexive habitus, they would be able to catch "the feel of the game" in whichever game they are about to play. Just as Wiborg (2001) stated: "after completing education, they are then incorporated into society as changed individuals who can enter other social, and often geographical positions than before the transitional phase commenced" (p. 25). As for participants such as Yang, who despite his high academic success, still struggled to become a true city person, unless he could learn to accept and appreciate his unique dual identity and use it to balance his life in two different social contexts, he would always suffer in a world of symbolic violence and social reproduction.

5.2 Implications

5.2.1 Implication for higher education institutions

Through interviewing ten university students from rural areas, this research looked into the life experience of rural students before and after they went to university and have found out the gap between the two social contexts, not only academically, but in the social aspect as well. The research finding has significant implications for the recruitment of rural students for higher education institutions.

First of all, which is also the most critical point is that universities in the future should avoid acting as the "accomplice" in symbolic violence. In the case of Robert, the rumor he heard about the university and the reality of the university he experienced proved the existence of

tricks played by symbolic violence, as it prevented many rural and disadvantaged students from going to university by playing a mind game. The truth is, although the life in university is difficult, and the transition phase would indeed cause some pain, especially for rural students who lacked enough required cultural capital, we must remember that it is not unconquerable. The experiences of ten participants indicated that each of them has achieved balance and(or) success in the setting of the university in their own way. The higher education institutions must serve to advocate social equality instead of the opposite. Such duty lies heavily on the university representatives. The representatives must highlight the importance of higher education and let the rural students know that their ill-preparedness is not caused by their inferiority or lack of talents. Such an address is essential, especially for those first-generation rural students. Since lacking role models in their family not only made them lack awareness of the importance of higher education but caused them to lack self-confidence about their academic ability. The representatives should point out that the university is not only hard for them but hard for everyone. Just as Ann said: "study is hard for everybody in university, that's just the point of getting a degree. However, I don't think it would make me drop out or something. It just needs me to get used to". Rising the awareness of the existence of symbolic violence and social reproduction would be extremely imperative for rural students, as it would make sure that fewer of them become the victim of symbolic violence and social reproduction, especially for some first-generation students who are talented in the academy but lacked self-confidence. Just as Aries and Seider (2005) suggested, that higher education institutions must admit the existence of social class and allow for open discussion about it.

All of the Canadian participants reported that they knew little about information regarding universities in other provinces. Several participants mentioned that only the representative from

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MUN had come to their schools. In the future, other universities across Canada should be introduced more to rural high schools. To save expenses, some videos regarding some of the important information, such as program selection, student loans and scholarship, could be recorded beforehand by the host universities. Online live meetings could be arranged between the university representative and the rural student representative, in which student representatives could ask some of the questions which the students care the most.

The finding highlighted that the biggest problem stopping many participants applying for universities outside of NL is lack of financial support. Furthermore, based on previous research (e.g. Ast, 2014; Byun et al., 2012b), rural students are more likely to come from a lower socioeconomic background. The financial limitation is one of the biggest factors which influence students' higher education aspiration (Smith et al., 1995). Although in the case of this research, most of the Canadian participants are coming from middle-class families, still a large number of rural students across the globe are suffering financially, especially those from developing countries. Therefore, each university, especially those elite universities with high tuition fees should set up scholarships specifically for rural students to attract more rural students to attend university.

Participants, such as Sofia who changed her major four times, represent a large group of students who need guidance on their program selection. Upon arrival on campus, each faculty in the university should arrange some seminars for first-year students. Detailed information regarding the program offered in their faculty should be introduced in the seminar, such as the courses offered, the faculty members and the career outcome of the program, so that the students would know more about each program to make the right selection. Some seniors should also be invited to provide some advice on the academy and social life in university.

In the research conducted by Fleming and Grace (2017), the university experience camp in Australia successfully changed some rural students' negative or ambivalent opinions about higher education, and many of them decided to go to university after high school. Therefore, to assist more rural students attending higher education, summer camps should be set up by each university or by the cooperation of several universities and arrange rural students to experience the life in university during their high school time. Most importantly, the camp should not only include students from graduate class in high school, students from grade 10 and 11 should also be included so that students could start to prepare for university application at an earlier time.

5.2.2 Implications for future research

This research supports Aries and Seider's (2005) view that different social contexts would have different influences on the identity of students from a lower socioeconomic background. The working-class students in the elite university in their research struggled much more than those in the state university because of the larger gap of socioeconomic status in an elite university. In this research, the universities attended by the participants are all state-level universities in which socioeconomic gaps are smaller than those in elite universities. Moreover, except for the two international students, the majority of participants were from middle-class families, and few differences they perceived between themselves and those from the city stemmed from a lack of economic capital but were from the result of living in different fields. Therefore, few of their identity struggles in this research was class-based. In the future, studies could be conducted in elite universities in Canada to find out whether rural Canadian students in elite universities faced more struggle than rural students in state universities. The two

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international students perceived larger contrast between themselves and those from the city because of their lack of economic capital, which suggested the larger economic gap between rural-urban areas in developing countries. Future research could combine the rural background with social class background and pay more attention to rural-urban identity negotiation issues in the setting of the developing countries where more class-based identity struggle might be found in students coming from rural areas.

In this research, although all the participants either received moral or financial support from parents to go to university, they still lacked enough guidance and encountered various challenges upon their arrival in university. This finding is similar to the study of Means et al. (2016). The research supported the notion that parents with higher education levels have a higher educational aspiration for their children, and parents' support plays an important role in children's decision to go to university (Blackwell & Mclaughlin, 1998; Brown et al., 2009). However, it also challenged the previous research (e.g. Chenoweth & Galliher, 2004; Collier & Morgan, 2008; Schultz, 2004), which believed that non-first-generation students could receive more guidance and facilitation on the transition to university from their parents. In many cases, the non-first-generation students still have to rely on themselves on the transition to university, especially when their parents only have received a low level of post-secondary education credential such as a diploma, which is the case in this research. The previous research only looked at the difference between parents who have post-secondary education credentials and those who have none. Future research should look into the different levels of influence and support on children's post-secondary education between parents who have received a high level of post-secondary education such as bachelor and above and parents who have only received a low level of post-secondary education such as a diploma degree. Also, this research highlighted

that moral and financial support from parents are not enough to ensure a smooth transition for students; future research should identify specific ways and strategies for parents to guide their children in the transitional phase (Bufton, 2003).

Chenoweth and Galliher (2004) believed that parents with higher educational level would know the importance of higher education better than those parents who have no higher education credentials. Therefore, they would be more supportive of their children to continue post-secondary education (Jenkins et al., 2013). Smith et al. (1995) believed that rural parents are less likely to encourage higher education. However, the finding in Handke's (2012) and Heinisch's (2016) studies, and the support from the parents received by two first-generation international students Yang and Ming suggested that parental educational level should not be used as the only determinant to evaluate parents' post-secondary education aspiration for their children. Future research should investigate the factors which influence and shape the aspiration of those parents who have no post-secondary credentials themselves but wished their children to continue post-secondary education.

5.3 Limitations of research

One of the biggest limitations of this research is the small scale of the sample. Only ten participants were recruited due to time and labor constraint. Therefore, the finding could not be generalized to a larger population. Moreover, although this research has covered some international perspectives by including two international students, the number limits its generalizability. Furthermore, two international students are Chinese, from whom one could only

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reflect Chinese society. Future research should consider taking students from other countries as well.

The research is conducted in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, which is a province where the social class gap and rural-urban gap are less evident than more economically developed provinces in Canada, such as British Columbia or Ontario. Therefore, the result of the research could not be generalized to rural students in other provinces, especially those more economically developed provinces. However, the other three Atlantic provinces in Canada have a similar situation as NL. Therefore, the result might be applicable in the other three Atlantic provinces.

 As most of the relevant research, this research adopted a qualitative research method to investigate students' identity negotiation. While qualitative research could reflect the inner thoughts of the participants, such a research method limits its generalizability and validity. In the future, mixed-method research should be conducted so that more rural students could be included in the research. In the future, some of the general questions about their experiences in rural community and university could be turned into questionnaires, and in-depth interviews could be conducted with students who experienced the most struggle in university.

Lastly, like most of the qualitative research, the research bias could not be avoided in this research. However, the researcher adopted member checking method and sent the transcripts to each participant for review to control the influence of research bias.

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Appendices

Appendix A

ICEHR Number:	20201532-ED
Approval Period:	March 10, 2020 – March 31, 2021
Funding Source:	
Responsible Faculty:	Dr. Dennis Mulcahy Faculty of Education
Title of Project:	*Fish Out of the Water? A Collective Case Study on Identity Negotiation of Rural Students in Higher Education*
Amendment #:	*01*

MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY

Interdisciplinary Committee on
Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR)

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April 30, 2020

Ms. Xiaoxiao Zhang
Faculty of Education
Memorial University of Newfoundland

Dear Ms. Zhang:

The Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR) has reviewed the proposed modifications for the above referenced project, as outlined in your amendment request dated April 20, 2020, and is pleased to give approval to conduct interviews online via Skype, as described in your request, provided all other previously approved protocols are followed.

If you need to make any other changes during the conduct of the research that may affect ethical relations with human participants, please submit an amendment request, with a description of these changes, via your Researcher Portal account for the Committee's consideration.

Your ethics clearance for this project March 31, 2021, before which time you <u>must submit an annual update to ICEHR</u>. If you plan to continue the project, you need to request renewal of your ethics clearance, and include a brief summary on the progress of your research. When the project no longer requires contact with human participants, is completed and/or terminated, you need to provide an annual update with a brief final summary, and your file will be closed.

Annual updates and amendment requests can be submitted from your Researcher Portal account by clicking the *Applications: Post-Review* link on your Portal homepage.

The Committee would like to thank you for the update on your proposal and we wish you well with your research.

Yours sincerely,

Kelly Blidook, Ph.D.
Vice-Chair, Interdisciplinary Committee on
Ethics in Human Research

KB/bc

cc: Supervisor – Dr. Dennis Mulcahy, Faculty of Education

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

Title: Fish Out of the Water? A Collective Case Study on Identity Negotiation of Rural Students
in Higher Education

Researcher(s):	Xiaoxiao Zhang, Faculty of Education, Memorial University of Newfoundland, Email: xiaoxiaoz@mun.ca
Supervisor(s):	Dr. Dennis Mulcahy, Faculty of Education, Memorial University of Newfoundland, Email: dmulcahy@mun.ca

You are invited to take part in a research project entitled "Fish Out of the Water? A Collective Case Study on Identity Negotiation of Rural Students in Higher Education."

This form is part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. It also describes your right to withdraw from the study. In order to decide whether you wish to participate in this research study, you should understand enough about its risks and benefits to be able to make an informed decision. This is the informed consent process. Take time to read this carefully and to understand the information given to you. Please contact the researcher, xiaoxiao zhang, if you have any questions about the study or would like more information before you consent.

It is entirely up to you to decide whether to take part in this research. If you choose not to take part in this research or if you decide to withdraw from the research once it has started, there will be no negative consequences for you, now or in the future.

Introduction:
I am a master student from the faculty of education, Memorial University of Newfoundland. As part of my master thesis, I am conducting research under the supervision of Dr.Dennis Mulcahy from the faculty of education, Memorial University of Newfoundland.

Purpose of Study:
This research aims to explore how university students from rural areas negotiate their identity between their past rural educational and family background and new university experience. Most current related research focuses on the identity negotiation issue of university students only from a general class-based perspective. However, little research has been focusing on the issue specifically from a rural perspective and explores how urban university life influence on the identity of those students with a rural background. By understanding how the identity of rural university students are renegotiated when they start a new life in universities, this research could fill in the gap of the current literature. Moreover, this research could help the rural university students, especially those who freshly start their life in university, to have a smooth and successful transition to the university. This study also could guide the university and department of education in the local government on planning rural student recruitment strategies to attract more rural students to continue higher education in the future.

What You Will Do in this Study:
You are asked to have an online Skype video interview with the researcher. During the interview, you will be asked to tell the researcher about your past rural educational experience, and share your story of life back in the rural communities, including your childhood upbringing and life with your family and friends, and reflect upon your new experience since you came to university.

This consent form will be given to you, together with a demographic questionnaire, both in digital version, several days before the Skype interview through response email. **You need to read through this consent form first, then you should provide a digital signature at the end of this consent form.** Before signing the consent form, you can email or chat with the researcher on Facebook if you have any questions regarding the research and the consent form. Before the interview, the researcher will first spend 5-10 mins to review the consent form with you and answer any questions you may have.

You should fill out the questionnaire electronically and email it back to the researcher together with the signed consent form before the Skype interview. In the questionnaire, you will be asked about some of your basic information, including the location and population of your hometown, the size of your high school, your GPA in high school, age, marital status, parents' educational level and family household income. The purpose of collecting personal information through

demographic questionnaire is that collecting some demographic information is a significant step in helping the researcher to better understand the life experience of the participant. In order to protect your confidentiality, the demographic information would not appear in individual raw data format in the thesis, but only will be briefly introduced in the aggregated format (e.g. the average age and family income of all participants). No individual case will be displayed.

Length of Time:
The questionnaire can be completed within 5 mins. The interview with the researcher will last between 60 to 90 minutes. You are required to have **only one** interview.

Compensation:
10 dollars (e-transfer) will be given as the compensation for your participation. If you wish to withdraw from the research, compensation will be given proportionally based on the contribution you have made up to that point. If you wish to withdraw in the first 30 minutes of the interview, 4 dollars will be given for the time and commitment you made on interview up to that point. If you withdraw after the first 30 minutes before the end of the interview, you will be given 8 dollars for your contribution. If you wish to withdraw after the entire interview, you would be compensated with full 10 dollars. If you withdraw before the interview, no compensation will be given.

Withdrawal from the Study:
- You can request to stop or end your participation at any time during the data collection (e.g. in the middle of the data collection). All the data collected up to that point will be destroyed or deleted immediately, and will be excluded from the data analysis.
- Withdrawal of participation doesn't lead to any negative consequences. You are not required to provide reasons for withdrawal.
- The researcher will send the transcripts to you before the data analysis begins through email and invite you to review the transcript. You will have 15 days to review the transcript and provide any feedback if you want to. You could also ask for withdraw within the 15 days timeline. After 15 days, the researcher will send email to you to notify you that you could no longer withdraw from the study.
- If you wish to request withdrawal within the 15 days timeline, you need to send email to the researcher to state your intention of withdrawal. The researcher will then remove all the concerned data collected up to that point.

Possible Benefits:
By joining in the research, you may benefit from the opportunity to reflect upon your past and current life experiences in understanding your individual development. The story of rural students reflected in this research might also help the university and department of education to understand the needs of rural students, which might help them to make student recruitment strategies specifically for the rural students.

Possible Risks:
There are minimal risks involved in this study. The possible discomforts might be associated with possible emotional distress in exploring your experiences in transitioning into university. Subjects surrounding upbringing and family life may be distressing. A strong effort will be made to avoid deeply personal topics.

There is student wellness and counselling centre located on campus. The location is UC5000, and telephone number is (709) 864-8874. The Mental health crisis line for people across NL is 1888-737-4668.

Confidentiality:
The ethical duty of confidentiality includes safeguarding participants' identities, personal information, and data from unauthorized access, use, or disclosure.

Your identity and all the information you provide will be kept confidential at all times. Under no circumstance during or after data collection will your personal information be released to anyone or any third parties without your explicit permission. Pseudonyms will be used as identifiers in the final version of the thesis and your identity will not be made public. Although the researcher will present some of the direct quotations from the interview, all identifying information (such as the name of your hometown, family member, friends) will be removed from the thesis.

The data will be safely protected and no third person or party will have access to the data without your explicit permission. All electronic data will be kept safe on a confidential laptop and personal password-required cellphone owned by the researcher. Your contact information will be kept apart from the interview and questionnaire data in a separate locked electronic file on the same password-required laptop. This consent form will also be kept separately from the questionnaire and video-recording, in a password-required file in the laptop at a locked room at the researcher's home.

Anonymity:
Anonymity refers to protecting participants' identifying characteristics, such as the name or description of physical appearance.

You will have anonymous participation. The interview will be one to one between only the researcher and the participant. There will be no third person present to join the conversation.

Every reasonable effort will be made to ensure your anonymity. You will not be identified in the thesis without your explicit permission.

Recording of Data:
To ensure accuracy and protect privacy, the Skype video interview will be recorded by Skype and saved by the researcher in a locked electronic file in researcher's personal laptop. No one except the researcher will have access to the laptop. The demographic questionnaire will also be in electronic form and given to the participant through the response email several days before the interview.

Use, Access, Ownership, and Storage of Data:

- The questionnaire, interview recording and the transcript will be stored in the locked electronic file in the password-required personal's Apple Macbook in a locked room at the researcher's home. The electronic device is the sole property of the researcher. The electronic consent form will be stored separately from the interview data in a separate locked file in the laptop. Your contact information will be kept apart from the interview and questionnaire data in a separate locked electronic file in the password-required laptop.

- The interview recordings will be transcribed by the researcher; only the researcher and the supervisor will have access to the recordings and transcriptions. The transcriptions of the interview will be used in writing the thesis, but all personally identifiable information will be protected and removed from the thesis. **Data will be kept for a minimum of five years, as required by Memorial University's policy on Integrity in Scholarly Research.**

Third-Party Data Collection and/or Storage:

Data collected from you as part of your participation in this project will be hosted and/or stored electronically by Apple Inc and Skype and is subject to their privacy policy, and to any relevant laws of the country in which the server are located. Therefore, anonymity and confidentiality of data may not be guaranteed in the rare instance, for example, that government agencies obtain a court order compelling the provider to grant access to specific data stored on their servers. If you have questions or concerns about how your data will be collected or stored, please contact the researcher and/or visit the provider's website for more information before participating. The privacy and security policy of the third-party hosting data collection and/or storing data can be found at: https://www.apple.com/ca/privacy/ and https://support.skype.com/en/skype/all/privacy-security/.

Reporting of Results:

- The data and analysis of the data will be published through the researcher's master thesis. Upon completion, my thesis will be available at Memorial University's Queen Elizabeth II Library, and can be accessed online at: http://collections.mun.ca/cdm/search/collection/theses.
- The data will be presented in the form of summaries and direct quotation, you will be given a pseudonym, and all personal identifying information will not be revealed unless the participant explicitly expresses wishes to disclose them.

Sharing of Results with Participants:

After your interview, and before the data are analyzed and included in the final thesis, you will be able to review the transcript of your interview, and to add, change, or delete information from the transcripts as you see fit.
The researcher might (or might not) send you an email for clarification of some of the unclear

points you made during the interview.

Questions:
You are welcome to ask questions before, during, or after your participation in this research. If you would like more information about this study, please contact: Xiaoxiao Zhang, Email: xiaoxiaoz@mun.ca and Dr. Dennis Mulcahy, Email: dmulcahy@mun.ca

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research, such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant, you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 709-864-2861.

Consent:
Your signature means that:

- You have read the information about the research.
- You have been able to ask questions about this study.
- You are satisfied with the answers to all your questions.
- You understand what the study is about and what you will be doing.
- You understand that you are free to withdraw participation in the study without having to give a reason, and that doing so will not affect you now or in the future.

- You understand that if you choose to end participation **during** data collection, any data collected from you up to that **point will be destroyed and deleted** unless you indicate otherwise.

- You understand that if you choose to withdraw **after** data collection has ended, your data can be removed from the study up to 15 days after data collection.

    I agree to be audio-recorded and video-recorded through Skype ⎯ Yes ⎯ No

I agree to the use of direct quotations   ⎯ Yes   ⎯ No

I agree to fill out the demographic questionnaire   ⎯ Yes   ⎯ No

I agree that my audio-recording will be translated into English   ⎯ Yes   ⎯ No (for Chinese speaker only)

By signing this consent form, you do not give up your legal rights and do not release the researchers from their professional responsibilities.

Your Signature Confirms:

     ⎯ I have read what this study is about and understood the risks and benefits. I have had adequate time to think about this and had the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered.

     ⎯ I agree to participate in the research project understanding the risks and contributions of my participation, that my participation is voluntary, and that I may end my participation.

     ⎯ A digital copy of this Informed Consent Form has been given to me for my records.

——————————————   ——————————————

Digital Signature of the participant   Date

Researcher's Signature:

I have explained this study to the best of my ability. I invited questions and gave answers. I believe that the participant fully understands what is involved in being in the study, any potential risks of the study and that he or she has freely chosen to be in the study.

——————————————   ——————————————

Signature of Principal Investigator   Date

Appendix C

Recruitment Letter

Dear Sir/Madam:

My name is xiaoxiao zhang, and I am a master student from the faculty of education at the Memorial University of Newfoundland. I am conducting a research project called "Fish Out of the Water? A Collective Case Study on Identity Negotiation of Rural Students in Higher Education" for my master's degree under the supervision of Dr. Dennis Mulcahy. The purpose of the study is to explore how university students from rural areas negotiate their identity between their rural background and university experience.

I am contacting you to invite you to participate in an online Skype interview in which you will be asked to tell the researcher about your past rural educational experience, and share the story of your life back in the rural communities, including your childhood upbringing and life with your family and friends, and reflect upon your new experience since you came to university. Participation will require 60 to 90 minutes of your time.

Before the interview, you will be asked to fill out a demographic questionnaire, in which you will be asked about some of your basic information, including the location and population of your hometown, the size of your high school, your age, marital status, ethnicity, religion, your GPA in high school, parents' educational level and family household income. The purpose of collecting personal information through demographic questionnaire is that collecting some demographic information is a significant step in helping the researcher to better understand the life experience of the participant.

To participate in the research, you need to fit in the following criteria:
1. You are currently enrolling at Memorial University of Newfoundland as a full-time undergraduate or graduate student.
2. You grew up in rural area (spent at least 10-15 years there) and had rural k-12 educational background.

(By definition, rural area is referred to a place with less than 1000 people, and is located more than 50km to the nearest urban area and 20km to the nearest suburban area.)
You will be compensated 10 dollars cash for your participation.

If you are interested in participating in this study, or if you have any questions about me or my project, please contact me through email: xiaoxiaoz@mun.ca, or call me at 709-907-3126.

If you know anyone who may be interested in participating in this study, please give them a copy of this information.

Thank you in advance for considering my request,

Xiaoxiao Zhang

Note:

This research is not a university requirement. Participation is completely based on individual's own preference. And participation will not be reported to other students, or to staff or professors.

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research, such as your rights as a participant, you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr.chair@mun.ca or by telephone at 709-864-2861.

Appendix D

Response Email

Dear (Name of participant),

Thank you for your interest in participating in my research entitled, "Fish Out of the Water? A Collective Case Study on Identity Negotiation of Rural Students in Higher Education." I am very pleased to inform you that based on your feedback, you are eligible to participate in the research.

As a reminder, the purpose of this study is to explore how university students from rural areas negotiate their identity between their past rural educational and family background and new university experience. By joining the research, you would have a chance to reflect upon your past and current life experiences in understanding your individual development.

A one-on-one online Skype video interviews will be conducted. Your interview will last between 60 minutes to 90 minutes.

I would like to make this interview as convenient as possible for you, so please let me know if you have any preference on the time of the interview.

In the attach you will find an informed consent form outlining the conditions of your participation in this study. **Please take some time to read it before providing a digital signature at the end of the consent form.** Before giving your consent, if you have any questions about the consent form, please email me or chat with me on Facebook. Before the interview, I will also spend 5-10 mins to review the consent form with you and answer any questions you may have.

The demographic questionnaires and interview questions are also attached in this email. After you sign the consent form, you need to fill out the questionnaire electronically and email the questionnaire back to me together with the signed consent form.

The purpose of giving you the interview questions beforehand is not asking you to form the answers ahead of time, but to give you a better idea of what I am looking for and let you have more time to reflect on your past experience.

At the completion of the interview, you will be compensated with 10 dollars (e-transfer) If you wish to withdraw from the study in the middle of the data collection, you will be compensated proportionately based on the amount of contribution to the research you have made up to that point. If you withdraw before the interview, no compensation will be given. If you wish to withdraw in the first 30 minutes of the interview, 4 dollars will be given for the time and commitment you made on interview up to that point. If you withdraw after the first 30 minutes before the end of the interview, you will be given 8 dollars for your contribution. If you complete the entire interview, you would be compensated with 10 dollars. You would have 15 days after the

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interview to withdraw from the study, after 15 days, the researcher will send you an email to notify you that you are no longer able to withdraw from the study.

If you are no longer interested in participating in this study or have any further questions regarding the study, please contact me through email: xiaoxiaoz@mun.ca, or call me at 709-907-3126.

Thank you for your time. I look forward to speaking with you and hearing about your experiences.

Xiaoxiao Zhang

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research, such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant, you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 709-864-2861.

Appendix E

Demographic questionnaire

Research Title: Fish Out of the Water? A Collective Case Study on Identity Negotiation of Rural Students in Higher Education
Researcher: Xiaoxiao Zhang
Supervisor: Dr. Dennis Mulcahy

To assist with the facilitation of this study, please indicate your response to the following questions. You may decline to state your answer to any of the following questions without any consequence.

1. What is your age?
A. Less than 19 years old
B. 19-24 years old
C. 25-30 years old
D. 30-35 years old
E. 35 years or older

2. What is your current educational program?
A. Undergraduate
B. Master
C. PhD

3. what is your year in your program?
A. first year
B. second year
C. Third year
D. last year

4. What is your marital status?
A. Single
B. Married
C. Separated
D. Divorced
E. Common-in-law
F. Widowed
G. Others

5. what is your nationality? (if Canadian, please also indicate the province you are from)

6. What is the highest level of education your parent(s) have completed?

Mother:
- A. Less than high school
- B. High school
- C. Diploma
- D. Bachelor
- E. Master's degree or above
- F. N/A

Father:
- A. Less than high school
- B. High school
- C. Diploma
- D. Bachelor
- E. Master's degree or above
- F. N/A

7. What was your final high school grade point average?
A. Below 2.49
B. 2.5-2.99
C. 3.0-3.49
D. 3.5-3.99
E. 4.0 or above

8. what was the size of your rural high school?
A. less than 100 students
B. 100-300 students
C. 300-500 students
D. 500-1000 students
E. above 1000 students

9. What is your family's annual household income (Canadian dollars)?
A. Less than $ 23000
B. $23000-$39,999
C. $40,000-$59,999
D. $60,000-$79,999
E. More than $80,000
F. Unknown

10. what is the population of your rural community?
A. Less than 500
B. 500-1000
C. 1000-3000
D. 3000-5000
E. 5000-10000
F. above 10000

11. what is the distance between your rural community and the nearest suburban or urban area?
A. within 20km
B. within 50km
C. within 100km
D. above 200km

12. How many years you have spent in your rural community?
A. Less than 5 years
B. 5-10 years
C. 10-15 years
D. above 15 years

13. What is your father's occupation?
A. Farming
B. Fishing
C. Construction
D. professional work in the rural community such as teachers, physicians, member of the community committee, etc
E. Others (please indicate)

Thank you very much for your response! Your contribution is vital to the research.

Appendix F

Interview Questions

Research Title: Fish Out of the Water? A Collective Case Study on Identity Negotiation of Rural

Students in Higher Education

Researcher: Xiaoxiao Zhang

Supervisor: Dr. Dennis Mulcahy

The following questions will be used to guide semi-structured interviews for this study. It is important to note that these questions provide a list of possible areas of semi-structured interview questions. The researcher will maintain the option to ask follow-up questions for clarification of anything the interviewee has said. Questions may differ between participants based on the flow of the conversation, their comfort level in the topic, and their responses to the demographic questionnaire. The order of questions may change depending on the flow of the conversation. This interview is meant to be more conversational than structured, as the words and experiences of the participants from their personal lens are important.

Main questions:
The following questions have been placed in the order that the researcher plans to address them. Depending on the flow of the conversation, questions may be reordered to facilitate a more effective dialogue.

Can you describe briefly about your rural experience? How do you describe your rural identity, in other words, do you think your rural upbringing shaped who you are in some way?

Why did you choose to go to university? Can you describe any members of your home community (family members, high school teacher, friend) who affected your decision to enroll in university, either positively or negatively?

Did you hold some doubts when you decided to go to university about whether you could make out successfully?

Why did you choose to enroll at this institution specifically?

What is your first impression of the university? What were some aspects of university and city that surprised you?
Tell me about your life in university. (study, friendship, extra-curricular activities, part-time job etc)

Do you think your rural background and rural identity have affected your experience in the university? If yes, in what way?

Do you think there is any difference between you and those students who are from the cities? If yes, in what way? (either positive or negative) Do you find there are some quality in you which were missing in the students from cities?

What do you think your friends in university perceive you? Do you think their perception change as time goes by? In what way?

Do you think you have changed since you come to university? In what way? Do you think such change was formed unconsciously or you consciously change yourself?

Did you experience an identity struggle? How did you negotiate the rural identity and the new identity you acquired in university?

Do you feel as though you fit in the university and urban life? Why or why not? What was the easiest aspect of moving from your home community to university?

Have you encountered some difficulty making a transition to urban university life? How did you conquer these difficulties?

How often do you go back home during university life? How would you describe the interactions you have with family and high school friends when you return to your rural community? Do you think anything change about the relationship you have with your family or old friends? Do you experience any tension between home and university? (Have your family or old friends mention any difference or change they witness in you?)

Did university life change your perception about your rural background?

What do you think university life have brought you?

What do you plan to do after graduation? Go back to your rural community or live in the city?