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THE HUMAN FACTORS WHICH ACTED AS  
A DRIVING FORCE FOR INSPIRING  
IMPOVERISHED, RURAL STUDENTS TO  
SUCCESSFULLY PURSUE POST-  
SECONDARY EDUCATIONAL  
OPPORTUNITY

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THE HUMAN FACTORS WHICH ACTED AS A DRIVING FORCE FOR INSPIRING  
IMPOVERISHED, RURAL STUDENTS TO SUCCESSFULLY PURSUE  
POST-SECONDARY EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

By

Adam E. Lucas

THESIS

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **THE HUMAN FACTORS WHICH ACTED AS A DRIVING FORCE FOR INSPIRING IMPOVERISHED, RURAL STUDENTS TO SUCCESSFULLY PURSUE POST- SECONDARY EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY**

By

Adam E. Lucas

This qualitative study explored how students from rural poverty were able to find the motivation from an adult-role model to pursue post-secondary academic opportunity. This study used an open-ended questionnaire to elicit responses from four recent high school graduates who are currently enrolled in a post-secondary academic institution. The questionnaire asked the student participants to identify a specific adult individual, as well as the attributes about this individual that acted as motivation to successfully pursue post-secondary academics. In a second phase of questionnaires, the adult-role models identified by the student participants are asked about their perception of the student participants' motivation to pursue post-secondary academic opportunities.

Results yielded eleven sub-themes and four overlying themes. Students were in-fact able to identify a specific adult who acted as a motivational factor for their pursuit of post-secondary academics; students could define attributes about this individual, which they deemed motivational; a differentiated and engaging relationship between the student and adult role-model participants developed; and due to the relationships cultivated in each student and adult-role model case, student participants were able to internalize how the actions exhibited by an adult-role model affected the adult-role model's future and were therefore able to incorporate similar practices into their own lives in order to achieve successful outcomes of their own.

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This thesis follows the format as recommended by the Department of Education, Leadership, and Public Service.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

As educators, it is our legal, moral, and ethical responsibility to ensure that all students are achieving to their maximum potential therefore creating favorable post-secondary educational opportunities for themselves. Due to our country's substantial cultural, racial, socioeconomic, and geographic diversity, our educational system faces challenges that are relatively unseen in other regions of the world, and this diversity must be addressed to ensure that students from varying demographics are not neglected. Identifying our system's shortcomings, and discovering strategies, practices, and actions to ensure that all students, regardless of background, are able to access post-secondary educational opportunity, needs to be a priority of our educational system as a whole.

Generalizing successful practices across our country's school systems may be beneficial to some extent; however, identifying motivational factors, which have proven to be successful for specific populations will allow for more students from a diverse range of backgrounds to find incentive to attend a post-secondary academic institution. Identifying adult role-models and the specific actions, behaviors, and characteristics they have demonstrated which motivated rural students who had qualified for free or reduced-priced lunch during their time in secondary school to attend a post-secondary academic institution will allow more adult-role models to promote similar attributes which have proven to be effective at motivating students from this specific demographic.

### **Problem Statement**

Due to the complex nature of our nation's educational system, there are deficiencies in our ability to provide incentives for all of our students to access post-secondary opportunities.

Often times the negative features of our educational system overshadow the positives and it must be realized that there are many things that are being done correctly. As an educational community, we must build upon these positive aspects to ensure that students are able to realize their potential.

Nationwide, the educational infrastructure does exist to provide opportunity for impoverished, rural students to access post-secondary academics; however, many students that fit within this demographic do not take advantage of this opportunity and do not realize their optimal potential. Regardless of the many obstacles that stand in the way of students from rural poverty, there are individuals who are able to overcome these hindrances and find ways to successfully access post-secondary educational opportunities. Although many students in the United States face difficult situations, which can negatively impact school success and later outcomes in life, some students are able to persevere and experience academic success (Williams, Bryan, Morrison, & Scott, 2017). Developing a better understanding of ways in which students are able to persevere despite adversity will greatly improve our effectiveness of implementing preventative measures not only in the school setting, but with community and family services as well (Williams et al., 2017).

Students from poverty often times do not have the same access to adult role models as students from more affluent regions. Impoverished students may have less academic and social support and may not have adult individuals in their lives, whether at home or school, who have contact to high levels of social capital (Noguera & Wells, 2011). Adult role-models, especially for secondary students, have a substantial impact on the future of the impoverished student. While parents tend to have greater influence on student motivation in the early grades, the strength of influence that a teacher has on a student increases in higher grades; therefore, making

the role of a teacher as a student motivator especially critical (Hardré & Sullivan, 2009).

Ensuring that teachers are provided information as to what adult characteristics, practices, and experiences motivate rural students from poverty to pursue post-secondary educational opportunity is essential to ensure that we are promoting these attributes and therefore impacting as many students as possible.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to identify impoverished students from a rural high school who have enrolled in a post-secondary academic institution and explore what adult individuals in their lives helped motivate them to pursue this opportunity. By examining specific characteristics, actions, behaviors, and practices exhibited by these adult role-models, which inspired students from rural poverty to access post-secondary academics, additional adult role-models, including educators, can exemplify these attributes in order to develop similar role-model relationships with students from this demographic to increase post-secondary educational opportunity for these individuals.

### **Research Questions**

1. What was the role of an adult individual who has positively impacted impoverished, rural high school students to successfully pursue post-secondary educational opportunity?
2. What specific attributes has this adult individual demonstrated, which has positively impacted impoverished, rural high school students to successfully pursue post-secondary educational opportunity?

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study was designed to discover ways in which students from rural poverty are able to find motivation from an adult individual in their life in order to attend a post-secondary

academic institution, so that others from this demographic may realize similar opportunity.

Although some aspects of student motivation are due to individual differences and the impact of external experience, others can be attributed to the students' interactions with individuals in their school setting (Hardré & Sullivan, 2009). Certainly adult-role models outside of the school setting are impactful on student outcomes as well, so identifying these individuals and their attributes, as well as educators in the school setting, is equally important as our educational community develops practices which allow students to find motivation to access higher education.

Social Cognitive Learning Theory, which approaches the description of human behavior as a continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioral, and environmental factors (Bandura, 1977), is the theoretical framework for which this research is based. Students observe many models, which are able to influence their individual's actions and behaviors (Bandura, 1977). By observing educators, or other adult role-models, and the characteristics, actions, and behaviors exhibited by these individuals, students are able to internalize certain actions and model their personal actions after the role-model. Whether a student does or does not imitate a behavior correlates to the student's ability to relate to a model and the opportunity for a student to experience positive or negative reinforcement associated with the seen behavior (Bandura, 1977).

There are three primary tenets of social cognitive theory being: people construct knowledge through observation; both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards reinforce learning; and not all learning results in behavioral changes (Foster, 2013). Observing a model does not guarantee the student's ability to exhibit the behavior. Rather models provide examples of consequences associated with certain behaviors, which may influence a student's desire to replicate the

behavior or not (Schunk, 2008). Money (1995) describes Social Cognitive Theory as a “bidirectional interaction among behavior, cognitive and personal factors, and the external environment” (p. 68).

Social Cognitive Theory supports the idea that culture and community are able to impact the way in which students are able to construct knowledge (Foster, 2013). As educators, the behaviors and actions that we exhibit on a daily basis have the ability to profoundly impact our students’ outcomes. Exploring which actions, behaviors, experiences, or characteristics have positively impacted a student’s desire to pursue post-secondary academic opportunity will allow our educational community to replicate these attributes in order to impact additional students as well.



## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

The goal of an educator is to ensure that all students are accessing opportunity and acquiring the proper skill set to become productive members of society. Educators find themselves in a unique position in which they are able to directly impact consequent generations and the impression that we instill upon our students will have a lasting impact on the progression of our society as a whole. This study set out to explore the personal experiences of students from rural poverty who were able to find the motivation from an adult individual to pursue post-secondary academic opportunity. This discovered desire to better one-self educationally can have lasting effects on our nation's unemployment rate, poverty rate, and economic growth.

Unemployment in the United States is a significant social problem, which negatively impacts the world economy. Although the unemployment rate has declined in recent years from 9.8% in January of 2010 to 3.7% in October of 2018 (United States Department of Labor, 2018), far too many individuals in our population are unable to find sustainable employment and income.

On the other end of the spectrum, The United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018) reports that in August of 2018, there were 7.1 million available jobs in the United States. There are a number of reasons why jobs become vacant such as voluntary leave, retirement, and layoffs; however, many of these jobs are still unable to be filled by our nation's work force due to lack of specific training or education needed to properly fill these positions (Koc, 2018). As can be seen from these statistics, there exists much disconnect in our nation between the unemployment rate and the number of professional positions available. As

educators, it is our responsibility to ensure that our students are the individuals who are properly motivated and educated to fill these positions; therefore, decreasing the unemployment rate further.

In a continually developing and globalizing world, many of the modern professional positions, which are being unfilled require a level of education higher than a high school diploma. Many jobs, which were once filled by individuals with no college degree are now requiring candidates to hold a bachelor's degree and almost all of the new jobs created since the 2008 recession have gone to college graduates (Koc, 2008). Koc (2008) states, "...jobs are rapidly changing in an ever-more technological world, and the skills connected with those jobs need to be constantly updated" (para. 19). Ensuring that more of our secondary students are able to find the motivation to access post-secondary academic opportunity is essential to filling more of these professional opportunities. Exploring reasons why certain students are motivated to persevere, while others are not, is a key component to closing the gap between the unemployment rate and the available professional positions.

Identifying diverse populations of students from distinct cultural, racial, socioeconomic, and geographic backgrounds and the specific motivational factors, which have been demonstrated by adult role-models prompting these students to pursue post-secondary opportunity will allow for additional students from these demographics to access similar opportunity. This study focuses on students from a rural region of Eastern Lower Michigan who had qualified for free or reduced-priced lunches during their time in secondary school. Understanding why these individuals realize the desire to pursue post-secondary academic opportunity while many of their peers do not can increase the likelihood of students from this demographic accessing post-secondary education; therefore, obtaining the qualifications

necessary to fill the available professional positions which are, and will continue to be, available in our country.

### **Poverty in the United States**

The U.S. Census Bureau calculates poverty by using a set of dollar value threshold that varies by family size and composition. Therefore, if the total monetary income of a family is less than the applicable threshold, every member of that family would be considered to be in poverty (Fontenot, Semega, & Koller, 2018). In a report by the U.S. Census Bureau, Fontenot et al. (2018) indicate in 2017, 39.7 million people in the United States were living below the poverty line which equates to 12.3 percent of the population. The report divides the U.S. population into three age groups: under 18, between 18 and 64, and 65 and older. Of the three age groups, the under 18 group had the highest percentage of individuals living below the poverty line at 17.5% compared to 11.2% and 9.2% respectively for the remaining age groups (Fontenot et al., 2018). This statistic is cause for concern for the educational community considering the students that we serve in our primary and secondary schools fall under this demographic. The realization that a significant percentage of students nationwide under the age of 18 are considered impoverished must act as a catalyst to address this problem and identify best practices to ensure that these individuals are able to find the motivation to access the same post-secondary educational opportunity as their non-impoverished peers.

Another relevant statistic which must be addressed by the educational community as it pertains to student motivation to pursue post-secondary academic opportunity is the poverty rate in relation to educational experience. Although generally understood that more education theoretically leads to better career opportunity and therefore more individual economic success, exploring comparative data between groups with differing academic experience will allow the

educational community to internalize a better understanding of consequences associated with pursuing post-secondary academic opportunity or not. In 2007 24.5% of individuals over the age of 25 years old who had no high school diploma were identified as living below the poverty rate compared to 12.7 % of individuals who had a high school diploma however no college experience (Fontenot et al., 2018). A student's ability to access a post-secondary academic institution, even without completion of a degree will decrease their chance of becoming impoverished. Fontenot et al. (2018) found that 8.8% of individuals over the age of 25 that had some college with no degree were impoverished while only 4.8% of individuals who had a bachelor's degree or higher were living below the poverty line. Realizing the drastic differences associated with poverty and post-secondary academic opportunity and promoting these statistics as motivational factors can be a beneficial approach to improving student motivation to pursue post-secondary educational opportunity.

### **Free and Reduced-Priced Lunches**

Due to the fact that many students are unable to accurately assess whether or not they are identified as impoverished or not, this study uses the free or reduced-priced lunch program to indicate whether a student is economically disadvantaged compared to their more affluent peers. All students who attend schools which participate in the National School Lunch Program are eligible for regular priced lunches; however, there are ways in which a student may become eligible for a free or reduced-priced lunch (Snyder & Musu-Gillette, 2015). Traditionally, family income has been used as a gauge to establish eligibility for a student to receive a free or reduced-priced lunch (Snyder & Musu-Gillette, 2015). Although qualifying for free or reduced-priced lunches does not necessarily indicate that a student is living below the poverty line, often times this data is used as a proxy for research purposes due to the fact that this information is more

readily available at the school level while poverty rate is not (Snyder & Musu-Gillette, 2015). “Because the free/reduced-priced lunch eligibility is derived from the federal poverty level, and therefore highly related to it, the free/reduced-priced lunch percentage is useful to researchers from an analytic perspective” (Snyder & Musu-Gillette, 2015, para. 5).

### **Geographic Distribution of Population and Rural Poverty in the United States**

As described by Fontenot et al. (2018), the four major geographical areas of our country, Northeast, Midwest, South, and West have poverty rates of 11.4%, 11.4%, 13.6% and 11.8% respectively. Roughly 97% of the land in the United States is considered to be rural, with 19.3% of the population, or about 60 million people, residing in these rural regions. Of this population, approximately 13.4 million individuals under the age of 18 live in rural areas and attend rural school districts (United States Census Bureau, 2016). Fontenot et al. (2018) report that 9.7% of the U.S. population living outside of principle cities are considered impoverished, while 14.8% of individuals who reside outside of metropolitan statistical areas live below the poverty line. Due to the fact that such a high percentage of individuals who live in rural regions of our country and attend rural school districts are considered impoverished, understanding the specific obstacles that students from this demographic face compared to impoverished students from urban or suburban regions is essential in promoting practices which can positively impact this population.

An important consideration when researching rural populations is the complexity of the definition of rural. The meaning of the term rural can be quite variable depending on the organization which is using the term and the underlying reasoning for identifying an area as rural. The U.S. Census Bureau defines rural as an area with a population of less than 2,500 people; the Office of Management and Budget builds upon the Census definition but designates

entire counties as non-metro if a county does not have a city with 50,000 or more inhabitants or an urbanized area with at least 100,000 inhabitants; the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service designates counties as metro and non-metro but also takes into consideration if a county is adjacent to a metro or non-metro county; and the National Center for Educational Statistics divides regions into seven categories ranging from large-city with a population greater than or equal to 250,000, to rural, which is any place designated as rural by the Census Bureau (Khatti, Riley, & Kane, 1997).

The numerous definitions can create disconnect when comparing student populations, and these variations must be taken into account when generalizing research findings across populations which have been identified by a researcher as rural. Researchers have not used a common definition of the word rural, (Khatti et al., 1997) and many students who are designated as attending a rural school may be much closer to larger population centers than others, therefore, increasing access to additional resources and supportive services.

To mitigate much of the confusion which may be associated with the term rural, this study uses the Michigan Department of Education's designation of rural and urban school districts. This list identifies all of Michigan's school districts and categorizes them as either rural or urban. The school district used in this study is listed as a rural district based on this document (Michigan Department of Education, 2014). Although there will be differences among the districts listed as rural based on proximity to larger urban populations, using this designation of rural allows for a standardization of the term.

### **Rural Schools and Impoverished Students**

In rural schools across the United States, poverty is a common barrier to student achievement and ability to pursue post-secondary academic opportunity. This study focused on

rural schools due to the fact that rural schools are underrepresented in the research literature. Findings associated with schools consisting of varying demographics may not be able to be generalized across a distinctly unique student population (Hardré & Sullivan, 2008a). Hardré, Crowson, DeBacker, and White (2007) state, “Given the number of factors that may contribute to school motivation and success, we cannot simply generalize the results of a body of predominantly urban and suburban studies to rural students and schools” (p. 249).

Although over 30% of U.S. schools, serving 18% of students nationwide, are located in rural communities, less than 6% of the research conducted in schools involves a rural population (Hardré et al., 2007). Rural schools face numerous challenges that affect a student’s ability to pursue post-secondary academic opportunity including high rates of child poverty, limited resources for academic materials and teacher development, and difficulty recruiting and retaining high quality educators (Chance & Segura, 2009; Holloway, 2002). Rural schools also often serve large numbers of families in socioeconomic distress, contain populations of students who are at high risk for low motivation and lack of academic success, and offer fewer support and extracurricular programs (Hardré, Sullivan, & Crowson, 2009) compared to more affluent schools or schools which may be closer to larger population centers.

Awareness of these challenges, which students from this demographic face can allow the educational community to mitigate adverse factors which might impede on a student’s ability to successfully pursue a post-secondary academic opportunity.

Because of these numerous obstacles that students from rural poverty face during their years in primary and secondary school, many are not able to realize their optimal potential academically and professionally. A statistic from 2011 found that students from low-income families had a 16% lower graduation rate compared to their peers from high-income families,

while a statistic from 2012, revealed that only 52% of students from low-income families were accepted into college immediately after high school compared to 82% of their peers from higher-income households (Williams et al., 2017).

A report from the National Center for Educational Statistics (2017) compares the number of dropouts between the ages of 16-24 across four different categories of family income: lowest quarter, middle-low quarter, middle high quarter, and highest quarter. In 2016, 900,000 students between the ages of 16 and 24 from the lowest quarter dropped out of school compared to 649,000 students in the middle-low quarter, 499,000 students in the middle-high quarter and 286,000 students in the highest quarter (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). These statistics demonstrate a significant deficiency in a student's ability to pursue post-secondary academic opportunity coming from an impoverished background.

When researching secondary school dropout rates from a rural perspective independent of family income, Hardré and Reeve (2003) found that dropout rates for rural high school students are at nearly 20%, while in more remote schools this rate can be as high as 40%. Dropout rates for students from rural regions in some instances are close to twice the national average and in some areas are higher than those in urban settings (Hardré et al., 2007). As disadvantageous as poverty may be on a student's chance to successfully complete secondary school, linking poverty with a rural component further decreases a student's ability to complete secondary school therefore eliminating the opportunity to attend a post-secondary academic institution.

As has been demonstrated through a number of studies included in this literature review, students from rural regions of our country face a number of challenges associated with successful completion of secondary school. These challenges, specifically those related to poverty, significantly decrease the ability of students from this demographic to complete secondary



school and successfully pursue post-secondary academic opportunity. Identifying motivational factors which can assist students in overcoming these barriers will allow for more individuals from rural regions who were impoverished to realize their potential.

### **Motivational Factors**

Motivating student populations to find academic success is a primary responsibility required of educators. Due to the complexities of student motivation and the multitude of factors which may influence a student, identifying successful motivational practices which have influenced students to pursue post-secondary academic opportunity is essential to ensure that more students from specific demographics are able to realize their potential. Ryan and Deci (2000) state:

Research on the conditions that foster versus undermine positive human potentials has both theoretical import and practical significance because it can contribute not only to formal knowledge of the causes of human behavior but also to the design of social environments that optimize people's development, performance, and well-being (p. 68).

As educators, it is critical that we address academic motivation in high school education due to the malleable nature of motivational features which can influence student engagement, learning, achievement and future aspirations (Deci & Ryan 1985; Hardré & Reeve 2003; Hardré & Sullivan, 2009; Pintrich & Schunk 1996; Sternberg & Wagner 1994). Students often times have above average ability; however, low levels of motivation which is a result of complex interactions between internal and external factors (Hardré & Sullivan, 2009). The inability of students to find motivation to achieve academic success is detrimental to our educational system and inhibits our students' ability to pursue post-secondary academic institutions and therefore fulfill employment positions which require a specific standard of educational achievement.

Students from varying demographics may be influenced differently by certain factors and identifying how students from rural poverty find motivation may differ compared to those students from urban or suburban populations. Rural youth can experience conflict between educational goals and their family connections and therefore are more likely to have lower educational aspirations which delay the pursuit of postsecondary educational opportunities (Hektner, 1995; Hardré et al., 2009). Local, rural communities may have different perceptions of the value of traditional educational institutions which are based on a comprehensive national educational model, (Corbett, 2009) and schools may focus on national standards compared to what rural students perceive to be relevant to their lives (Hardré et al., 2009). Becoming aware of these differing perceptions in regard to educational motivation can allow for researchers and educators to focus on factors which may influence specific populations, in this case rural students from poverty.

Students may find motivation from numerous sources including home and family circumstances and resources; school resources and opportunities; interactions with teachers, administrators, and peers; school related learning and development; and the beliefs and perceptions obtained from these interactions (Maehr, 1989; Hardré & Sullivan, 2008; Pintrich, 2003). Although all sources of motivation are important for student success, this research focused on the motivational attributes which were promoted by a specific adult role-model. Impactful adult role-models could be any individual involved in the lives of students including parents, coaches, relatives, mentors, administrators, or teachers and being able to identify what attributes, experiences, or behaviors a student found to be motivating will allow individuals in the educational setting to adopt and exemplify similar motivational characteristics therefore positively impacting student motivation. Hardré and Reeve (2003) state, “Once nurtured and

developed in the classroom, motivation can therefore function as a student-owned internal resource that contributes significantly to the decision to persist in school” (p. 347). As related to the social cognitive theory, students will observe behaviors and based on consequences decide to replicate the behavior or not. Progression from an extrinsic to an intrinsic desire to self-motivate will allow students to pursue successful outcomes independently at the post-secondary level and beyond.

### **Teacher Perception of Student Motivation**

An essential component connected to the complex dynamic of student motivation is the teacher perception of how a student is able to be motivated. Students are able to be motivated in numerous ways and educators must find an understanding as to how and why students are motivated for school achievement (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002). Rural schools often have difficulty recruiting and retaining highly effective teachers, (Chance & Segura, 2009; Holloway, 2002) and teachers often must teach multiple subject areas to a variety of grade levels with less access to professional development and less competitive salaries compared to schools in non-rural regions (Hardré & Hennessey, 2013). Hardré and Hennessey (2013) state, “These historical risk factors for school engagement and achievement invite concern about rural students’ motivation and their teachers’ motivating practices” (p. 412); therefore, a rural student’s ability to find motivation from an educator in a rural setting may be deficient compared to students from non-rural regions who may have access to educators with improved understanding of student motivation.

Teachers in rural settings attribute deficiencies in student motivation to numerous factors associated with a rural area including poverty and isolation, low numbers of jobs in the region, lack of family support in education, lack of educated and successful role-models, and a scarcity

of diverse experiences, however some teachers are also able to see benefits of a rural area on student motivation such as community interconnectedness which can be characteristic of a smaller community (Hardré, 2012). A teachers' ability to motivate students relates to that teacher's general beliefs in regard to the malleability of motivation (Hardré & Hennessey, 2013). Teachers are more likely to invest in motivating students if they feel as if they can effectively change a student's motivation and believe they are able to control factors which hamper a student's motivation (Hardré & Hennessey, 2013).

The belief that an educator is able to impact student motivation is imperative when motivating students from any demographic. Discrepancy exists in the educational community's perception of just how impactful a teacher can be on the motivation of student academic success. Some high school teachers believe parent and peer influence to be more impactful on student motivation than teacher influence, (Hardré & Sullivan, 2008a) and many teachers feel less than able to address student motivation, feel ineffective in motivating, and lack the ability to diagnose student motivational problems while attributing a student's lack of motivation to factors outside of the teacher's control (Hardré & Sullivan, 2008b).

Although teachers often times may feel inadequate in their ability to motivate students, teachers do recognize student motivation as highly significant (Turner, 2006). Turner (2006) finds that a lack of student motivation is a primary concern that is encountered on a daily basis in the classroom, and a high percentage of teachers would seek additional training in student motivation if available to them. Teachers recognize their lack of knowledge and inability to motivate students indicating that more professional development should be provided which addresses the evolving field of motivation (Hardré & Hennessey, 2013). Providing these types of opportunity for teachers to develop a profound understanding of contributing factors to student

motivation as well as additional implementable strategies for promoting student motivation can instill confidence in a teacher's ability to address this complex issue.

While certain generalizations can be made about student motivation, the application of these generalizable principles must be adapted to fit within the local classroom, school, community, or cultural context (Pintrich, 2003). Student motivation must be recognized by the teaching community as variable across individual students and teachers must accurately assess and address a student's unique needs in order to intervene with motivational strategies where gaps are apparent (Hardré, 2012). Linnenbrink and Pintrich (2002) further describe the individualistic nature of student motivation and emphasize the importance of educators internalizing a multidimensional view of motivation and that motivation is not a stable trait but reflects an interaction between the context and what a student brings to a context (p. 324). Although student motivation is related to numerous factors, using these factors as an excuse for deficiencies in student success must be avoided. Linnenbrink and Pintrich (2002) state:

Accordingly, it is inappropriate to label students as "motivated" or "unmotivated;" rather, school psychologists and other educators are urged to consider ways in which the learning environment can be altered to enhance all students' motivation based on a variety of motivational constructs including academic self-efficacy, attributions, intrinsic motivation, and achievement goals (p. 324).

By enhancing teacher confidence in their ability to address student motivation and finding balance between the more generalizable and individualistic characteristics associated with student motivation, educators will be able to motivate more students to pursue academic success and higher educational opportunity.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to capture personal accounts of student perceptions of what adult individual in their lives, and the experiences, behaviors, and attributes that this individual exhibited, motivated them to pursue post-secondary academic opportunities. As a researcher, my goal was to collect qualitative experiences through open ended questions in order to identify emerging themes which revealed how an adult individual in the student's life was able to inspire. Creswell (2012) describes qualitative research as an exploration of a central phenomenon with intent to engage in an emerging process of research. In qualitative research a researcher relies on interviews or observations to not restrict the views of participants (Creswell, 2012). Eliminating preconceived notions as to what might motivate a student and allowing themes to emerge from first-hand accounts of impactful experiences, enables the opportunity for less-common or less-researched motivational factors to reveal themselves for further exploration and implementation.

### **Demographics of the School District**

This study was conducted with participation from students who had recently graduated from a secondary school, designated as rural by the Michigan Department of Education (Michigan Department of Education, 2014) which is located in the eastern part of the Lower Peninsula of Michigan just to the southwest of what is referred to as the "thumb region" of the state. The district consists of three educational buildings including an elementary school which serves kindergarten through fourth grade with a total of approximately 433 students, a middle school housing fifth through eighth grade totaling approximately 392 students, and a high school consisting of ninth through twelfth grade with approximately 430 students (Lakeville

Community Schools, 2017; Michigan Department of Education, MI school data: Parent dashboard for school transparency, n.d.). Total student numbers are approximations due to student transfers, drop outs, expulsions, and other factors which may influence student populations.

An important trend to note is the consistent decrease in student enrollment in the district. During the 2016 academic year, the final enrollment of students after the spring semester was 1287 students while in the five years previous, the final enrollment numbers starting with 2015 academic year and working backwards to the 2010 academic year were 1307, 1383, 1446, 1573, 1647, and 1695 (Lakeville Community Schools, 2017).

The district's racial composition is primarily Caucasian, with 91.2% of students identifying as such (Michigan Department of Education, MI school data: Student count, n.d.). Hispanic/Latino students account for 4.3% of the population, while students who identify as two or more races represent 2.93% of the population (Michigan Department of Education, MI school data: Student count, n.d.). African American and American Indian students make up .52% and .43% of the student body respectively and no students who identify as Asian attend the district (Michigan Department of Education, MI school data: Student count, n.d.). Of all students in the district, 16.81% were identified as a student with a disability (Michigan Department of Education, MI school data: Student count, n.d.).

Poverty is an obstacle that many of the students in this district face with 63.7% of district students being identified as economically disadvantaged which is higher than the overall county and state percentage of economically disadvantaged students which were reported at 58.38% 50.74% (Michigan Department of Education, MI school data: Student count, n.d.). Since this study focuses on the motivational factors which inspired rural impoverished students to pursue

post-secondary academic opportunity, understanding how this specific student population compares to other populations state and county wide can be useful when attempting to relate findings to these similar student populations.

### **District Student Achievement**

A fundamental objective of student education is to promote proficient levels of student achievement in order to access opportunity at the post-secondary level and beyond. Attaining a higher level of education can be used to reduce social inequalities however growing up in poverty has been linked with lower levels of student academic success (Palomar-Lever & Victorio-Estrada, 2017). Tynkkynen, Vuori, and Salmela-Aro (2012) found that the lower the level of the parents' socioeconomic standing, the lower the academic performance of their offspring. These findings suggest that many impoverished students are unable to achieve adequate success during their primary and secondary years; therefore, restricting access to similar opportunity at the post secondary level compared to those students from more affluent populations.

The district which served the students involved with this study struggles with student academic performance. Academic achievement and the ability to access and persist in post-secondary academic institutions among students from the district is below both the state average and the average of schools with similar student body demographics in most measured categories.

During the 2016-17 school year the percentage of students who achieved a score of "proficient" or "advanced" on the Michigan standardized state tests was 28% compared to the state average of 36% and the average of similar schools by student characteristics at 39% (Michigan Department of Education. MI school data: Parent dashboard for school transparency, n.d.). Interestingly enough, during the 2017-18 school year an increase in performance was



measured, and 40% of students in the district met the “proficient” or “advanced” standard which equaled the state average but was still 2% below the average of schools with similar student characteristics (Michigan Department of Education. MI school data: Parent dashboard for school transparency, n.d.).

Although state standardized test scores have improved in the district, during the 2017-18 school year district students only achieved 22% proficiency on the SAT compared to the state which registered 35% proficiency, and schools with similar student characteristics which achieved 31% proficiency (Michigan Department of Education. MI school data: Parent dashboard for school transparency, n.d.). Since the SAT is used as a measure of student success at the post secondary level and is relied upon to access post-secondary academic institutions, this low level of proficiency on the SAT further limits the ability of students from the district to continue their education after secondary school.

From the 2014-15 to the 2016-17 school years, the district’s graduation rate has fluctuated more than that of schools with similar student characteristics, while the state graduation rate has remained constant at 80% for each of these three school years (Michigan Department of Education. MI school data: Parent dashboard for school transparency, n.d.). For the 2014-15, 2015-16, and 2016-17 school years, the district’s graduation rates were 87%, 79%, and 86% respectively, while the graduation rates for school’s with similar characteristics were found to be 91%, 90%, and 90% respectively. Although the district graduation rate achieved a higher mark than the state graduation rate in both the 2014-15 and 2016-17 school year and was within 1% of the state graduation rate during the 2015-16 school year (Michigan Department of Education. MI school data: Parent dashboard for school transparency, n.d.), the district still

graduated a smaller percentage of students than schools with similar student characteristics in each of these school years.

As a district, ensuring that students are able to graduate is a top priority; however, simply earning a high school diploma without continued training or education continues to limit student opportunity. The desire to attend and persist in a post-secondary educational institution must be internalized for a student to realize their optimal potential in a professional setting. Although the district's post-secondary enrollment rate from the 2015-16 (62%), 2016-17 (58%), and 2017-18 (62%) school years met or exceeded the state averages for those years 2015-16 (58%), 2016-17 (58%), and 2017-18(55%) (Michigan Department of Education. MI school data: Parent dashboard for school transparency, n.d.), the district still failed to surpass the post-secondary enrollment rate of schools with similar student characteristics which were reported at 65%, 68%, and 64% for these three school years (Michigan Department of Education. MI school data: Parent dashboard for school transparency, n.d.).

As imperative as post-secondary enrollment may be for district students, finding a way to endure and complete a degree program at a post-secondary institution is an important aspect of continuing to generate student opportunity later in life. A common problem which is encountered at the post-secondary level is the inability to retain students. The national center for educational statistics (2018) states, "For first-time, full-time degree-seeking students who enrolled at 4-year degree-granting institutions in fall 2015, the retention rate was 81 percent" (para. 2). Post-secondary retention rates for the district, which is the percent of students who remain enrolled in college after one year, for the 2014-15, 2015-16, and 2016-17 school years were at 48%, 46%, and 48% respectively, compared to the schools with similar student characteristics which registered retention rates of 50%, 54% and 54% respectively, and the state averages of 60%,

60%, and 69% respectively (Michigan Department of Education. MI school data: Parent dashboard for school transparency, n.d.). Not only does district post-secondary retention rate fall short of both the state and schools with similar student characteristic averages, but it also falls well below the national average.

Another concerning statistic is the post-secondary completion rate for district students which was below both the state average and below or equal to the average of schools with similar student characteristics. During the 2014-15, 2015-16, and 2016-17 school years, the district's students realized a post-secondary completion rate of 30%, 28%, and 31% respectively, compared to the state averages of 33%, 34%, and 36%, and the average of schools with similar student characteristics with rates of 30%, 30%, and 33% respectively (Michigan Department of Education. MI school data: Parent dashboard for school transparency, n.d.). The data show that only during the 2014-15 school year did the post-secondary completion rate of the district equal that of schools with similar student characteristics.

Exploring data sets associated with student performance allows a researcher to internalize general patterns as they relate to student achievement on the state and even national level. Much disconnect exists between the ability of a student from the district to graduate from secondary school compared to their ability to complete their post-secondary education. When comparing the percentages between graduation (86%), post-secondary enrollment (58%), post-secondary retention (48%), and post-secondary completion (32%) for the district students recorded during the 2016-17 school year, it becomes apparent that not enough is being done in order to provide these students with the skillset necessary for finding success at the post-secondary level. This pattern of decreasing percentages is also seen in the data for schools with similar student

characteristics and in the overall state averages and is consistent when reflecting upon previous years of data.

The data, which is the primary concern for this study is associated with the discrepancy in the graduation rate compared to the post-secondary enrollment rate. During the 2015-16 and 2016-17 school years, the district graduation rate was recorded at 79% and 86% respectively; however, during these same two school years, the post-secondary enrollment rate was only 62% and 54%. This pattern is consistent across the state and by identifying motivational factors which inspired students to pursue post-secondary opportunity, it may be possible to provide motivation for more students to pursue higher education; therefore, increasing post-secondary enrollment rates.

## **Participants**

### **Sampling protocol.**

Creswell (2012) states, “In qualitative research, we identify our participants and sites on purposeful sampling, based on the places and people that can best help us understand our central phenomenon” (p. 205). This study uses two phases of questionnaires to identify emerging themes from a student group and then an adult role-model group which was identified from the student questionnaires. For the student group phase of the study, extreme case sampling was used in order to select the participants. Creswell (2012) describes extreme case sampling as, “a form of purposeful sampling in which you study an outlier case or one that displays extreme characteristics. Researchers identify these cases by locating persons or organizations that others have cited for achievements or distinguishing characteristics” (p. 208). Considering that post-secondary enrollment is atypical for rural students who come from an impoverished background, the students involved with this study were individuals with the distinguishing characteristics of

attending a post-secondary academic institution despite coming from a rural school district and qualifying for free or reduced-priced lunch which is used in this study as a proxy to indicate poverty.

The second phase of the research uses a combination of opportunistic, snowball, and confirming and disconfirming sampling to identify the adult-role model population. Creswell (2012) describes opportunistic sampling as a form of purposeful sampling done after the research has begun which uses unfolding events to help answer the research question. Creswell (2012) states, “ In this process, the sample emerges during the inquiry” (p.209). On the student questionnaire, students are asked to identify the adult role model which provided the inspiration to attend a post-secondary academic institution therefore creating a second population of adult role-models who were given a second questionnaire.

Snowball sampling is described as a method of sampling which occurs after research has commenced where the researcher asks participants to recommend other individuals to be sampled (Creswell, 2012). Since the original student questionnaire requests the student to identify the adult role model so that they may be provided a questionnaire as well, the second phase of sampling could be considered a form of snowball sampling as well as opportunistic sampling.

The purpose of the second phase of questionnaires, which are provided to adult role-models is to confirm or disconfirm findings from the first phase of responses from the student questionnaires; therefore, this phase could also be considered a form of confirming and disconfirming sampling. Creswell (2012) describes this sort of sampling as a purposeful sampling used after studies have begun in order to sample individuals to confirm or disconfirm preliminary findings.

### **Student participants.**

The student population involved with this study graduated from the district in the 2018 school year and were enrolled in a post-secondary institution beginning in the summer or fall of the 2018-19 school year. The 2018 class from which the students were chosen consisted of approximately 97 students, 42% of which identified as female and 58% identified as male. On a survey conducted by the student guidance counselor in regard to post-secondary plans, 32 students indicated they were to attend a university or college, 21 indicated they would attend a community college, 18 were to enter the workforce, eight planned on attending a trade school, nine intended on joining the armed forces, and four were undecided. This data is unofficial and was collected early in the class of 2018's senior year however these statistics can provide insight as to the intentions of students from this population. No follow up data collection has been completed by the district.

In May of 2018 the district administration was approached to gain permission to conduct research and identify a student population. Students who were on track to graduate, whose families had qualified for free or reduced-priced lunch and had indicated on a survey previously collected by the district's guidance office their intention to attend a post-secondary academic institution were identified. In accordance with the parameters of extreme case sampling (Creswell, 2012), six individuals from the district who were identified as meeting these requirements were provided to the researcher as a sample. As an employee of the district, the researcher was familiar with the students indicated as meeting the constraints of the study by the administration.

Considering the volatility of a recent high school graduate's educational aspirations and expectations, many students who indicate they may be attending a post-secondary academic

institution may not follow through with their original plan. Also, due to the nature of human willingness to participate in research, some individuals may not desire to participate in the study, and for these reasons, four additional students, who also met the requirements of the study, were indicated by the administration to be contacted in the case that the original six participants were unwilling to participate or had not gone on to attend a post-secondary academic institution.

In the fall of the 2018-19 school year, a preliminary e-mail (Appendix A) was sent to the six students inquiring about their willingness to participate in the research. Three students responded positively, and a second e-mail (Appendix B) which included the student research consent form (Appendix C) and the student questionnaire (Appendix D) was sent to the students. A follow up e-mail (Appendix E) was sent as a reminder one week after the secondary e-mail.

Since only three of the original six students indicated willingness to participate, the additional four students were also contacted using the same procedure. Only one of the additional four students still met the parameter of the research and was willing to participate.

The final number of student participants totaled four (N=4) and included two males and two females. One male student attends a large four, year in-state university, while the other attends a satellite campus of the same university which is located closer to the school district. One of the female participants attends a community college in the nearest urban region to the district while the other female participant attends a medium sized in-state university.

#### **Adult role-model participants.**

Adult role-model participants were identified by using a combination of opportunistic, snowball, and confirming and disconfirming sampling (Creswell, 2012). In the preliminary phase of the research, students were given a questionnaire which asked about a specific individual who acted as an adult role-model who inspired them to attend a post-secondary academic institution.

After collecting the completed student questionnaires, the individuals who were indicated by the student questionnaire were contacted via the information provided by the student on the student questionnaire. From the four students who completed a questionnaire the contact information for three adult-role models was obtained. The female student participant who attends the mid-sized in-state university did not provide contact information for their adult-role model. The male student who attends a large in state university indicated the researcher, who is an employee of the district, as his adult role-model.

All adult individuals, excluding the researcher, were sent a preliminary e-mail (Appendix F) asking of their willingness to participate and a secondary e-mail (Appendix G) including the adult role-model consent form (Appendix H) and adult role-model questionnaire (Appendix I) if they had indicated a willingness to participate. A follow up e-mail (Appendix J) was sent as a reminder one week after the secondary e-mail was sent. The final number of adult-role model participants totaled two (N=2). One adult-role model who was willing to participate was a male who was indicated by the male student who attends the large in-state university. This individual also happens to be the researcher. The other adult-role model willing to participate was indicated by the female student who attends the community college. The third adult indicated by the second male student was unable to be contacted.

Being that the researcher was indicated by a student participant as the adult-role model, a unique perspective to the student adult-role model relationship was able to be presented. Ensuring a distinct separation between the responsibilities associated with the researcher compared to those expected of the adult role-model participants allows for minimal bias throughout the research protocol. As the adult- role model, the questionnaire questions were answered with honesty and integrity and in the same manner as the other adult participants. As



the researcher, the case was handled following the same procedure as the other cases. This personal interpretation of the student adult role-model relationship can allow for insightful conclusions in regard to the student's motivation to pursue post-secondary academics.

## **Data Collection**

### **Student participant questionnaire.**

In order to discover what adult-role model and the attributes demonstrated by this individual inspired the student participants to pursue post-secondary academic opportunity, a questionnaire (Appendix D) was administered to each of the compliant student participants via e-mail and student participants were to e-mail responses back to the researcher directly. One student participant printed the questionnaire and returned a hard copy to the researcher.

The questionnaire consists of four questions to establish background, followed by eleven open ended questions. Creswell (2012) states:

The advantage of this type of questioning is that your predetermined closed-ended responses can net useful information to support theories and concepts in the literature.

The open-ended responses, however, permit you to explore reasons for the closed-ended responses and identify any comments people might have that are beyond the responses to the closed-ended questions (p. 220).

In the questionnaire, the student participants were asked to identify an adult role model which positively impacted the motivation of that student to attend a post-secondary academic institution, what qualities this individual exhibited which made them strong role-models, and factors that contributed to the development of the relationship between the student participant and the adult role-model. Students were also asked about their self-perceptions in regard to achievement and motivation. To further relate to the Social Cognitive Learning Theory

(Bandura, 1977) context of the study, questions inquire about attributes exhibited by the adult-role model that the student participant viewed as significant and affected the student's pursuit of post-secondary academic opportunity.

### **Adult role-model participant questionnaire.**

Following the student questionnaire process, an additional questionnaire (Appendix I) was completed by the available adult individuals who were recognized by the student participants as impactful in order to further corroborate actions, behaviors, characteristics, and relationships that influenced the student decision to pursue post-secondary academic opportunity. Obtaining information provided by the adult-role model provides another perspective on student motivation and reveals how student perception compares to that of the adult-role model.

Similar to the student questionnaire, the adult-role model questionnaire consists of both closed and open-ended questions. The adult questionnaire has a total of twelve questions, four of which being closed ended while the remaining eight are open-ended therefore providing the adult role-model the opportunity to elaborate.

Questions on the adult-role model questionnaire differed slightly compared to the student questionnaire and inquired about the adult's perception of why the student may have been inspired by their actions, behaviors, and experiences; the adult's perception of the student's ability; the adult's perception of the relationship developed between them and the student; and the adult's perception of their own motivation.

### **Data Analysis**

After both phases of the questionnaire process are completed by both the student and adult-role model population, the analysis of the data may commence. An essential component in qualitative data analysis is the researcher's ability to organize the data which has been collected.

Creswell (2012) states, “Organization of data is critical in qualitative research because of the large amount of information gathered during the study” (p. 238).

Responses to both the student and adult questionnaire were received by the researcher via e-mail and were saved to a computer file. The hard copy of the questionnaire which was returned directly to the researcher was scanned and saved to the same file in order to create uniformity. Each student and adult-role model participant were assigned a pseudonym to maintain anonymity and to provide a name to correspond to the responses for the sake of organization. In the computer folder, sub folders were created for both student and adult questionnaires, and for student and adult consent letters. Since the questionnaire allows for student and adult role-model participants to provide a written response to the open-ended questioning, the analysis process does not require a step for data transcription.

Due to the relatively few number of participants involved with the study, the data analysis was conducted by hand as opposed to using a computer program. Student responses, as well as adult-role model responses, were organized by correlating student responses to role-model responses. Creswell (2012) describes a preliminary step in qualitative data analysis as exploring the general sense of the data. The researcher read and re-read the data in order to obtain a broad sense of what was being communicated by the participants before dividing the information into parts.

Once a general understanding of what was being expressed by the participants had begun to take shape after the preliminary exploratory analysis (Creswell, 2012), the coding process began. Creswell (2012), states “Coding is the process of segmenting and labeling text to form descriptions and broad themes in the data” (p. 243). As the questionnaire responses were read and re-read, codes were assigned to indicated sections of text. Codes were allocated a color so

they could be quickly identified by the researcher. The idea of lean coding (Creswell, 2012) was used in order to minimize excessive code words or phrases. After a number of codes had been established, codes were grouped and reduced in order to identify emerging themes derived from the codes. The researcher continued to explore the information obtained from the questionnaires in an attempt to identifying additional themes until the point of saturation was realized (Creswell, 2012). Both major and minor sub-themes emerged from the data as well as overlying themes, which allowed the researcher to realize factors which contributed to the student participant's motivation to attend a post-secondary academic institution.

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

### Introduction

Four students, two male and two female, who had recently graduated from a rural high school, qualified for free or reduced-priced lunch, and currently attended a post-secondary academic institution completed a questionnaire which identified an adult role-model who provided inspiration to the student to pursue post-secondary academic opportunity. The open-ended questionnaire responses indicated different attributes, experiences, and behaviors exhibited by the adult-role model as well as the nature of the relationship between the student participant and adult-role model participant, which assisted in the motivation of the student to attend a post-secondary academic institution.

Two of the adult role-models, both male, who were identified by the student participants consented to complete a questionnaire in order to provide an additional interpretation of why the corresponding student participant was able to find the motivation to pursue opportunity at a post-secondary academic institution.

Burney and Cross (2006) identify the lack of role models within the family who promote advanced academic achievement and the lack of parental assistance with the college planning process as barriers encountered by students from an impoverished and rural background. Some students from this demographic may have support at home which can assist in their pursuit of post-secondary academic opportunity; however, many do not. By revealing ways in which students are able to realize the motivation as provided by an adult-role model to attend a post-secondary academic institution, individuals in the educational setting may adopt and exhibit

similar attributes in order to build the type of relationship with students which may inspire them to pursue post-secondary academic opportunity.

### **Participant Identification**

As a researcher, much caution must be taken when allocating a pseudonym to a research participant. Lahman et al. (2015) discuss the power a researcher possesses in their ability to strip the name from a research participant. When assigning names to participants, considerations such as whether the name is culturally or ethnically identifiable or if society has created an association to the name must be taken into consideration (Lahman et al., 2015). Lahman et al. (2015) state, “Researchers have been assigning pseudonyms throughout the history of research and have believed this practice is for the protection of the researched. However, practical experience and research has shown people will assign characteristics to other people according to their name” (p. 448).

In an effort to mitigate the complexities associated with assigning human name pseudonyms to participants, and since participants did not select their own pseudonym, an internet search of the most common names given to children in Michigan in the year 2000 was conducted. Since students who graduated in the 2018 school year would have possibly been born in the year 2000, using the most common names associated with this birth year from the state of Michigan can represent this specific age group appropriately.

The two male students in the study were assigned the names Jacob and Joshua, the two most popular boy names in the year 2000 in the state of Michigan, and the two female student participants were assigned the names Emily and Hannah, the two most popular girl names in the state of Michigan for the same year (Social Security Administration, n.d.). The allocated names

are not a representation of the student's cultural, ethnic, or socioeconomic background, and any societal perceptions associated with the given names must be disregarded.

Since the adult role-models were most likely born in different years and may not be from the region from which the study takes place, an internet search of the two most common last names in the United States was conducted, which yielded the names Smith and Johnson (United States Census Bureau, 2016, December 27). As stated previously the chosen names are not a representation of the adult role-models cultural, ethnic, or socioeconomic background, and any societal perceptions associated with the given names must be disregarded.

#### **Female student participants.**

Emily- Emily attends a community college about 25 miles from the district from which she graduated. Emily indicates Mr. Johnson as the adult-role model which provided inspiration to pursue post-secondary academic opportunity.

Hannah- Hannah attends a middle-sized in-state university located about 80 miles from the district from which she graduated. Hannah did not provide the contact information for her adult-role model in the student questionnaire.

#### **Male student participants.**

Jacob- Jacob attends a large in-state university located about 75 miles from the district from which he graduated. Jacob indicates Mr. Smith as the adult-role model which provided inspiration to pursue post-secondary academic opportunity.

Joshua- Joshua attends a satellite campus of the large in-state university which Jacob attends which is located about 25 miles from the district in which he graduated. The adult role-model which Joshua indicates on his questionnaire did not respond to the researcher.

### **Adult role-model participants.**

Mr. Johnson- Mr. Johnson was indicated by Emily as an adult-role model who provided inspiration for that student to pursue post-secondary academic opportunity.

Mr. Smith- Mr. Smith was indicated by Jacob as an adult-role model who provided inspiration for that student to pursue post-secondary academic opportunity.

### **Findings**

The purpose of this study was to explore both student and adult-role model perspectives as to what inspired the student participants to pursue post-secondary academic opportunity in relation to attributes associated with their adult-role model. The research questions addressed by the study were:

1. What was the role of an adult individual who has positively impacted impoverished, rural high school students to successfully pursue post-secondary educational opportunity?
2. What specific attributes has this adult individual demonstrated, which has positively impacted impoverished, rural high school students to successfully pursue post-secondary educational opportunity?

#### **Case 1.**

**Emily (Student questionnaire, received October 5, 2018)**

**Mr. Johnson (Adult role-model questionnaire, received November 6, 2018)**

The information in the following case was provided by responses to a questionnaire completed by both the student and adult-role model. All quotations involved with this case were obtained from these questionnaires.

Emily attends a community college and as revealed on the questionnaire neither of her parents had obtained a college degree. Interestingly enough, Emily indicates on her questionnaire



that she did not qualify for free or reduced-priced lunch while attending high school, however the district records indicate that she did in fact qualify for free or reduced-priced lunch during that time. Being that the researchers is an employee in the district, it may be plausible that Emily did not want to reveal this information to the researcher.

In regard to student perception of their own success, Emily states that she feels unsuccessful for now due to the fact that she hasn't done anything successful yet and is still going to school. Emily does indicate she perceived herself as a successful high school student and she contributes her motivation to be a successful high school student to her mother.

Although Emily mentions her mother as a motivational factor to her success in high school, the adult role-model she indicates on the questionnaire that helped inspire her to pursue the opportunity to attend a college or university was Mr. Johnson. Mr. Johnson was a cook who was involved with Emily's tenth grade health class. Emily describes Mr. Johnson as friendly, welcoming, and willing to always teach and talk to her. She states "fun learning" as a characteristic that Mr. Johnson exhibited which allowed him to inspire her and she does not believe that she would have gone to college without the impact of Mr. Johnson. Emily does believe that she has also impacted Mr. Johnson's life and states, "He would always ask me how I was doing and I would ask him."

Although Emily does not elaborate or divulge a great deal of information on a number of responses, there is enough provided to establish a general understanding of the relationship between the student and adult role-model and what attributes Mr. Johnson exhibited which assisted in Emily's successful pursuit of post-secondary academic opportunity.

The questionnaire provided by Mr. Johnson allows the researcher to explore a different viewpoint compared to that of the student participant. Responses provided by Mr. Johnson can

assist in confirming or disconfirming perceptions contributed by Emily and allow for more information to be presented as to what motivated Emily to pursue her community college opportunity.

Mr. Johnson has a Bachelor's degree in biology and two Masters' degrees, one in human nutrition and the other in Kinesiology. During his time in secondary school he did not qualify for free or reduced-priced lunches and neither of his parents had obtained a college degree. Mr. Johnson indicates his parents were individuals who inspired him to attend college and states, "My parents pushed me because they had never gone to college. I wanted to make them proud." In response to what motivated him to be a successful high school student, Mr. Johnson states, "I wanted to please my mentors and was always a kid who wanted to please others. I didn't care for the course work of high school when the teachers were bad. I loved classes with good teachers."

Contrary to Emily's belief that she was unsuccessful until now because she "hadn't done anything successful yet," Mr. Johnson views Emily as "extremely successful" and believes that she has the potential to achieve all of her goals. Mr. Johnson describes qualities witnessed in Emily as "mature, personable, volunteers regularly, easy going, minimal drama, and like an adult in high school." To provide more information as to Mr. Johnson's role in Emily's life, he indicates that he was the cooking teacher from the intermediate school district who assisted in Emily's health class.

Mr. Johnson states, "I was her easy-going mentor" as a description of the relationship between him and Emily, and he indicates that Emily's interest in learning and maturity when talking with adults allowed this relationship to build. "[Emily] made conversations grow over time." He believes that characteristics which he exhibited which may have inspired Emily were

his easy going mentality and humor and that he always attempted to listen to Emily and ask a lot of questions about her life. In regard to personal life experiences of Mr. Johnson which may have inspired Emily, he believes that his style of teaching cooking classes in high schools could have been an impact, and states, “I think she likes the idea of my job.”

## **Case 2.**

### **Hannah (Student questionnaire, received January 7, 2019)**

The information in the following case was provided by responses to a questionnaire completed by the student. All quotations involved with this case were obtained from this questionnaire.

Hannah attends a medium sized in-state university and would consider herself successful due to the fact that “she works hard for everything that she has or wants.” She believes that others would describe her as successful as well because they see that she works hard to obtain her goals.

Hannah indicates on the questionnaire that she did qualify for free or reduced-priced lunch during high school and that at least one of her parents had obtained a college degree. Her motivation to be a successful high school student is attributed to “having people such as teachers and coaches there for [Hannah] throughout all four years.”

Although Hannah indicates that teachers and coaches assisted in her success in high school, Hannah credits her father as the individual who provided her the motivation to attend college. Characteristics which her father exhibited which allowed him to be an inspiration to her and allowed for their relationship to develop is that he is very easy to talk to, and like Hannah, “they [her father] work hard too.” Hannah describes their relationship as “very close” and she believes that she has also impacted the life of her father as well. In regard to personal life experiences of

her father which Hannah views as impactful, Hannah states, “My dad grew up in a not so good area so he had to work hard to get out and see other parts of the world.”

Regardless of the impact that Hannah’s father may have had on her life, Hannah indicates that she does believe she would have gone on to college even without his influence. Hannah did not provide contact information for her adult-role model therefore no questionnaire was sent to her father.

### **Case 3.**

#### **Joshua (Student questionnaire, received October 3, 2018)**

The information in the following case was provided by responses to a questionnaire completed by the student. All quotations involved with this case were obtained from this questionnaire.

Joshua attends a middle-sized university which is a satellite campus of a large in-state university. Neither of his parents had obtained a college degree and like Emily, Joshua also indicates that he did not qualify for free or reduced-priced lunch during high school; however, administrative records indicate that he did in fact qualify. Similar to Emily, due his familiarity with the researcher, this could be information that Joshua did not want revealed to the researcher.

Joshua believes that he has been successful up until this point in his life and believes his success can be measured by the fact that he has a strong group of friends and has performed well academically at the high school level as well at the collegiate level up until now. Joshua graduated second in his class, and he is in the honors program at his university. Joshua was motivated to be a successful student in order to secure a better future for himself and future family.

Not only does Joshua believe that he is successful, he believes that others would generally view him as successful as well. Joshua states:

Doing well in school and having good friends gives the impression to those that don't know me well that my life is perfect. The people that know me best though, my closest friends and family, know the most important thing. That is that I'm trying. The whole "be the best version of yourself" is only cheesy because it's true. It's the hardest challenge that anyone can pick up.

Joshua identifies his mother as an individual who motivated him to pursue post-secondary academic opportunity and in response to what characteristics his mother exhibited which allowed her to be an inspiration, Joshua states, "she has always spoken very highly of me even when our relationship hasn't been the strongest." Joshua describes the relationship between him and his mother as "not always perfect" but he expresses how he can't thank her enough for all that she has done for him. He appreciates that his parents are allowing him to live at home and commute to school in order to save money on rent or room and board.

Characteristics about Joshua's mother which have allowed their relationship to build would be her caring and forgiving attitude. Joshua states, "She raised me, she is caring (overly sometimes). She's human and she's allowed me to be as well." Joshua expresses that his mother has told him his entire life that he would be going to college. From the time he began receiving homework in kindergarten, his mother would make him complete the assignments everyday as soon as he returned home from school. She reinforced this practice through elementary school and consistently reminded Joshua that he was smart and that he did very well in school. Joshua states:

I'm not sure how much of an effect the positive reinforcement had but I'm sure the confidence didn't hurt in school. It has just become a fact of life that I do need to do well in school for scholarships. I'm not saying it's never taken effort.

Joshua views his mother as "an example of social mobility over the last 30 years" and identifies a number of her experiences which have been impactful to him including her career as a head cook at an elementary school for 28 years and the "countless hours" that she has spent caring for Joshua's grandmother with Alzheimer's disease. Joshua's mother and father are older compared to other parents with students his age and he has five brothers and one sister who are older than Joshua and were out of the house for most of his life. "A lot of my life has been spent as a "single" child." Joshua believes that his parents have always done their best to be caring and supportive of him, and states, "It's unfortunate that many kids cannot say the same."

Joshua is unable to say for sure if he would have been able to find the motivation to attend college without his mother's impact and states, "If I didn't have my mom, it's obvious that I don't know where I'd be now, but that's mostly because I live with her." He does believe that if she had treated him differently growing up and had not been as supportive that he "may have found a fatal distraction throughout the long path that is public school." Joshua believes that students with bad relationships at home have the "odds stacked against them at school" and that most of the effort associated with school is the student's ability to take that first step in attempting to "try." Joshua states, "Once you're doing it, it's no problem to keep going." He also believes however the reciprocal is true and if a student is not accustomed to "trying" then it becomes difficult to break the habit.

As impactful as Joshua's mother has been on his life, Joshua also believes he has impacted her life as well. "I'm sure I have changed her life a lot. I'm not sure if I could detect

changes in her personality though having lived with her my entire life.” Joshua divulges that his mother feels much happiness knowing that she has helped him to get where is currently and “she’s also doing her best to continue my success, and though annoying at times, I just have to keep in mind that she cares.”

Joshua’s mother did not respond to the researcher in regard to willingness to participate in the questionnaire process, therefore no information was obtained from her.

#### **Case 4.**

**Jacob (Student questionnaire, received October 3, 2018)**

**Mr. Smith (Adult role-model questionnaire, received October 28, 2018)**

The information in the following case was provided by responses to a questionnaire completed by both the student and adult-role model. All quotations involved with this case were obtained from these questionnaires.

Jacob attends a large in-state university and indicates on the questionnaire that he did qualify for free or reduced-priced lunch during high school and that neither of his parents had obtained a college degree. Jacob identifies himself as successful because he has “sacrificed a lot of momentary pleasure and instant gratification in exchange for a better future”. Jacob believes that others would describe him as successful due to the fact that he is attending a “2<sup>nd</sup> tier university,” or because neither of his parents graduated from high school. He attributes his motivation to be a successful high school student mostly to the financial struggles experienced with his family. Jacob states, “I felt an obligation to improve the world as much as I could, and I knew getting good grades was the first step in that pursuit.”

Jacob reveals that he encountered a few different individuals who helped to motivate him to get good grades and work hard, but a specific role model which inspired him to pursue the

opportunity to attend college was Mr. Smith, a classroom teacher of his during high school. Jacob describes Mr. Smith as conscientious and believes that he and Mr. Smith had a “really good relationship.” Jacob states:

I respected him as a teacher because every day was structured and demanded work. Most of my other classes were easy and laid back, but whenever I had [Mr. Smith] I really had to hone in on my work. I understood that Mr. Smith was only trying to help us gain experience in pushing ourselves.

Characteristics which Mr. Smith displayed which allowed this relationship to build were Mr. Smith’s discipline, intellectual drive, and open mindedness. Jacob states, “[Mr. Smith] was open minded enough to engage in discussion over topics that my friends and I found interesting.” In response to a question about a personal life experience of Mr. Smith’s which was impactful, Jacob describes:

One day when I was a sophomore, Mr. Smith spent nearly a full class hour talking about the effort one must give in order to make it into college. As a class we looked up different Universities and examined graphs that displayed acceptance rates based on GPA and SAT scores which helped give me a good idea of how hard I needed to try if I wanted to meet my goals.

Although Mr. Smith has impacted Jacob’s life, Jacob cannot think of any reason why he may have majorly impacted Mr. Smith’s view on the world, but he does believe that Mr. Smith is proud of his behavior in school. Even without the influence of Mr. Smith, Jacob does believe that he still would have gone on to attended college, however he does not see it as likely that he would have been able to be accepted into the university which he currently attends.



Jacob hopes that he can serve as an example of how being conscious of some form of discomfort, in Jacob's case the financial instability he experienced with his family, can be a tremendous motivator.

Mr. Smith provides an additional perspective as to Jacob's motivation to attend a post-secondary academic institution. Mr. Smith indicates on the questionnaire that he did not qualify for free or reduced-priced lunch while attending high school and that at least one of his parents had obtained a college degree. He credits his motivation to be a successful high school student to his parents and states, "My parents pushed me to be successful, although looking back, I wasn't as successful as I could have been or as dedicated as my parents maybe would have wanted me to be." Mr. Smith also indicates his parents as individuals who inspired him to attend college and states, "I guess it was always just an expectation to go to college because that is what is done after high school. Never did it even cross my mind that I wouldn't attend college."

Mr. Smith agrees that Jacob should be considered successful and states, "I would consider this individual to be very successful due to their understanding of the work ethic required of them to be a high-level student at the secondary and post-secondary level." Mr. Smith enjoyed having Jacob in class because he was intelligent and asked profound questions. "I respected him very much as a student and as a person." Mr. Smith identifies the desire to push himself and constantly wanting to learn as characteristics in Jacob which allowed the development of their relationship and recognizes that "He had a different mindset than many students in our school and he always wanted to achieve at a high level."

In regard to Mr. Smith's perception of what characteristics that he exhibited which may have inspired Jacob, he believes that setting high standards and promoting practices associated with success at college assisted in Jacob's pursuit of post-secondary academics. Mr. Smith believes

that his interest in post-secondary education and his desire to continue to pursue further degrees are personal experiences of his which may have inspired Jacob to want to attend college.

**Connecting findings to overlying questions.**

1. What was the role of an adult individual who has positively impacted impoverished, rural high school students to successfully pursue post-secondary educational opportunity?
2. What specific attributes has this adult individual demonstrated which has positively impacted impoverished, rural high school students to successfully pursue post-secondary educational opportunity?

***Question 1.***

Exploring student and adult-role model responses to the questionnaires and relating them to the two overlying research questions which this study addresses, it can be determined that each student was in fact able to successfully identify a specific individual who had positively impacted their desire to pursue post-secondary academic opportunity. The role in the student participant's life of the adult-role models differed, and three of the student participants were able to credit other individuals such as teachers, coaches, or parents with also providing inspiration for successful outcomes to the student as well as the specified adult-role model.

Two students identified parents, one mother and one father, while the remaining two participants indicated a teacher as the specified role-model who provided the inspiration to pursue post-secondary academic opportunity. The female student Hannah indicates her father as her adult-role model, while the male student Joshua describes his mother as his adult-role model. The remaining female and male students Emily and Jacob both identify a male teacher.

Two students, Jacob and Hannah both believe they would have gone on to college without the adult role-models' presence in their life, while Joshua is unsure, and Emily does not believe she would have pursued post-secondary opportunity without her adult-role model's inspiration.

*Question 2.*

All four of the student participants were able to definitively describe attributes associated with their indicated adult-role model which allowed a relationship to build and motivate the student participant to pursue post-secondary academic opportunity. Three of the four students perceived themselves to be successful individuals, while one student Emily, did not view herself as successful. Emily also indicated that she did not believe she would have gone on to college without the influence of her adult-role model.

Attributes of the adult role-models which the student participants identified as motivational in their pursuit of higher education were similar among some of the student participants while differing among others. Hannah identifies strong work-ethic and the fact that it was easy to talk to her adult-role model as impactful factors. Similar to Hannah, Emily also mentions a willingness to talk to her as important, and adds friendliness, welcoming, willingness to teach, and fun learning as additional factors. Emily goes on to again address how her adult role-model Mr. Johnson "would always ask about how she was doing and she would ask him." Mr. Johnson corroborates Emily's statements and indicates he always tried to listen to her and ask a lot of questions about her life. He also mentions his easy-going attitude, mentality, and humor which relate to Emily's interpretation.

The male student's, Joshua, and Jacob, perception of what motivated them to pursue post-secondary education differ to some extent from that of the female participants. Jacob describes conscientiousness, structure, discipline, intellectual drive, and open-mindedness as motivational

attributes of his adult-role model Mr. Smith, while Joshua indicates consistent practices in association with positive student outcomes, expectations, dedication, lovingness, forgiveness, and support as role-model attributes which were inspiring for him to pursue higher education.

Mr. Smith's perception of his own attributes which may have inspired Jacob to attend college were his high standards and promotion of practices associated with post-secondary success, as well as his interest in post-secondary education and his own desire to pursue further degrees. These responses do correspond to Jacob's responses of discipline and intellectual drive.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY

### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to gain insight as to how impoverished students from rural regions find the motivation from an adult-role model to pursue post-secondary academic opportunity. By shedding light on what specific attributes demonstrated by the adult-role models the student participants deemed impactful, others in the educational community can adopt similar practices in order to influence more students from this demographic. Hardré and Sullivan (2009) state, “If teacher professional development of successful efforts caused teachers to view motivation as a more malleable characteristic, it could dramatically change their motivating practice” (p. 13). Ensuring that educators are aware that their actions impact student motivation and differentiating their motivational practices to reach the greatest range of students can allow for more successful outcomes for students who may not have been able to find the motivation to pursue post-secondary academic opportunity.

The intent of the study was to explore the central phenomena (Creswell, 2012) relating to the two research questions.

1. What was the role of an adult individual who has positively impacted impoverished, rural high school students to successfully pursue post-secondary educational opportunity?
2. What specific attributes has this adult individual demonstrated, which has positively impacted impoverished, rural high school students to successfully pursue post-secondary educational opportunity?

As responses to open-ended questions obtained from the research participants were analyzed, themes emerged which addressed these research questions specifically, however as can be

encountered in Qualitative research, additional themes developed which were able to shed light on a more generalized outlook of student motivation as well. As an educator the ability to identify the specific motivational factors associated with adult-role model attributes as well as being able to relate student motivation to additional factors such as the nature of the relationship between the student and adult-participants as well as factors not specifically addressed in the research questions can provide educators with a more comprehensive understanding of what has motivated these student participants to attend post-secondary academic institutions.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

On a case by case basis, minor and major sub-themes (Creswell, 2012), as well as overlying themes common to all cases, identified shed light as to what motivated the student participants to pursue post-secondary academic opportunity. Motivational factors which prompted the desire to pursue a post-secondary academic institution were revealed from differing view-points including the student perception of motivating adult-role model attributes, adult role-model perception of what attributes they demonstrated which motivated the student, adult-role model perception of what was motivating to them while a secondary student, and adult-role model perception of student attributes which allowed for successful pursuit of post-secondary academic opportunity. Information was also obtained as to what additional factors motivated student participants to pursue post-secondary academic opportunity that were not related to the specified adult role-model.

Responses to the questionnaires were read and re-read while codes were assigned to segments of texts. From the codes sub-themes followed by overlying themes emerged from the responses provided to the researcher. As the analysis process progressed, data continued to be explored with the intent of revealing additional themes until the point of saturation was realized

by the researcher (Creswell, 2012). The themes which emerged from the raw findings which were presented in the previous section are now indicated as they related to the individual cases.

### **Case 1- Emily and Mr. Johnson.**

After the collection of responses and analysis process of the questionnaires provided by student participant Emily and her adult-role model participant Mr. Johnson, four sub-themes emerge which relate to the motivation of Emily to pursue post-secondary academic opportunity. Academic Engagement, Friendly Engagement, Approachability, and Maturity were reoccurring themes collected when analyzing this case (Table 1). Academic Engagement refers to Emily's interest and attentiveness in regard to the academic content presented by Mr. Johnson. It also attests to Mr. Johnson's ability to present his content in a manner in which Emily describes as "fun learning." Mr. Johnson describes how he believes that Emily enjoyed the idea of his profession and that she was interested in learning. Mr. Johnson also describes Academic Engagement as a personal motivational factor while a student himself by indicating that he did not like classes with "bad teachers" but loved classes with "good teachers." The way in which he conducted his class was interesting to Emily which acted as a motivator for her to attend a post-secondary institution.

Differing from Academic Engagement where Emily was interested by the way in which Mr. Johnson presents content in an academic setting, Friendly Engagement refers to the development of the relationship between Emily and Mr. Johnson which assisted in the motivation of Emily to pursue higher education. Both participants describe communicative aspects of their relationship and Emily emphasizes Mr. Johnson's "willingness to talk" with her. Further corroborating this aspect of the relationship, Mr. Johnson also indicates his interest with personally engaging in conversation with Emily by asking a lot of questions and listening to her.

The following two sub-themes of Maturity and Approachability are both closely connected to Friendly Engagement and could be considered sub-themes of the sub-theme. Both participants indicate an easy going and humorous aspect of their relationship which is indicative of Approachability. Like Approachability, Maturity is a sub-theme which is closely connected to the sub-theme of Friendly Engagement in this case. Maturity was indicated by Mr. Johnson as a catalyst which allowed for Friendly Engagement between Mr. Johnson and Emily to evolve. Mr. Johnson indicates that Emily was mature enough to talk to which allowed for their “conversations to grow over time.” Although the sub-themes of Maturity, Approachability, and Friendly Engagement are interconnected, specifically identifying the correlation between the three reveals insight as to how the relationship between student and adult-role model develops which promotes the motivation of that student to pursue post-secondary academic opportunity.

#### **Case 2- Hannah.**

In the case of Hannah, sub-themes which came to fruition through the analysis process were Support, Strong Work Ethic, Friendly Engagement, and Approachability (Table 1). Friendly Engagement and Approachability are reoccurring sub-themes and were encountered in the case of Emily and Mr. Johnson as well.

Not only did Hanna receive Support from her father who was the adult role-model indicated in her questionnaire, but Support from adult individuals such as coaches, and teachers was an important factor for Hannah’s success to pursue post-secondary academic opportunity. Hannah describes how these individuals were “there for her for all four years [of secondary school].”

Strong Work Ethic was a reoccurring sub-theme which Hannah referred to a number of times as a motivational aspect of her life. She describes how her father worked hard to get out of



his life situation, and that she has worked hard for everything that she has achieved or has wanted. Hannah mentions others as describing her success based on her hard work and again designates hard work as an attribute displayed by her father as impactful on her motivation to pursue higher educational opportunity.

As with Emily, Friendly Engagement and Approachability are important factors which enabled the relationship between Hannah and her adult-role model to develop therefore positively impacting the motivation to attend a post-secondary academic institution. Although Friendly Engagement and Approachability may or may not be interconnecting sub-themes, in Hannah's case the Friendly Engagement described with her father is directly dependent on his Approachability as she describes her father as easy to talk to and engage which has created a "very close" relationship between the two.

### **Case 3- Joshua.**

Joshua's case reveals five sub-themes, Expectations, Consistent Reinforcement, Caring, Support, and Strong Work Ethic (Table 1). Support and Strong Work Ethic, were revealed in Hannah's case as well, however Joshua shares no sub-themes with Emily's case as to his motivation to pursue post-secondary academic opportunity.

Beginning with a reoccurring sub-theme seen also in Hannah's case, Support from Joshua's mother, who was indicated as his adult-role model, has been an important factor in Joshua's motivation to pursue post-secondary academic opportunity. Joshua describes his mother as helpful and supportive and explains how she continues to allow Joshua to live at home in order to assist with financial aspects. Joshua explicitly mentions how his mother, and father as well, have always done their best to support him, and recognizes that many other students may not be able to say the same of their parents or guardians. Joshua states, "If she had treated me

different and been very unsupportive though, I may have found a fatal distraction throughout the long path that is public school.”

Caring is a sub-theme which is correlated to the Support received from Joshua’s mother. In Joshua’s case, Support he received from his adult-role model stems from her Caring for Joshua and his future. Joshua specifically describes his mother as Caring, “overly sometimes” and loving. Not only does she care for Joshua, but Joshua reveals how many hours she spends Caring for his grandmother with Alzheimer’s in order to emphasize the level of Caring for others that his mother demonstrates. Joshua indicates on more than one occasion how his mother’s Caring can be overwhelming at times, but understands it is for his best interest.

Another reoccurring sub-theme encountered in Hannah’s case, Strong Work Ethic was encountered in Joshua’s case as well. Strong Work Ethic was instilled in Joshua at a young age as his mother set Expectations for him to be a high performing student and complete all of his work promptly. Joshua reveals that the individuals who know him best understand that he is “trying” and intends to be the “best version of himself” which he recognizes as being a difficult challenge. Joshua understands that he needs to do well in school to find success which takes effort and that a big hurdle for many students is their inability to take the initial step to demonstrate effort in the school setting. He describes how students who take this first step and begin to “try” are able to continue down this path of demonstrating academic effort, but other students become stuck in a negative pattern and their inability to demonstrate a Strong Work Ethic in school is a difficult habit to break.

Expectations is a sub-theme that comes about consistently in Joshua’s case. As mentioned previously, Joshua’s Strong Work Ethic was placed in motion based on Expectations which were set for him. These expectations were established at a young age and Consistently

Reinforced, another sub-theme revealed from this case, and Joshua internalized the fact that he was expected to do well in school and that he would be going to college. Due to the sub-theme of Consistent Reinforcement of the established Expectations, Joshua states, “It has just become a fact of life that I do need to do well in school for scholarships.” Not only were Expectations fortified by Joshua’s mother, but Joshua himself defines the Expectation of “securing a better future for myself and future family” as motivation which positively impacted his current successes.

#### **Case 4- Jacob and Mr. Smith**

As has been seen in the previous three cases, the case of Jacob and Mr. Smith has uncovered sub-themes that have emerged in other cases, while also revealing additional sub-themes that are unique to this specific case. Like Joshua, Jacob divulges more information on his questionnaire compared to the information presented by Hannah and Emily; therefore, more insight as to what motivated both Joshua and Jacob to pursue post-secondary academic opportunity was able to be obtained resulting in additional sub-themes.

The case of Jacob and Mr. Smith reveals five sub-themes: Expectations, Strong Work Ethic, Academic Engagement, Awareness, and Respect (Table 1). Expectations, Strong Work Ethic, and Academic Engagement have emerged from previous cases while Awareness and Respect have not been revealed until now. Jacob shares the sub-themes of Expectations with Joshua and the sub-theme of Academic Engagement with Emily. Strong Work Ethic is a sub-theme that is common to Hannah, and Joshua as well as Jacob.

For Jacob, Expectations is the sub-theme that is the primary factor which allowed him to pursue post-secondary academics. Jacob describes Mr. Smith as setting the expectations of attending college and providing explanations of what Expectations need to be met in order to

fulfill the requirements enabling one to attend college. Jacob states, “As a class we looked up different universities and examined graphs that displayed acceptance rates based on GPA and SAT scores which helped give me a good idea of how hard I needed to try if I wanted to meet my goals.” Jacob also talks about students being expected by Mr. Smith to push themselves in order to understand the Strong Work Ethic needed to be successful at the post-secondary level. Jacob also wants to adhere to Expectations that reach well beyond the academic setting describing the Expectation of a better future, and a desire to “improve the world as much as [Jacob] could.”

Information gathered from Mr. Smith indicates Expectations as a sub-theme as well, as Mr. Smith believes that setting high expectations to attend a university or college was helpful in motivating Jacob. As a secondary student Mr. Smith had internalized the Expectation of going to college himself and describes this as being an Expectation set by his parents as they both attended college as well. In this instance, the sub-theme of Expectation has been passed on from the parents of Mr. Smith, to Mr. Smith and then to his student Jacob.

Strong Work Ethic is a sub-theme derived from the sub-theme of Expectations. Although Jacob indicates different Expectations in his responses, one of the instilled Expectations of Jacob is Strong Work Ethic. Discipline, intellectual drive, and desire to push oneself to learn in order to achieve successful outcomes were responses collected from both Jacob and Mr. Smith and Mr. Smith identifies Jacob as a student who always wanted to achieve at a high level and states, “I would consider this individual to be very successful due to their understanding of the work ethic required of them to be a high-level student at the secondary and post-secondary level.” These responses support the sub-theme of Strong Work Ethic as being correlated with the sub-theme Expectations.

Another related sub-theme to Expectations and Strong Work Ethic is Academic Engagement. Expectations may deviate from academic expectations and Strong Work Ethic also may not necessarily be associated with academics therefore describing Academic Engagement as a separate sub-theme is important in revealing an individual's motivation to pursue post-secondary academic opportunity. Jacob describes engaging in interesting topics, and that during Mr. Smith's class he needed to "hone in" on his work, while Mr. Smith describes Jacob as "constantly wanting to learn." Jacob describes discussions over topics that him and his friends found interesting while in Mr. Smith's classroom. These findings support the importance of Academic Engagement as a sub-theme which assisted in Jacob's motivation to pursue post-secondary academic opportunity.

Respect is a sub-theme that was not directly encountered in any of the other cases. In questionnaire responses by both Jacob and Mr. Smith, the term Respect was used to describe both the person and the nature of the relationship between the two. Although not reoccurring often in the questionnaire responses, the explicit use of this term by both participants sheds light on the importance of this sub-theme when describing the relationship and personal attributes that are partially responsible for motivating Jacob.

A primary sub-theme which was not encountered as profoundly in other cases but pushes to the fore-front in the case of Jacob is that of Awareness. In the case of Jacob, terms such as conscientious and open-mindedness are presented. Mr. Smith describes Jacob as an intelligent individual with the ability to ask profound questions. Numerous responses provided by Jacob demonstrate a deep understanding of awareness such as his ability to relate his work ethic to being able to "improve the world." Jacob explains how he has "sacrificed a lot of momentary pleasure and instant gratification in exchange for a better future," and how his family's financial

struggles acted as inspiration for him to be a successful student. Jacob states, “I hope I served as an example of how being conscious of some form of discomfort (in my case the financial instability I experienced with my family) can be a tremendous motivator.” As an educational community, applying this understanding of student motivation as described by Jacob can act as a catalyst to motivating other students who have experienced similar hardships.

Sub-themes described in this section were derived from responses obtained from open-ended questionnaire responses. The amount of information provided by the participants varied from questionnaire to questionnaire and just because a sub-theme was not described in correlation to a particular case, does not mean that it was not a part of the motivational factor of that student. As a researcher, in order for a sub-theme to be assigned to a case, explicit descriptions associated with the sub-theme must be demonstrated in the questionnaire response. In certain instances, one may be able to assume or predict certain aspects of a sub-theme in connection with a case however unless clearly exemplified in the responses provided, the sub-theme is not able to be assigned to a case.

Table 1: Sub-themes by student/adult role-model case.

<b>Sub-Themes</b>	<b>Emily and Mr. Johnson</b>	<b>Hannah</b>	<b>Jacob and Mr. Smith</b>	<b>Joshua</b>
Academic Engagement	x		x	
Awareness			x	
Caring				x
Consistent Reinforcement				x
Expectations			x	x
Approachability	x	x		
Maturity	x			
Friendly Engagement	x	x		
Respect			x	
Strong Work Ethic		x	x	x
Support		x		x

### **Overlying themes.**

As educators, it is our responsibility to ensure that all students are able to access opportunity; therefore, adjusting our practices in order to motivate students is vital and findings from this research, coupled with findings from related studies must be applied in order to motivate more students from this demographic to realize post-secondary academic success. “America simply cannot afford to fail at educating its citizens who are in poverty” (Hollifield-Hoyle & Hammons, 2015, p. 56), and information gathered as to how to motivate students from poverty, and in this case rural poverty, can assist in ensuring more students are able to access post-secondary academics.

The goal of this study is to obtain an understanding of what adult role-model and attributes exhibited by this individual assisted in motivating impoverished students from a rural region to pursue post-secondary academic opportunity. When considering the study as a whole in order to comprehend what these participants are trying to communicate, four overlying themes emerge from the sub-themes which were identified from the specific participant cases.

#### ***Identifiable adult role-model.***

Although the questionnaire specifically prompts student to indicate an adult-role model who provided motivation to the student, it could be very plausible that a student would not be able to definitively identify any one person as motivational in their pursuit of post-secondary academics. In the cases of all four student participants, each individual was able to explicitly identify one adult role-model who assisted in motivating that student to pursue post-secondary academic opportunity. Three of the four students indicated that more than one adult-individual assisted in their motivation; however, these students were still able to differentiate between these

adult role-models and distinguish which specific adult role-model was the predominant motivational catalyst for the student.

The student participants in this study identify both parent and teacher role-models as motivating. Joshua states, “If I didn’t have my mom, it’s obvious I don’t know where I’d be now” (Student questionnaire, received October 3, 2018), while Jacob states, “I definitely encountered a few different people who helped inspire me to get good grades and work hard, but a role-model that inspired me specifically to pursue the opportunity to attend college would have to be Mr. Smith” (Student questionnaire, received October 3, 2018).

Plunkett, Henry, Houltberg, Sands, and Abarca-Mortensen (2008) describe a correlation between support from both family members and teachers as important predictors of student academic success, and in instances where there may be a lack of support from family members, students are able to find academic motivation from teachers. Crosnoe and Elder (2004) find that across numerous subgroups of student populations, supportive relationships with teachers are able to mitigate the academic risk factor associated with problematic parental relationships.

Regardless of familial background, students are able to recognize adult individuals as motivational role-models in their pursuit of post-secondary academic opportunity. Ensuring these role-models are identified by students becomes essential and in cases where students are not able to find this motivation from family members, teachers, and others in the educational setting may be able to fill this role in order to promote post-secondary academic opportunity for these students.

***Identifiable motivational attributes.***

Not only were student participants able to specifically identify an adult-role model that assisted in motivating the student to pursue post-secondary academic opportunity, each student



was able to definitely define attributes about this individual and the nature of the relationship between the student and adult-role model which enabled this motivation. As was the case in the overlying theme described previously, the questionnaire did explicitly ask student participants about which attributes they experienced with their adult role model, however it could have been plausible that student participants would not have been able to pinpoint exactly what about this adult-role model was motivating. The fact that each student could clearly describe what attributes allowed their selected adult-role model to be motivational is important to address in order to support the fact that actions, behaviors, experiences, and characteristics exhibited by potential adult-role models do matter when making connections with student populations.

An interesting realization comes to fruition in regard to the differences between student participant responses as to motivational attributes exhibited by the indicated adult role-model. Although there was some overlap in the sub-themes from case to case, there was not one sub-theme that was common to all four cases, however each student did share a common sub-theme with at least one other student participant. Although some sub-themes were encountered more often than others, each student describes a unique relationship with their adult-role model that was developed from a combination of differing motivational attributes. Hardré and Sullivan (2008b) describe how individual differences and perceptions influence how students are motivated which therefore influences educational outcomes while Linnenbrink and Pintrich (2002) further support this finding by indicating that social cognitive motivational theorists propose numerous motivational constructs that may facilitate or constrain student achievement and learning (p. 314).

Although the student participant population is small, and particular findings may not be generalizable, important connections can be made among the cases presented in the study.

Differences in sub-themes between the students who identified a teacher as an adult-role model (Emily and Jacob) compared to those who identified a parent as an adult-role model (Hannah and Joshua) are encountered. A common sub-theme connected to both Emily and Jacob, and not identified in the cases of Hannah and Joshua was Academic Engagement. The sub-theme of Academic Engagement appears to directly relate to Emily's and Jacob's selection of a teacher as an adult-role model compared to another adult individual encountered in their lives. As educators, this finding supports the importance of adjusting practices in order to academically engage students therefore providing motivation for these students to pursue post-secondary academic opportunity.

Another connection to note is a difference between sub-themes encountered in the male and female cases. In the cases of Emily and Hannah, Approachability and Friendly Engagement with the adult-role model was an important factor for motivation which was not encountered in either of the male participants' cases. On the contrary, both male participants indicated Expectations as a strong motivational factor which was not revealed in either of the female cases. Although similarities were encountered across both male and female student cases as well as cases describing both teacher and parent adult-role models, identifying sub-themes that are common to sub-groups within the study can assist in differentiating between students with the intent of providing motivation for these individuals to pursue higher educational opportunity.

As educators, finding balance between promoting general practices to the masses which have proven effective; however, still finely tuning these practices and differentiating to meet the needs of specific students is essential, and the same mentality needs to be adopted when building motivational relationships with student populations as well. As has been uncovered in the questionnaire responses, there are certain attributes which adult-role models display which are

more universally perceived as motivational compared to others. As an educational community, promoting these attributes to reach a wide range of students while also adjusting to meet the needs of specific students in order to build a unique relationship between student and adult-role model is important in our attempt to motivate more students from this demographic to attend a post-secondary academic institution.

***Engaging relationship.***

Both previously described overlying themes progress into the third overlying theme which describes the importance of an engaging relationship between the student and adult role-model participant. Both Academic Engagement and Friendly Engagement were described as sub-themes previously and although not all cases demonstrate both Academic and Friendly Engagement, it becomes very apparent from the questionnaire responses that an engaging relationship of some kind was developed between all student participants and their adult-role model. Foster (2013) supports the importance of engaging relationships and states, “Connections with other people is central to the success of each student” (p. 158). Although admiring a role-model with whom an individual is not acquainted or does not have a personal relationship with is common, all of the student participants in this study found the motivation to pursue post-secondary academic opportunity from an individual whom they did personally know and with whom they had developed an engaging relationship.

Connecting to the previous section where motivational adult-role model attributes differed from case to case, so did the nature of the engaging relationship between student and adult-role models. Each student experienced a unique type of engagement with their adult role-model which assisted in motivating the student participants to pursue post-secondary academics. As educators, this finding supports the importance of developing engaging relationships

specifically tailored to the needs of individual students and ensuring we are doing all we can to build some sort of engaging relationship with every student can provide motivation to these students who may not have been able to find the motivation to pursue post-secondary academic opportunity from other aspects of their life.

Although both parents and teachers were identified by the student participants as the adult-role models who provided inspiration for the student participants to pursue post-secondary opportunity, in the educational community we are unable to control certain variables of a student's life, one being their ability to build engaging relationships with adult-role models outside of the school setting. In these instances, the responsibility to provide this sort of engaging relationship to students falls on the educator, and the importance of these teacher-student relationships cannot be overemphasized. A qualitative study conducted by Williams et al. (2017) found the majority of their study participants (83%) attributed a portion of their academic successes to caring adult relationships at home or within the community; however, all of the student participants involved with the study were able to describe the importance of a relationship with a teacher as essential to their academic success. Hardré and Sullivan (2008b) further reinforce the significance of teacher influence on student motivation and find that although both peers and other adults can significantly influence students, teacher related factors were found to be more strongly predictive of student success.

Internalization as to how impactful an engaging relationship between a student and adult-role model may be on that student's ability to pursue post-secondary academic opportunity becomes essential as the educational community strives to provide more opportunity for students from all backgrounds. In the instances where an adult-role model is not available in the lives of students outside of the academic setting, educators must step into this role to provide the

motivation for these students. A qualitative study conducted by Hollifield-Hoyle and Hammons, (2015) states, “The students repeatedly described the educators they had formed relationships with as being “family,” “proud parents,” or “friends”” (p. 55). Understanding the student perception of the importance of these engaging relationships between themselves and teachers can provide the incentive for more educators to prioritize the development of these sorts of engaging relationships.

*Connection to successful outcomes.*

The final overlying theme which emerges, connection to successful outcomes, is a direct result of the progression of the previous three overlying themes. As an understanding of what the student participants were attempting to express with their questionnaire responses as to their motivation to pursue post-secondary academic opportunity, connection to successful outcomes becomes a predominant theme which is common to all cases involved with the study.

Due to this progression of overlying themes beginning with the students’ ability to identify an adult-role model, followed by the attributes exhibited by this role-model; therefore, enabling an engaging relationship to develop between the two, student participants were able to relate actions, behaviors, experiences, and characteristics exhibited by the adult-role model to successful outcomes in life. In concordance with Social Cognitive Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), student participants were then able to relate their own actions to successful outcomes in their own lives. As Jacob states, “I felt an obligation to improve the world as much as I could, and I knew getting good grades was the first step in that pursuit” (Student questionnaire, received October 3, 2018). Jacob also states “One day when I was a sophomore, Mr. Smith spent nearly a full class hour talking about the effort one must give in order to make it into college” (Student questionnaire, received October 3, 2018). Both examples shared by Jacob indicate an

understanding of the relationship between Jacob's actions, and his successful outcomes: to make it to college and improve the world as much as he could.

Hannah also demonstrates this ability to connect to successful outcomes and states, "My dad grew up in a not so good area so he had to work hard to get out and see other parts of the world" (Student questionnaire, received January 7, 2019). Hanna indicates that one of the reasons she views herself as successful is because she works hard and also declares her father's work-ethic as the primary motivational attribute of his, therefore exemplifying how Hannah's perception of her father's work ethic and the successes associated with this work ethic have translated to her own actions and successful outcomes as well.

This understanding of how actions affect the future is often times a deficiency in a student's ability to motivate oneself, and as educators we must work to bridge the gap between current student actions and how these actions will impact their future. Hardré and Sullivan (2009) find that links between education and things that students value both now and their future can be attributed to student motivation. In the educational setting there exists disconnect in a student's ability to understand why what they may be doing is relevant to their lives while teachers focus on specific day to day minutia while losing track of the larger picture as to the overall purpose of educating. By consistently connecting practices and actions to real life successful outcomes and illustrating just how impactful the present is on future student successes, as an educational community, we can assist in providing the motivation to more students to pursue post-secondary academic opportunity therefore creating more successful real-life outcomes.

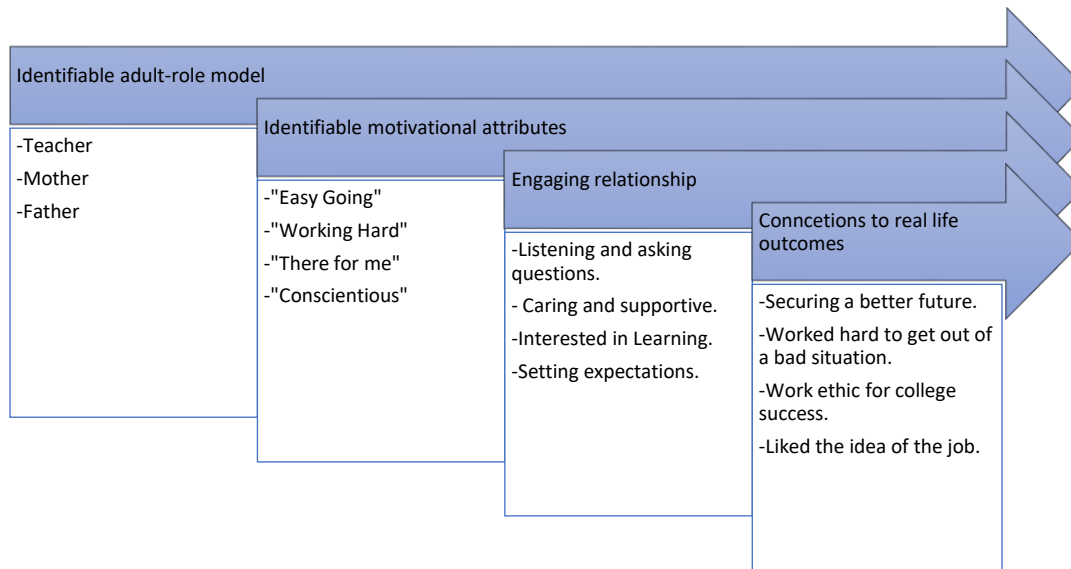


Figure 1: Progression of overlying themes.

*Note: Not all responses correlated to overlying theme are included in figure.*

### Implications of Findings

Students from rural regions of our country coming from impoverished backgrounds often times have difficulty finding the motivation to pursue post-secondary academics compared to their more affluent peers (Williams et al., 2017). Although students are able to find motivation from numerous sources (Hardré & Sullivan, 2008a; Maehr, 1989; Pintrich, 2003), outcomes from this study suggest that an engaging relationship with an adult-role model can be an important factor when motivating students from rural poverty to pursue post-secondary academic opportunity.

Another finding associated with this study was the ability of students to find motivation by relating experiences, actions, practices, and behaviors to successful real-life outcomes. In relation to the Social Cognitive Learning Theory, Bandura (1977) indicates that students will witness a behavior by an individual and whether the student chooses to imitate the behavior correlates to the student's ability to relate to a model and the opportunity for a student to

experience positive or negative reinforcement associated with the seen behavior. Due to the relationships cultivated in each student and adult-role model case, student participants were able to internalize how the actions exhibited by an adult-role model affected their future and were therefore able to incorporate similar practices into their own lives in order to achieve successful outcomes of their own.

Teacher education and professional development programs need to emphasize the importance of educators promoting attributes which enable an engaging relationship to develop between student and teacher. By exhibiting general attributes associated with student motivation, which may impact a broad range of students, while still differentiating among students and promoting attributes which can connect with specific individuals with the purpose of building a unique relationship with that student, educators can act as a motivational factor for students to pursue post-secondary academic opportunity.

Educators often don't realize just how profound of an impact they may have on their students' motivation. Hardré and Sullivan (2008b) find that many teachers believe that peers or parental influence impact student motivation more than educators. Although students find motivation from these sources, teacher-related motivational factors were found to be more predictive which should provide hope and optimism to rural teachers regarding the influence they bring to student motivation (Hardré & Sullivan, 2008b). As important as any adult role model maybe on student motivation, educators often have little control as to who students interact with outside of the school setting therefore educators must fill these voids in order to provide a motivational role-model to students who may not have access to this type of individual otherwise. As essential as all components of traditional teacher education are in preparing future educators, an additional emphasis on the importance of developing engaging relationships with



individual students in order to develop within these students the ability to connect with future outcomes is crucial in order to provide the motivation for more students from rural poverty to pursue post-secondary academics.

### **Limitations of the Study**

A primary limitation of this research is the small sample size which took part in the study. Although Creswell (2012) describes the purpose of qualitative research as not necessarily to generalize to a population but explore a central phenomenon, the ability to apply findings encountered in an educational study to benefit student populations is a priority. Due to the small number of individuals who took part in this research, themes which have emerged from this research may not be applicable to other student populations.

Not only was the sample size small, due to the process of an on-line questionnaire with no ability of the researchers to ask follow up questions, the depth of responses obtained from the participants varied. Some participants elaborated upon their thoughts in regard to the questionnaire questions, while others provided minimal answers therefore limiting their ability to express their individual voice.

Another factor when considering limitations associated with this research is the researchers roll within the district involved with the study. Foster (2013) states, "Inherent in qualitative research are the interactions between the researcher and the participants and the impact those interactions have on the collected data" (p. 9). Being that the researcher in this study is a teacher in the district and was familiar with each student participant, students may feel uncomfortable providing information to an individual whom they know therefore responses may be skewed to some extent.

A final limitation to the study involves the terminology rural and impoverished. As was indicated earlier in the study, the definition of the term rural varies (Khattri et al., 1997) and the rural region involved in this study may differ from other rural regions of the country based on the areas distance from a metropolitan region, population of the county, and resources which may be readily available, therefore the themes which have emerged from this study as to student motivation to pursue post-secondary academic opportunity may differ from students from other regions which are considered rural.

Impoverished is another term which is dependent on numerous factors so the use of free and reduced-priced lunches was used as a proxy for the term impoverished which is common in research as this information is more readily available to the researcher (Snyder & Musu-Gillette, 2015). The variation associated with the level of poverty encountered by students and their families is large, therefore students who find themselves closer or further from the poverty line may be motivated very differently and common themes encountered in this research may not be seen in the cases of other students identified as impoverished.

### **Future Research**

The ability to motivate students to pursue post-secondary academic opportunity must be a top priority for educators therefore finding ways to motivate students from all backgrounds is essential. Because rural schools, and the levels of poverty associated with rural districts, are underrepresented in the research literature (Hardré & Sullivan, 2008a) more research as to what may allow student from rural populations to pursue post-secondary academic opportunity can be conducted in order to promote practices which would potentially allow more students from this demographic to pursue higher education.

An exploration of student motivation as related to an adult-role model using a quantitative approach is an important next step in this realm as well. A quantitative study would be able to obtain a large quantity of information from a vast population of students and adult-role models which could more readily be generalized to populations with similar demographics as is a characteristic of quantitative research (Creswell, 2012).

Finally, a significant finding in this study, was the student participants' ability to relate attributes associated with their adult-role model and themselves with successful real-life outcomes. Further knowledge of student understanding as to how actions in the present effect the future and how motivation can be associated to this realization is important and warrants more exploration. This may be accomplished qualitatively, by using open-ended questionnaires or interviews which enquire about student understanding of this phenomenon, or quantitatively by testing hypotheses, using randomly selected populations (Creswell, 2012), which address student motivation as associated to this ability to connect to successful outcomes.

## **Conclusion**

Motivating students to pursue post-secondary academic opportunity is a fundamental priority of an educator; however, the multifaceted dynamics associated with student motivation often make it difficult to reach each individual student on a personal level. Findings from this research suggest that the student participants from rural and impoverished backgrounds were able to identify motivational attributes demonstrated by an adult individual which assisted in their motivation to pursue academic opportunity at the post-secondary level. Furthermore, the attributes demonstrated by the adult individual allowed for an engaging relationship to develop between the student and adult-role model participants which enabled the student participants to

relate actions, behaviors, characteristics, and experiences associated with the role-models' successful outcomes, to successful outcomes in their own lives.

For the educational community, an emphasis on the development of individualistic relationships with each student becomes essential in providing a path for these students to pursue post-secondary academic opportunity. The effort and commitment required of an educator to pursue individualistic relationships with each student is substantial, however as educators it is our ethical responsibility to ensure that no individual is left without the motivation from an adult-role model. Starratt (2004) describes a progression from a transactional to a transformational ethical mindset where an educator is asked to reach beyond self-interest for some higher ideal or something heroic (p. 79). By internalizing and applying this mindset to the development of individualistic relationships with all students, educators can impact each student they encounter which will allow for more individuals from varying backgrounds to find the motivation from an adult-role model to pursue post-secondary academic opportunity.

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## APPENDIX A

### Student Participant Preliminary E-mail

Hello, my name is Adam Lucas. I am a graduate student at Northern Michigan University in the Department of Education, Leadership, and Public Service. I am conducting research on adult role-models which have inspired students to pursue college/university opportunity, and I am inviting you to participate because you are an individual who fits the parameter of the study.

Participation in this research includes responding to an open-ended questionnaire about an adult role-model which inspired you to pursue college/university opportunity. The questionnaire will take between 15 and 45 minutes to complete.

If you have any questions or would like to participate in the research, I can be reached at 906-869-5962 or [adalucas@nmu.edu](mailto:adalucas@nmu.edu). Please respond by \_\_\_\_\_, and a consent form along with the study questionnaire will be sent to be completed by \_\_\_\_\_.

Thank you,

Adam Lucas

## **APPENDIX B:**

### **Student Participant Secondary E-mail**

Thank you for your willingness to participate. Attached you will find the consent letter and questionnaire. Please type your name on the "Signature" space provided on the consent letter and complete the questionnaire questions to the best of your ability. You may type your responses directly on the questionnaire attached to this e-mail. Please e-mail both completed forms back to this e-mail address no later than \_\_\_\_\_.

Thank you,

Adam Lucas

## APPENDIX C:

### Student Participant Consent Form

**DESCRIPTION:** You are invited to participate in a research study on the adult role models which inspired you to want to go to college/university. You will be asked a number of open-ended questions which look to identify an adult individual who was important as an inspiration for you to attend college/university. You will also describe the characteristics, actions, behaviors, and experiences of the role model you identified which were inspiring to you in your decision to go to college/university. Once an adult individual has been identified, they will be informed that they have been identified by you as a role-model and a questionnaire will be sent to this individual asking about their characteristics, actions, behaviors, and experiences which they think had inspired you to pursue college/university.

This research is looking to identify certain characteristics, actions, behaviors, and experiences by an adult role model which have been inspiring to students so that other adult role models may be able to exhibit these same features therefore enabling other students to pursue college/university opportunities. You will be asked to respond to the questionnaire with typed responses and return to [adalucas@nmu.edu](mailto:adalucas@nmu.edu). Responses will be kept in a secure file and backup file with access limited to the researcher (Adam Lucas) and select Northern Michigan University personnel. Adult role-models will be informed that they have been identified by you as a role-model, however each participant will be given an alternate name in the final write-up in order to maintain public anonymity

**TIME INVOLVEMENT:** Your participation will take approximately 15-45 minutes

**RISKS AND BENEFITS:** The risks associated with this study are minimal but may include a lack of comfortability in identifying a specific individual who has been an inspiration. The benefits which may reasonably be expected to result from this study are a better understanding by the educational community of specific characteristics, actions, behaviors, and opportunities which have helped student to move on to college/university which other adult role-models may imitate. We cannot and do not guarantee or promise that you will receive any benefits from this study.

**PAYMENTS:** Participation in this study is voluntary, therefore you will receive no payment or reimbursement for your participation.

**PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS:** If you have read this form and have decided to participate in this project, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time. The alternative is not to participate. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. The results of this research study may be presented at scientific or professional meetings or published in scientific journals. Your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data

resulting from the study. As previously stated your identity will be revealed to the adult role-model which you have identified, however your identity will be concealed in any final write-ups, articles, publications, meetings, or presentations.

**CONTACT INFORMATION:**

**Questions:** If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this research, its procedures, risks and benefits, contact the Protocol Director, **Adam Lucas (906) 869-5962**

**Independent Contact:** If you are not satisfied with how this study is being conducted, or if you have any concerns, complaints, or general questions about the research or your rights as a participant, please contact the Northern Michigan University Institutional Review Board (IRB) [dereande@nmu.edu](mailto:dereande@nmu.edu) to speak to someone independent of the research team.

**Please sign and date an extra copy of this consent form for your own records.**

**SIGNATURE** \_\_\_\_\_ **DATE** \_\_\_\_\_

**Print name of participant** \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX D:

### Student Participant Questionnaire

1. What college/university do you attend?
2. Did you qualify for free or reduced-priced lunch while attending high school?  
Yes No Unsure
3. Have either of your parents obtained a college degree?  
Yes No
4. Do you identify yourself as successful or unsuccessful?
5. Why would you describe yourself as successful or unsuccessful?
6. Why would others describe you as successful or unsuccessful?
7. What motivated you to be a successful high school student?
8. Who was an adult role-model for you that helped to inspire you to pursue the opportunity to attend college/university?
9. What was this individual's role in your life? (Example: teacher, parent, coach)
10. What characteristics did that individual exhibit which allowed them to be an inspiration to you?
11. What personal life experiences of this individual were impactful to you?
12. How would you describe the relationship between you and this individual?
13. What characteristics about this role-model allowed you to build a relationship with that individual?
14. Without this role model's impact, do you believe you would have gone to college/university?
15. Do you believe you had an impact on the role-model?

If you have contact information for the adult role-model that you have identified so that they can be asked similar questions about their involvement in your success, please list below.

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## **APPENDIX E:**

### **Student Participant Follow-up E-mail**

Hello \_\_\_\_\_,

You were recently invited to participate in a study about motivational factors which inspired you to attend college. If you have not already completed the questionnaire, we encourage you to take a few minutes to do so before \_\_\_\_\_, midnight Eastern Time. Please take a few minutes to complete the questionnaire as your feedback can help future students find the motivation to attend college as well.

Thanks again for your willingness to participate.

Adam Lucas

## **APPENDIX F:**

### **Adult Role-Model Participant Preliminary E-mail**

Hello, my name is Adam Lucas. I am a graduate student at Northern Michigan University in the Department of Education, Leadership, and Public Service. I am conducting research on adult role-models which have inspired students to pursue college/university opportunity, and I am inviting you to participate because you are an adult individual who has been identified by a student as a role-model.

Participation in this research includes responding to an open-ended questionnaire about your characteristics, behaviors, actions, and experiences you demonstrate as an adult role-model which could have inspired a student to pursue college/university opportunity. The questionnaire will take between 15 and 45 minutes to complete.

If you have any questions or would like to participate in the research, I can be reached at 906-869-5962 or [adalucas@nmu.edu](mailto:adalucas@nmu.edu). Please respond by \_\_\_\_\_, and a consent form along with the study questionnaire will be sent to be completed by \_\_\_\_\_.

Thank you,

Adam Lucas

## **APPENDIX G:**

### **Adult Role-Model Participant Secondary E-mail**

Thank you for your willingness to participate. Attached you will find the consent letter and questionnaire. Please type your name on the "Signature" space provided on the consent letter and complete the questionnaire questions to the best of your ability. You may type your responses directly on the questionnaire attached to this e-mail. Please e-mail both completed forms back to this e-mail address no later than \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you,

Adam Lucas

## APPENDIX H:

### Adult Role-Model Participant Consent Form

**DESCRIPTION:** You are invited to participate in a research study on the adult role models which inspired students to want to go to college/university. You have been identified by a college/university student as a role-model which inspired the individual to want to go to college/university. You will be asked a number of open-ended questions which look to identify what characteristics, behaviors, actions, and experiences you feel may have impacted this student in their desire to attend college/university.

This research is looking to identify certain characteristics, actions, behaviors, and experiences by an adult role model which have been inspiring to students so that other adult role models may be able to exhibit these same features therefore enabling other students to pursue college/university opportunities. You will be asked to respond to the questionnaire with typed responses and return to [adalucas@nmu.edu](mailto:adalucas@nmu.edu). Responses will be kept in a secure file and backup file with access limited to the researcher (Adam Lucas) and select Northern Michigan University personnel. Adult role-models will be informed that they have been identified by individuals as a role-model, however each participant will be given an alternate name in the final write-up in order to maintain public anonymity

**TIME INVOLVEMENT:** Your participation will take approximately 15-45 minutes

**RISKS AND BENEFITS:** The risks associated with this study are minimal but may include a lack of comfortability in identifying one-self as a role model. The benefits which may reasonably be expected to result from this study are a better understanding by the educational community of specific characteristics, actions, behaviors, and opportunities which have helped student to move on to college/university which other adult role-models may imitate. We cannot and do not guarantee or promise that you will receive any benefits from this study.

**PAYMENTS:** Participation in this study is voluntary, therefore you will receive no payment or reimbursement for your participation.

**PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS:** If you have read this form and have decided to participate in this project, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time. The alternative is not to participate. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. The results of this research study may be presented at scientific or professional meetings or published in scientific journals. Your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study. Your identity will be revealed by the student in the student questionnaire, however your identity will be concealed in any final write-ups, articles, publications, meetings, or presentations.

**CONTACT INFORMATION:**

**Questions:** If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this research, its procedures, risks and benefits, contact the Protocol Director, **Adam Lucas (906) 869-5962**

**Independent Contact:** If you are not satisfied with how this study is being conducted, or if you have any concerns, complaints, or general questions about the research or your rights as a participant, please contact the Northern Michigan University Institutional Review Board (IRB) [dereande@nmu.edu](mailto:dereande@nmu.edu) to speak to someone independent of the research team.

**Please sign and date an extra copy of this consent form for your own records.**

**SIGNATURE** \_\_\_\_\_ **DATE** \_\_\_\_\_

**Print name of participant** \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX I:

### Adult Role-Model Participant Questionnaire

1. \_\_\_\_\_ has identified you as an adult role model who helped inspire them to pursue the opportunity to attend college/university. Can you describe the qualities that you witnessed in this student?
2. Would you qualify this student as successful or unsuccessful?
3. What is your role in this student's life? (Example: teacher, parent, coach)
4. How would you describe the relationship between you and this individual?
5. What characteristics about this student allowed you to build a relationship with that individual?
6. What characteristics did you exhibit which you believe may have inspired this student?
7. Which of your personal life experiences do you believe may have inspired this student?
8. What motivated you to be a successful high school student?
9. Who was an individual who inspired you to attend college/university and why were they an inspiration?
10. What college/university did you attend? \_\_\_\_\_
11. Did you qualify for free or reduced-priced lunch while attending high school?  
Yes    No    Unsure
12. Had either of your parents obtained a college/university degree?  
Yes    No

## **APPENDIX J:**

### **Adult Role-Model Participant Follow-up E-mail**

Hello \_\_\_\_\_,

You were recently invited to participate in a study about motivational factors which inspired a student to attend college. If you have not already completed the questionnaire, we encourage you to take a few minutes to do so before \_\_\_\_\_, midnight Eastern Time. Please take a few minutes to complete the questionnaire as your feedback can help future students find the motivation to attend college as well.

Thanks again for your willingness to participate.

Adam Lucas

## APPENDIX K:

### IRB Approval

Memorandum

TO: Adam Lucas  
School of Education, Leadership, and Public Service

CC: Joseph Lubig  
School of Education, Leadership, and Public Service

DATE: August 22, 2018

FROM: Lisa Schade Eckert, Ph.D.  
Interim Dean of Graduate Education and Research

SUBJECT: IRB Proposal HS18-967  
IRB Approval Dates: 8/22/18 – 8/21/19  
Proposed Project Dates: 8/22/18 – 4/30/19

“The human factors which acted as a driving force for inspiring impoverished, rural students to successfully pursue post-secondary educational opportunity”

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your proposal and has given it final approval. To maintain permission from the Federal government to use human subjects in research, certain reporting processes are required.

A. You must include the statement "Approved by IRB: Project # HS18-967" on all research materials you distribute, as well as on any correspondence concerning this project.

B. If a subject suffers an injury during research, or if there is an incident of non-compliance with IRB policies and procedures, you must take immediate action to assist the subject and notify the IRB chair (dereande@nmu.edu) and NMU's IRB administrator (rwinn@nmu.edu) within 48 hours. Additionally, you must complete an Unanticipated Problem or Adverse Event Form for Research Involving Human Subjects

C. Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant.



D. If you find that modifications of methods or procedures are necessary, you must submit a Project Modification Form for Research Involving Human Subjects before collecting data.

E. If you complete your project within 12 months from the date of your approval notification, you must submit a Project Completion Form for Research Involving Human Subjects. If you do not complete your project within 12 months from the date of your approval notification, you must submit a Project Renewal Form for Research Involving Human Subjects. You may apply for a one-year project renewal up to four times.