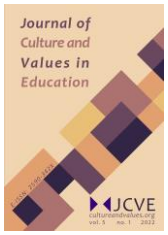

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"I Thought It [University] was the Only Way to Go:" Competent Agents in Pursuit of Possible Paths beyond University Walls

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ABSTRACT
This qualitative study documents the experiences of youths in Montréal during both their university and post-university phases, specifically focusing on individuals whose parents originate from the Caribbean, sub-Saharan Africa, or Latin America. Through semi-structured interviews with six youths who interrupted their university studies, our investigation employs the theory of structuration and the concept of intergenerational temporality. The findings illuminate the challenges these individuals face in deciphering the intricacies of the academic landscape and highlight their struggle to establish a genuine sense of belonging within the university environment. Furthermore, our analysis sheds light on the discernible impact of parental expectations, which contribute to prolonging their educational journey. Notably, following the interruption of their university studies, our examination accentuates the agency displayed by these youths beyond the confines of the university. Their choices to either reenroll in a college or technical program or directly enter the job market underscore their agency. In conclusion, we underscore the imperative need to deconstruct the prevailing university model, advocating for a paradigm shift that prioritizes adapting the educational system to the diverse needs of students. This approach, rooted in principles of equity and social justice, emphasizes the significance of reconfiguring the educational landscape to better serve the student body.

KEYWORDS
University experiences; agency; immigrant parents; Montréal; Quebec; Canada.

INTRODUCTION

In Canada, particularly in Quebec, the academic achievements of youth immigrants align closely with those of their counterparts with Canadian-born parents (Cheng & Yan, 2018; Hochschild & Cropper, 2010; McAndrew et al., 2015). Nonetheless, specific elements influence their likelihood of successfully concluding their studies, such as parental education and geographical origins in certain global regions (Statistics Canada, 2019). Research conducted in Canada and specifically in Quebec highlights that youths with parents originating from the Caribbean, sub-Saharan Africa, or Latin America often encounter systemic inequalities and injustices within the educational system. These disparities manifest in various forms, including unequal access to information related to school guidance, lower expectations from school counselors, and over-representation in special education classes (Magnan et al., 2019). These challenges, in turn, contribute to the interruption of their secondary or post-secondary studies (Lafortune & Kanouté, 2019). Critiques from qualitative research (Ainscow & Miles, 2008; AuCoin & Vienneau, 2015; Borri-Anadon et al., 2021) point out a notable limitation in the prevailing body of research in Canada and Quebec concerning the interruption of high school studies among youths with immigrant parents. The criticism centers on the predominant adoption of an individualizing perspective that attributes educational and social inequalities primarily to an individual's characteristics. This approach, as highlighted by these researchers, tends to associate challenges with an alleged lack of potential or an inability to develop certain skills, reflecting a deficit thinking (Valencia, 1997). Contrastingly, quantitative studies have identified barriers rooted in both individual and social elements. Factors such as families' educational and economic capital, ethno-cultural background, and gender play pivotal roles in shaping educational outcomes (Bakhshaei & Mc Andrew, 2011; Lafortune & Balde, 2012; Mc Andrew et al., 2015). This broader perspective acknowledges the multifaceted nature of the challenges faced by youths with immigrant parents, emphasizing the intersectionality of individual and social factors in understanding educational disparities. Thus, existing studies concentrate on “variables” identified by researchers as influencing the trajectories of students born to immigrant parents. However, they fall short in capturing the agency behind the choices of these students to interrupt their university studies and navigate paths beyond the confines of the university. In this article, we aspire to rectify this gap by amplifying the voices of youths whose parents were born in the Caribbean, sub-Saharan Africa, or Latin America. Our focus is on elucidating their perspectives, agency, and, more specifically, the strategies they employ to realize their goals along their life journeys. Consequently, the objective of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of their university experience and the subsequent educational and career choices they make. More precisely, we sought to comprehend, based on their narratives, their experiences during university studies—exploring why they chose to depart from university and how they felt post-departure, particularly regarding potential decisions about education and work after completing university studies.

Youth and Immigration: Between Aspirations and Post-Secondary Graduation

Studies conducted in Canada reveal that youth immigrants or those born to immigrant parents are more likely to access post-secondary education compared to their third-generation or beyond peers. This increased access is attributed to immigration policies that prioritize socioeconomic immigration (Finnie & Mueller, 2010; Kamanzi et al., 2016). However, despite their elevated aspirations and access to post-secondary education, these individuals do not consistently exhibit higher graduation rates than the general population (Kamanzi & Murdoch, 2011). Quantitative surveys highlight disparities based on parents' countries of origin. While perseverance is notably high for youths with parents from European or Asian countries (East Asia, Southeast Asia), it is lower for their counterparts whose parents come from sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean, and Central and South America (Abada et al., 2009; Kamanzi & Collins, 2018; Livingstone & Weinfeld, 2017; Thiessen, 2009). Youths with parents from sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean, and Central and South America are more likely to attend public schools, face judgments of learning difficulties, experience higher dropout rates, and follow non-linear educational paths (Kamanzi et al., 2018). Furthermore, international research underscores various factors influencing the academic success and retention rates of immigrant and minority students. These include experiences of racism (Magnan et al., 2021), lack of information about available resources (Solis & Durán, 2022), low-quality interactions with peers and staff (Winterer et al., 2020), balancing work and family responsibilities (Stebleton & Soria, 2012), and facing judgments for not meeting institutional expectations (e.g., lack of engagement in class) (Soria & Stebleton, 2012). In Quebec, including the city of Montréal, the majority of studies examining the education of youth immigrants or those born to immigrant parents have primarily concentrated on academic success at the high school or post-secondary levels. These studies have been instrumental in identifying regions of origin where youths are more susceptible to experiencing interrupted educational paths, notably sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean, and Central and South America (Bakhshaei, 2013; Mc Andrew et al., 2015). To our knowledge, there is a paucity of qualitative research delving deeper into the intricacies of university trajectories (and perseverance) among youths born, or with parents born, in sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean, and Central and South America. Qualitative analyses, centering on the voices of these youths, promise to provide additional insights that complement the findings reported by quantitative research. Likewise, research underscores the interconnectedness of interactions within the school environment and those within the family setting. Migrant parents, it is revealed, highly value the educational success of their children, viewing the pursuit of university studies as a cornerstone of the success of their migration project (Charette & Kalubi, 2017; Kanouté et al., 2010). These parents harbor lofty aspirations for their children, aspirations that play a significant role in shaping the academic and professional trajectories of their offspring (Caille, 2008). Education, for migrant parents, is perceived as a means to secure a "good job," and they express a desire for their children to surpass their own educational achievements (Scanlon et al., 2019). Understanding the paths chosen by youths necessitates a holistic

consideration of the interactions occurring within both the family and educational institutions. Consequently, the primary objective of this study is to unravel the intricate role played by both family dynamics and the educational sphere, with a particular emphasis on the agency exercised by individuals within these realms. The focus is on comprehending the nuanced decision-making processes that youths engage in when making choices related to the educational system and the job market in Montréal. The study aims to illuminate experiences lived within and beyond university walls, exploring the dynamics within both the family and educational institutions.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

We employed the theory of structuration (Giddens, 1986) as our analytical framework to analyze the dichotomy between social structure (macrosocial) and social action (microsocial). This theoretical approach represents a departure from traditional sociological theories that often posited a strict separation between the individual and society. In the theory of structuration, there is a reciprocal relationship between social structure and social actions—social structure influences social actions, and conversely, social agents actively contribute to the production and reproduction of social structure through their everyday behaviors. Crucially, social structure is characterized as both constraining and enabling, intricately linked to the competencies of social agents (Giddens, 1986). This perspective recognizes the dynamic interplay between individual agency and the broader societal context, offering a nuanced understanding of how social structures both shape and are shaped by the actions of individuals. According to this theory, social actors are competent agents through the recognition and use of possible resources. Competence concerns opportunities based more on agents' attributes related to social categories (e.g., age, gender, etc.) than on agents' choices (e.g., interests) (Giddens, 1986). Moreover, human actions can create unintentional consequences; this non-intentionality can contribute to limiting the agents' competence (Giddens, 1986). Limited by the social structure, agents rely on their knowledge of it when making decisions, drawing on their ability to comprehend potential actions in the context of external constraints. Giddens, in his analysis of individuals' awareness of the influence of social structure on their actions and the reciprocal relationship where social actions (re)produce social structure, identifies three types of consciousness or knowledge: discursive, practical, and mutual. Discursive consciousness involves the ability to verbally express knowledge and reflexively rationalize it—essentially, articulating what individuals can explain regarding the conditions of their actions. Practical consciousness pertains to knowledge that is applied in daily life in an almost unconscious manner, with little awareness of the reasons behind actions. Mutual knowledge deals with community knowledge grounded in social conventions, potentially less conscious (Giddens, 1986). Specifically, agency in this context refers to an individual's capacity for social action in relation to social structure. Individuals can accept, resist, or negotiate the structural elements present in social interactions (Giddens, 2009). In the scope of this study, agency is defined as the capacity for social action in relation to social structure, presenting individuals as competent

agents in their educational and career choices. Moreover, we incorporate the concept of intergenerational temporality to analyze our data, focusing on constraints related to family and university, as revealed by our research findings. Intergenerational temporality encapsulates the connection between family history and the social dynamics of the past and present. It emphasizes the intricate interplay between personal time (microsocial) and social time (macrosocial), highlighting their interconnectedness (e.g., personal time linked to family) and their continual renegotiation, involving present priorities, experiences, and future expectations (Santelli, 2014). The individual's capacity for action is constructed in tandem with these two temporal planes, personal and social. Students' trajectories, as a result, are shaped by the interplay of personal time and social time—paths are contemplated in social space based on individual resources and social contexts (Santelli, 2014).

METHODOLOGY

We conducted interviews with youths who attended university, selecting participants based on specific inclusion criteria. Inclusion criteria comprised individuals who had both parents born in the Caribbean, sub-Saharan Africa, or Latin America, attended high school in Quebec, interrupted an undergraduate program in Montréal, and were between the ages of 19 and 35. To recruit participants, diverse methods were employed, including leveraging the Facebook platform through groups of students from various universities in Montréal and groups of immigrants from the targeted regions. Additionally, the snowball technique was utilized to expand the participant pool. A total of 6 respondents were interviewed, representing diverse regions of origin: 1 person with parents born in Haiti, 1 in Colombia, 1 in Brazil, 1 in St. Kitts and Jamaica, 1 in Haiti and Chad, and 1 in Mauritius and Trinidad and Tobago. The participant group consists of 3 women and 3 men. Additionally, 1 participant arrived in Quebec during high school, while 5 were born in Quebec to immigrant parents. Regarding parental education, 4 participants had at least one parent with a university degree, 1 had at least one parent with a college degree, and 1 chose not to disclose their parents' level of education. Most of the participants (4 out of 6) received their education exclusively in English, covering high school, college, and university. Furthermore, the majority (4 out of 6) attended high schools with a high disadvantage rating (9 out of 10). The range of university programs chosen by the participants is diverse. Socio-demographic information about the participants is detailed in Table 1. To ensure confidentiality, participants are identified by pseudonyms, adhering to the requirements of the Université de Montréal's Multi-faculty Board on Research Ethics. It is crucial to highlight that this study is exploratory, marking the first qualitative exploration in Quebec focusing on these populations and the interruption of their university studies.

Table 1.

Detailed profile of the interviewees.

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Parents' country of origin	University	Parents' highest level of education	Program	Changes in university studies	Migration status
Marcos	M	29	Brazil	Concordia	University	Independent Studies	Interruption of university studies for a technical program	Arrived in high school
Luciana	F	22	Colombia	Concordia	College	Art History	Interruption of university studies for a college program	Born in Quebec
Ali	M	34	Trinidad and Tobago / Mauritius	Concordia	College	Fine Arts	Interruption of university studies for entry into the job market	Born in Quebec
Esther	F	22	Haiti	Université du Québec à Montréal	No information given	Accounting	Interruption of university studies for entry into the job market	Born in Quebec
Devon	M	22	St. Kitts / Jamaica	Concordia	College	Leisure Sciences	Interruption of university studies for entry into the job market	Born in Quebec
Fatime	F	25	Haiti / Chad	Concordia	College	Independent Studies	Interruption of university studies for a technical program	Born in Quebec

In this study, conducted in 2019, semi-structured interviews (Savoie-Zajc, 2021) were employed, each lasting approximately 1.5 hours. The interviews covered various themes, including family experiences during childhood and adolescence, the academic path from elementary school to college, the choice of university career, experiences during university, contexts and reasons for interrupting undergraduate studies, and career aspirations. To maintain flexibility and inclusivity, interviewees were given the option to respond in either French or English. All interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed in their entirety. Rigorous measures were implemented to ensure the validity and reliability of the interviews, focusing on the accuracy of data and the consistency of the study. The research questions and related methods were formulated based on a comprehensive review of the literature, and an interview guide was created in alignment with this literature review and the theoretical framework (Savoie-Zajc, 2021). Rigor was further enhanced through counter-coding, where all coauthors participated in validating common interpretations (Savoie-Zajc, 2021). Utilizing an inductive analysis of the interviews, we conducted a thematic analysis in line with the approach outlined by Paillé and Mucchielli (2021). Through this process, recurring themes surfaced, including parental pressure to pursue university studies, a lack of a sense of belonging at university, and challenges in understanding the student craft. Additionally, we conducted an analysis of the various paths chosen by the participants, which encompassed decisions to either return to a college or technical program or to directly enter the job market.

FINDINGS

University and Post-University Experiences

The participants conveyed experiencing pressure from their immigrant parents to pursue university studies. Simultaneously, they expressed feelings of not fitting in and struggling to comprehend the expectations associated with the student craft. In this context, the concept of student craft refers to the student's understanding of the role of student expected within the university, as articulated by Coulon (1997). According to Coulon (1997), succeeding at the university requires a comprehensive understanding of the student craft, which unfolds in three key phases: familiarizing oneself with the new environment, acquiring knowledge about how the institution operates, and developing a sense of belonging.

The Impact of Parental Pressure on Choices About University: The Weight of Family Interactions

The participants shared experiences of feeling pressured by their parents to pursue university studies, driven by a shared desire to "succeed" in their family's migration project. Devon expressed this sentiment, stating, "Coming from an immigrant background, I'll assume like if your parents came from nothing and made it this far, you kind of take it upon yourself to like do better than whatever they did" (Devon, parents born in St. Kitts and Jamaica). Luciana described a similar belief conveyed by her mother: "She, being an immigrant, was like: 'You're going to be better than me, you're going to have a better life, you're going to be an academic, you're going to do so much more with your life than I did'" (Luciana, parents born in Colombia). The decision to attend university for these individuals was intricately linked to parental expectations and the overarching migration project. Esther, for instance, highlighted this connection, stating, "I didn't decide... my parents sort of forced me. Basically, my brother and sister went to university, so I had no choice but to follow in their footsteps. I told myself I had no choice" (Esther, parents born in Haiti). Ali articulated that, initially, he perceived university as the sole path forward: "I chose to go to university because my family had that blueprint of university, and so I thought it was the only way to go" (Ali, parents born in Mauritius and Trinidad and Tobago). In fact, when the participants opted for paths outside of the university, they expressed a sense of guilt. Marcos, for instance, shared his feelings after failing in school: "I felt pretty bad about myself, especially since my parents always focused on the importance of going to school. I guess I felt ashamed" (Marcos, parents born in Brazil). Subsequently, as they navigated paths beyond the university, the participants demonstrated agency in justifying their choices and managing feelings of guilt by reinterpreting the significance of university in their lives. Ali encapsulated this belief, stating, "University is not for everyone" (Ali, parents born in Mauritius and Trinidad and Tobago). The pressure to conform to parental expectations initially influenced their academic choices, contributing to the elongation of their career paths. However, these experiences marked by reorientations underscore their evolving agency in shaping their own educational and career trajectories. The participants also shared insights into how their parents reacted upon learning about their decision to interrupt university studies. While they reported that their parents, in general, were not pleased with this choice, it appeared that some parents

had a less negative reaction than others. Fatime, for instance, highlighted the support she received from her parents, particularly her mother: "My parents seem to be supportive. My dad is still kind of like 'Come on,' but my mom's pretty happy for me" (Fatime, parents born in Haiti and Chad). Esther, on the other hand, revealed that her parents were not pleased with her decision: "They were trying to say, 'No, it's school, school, school, school.'" She further noted that her father, in particular, struggled to accept her decision: "He barely speaks to me to this day" (Esther, parents born in Haiti). Luciana shared that her mother did not exert pressure but expressed unhappiness with her decision, emphasizing her mother's belief that going to university is linked to securing a "good" job.

> My mother is not so happy that I didn't get a university degree because she is under the impression that like that's what you need in order to get a good stable paying job, hum, but she's not putting like pressure for me to go back and my father doesn't put any pressure on that (Luciana, parents born in Colombia).

The participants underscored the connection their parents establish between university studies and employment. However, despite this perception, they indicated that they felt considerably at ease informing their parents about their decision to interrupt university studies, especially considering that they were financially responsible for their own tuition and worked to support themselves. Ali, for example, shared that he straightforwardly informed his parents, and while they initially asked questions, they eventually understood and accepted his decision:

> I just told them like I'd rather… Obviously, I was paying my own bills, so I just said, you know, ''I'm going to continue to do that'' […]. [There was] some questioning on their end in terms of like: what did I do, where was my university career, what was going on with that, but I think obviously they were … they understood my priorities at that point (Ali, parents born in Mauritius and Trinidad and Tobago).

Relationship with University: Feeling Out of Place

The participants shared a common sentiment of not feeling a sense of belonging at the university. They expressed a lack of enjoyment in spending time at the university outside of class hours and reported limited interaction with both their peers and professors. Their involvement in student life was also minimal. Luciana, for instance, described her experience, stating, "I just tried to get in and out as fast as possible and just go home" (Luciana, parents born in Colombia). In fact, they felt out of place, as Devon expressed, "I was kind of, I guess out of place is the way to put it" (Devon, parents born in St. Kitts and Jamaica). Believing they had a comprehensive understanding of what the student craft entailed, the participants were occasionally taken aback when their grades did not align with their university expectations. Ali, for instance, shared his realization: "Actually, I wasn't succeeding at all. I thought I was doing well, but I wasn't doing as well as I thought" (Ali, parents born in Mauritius and Trinidad and Tobago). They encountered moments of feeling overwhelmed and stressed when confronted with a lack of comprehension regarding the expectations and information presented in class, as expressed by Luciana: "I couldn't keep up" (Luciana, parents born in Colombia). This misunderstanding had a direct

impact on their academic performance, as Fatime disclosed: "I actually failed some of my classes because I didn't finish them. My GPA was bad" (Fatime, parents born in Haiti and Chad). This lack of understanding influenced their overall attitude toward university studies. For example, Marcos admits, "I wanted to kind of do the bare minimum" (Marcos, parents born in Brazil). Consequently, their average grades and approach to their studies had cascading effects on their educational paths. Marcos recounted how he was not allowed to continue his university studies due to a low-grade point average: "My grades weren't high enough to boost up my GPA, and so I was 0.1 points short of the target" (Marcos, parents born in Brazil). This lack of comprehension of the student craft had repercussions on their subsequent decisions to navigate paths beyond university walls, as exemplified by Esther's account: "I tried to do everything, but once again, I couldn't do everything. I just quit" (Esther, parents born in Haiti). It is important to note that the participants did not follow a linear path from school to college to university. Ali, for example, mentioned taking a detour: "I worked for a year or two between college and university, and then from there I got into university as a mature student" (Ali, parents born in Mauritius and Trinidad and Tobago). Similarly, Fatime described a journey marked by breaks and changes both before and during her university studies:

> I stayed in one school, then I left. Then I went to college, then I left. Then I worked for a bit, then I stopped. I went back to school, then I was working, and going back to school and realizing that wasn't for me, and then I left (Fatime, parents born in Haiti and Chad).

This non-linear trajectory reflects their varied and evolving educational paths. The necessity to work while attending university emerged as a significant element influencing the participants' ability to continue their university studies. Ali, for instance, highlighted the financial aspect, stating, "I also had to pay for a lot of my courses, so [I thought] I'm going to take it step by step, I'm going to take classes when I can afford to take classes" (Ali, parents born in Mauritius and Trinidad and Tobago). Work took precedence over their university studies, as Devon emphasized, "I needed to make it work with my work, so I was like no, I'm going to take it easy, work but still do school kind of on the side" (Devon, parents born in St. Kitts and Jamaica). Their pursuit of studies also led to accumulating debts that needed repayment, as Fatime disclosed: "I got myself into a lot of debt in previous schools that I went to, that I didn't finish as well, and I had a grant, I had a loan from the government that I had to pay back" (Fatime, parents born in Haiti and Chad). Additionally, the participants perceived work as a relatively stress-free environment compared to their university studies, as expressed by Esther: "I had no stress. It was really the stress of school that got to me" (Esther, parents born in Haiti).

Upon identifying the shared elements related to parental pressure and their relationships with the university, we discerned two types of agency demonstrated by the participants as competent agents beyond university walls. The first type of agency involved a return to a college or technical program, observed in three cases. The second type of agency involved a direct entry into the job market, also evident in three cases.

The First Type of Agency: The Choice to Return to a College or Technical Program

In the first type of agency, the participants chose to interrupt their university studies with the intention of returning to a college or technical program. Their decision was grounded in the belief that this alternative presented the best opportunity for gaining access to the job market and furthering their education. As competent agents, they actively seized these opportunities to pursue their educational paths beyond the confines of the university. They highlighted in their statements that learning at the college or technical level is more practical and promising. They expressed the view that these programs offer more rapid preparation for the job market compared to university programs, which they perceived as being too theoretical, lengthy, and expensive. Marcos, for instance, emphasized the practicality and shorter duration of a technical program: "I was able to see kind of the end of it, because it was only 6 months rather than 4 or 5 years or whatever" (Marcos, parents born in Brazil). He further explained, "Also, it was more practical and not as hypothetical... It's something concrete that you can see rather than just an idea, which is what I felt was university" (Marcos, parents born in Brazil). Luciana also underscored the length and practicality of college programs:

> The college program, it's a 3-year program, and then you get your certificate, so you can work right away in the field, and it's more hands on, there's actually *stages* during the 3-year program, and the one at Concordia University, it was more […] theory, it was more research and… And yes, I didn't really want to do that, I wanted to really get out there and start, and get experience in the field (Luciana, parents born in Colombia).

Moreover, the participants conveyed that they chose to return to college or technical programs due to dissatisfaction with the social interactions they encountered at the university. They perceived the university environment as cold, lacking the essential support and opportunities to establish connections with peers and faculty members. Luciana articulated her feelings about the university, highlighting the absence of connections: "the bad experiences with the people that I did work with, and the teachers not being very open or understanding, not really having a connection... and yes, lack of friends" (Luciana, parents born in Colombia).For the participants, college or technical programs offered a more welcoming environment where they felt a closer connection to their peers and the teaching staff, as well as a greater sense of support. Marcos shared his positive experience: "We were doing a lot of things together and the teacher was always kind to me, looking and making sure that I was doing it right" (Marcos, parents born in Brazil). Luciana also expressed a sense of building a "better community" in these programs, facilitating the creation of connections due to structured schedules and situations that encourage more peer interactions:

> There's no choice, you're with the same people every day, no switching around, and we also have breaks between all of our classes, like that we take together. So, for example, me and my friends were not just seeing each other within the designated classroom time, we're also kind of forced to hang out during our breaks, and so with those breaks we get to socialize and so, we get to know each other better, and so we have a better bond, and so therefore, it's a better community (Luciana, parents born in Colombia).

The sentiments shared by Marcos and Luciana align with the findings of studies focused on students with parents born in Latin America. These studies underscore the significance of a welcoming university atmosphere that fosters bonds and community (O'Hara, 2020; Soares & Magnan, 2022).

The Second Type of Agency: Opting for Direct Entry into the Job Market

In the second type of agency, participants exercised their agency by interrupting their university studies and directly entering the job market to work full-time. Drawing from their university experience, they adopt a critical and reflective stance toward the perceived necessity of having a university degree and the limitations of university programs. For example, in Fatime's case, existing music programs failed to meet her expectations: "I just realized that what I wanted to do, [this kind of] singing, I wasn't going to find what I was looking for there [in university]" (Fatime, parents born in Haiti and Chad). Participants who exhibited this type of agency reported a lack of interest in university, combined with a sense of fatigue. Esther expressed her experience, stating, "Personally, the way I look at my situation, I think it's all to do with my lack of interest, my level of fatigue and the pressure exerted by my parents" (Esther, parents born in Haiti). Ali similarly highlighted his lack of "motivation" toward university studies: "I really wasn't motivated to continue with that, I was actually more motivated just in terms of working... I was more determined to continue working than actually proactively seeing where my scholastics was going to take me" (Ali, parents born in Mauritius and Trinidad and Tobago). Having spent some time at university, they reached the conclusion that the university is just one of several "possible" paths: "I didn't realize that I had so many other talents, there were so many avenues that I could have done" (Ali, parents born in Mauritius and Trinidad and Tobago). Esther echoed this feeling:

> They say that everyone should go to university, that it's necessary, but it's not. It depends on each person, there are people who don't have to go to university, maybe they're not capable either. So maybe just don't force the person to attend university (Esther, parents born in Haiti).

Devon said he does not understand the usefulness of university. He sees it as a waste of time:

> Looking back, I probably could have applied myself more to give myself more options, but I was never interested in going to school, school wasn't my plan, not that I have a plan […]. I tried it, it's just, it's not something I'm particularly interested in. I feel like it's a waste of time, I'd rather make money than learn something that's not going to bring me anything, like oh yes, I have this piece of paper, it doesn't really apply to what I'm doing currently so, there's no use for me (Devon, parents born in St. Kitts and Jamaica).

He further stated, "I'm not going to pay that [university] and books, and it's not going to bring me anything; like this doesn't make sense, this is stupid, it's a waste of time and money" (Devon, parents born in St. Kitts and Jamaica). However, he acknowledged the importance of his college studies that preceded his university experience: "But to get the job that I have now, I needed college, I needed 13 years of education, so this is all in hindsight; like I didn't know that at the

time, but so like it makes sense" (Devon, parents born in St. Kitts and Jamaica). Thus, the participants articulated various criticisms about the execution of university studies, distancing themselves from the perception of being "forced" to undertake university studies, a belief originating from discussions with their parents. These findings resonate with studies highlighting tense discussions between immigrant parents and their children. Newly arrived immigrant parents may undervalue their children's choices of college-level technical programs (Gagnon-Paré & Pilote, 2016). Research has indicated that these parents lack sufficient information from the host society about the flexibility of post-secondary educational paths in Quebec, the workings of the Quebec education system, the role of college studies, the possibility of completing a technical program while in college and still being able to attend university afterwards or directly enter the job market, etc. (Kamanzi et al., 2017). This lack of information might lead them to underestimate the value of certain training paths, such as professional or technical studies. Consequently, their preferred path for their children might be university studies, aligning with their aspirations and providing access to a job they consider of high quality. It is essential to note that this parental pressure is compounded by societal pressure, which generally values university studies (Kromydas, 2017; Naidoo, 2004; Scanlon et al., 2019; Schofer et al., 2021). However, within this type of agency, the participants distance themselves from this familial and societal pressure to make a choice that aligns with their preferences within the existing possibilities.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Our analysis has illuminated the interconnected challenges experienced both within family and university settings. The participants conveyed experiencing pressure from their families to pursue university studies, aligning with the family migration project, consistent with prior studies (Charette & Kalubi, 2017). The participants had to consider their parents' aspirations when making decisions about their university studies and career plans (Caille, 2008). Their goal was to surpass their parents' achievements, viewing education as a means to attain a satisfactory job (Scanlon et al., 2019). According to the participants, their parents were displeased with the interruption of their university studies, with varying reactions to their decision to redirect their study and work paths. This article documents the impact of (immigrant) parental pressure on the elongation of the participants' paths. They initially enroll in university programs they had not originally intended to pursue, later opting to return to a college or technical program or enter the job market directly once they manage to detach themselves from the "injunction" to attend university. While our findings emphasize that, according to the interviewed participants, the university environment does not contribute to their success, their career paths are nevertheless shaped by their competence as agents. This competence leads them to subsequent reorientations. All participants highlighted a lack of belonging at university and a misunderstanding of the expectations tied to the student craft, findings consistent with other studies (Soares & Magnan, 2022). Additionally, the participants

did not follow a linear educational path, prioritizing work over their university studies, aligning with findings in other studies (Kamanzi et al., 2018; Soria & Stebleton, 2012; Stebleton & Soria, 2012). The lack of understanding of the student craft reported by participants may indeed be influenced by various factors, including being the first generation at university or the first generation of immigrants. Existing literature supports the idea that these factors can contribute to challenges in navigating the university environment (Ives & Castillo-Montoya, 2020; Soares & Magnan, 2022; Solis & Durán, 2022; Soria & Stebleton, 2012; Stebleton & Soria, 2012). In your corpus, the majority of respondents have at least one parent with a university degree, and most were born in Quebec. However, attending secondary schools in disadvantaged communities may have played a role in shaping their understanding and socialization within the student craft. Additionally, differences in the valuation of educational capital from the country of origin to the host country (Kelly & Lusis, 2006), as well as a potential lack of transferability of parental educational capital to the host country's educational system, could contribute to these challenges. The reported lack of a sense of belonging to the university might further impact their approach to university studies, affecting their chances of success and completion of their university studies.

The participants' responses to challenges at home and university, as analyzed through the concept of intergenerational temporality, reveal the interconnection between their family history and social dynamics. The decisions they make regarding their university and post-university paths are influenced by both personal time (microsocial) and social time (macrosocial). This analysis allows for an evaluation of potential future paths based on their past experiences, highlighting the intricate relationship between individual trajectories and broader social contexts (Santelli, 2014). Despite the challenges in meeting the expectations of their families and the university, the participants demonstrated agency as competent agents (Giddens, 1986). They approached their decisions strategically and critically, exploring alternative paths beyond university. This involved either pursuing college or technical studies or directly entering the job market. Through reflective consideration of their options, they diverged from the discourse of their families and society, overcoming initial feelings of guilt. The participants rejected the notion that university is the sole option, a discourse endorsed by their parents and prevalent in society. Importantly, they expressed satisfaction with their choices, a sentiment not experienced during their university studies. Their reported sense of belonging, whether in college or technical programs or the workplace, reflects the positive outcomes of their chosen paths. In alignment with Giddens (1986), the social structure is recognized as both constraining and enabling. The participants, acknowledging the societal emphasis on job attainment, navigated alternative paths to achieve employment without completing their university education. Both the educational and professional realms in society encompass constraints and opportunities, yet the flexibility they harnessed empowered them to respond strategically to these expectations. By doing so, they demonstrated adaptive capabilities as competent agents, leveraging available resources to explore and create new pathways within

the framework of social constraints. The participants, as competent agents, exhibited both discursive and practical consciousness (Giddens, 1986). Practical consciousness reflects the initial actions taken somewhat instinctively, driven by the prevailing belief that pursuing university studies was the sole path to achieving their career objectives. This alignment with societal ideologies and the discourse echoed in their families underscored the influence of macrosocial pressures on parental expectations (Kromydas, 2017; Naidoo, 2004; Scanlon et al., 2019; Schofer et al., 2021). On the other hand, discursive consciousness sheds light on how participants rationalize and justify their actions retrospectively. The actions of competent agents, as per Giddens (1986), are not always planned or rationalized. Discursive consciousness involved reflexive actions before, during, and after their university experience, while practical consciousness encompassed actions taken without always initially knowing how to explain them. These actions were influenced by mutual knowledge regarding the ultimate goal of securing a rewarding job. The decisions made by the participants, that is, starting university studies and later interrupting them to return to a college or technical program, or entering the job market directly, were not always premeditated. As Giddens notes, non-intentionality is part of the agents' actions (Giddens, 1986). Participants expressed a sense of non-intentionality and retrospective awareness in some of their statements such as "I didn't realize that..." (Ali, parents born in Mauritius and Trinidad and Tobago) or "Looking back, I probably could have..." (Devon, parents born in St. Kitts and Jamaica) or "this is all in hindsight" (Devon, parents born in St. Kitts and Jamaica) or "I just realized that what I wanted to do..." (Fatime, parents born in Haiti and Chad). Finally, the participants' experiences highlight the need to deconstruct the university model to better align it with the diverse needs of students. This deconstruction should be done with a focus on promoting equity and social justice, placing the emphasis on student needs rather than expecting students to conform. In that sense, it is suggested a practice of daily care, emphasizing coexistence and affection (Banda et al., 2020). This contrasts with the support structures that may inadvertently reinforce socialization for minority groups within the university setting and the standards of excellence set by the university. The stressful and unrewarding experiences reported by participants at the university underscore the importance of fostering a more supportive environment that considers the well-being of students. Moreover, this study acknowledges limitations, including challenges in recruiting participants meeting specific criteria, resulting in a small sample size. The absence of information on the participants' parents migratory category and the country where they obtained their university degree is identified as an additional constraint. Future research is recommended to delve deeper into these exploratory findings by comparing diverse student populations and expanding and diversifying the sample. Despite these limitations, the study aligns with previous research highlighting the significance of familial expectations from immigrant parents (Charette & Kalubi, 2017) in shaping the importance of success at university. Similar elements influencing the continuation of university studies, such as unsatisfactory interactions with peers and staff and work responsibilities, are also consistent with findings from other research (Stebleton & Soria,

2012; Soares & Magnan, 2022; Winterer et al., 2020). The research suggests a potential avenue for future investigation, indicating that young individuals with parents born in the Caribbean, sub-Saharan Africa, or Latin America may face inequalities or discrimination that could contribute to the interruption of their postsecondary studies (Lafortune & Kanouté, 2019). While not explicitly addressed by participants in the interviews, financial constraints, as indicated by the need to self-fund their university studies, may point to challenges in parental financial support. This scenario may be linked to potential deskilling of university-educated parents in the labor market of the host country, hindering the transfer of economic capital from the country of origin. Despite these challenges, the study emphasizes the agency of participants in making choices after interrupting their university studies. The research contributes to advancing knowledge by shedding light on both the challenges faced during university studies and the significance of considering participants' agency as a response to these challenges. The findings could be valuable for guidance counselors and professionals working with young immigrants or those born to immigrant parents. Additionally, the study aims to contribute to enhancing the training of guidance counselors, ensuring they are better equipped to understand the realities of immigrant families in both initial and ongoing training programs.

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