Post-Secondary Pathways among Second-Generation Immigrant Youth of Haitian Origin in Quebec

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to develop a better understanding of the educational pathways experienced by Haitian youth in Montreal when it comes to their post-secondary studies. The qualitative analysis of their life stories within the educational and learning pathways framework (Doray, 2011) reveals an assortment of pathways. Many are characterized by various sources of constraint (financial, institutional, social) and negative experiences with guidance counsellors during the transition to post-secondary studies. Perceived discrimination and racism also emerge as significant themes in the students' discourses. In conclusion, future research and intervention strategies are suggested.

Résumé

Cet article vise à développer une meilleure compréhension des parcours postsecondaires vécus par les jeunes d'origine haïtienne à Montréal. L'analyse qualitative de leurs récits de vie menée à partir du concept de parcours éducatifs et scolaires (Doray, 2011) révèle une variété de cas de figures. Il s'avère que leurs parcours sont jalonnés par diverses formes de contraintes (financières, institutionnelles, sociales) ainsi que par des expériences négatives avec les conseillers d'orientation au cours de la transition vers les études postsecondaires. Également, des effets perçus de racisme et de discrimination ont émergé dans les discours des jeunes. En conclusion, des pistes de recherche et d'intervention sont envisagées.

Mots-clés : parcours postsecondaires, jeunes issus de l'immigration, communauté haïtienne, minorités visibles, éducation et minorités

Introduction

Post-secondary education (PSE) is well-documented as being beneficial to individuals and to society as a whole. Individuals who pursue PSE have greater chances of success in the labour market, enjoy better economic security, and have better health (Shaienks & Gluszynski, 2007), while society advances in achieving its national equity and global economic goals (Finnie, Childs, & Wismer, 2011). In Canada, although PSE access continues to widen (Kamanzi et al., 2009), not everyone who pursues PSE perseveres (Shaienks & Gluszynski, 2007). In particular, this is the case for students from Caribbean backgrounds, who are underrepresented in PSE completion compared to other immigrant groups that generally fare well in the PSE market (Fuligni & Witkow, 2004; Kamanzi & Murdoch, 2011). In Quebec, the educational portrait of this group raises concerns as it reveals significant academic and social challenges, which often persist or worsen over time (Mc Andrew & Ledent, 2008).

This article complements existing quantitative studies (see Abada, Hou, & Ram, 2009; Kamanzi & Murdoch, 2011; Kamanzi & Collins, 2018) by exploring the defining moments in the educational pathways of Haitian youth attending CEGEP[1] in Montreal, spanning from primary school to PSE. From a micro-sociological perspective, the results obtained from the analysis of their life stories (Bertaux, 2010) will be presented by highlighting their PSE pathway profiles. In order to provide context and underscore the social significance of the study, this article begins with a general portrait of the populations at risk of not completing PSE in Canada and Quebec. Additionally, a literature review, as well as the conceptual and methodological frameworks guiding this research, will be presented prior to introducing the heart of the analysis. Following the interpretation of the results, achieved through longitudinal, thematic, and typological analyses, future research and intervention strategies are suggested in order to develop more systematic practices of equity in education.

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1   CEGEP constitutes the first phase of post-secondary studies in Quebec. Students can choose to enrol in a 2-year pre-university program or a 3-year technical program. The 2-year program is the equivalent of Grade 12 and first year-university elsewhere in Canada, while the 3-year program provides certified access to the labour market. University studies are accessible via both programs.

Post-Secondary Education, Immigrant Populations, and Vulnerable Groups

Identifying the populations that are less likely to pursue or complete PSE is an important step in understanding PSE participation and perseverance, and in developing intervention approaches to assist students. Past studies on PSE participation and perseverance mainly concentrated on financial (Finnie et al., 2011) or academic issues (Kamanzi et al., 2009). However, "access to and persistence through PSE are the result of a complex set of processes typically starting early in a person's life" (Finnie, Sweetman, & Usher, 2009, p. 5). From this perspective, recent studies have targeted non-traditional factors such as the sociocultural and structural aspects of family composition and beliefs, university aspirations and expectations, and differences among individuals' country of origin (Thiessen, 2009).

Immigrant groups are an important "at-risk" population given that Canada places their permanent settlement at the heart of its demographic, economic, and social development (Finnie & Mueller, 2009). In general, immigrant students not only perform better than their Canadian-born counterparts, but they also have significantly higher PSE aspirations overall (Kamanzi & Murdoch, 2011; Krahn & Taylor, 2005). However, the success rates differ when students' country of origin is considered. For example, the dropout rates of students from East and Southeast Asia are considerably lower than the national average, while those from the Caribbean have higher-than-average dropout rates (Kamanzi & Murdoch, 2011; Thiessen, 2009).

The Haitian Community in Quebec

In 2011, the "Haitian ethnic origin population" (MIDI, 2014) in Quebec was reported at approximately 119,185, representing 2.7% of the total population and qualifying them as one of the largest immigrant groups in the province (MIDI, 2017). Quantitative studies have revealed a number of issues related to the educational performance of this group, including higher-than-average high school (HS) dropout rates, overrepresentation in special education (Mc Andrew & Ledent, 2008), and underrepresentation in private schools (Mc Andrew, Ledent, & Murdoch, 2011). While studies show that some students experience academic success and positive relationships with their peers and school staff, others

report a widespread sense of discrimination and exclusion (Lafortune, 2012; Livingstone, Celemencki, & Calixte, 2014). One study documenting student experiences in the general adult education sector revealed institutional and systemic barriers that contribute to relegating certain Haitian students from the youth education sector to short-term professional training, which is predisposed to hindering PSE prospects (Potvin & Leclercq, 2014). Nationally, Haitian immigrants not only have a higher tendency to access PSE via a non-linear pathway compared to the total population (Kamanzi & Collins, 2018), but they also have the lowest PSE graduation rate, as well as the highest dropout rate (Kamanzi & Murdoch, 2011). Furthermore, in addition to being part of a group that tends to enrol in vocational and technical programs (as opposed to university) (Abada & Tenkorang, 2009), they are also among one of the few immigrant groups that fail to surpass the educational levels of their parents (Abada et al., 2009).

Significant Predictors of Post-Secondary Attainment, Perseverance, and Attrition among Immigrant Youth

North American studies have shown high variability in the pathways to PSE attainment across ethnicity and socio-economic status (SES) (Abada et al., 2009). In addition to individual and contextual factors such as student aspirations (Krahn & Taylor, 2005) and parental expectations (Thiessen, 2009), PSE attainment for immigrants is largely affected by parental human, cultural, and social capital (Abada & Tenkorang, 2009). Abada and Tenkorang (2009) underscore parental PSE as an important unit of human capital, since highly educated parents tend to provide their children with the cultural capital that is socially valued by academic institutions (Childs, Finnie, & Mueller, 2012). In fact, immigrants with rich cultural and social capital backgrounds, coupled with low SES, consistently demonstrate higher performance and PSE attainment than do their non-immigrant counterparts (Abada & Tenkorang, 2009; Mc Andrew, Ledent, Garnett, & Ungerleider, 2008). Nevertheless, SES remains an important component of human capital because of its interaction with other variables related to PSE attainment (Robson, Brown, & Anisef, 2016) and its direct and indirect effect on educational experiences, particularly among black visible minorities (Nicolas, DeSilva, & Rabenstein, 2009).

While some immigrants benefit from strong human capital that facilitates their academic integration, others begin their PSE journey from a disadvantaged position. The latter may have inadequate information regarding access to PSE opportunities and may experience racism and discrimination (Baum & Flores, 2011; Sweet, Anisef, Brown, Walters, & Phythian, 2010). The few studies that have focused on country of origin as a factor in PSE perseverance demonstrate that Haitians face more barriers than most (Baum & Flores, 2011). Krahn and Taylor (2005) suggest that black youth become more exposed to systemic racism that hinders their pursuit of career goals and opportunities, resulting in decreased confidence and motivation to follow through with PSE. Furthermore, youth from the Caribbean generally have less access to information about PSE options (Brown, Santiago, & Lopez, 2003). These students tend to be socialized in public schools in disadvantaged areas, which reduces their access to social environments that promote the pursuit of PSE, along with the information and resources that help to make PSE access possible (Lafortune & Balde, 2012). Socialization in HS has been shown to have a significant impact on the development of PSE aspirations, "studentship" skills, and the navigation of meritocratic school systems (Draelants, 2013).

Conceptual Framework

The aim of this study is to investigate the aspects that play a role in the construction of the educational pathways of Haitian CEGEP students. Within the context of this inquiry, it is important to note that the idea of young people undertaking a linear pathway towards PSE and adulthood is perhaps more descriptive of white middle-class families than it is of families from other SES and ethnic backgrounds (Cone, Buxton, Mahotière, & Lee, 2014; Kamanzi & Collins, 2018). Haitian immigrants may be more likely to encounter circumstances evoking interruptions and alterations to their academic journeys. Rather than using concepts that consider schooling as a linear path (e.g., school trajectory), the *pathway* concept was retained for this study (Doray, 2011). This allowed us to better comprehend the unanticipated and non-sequential variability of the participants' experiences, as well as the emergence of new phenomena throughout their life courses.

The framework consists of concepts emanating from the life course approach, reproduction theories, and interactionist perspectives. The life course approach situates

individuals as the product of their own stories. It also considers how various dimensions relate to individuals' life roles associated with family, education, and work, throughout their life courses (Hutchison, 2010). Reproduction theories recognize the structural aspects related to social origin, while interactionists consider the integration of individuals in social groups or institutions (Picard, Trottier, & Doray, 2011). In Quebec, the *pathway* concept has been utilized in scientific studies to ascertain downward social mobility patterns of university students from high cultural capital backgrounds (Groleau, 2017); difficulties encountered in CEGEP by students who begin their studies in a Springboard program[2] (Picard, Kamanzi, & Labrosse, 2013); and the school experiences of Aboriginal students (Sarmiento, 2017).

To date, quantitative research on post-secondary perseverance has established a link between family background, educational background, and certain aspects of university experience and PSE completion or abandonment (Thiessen, 2009; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004; Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005). We maintain that it is relevant to examine these factors influencing PSE perseverance and to pay particular attention to the social and institutional constraints present within these pathways. Therefore, an analysis of interviews with Haitian youth was undertaken, in an attempt to answer the following research question: What aspects delineate the educational pathways of Haitian youth in Quebec, spanning from primary school to PSE? It is also from this approach that the longitudinal, cross-sectional, and typological analyses were employed.

Methodology

In order to answer the research question, we conducted a qualitative study on the school experiences of second-generation, immigrant CEGEP students. A life story method (Bertaux, 2010) was employed to examine the range of plausible dimensions related to the educational pathways of Haitian youth attending CEGEP. The collection of retrospective narratives made it possible to gain insight into the educational experiences, perceptions, and PSE decisions of the participants, as well as the dimensions that played a role in

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2   A program designed to help students gain the necessary requirements to access an accredited CEGEP program leading to a technical or pre-university diploma.

their development. The recruitment was mainly done through campus advertisements and social networks, through an agreement between the research team and the CEGEPs.

The participants were born in Quebec to Haitian immigrant parents, and had completed their primary and secondary schooling in the French education sector of Montreal. They were between the ages of 17 and 30, were single at the time of the interview (never been married), and had no children. As such, 11 participants were interviewed, among which nine were female and two were male. Ten reported French as their mother tongue, with only one participant reporting Creole as a first language. Six were enrolled in pre-university programs, while five chose a technical option. Six of the participants reported having changed their CEGEP program or temporarily interrupted their studies at some point. In addition, their parents came from various social and educational backgrounds: five participants had at least one parent who had a university degree, one parent had a CEGEP diploma, three parents had a HS diploma, and two had an education level inferior to HS. A variety of parental occupations were also reported, such as chauffeur, nurse, industrial designer, correctional service agent, and retiree. As such, this subset provided diversity in key areas that interplay with shaping PSE pathways (Rothon, Heath, & Lessard-Phillips, 2009; Sweet et al., 2010), which was useful in ensuring a rich portrait of the various perspectives represented in the group (Pires, 1997), given the exploratory nature of this study.

Using the life story method (Bertaux, 2010), the data collection was accomplished through semi-structured interviews with the use of an interview guide. The guide covered five main themes: (1) participants' family experiences during childhood and adolescence, (2) school experiences in the youth sector of Montreal, (3) experiences in CEGEP, (4) linguistic, cultural, and geographical identity, and (5) future plans regarding PSE and employment. The interviews were conducted in a single session of approximately 90 minutes, in French (according to the preference of all 11 participants), and were held on the participants' institutional campus. All of the interviews were conducted on an individual basis and were recorded and later transcribed.

Further, an ethics certificate was granted by the Comité plurifacultaire d'éthique de la recherche (CPÉR). As such, the participants signed a consent form, informing them of the framework and objectives of the research, as well as their rights as participants. They were made aware of the voluntary nature of their participation, of the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time, and of their option to refuse to answer questions

as they wished. Moreover, they were informed that the collected data could also be used to make secondary analyses in other research projects. Finally, the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants has been fully upheld by replacing participant names with pseudonyms in the data analysis, and ensuring that the data are stored in a secure file with limited access.

Three levels of analysis were employed in order to produce the most comprehensive interpretation of the results. The first stratum consisted of a longitudinal analysis of each life story. This allowed for the sequential reconstruction of each participant's educational pathway, while establishing a link to the surrounding family, social, and school dimensions. The information was compiled into *pathway matrixes* that summarized each participant's experiences individually. This first step allowed for a dense familiarization of the data, which prompted a thematic analysis.

Subsequently, a cross comparison between the 11 life stories was conducted, and a manual coding process was carried out in order to identify similarities and/or differences within the body of data. Distinct themes emerged between the participants, namely (1) their relationship to the curriculum in HS, (2) experiences with mentors and guidance counsellors, (3) CEGEP transition and integration, (4) relationship to the community, (5) perception of parental involvement, and (6) perception of parental ambitions and expectations. The participants' collective representations were organized and interpreted according to the key dimensions at play in the formation of PSE pathways.

The final level of analysis allowed for the concentering of the pathways in the framework, which led to a deeper understanding of the complex social and abstract processes and experiences (and their underlying meanings and rationales) within the corpus. This was accomplished through a typological analysis comparing these social realities to profiles known as *ideal-types* (Weber, 1978): an abstraction of individual characteristics and their relationships to social contexts, in opposition to an exact representation. In order to develop a cohesive typology, a *piling method* was used, by generating core-meaning units inductively, through a cross-sectional comparison between pathways. The typology that emerged consists of three profiles that serve to classify each of the 11 life stories according to each participant's unique experiences. Through this typology, it was possible to derive a broad interpretation of the historical, structural, and social dimensions, and to view them in juxtaposition with the components of the narrative and thematic analyses.

Findings: Typology of Post-Secondary Pathways

The comparative analysis gave rise to a typology consisting of three types of PSE pathways that delineate the abstract relationships and experiences among the participants. However, prior to presenting these ideal-types, it is relevant to highlight some key points of convergence among them, namely, an overall positive elementary school experience, the accentuation of Haitian or black identity during HS, and high university aspirations.

In all three pathways, primary school experiences were fondly described. In fact, participants almost unanimously expressed pleasant school and learning experiences, positive relationships with teachers, and a retrospective sense of unity and belonging with their Québécois peers and those of various ethnic backgrounds. However, these dispositions did not remain consistent as the participants' narratives progressed to future stages of their pathways:

> Hmm, in HS, it was really different from elementary school, there were more ethnic divisions, then I started more, like, feeling more Haitian, it was really in HS where it was accentuated. Then I felt a little bit, like in a bubble. (Ruth)

In accordance with the findings of Lafortune (2012), the participants explained that this relatively new and heightened feeling of difference in HS was accompanied by feelings of exclusion, not only from peers, but also from school staff:

> Yeah, there's someone who made us realize pretty quickly that we were not like the others... Uh, well I remember a class, I arrived, first class, the teacher says: "Oh, we have many ethnic communities today! You sir, where are you from?" So [the conversation] started with me, so I look at her and I tell her: "Well, I was born here" (*laughs*). "So I don't know what you're talking about." And then she says, "Well, you weren't born here in the classroom." So, already it was pretty cold, I was like, I don't understand. (Jackson)

This sense of non-belonging also extends to the participants' views on the Quebec history curriculum. Respondents commented on possible inaccuracy and idealism as well as the blatant absence of their ancestors' contribution to Quebec history as immigrants. According to other studies, these individual, institutional, and systemic aspects that are related to feelings of exclusion in HS can potentially compromise student school engagement and,

consequently, PSE aspirations (Krahn & Taylor, 2005) and perseverance (Goldrick-Rab, 2006).

Nevertheless, the high university aspirations for this group are in alignment with the findings of Kamanzi and Murdoch (2011). With the exception of one participant who attended university prior to CEGEP, all respondents communicated their intention of going to university. Whether they were enrolled in a technical program, worked while studying to pay for school expenses, or intended to attend part-time, university attainment was a driving force in their decision-making processes. Although each participant had a unique experience in the pursuit of this goal, it was possible to identify three distinct pathway ideal-types: (1) *exploratory*, (2) *constrained*, and (3) *disoriented*. Following the presentation of these pathways, the discussion of the results will shed light on the effects of the various social dimensions that mediate them, mainly with respect to PSE perseverance.

The Exploratory Pathway

As the name suggests, the *exploratory pathway* (*n* = 4) is characterized by the participants' motivation to discover their future potential and to pursue academic and/or professional endeavours. The students were generally undecided about their personal and professional goals. Therefore, they chose studies based on personal interests and focused on university attainment rather than professional integration. CEGEP was viewed as a gateway to a higher level of education and a time during which they could explore their own interests. Most participants experienced periods of "transitional indecision." However, such periods were quickly overcome by undertaking independent research, consultations with guidance counsellors, or brainstorming to eliminate certain options:

> In CEGEP, at the beginning, I thought, maybe a technical program in rehabilitation, because that was exactly what I was into at that time. Umm, because I wanted to be a physiotherapist, so I wanted to pursue rehabilitation, then I said no, I don't want to do that anymore. Then I thought maybe accounting, maybe in business management or something related, but in the end it would have taken too much time, because I've always thought about going to university, so, it's not... for my parents it's always been, uh, "You're going to university so you can have a good job" and all that, yes... They had no problems with a technical program, but

they talked about me going to university after. Then I thought it would really take way too long (*laughs*), so, pre-university, then, university. (Ruth)

In essence, enthusiasm and an incentive to pursue university studies can be attributed to the *exploratory pathway* participants, despite their indecision in regards to personal and professional goals. Thus, they all enrolled in pre-university programs in the social science field. A possible explanation for this tendency is the general nature of social science programs and the perception that they are a favourable gateway to university. As Tania affirmed: "I thought maybe social sciences, you know, it opens doors."

The Constrained Pathway

In contrast, the *constrained pathway* participants (*n* = 5) had a better sense of their future professional goals and selected their programs of study accordingly. Goals were predominantly aimed at job market integration and the attainment of a university degree, in concordance with personal interests. Although technical programs emerged as the preferred study avenue, most respondents perceived them as the "first step" of a lengthier pathway. Furthermore, our analysis revealed several prevalent forms of constraint that characterized this pathway, mainly related to (1) finances, (2) accessibility to desired programs of study, and (3) subjection to lowered expectations.

Four of the five participants in this group exhibited a pathway in which financial constraints played a major role. These respondents were under the impression that their parents would not be in a position to support them financially. Therefore, financial security was a priority before accessing university. For example, Cynthia was reassured by the possibility of gaining employment in her technical field of study, which would allow her to save money in order to achieve her university goals later:

One of my aunt's friends who is also an educator, she told me that during university she worked part-time at the youth centre, and she managed to pay for her studies, so I'm thinking I could do that too. That's also why I chose a technical program.

For Cynthia, enrolling in a technical program was also a building-block strategy that she used to manage the uncertainty of gaining access to university by first pursuing studies that are deemed more accessible whilst keeping university studies within reach (Tirtiaux,

2015). In fact, four of the five participants in this ideal-type used enrolment in technical programs as a stepping stone to gain future access to university.

Moreover, we observed that various points of tension (financial, institutional, personal) tended to occur simultaneously in all of the pathways. In Karine's case, constraints in regards to program accessibility manifested in conjunction with financial tension:

> I told myself that if I am not accepted to university, I would at least have something to fall back on because... For example, if I do a pre-university program and I'm not accepted into the university program that I want, and then I have to wait a year, let's say, I would work as a sales assistant or a clerk, I'm not interested in that. So, if I have a technical diploma, and then I'm not accepted into the program in university, and I have to wait a year, I can work and also have a good salary.

Both of the above accounts reveal that a technical program is not a limiting factor but rather a channel that provides multiple options, including university. These results may help explain quantitative findings pertaining to the tendency of black students to enrol in technical programs when making PSE choices (Abada & Tenkorang, 2009). Furthermore, it is relevant to underscore the highly pragmatic nature of the participants' decision-making processes. Families and individuals evaluate the costs, benefits, and risks of their decisions about PSE, and choose the most useful combination of all three (Boudon, 1974). In the above excerpt, Karine's choices lean on the benefit of being able to work in her desired field because of the qualifications that she will have acquired through her technical program. In the event that she is not accepted to university, this benefit outweighs the possible time costs. Moreover, the risks of going to university, such as financial and time loss, or school failure, are judged as worthwhile given her circumstances. Karine is creative in managing constraints by devising a backup plan while simultaneously dealing with possible future economic constraints associated with university fees.

Furthermore, the data analysis revealed constraint as a result of the interaction between accessing a desired program of study and subjection to perceived lowered expectations, beginning in HS. In fact, three of the five participants exhibiting this ideal-type

who met with guidance counsellors in HS reported negative experiences.[3] In Phara's case, she felt that undesired and inferior options were explicitly imposed on her:

> High school guidance counsellors are not good at all. He was saying whatever. He wanted...he was sending me to do a vocational program; he didn't even want me to go to CEGEP... He said: "Oh no, you don't have the grades to get into CEGEP, you won't be able to go to CEGEP, you'll never be able to get into CEGEP." He sent me to do a nursing assistant certificate. Then I said that I wanted to do social work and he told me: "Oh you don't have the grades to do social work, you'll never be able to get into that [program]."

In this excerpt, Phara found her career plan compromised based on one meeting with her counsellor. At the time of the interview, she was enrolled in a pre-university program in social science. However, it is reasonable to hypothesize that her pathway may have been negatively affected had she not had access to other alternatives due to her family's high level of cultural capital (both parents being university graduates). Lowered expectations were also confronted during the participants' experiences at CEGEP. Mirlande underscores:

> Yes, there's a lot of, like there's an added pressure because it's like, you know often, people expect...because there are many more problems related to academic success, let's say in the black community, then you know for example, we feel this pressure from people, you know…the comments. Anyway, I see it as if it were racism. But as an example, I went to see the [academic advisor], then the lady, she says: "What program are you in?" I tell her "in physical rehabilitation," "Oh ok, for withdrawal"…I was like, why did you automatically assume it was going to be that?

It is baffling for Mirlande to find herself in such a circumstance given that she describes herself as someone who had no academic difficulties throughout the entirety of her educational pathway. Researchers have brought to light the increased exposure to systemic racism of black youth in comparison to other minority groups (Krahn & Taylor, 2005).

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3   Of the eight participants from the corpus who met with a guidance counsellor during the CEGEP application process in HS, five had unfruitful experiences to varying degrees.

Further, the negative effects of implicit student labelling by school personnel (Magnan, Pilote, Vidal, & Collins, 2016) and student-deficit perspectives (Douglas, Lewis, Douglas, Earl Scott, & Garrison-Wade, 2008) toward black students in the youth education sector are well documented. Thompson (2004) also suggests that PSE can be compromised as an effect of these labels. Before discussing this constraint in greater detail, the final profile of our typology will be presented.

The Disoriented Pathway

The *disoriented pathway* (*n* = 2) manifests through the participants' high degree of indecision, unawareness, and confusion pertaining to PSE and how to navigate through the available options. We observed a pronounced sense of bewilderment as well as an "auto-pilot" transition and integration process to CEGEP. While future professional aspirations were central to their decision-making processes, participants described the pathway to get there as elusive and distressing. The resulting pathways were highly atypical, involving various turning points and multiple changes in institutions, programs, and levels of study.

Starting in HS, the participants seemed to begin their PSE journey at a disadvantage due to a lack of guidance and information. For example, Pascale did not have the slightest idea of what program to choose in order to achieve her post-secondary goals:

> We didn't know, we're in secondary five [final year of HS] then all of a sudden we were told about "first round" and to register. Ok, register where? Why there? What? We were so unprepared, oh my god... It's crazy, it's crazy, I went to [CEGEP X]. Why did I go to [CEGEP X]? I have no idea (*laughs*). I don't know!

Moreover, the lack of guidance and role models was a key theme, despite the differing levels of cultural capital in the participants' backgrounds: "[My parents] wanted me to go to CEGEP, they always encouraged me, but to do what?" (Pascale). This excerpt exemplifies the existing ambiguity when it comes to the role of parental expectations in the PSE decision-making process. Pascale's family had a low cultural capital, which could possibly explain the vague nature of their input (Boudon, 1974). However, Jackson's family, from a high cultural capital background, demonstrated similar tendencies:

But you know, I had…my problem was that I never had any support; I've never had a reference point. My big brother failed all his courses, so that leaves me. I finished HS before my brother. Then um, there was no one to guide me. It was as if I was in an ocean, I didn't know where I was going, I didn't know what I was doing, I didn't know where it would lead.

Furthermore, the participants' solitude in navigating their way towards CEGEP extends beyond the family dimension to their academic institutions:

We weren't prepared, we really weren't. And I say it and I repeat it, I feel like my generation was a sacrificed generation. Sacrificed. We didn't even know what we were getting into. There are so many people that I run into and they have dropped out of school, and I'm like why? "Well I don't know what I'm doing, I don't know what to do." It's unbelievable what we experienced, all we knew is that in Grade 9, you had to have [mathematics] "4-16" or "4-36"... But at that point you were already making decisions about your future without even realizing it because for you "4-36" is for geeks, the little smart kids who listen, and "4-16" is your friends, you know, everyone's there. Yet you're not just picking a class, you basically just made a critical choice because that "4-36," in [CEGEP Y], you need that to access [competitive] programs... No, they didn't prepare us at all. (Pascale)

This passage illustrates a lack of direction and even misguidance that some participants experienced as early as ninth grade. The implications of the different math levels (4-16 or 4-36) were very unclear. Yet these were crucial choices when it came to CEGEP pathways, with math 4-36 allowing for a greater accessibility to limited enrolment programs, for example. There seems to be an unofficial streaming process happening, as Pascale refers to her "sacrificed generation," implying that she was among many who experienced the same fate, which resulted in adverse PSE circumstances. This excerpt exemplifies the theory of social inequalities, whereby individuals belonging to a dominated class are led to believe that they have equal access to opportunities for success. They thus accept their failures as normal because they are unaware of the institutional structures that reproduce social inequalities (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). This can be further supported through the type of guidance that was offered by the school: "...all that they told us was that 'you have to get ready, you have to at least be prepared, it will be more difficult in CEGEP, it's

going to be tougher. Work hard, work hard, you can do it'…but we didn't know..." (Pascale). Hence, the students were provided with high hopes in the absence of tools or education on how to achieve them. There is an overemphasis on CEGEP access and a serious deficiency in terms of guiding students in how to succeed at it. As a result, Pascale and many of her peers ended up dropping out of CEGEP. Retrospectively, Pascale expressed regret about her decisions: "You know, sometimes I just want to go back into my past and give myself a slap in the face... I just needed guidance."

Discussion

The classification of the respondents within an ideal-type closest to their experience allowed us to identify their common social characteristics, and consequently, the social dimensions that contribute to the construction of their PSE pathways. Although the corpus only consisted of 11 respondents, which limits us from making generalizations about the population, some interesting patterns were revealed. While the respondents' primary school experiences were generally positive, they reported many negative experiences in HS. Our analyses of the HS segment of their pathways support the findings of other researchers who have suggested that Haitian immigrants are more likely than other groups to experience situations of perceived exclusion and discrimination in HS in Quebec (Lafortune, 2012; Livingstone et al., 2014), in Canada (Abada et al., 2009), and in the United States (Cone et al., 2014). Certain researchers posit that socialization in HS can impact the construction of aspirations for PSE as well as mastery (or non-mastery) of "studentship" in the navigation of a meritocratic school system (Draelants, 2013). Others advance the notion that feelings of exclusion based on race or ethnicity can act as a positive motivator in PSE attainment (Abada et al., 2009), which is possibly related to the high PSE aspirations of Haitian youth.

Furthermore, the importance of generational differentiation in research concerning immigrant groups is supported through our study. Given that the corpus consists of second-generation immigrants, 10 of the 11 participants spoke French as a first language. As such, no academic challenges in HS were self-reported, and all respondents obviously graduated to CEGEP. This allows us to make a link to the notion that Caribbean students having French as their mother tongue perform as well or better than their peers,

as opposed to the inferior performance and graduation rates of those whose first language is Creole—a characteristic more common to first-generation Haitian immigrants (Mc Andrew et al., 2008). Nevertheless, while language is documented in Quebec as a much more predictive factor than SES in the academic success of Haitian immigrants in HS (Mc Andrew et al., 2008), our analyses reveal differences pertaining to cultural capital and SES at the PSE level worthy of mention.

Haitian students with moderate to high cultural capital described their PSE decision-making process as being less complicated or confusing than did their peers with lower cultural capital. While the former exhibited various levels of indecision in regards to their PSE choices, they were generally confident about their prospects for university studies. Most of these participants fell within the *exploratory category*. Those who experienced a *constrained pathway* with a high cultural and social capital had access to helpful guiding agents such as psychologists or mentors, which helped, in part, to reduce decision-making tension and feelings of discouragement. However, the decision-making processes of those from low cultural capital backgrounds involved a greater consideration of the costs and benefits associated with their PSE choices and higher levels of self-reliance in order to obtain the necessary financial resources to move forward. Navigational difficulty in the PSE system emerged as a major obstacle in this group's pathways, and the participants expressed a higher level of stress in regards to their transition to PSE. Furthermore, Nicolas and colleagues (2009) suggest that the pathways of immigrant youth should not be analyzed without accounting for SES. Some studies have demonstrated that cultural capital can counter the effects of low SES for immigrant families (Abada & Tenkorang, 2009). However, a number of cases from our study on the children of Haitian immigrants do not support this point. Therefore, it is relevant to highlight that the *disoriented* participants have a low SES background, despite having various levels of cultural capital. The pathway of this last group is unique, given that it involved the most interruption and instability of all the profiles of our typology.

Furthermore, while high aspirations did play a role in the participants' eventual access to PSE, in some cases their perseverance was jeopardized by a lack of parental and institutional guidance. This posed a double-acting constriction in interaction with their cultural capital and SES. In particular, participants with lower SES, cultural, and social capital backgrounds described negative experiences with guidance counsellors that had a significant effect on both their confidence and their access to critical information

regarding PSE options. These negative experiences manifested into periods of stress and tension for participants within *constrained pathways*, and multiple bifurcations in the *disoriented pathways*. This can be contrasted with those from higher cultural capital backgrounds who were able to access reliable resources through their social networks in the event that their guidance counsellors were unhelpful. Overall, there appears to be an institutional laissez-faireism, whereby youth seem to receive general guidance and encouragement, but rarely receive support regarding the specific challenges of making the right decisions for PSE.

Some researchers suggest that the dominant meritocratic ideology in Quebec's school system leads many actors (counsellors, teachers, etc.) to be oblivious to the existence of racial discrimination (Potvin, 2015). At an institutional level, the contribution of schools to the perpetuation of racial discrimination has been documented in ways such as racial profiling (Tator & Henry, 2006); hegemonic, euro-centric, and hidden curriculum (Jay 2003; Zyngier, 2011); academic streaming and lack or absence of support (Nieto & Bode, 2008); and student- and parent-blaming in lieu of questioning professional practices (Dei, 2008), to name a few. Hence, the inability of Ruth, Mirlande, and Sandra to relate to the Quebec history curriculum; the academic streaming of Pascale and her Haitian peers to lower-level math courses; the uninviting and culturally inappropriate questioning from Jackson's teacher on the first day of class; the assumed class-withdrawal meeting between Mirlande and her academic advisor; the inferior career recommendations made to Phara by her HS guidance counsellor; as well as the "non-recommendations" made to Pascale and others, all fall under this umbrella. These instances, in combination with the aforementioned institutional practices resulting in the youth being left to fend for themselves, lend a possible line of explanation to quantitative studies that have identified perseverance challenges among black youth in PSE (Kamanzi, Bastien, Doray, & Magnan, 2016; Kamanzi & Murdoch, 2011).

In contrast to the studies that posit SES and cultural capital as defining factors in educational pathways, we found agency to be the primary characteristic of all of our participants' pathways. For example, the participants who felt subjected to low expectations or racism converted that negativity into positive motivation in order to avoid living up to their counsellors' negative impressions of them. Similarly, in the absence of role models and guidance, all of the participants were determined to seek resources independently. Furthermore, the choice to enrol in a technical program was more of a strategy

to facilitate university access rather than just an act of settling for a shorter, lower-prestige program. This element of detail is particularly important because quantitative studies might misinterpret temporary interruptions in PSE as dropouts instead of as a strategy employed in the face of adversity. In sum, the positive interplay of resilience and agency is an important dimension in the PSE pathway construction of Haitian youth.

Conclusion

In light of persisting educational and social inequalities affecting Quebec's Haitian communities, the goal of this study was to explore how social, economic, and institutional factors interact in the formation of the educational pathways of Haitian youth, spanning from primary school to PSE. In order to address this issue, we used Doray's (2011) concept of *learning and educational pathways* to conduct a tri-levelled analysis of the data gathered from our fieldwork. The typology that was devised allows us to highlight the interplay between social and structural dimensions in juxtaposition with social class, cultural and social capital background, race, and country of origin. Our research is innovative in that very few studies have examined the PSE profiles of specific minority groups in isolation (Nicolas et al., 2009; Thiessen, 2009), especially from a qualitative angle. As such, our results provide intricate information regarding certain aspects that may have been concealed in studies that have traditionally grouped Haitians into broader categories such as "Caribbean," "black," or "immigrant" in an intergenerational manner.

While the analysis produced a rich yield of information pertaining to the formation of PSE pathways among Haitian CEGEP students, our research had some limitations. The results of this initial exploratory study (which are specific to the participants involved) did not allow for the consideration of other variables that have historically influenced PSE, such as gender or family composition (Lambert, Zeman, & Allen, 2004). It is also necessary to underscore that our data focus only on youth who persevered and accessed CEGEP, leaving the experiences of those who dropped out of HS or PSE (such as the friends of Pascal and Jackson) unaccounted for. In light of these boundaries, future research is necessary. It is essential that research look into the practices of guidance counsellors and other institutional actors regarding the PSE preparation and transition process, particularly when dealing with students and families from diverse backgrounds.

If educational systems assume that all students possess the same level of cultural capital, existing counselling practices might be ineffective in meeting the needs of some disadvantaged groups. Therefore, intercultural training should be made available to teachers, guidance counsellors, administrators, and other school and CEGEP actors. The goal of such training should be to raise awareness about the potential for unconscious and subtle forms of racism that negatively affect their everyday interactions with students, as well as to equip staff with the information and tools necessary to properly inform students and families about the functioning of meritocratic educational systems. Actors must prioritize practices that clearly outline all of the available PSE options, including the potential consequences that course, program, institution selection, and R-Score (GPA equivalent) can have for students' long-term PSE and employment prospects.

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