

ABSTRACT

When I was 14, I obtained my first official paid job at a local McDonald's in southern New York, and I have been employed ever since. As a low-income, blue collar, prospective first-generation college student, my career imaginings were limited by the world around me, but my will to succeed and my supporters allowed me to flourish in life and work.

Years later, having graduated college and nearing completion on my Master's degree, I look back on my own career development with much amazement. I see obstacles overcome, blessings provided, the support of incredible people and I know that my success was no accident.

In my thesis, I have chosen to explore career development in first-generation college students by using my lived experiences as a first-generation college graduate to illuminate some commonalities shared by others within this identity group. These issues are explored through the lenses of: education, the role of family, career imaginings and job experiences, mentors, faith, and the pervasive role of self-efficacy in each of these categories. I have included recommendations for best practices for career counselors when working with these students, but the concepts can be broadly applicable to other higher education administrators. As a first-generation college graduate with blue collar roots, I know firsthand some of the obstacles that exist for all college students navigating their career journeys, but especially the added layers of difficulty faced by being first-generation college students.