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The internal worlds of first generation community college students : students' critical reflections on the role of resilience in their academic success

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THE INTERNAL WORLDS OF FIRST GENERATION COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS: STUDENTS' CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE ROLE OF RESILIENCE IN THEIR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to two very special people in my life. Without their encouragement, support, and love, this dissertation would still be an idea. Thank you for believing in me.

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CHAPTER I

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Statement of the Problem

There are more students entering higher education in the United States in the year 2003 than ever before. Although this number is increasing, there has been a decline, however, in the number of students who complete college with a degree (Justiz, 1994). These seemingly inconsistent statistics highlight an important challenge: how can educators help more students successfully negotiate their college experience and achieve their academic goals?

Any attempt to address the needs of college students is complicated by the diverse population found on today's college campuses. There are many different student sub-groups, each with different characteristics and students who face unique challenges. In order to assist a specific group of students, researchers must first identify and understand them.

The focus of this study was on a specific group of students called first generation college students. First generation college students are individuals who are the first in their families to attend college. In 1995-1996, 45% of all undergraduates in the United States were first generation college students (Education Resource Institute & Institute of Higher Education Policy (ERI & IHEP), 1997). Within this large group of students, this study narrowed its focus to first generation college students who are also low-income, and who attend an urban community college. For the purpose of this study, low-income students were defined as students whose adjustable gross income is less than $12,525 for

one person and $25,575 for a family of four. An urban community college was defined as a two-year college serving an urban community in the United States.

The first generation college student population presents an interesting challenge for a number of reasons. Existing research (Billson & Terry, 1992; Brooks-Terry, 1998; ERI & IHEP, 1997; Hsaio, 1992; National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), 1998; Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1995; York-Anderson & Bowman, 1991; Zwerling, 1992) suggests that first generation college students face more challenges than students whose parents attended and completed higher education. First generation college students receive less familial support and encouragement. They are not as prepared emotionally and/or academically for the challenges of college life.

Furthermore, first generation college students also often have limited financial resources. This disadvantage makes it more difficult for first generation college students to achieve their academic goals (Billson & Terry, 1982). This study focused on the most financially challenged students within this group—low-income students who are also the first in their family to attend college.

Another important factor related to first generation college students is that the majority of research has been done at the university level, even though most first generation college students begin their post-secondary education at the community college level (Dougherty, 1994; Willet, 1989). One cannot assume that the findings from this population are applicable to the community college student. Although most of the research conducted with first generation college students has been at four-year institutions, these findings provide an improved understanding of this population of

students. This fact provided an additional reason for research to be carried out in the community college setting with first generation college students.

Instead of focusing on first generation college students who were not achieving their academic goals, this study focused on first generation college students who were successful in their academic careers. Successful students who achieved their academic goals could provide insight into what contributes to academic success in this student population. By identifying common success factors in first generation college students who achieved their academic goals, educators can learn how to stimulate those same factors in other students and increase their chances for academic success.

The central challenge lies in identifying what are the crucial factors that affect first generation college students in order to improve their chances of success. Most of the research already conducted addressed the external obstacles of these students such as demographics, family characteristics, and financial factors (Billson & Terry, 1992; Brooks-Terry, 1998; ERI & IHEP, 1997; Hsaio, 1992; NCES, 1998; Terenzini et al, 1995; York-Anderson & Bowman, 1991; Zwerling, 1992).

In addition, current research provides information on the personal characteristics of first generation college students (Hellman, 1996; McGregor, Mayleben, Buzzanga, Davis, &Becker, 1991; Pratt & Skaggs, 1989; Riehl, 1994; Terenzini, et al., 1994). Although this research is important in understanding some aspects of their college experience, this study proposed that it is also necessary to investigate the internal factors such as attitudinal and experiential, and how those interact with environmental factors that affect their chances of success. One way to approach this is to use successful students as models. Some first generation college students do achieve their academic

goals and earn a college degree. Understanding their strategies for success could be beneficial in building programs that inspire similar success for other students.

Background and Need for the Study

In 1995-1996, first generation college students made up 45% of all undergraduates, and in 1994, more than half (55%) of all first generation college students attended community colleges (ERI & IHEP, 1997). The research of NCES (1998) and Brooks-Terry (1998) indicated that first generation college students are more likely to enroll in two-year public and private institutions than four-year institutions due to low cost of tuition, program offerings, and proximity to their homes. Approximately half of the community college population consists of first generation college students compared to about 30 to 35 % in public and private four-year institutions (Phillippe & Patton, 2000). Due to the large number of first generation college students attending community colleges, it is important for educators to pay special attention to first generation college students in the community college.

Terenzini et al. (1995) asserted that first generation college students represent a unique population of students with distinct goals, motivations, and constraints compared to their counterparts. Furthermore, according to Zwerling (1992), many first generation college students are members of ethnic minority groups and come from working class families. These students often have limited financial support from their families. This reality often makes it necessary for these students to work part-time or full-time in order to fund their education. In addition, many of these students feel pressured to complete school quickly in order to enter the work force as soon as possible. This factor makes time an important concern for these students.

First generation college students are at greater risk of not attaining a degree compared to students whose parents attended college. There are numerous factors that could account for this finding. Previous research suggested this is due to their having lower levels of integration; both academically and socially (Billson & Terry, 1982). Many students do not feel connected to or develop a sense of community with the institution they are attending.

Researchers maintained that first generation college students also tend to be from lower socioeconomic groups (NCES, 1998) and have less support from their families (ERI & IHEP, 1997; Hsaio, 1992; Terenzini et al, 1995; York-Anderson & Bowman, 1991). They also reported the students to be older, and more are female than male (Inman & Mayes, 1999; NCES, 1998).

Research has been conducted (ERI & IHEP, 1997; Hsaio, 1992; Inman & Mayes, 1999; NCES, 1998; Terenzini et al, 1995; York-Anderson & Bowman, 1991) to understand the external world of first generation college students and the many obstacles they encountered. This study focused on the "internal" world of first generation community college students. This is an area that has not been fully explored. Current research on first generation college students has begun to explore this internal world. The findings of McGregor, Mayleben, Buzzanga, Davis, and Becker (1991) indicated that these students tend to feel less socially accepted and have lower self-esteem. Pratt and Skaggs (1989) and Riehl (1994) concluded that first generation college students often perceived their academic abilities to be lower than their counterparts. Research has also claimed that these students have a lower sense of self-efficacy than students whose parents attended college (Hellman, 1996).

Furthermore, Terenzini et al. (994) claimed that first generation college students need more academic validation. Academic validation is defined as assurance that the student is capable of learning and succeeding at college. Conversely, non-first generation college students are more concerned with social validation which implies making friends and fitting in socially at college. Terenzini et al's research suggested internal factors such as motivation may play a role in persistence and resilience.

There are two areas that the current research does not adequately cover. One is the success factors that drive students toward success. The other is the internal factors that play a part in their success. Understanding the success factors in students who achieve their academic goals could provide insight into ways that educators could stimulate those same factors in other students.

Also, resilience and persistence theories can be useful frameworks in bridging the gaps in current research because they address important factors that contribute to a student's academic success. Current research in higher education needs to further expand the knowledge in this area. Specifically, research needs to explore the concept of resilience as it relates to particular populations in education. Resilience is defined as "the ability to thrive, mature, and increase competence in the face of adverse circumstances...remaining competent by drawing upon individual characteristics and environmental factors despite chronic or severe adversity" (Gordon & Coscarelli, 1996, p.15).

Persistence is a key factor in understanding why some students succeed and some do not. Two of the most utilized student development theories are Astin's (1984) student involvement theory and Tinto's (1987) model of institution departure. These theories

provided some concepts useful in understanding the experiences of first generation college students at the community college.

Although Astin (1984) and Tinto (1989) provided a framework for understanding what contributed to students persisting in higher education, their research can be expanded upon. Astin's and Tinto's works focused mainly on environmental factors that contributed to students' academic persistence. In addition to these factors, educators also need to know the story behind the student in order to help the student create the next successful chapter in their lives. Why would students integrate into an institution? It is crucial that educators understand what students bring to their academic experience as well as the environmental factors that may influence their success. It is important to investigate both sides of a students' academic experience as they may be crucial in maximizing a students' chances of academic success.

It is important to understand how resilience is fostered by certain experiences both personal and educational. The students' experiences are the very heart of their inner worlds. That resilience which is manifested in their inner drive ultimately influences the students' academic and social integration, and the ability to overcome external obstacles.

Another theory that provides insight into this area is the resilience theory. Kumpfer (1999) provided a comprehensive framework to better understand and organize the factors related to resilience. Her framework and research in the area of resilience may contribute to the exploration of low-income, first generation community college students. Educators need to understand what personal and environmental factors contribute to the development and attainment of resilience to help aspiring students persist and meet their academic goals.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of resilience in first generation college students who successfully complete their academic goals. Focusing on low-income students at an urban community college, this study extended previous research (Brooks-Terry, 1998; ERI & IHEP, 1997; Hsaio, 1992; Inman & Mayes, 1999; McGregor et al., 1991; NCES, 1998; Pratt & Skaggs, 1989; Riehl, 1994; Terenzini et al, 1995; York-Anderson & Bowman, 1991) by exploring the resilience attributes associated with resilience in first generation college students as they might contribute to student academic success.

This study also explored the personal and educational experiences that may contribute to the attainment and development of these students' educational resilience. In exploring these experiences, this study investigated possible relationships between these experiences and students' meeting their academic goals.

Lastly, this study investigated recommendations and suggestions of low-income, first generation community college students who have successfully completed their academic goals. These responses focused on creating action to improve the possibility for their peers to meet their academic goals and dreams successfully.

This qualitative study was exploratory in nature. Dialogues with students were utilized to examine the role of resilience in the persistence and academic success of these students in a community college setting. Furthermore, this study explored how environmental factors affect their reported experiences and influence the development of resilience attributes as they relate to success.

Research Questions

The following research questions constitute the essential issues explored in this study:

1. What resilience attributes do low-income, first generation community college students identify as contributing to their academic success?

2. What educational experiences have contributed to the attainment and development of these resilience attributes?

3. What personal experiences have contributed to the attainment and development of these resilience attributes?

4. What recommendations do these low-income, first generation community college students have for others?

Theoretical Framework

This section focuses on theories relevant to the central research questions. The following theories are discussed: Student development theories (Astin, 1984; Tinto, 1987) and resilience theory (Kumpfer, 1999). These theories contributed to the understanding of students in higher education, and shed light on important factors that contributed to and hindered the academic success of students. Astin's (1984) Student Involvement Theory suggested that the more involved a student is the greater the amount of personal growth and persistence that will develop. He defined student involvement as the "quantity and quality of the physical and psychological energy that students invest in the college experience" (p. 307). Astin claimed that the more the students are involved in these institutional activities and resources, the higher the chance that they will persist in the institution. On the other hand, their lack of involvement would result in their not

persisting in the institution. Astin's theory presented an example of how a student's experiences might be closely linked to the internal state of the student. It is important to note that Astin's model defined "involvement" in behavioral, not in experiential terms. This study examined the experiences and role of resilience with first generation college students. It addressed the question, why would a student be motivated to spend more time being involved?

In addition, Tinto's (1987, 1993) Model of Institutional Departure had two primary foci: academic and social integration. According to Tinto, the institution has two primary communities that students must access and integrate into in order to increase their likelihood of persisting. Academic integration encompasses the formal classroom educational experience and academic performance of the student. Social integration involves the interaction and satisfaction with peers, faculty, and staff outside the classroom which includes extracurricular activities. Astin's (1984) and Tinto's (1987, 1993) student development theories are important in understanding how students persist in higher education. These student development theories describe the external events and behaviors which contribute to a student's persistence in higher education. They do suggest that the experience of involvement breeds more involvement and therefore more persistence.

First generation college students have many obstacles as well as attributes or qualities which affect their experience in education. Although they encounter many obstacles in higher education, many do persist and achieve their academic goals. In understanding these students, it is important to explore the role of resilience. Some of the key characteristics of resilience are: (a) Positive peer and adult interaction, (b) high level

of participation, (c) high self-efficacy, (d) active goal-directed behavior, and (e) an internal locus of control (a belief that they contribute to their successes and failures) (Garmezy, 1991).

Research (Garmezy, 1991; McMillian & Reed, 1994) has shown that successful students displayed qualities of resilience, a positive sense of self, and self-efficacy. Given the many obstacles first generation college students encountered, the ones who were able to persist displayed some type of resilience. Wang, Haertel, and Walberg (1994) defined educational resilience as "the heightened likelihood of success in school and in other life accomplishments, despite environmental adversities, brought about by earlier traits, conditions, and experiences" (p. 46). This definition was based on comprehensive research on urban youth and the role of resilience in their lives. Given this definition, first generation college students also had experiences which contributed to or inhibited the development of resilience in their lives.

Resilience has proven to be a complex and elusive construct. This is partially due to its various definitions, and the numerous factors which contribute to its development or subversion. Due to the complexities of resilience, Kumpfer (1999) developed a comprehensive resilience framework to better incorporate and organize the multiple factors related to resilience.

The basis of Kumpfer's (1999) framework stems from a comprehensive analysis of resilience research. Her resilience framework not only addressed the factors that contribute to resilience, but also contained the interactional process between the individual and his/her environment. This resilience framework included:

1. Environmental precursors commonly called risk and protective factors;
2. Characteristics of the resilient person; and

> 3. His/Her resilient reintegration or positive outcome after a negative life experience as well as dynamic processes that mediate between the person and their environment and the person and the outcome (p. 180)

Kumpfer's (1999) resilience framework is divided into six major domains which are viewed as predictors of resilience (See Figure 1). Kumpfer wrote, "All six of these major cluster variables or constructs are needed to organize predictors of resilient outcomes in high-risk youth because research studies have reviewed these different constructs as predictive of resilience in an individual" (p. 184). Kumpfer claimed that the resilience process begins with some type of stimuli such as a stressor or challenge. The challenge encountered by the individual will disrupt their environment (i.e., school, family).

The second domain is the environmental context. According to Kumpfer (1999), this domain has a profound impact on the individual's resilience process. She maintained that the individual's environment (school, peer group, community, family, culture) influences the development of potential risk and protective factors. For example, if an individual is encountering academic stressors or challenges in school, their environment will shield or exaggerate the impact of the stressful situation.

The third domain is the first of two transactional points in Kumpfer's (1999) resilience framework. It is the person-environment transactional process which is the interaction between the individual and his or her environment. At this stage, Kumpfer's framework attempts to show "the ways that people consciously or unconsciously modify their environment or selectively perceive their environment" (p. 191). In other words, how do individuals in high risk environments develop more protective and successful

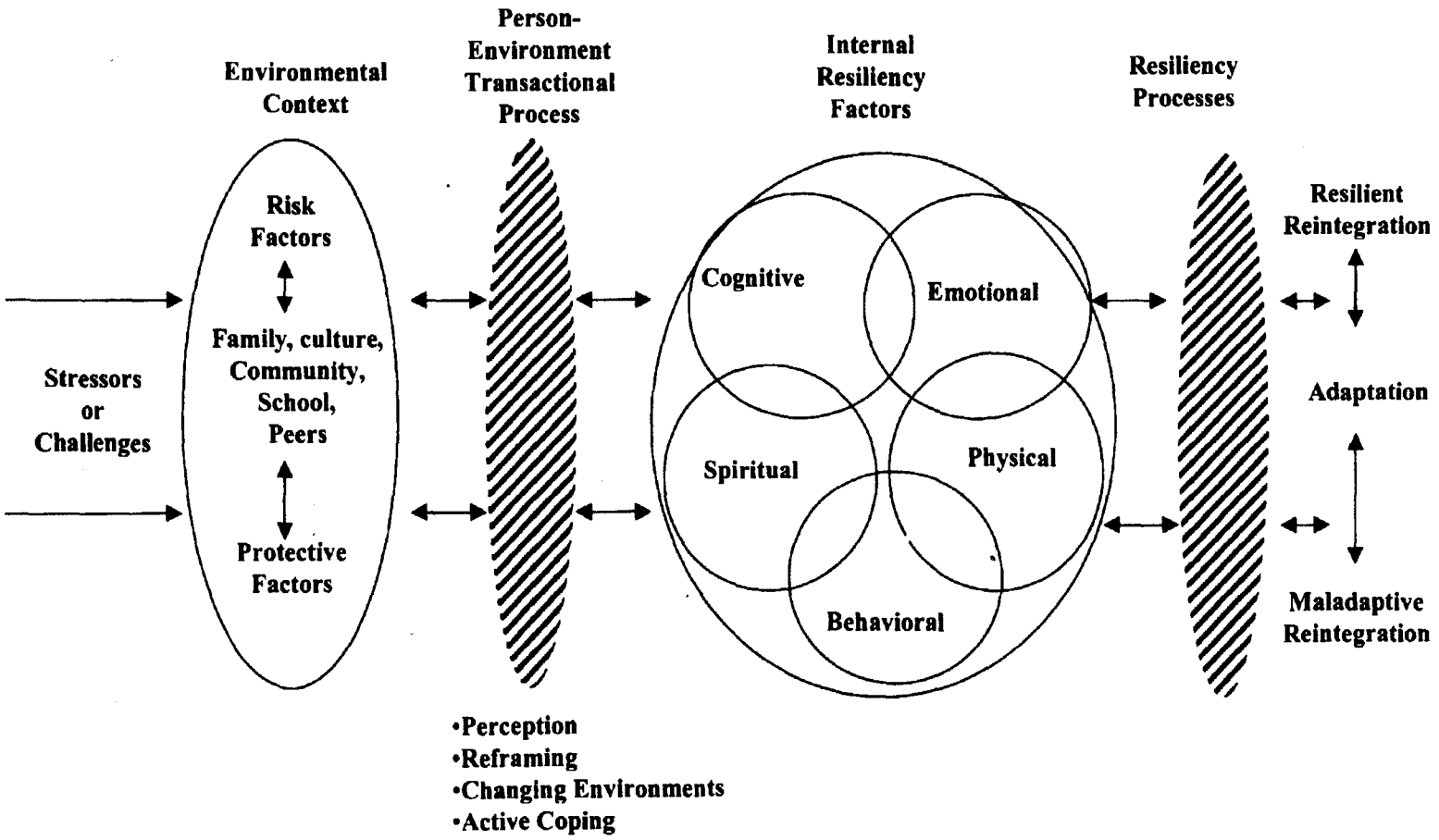

Figure 1. Kumpfer's resilience framework (Kumpfer, 1999, p. 185)
Note. From *Resilience and Development: Positive Life Adaptations* (p. 185), by M.D. Glantz and J.L. Johnson (Eds), 1999, New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers.

environments? Kumpfer (1999) indicated some ways individuals can develop protective environments including: (a) selective perceptions, (b) cognitive reframing, (c) planning and dreaming, (d) identification and attachment with prosocial people, (e) active environmental modifications by the youth, and (f) active coping.

The fourth domain is internal resilience factors or self characteristics of the resilient individual. Research (Bernard, 1991; Garmezy, 1991; Graham, 1989; Masten, 1994; McMillian & Reed, 1994; Rutter, 1987; Werner & Smith, 1992; Winfield, 1991) has demonstrated there are resilience factors or traits in the areas of spiritual, cognitive, behavior/social skills, emotional stability/management, and physical well-being that are affiliated with individuals being successful in challenging or stressful situations (See Figure 2). According to this resilience framework, competencies in these areas are necessary to be successful in varying environments (Kumpfer, 1999).

Some internal characteristics of a resilient individual are (a) high intrinsic motivation or internal locus of control (Graham, 1989; McMillian & Reed, 1994; Werner & Smith, 1992), (b) a sense of purpose and future (Bernard, 1991; McMillian & Reed, 1994), (c) a basic willingness or ability to trust others outside the family structure who can help them (Garmezy, 1991, McMillian & Reed, 1994), and (d) self-efficacy (Garmezy, 1991; Rutter, 1987; Mastin, 1994; Winfield, 1991).

The fifth domain which is the second of two transactional points in Kumpfer's (1999) resilience framework is resilience processes. This is the interaction between the internal characteristics of the individual and the final result or outcome. This domain is particularly crucial to the development of resilience. It includes resilience or coping processes that the individual has acquired due to incremental exposure to increasingly

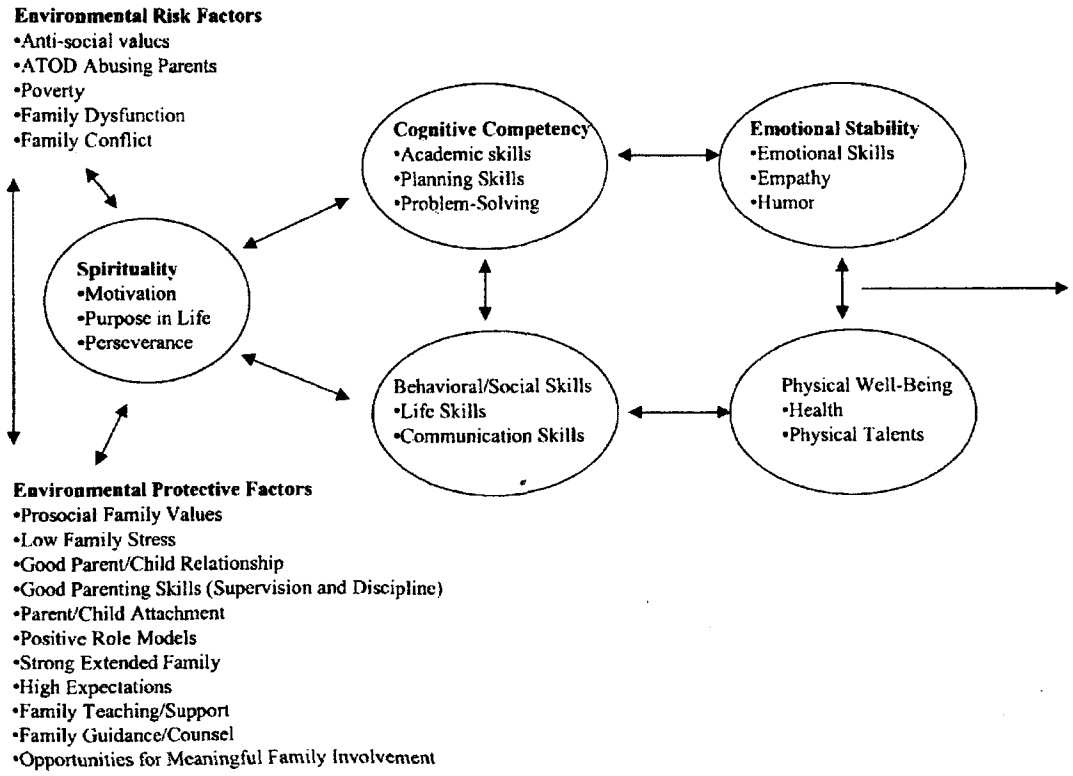

Figure 2. Internal resilience characteristics.

Note. From *Resilience and Development: Positive Life Adaptations* (p. 196), by M.D. Glantz and J.L. Johnson (Eds), 1999, New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers.

challenging events. Kumpfer suggested that the development of these resilience or coping strategies assists the person to display resilient reintegration also known as the ability to 'bounce-back'.

The last domain in Kumpfer's (1999) resilience framework is the point at which the individual hopefully adapts positively to his or her environment. This adaptation phase results in positive outcomes which indicate the individual as successfully adapted to a life challenge or stressor. This in turn will nourish positive outcomes despite future

negative life events or obstacles. The individual has displayed and developed resilient reintegration and is ultimately viewed as resilient.

Kumpfer (1999) provided a comprehensive framework for understanding the concept and process of resilience. This study explored the role of resilience in first generation college students' successful completion of their academic goals at a community college. In doing so, this study utilized both Astin's (1984) and Tinto's (1987) student development theories and Kumpfer's resilience framework to determine how first generation college students meet their academic goals and dreams. It explored the perceptions, experiences, and world views of students themselves.

Significance of the Study

It is important for educators to understand more than just the environmental contexts of first generation college students. The internal world of these students is important. Educators must understand what first generation college students bring to their journey in higher education and nurture those attributes which contribute to their academic success.

This study intended to shed light on the personal and educational experiences of successful first generation college students. More importantly, this study explored how these experiences foster resilience attributes in students' educational lives. The ultimate benefit of this study is that it provided information that may enable educators to develop programs, services, and curriculum that will improve academic performance in first generation college students. To date, most programs have focused only on selected environmental contexts to support these students (i.e., tutoring, financial assistance, academic advising). Although these programs provide some support for these students,

few programs exist that address their internal worlds. This gap in services creates an exciting opportunity to reach a significant number of students who are currently struggling in their educational journey.

Delimitations of the Study

The sample for this study was limited to students who participated in Extended Opportunity Programs & Services (EOPS). Students who do not participate and/or qualify for EOPS may differentiate from the sample for this study. Also, this study was conducted at one urban community college. Low-income, first generation community college students at City College of San Francisco may differ from other students with similar backgrounds at other urban community colleges. Lastly, the participants in this study completed 60 or more units by the end of the Spring 2003 semester. Students with lower levels of units may have different experience than students with more higher education experience.

Limitations of the Study

The nature of participatory research places the emphasis on the individual, and how he/she experiences their environment. In other words, the narratives focused on the distinctive experiences of the participants. With this in mind, it would not be appropriate to generalize these findings to the large group of low-income, first generation community college students.

Definition of Terms

Academically successful college students: Students who have completed academic goal(s) at the community college such as an Associate's degree, vocational certificate, or general education and major requirements for transfer to a four-year institution.

Community college programs: Programs that include associate degrees and transfer programs, work training and retraining programs, and occupational certificates.

First generation college students: There have been several definitions of first generation college students presented in the literature. They include the following: Neither parent had completed a college degree (Willet, 1989); first member of family to attend higher education (Inman & Hayes, 1999; Terenzini et al, 1994; York-Anderson & Bowman, 1991); and student's parents had no college experience (Billson & Terry, 1982; Brooks-Terry, 1988; McGregor et al., 1991; Pratt & Skaggs, 1989; Riehl, 1994). For the purpose of this study, first generation college students will be defined as students who are the first in their family to attend college and their parents have no college experience.

Generative themes: The investigation of communities' meaningful thematics through a dialogical process. This involves investigating the communities' reality and "the level at which they perceive that reality, and their view of their world, in which their generative themes are found" (Freire, 1999, p. 97).

Low-income students: Students who are eligible for State Board of Governor's Fee Waiver (BOGW). This State program is designed to ensure that the fee policies of the California Community Colleges are not a financial barrier to education for California Residents. The current income standards for BOGW eligibility are an adjustable gross

income of $12,525 for one person and $25,575 for a family of four. The income standards vary depending on family size.

Resilience: "the ability to thrive, mature, and increase competence in the face of adverse circumstances.....remaining competent by drawing upon individual characteristics and environmental factors despite chronic or severe adversity" (Gordon & Coscarelli, 1996, p. 15).

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The review of the literature is divided into three sections. The first section is a discussion of the theoretical framework that is pertinent to the major research questions. This section focuses on the following: student development theories that center on student involvement, and relate to social and academic integration, and resilience theory. The second section explores research on the environmental contexts relevant to students who are the first in their families to attend college. The research in this area concentrates on the background and history of the community college environment, and how low-income students experience higher education. The third section addresses the literature related to first generation colleges students and their external and internal worlds. This research focuses on two main areas: transitioning to college, and performance in college.

Theories Relevant to the Major Research Questions

This section discusses the theoretical framework that is pertinent to the major research questions. The following student development theories are discussed: Astin's (1984) student involvement theory and Tinto's (1987) model of institutional departure. Next, Kumpfer's resilience theory is discussed. Kumpfer's (1999) resilience theory is presented in three major sections: (a) environmental precursors, (b) characteristics of a resilient person, and (c) resilient reintegration.

Student Development Theories

Student Involvement Theory

Astin's (1984) student involvement theory suggested that the more involved a student is in his/her educational environment, the greater the amount of personal growth and persistence that will develop. He defined student involvement as the "quantity and quality of the physical and psychological energy that students invest in the college experience" (p. 307). Some examples of involvement are the amount of time students dedicate to studying, interacting with faculty and other students, participating in campus clubs and organization, and staying on campus. Astin claimed that the more the students are involved in these institutional activities and resources, the greater the chance they will persist in the institution. On the other hand, their lack of involvement would result in greater chances that they would not persist in the institution.

Astin's (1984) student involvement theory stemmed from his longitudinal study which investigated the effects of campus environment factors on college drop-outs. Astin (1975) concluded that students who worked full-time, participated in non-academic activities, and attended a community college were less likely to be involved on campus. This resulted in lower persistence rates for these students. Persistence rates were much greater for students who were in school full-time, lived on campus, interacted with faculty and other students, participated in campus activities, and studied hard.

Model of Institutional Departure

Tinto's (1987, 1993) model of institutional departure had two primary foci: academic and social integration. According to Tinto, the institution has two primary worlds that students must access and integrate into in order to increase their likelihood of persisting. In order to persist, students must integrate into one or both of these communities. Academic integration encompasses the formal classroom educational

experience and academic performance of the student. Social integration involves the interaction and satisfaction with peers, faculty, and staff outside the classroom. This includes extracurricular activities. He wrote, "All things being equal, the greater the contact among students, the more likely individuals are to establish social and intellectual membership in the social communities of the college and therefore the more likely they are to remain in college" (p. 117). He claimed the greater the student's integration, both social and academic, the greater the possibility for persistence. Integration is measured by the amount of satisfaction a student experiences during his/her interaction at a given institution.

Tinto (1987) advanced the notion that as students negotiate the educational environment, their experiences can have a positive or negative impact on their goals. This may result in their persistence or withdrawal from an institution. He concluded that students who persist are more likely to have had positive experiences in the academic and social aspects of their college life (i.e., they were more academically and socially integrated). Students who withdraw are more likely to have had negative experiences in the academic and social aspects of their college life (i.e., they were less academically and socially integrated).

Astin's (1984) and Tinto's (1987, 1993) student persistence theories are important in understanding how students persist in higher education. According to these student persistence theories, first generation college students would have a high degree of attrition given the many obstacles they encounter. In addition to these obstacles, Terenzini et al. (1995) concluded that first generation college students were less involved with teachers and student groups in high school, and entered college with lower reading,

math, and critical thinking skills. They were also more likely to work full-time and work off campus (NCES, 1998). This makes it even more difficult for them to persist, and achieve their academic goals.

Resilience Theory

Overview of Resilience

Garmezy (1991) and McMillian and Reed (1994) indicated that resilience is a central quality that many successful students display. McMillan and Reed (1994) reflected on research that looked at factors that contribute to the academic success of students. They concluded that in the face of what appears to be impossible obstacles and adversities, a number of students are successful in developing characteristics and protective strategies that facilitate success. These individuals are able to adapt to the stresses and obstacles they encounter (McMillan & Reed, 1994).

Masten (1994) explained the importance of the concept of resilience: "The rationale for examining resilience phenomena rests on the fundamental assumption that understanding how individuals overcome challenges to development and recover from trauma will reveal processes of adaptation that can guide intervention efforts with others at risk" (p. 3).

Despite over two decades of research, the construct of resilience appears to be elusive. Resilience includes multifaceted and assorted phenomena. To further understand resilience, research in this area must include various viewpoints and disciplines. Wang, Haertel, and Walberg (1994) observed,

> The construct of resilience has been studied for nearly two decades by psychiatrists, clinical psychologists, developmental psychologists, and other mental health professionals. Originally, their research focused on identifying the characteristics and attributes of children who were resilient. Over time, the focus

> of this research shifted to determining the protective mechanisms and processes that foster resilience. (p. 65)

Kumpfer's Resilience Framework

The focus of this section of the literature review is to explore the current theories around resilience. This section is organized using Kumpfer's (1999) resilience framework.

According to Kumpfer (1999), to initiate a resilience situation one must encounter a challenge or stressor. These events can be both planned and unplanned by the individual. The essence of resilience is learning from these events and developing coping strategies from these potentially negative events. First generation college students have numerous challenges and stressors, unlike their non-first generation counterparts, while engaging in the higher education process. Given these challenges, students who are the first in their families to negotiate higher education and meet their academic goals could be viewed as resilient.

Due to the complexities of resilience, Kumpfer (1999) developed a comprehensive resilience framework to better incorporate and organize the multiple factors related to resilience. The basis of her framework stemmed from a thorough analysis of resilience research. Kumpfer's resilience framework not only addressed the factors that contribute to resilience, it contained the interactional process between the individual and environment. This resilience framework includes:

> 1. Environmental precursors commonly called risk and protective factors,
> 2. Characteristics of the resilient person, and
> 3. Resilient reintegration: a positive outcome after a negative life experience as well as dynamic processes that mediate between the person and their environment and the person and the outcome. (p. 180)

Environmental precursors. It is difficult to determine whether an individual is

resilient due to an innate genetic make-up, their environmental factors, or both. Although much research describes resilient children by a set of characteristics, Kumpfer (1999) hesitated to focus primarily on these characteristics because it may have lead educators to believe they had no effect or control in the development of resilience in a child's life.

Brohnfenbrenner (1986), Garmezy (1991), Kumpfer (1999), and Werner and Smith (1989) acknowledged that resilient children do share numerous internal characteristics. They also assert that these internal characteristics can be fostered by an assortment of environmental situations and interventions. Researchers often utilize the concept of protective factors to describe conditions, situations, or traits which positively affect one's internal characteristics. Protective factors enable individuals to evade or modify negative life events to enable a more positive life outcome.

Based on the analysis of numerous longitudinal studies and cross-sectional research, Masten (1994) suggested that the following set of factors seem to play a major role in the resilience of individual children and adolescents in a multitude of situations:

1. Effective parenting;
2. Connections to other competent adults;
3. Appeal to other people, particularly adults;
4. Good intellectual skills;
5. Areas of talent or accomplishment valued by self and others;
6. Self efficacy, self-worth, and hopefulness;
7. Religious faith or affiliations;
8. Socioeconomic advantages;
9. Good schools and other community assets; and
10. Good fortune. (p. 14)

The individual's environment influences his or her risk and resilience processes. One's environment such as school, family characteristics, peer group, community, and socio-economic background affect one's stressor or challenge (Kumpfer, 1999). This can

be either a cushioning or aggravating effect.

The conference on Community Violence and Children's Development had two primary foci: (a) to explore findings that demonstrate risk behaviors of children who live in poverty and (b) to identify protective factors displayed by youth who live in adverse environments. As a result of the conference, Garmezy (1993) asserted that resilient youth are individuals who locate support within high risk environments. High risk environments are often defined by demographic factors such as socio-economic status and minority status. The environmental context of stressors and supports can assist an individual through psychosocial facilitation processes (Kumpfer, 1999).

Furthermore, Dunst as cited in (Kumpfer, 1999) suggested that expanding one's protective factors could ease high risk environments. Rutter (1993) further supported this finding by asserting that what is crucial to one's survival is the protective factors one attains and develops versus the high risk environment.

Research suggests that knowing a student's protective factors as well as increasing those factors may enhance the likelihood that the student will successfully adapt. In forming a developmental model to describe facets of adolescent drug use, Brook, Brook, Gordon, Whitman, and Cohen (1990) administered questionnaires to 649 college students and their parents. One of the major conclusions from this study was that the balance between stressful life events and protective factors was more crucial than the number of stresses in the individual's life.

In addition to knowing what environmental factors influence a student's academic success, it is necessary to grasp how students in high risk circumstances develop more protective and successful environments. How do students interact with their environment

to form more conducive and fruitful environs?

According to Kumpfer (1999), interactional processes that assist individuals shift a high-risk environment to a more protective environment. These processes include:

1. selective perception;
2. cognitive reframing;
3. planning and dreaming;
4. identification and attachment with prosocial people; and
5. active environmental modification and active coping.

Kumpfer (1999) also asserted that prosocial and caring individuals identified by resilient youth provided positive socialization and life adaptations by role-modeling, teaching, advice giving, empathetic and emotionally responsive caring, creating opportunities for creative involvement, effective supervising and disciplining, and creating reasonable developmental expectations.

Duran (1998) conducted a retrospective study of academic resilience in successful Latino students. In his study, he explored the external factors which fostered academic resilience in a rural California community. The study concluded that parents as well as "educational brokers" were instrumental in encouraging educational resilience for the participants. Thus, this research suggests that identifying key interactional processes which facilitate first generation college students to shift to a more protective and supportive environment may prove to be beneficial to these students.

Characteristics of a resilient person. Research that focuses on children who are successful despite experiencing adverse environments has concluded that they share similar characteristics. Some of the key characteristics of resilience are set forth by

Garmezy (1991): (a) Positive peer and adult interaction, (b) high level of participation, (c) high self efficacy, (d) active goal-directed behavior, (e) an internal locus of control (a belief that they contribute to their successes and failures).

One study by Werner and Smith (1989) assessed children's behaviors and the environmental factors that affected each child. The study followed the children over eighteen years. The researchers concluded that successful and resilient children shared the following characteristics: active problem solving ability, facility to maintain a vision of a meaningful life, aptitude to be flexible and adaptive, and the capability to understand their negative experiences as positive. This study was reinforced by Rak and Patterson (1996) who synthesized longitudinal studies that have identified protective factors in the areas of personality, familial, and other environmental dynamics that encourage resilience. They concluded, in addition to the above findings, that resilient children have the ability to be alert and autonomous and have a tendency to seek novel experiences.

Kumpfer (1999) organized these internal resilience factors into five major clusters:

1. Spiritual or motivational characteristics,
2. Cognitive competences,
3. Behavior and social competencies,
4. Emotional competencies, and
5. Physical well-being.

Spiritual or motivational characteristics consist of the belief systems which contribute to the nurturing for motivation and focus of the individual. The ability of an individual to dream and create new possibilities for one's self is important in overcoming

unfavorable situations. Quinton, Pickeles, Maughan, and Rutter (1993) studied youth who were raised in children's homes and displayed conduct problems. They asserted that more resilient youth displayed planning behavior which is a general tendency to forethought. This was supported by Rutter and Quinton (1994) who concluded that resilient children living in negative environments maintained the internal ability to hope and dream. Bernard (1991) reviewed key protective factors which foster the growth of resilience in at risk youth. She asserted that a child's ability to hope for and aspire to a better future is reflective of the child's ability to find meaning or purpose in one's life.

In the midst of a high risk environment, resilient individuals are capable of seeing themselves outside their bleak surroundings and find alternate positive outcomes for themselves. As cited in Kumpfer (1999), Neiger conducted a study of college students in South Carolina and concluded that individuals who displayed resilience maintained life purpose (Kumpfer, 1999). This was reinforced by Bernard (1991) and Dunn (1994), who also concluded purpose in life was a protective factor related to resilience.

In order for the resilient individuals to maintain their goals and purpose in life, research has suggested that determination and perseverance contribute to their success. In her longitudinal study on resilient offspring of alcoholics, Werner (1986) indicated that resilient individuals often display characteristics of determination.

Studies revealed that resilient individuals have a high sense of locus of control (Garmezy, 1991; Werner, 1986; Werner & Smith, 1992). In Luther's (1991) examination of inner-city youth and socially competent behavior, she concluded that youth labeled as resilient maintained an internal locus of control and displayed less stress. Internal locus of control is the belief or perception that one can affect one's situation both presently and

in the future. External locus of control is the belief or perception that one has no influence or control in one's situation which often results in a sense of powerlessness over one's situation. Kumpfer (1999) stated, "Possibly, one of the most powerful predictors of positive life adaptation against environmental odds is a sense of powerfulness and an ability to modify one's negative life circumstances through direct actions or soliciting help from others" (p.200). These findings revealed that resilient individuals display an array of motivational characteristics which contribute to their ability to negotiate high risk environments or situations successfully.

Kumpfer (1999) suggested that there are cognitive competences pertinent to resilient individuals. Cognitive competences demonstrate one's ability to analyze and reflect on one's situation and options. The ability to make plans for one's future as well as understand the potential outcome for decisions is essential in negotiating unfavorable situations. Rutter and Quinton (1994) found that resilient high risk youth are more likely to display the ability to plan, as well as the ability to problem solve. This behavior provides the individual with direction and effective problem-solving ability provides the aptitude to assess the positive and negative consequences of decisions. The ability to plan and the ability to problem solve leads to behavioral competencies. Once an individual utilized the ability to plan, he or she needs to act on the decisions he or she has made. Behavioral competencies displayed by resilient individuals are seen through their problem solving ability (Rutter & Quinton, 1994).

Subsequently, social competencies are characteristics found in resilient individuals. Demos (1989) and Werner and Smith (1992) concluded that resilient individuals displayed involvement in relationships and elicited positive responses from

their relationships. Specifically, Werner and Smith (1992) conducted a longitudinal study on resilient children and youth who were raised in constant poverty and by parent(s) with a limited degree of education. They concluded that these resilient children displayed positive social orientation, strong social competence and elicited positive social responses for their caregivers.

Furthermore, due to resilient individuals' high social capabilities, they are more likely to utilize social support to shield stressful environments or situations (Garmezy, 1991). Rutter (1987) investigated mechanisms that psychologically guard individuals in adverse conditions. He asserted that the ability to access and utilize supportive personal relationships is a protective process that counters high risk environments or situations. Rutter also concluded that these relationships foster higher self esteem and self efficacy. In addition, as cited in Kumpfer (1999), Wolin concluded that the ability to be flexible is found in individuals who are resilient.

Additional studies have concluded that resilient children are socially competent (Bernard, 1991; Werner & Smith, 1989). Resilient children are able to establish and maintain positive friendships with peers, elders, teachers, and mentors. In addition to developing these positive relationships, Wolin (1991) concluded that resilient individuals have other prosocial behaviors such as good communication skills.

Lastly, Kumpfer's (1999) framework suggested that resilient individuals maintain certain emotional competencies and physical well-being. Emotional competence reflects an individual's ability to be optimistic and relatively happy as opposed to being depressed, and to display a sense of hope for themselves and their future. Physical well-being refers to an individual's health and health preservation such as diet and exercise.

It is important to note that it is not the assumption of resilience research that resilient individuals must have all the resilience characteristics reflected in this review. Research has suggested only that individuals who are resilient tend to share some of these characteristics.

Resilient reintegration. Resilient reintegration is the interaction between the internal characteristics of the individual and the final outcome of a challenge or stressful event. This is particularly crucial to the development of resilience. It includes resilience or coping processes that the individual has acquired due to incremental exposure to increasingly challenging events. Kumpfer (1999) suggested that development of these resilience or coping strategies assists the person to display resilient reintegration also known as the ability to 'bounce-back'.

Positive outcomes or successful life adaptations are outcomes which indicate the individual as successfully adapted to a life challenge or stressor. This in turn will nourish positive outcomes despite future negative life events or obstacles. The individual has displayed and developed resilient reintegration and is ultimately viewed as resilient. Studies of resilience suggested that "When adversity is relieved and basic human needs are restored, then resilience had a chance to emerge. Rekindling hope may be an important spark for resilience processes to begin their restorative work" (Masten, 1994, p 21).

Environmental Contexts Related to First Generation College Students

This section further explores what research reveals about the environmental contexts relevant to students who are the first in their families to attend college. It is presented in three main divisions: (a) background and history of the community college

environment, (b) obstacles in the community college system, and (c) how low-income students experience higher education.

Background and History of the Community College Environment

In 1901, the first two-year, public community college in the United States, Joliet Junior College, opened its doors (Coley, 2000). During the first few decades of the twentieth century, two-year colleges grew in number and took the job of educating the nation's economically poor. By 1920, there were more than 200 two-year colleges (Cohen & Brawer, 1982).

Currently, the two-year community college system enrolls over 10.5 million students in both credit and non-credit courses and consists of roughly 1600 institutions nationwide (Coley, 2000). California contains the largest community college system in the nation with over 1.1 million students (American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), 1998).

According to Shaw, Rhoads, and Valdez (1999),

> Community colleges are positioned to play a critical role in the process of upward mobility in American Society. While higher education traditionally has been the realm of the white and middle class, over the past 30 years the poor, the working-class, and ethnic and racial minorities have enjoyed increased access to postsecondary education, largely through the doors of community colleges. (p.1)

Cohen and Brawer (1989) and Shaw, Rhoads, and Valdez (1999) asserted community colleges have advanced with the mission of providing the masses with access to higher education. In exploring the experience of minority students with higher education, Richardson and Bender (1991) affirmed that community colleges' open door policy provides an optional path to postsecondary education for America's working-class,

minorities, and immigrant student populations.

The community college population is one of the most diverse student populations in higher education and is becoming more diverse. Its population is different from four-year institutions in that it consists of more minorities, older students, women, students enrolled part-time, and more students from lower socio-economic status (AACC, 1998; Cohen & Brawer, 1989; Dougherty, 1994; Roueche & Roueche, 1994).

Dougherty (1994) concluded that 10 % of community college students have family incomes below $15,000. Thirty-seven percent of students are more than 30 years old and 22 percent are minorities. These findings are not reflective of the student population in four-year institutions. The AACC (1998) study supported the above results by concluding students who begin in community colleges tend to be older and more racially diverse compared to students in four-year institutions.

According to the NCES (1989), community colleges enroll more minorities, more students who are the first in their immediate family to attend college, and great numbers of lower income students compared to four-year institutions. Currently 53% of community college students earn incomes below the national poverty line.

Additionally, most first generation college students begin their college experience at the community college (London, 1992; Rendon, 1994; Richardson & Skinner, 1992; Willet, 1989). Richardson and Skinner (1992) conducted 107 in-depth interviews with underrepresented minority students who completed their degree at public universities. They concluded that 60 % of first generation college students began their academic careers at the community college. Furthermore, the study asserted that the community college system significantly contributed to the students' obtaining their baccalaureates.

These conclusions were supported by Willet (1989), who administered surveys to students at four community colleges. Willet's finding indicated that 80 % of the students surveyed were first generation college students.

Lastly, Kojaku and Nunez (1998) investigated the behaviors and characteristics of first-year postsecondary students as they relate to persistence and degree attainment. They concluded that institutions with programs lasting two years or less had 52 % of their populations as first-generation college students dissimilar to four-year institutions which had 35 %. These finding suggested that as the level of education offered by an institution increased, the number of first generation college students decreased.

Obstacles in the Community College System

Although the research previously cited suggests that the community college system serves more ethnically diverse and low socio-economic status students (Dougherty, 1994; Hetherington, 1995), it has also been suggested that the community college system is failing this population due to low transfer rates and high dropout rates (Shaw et al., 1999).

Many community college students embark on the higher education journey with the goal of transferring to a four-year university and earning a baccalaureate degree. Nonetheless, research has indicated that community college students are considerably less likely to receive a baccalaureate degree compared to students who start their educational process at a four- year institution (Dougherty, 1987; Grubb, 1991; Richardson & Bender, 1987). Dougherty (1987) critically synthesized research determine the effects of community colleges on socioeconomic attainment. Dougherty concluded that four-year college students had a higher level of educational and economic

attainment compared to baccalaureate hopefuls starting at a community college.

As cited by Tinto (1993), research conducted by the American College Testing Program in 1992 (see Table 1) indicated that a majority of student attrition occurs during the first year of college. The study found that community colleges had higher attrition rate compared to four-year institutions. In 1992, of all the entering students at the community college, there was a departure rate of 54.2 % compared to a 28.5 % departure rate at four-year institutions. Of the students who did not leave their schools after the first year, 38.7 % of community college students completed their degree goals, compared to 50.2 % of students who completed degrees at four-year institutions.

Table 1

Estimated Institutional Rates of First-Year Attrition for All Entering Students (1992 ACT Survey)

Institutional Type	All Entrants (%)
Four-year public	30.0
Four-year private	25.4
Four-Year Total	28.5
Two-year public	54.2
Two-year private	29.6
Two-Year Total	49.6

Note. From *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition (revised ed.),* by V. Tinto, 1993, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

In their study of urban community colleges and universities, Richardson and Bender (1991) concluded that the following factors contribute to the non-completion of associate degrees and low transfer rates: financial pressures, conflict between long term academic goals and short term occupational goals, low levels of academic preparation, and unfamiliarity with the postsecondary educational system. The research indicated that these factors affected the academic success and options for these students.

The lack of student involvement and overwhelming commitments outside of their educational world affect community college students' chances for success in higher education. Dougherty (1994) concluded that community college students were less likely to have contact with peers and faculty outside of the academic classroom, less likely to be involved in extracurricular activities, and were more likely to have more obligations beyond their academic commitments compared to their counterparts at four-year institutions.

Furthermore, Wies (1985), London (1978), and Rhoads and Valadez (1996) suggested that community college students' values may conflict with the values of their educational institutions. Utilizing an ethnographic methodology with black students in a large urban community college, Weis (1985) asserted that elements of black student culture often conflict with each other and the educational process. For example, students often reject and accept education at the same time. Community college students' values are influenced by a set of experiences that are very different from those of traditional students, and very different from most educational institutions.

The above research provides a summary of the various obstacles the community college student encounters in higher education. It is important to go beyond these studies and better understand the full richness and intricacy of the educational experience from the viewpoint of a community college student (Trujillo & Diaz, 1999). In discussing community college students, Shaw et al (1999) explained:

> The lives of community college students are, in many ways, defined by complexity. In contrast to more "traditional" college students, community college students are more likely to be employed either part- or full-time; to have spouses, children, or both; and financial or logistical difficulties that make attending college a difficult endeavor. In fact, for many students, community college attendance often represents a real attempt to improve their social status. (p. 153)

Low-income Students' Experience in Higher Education

As the number of community colleges increased, it was abundantly evident that the population attending two-year colleges was primarily composed of low-income college students. Levine (1986) cited a study conducted in 1929 on the California community college system which concluded that there were three times more low income students in two-year schools than four-year schools.

Levine and Nidiffer (1996) claimed the following about students with low socio-economic backgrounds:

> To put it succinctly, the odds of a poor student attending a community college are considerably higher than the odds of the same student enrolling in an Ivy League university or other selective college. The odds are even higher that a poor person, even one who graduates from high school, will not attend college at all. And in recent years the odds against the poor have grown increasingly larger. (p. 53)

With an annual income of $18,104 for a family of four, 32.9 million people in the United States live below the poverty level. This number represents 1.3 million people higher than the previous year. The percentage of people 18 to 64 and poor families climbed from 2000 to 2001 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2002). These numbers presents a rising trend of poverty in our nation. According to Mortenson and Wu (1990), students whose families are in the lowest-income quartile are approximately two and a half times more likely not to participate in higher education compared to families in the highest-income quartile, and even less likely to graduate if they do enroll. These trends appeared to continue and even worsen. Mortensen (2001) analyzed data from the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey (CPS). The CPS collects data on postsecondary enrollment annually. In Mortenson's analysis, he examined income level and educational progress of students by investigating high school graduation rates, college continuation, and

Bachelor's degree completion rates by age 24. He concluded the following:

1. High school graduation rates are higher in the top quartile of family income (92%), and lowest in the bottom quartile of family income (65.1%);
2. College continuation rates are higher in the top quartile of family income (81.7%) and lowest in the bottom quartile of family income (54.4%);
3. Bachelor's degree attainment rates by the age 24 are higher in the top quartile of family income (69.6%) and lowest in the bottom quartile of family income (19.5%); and
4. Bachelor's degree attainment rates by age 24 for dependent family members are higher in the top quartile of family income (52.3%) and lowest in the bottom quartile of family income (6.9%).

Therefore, a student who is in the bottom quartile of family income is 8 times less likely to complete a bachelor's degree by age 24 compared to a student who is in the top quartile of family income. Furthermore, in a longitudinal study conducted from 1992 to 2001 college participation rates for students from low-income families in California were below the national average (Postsecondary Education Opportunity, 2003).

As cited by Levine and Nidiffer (1996), President Truman's Commission on Higher Education (1947) identified five barriers to post-secondary education for the youth of America. The five barriers consisted of economics, geography, race, religion, and gender. Mortenson and Wu (1990) conducted a study from 1940 to 1989 on the college attendance and graduation rates for women, blacks, Hispanics, and low-income college students. They found that the barriers of gender, race, geography, and religion

had all declined. Although these barriers are not completely non-existent, there have been substantial improvements in attendance and graduation rates over the years.

For low-income college students, Mortenson and Wu (1990) found that their attendance rate had lessened over time. The study concluded that in 1970 an individual in the lowest income bracket had 16 percent possibility of completing a bachelor's degree compared to someone from the highest income bracket. The percentage for the lowest income group had decreased to 11 % by 1989. In 1993, the percentage had declined even further to 10 % (Mortenson, 1993).

Furthermore, when students who come from low income backgrounds do make it to higher education, they are less likely to complete their academic goals. Choy (2000) examined the characteristics of undergraduate students living below the U.S. poverty level and compared them to their counterparts who were not low-income. Choy found that: 1) 26 % of all undergraduate students were low-income and 2) low-income students were less likely to have persisted and attained a degree compared to students at higher income levels. She also concluded that as parents' educational level decreased, the number of students who were low-income increased. These finding suggest that first generation college students are more likely to be low-income.

Furthermore, as cited in Duran (1998), the National Opinion Research Center in 1981 concluded that socio-economic status affects academic progress and achievement. The study found that students from affluent families performed better on standardized tests, held elevated educational goals, progressed through school more efficiently, and achieved better academic results compared to their lower income counterparts.

Levine and Nidiffer (1996) reflected on the current conditions of the

economically poor in our nation,

> Not only is the number of poor people expanding, but the condition of poverty under which they live is becoming more permanent. The odds of mobility out of the poorest neighborhoods in America are getting slimmer and slimmer. The traditional path to economic mobility in the United States for the poor-education-is becoming less and less accessible. College costs are rising and income inequality between the rich and the poor is growing. For our country's poor, the American Dream is dying. (p. 6)

Garmezy was one of the first researchers to use the term resilience to refer to one's ability to successfully adapt despite developmental risk and adversity (Rolf, 1999). In an interview with Rolf (1999), Garmezy stated,

> My thinking now has turned toward children in poverty. When you study children who are caught up in the midst of impoverishment, you find numerous stressors in that child's environment and background.....the environment, the family, and the background all add up to generate negative events and circumstances that ordinarily would bring a child down, but in many instances do not. ...poverty is one of the greatest issues for the country to cope with. (p. 8)

First Generation College Students

The third section of the literature review is dedicated to reviewing current research on the first generation college student. The research on this student population clusters in two main areas:

1. Transitioning to College: aspects related to first generation college students transitioning to higher education, and
2. Performance in College: what happens to them once they gain entrance to higher education?

Within these two areas, the literature is divided by research focusing on the external world and internal world of these students. Research around their external world focuses on factors such as demographics, financial factors, family characteristics, and

behaviors. Research around their internal world focuses on topics related to the inner dynamics of the student.

Transitioning to College

External World

First generation college students face more challenges than students whose parents attended and completed higher education. The NCES (2001-126) summarized their findings about the experiences of recent high school graduates as well as postsecondary students whose parents did not participate in higher education. This comprehensive study concluded that students who are the first in their families to attend college are at a distinct disadvantage when it comes to postsecondary access, persistence, and degree attainment. This disadvantage persisted even after controlling for socio-economic status, age, sex, race/ethnicity, type of institution, and enrollment status. Enrollment rates for postsecondary education vary substantially depending on the parents' educational participation.

In addition, Horn and Nunez (2000) examined first generation college students by comparing their high school experiences with the experiences of non-first generation college students. They asserted that there are a multitude of factors other than first generation status which impact postsecondary enrollment, such as family income, educational expectations, academic preparation, and parental involvement. This reinforced the findings of the above research that first generation college students have distinct disadvantages.

The research reviewed in this study suggested that first generation college students' external worlds are full of obstacles that affect their road to higher education.

First generation college students tended to be from lower socio-economic groups (NCES, 1998; Zwerling & London, 1992) and members of ethnic groups (NCES, 2001-126; Zwerling & London, 1992). They had less support from their family (ERI & IHEP, 1997; Hsaio, 1992; Terenzini et al., 1995; York-Anderson & Bowman, 1991) and tended to be older, women, and single mothers (Inman & Hayes, 1999; NCES, 1998). Lastly, research indicated that first generation college students tended to be less academically prepared than traditional students (ERI & IHEP, 1997; Terenzini et al., 1995).

Terenzini et al. (1995) conducted a study as part of the three year longitudinal study of the National Study of Student Learning (NSSL). Terenzini et al. assessed 825 first generation college students and compared them to 1,860 non-first generation college students at 23 postsecondary institutions in the United States. Specifically, they studied the pre-college characteristics, college experiences, and first-year academic gains of these students. One major conclusion drawn from this longitudinal study was that first generation college students were more likely to enter college with lower reading, math, and critical thinking skills. This research was supported by ERI and IHEP (1997) which analyzed data drawn from the Census Bureau and the U.S. Department of Education. In their analysis of factors that hindered access and success in postsecondary education for low-income and minority students, they reported that first generation college students were less academically prepared for college. These findings contradicted an earlier study by Pratt and Skaggs (1989) who investigated the attrition risk of 1,035 first-time, full-time freshmen. They claimed that first generation college students and second generation students were similar in academic ability, intellectual self-confidence, and math ability. Thus, they indicated that first generation college students were not at greater risk for

attrition compared to their counterparts. But this study concluded that first generation college students doubted being academically prepared for higher education.

A comprehensive study conducted by the NCES (1998) attempted to understand first generation college students' experiences prior to enrollment in higher education. The researchers of the study found that high school completers whose parents received a bachelor's degree or higher were more likely than first generation college students to be academically prepared for admission to a four-year college. In addition, the study concluded that first generation college students obtained less assistance from their parents in preparing to enter higher education. It is possible this lack of assistance was due to their parents' lack of experience and knowledge of the complex educational system. The community colleges' open enrollment process may be more appealing to these families.

Research has suggested that the external world of first generation college students has some effect on their choice of institution to attend. Most first generation college students began their educational career in the community college system. There were a disproportionate number of first generation college students in the community college system (London, 1992; Rendon, 1994; Willet, 1989). Through an intense synthesis of statistics from the U.S. Department of Education, AACC surveys, and other current research, Phillippe & Patten (2000) developed a comprehensive profile of the American community college. They reported that approximately half of the community college population consisted of first generation college students, compared to 30-35 % in public and private four-year institutions (Phillippe & Patton, 2000).

Internal World

This review addresses the literature related to the internal world of first generation

college students as it, in turn, relates to their transition to college. The literature in this area suggested that first generation college students faced a unique set of obstacles when it came to their internal world.

Research has examined the barriers of first generation college students in their quest for academic success (Rendon, 1994). Rendon claimed these students enter higher education with an array of barriers such as intimidation of the educational system, self-doubt, fear of failure, limited academic abilities, uncertain educational goals, and fear of being perceived as incompetent. These barriers were much more pronounced for first generation college students, versus college students whose parents attended college.

This was consistent with the McGregor et al (1991) study which examined the level of self-esteem in first generation college students in comparison to the level in students whose parents attended college. He found that first generation college students retained the lowest levels of self-esteem when compared to their counterparts, who retained the highest levels of self-esteem.

In addition to first generation college students entering higher education being intimidated, and with lower belief in themselves (Inman & Mayes, 1999), research (ERI & IHEP, 1997; Hsaio, 1992; NCES, 1998; Terenzini et al, 1995; York-Anderson & Bowman, 1991) conducted has concluded that limited finances and lack of familial support also posed challenges for these students. Also, inquiries (ERI & IHEP, 1997; Hsiao, 1992; Terenzini et al., 1995; York-Anderson & Bowman, 1991) have concluded that first generation college students often perceived their parents to be less supportive of their choice to participate in higher education as well as less engaged in the process. Also, few first generation college students believed their parents value college at all (Pratt

& Skaggs, 1989).

Lastly, first generation college students entered college with a different purpose compared to students whose parents went to college. Billson and Terry (1982) surveyed and interviewed students at two liberal art colleges. They concluded that the primary reason first generation college students attended college was for career preparation. This was different from their counterparts whose parent attended college. These students attended college for personal growth. Furthermore, the NCES (1998) study indicated that first generation college students were more likely to attend college with hopes of improving financial success. This may have affected the success of first generation college students meeting their academic goals. Gillock (1999) examined the factors that affect students' adjustment and attrition during the transition to college. Her findings suggested that students who persisted place a high value on academics, not financial success.

Performance in College

This section addresses the literature relating to what happens to first generation college students once they enroll on a college campus. Due to the lack of literature examining the internal world of these students, the focus will be on their external world.

Research has consistently concluded that first generation college students were at greater risk of attrition during the first year of college (Inman & Mayes, 1999; Riehl, 1994). In their study, Inman and Mayes surveyed over five thousand first generation college students in over twelve community colleges. They claimed that few first generation college students returned to the institutions after the first year of college. Further, Billson and Terry (1982) and NCES (1998) concluded that they were less likely

to complete a degree. First generation college students were more likely to leave higher education without completing a degree, more likely to earn a vocational certificate, and as likely to earn an associate's degree compared to their counterparts. NCES (1998) also found that they were less likely to be enrolled in college after five years, but students who do persist were more likely to pursue and obtain a two-year degree. In conclusion, the study found that first generation status negatively affected the persistence of these students.

Inman and Mayes (1999) concluded that first generation college students compared to non-first generation college students were twice as likely to report that a two-year degree was their ultimate goal. In addition, they found that first generation students were more likely to stay at college until they completed their academic goal. This study also concluded there was little difference in hours earned and GPAs after their first year of college between first generation students and their counterparts. Furthermore, after their third year, first generation college students were comparable in persistence and attainment of a certificate or associate's degree to other students with similar academic goals (NCES, 2001-126).

Terenzini et al. (1995) found that first generation college students completed fewer units the first year of college and reported studying fewer hours. They were also more likely to take at least one remedial course during their first year in college and their overall grade point averages were lower than their counterparts (NCES, 2001-153). This finding was further supported in the study conducted by Billson and Terry (1982) where they found first generation college students were more likely to have lower grades compared to their counterparts. Other research demonstrated that after the first year of

college, first generation college students were no different than second generation college students in terms of grades, math and critical thinking skills, and units earned (Inman & Mayes, 1999; Terenzini et al., 1995; Strage, 1999).

Although some research indicated that first generation college students were not academically prepared for college (Hsiao, 1992; Riehl, 1994; York-Anderson & Bowman, 1991), most first generation college students left for non-academic reasons. Research indicated they left because they are unable to negotiate and balance the many responsibilities in their lives such as work, school, and family obligations (Brooks-Terry, 1988; London, 1992; Terenzini et al., 1995).

As stated earlier in this review, first generation college students were more likely to be low-income and part time students. In turn, these students were much more likely to work full time compared to their counterparts whose parents had attended college (NCES, 2001-126). Terenzini et al. (1995) found that first generation college students tended to work out of necessity and tend to spend less time studying and more time working.

Research suggested that first generation college students had similar experiences with non-first generation college students once they completed their academics. Nunez and Cuccaro-Alamin (1998) found that first generation college students and non-first generation students who completed a four-year degree had similar incomes and occupations.

In summary, the literature on first generation college students overwhelmingly suggested that students who are the first in their families to partake in higher education faced copious challenges and obstacles in their journey. In regards to student academic

success, the literature revealed that students who were the first in their families to partake in college bring with them many obstacles from their external and internal worlds. They often entered higher education with limited familial support and encouragement, but more financial barriers. They were less prepared academically, had limited self confidence and self-esteem, and had various commitments outside of the educational setting. One might propose they were not the model student for higher education. However, there were students with this less than ideal profile who enter higher education and completed their academic goals.

Summary

The first section of this review discussed the theoretical framework that is pertinent to the major research questions. In this section, there were additional discussions of the following: student development theories that focused on student involvement, and social and academic integration; and resilience theory. The second section further explored what research revealed about the environmental contexts relevant to students who were the first in their families to attend college: (a) background and history of the community college environment, (b) obstacles in the community college system, and (c) low-income college students and higher education. The third and final section addressed the literature related to the external and internal worlds of first generation college students: (a) transitioning to college, and (b) performance in college. In reviewing the literature for this study a number of essential conclusions were evident.

The student development theories described the external events and behaviors which contributed to a student's persistence in higher education. They suggested that the experience of involvement bred more involvement and therefore more persistence. What

is less clear by these persistence theories is what the students themselves bring to the higher education process. What leads one student to involvement and another to departure? What attributes do the students bring to higher education and how do they contribute to their persistence or attrition? What personal qualities, attitudes, and previous experiences lead to involvement? These current theories do not directly address the role of resilience in the success of first generation college students. In filling the gap with Astin's and Tinto's persistence theories, it is necessary to understand factors related to resilience.

In regards to resilience theory, the literature asserted that resilience contributes to an individual's successful life adaptation despite experiencing adverse or unfavorable situations. A large amount of research on resilience has focused on children in adversity. There is limited literature on resilience as it relates to education, in particular, students who are the first in their families to attend higher education. This study attempted to understand the role of resilience in first generation college students successfully completing their academic goals.

It is important to mention that due to the complexity of this concept and framework, this study focused on certain components of Kumpfer's resilience framework. These components were utilized to understand what contributes to the academic success of low-income, first generation college students. In particular, this study utilized the first two components of Kumpfer's resilience framework: environmental precursors to resilience and characteristics of resilient individuals.

Although the literature reviewed demonstrated that numerous first generation college students began and often completed their higher education experience at the

community college level, most of the research conducted with first generation college students was at four-year institutions. Understanding first generation college students in the community college context would be necessary in facilitating success for these students.

Furthermore, a major challenge and stressor in the external worlds of first generation college students appeared to be socio-economic status. The literature consistently displayed the effects of limited finances on the educational success of students who were the first in their family to attend college. Yet there are limited findings which indicate why some low-income, first generation college students did access higher education and complete their academic goals. It was the intent of this study to understand these students' educational success through the concept of resilience.

Most of the research pertaining to first generation college students concentrated on the external worlds of these students. There was little research which was pertinent to the internal worlds of these students. The literature on first generation college students overwhelmingly suggested that students who were the first in their families to partake in higher education face copious challenges and obstacles in their journey.

In regards to academic success, the literature revealed that students who were the first in their families to partake in college bring with them many obstacles from their external and internal worlds. However, there were limited studies that addressed the educational and personal experiences that contributed to the academic success of first generation college students. This study attempted to understand these experiences as they relate to resilience in the lives of these students.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

> The moment came when we not only *lived*, but began to *know* that we were living – hence it was possible for us to *know* that we know, and therefore to know that we could do more. What we cannot do, as imaginative, curious beings, is to cease to learn and to seek, to investigate the "why" of things. We cannot *exist* without wondering about tomorrow, about what is "going on," and going on in favor of what, against what, for whom, and against whom. (Freire, 1998, p. 98)

Introduction

The intent of this study was to explore the critical reflections of academically successful low-income, first generation community college students on the role of resilience in their lives. Lobo (2001) suggested, "The research methodology should be a vehicle that allows the researcher, the co-participants, and the readers of the study the opportunity to reflect on the significance of the results not only on a societal level, but on a personal, level as well" (p. 48).

Maxwell (1996) wrote, "The strengths of qualitative research derive primarily from its inductive approach, its focus on specific situations or people, and its emphasis on words rather than numbers" (p. 17). Using the participatory research methodology, the participants' reflections were gathered and analyzed in this qualitative research.

Research Design

Low-income, first generation community college students who have successfully completed their academic goals critically reflected on resilience and how this factor contributed to their academic success. They also discussed the personal and academic experiences they felt were crucial in developing such resilience. Participatory research

was most appropriate for this study because it explored the critical reflections and stories of first generation college students in a way that allowed the participants to understand and transform their realities.

Ada and Beutel (1993) claimed, "Participatory Research is 'to listen loudly' to the voices of those around us" (p. 43). Participatory research methodology brings together investigation, education, action, and dialogue (Freire, 1999; Maguire, 1987). Furthermore, participatory research was used "to highlight the usage of voice and collaborative inquiry" (Lobo, 2001, p. 49). This methodology was a dialogical process which occurred between the researcher and the participants in the study; both acting as "coresearchers" (Maguire, 1987; Patton, 1990). According to Freire (1998),

> The students – longer docile listeners – are now critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher. The teacher presents the material to the students for their consideration, and re-considers her earlier considerations as the students express their own. The role of the problem-posing educator is to create, together with the students, the condition under which knowledge at the level of the doxa is superseded by true knowledge, at the level of the logos. (p.81)

This same relationship occurs between the researcher and participants who engage in participatory research. Furthermore, this relationship is developed and maintained through a dialogical process between the researcher and the participants. Freire (1998) suggested, "If it is in speaking their word that people, by naming their world, transform it, dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings" (p. 88).

Participatory research was founded on the principles of critical pedagogy. Maguire (1987) maintained, "Participatory research aims to develop critical consciousness, to improve the lives of those involved in the research, and to transform fundamental societal structures and relationships" (p. 3). A critical aspect of

participatory research is to foster the development of the participant's voice to underrepresented groups and also develop a plan for action to transform their world. Maguire (1987) called this aspect of participatory research the "definition of action plans". No transformation will occur unless the co-participants name their realities and then take action to improve them for themselves and others with similar realities. Ada and Beutel (1993) concluded that through the process of participatory research and the reflection that occurs, "our inner reality has changed and, therefore, our way of acting externally begins to change" (p. 41). Freire (1998) goes on to write, "Liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it" (p. 79).

The researcher engaged the participants in reflecting on their realities and developing action plans. The participants developed recommendations for other low-income, first generation community college students. In addition, they provided recommendations to faculty and administrators at the City College of San Francisco. Their hope was to develop and create a plan of action to improve the realities of other first generation college students. This plan of action could include students, faculty, and administrators meeting to improve existing programs which serve these students. The researcher was eager and willing to participate in any action plans developed by the participants of this study. Since all the participants were in their last semester at the community college, the researcher ensured them that their action plans be set in motion. The researcher anticipates taking their recommendations and implement them with students, faculty, and administrators at CCSF. Thus, the research will realize the clear and specific recommendations which resulted from this dialogical process, in order to

assist low-income, first generation community college students achieve their educational dreams. As promised, the research has developed and implemented a series of college success workshops at the City College of San Francisco based on the recommendations and findings of this study.

Research Setting

The research was carried out at City College of San Francisco (CCSF) which is a two-year, public community college institution in an urban setting. The research was conducted at the Ocean Campus which is the largest of the nine CCSF campuses. The Ocean Campus was chosen because the EOPS main building was located on this campus and a majority of EOPS student participants attended classes at this campus. The actual research was conducted at convenient times and locations such as library conference room or the EOPS building. It was essential that the location was the most comfortable for the participants.

The City College of San Francisco is one of the largest and most diverse community colleges in the nation. CCSF served more than 105,000 credit and noncredit students each year at 10 locations throughout the city of San Francisco (CCSF Fact Sheet 2002, 2002). In addition to its ethnic diversity (see Table 2), CCSF provided numerous programs in order to meet the educational and personal needs of its community. These programs helped individuals transfer to a four-year institution, complete a two-year college degree, develop career skills, receive vocational training, develop pre-college academic abilities, and receive personal enrichment.

Table 2

Ethnicity of 2002 CCSF Students

Ethnicity	Percentage
Asian/ Pacific Islander	32.9
White	30.4
Latino/a	14.3
African American	8.6
Filipino	7.0
American Indian	.5
Other	6.3

Note. From CCSF Fact Sheet 2002, 2002, City College of San Francisco.

The Participants' Community

The participants in this study were seven students who were participating in Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS). This program has been in existence for over 35 years, and its purpose, according to Article 8 of the California Education Code (2003), is

> to encourage local community colleges to establish and implement programs directed to identifying those students affected by language, social, and economical handicaps, to increase the number of eligible EOPS students served, and assist those students to achieve their educational objective and goals, including but not limited , to, obtaining job skills, occupational certificates, or associates degrees, and transferring to four-year institutions. (Section 1)

EOPS's mission is to provide services that improve the retention of students with educational and economic challenges. Students in this program have access to the following services: on-going academic and career counseling, early registration times and dates, orientation to college courses, book vouchers, one-on-one tutoring services, and financial aid advice.

To be eligible for CCSF's EOPS, the students had to be California residents. The students had completed no more than 70 degree applicable units and were enrolled in 12 or more units each semester. Furthermore, the students must qualify for a board of governor's fee waiver (BOGW) A or B (see Table 3). Also, the students were educationally underserved, which could mean that they are first generation college students, have low college preparation skills, had parents who are non-English speakers, or face other academic challenges.

Table 3

2002/2003 Income Standards for BOGFW Part B Eligibility

Family Size	2000 Income
1	12,525
2	16,875
3	21,225
4	25,575
5	29,925
6	34,275
7	38,625
8	42,975
Each Additional Family Member	4,350

Note. From (www.ccsf.edu/Services/Financial_Aid/BOGG_Elig%200203.htm), 2003, City College of San Francisco (CCSF).

This program served over 1,400 students annually and had more than 200 students each semester who completed their educational goals. Their ethnic backgrounds, age and gender represented the diverse population in EOPS (see Table 4).

Researcher's Entry

Ada and Beutel (1993) asserted, "Entry into the community is connected with the issue of *authenticity*. As a researcher you need to construct a solid connection with the

community in which you will be working" p. 63). The researcher had worked with the EOPS at CCSF over the past three years at the time of this research. Due to the

Table 4

Demographic Background of 2002 EOPS Students

Ethnicity, Age, Gender	Percentage
Ethnicity	
Asian/ Pacific Islander	63.7
White	9.5
Latino/a	9.5
African American	11.6
Filipino	2.4
American Indian	.3
Other	3.0
Age	
Under 18	0.6
18-25	62.0
26-35	20.0
36+	17.0
Gender	
Female	60.0
Male	40.0

Note. From EOPS: Summary of Accomplishments, 2002, City College of San Francisco.

researcher's professional relationship to the program and its students, academic counselors, and director, entry to the community was welcomed and encouraged. This relatively open entry to the EOPS program and the students it served stems from the researcher's professional and personal commitment to better understand and serve low-income, first generation community college students at CCSF.

Recruitment of Participants

A letter (see Appendix A) was mailed to all EOPS students who are first generation college students and who were completing their last semester at CCSF at the

end of Spring 2003. The list of students was obtained from the EOPS database with the permission of the program director. This study focused on students who had successfully achieved their academic goals. Achievement of academic goals was defined as receiving a vocational certificate, associates degree, and/ or completing transfer requirements. The announcement invited these students to participate in an informational session to discuss the purpose of the study and complete a questionnaire.

The questionnaire (see Appendix B) included open-ended questions related to the role of resilience in completing their academic goals. This questionnaire also asked students if they would like to further explore this topic in a one-on-one interview with the researcher. Of the participants that attended the informational session and completed the questionnaire, seven students were chosen based on the following criteria: (a) demonstrated a high level of resilience attributes and (b) indicated they were interested in participating in dialogues. In addition, all EOPS staff and faculty were notified (see Appendix C) about the study and encouraged to refer potential participants for the study. It is important to note that all the participants were referred by their EOPS counselor or the EOPS director to participate in this study. They viewed these students as "special" and described them as "resilient students". Informational sessions and administration of the questionnaire were held in February 2003. Dialogues occurred in March and April 2003.

The Participants

Out of the 11 students who were willing to participate in dialogues, the researcher chose seven low-income, first generation community college students who had completed their academic goals at CCSF. They were also viewed by their counselors as resilient

students. Lastly, the participants had completed 60 or more units by the end of the Spring 2003 semester.

Questions that Guided the Initial Dialogues

The following questions were developed to help guide the initial dialogues with the participants and further expand on the initial research questions provided. It is important to note that not all questions were asked and additional questions were allowed to develop as the dialogues progressed.

Research Question # 1: What internal resilience attributes do low-income, first generation community college students identify as contributing to their academic success?

1. How do you feel different from your peers?
2. Do you consider yourself a successful student? Why or why not?
3. Describe what strategies assisted you in successfully meeting your educational goals.
4. What academic expectations did others have for you?
5. How would you describe your interaction with others?
6. How have you sought extra help or developed mentoring relationships during college?
7. Describe your dreams about your future. What do you do to move closer to realizing your dreams?
8. Are you an optimistic person? How do you cope with challenging situations in your life?

9. Describe your interactions with other people. How would you describe your relationships with other people?
10. What happens when you encounter obstacles in your academic career? How do you overcome them?

Research Question #2: What educational experiences have contributed to the attainment and development of these resilience attributes?

1. What did you like best about your educational experience? Least?
2. What role did teachers, counselors, and other educational staff play in your achieving your academic goals?
3. What do you feel is the most important factor in your success in education?
4. What obstacles did you have to overcome while in school in order to meet your goals? How did you overcome those obstacles?
5. Why was education important to you? Where did you learn this belief?
6. What educational experiences motivated you to complete your academic goals?

Research Question #3: What personal experiences have contributed to the attainment and development of these resilience attributes?

1. Who or what influenced your decision to go to college?
2. How were you supported or not supported in your decision?
3. What role did your family and friends play in your completing your academic goals?
4. Who or what in your personal life encouraged and supported you to complete your academic goals?

5. Where did you grow up and how did that environment influence your education?
6. How did your community influence you in your education?
7. What personal experiences motivated you to complete your academic goals?
8. Were there important individuals who influenced your decision to go to college?

Research Question #4: What recommendations do these low-income, first generation community college students have for others?

1. How would you encourage other first generation college students to complete their academic goals?
2. How have you changed as a result of your experiences in college?
3. How will completing your college degree change the lives of others?
4. What do you feel City College of San Francisco can do to improve the experience of low-income, first generation college students?

Data Collection

Ada and Beutel (1993) wrote the following about participatory research, "Informing every aspect of your work as a researcher should be deep respect of the ability of the participants to know and to conduct their own research and your unconditional commitment to assist them" (p. 45). The relationship between the researcher and the participants was a collaborative process. As co-researchers, the researcher and participants were in a constant exchange of reflection. The participants had the opportunity to review and reflect the transcriptions of their dialogues. This allowed the participants to add or change their voice as needed. It also provided the

researcher with an opportunity to expand and to gain clarity which ensured the participants were truly being heard.

The following is a chronological outline of the data collection procedures of this study. Portions of the data collection procedure were adapted from Castillo (2002).

1. Formally notified EOPS staff, counselors, and director of the study being conducted. Asked them to refer potential participants.
2. Mailed announcements to all eligible participants inviting them to attend an informational session and to complete a questionnaire.
3. Conducted the informational session and administer and collect consent forms (see Appendix D) and questionnaires.
4. Analyzed questionnaire results.
5. Contacted students who were interested in participating in one-on-one dialogues and demonstrated high resilience attributes, and scheduled first dialogue.
6. First dialogue: Taped dialogue, and set the date that transcript would be sent to participant for review and analysis.
7. Transcribed first dialogue verbatim.
8. Sent copy of transcript to participant.
9. Scheduled date to review transcript with participant.
10. Second dialogue: Taped dialogue, reviewed transcript and generative themes with participants, and elaborated on data.
11. Transcribed second dialogue verbatim.
12. Analyzed data.

13. Mailed participants final data and asked for feedback on generative themes.

Data Analysis

As in the data collection, participants were actively involved in the analysis and understanding of the data collected. Ada and Beutel (1993) asserted, "Researchers and participants come together in a mutual and rigorous exploration of their lives, deeply respecting each other's ability to truly know and believing that through the act of knowing we can transform our reality" (p. 7).

After the initial dialogues were completed, each participant was given a copy of their transcript. They were asked to review the transcript for new concepts or ideas that stood out to them, and concepts or ideas they wanted to add or change. This gave the participants an opportunity to review and provide feedback regarding the data collected during the first dialogue. Furthermore, the researcher analyzed the transcripts from the first dialogue and extracted emerging concepts. This was achieved by analyzing each participant's transcript independently of one another. This analysis included reading each transcript two times without coding. During a third reading the researcher performed initial coding. The concepts were then color coded. This illustrated the emergence of concepts for all seven participants. After this process was completed, the researcher analyzed the individual concepts to find larger concepts that represented the entire group of participants.

After the participants and the researcher completed their analysis and identified initial concepts from their first dialogues, their second dialogues were arranged and completed. During the second dialogue the researcher and participants discussed

additional questions that remained from the first dialogue. The participants also reflected on their transcript analysis and the concepts that emerged for them. The researcher also introduced the initial concepts that emerged from his analysis of their first dialogues. Then the researcher initiated a dialogue with the participants to elicit their perspective on the initial concepts.

Once the first and second dialogues were complete, the researcher analyzed the data from the two dialogues for each participant. From this analysis, initial generative themes were developed from the concepts. This process was completed for each participant and then for the group as a whole.

Next the researcher mailed the second dialogues and the initial generative themes to the participants. The participants were asked to review their dialogues and the initial generative themes, and mail back their feedback to the researcher. All the participants returned their feedback to the researcher. This final process allowed the participants and the researcher to come together again to analyze the data from the first and second dialogues in order to explore the generative themes that emerged.

Protection of Participants

The researcher received permission from the director of EOPS to conduct research at City College of San Francisco and with the students in the EOPS program (see Appendix E). Also, the researcher received approval from the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects prior to conducting this research study (see Appendix F). Participants signed and returned a consent form. Each participant was informed that they reserve the right to withdraw from the study at anytime for any reason. All information collected from the participant's questionnaire responses and the

dialogical process remained confidential. To ensure confidentiality, the researcher used pseudo-names to protect each participant's identity. The IRBPHS approval notification, signed consent forms, and other related forms are found in Appendixes A, B, C, D, E, and F.

Profile of Researcher

I am a white European American man whose background is Portuguese, French, Dutch, and Irish. I was raised in a small, rural farming community in Taylor, Texas. I am a first generation college student and was raised in a low-income family. I attended the University of Texas in Austin and earned a Bachelors Degree in Psychology in 1994. I moved to Northern California and attended Sonoma State University in Rohnert Park, California where I completed my Master's Degree in Counseling in 1997. While completing my Masters Degree, I focused my training on working with students who were the first in their families to attend higher education. I developed and facilitated seminars and courses focusing on the development of low-income, first generation college students in the Sonoma County area.

After completing my Master's Degree, I was a counseling intern working under a licensed psychologist, and worked as an academic and career counselor at several Northern California community colleges. Over the past five years, I have worked with various community colleges and programs within those institutions. I have worked in the CalWorks program which serves students who are receiving financial assistance from the government and Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS) which serves low-income, educationally disadvantaged students who are often first generation college

students. Currently, I am a tenure-track faculty member at City College of San Francisco where I serve as a counselor and instructor.

Though my primary assignment is a career counselor in the Career Development Department (CDD), I requested to split my assignment between CDD and EOPS. I felt there was a need for a career counselor to be actively involved with the EOPS and the students they serve. For the last two years, I have provided career counseling, workshops, and other services to the EOPS program. Through close collaboration with EOPS students, administrator, and faculty, this research study has been informed by the many experiences of low-income, first generation community college students.

My professional and personal experiences in education fueled my desire to pursue my doctorate degree. My intent in this study was to better understand students in order to better serve them as an instructor and counselor. Through this journey, it was my hope that I would better understand my own experiences as a low-income, first generation college student. As a student who was the first in my family to go to college, I experienced many social, academic, and transitional difficulties first hand. I often felt disconnected from the academic institutions I attended and my peers. I did not "fit-in", and often felt different. Due to my limited finances, I never had the opportunity to fully engage in campus life. When I was not working, I was in class, and when I was not in class, I was studying. At the time it was difficult to describe my experiences. With time, and my participation in this doctoral program, I have found some clarity around my own experiences in education. This study gave voice to and a better understanding to first generation college students' experiences.

I also conducted a class research project exploring the experiences of first generation college students who were transitioning from the community college system to a four-year institution. The findings from this study helped develop the ideas and direction of the current research study. One of the conclusions of this research project was that low-income, first generation college students display internal drive, motivation, and are focused on achieving their educational goals and dreams (Rowley, 2001). These experiences professionally, educationally, and personally contributed to the development of this study and my role as a researcher.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

The utilization of participatory research allowed the participants to impart the unique experiences and thoughts that enabled them to successfully negotiate the institution of higher education. The dialogical process between the researcher and the seven low-income, first generation community college students who successfully completed their academic goals, resulted in the emergence of extensive and illuminating data. From this data came a greater understanding of these students' journey in the community college system.

This chapter presents the backgrounds of each student participant. This provides the distinctive perspective and background that each participant brought to the educational process. Next, this chapter presents the generative themes that emerged from the data collected during the dialogues. The transcripts from the first and second dialogues were analyzed repeatedly, four to seven times, until the generative themes and sub-themes emerged into a consistent pattern. This process was conducted to ensure that the themes were authentic to the experiences and perceptions of the student participants in this study. It is important to note that the researcher was unable to include all the data presented by the participants. The researcher selected quotes that were the most representative of the participants in this study. The five central themes were (a) organizing their world, (b) educational transformation: reframing their world, (c) originators of their support system, (d) finding meaning in their world, and (e) participants' recommendations.

Engaging in this research experience gave the participants an opportunity to reflect on their experiences and, most importantly, the opportunity to be heard. There were many tears shed as these students discussed the various aspects of their lives that contributed to their achieving their academic dreams. The emotions displayed by these low-income, first generation college students came from many paths. The participants were not only empowered by the opportunity to reflect on their experiences, but also gained understanding on how and why they made it through higher education. In addition, they were overwhelmed with the sense of pride gained from being academically successful, and discovered the role they played in their success. The participants in this study became conscious of the pain and sacrifice they endured while pursuing their academic dreams.

Profiles of the Participants

Table 5 summarizes the demographic information of the participants and is followed by a more detailed description of each participant in the study. To ensure confidentiality, the participants were assigned pseudonyms. The participants from this study came from various racial and ethnic backgrounds and ages. All the participants were the first in their family to complete a degree in higher education. Each participant had completed 60 or more units and was completing their last semester at the community college institution and were attending CCSF full- time and receiving financial assistance. All but two have parents who had not completed a high school diploma. Only one participant has a parent who had completed some college education. With the exception of one, all were working part-time while attending school.

Table 5

Demographic Data of the Participants

Name	Gender	Age	Race/ Ethnicity	Major	Units Completed	Parent's Education	Academic Goals
Bill	Male	45	White	History/ Psychology	90	F 8 M 6	A.A. Transfer
Wes	Male	23	African-American	Urban Studies	66	F N/A M 12	A.A. Transfer
Robert	Male	22	Filipino-Welsh	Ethnic Studies	60	F 10 M 13	A.A. Transfer
Jay	Male	31	African-American	Sociology	62	F 12 M 12	A.A. Transfer
Evette	Female	32	Latina/ Nicaraguan	Liberal Studies	60	F 3 M 12	A.A. Transfer
Mary	Female	37	African-American	Social Work	111	F 12 M 12	A.A. Transfer
Monica	Female	33	African-American	Nursing	72	F 12 M 9	A.S.

All the participants were completing their two-year college degree and five were intending to transfer. Four participants were planning to transfer to the California State University (CSU) system, and two to the University of California (UC) system. All the participants planned to transfer to a university were transferring to an institution in the Bay Area. One participant was majoring in Nursing, one in Urban Studies, one was double majoring in History and Psychology, and the remaining participants were majoring in the Social Sciences (Social Work, Liberal Studies, Sociology, and Ethnic Studies). Half of the participants had plans of pursuing a graduate level degree.

Monica

Monica is a 33-year-old African-American female. Her academic goal is to complete an Associate of Science degree in Nursing. She married at an early age and then divorced. Monica raised herself in Oakland, doing whatever she needed to survive. She described her childhood environment as poverty stricken. With little food to eat, she remembered eating oatmeal for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. In order to survive, she sold drugs for most of her adolescence and twenties. Monica spent approximately one year in prison. She was unable to stop selling drugs until two years ago. She is currently working full time as a licensed vocational nurse. She stated, "Everybody always wondering, why you been in school so long? Because this is like my home, and this is where I can be me, and I took my time. It's not when you finish the race, just as long as you finish it" (Rowley, 2003, p. 264).

Mary

Mary is a 37-year-old African-American female. Her academic goals are to complete an Associate of Arts degree and to transfer as a Social Work major to a local CSU. She was raised primarily by her grandmother in San Francisco and currently resides in Oakland. Mary was a young, single mother of two, due to the incarceration of her children's fathers and is currently working with a program called Second Chance which assists non-violent felons transition from prison to higher education. Mary hopes to develop a transitional housing program to assist at-risk students who are attending higher education. Mary claimed, "Education showed me where I was supposed to be in life, just like my calling" (Rowley, 2003. p. 20).

Evette

Evette is a 32-year-old Latina female. Her academic goals are to complete an Associate of Arts degree and to transfer as a Liberal Studies major to a local CSU. She came to this country from Nicaragua when she was eight years old. Prior to that, she and her brother were left with family members at a very young age because their mother had to leave years before them. Once here, she had a difficult transition to American culture because she did not speak English, which made communication difficult. In addition to this difficulty, during her first semester in college she was diagnosed with a learning disability. She is currently married with two children. Her full-time job is school, and getting her college degrees. She plans to earn her master's degree. Evette hopes to pursue a career in education, possibly as a teacher.

Jay

Jay is a 31-year-old African-American male. His academic goals are to complete an Associate of Arts degree and to transfer as a Sociology major to a local CSU. He

plans to go on to complete a master's degree. He hopes to work with incarcerated individuals, possibly as a parole officer. Jay was incarcerated for nine years in a California correctional facility. This time frame comprised his entire twenties. While incarcerated, he took college courses through correspondence. After his incarceration, he started at CCSF where he participated in the Second Chance Program as part of the EOPS program. Currently, Jay works with ex-felons in Second Chance. He wants to dedicate his life to bringing education to the incarcerated community.

Robert

Robert is a 22-year-old Filipino-Welsh-African male. His academic goals are to complete an Associate of Arts degree and to transfer as an Ethnic Studies major to a local UC. He plans to complete at least a master's degree. He anticipates on returning to the community college system as a teacher. He maintained, "I want to have a broad impact on the system of education on a national level some day" (Rowley, 2003, p. 60). Robert was raised in the Bay Area, splitting his time between his parents. He currently lives in the Hunter's Point area in San Francisco with his father. This area is known for high crime and gang-related activities. Robert is highly involved in student government and Pilipinos for Education and Cultural Empowerment (PEACE) which is a Filipino student organization. He has served in multiple high level positions in student government.

Wes

Wes is a 23-year-old African-American male. His academic goals are to complete an Associate of Arts degree and to transfer as an Urban Studies major to a local UC. He also plans to earn a master's degree. After completing his education, he hopes to be involved in city planning or pursue a career in education. Wes was born and raised in San Francisco by his mother. He has no relationship with his father. Wes has served as a

strong student advocate and initiator. While at CCSF, he has held several student body positions, including student body president.

Bill

Bill is a 54-year-old White male. His academic goals are to complete an Associate of Arts degree with a focus on drug and alcohol counseling and to transfer as a History major to a local CSU. Bill intends to complete at least a master's degree in order to teach. Throughout most of his tenure at CCSF Bill has been homeless. He has spent many nights sleeping on the streets and homeless shelters. This was compounded by an addiction to drugs and alcohol. Bill has completed two years of sobriety and is living in a rented room.

Critical Reflections of the Participants

Based on the analysis of dialogues with each participant, these were the resulting themes and sub-themes. The five central themes are (a) organizing their world, (b) educational transformation: reframing their world, (c) originators of their support system, (d) finding meaning in their world, and (e) participants' recommendations. These themes represent the five major components of figure 3. Within each box there are sub-themes that represent the components of the central themes. The major theme of organizing their world was sustained by the following sub-themes: (1) skills and (2) enabling characteristics.

The major theme of educational transformation: reframing their world was sustained by the following sub-themes: (1) leaving their past behind, (2) changing their relationship with education, and (3) the driving force: turning adversity into motivation. As represented in figure 3, these sub-themes interact with one another. In order for

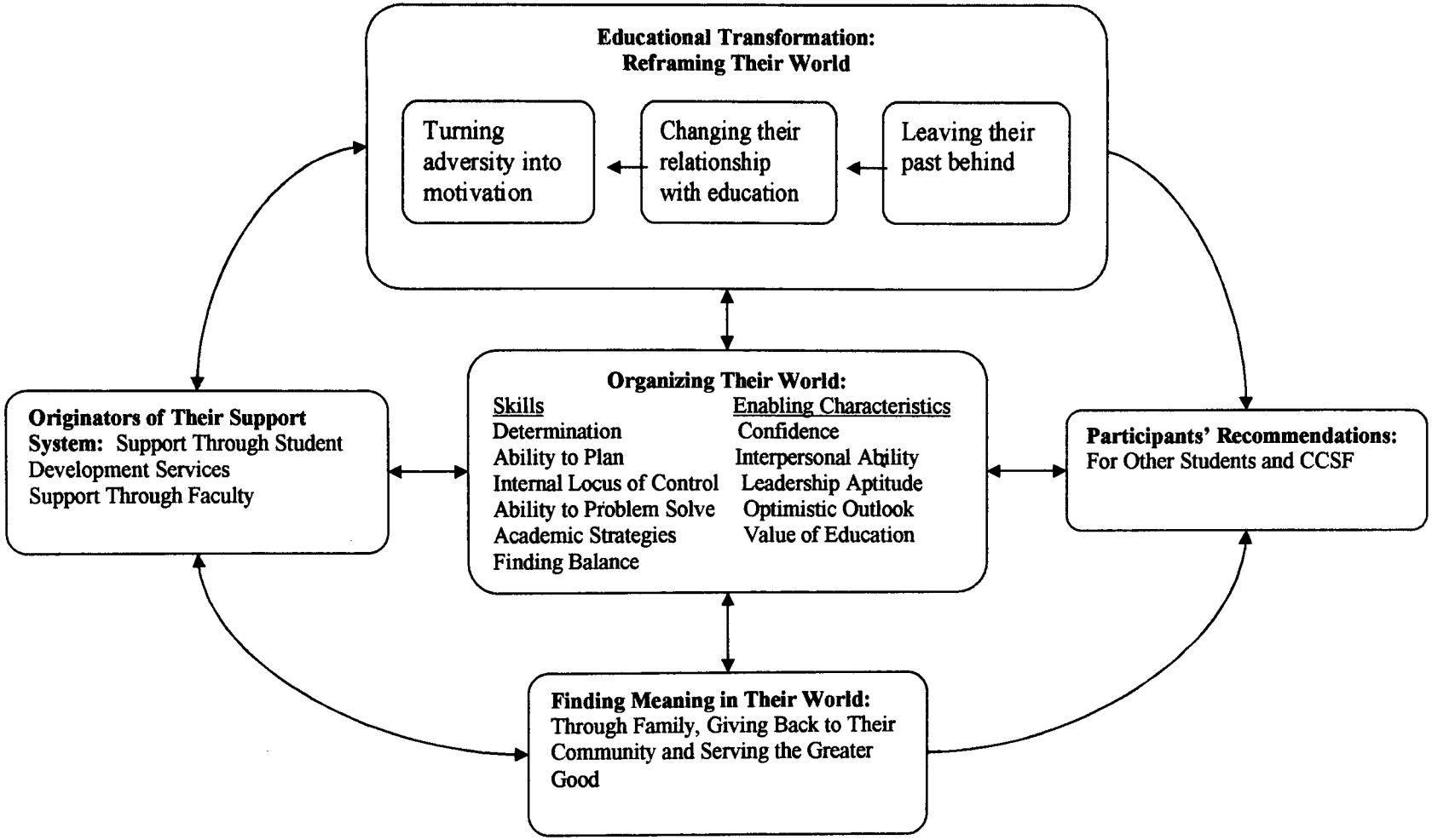

Figure 3. Generative Themes

educational transformation to occur, the participants begin the process by leaving portions of their past behind which allowed for them to change their relationship with education. The process ends with them developing mechanisms that assist them in turning adversity into motivation.

The major theme of originators of their support system was sustained by (1) support through student development services and (2) support through faculty. The major theme of finding meaning in their world was sustained by the following sub-themes: (1) meaning through family, (2) meaning through giving back to their community, and (3) meaning through serving the greater good. The major theme of participants' recommendations was supported by (1) recommendations for students and (2) recommendations for CCSF.

As reflected in figure 3, the generative themes were organized in order to illustrate the relationship between the themes. There was a constant exchange between how the participants organized their world and their educational transformation, their support systems, and how they found meaning in their world. Each of these themes influenced the development of the other. In turn, each of the four themes contributed to the development of the participants' recommendations. A brief description of each of the themes and how they connect to one another will follow.

Organizing their world demonstrates the ways in which the participants interacted with their world. The participants developed and utilized resilient qualities and abilities to help them meet their academic goals. The participants displayed these qualities in two areas: skills and enabling characteristics. The participants developed a repertoire of skills enabling characteristics that fostered their success in higher education. These resilience

qualities alone do not create transformation or success for these students, but in some ways enable it.

Educational transformation: reframing their world demonstrates the interaction between the participants' resilient qualities and their environment. This interaction allowed their educational transformation to take place. This process of transformation required the participants to develop a new perspective on the role of education in their lives as well as created mechanisms to assist them in enduring this educational journey. A major portion of their transformation involved developing a more vibrant relationship with education as a whole. This transformation enabled them to create a new educational direction for their family.

Originators of their support system demonstrates the way in which the participants developed a support structure. The participants created their support system by accessing student development services and developing relationships with positive faculty members. This support structure was essential to the success of these low-income, first generation community college students. All the participants in this study actively pursued and sustained a network of support directed towards helping them complete their academic goals.

Finding meaning in their world demonstrates how the participants found meaning in their education and learning, and the purpose of education in their lives. This central theme was explored by the participants in three main areas: meaning through family, meaning through giving back to their community, and meaning through serving a greater good.

Participants' recommendations included those provided by the participants to improve services and the experience of low-income, first generation community college students at City College of San Francisco. To achieve this, the participants provided recommendations to other low-income, first generation community college students and to CCSF so that they may succeed. In addition, the participants provided specific suggestions for students that would create an environment that fosters resilience.

Organizing Their World

The participants presented resilient qualities which contributed to their academic success in community college. The qualities were divided into two sub-themes: skills and enabling characteristics. These skills included:

1. Determination,
2. Ability to plan,
3. Internal locus of control,
4. Ability to problem solve,
5. Academic strategies and
6. Finding balance.

In addition to these skills, the participants in this study displayed characteristics that enabled them to achieve their academic goals. These enabling characteristics included:

1. Confidence,
2. Strong interpersonal ability and leadership aptitude,
3. An optimistic outlook, and
4. Value of education

These resilience qualities provided a foundation for how these low-income first generation college students made sense of, and organized their world.

Skills

The following section will present the skills demonstrated in the educational and personal lives by the participants.

Determination. The importance of determination permeated the personal and educational experiences of the participants in this study. These students displayed a commitment to successfully completing their academic goals, no matter the sacrifice. This resolve was present in numerous aspects of their lives. According to Monica:

> You have to take chances, and when you fall you just have to pick yourself up and keep going, no matter what. When somebody say, you ain't gonna be shit, you ain't this, you ain't that, you ain't never gonna be nothin, oh, that's what's making me drive more. (Rowley, 2003, p. 256)

There were times when academic pressure appeared to overcome them, but something allowed them to rise above and push through. Wes had attempted to complete a required English course several times without success. Although discouraged, he continued to take the course until he completed it. Instead of attempting the course once or even twice and then leaving the institution, Wes persisted until his goal was attained. He did not allow anything to get in the way of him finishing. This determination was reflected in all the participants. According to Mary:

> I can say once I was a runner, but now I'm a tackler. I just tackle it, I just deal with it.....A go getter. if I see it, I'm gonna get it. Once my mind is made up, that's it. You know, like tunnel vision, you see something, and you're stuck on it until you get to the end of it, you know? (Rowley, 2003, p. 12)

Robert also asserted, "I think definitely one of the things that helped me get through school is um being determined not to, not to fail, and not just become what sort of society

wants me to (be) you know" (Rowley, 2003, p. 38).

After being accepted to the nursing program, Monica suffered a serious spinal injury and was threatened with the possibility of not being able to walk again. She attributes her recovery to her commitment to school and determination to finish. Monica asserted:

> When I got accepted into the nursing program, I was willing to die for it. Lemme tell you. I was willing to die for it. I slept with books, I woke up with them. I just buckled down and I knew I wanted to do better, and I wanted to be successful and I wanted to – I didn't want to be on the bottom of the food chain. I still got that drive. I'm tired, exhausted, but I am still here. (Rowley, 2003, p. 246)

All the participants indicated that being prepared mentally and psychologically for higher education was important in their success. They believed the mental challenges encountered in school and in their personal lives were the most difficult to overcome. Being determined, hard working, and persistent were essential to them being prepared mentally for the challenges in their lives. It was not an option to drop out or give up. They had too much invested in their educational dreams. Jay shared:

> I just want it so bad that that's what pushes me. I have a determination and drive and motivation to do this school thing. I have to finish...it's not an option to quit. I see a lot of people that don't make it, just quit, cause I mean many times I can see how because this stuff is hard..... So even though I had emotions of anger, frustration, getting mad, because it is difficult, I was like, I am determined to finish this.... there's always something worse. So no matter what is thrown at me here in school, it is worse out there. So maybe that helps me continue on instead of what others might do like give up or stop....I can't give up. (Rowley, 2003, p. 210)

Ability to plan. The participants' ability to plan was a recurring theme. This behavior enabled them to organize their often hectic and demanding lives- professionally, personally, and academically. The participants expressed a strong need for developing and implementing both personal and academic plans and goals. These plans and goals

ensured they had direction and purpose in their lives. Also, constantly reevaluating their educational goals provided inspiration, and organization for their world.

Jay reflected on the importance of re-evaluating his goals. He insisted, "I definitely have a set plan and goals, you know; I stay focused on my plan. I think it's a constant evaluation process. Cause you know you do things and it may not work that way and you have to try it another way" (Rowley, 2003, p. 222). He goes on to share how the ability to plan provides focus and direction, and allows him to take action in his life. He shared:

> When things get in the way or whatever, you know, I stay very focused and do what I need to figure it out and move on. Yeah, cause you have to think. Think about what direction you are going and how you're gonna get there or you get lost. (Rowley, 2003, p. 223)

Similarly Mary says, "I think to be unsuccessful is to not have any direction, pretty much, you're just doing something" (Rowley, 2003, p. 5).

All seven of the participants felt that having the ability to plan set them apart from their peers. They believed that many of their peers did not develop personal and academic plans or goals. Developing a long-term educational plan and reevaluating it each semester was essential to them completing their academic goals. Oftentimes, meeting with an academic counselor or taking College Success courses gave them the information they needed to expand and assess their plans. It appeared to be equally important to have goals in other areas of their lives. According to Robert:

> Goals are definitely a way that helps me succeed. It helps me stay on track –you don't know where you'll get if you don't know where you're trying to go, and just like doing it on all different levels like broad goals for this semester and maybe for that month and for that week....Like getting a certain GPA, qualifying for a certain number of scholarships but I always break it down in a couple of categories. (Rowley, 2003, p. 45)

Mary pointed out, "part of what supported me being successful is that I had a plan and direction...I just plan it all out as best I can" (Rowley, 2003, p. 5).

In addition to constantly evaluating their plans and goals, effective time management fostered these students ability to plan. Although Wes was working 35 hours per week, enrolled in 13 units, and trying to study a minimum of 30 hours per week one semester, he was still able to have a productive semester in school. He suggested:

> I think that time management plays a huge role in my success in school. When I'm not managing my time well, I don't do well. When I actually am sitting down and kind of planning out and gridding out blocks of time for different things for the semester, I've succeeded. (Rowley, 2003, p. 96)

Internal locus of control. The participants demonstrated a high level of internal locus of control. They believed that they exercise a high degree of control over their environment. Evette felt she had power and control over how successful she was going to be in school. She asserted, "So, I think my whole time that I've been here has been successful. I have- all I can say is that it's all within my power" (Rowley, 2003, p. 138).

In essence, the participants owned the successes and failures in their educational and personal experiences. They did not maintain the perception that they have no control or influence on their experiences. Furthermore, they did not exhibit a sense of powerlessness in their often challenging environments. This perception added to the participants' being responsible for their actions, and generated actions that resulted in academic success. Robert shared his thoughts about applying to universities. He expressed the following:

> I feel very in control of my own destiny. I mean there are those sorts of barriers like you know the people who read your personal statement at the UC. Regardless they DO hold some power but I just feel um I feel like yeah I do control my own destiny....when I say, I wanna go to the Harvard Graduate School

> of Education, I KNOW I can achieve that. I know that that's just – the only one that's stopping me from doing that is myself. (Rowley, 2003, p. 70)

Internal locus of control appeared to foster the participants' level of effort. They maintained the belief that the more effort they put forth, the more educational success they would achieve. Jay talked about his effort in school, "All I know is that I try....everyday. So, I consider myself a striving student! Striving to be a successful student" (Rowley, 2003, p. 211).

Ability to problem solve. The participants in this study encountered numerous obstacles in their educational pursuits. These obstacles spread over a broad range of situations and circumstances, both personal and educational. Although the obstacles often appeared insurmountable, these students maintained their ability to negotiate them successfully, and prevailed despite them. All the participants expressed their various challenges and how they overcame them using their problem solving capability. For example, according to Mary:

> College is all about problem solving. I really try to get to a root. I do try to get to a root of the problem – because I believe if you don't get to pull it from the root, it's gonna grow back, whatever the situation is. You've have to get to the root of the problem or it will always come back. (Rowley, 2003, p. 27)

Each participant provided insight regarding their struggles with financial limitations while attending school. Monica felt pressure when she encountered a delay in her financial aid check, and she had no financial support from her family. The semester had started and it was time to purchase her books. She recalled,

> Oh, well, like, like it was times when my financial aid didn't come in and I didn't have money to get over here or to get my books...I even pawned my jewelry to get to school, uh huh. I sold my TV. I said I'm not going back to the streets. It was survivor school. And I had to weigh what was important and what wasn't important. That's what I always told myself; don't worry about that jewelry, if you lose it, oh well. When I finish doing what I'm doing, school, education, and

> what I was goin for, like my nursing degree and everything. That's what was important. And the times I didn't come [to class], trust me, I was flat broke. (Rowley, 2003, pp. 259-260)

She went on to say that there had been times when she was so broke she did not have the finances to pay for the bridge toll to get to school. For most of the participants, their financial situation often dictated the number of units they were able to enroll in each semester and how much they needed to work each semester. This was an issue many of the students had to mitigate on a semester-by-semester basis.

The students articulated repeatedly the importance of problem solving as it related to instructors and demanding courses. They indicated that without the ability to look at each situation critically, it would have been difficult for them to reach their academic goals. It was crucial for them to explore the possibilities within each problem and develop options for themselves. Mary pointed out:

> I was taking an English class and she told me that she was gonna fail me. And I was really HURT, I mean, I was like BLOWN AWAY, like, oh, my god. And I just started thinking, this is gonna set me back. I start asking her, what can I do? Is there anything extra credit? And she's like you really deserve an F. I just really felt crushed. I sat back, I stepped back, I stepped out of the box, stepped out of the situation and I said, you know, Mary, she's helping you. She's really helping you because if she gives you the extra credit to pass, you really didn't learn the material. And when you go to the next level, you're gonna be stuck. So I failed the class and took it again. And wow. I literally e-mailed the other teacher and I told her, thank you, that's the best thing you could have ever done for me because I gained so much from taking the class again. I mean, I was like, wow! You know, and I was just like, thank god that she didn't pass me. (Rowley, 2003, pp. 13-14)

In addition to problems stemming from limited financial support, and difficult courses and instructors, the participants also experienced problems related to accessing services at the institution. They felt it was important for them to approach a problem by themselves prior to asking for help from others. Wes offered, "I try to really problem

solve before I – cause I know that people's time is valuable. And I depend on people a lot. I try to look at a situation from all angles" (Rowley, 2003, p. 109). They found that most often they could negotiate a problem more effectively if they tackled it first.

Furthermore, they encountered and overcame a multitude of problems related to their personal lives such as difficult relationships and the responsibilities of being a parent. Mary expressed the demands of being a single mother of two, and how sometimes she had to put her academic obligations second to her kids.

> When it comes to my children, I put my stuff on the back. So I would go to my teacher and say, you know what? My paper is not complete because my child was sick or whatever the situation was. I would just be honest. I found being honest and really explaining to people what your situation is; people are understanding. (Rowley, 2003, p. 17)

Mary and the other mothers frequently discussed the demands of being a parent while earning their college degree. Balancing being a parent and being in school was often their biggest challenge. The student parents indicated that without effective problem solving ability, they would not have been able to negotiate this important challenge.

Academic strategies. The participants often made reference to the academic strategies they developed and utilized while attending community college. They believed that critically selecting courses that stimulated their academic curiosity was crucial. They believed that community colleges offered some of the most diverse and stimulating course selections in the nation, and, there was no reason not to choose courses that would fulfill their academic requirements and interest them as well. Additionally, the participants fervently believed the student-teacher relationship was central to their achievement as students. They asserted that taking the time to develop an academic relationship with their instructor cultivated their love for learning and ultimately resulted

in them performing better in the course.

Furthermore, the participants thought the development of general study skills was necessary. The study skills they discussed included the utilization of study groups, effective note-taking, and test-taking strategies. Monica stated, "After I got my study skills down, my grades started going up to like a B. I went from a D and F student, to a B. I had to learn to study, you know, learn study skills" (Rowley, 2003, p. 265). Wes felt he performed his best academically the semesters he committed himself to developing study groups in his courses. Wes speculated, "I think study groups definitely helped. Because I think that learning is a collective experience and you gain much more when you're able to bounce ideas off of other people... Being able to go to a study group kind of keeps you focused on the subject" (Rowley, 2003, p. 96). Additional academic strategies utilized by the participants were the constant development and redevelopment of goals and life plans, and time management.

Finding balance. The concept of balance seemed important for the students in this study. They attempted to take action in their lives that encouraged them having balance in all aspects of their lives. Robert talked about the importance of finding balance:

> I just try to be really balanced with that and I think being balanced helps me more as a student. I think that's what being involved at City College has given me. Stuff has made me realize there's so much you learn outside of the classroom from like experiencing things, and meeting people that just, stuff you can never get in a classroom even if you wanted it. All the experiences enrich each other so I mean I try to apply that to the rest of my life with like spending time with family, friends and stuff like that cause I think it's more the overall mental health of students that's important (Rowley, 2003, pp. 44-45).

Wes also expressed the meaning of balance in his life, "the concept of balance is important to me as a student....I have had to make some decisions in my education to try

to get more balance in my life" (Rowley, 2003, p. 107).

Finding balance in their lives provided them with a richer experience in higher education and contributed to them being more engaged in the educational process. The participants pursued balance by dedicating time to develop and nurture multiple areas of their lives. This included physical exercise, spiritual practice, reading non-school material, volunteering, participating in on-campus clubs and organizations, and spending quality time with family and friends.

Enabling Characteristics

The following section will present enabling characteristics demonstrated in the educational and personal lives by the participants.

Confidence. Through the dialogical process, the participants demonstrated a sense of confidence in their academic capability and in their ability to complete their educational goals. When asked if they perceived themselves as successful students, the participants overwhelmingly agreed they were successful. For the participants, being a successful student involved motivation, intelligence, learning, being proud of one's self, and working hard. Robert revealed that "outwardly I might be humble and stuff, but inside I'm very honest with myself that I feel like I'm a talented individual, and I'm a talented person" (Rowley, 2003, p. 57). He believed his confidence contributed to his success as a student and a person.

Strong interpersonal ability and leadership aptitude. The participants in this study all believed that strong interpersonal abilities with instructors, counselors, and their peers facilitated positive interactions and relationships in higher education. These positive relationships made their educational experience much smoother. Wes and

Robert were elected by the student body to serve as student government body presidents. The ability to communicate effectively with faculty and peers supported the participants in their educational journey. Robert reflected on how he has benefited from positive interactions with faculty and peers as student body president and student trustee on the school board.

> To me it's just really something special when people are honest with you and open up themselves to you cause it shows that they not only respect you but I guess they CARE about you in a way. I guess that's been one of the most positive experiences for me. I think interacting with other students sort of reinforces like what we're all trying to do. Like talking to other students, you see that they're going through similar struggles. That feeling sometimes is like damn this is just happening to me. You realize that it's NOT just you, and then you can talk to other students and see how THEY got through it. And it just helps, you know, to sometimes feel like you're not alone in something. (Rowley, 2003, pp. 64-65)

One participant, Jay, felt that although he maintained positive relationships with others, he believed higher education was not a place for him to develop social relationships with his peers. He indicated that his primary focus was to achieve his academic dreams, not to socialize and make new friends. Jay stated, "When I come here, I really come here to do one thing, really, to take care of my education thing. This is not like a recreation thing to me. It's a very serious thing to me" (Rowley, 2003, p. 216). This said, Jay believed he had developed new relationships with a small number of valuable individuals on campus, and that these relationships were strong and supportive.

Participants articulated how strong interpersonal abilities cultivated their leadership ability. Robert and Wes focused their leadership abilities toward student government where they served as President. Monica directed her aptitude towards helping other struggling youth in her community. Mary and Jay actively worked with the Second Chance program's students and faculty to initiate new services to better serve

students transitioning from prison to education. Evette demonstrated her leadership ability in the classroom. She stated, "I had a group project yesterday and nobody took the lead on getting the group together. I did. I stepped in, and I got the group to work and everything" (Rowley, 2003, p. 143). In their own unique way, they demonstrated their ability to take initiative and exhibit effective leadership abilities.

Optimistic outlook. These students demonstrated an optimistic outlook on life. They repeatedly described themselves as optimistic, positive, and hopeful, regardless of their often taxing and trying reality. According to Jay:

> I'm definitely an optimist. I mean, even through bad times like being in prison for most of my twenties, I'm definitely focus on the positive things in my life. I mean, I can't speak for everybody. I have always tried to be hopeful about my future. (Rowley, 2003, p. 223)

The participants revealed that no matter how much adversity they encountered in their educational and personal lives, there was always a potentially positive outcome to it. They advanced towards each life experience with hope, and maintained the belief that they would be a better person because of it.

The participants in this study endured numerous stresses and challenges in their lives, yet always attempted to find something positive in it. Robert talked about the financial pressures caused by his father's inability to find employment. He pointed out:

> I mean, just my dad being unemployed for six years, it's hard to put a bright side to that, but that's what I always try to do. That's sort of not a positive experience, but I'm gonna learn from his negative experience and make my experience that much more positive. (Rowley, 2003, pp. 59-60)

Robert added that he lives in one of the most economically deprived areas in San Francisco. He described how it is sometimes difficult to have a positive outlook about

the environment he lives in and how many of the people in his community are not able to rise above it. He expressed:

> I live in the Bayview, so it's not like a positive place– it's not positive seeing like what, how different communities get treated.... I can see how when you limit yourself in your mind that just manifests itself in how you behave. And I mean it's unfortunate because those folks out in the Bay view got a lot of potential, but it's just not being realized and I guess that's the thing, you know, it has a reputation and, I mean, the violence is real. Some of the violence is real, and I think that's the hard part cause when you're just trying to survive and you can't even think about dreams, it seems like. You're just trying to live the next day, you know, and that's – fortunately for me, I don't feel like that's MY reality but you know I can see how definitely that's how some people feel. (Rowley, 2003, pp. 60-61)

Mary also stressed the importance of looking deeper into what may appear to be a negative circumstance. She believed that in most situations you can learn and grow. She went on to say, "it's never what it looks like – never consider yourself a failure. You just might be a little stuck right now, or you have a little lag time but the end is what counts" (Rowley, 2003, p. 12).

When Evette could not return to work due to a work injury, she originally felt like it was the most challenging event in her life to date. She quickly realized, "If something didn't happen the way it ought to happen or it wasn't good, I always believe there's something good that comes out of something bad" (Rowley, 2003, p. 146). Even though it was initially difficult for Evette to recognize that something positive could come from her work injury, she soon recognized it gave her the opportunity to pursue her academic dream of earning a college degree.

One of the most important factors presented by the participants was the need to dream about their future. Despite the fact that five of the participants lived in poverty, one was incarcerated for almost ten years, one was homeless, one dealt drugs to survive,

and all were first generation college students, they all had an extremely hopeful outlook towards their futures. They believed that dreaming leads to developing goals, both short-term and long-term. Those goals then cultivated hope for the future and nourished an optimistic outlook in difficult periods.

It was apparent that these participants had considerable dreams about continuing their education. Most of the participants had plans of attending graduate school to earn a master's degree and two intended to earn their doctoral degree. They also shared career aspirations and goals of economic advancement. Dreams about a better future reinforced their optimism towards their current realities. It also provided additional motivation to persist and complete their academic goals. Jay claimed:

> I'm definitely a dreamer. Cause I think dreams are motivations for me, I don't think people can go through life without dreams. Cause dreams motivate me and give me a reason to do this. They definitely give me hope. Cause you know I see myself someplace and that's kind of what I work for. (Rowley, 2003, p. 221)

Value of education. One of the most apparent beliefs held by the participants was the value of education. This belief had grown and evolved over time, and was fostered by both educational and personal experiences. Education served several purposes for the participants such as the ability to elevate their own and their families' financial circumstances, personal growth and achievement, and most importantly, it nurtured their desire to learn. Wes asserted, "Education means different things at different times depending on what's going on" (Rowley, 2003, p. 116).

Jay indicated his beliefs around education were different during high school and explained why education was important to him. He asserted:

> In high school, I wasn't thinking about college. I just wanted to get out of high school and leave and go to work somewhere, and that's it. Thinking everything's gonna be great. But it's NOT. It turns out that I need this, especially now more so

> than anything. I need all the benefits in my corner that I can get, man (p. 229)... I have seen a lot of people, seen grown men that just can't read and stuff a lot. And it's so disappointing to me, you know. I don't want to be uneducated. I don't wanna be 45 yrs old and uneducated....You know I need that confidence and having an education gives me that confidence. (Rowley, 2003, p 225)

Robert added:

> Before, school was just going through the motions, get your degree and then move on, get a job, you know, buy a house, whatever. It wasn't like even trying to learn, you know. It was just like memorizing stuff for as long as you needed to ... Education is important to me and this is me thinking education beyond just classroom context. Because I think it just opens up your world. I think it opens up your possibilities. It gives you new skills, and I think for me it just empowers you, it empowers you. You feel like you work upon the world when you're educated, not the world just works upon you, you know. (Rowley, 2003, pp. 68-69)

Mary asserted that having an education helped her to have a voice and to be heard by others. She shared:

> If I'm explaining something to you with an education behind me, people are gonna listen to me. If I don't have anything behind me, people listen but they don't hear you. And if you want to be HEARD, you gotta get your education. It's like knowledge is power. But in order to validate your knowledge, you gotta have that paper. (Rowley, 2003, p. 17)

Evette added how education facilitates change and open-mindedness. She explained:

> Education is important because education is power. Educating opens not just the mind but to be – to be open-minded, to know your surroundings. And I KNOW, now that I'm in school, that you can really tell now who has an education in some way by the way – things people do, and certain things people say. And education is very important because, like I said, it's very powerful and you can – and you can express your feelings, you can make a change....I've always felt about education like that. (Rowley, 2003, p. 154)

Monica found personal growth and validation through education. Monica stated, "Just to see a certificate in your name, that, that can change you. You see your name on that certificate in a frame on a wall, you'll feel so – you'll have so much more confidence in yourself than you not seein nothin but the streets" (Rowley, 2003, p. 263). She went

on to say, "Everybody always wondering, why you been in school so long? Because this is like my home, and this is where I can be me" (Rowley, 2003, p. 263).

The desire to learn, gain knowledge, and be exposed to information fuels the participants' value of education. They did not equate learning with a high grade point average. It was more important for them to actively learn the material than just maintain high grades. Wes admitted:

> I haven't ever been like a 4.0 student here, but I felt that I was learning a lot, which is more important to me than how my grades are (p. 93)....The most important factor in my success in education is that I'm gaining something from what I'm doing and that's more important to me than a grade. (Rowley, 2003, p. 114)

This sentiment was echoed by Evette. She asserted:

> But to me the grade is not important. To me, what's most important is that I know that what I'm learning so I can apply it later on in my life and not just memorize it and throw it away, no....It's not like a cash register. You take money in and you take money out. No, I want to be able to apply all that stuff that I learn. (Rowley, 2003, pp. 142-143)

Robert believed his desire to learn stemmed from wanting to be a more conscientious person. This in turn cultivated him being more conscientious in his educational experience. He offered, "I'm much more interested in myself as a learner and, you know, how I learn, what I learn, trying to learn, not just memorize" (Rowley, 2003, p. 77). Robert believed his desire to learn was fueled by the empowerment and energy it gave him. He added, "I felt like I was learning something new and relevant and it helped me make sense of my world" (Rowley, 2003, p. 65). Jay had a need to expose himself to novel and uncharacteristic material. He thrived by learning about areas he would not have normally been exposed to without participating in college. Jay admitted, "Like my English class, the books – I would have probably never chosen to read. And I

took up a film history class too. There were films I never would have seen" (Rowley, 2003, p. 226).

Educational Transformation: Reframing Their World

The participants in this study experienced a process of educational transformation while attending higher education. The participants needed change in order to create a different educational direction from that of their families. In essence, they were breaking the educational cycle that had been in place in their families for decades. In this process, they began to develop a new perspective on the role of education in their lives as well as created mechanisms to assist them in enduring this educational journey. The sub-themes that emerged surrounding the central theme *educational transformation: reframing their world* were (1) leaving their past behind, (2) changing their relationship with education, and (3) the driving force: turning adversity into motivation.

Leaving Their Past Behind

Prior to their reinvention, the participants believed they needed to leave portions of their past behind. This process allowed the students to fully engage in their new educational processes. For Robert, Mary, Jay, Monica, and Bill, this process was often complicated and painful to undergo. In the end, they felt empowered by substituting negative portions of their lives with more positive ones. The participants needed to let go of negative people in their lives and the ideology of instant gratification.

Jay spent all of his twenties in prison and has now left that life behind to start a new life in education. Jay reflected on his journey from prison to higher education:

> One thing I know about is how trying it gets here, but there's always something worse. So no matter what is thrown at me here in school, it is worse out there... When you get out, you think that for some reason, you think, that everybody

> recognizes that you're different or something. That's kind of something that stands out to me. And I have talked to guys that have gone through it too and they say the same thing. But I think that, I'm beginning to think that it's really psychological. I had to make the decision that it all starts right here... I made a choice a long time ago, that things were gonna be different...you gotta make a choice whether you want this forever or you want to take the same old path–well, what I'm sayin to myself, this is a new start. I had to decide if I want things to stay the same, or am I gonna make things better- BETTER FOR ME. Once I made that change in my mind, I knew what I had to do. I had to start making some changes, and I did. I started in THERE. I took college classes in prison. (Rowley, 2003, pp. 213-214)

Throughout her volatile childhood and adolescence, Monica learned quickly she only had herself to count on. She knew her survival depended solely on herself. This contributed to her selling illegal drugs for a large portion of her life, even while attending college, and serving time in jail. Monica reflected on her journey from drug dealer to college graduate:

> I hung around with a lot of people that sold drugs. Big drug dealers...yes, I sold drugs....You know, it's dangerous, real dangerous. I've been shot, robbed, I've gotten pulled out of car, and beaten up.... I used it (money) to buy my books, put me through school. I realized selling drugs is hurtin' people, especially my own people, and I came to that conclusion when I had prayed to God, and I told god, I said, God, put me in school and let me finish a program that's gonna help me to make enough money to feed myself and take care of myself, I promise you I'LL get off the corner. I stopped selling drugs but people think today I'm still a drug dealer, but I'm NOT. There's no future in that. And I believe that it's gonna be different. It's already – I mean, I DO feel different. (Rowley, 2003, p. 246)

The process of letting go of negative people to make room for more positive and supportive people appeared to ring true for all the participants. For some participants, it meant ending or limiting relationships with family members who were not supportive. This included family members such as parents, cousins, aunts, and uncles. Monica discovered, "I've outgrew a lot of things, and I've outgrew a lot of my friends" (Rowley, 2003, p. 271).

Furthermore, most of the participants had to end relationships with friends that opposed the positive direction they were making in their lives. Letting go of certain relationships sometimes included moving to a different location to live, work, or study. Several of the students chose to move to a new city or to commute to a school that was outside their current community. This gave them the opportunity and encouragement they needed to pursue their educational dreams. Robert stated:

> So I came to City cause I was living in the East Bay to kind of get away from friends from high school.....they just weren't helping me get anywhere, you know, I was just maintaining the status quo, so I came to City to hopefully kind of try something new. (Rowley, 2003, p. 41)

Monica discussed why she needed to let go of negative people in her life.

> My friends – tried to pull me away, party, keeping me out, you know, drinkin at night where I couldn't get up and go to class, or whatever, they couldn't understand. I didn't care if I stayed out drinkin, I got my butt up, put some dark glasses and I went and sat in that class. And they hated that (p. 226).... I'm not into partying anymore. I'm just hungry for more learning, more education. And so that's how I lost a lot of my friends. They're still stuck back there. So I had family members and a handful of friends that were not encouraging. They would say, she not gonna pass. She's not gonna be no nurse. (Rowley, 2003, p. 254)

The participants believed that it was essential for them to move on and develop relationships with individuals who understood and supported the direction they were taking in their lives. The most difficult part of letting go of certain relationships was the feeling of isolation many of them felt. Their isolation gradually subsided as they began to fill their lives with relationships and activities that nurtured their personal and academic goals.

In addition to letting go of negative people, the participants had to let go of the ideology of instant gratification. The idea of deferred gratification as a new concept was a recurring theme for the participants. This idea was mostly spoken about in terms of

financial rewards. Evette used a metaphor to describe the financial sacrifices she and her family were currently engaged in.

> My aunt tells me, today you can have rice and beans but you cannot have rice and beans for the rest of your life, you know, because you're gonna have an education. And just using the theory, my aunt will say, you know, later on you can have rice and meat and turkey, whatever, you know. So, financially it's been hard but I know that when I'm done, it's gonna be better. So it's just a little temporary sacrifice. I'm eating my rice and beans now, but I won't have rice and beans for the rest of my life. (Rowley, 2003, p. 153)

Jay concluded:

> I may suffer a little bit economically while I'm in school but I believe things will get better in the long run....I've gotta believe when I'm done that the rewards are gonna return themselves....I mean, I gotta make some sacrifices, that's all; whatever it takes. There's gonna be something better on the other side. (Rowley, 2003, p. 224)

Jay's and Evette's reflections were echoed by the other participants. In addition, the participants did not view this sacrifice as a burden. They believed it is as a required part of the educational journey they signed up for. Furthermore, sacrifice was something each participant was familiar with in their personal lives.

Changing Their Relationship with Education

Most of the participants' initial relationship with education was not encouraging. They encountered negative experiences with the academic world. Right after high school, Robert entered a community college in the east bay. During his first semester he only passed one class. Some of the participants attributed their academic failure to not being prepared for the academic demands of higher education. They believed they were not adequately prepared in high school for college level work. More importantly, they did not understand the appropriate college success strategies to be successful in college. Monica talked about her first semester in college, "When I first started I was scared. I

didn't think I was gonna do good. My grades were bad at first. They were bad. I had to learn new study skills, I mean, I didn't have any studying skills" (Rowley, 2003, p. 243).

They also believed the lack of support from the institution contributed to their initial discouragement in college. Robert discussed his encounter with his first academic counselor at CCSF.

> At first, my initial experience with City College was horrible. I mean, I went and saw a counselor in the general counseling dept. And told her I wanted to go to UC Berkeley. And major in business. And she said, as long as I've been here I've only known two students to transfer on to Berkeley personally so she was, like, you might want to think about San Francisco State...she made me actually doubt myself... she put that kind of doubt in my mind. I understand that Berkeley is competitive, but I don't think you just turn around and tell somebody you know, I don't know if Berkeley is for you, think about State – the first time you meet them, you know? (Rowley, 2003, pp. 43-44)

As Robert indicated, five other participants felt their initial experience with higher education was negative. Some experienced this same lack of encouragement or support from other members of the institution. The participants felt it was important for them to be affirmed and supported in their transition to higher education.

Whether the participants initially had a negative encounter with the academic world or not, all the participants revealed a moment or situation which shifted their attention to higher education. This shift facilitated a more positive, active, and passionate relationship with the academic world. When asked what moment made this shift possible, each participant promptly identified the precise situation. For some students, it was a relationship with a faculty member. For others, it was a specific student development service that assisted them. Each participant expressed the way in which they shifted their focus to higher education. For example, Robert, Monica, Mary, Wes, Jay, and Bill participated in motivating and stimulating courses with dynamic instructors.

Some of these courses were in the areas of ethnic studies. For Robert, it was a life changing experience to take a course about their ethnic heritage. Others were able to learn the history and identity of their ethnic community. Robert declared:

> The Philippine Studies class, it's the first time, I mean, my dad is Filipino and black, but I'm mainly Filipino. I KNEW I was Filipino, but I didn't really know what it meant to be Filipino....I would say, I'm Filipino, but what did that mean, you know? So taking that class I started to sort of open up some stuff, made me realize why a lot of things were the way they were in the Filipino community....A lot of the inequities and stuff that I'VE seen, she sort of broke it down you know, and it made a lot of sense so that just sort of making sense of my world more, so that helped. (Rowley, 2003, pp. 42-43)

It was apparent early on in the dialogues that these students at one point in their academic careers felt different from their peers. This difference often alienated many of the participants from the educational process. Although they felt this difference, the participants' experiences shifted as they learned how to negotiate this difference. Although three participants still feel different from their peers, this new understanding contributed to them feeling more included in the educational community.

Evette and Monica experienced this difference as early as elementary school, while all the participants experienced this in some way during college. These differences included speaking a different language, being of a different race or coming from a different culture, being the first in their families to attend and complete a college degree, or being of a different age. The participants indicated that these feelings of dissimilarity actually contributed to them being successful students in higher education.

When Evette first came to the United States at the age 8 years old, she felt different because she was unable to speak English. She also had to learn how to negotiate a new culture and educational system. Evette shared her experience with a new language and culture:

> When I first came to this country...I didn't speak English. I could not communicate with my teacher. Everything was new to me, so I used to cry all the time...I felt out of place. It was not easy because it was just – not just the language, but also the food, the way I had to dress different. (Rowley, 2003, pp. 135-136)

Evette indicated that this difference developed a self imposed pressure to learn the language as quickly as possible. Within a year she learned the basics of the English language.

Both Wes and Monica attributed feeling different by being African-American. They were often the only African- American students in their classes. When Monica first started college she felt people treated her different because she is African-American. She stated, "I felt like I had to strive harder and PROVE myself more" (Rowley, 2003, p. 241). She felt her peers perceived her as inferior, even though they all completed the same entrance requirements. It did not interfere with Monica's academic progress because she has experienced this type of inequitable treatment before in other areas of her life. Robert added that he felt different due to being interracial. His father is Filipino and African-American and his mother is Caucasian (Welsh). He stated, "I'm comfortable in different circles. But at the same time, for me, I never feel like I'm really IN any one of those circles because people comment – unless you're quote unquote pure, then it's kind of – you're different" (Rowley, 2003, p. 40).

Being the first in their families to attend and complete a college degree also appeared to contribute to the participants feeling different from their peers. The participants did not have the cultural capital that students' parents who completed higher education often have. In essence, they did not have the basic understanding of the college system or the guidance of their family to negotiate it. As first generation college

students, they learned how to negotiate this system on their own. This ranged from filling out applications for various services, choosing classes, accessing financial aid, and academic strategies needed to perform well academically.

Also, the participants were aware of the economic benefits their parents may have missed out on due to their educational level. And this often contributed to them feeling different from their peers. Robert openly discussed his father's employment limitations due in part to his educational level.

> In talking to a LOT of my classmates, they talk about how their parents went to college, or, you know, their parents are successful in a type of business... like my dad, so for like the majority of my life my father's been unemployed. And I mean I think that has something directly to do with the level of education he's attained. I mean, he's an intelligent, smart person but it's just I think the more education you have, your outlook kind of changes on what, what are your possibilities. And I think that's what's made me feel different. (Rowley, 2003, p. 39)

Mary, Bill, Jay and Evette felt different from their peers due to their age. The community college system is diverse in many ways, one being the varying age of the student population. For the older participants, they felt their age contributed to them being slightly more mature and focused when compared to the younger students. Mary spoke about being 15-20 years older than some of the students in her classes. Although she benefited from the younger students, she found taking courses with older students was more satisfying and comfortable at times.

The Driving Force: Turning Adversity Into Motivation

One of the most pertinent themes presented during the dialogues was the internal drive and motivation of the participants. This motivation to complete higher education often came from varying adversities in their lives. Their adverse conditions became the fuel for them to persist in college. The participants in this study developed an ability to

turn their adversities into motivation. This ability provided the participants with the endurance needed for the educational transformation to occur, which resulted in them being academically successful. Motivation to attend and complete higher education is important to most students, but it was especially important to these participants. This drive played a significant role in them achieving their educational dreams.

All the participants were motivated to complete college due to the countless sacrifices their parents had made for them to be there, both financial and emotional. Their families' sacrifices gave them the opportunities they currently are enjoying. Robert remembered:

> Well, feeling uncomfortable about my dad not going to college and sort of not having the history of our family being successful in THOSE terms, it's made me more determined to try and get through college. Not because I'm ashamed of my dad or anything, but just – I know, he made a lot of sacrifices coming here so that I COULD have those opportunities. So it's just, it's something that I really try and stay focused on....But like in a way I'm kind of going to college for my parents. And because I know that's one of their dreams for ME. I mean, it's one of my dreams for myself, too. But I know it's really important to them, so I'd like to realize it for the both of us, and I mean, my dad will be very proud of me if I got my BA or whatever. (Rowley, 2003, p. 40)

All the participants shared similar thoughts to Robert. They had the desire to complete college for themselves, but had a strong drive to accomplish it for their families. The participants described family as parents, significant others, children, and other key family members. By completing their academic goals, they were helping their family realize their goals as well. Also, their achievement would be an opportunity to thank their family for all the sacrifices they had made for them. In essence, the participants were not only improving themselves, but their family as well.

Also, it was an important motivator for the participants to break the lack of education cycle currently existing in their families. Evette stated, "My parents not having

a high education, my mother, my father, that makes me empowered to do it. Not because I wanna show them that I'm better, but because I wanna break the cycle" (Rowley, 2003, p. 159). The participants had to tread new and sometimes daunting paths in order to create a new educational direction for themselves and members in their families.

Furthermore, Evette was motivated by seeing her brother complete a college degree. She and her brother were the youngest children in her family. They raised themselves without the assistance of their mother. She left them with family members in Nicaragua in order to move to the United States. They are the only two people in their family to earn a college degree. Experiencing his graduation ceremony was a highly emotional moment in her life. Evette revealed:

> We have shared a lot of experiences together. A lot....I think that's one of the reasons that really motivated me to go to school, is seeing him graduate from UC Davis, and I said, if he can do it, I can do it. I remember, when I saw him graduating from De Anza College, I was so proud of him, but when he graduated from Davis, I said, oh, my, god, if he can do it [she's really crying now], I can do it. (Rowley, 2003, p. 164)

Mary and Evette were motivated by their children. They wanted to show them a different and more positive path in live. Mary's youngest child's father is in prison and she felt it was her obligation to be a role model for her son. She reflected on her children and the importance of leading by example.

> Letting them see something better. My son's father is in prison. He's serving 25 to life term, so he doesn't have a father, you know....So he doesn't have anything to look up to as far as that's concerned....So seeing ME doing something, it gives, it motivates him. You know, when he sees his mom doing something, it motivates HIM because he doesn't have that male figure at this point in his life, and he might not never have that male figure, you know, me and his father are history, so I mean, unless his father gets out. He'll be an adult when his father gets out, if he ever gets out. So it's important for me to really set an example for my children. (Rowley, 2003, pp. 15-16)

All the participants with children believed it was crucial for them to encourage their

children to have a positive relationship with education. And the best way to do so was by successfully engaging in education themselves. This was the biggest motivator for these participants to achieve their educational dreams. Furthermore, they believed by being a motivator to others, they were also being motivated themselves. Mary stated, "When I am encouraging others to finish, I hear myself and that motivates me to hang in there" (Rowley, 2003, p. 20).

Growing up, Monica had a volatile relationship with her mother, which was a major factor in her moving out on her own at an early age. Monica's mother was unable to provide a positive parental role for her during childhood and adolescence. This forced Monica to essentially raise herself, which included finding a place to live. Now that she is older, she is attempting to develop a better relationship with her mother. Needless to say, Monica did not have familial support while she was growing up, neither personally or educationally. Monica used her negative relationship with her mother as motivation to accomplish her academic and personal goals. She discussed her destructive relationships with both her mother and other family members, and how she turned it into motivation. Monica asserted, "I wanted to make a difference, I wanted to better myself...no matter what my family thought. They were just mean to me. And I wanted to make liars out of people. I wanted to make them eat their words... So it motivates me, it's my drive" (Rowley, 2003, p. 264). She went on to say, "And it's like this – I'm gonna DIE driving" (Rowley, 2003, p. 256).

For four of the participants, overcoming poverty was a factor which drove them to persist in education and improve their financial conditions. The participants were able to turn their economic adversity into a motivator. Monica stated:

> Hungry like, um, I was brought up in poverty. And I don't wanna go back there. I wanna go forward. I don't want to have to be hungry again. Not having much to eat, like eating oatmeal for breakfast, lunch and dinner....I've turn this frustration into a motivator. A drive. Yup. To do better. And to push myself harder. (Rowley, 2003, pp. 241-242)

Evette shared:

> But I think a lot of it has to do with where I was born; it's a third world country. People are very poor. And this was a big motivation for me and (my brother). We know the other side of the coin. We know what it is to be poor. We've been there. I've even been through a war. He and I together, when we lived in Nicaragua, we lived through a war. (Rowley, 2003, pp. 163-164)

All the participants thrived on the challenges they encountered in education and the process of overcoming them. They were highly motivated by courses that were the most academically rigorous. They believed if the course content did not challenge or push them, they were less likely to be motivated to engage with the course content. Also, they believed once the course was complete, it would feel less like an accomplishment if it were not challenging.

Originators of Their Support System

The major theme of originators of their support system demonstrates the way in which the participants developed a support structure while in higher education. The participants created their support system by accessing student development services and developing relationships with positive faculty members. Developing and maintaining an effective support structure was essential to the success of these low-income, first generation community college students.

Support through Student Development Services

All the participants in this study actively pursued support through student development services and programs. They accessed services geared towards helping

them complete their academic goals. These services included Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS), Financial Aid Office (FAO), Learning Assistance Center (LAC), Disability Programs and Services (DSPS), Writing Success Project (WSP), and tutoring.

The participants believed these programs and services fostered their success in college. In particular, they emphasized that EOPS and FAO were the two programs that resulted in their persistence in higher education. Jay stated the following about EOPS, "They go that extra little bit that some students needed. It keeps you motivated too...It is getting that encouragement, saying, you're not too far away" (Rowley, 2003, p. 228). Most of the participants asserted that EOPS was a supportive community on the college campus. Evette stated, "It's like a – I can't really say family, but I feel they are working for me and I am working for them" (Rowley, 2003, p. 141).

Although all the participants sought out and accessed various student development programs and services, some participants did not initially access these services. They experienced a shift in the importance of student support services and programs. Once they realized the value of these services, they began to actively seek them out. Robert wondered:

> I don't know, I guess my frame of mind kind a changed. Before, I didn't really see how that stuff really mattered. You know, I just thought you know you go to school, you study, you don't need all that other stuff. But then I guess I realized how there's a reason why there's these programs here....So I guess, I mean, I think the thing for me –it's not even so much, I sought OUT a lot of help, but people started approaching ME. (Rowley, 2003, pp. 55-56)

Six of the participants originally were not aware of certain services until a faculty member brought it to their attention. Once they knew what programs and services were available to them, they utilized them. Monica felt that being at one of the smaller

campuses, she was not exposed to the full range of services offered at the main campus. She admitted, "I did not know about EOPS....and then I started coming to the main campus more and seeing more signs and more posters and stuff like that. At the small campuses you don't see that" (Rowley, 2003, pp. 261-262). Wes felt he would have been more academically successful if he would have known about certain programs early in his academic career. He suggested that, "there would have been a lot more eyes on me if I had gotten into EOPS my first semester here" (Rowley, 2003, p. 127). He felt opportunities like EOPS should have been presented to him earlier.

Support through Faculty

It was apparent that accessing student development services contributed to the participants' achievement in community college. It was even more prevalent that the counselors working in these programs, as well as their instructors, created an environment that cultivated success. The participants created positive relationships in their educational lives to assist them in their education journey. Many of the participants believed they had a network of people on campus which served as their support system. The network included academic and career counselors, instructors, peers, and administrators. Mary acknowledged:

> And people make it easy for me...in my circle, made it easy for me to come and ask. They were never unapproachable. I'm talking about my counselors, EOPS, my classes, my teachers. I was fortunate enough to get teachers that wanted me to succeed... teachers that CARED. And if I did get a teacher that DIDN'T, I just dropped that, I just got another class. (Rowley, 2003, p. 10)

Monica discussed the role instructors played in her academic success, "I guess at times when I felt like...I wasn't gonna make it. I wasn't gonna be successful. I'd go to 'em, my instructors, they would say 'quit being so hard on yourself; you're doing good" (Rowley, 2003, p. 249).

All the participants believed the central characteristics of their network of support included flexibility and understanding. Wes also believed his network of instructors and counselors contributed to his success in college. Wes credited a teacher with his persistence:

> Um, my math instructor made an exception for me after turning away – after like closing off his section and looking at my transcript and understanding that I've already taken this course twice and still you know made an exception for me to be in the course....So I mean that kept me here this semester; that kept me from dropping out. (Rowley, 2003, p. 112)

Furthermore, the participants asserted that their support network required them to take some initiative in developing the supportive relationships with instructors, counselors, and administrators. Evette stated:

> Every semester I always go to my teachers' office hours. I visit with my teacher. I want to get to know my teacher outside of this – not just in class. I want them to know where I'm coming from. I mean, it's plain and simple. They have office hours. You take advantage of it, and you just go. And talk about class, or anything. They're there for you, and if you don't take advantage of it you know it's your loss. (Rowley, 2003, p. 137)

According to the participants, the relationships these students developed while in higher education cultivated an environment that fostered success. The results of these positive relationships were endless. Evette shared one of the benefits she received from her positive relationships with instructors. She said, "I keep in communication with my present and my past teachers. And then on the inside, it empowers me even more because I'm establishing those relationships. I feel successful, and then the next semester it continues" (Rowley, 2003, p. 138).

In order for these relationships to occur, most of the participants discussed the issue of trust. Two the participants had difficulty with trusting people in their personal lives, but all were able to develop positive and trusting relationships with faculty

members in higher education. Monica on her relationship with others:

> Okay. When I've trusted people at school it's been positive. When I needed MENTAL help. You know, I needed a push or I needed someone to talk to. I needed someone that I could trust and tell certain things to and it not be judged. That's why I felt like this is my home over here (community college). I can trust a lotta people over here than in my REAL home. (Rowley, 2003, p. 251)

The participants believed their network of support on campus, which was exemplified by the positive relationships they developed and sustained, was nurtured by the fact that the people in their lives believed in their ability. This belief in the participants' ability was accompanied with high expectations. In turn, these high expectations encouraged the participants to have elevated expectations of themselves, and cultivated a higher self confidence. Robert talked about a time when he was having difficulty in college, and how an instructor made a positive difference. He shared:

> I was walking across the campus and the teacher saw me and I had never really known the teacher that well and she just came up to me and she was like, hey, you know, I haven't' seen you in a while in my class, you know, let's talk. And it was a trip cause she just sat down with me on a bench there. She was obviously going somewhere and she just sat down and just started talking to me. I told her about what happened in high school and stuff like that, and she just really just sat there and listened. After that happened, I was just like, she really CARED about me and stuff and that was hella cool to me. I still didn't have the skills to like follow through on what I said I was gonna do going in her class and stuff like that but just that her showing that she cared, that already started me going up again in the right direction. I don't remember this woman's name but like, I owe a lot to her. (Rowley, 2003, pp. 65-66)

Robert went on to talk about the expectations administrators at the community college had of him in regards to transferring. He claimed:

> There was a point that people started expecting me to go to UC Berkeley vs. getting a degree in mechanics....But then like as soon as I started to have that name, like now I go see you know the vice chancellor. He says, 'can I help you get into Stanford? Can I write you a letter of recommendation?' The chancellor is telling me about these schools like you know – the chancellor of City College of SF is taking time out of his day to tell ME about schools on the East Coast where he has connections, where he can help me get in. So I think definitely

> that's a huge confidence boost like --to me it's really positive...people feel confident in my skills. (Rowley, 2003, p. 51)

Robert talked about his instructor and mentor: "she sort of expected a lot of me cause she saw something in me (p. 50)...she really took the time to try to get to know me and like encourage me to do a lot of stuff, like she saw some potential in me, and I needed that, for someone to think that like I could DO something" (Rowley, 2003, p. 41). Monica affirmed Robert's experience by stating, "They (instructors) knew I could do better...they seen something in me that I didn't" (Rowley, 2003, p. 248).

Often the participants were able to articulate the reasons these key people invested their time and energy into their academic success. The participants felt their counselors and instructors saw something special in them which resulted in them having high expectations in their academic growth and success in higher education. Also, they believed their network of support recognized they were hard working, determined, and took their involvement in higher education seriously. The participants shared how the high expectations of their network of support affected them in their academic journey. According to Robert:

> I don't know if it's my own personality or what it is, but I think people were being really receptive to me. They've been really nice. They've like opened themselves up to ME, and that's something that I always appreciate you know when someone is willing to have that honesty with you whether it be a counselor or someone else....I think that sort of for me like validated that I was becoming more responsible and really starting to take care of business, and it was just a positive reinforcement of everything that I was trying to do. (Rowley, 2003, p. 44)

And Monica:

> It was my (instructor) that pushed me. She told me I could do anything or be anything that I wanted; anything....I just kept that in my mind...She believed in me and I fed off of that. That's what kept me going. Teachers and counselors pushed me and challenged me and expected me to do well. (Rowley, 2003, p. 241)

Mary asserted, "They would say, 'she's doin it'. It wasn't a given to ME, it was like, I'm struggling. It made me push for what they wanted – what they saw in me. It made ME push for it....I didn't quite see it" (Rowley, 2003, p.9). Wes talked about how those high expectations affected him. He said, "It puts you in a position where I always feel I have to perform well and I think that that has often affected how I perform. I think it's affected me positively that it's kept me enrolled in school" (Rowley, 2003, p. 99).

All the participants, except one, had family members who had high educational expectations of them. The interesting thing is that none of their family members had completed a degree in higher education themselves. Mary discussed her grandmother, "she really pushed the education even though she wasn't able to achieve it...she always wanted to see me succeed on the educational level because she couldn't do it" (Rowley, 2003, pp. 20-21). Robert claimed, "My mom wasn't gonna not let me go to college. You know, it was just like not an option for me NOT to go" (Rowley, 2003, p. 70).

Jay, Robert and Monica indicated that their high school counselors and instructors had minimal expectations of them. They noticed a shift from low expectations to higher expectations once they entered the community college system. Jay insisted, "They (high school teachers) automatically expected that I would do some kind of manual work for a living....I don't think they saw that I could do more things other than that...a lot of people wrote me off because I made a few mistakes" (Rowley, 2003, p. 214).

Student involvement in campus life appeared to be a crucial element for the participants. This involvement was exhibited in student government, campus clubs and organizations, and on-campus work in student development programs. The participants

indicated that being involved in campus life contributed to the development and preservation of their support system.

Being involved in campus life provided access to faculty, administrators, and peers that they might not have been exposed to otherwise. These individuals became positive and active members in their lives. And in many cases, a mentoring relationship resulted from their exchange. Robert served as student body president and served on the community college school board as student trustee. He asserted that his involvement in these campus activities provided him access to his network of support. He ventured:

> I became a name and not just some random student; I got involved. I guess by me getting involved, maybe they felt like I was showing that I was interested (p. 50).....I started meeting more positive people at City College. I just try to get to know everybody, you know, counselors, administrators (p. 43)... I have a ton of mentors here at City College; people that I guess I consider kinda closer to MY circle....just having a community to kind of support you, so you can learn the ropes, I think that's what's like made me successful as a student. (Rowley, 2003, p. 50)

In addition to creating positive mentoring relationships, campus involvement provided the students with an educational and personal purpose. Student involvement also fostered the development of the participants and created more well-rounded individuals.

Finding Meaning in Their World

The participants shared how they found meaning through education and learning. This sense of meaning was accompanied by the purpose of education in their lives. This central theme was offered by the participants in three main areas: meaning through family, meaning through giving back to their community, and meaning through serving a greater good.

Meaning through Family

The participants in this study found meaning in education through the support and encouragement of family. They were overwhelmingly supported by their families in educational attendance and persistence. This encouragement and support fostered one of the primary reasons they were engaged in higher education- to make their families proud. In essence, it promoted an obligation to the family to attain their academic dreams.

It was imperative for the students to complete a college degree not only for themselves, but also for their families. Their attendance and completion was the catalyst for transformation in themselves and their family unit. They were clearly in this for the team; their family. Bill discussed his relationship with his mom who had a terminal illness:

> Going to school is what I do for a living...And I want my mom to know I'm gonna be all right, and she'll go to her grave not worrying about what's gonna happen to the baby in the family. My mom probably got another year, maybe two, to live, and I'm trying to get all this done before that happens. (Rowley, 2003, p. 179)

For these first generation college students, the word support had varying meanings. Many of the participants felt they were supported emotionally by their families. This translated into the family unit encouraging them to attend and attain a college degree, but did not include financial support or providing skills on how to negotiate the education system, or understanding academic expectations. Robert reflected:

> I was supported by family, friends. In terms of they all agreed go to college. But that's pretty much kinda where it stopped. I didn't have a lot of support in terms of how to study in college, or the bureaucracy of college. I had to learn as I went type of thing, so emotionally I felt supported in that I should GO.... I think the thing with my dad that I've realized is like, he very much wants me to go to college and get a degree, but he doesn't understand cause he never went through

> it. Like what it really entails and what being a college student is, or what it takes. Or that you actually do have to study. He'll call me up and ask me to take him grocery shopping cause they don't have a car, and I'd be, like, I gotta write a paper and they don't really understand that. (Rowley, 2003, pp. 71-72)

Evette did not feel educationally supported or encouraged by her family while growing up. As an adult, she has created her own family and now feels supported in her educational aspirations. Evette indicated that her family was the primary factor contributing to her success in college due to their emotional support. She stated:

> Not having my parents in college and my mother not going to college, I never really had my mother's support about school, but my husband, of course, he's been to graduate school. I'm with someone who appreciates education also. He understands it. Yeah, he knows that I need to study, he knows that I need to do this (p. 154).....My family is very important to me. Sorry, it's a little bit emotional [she's crying]. But, uh, my family has been there for me, my husband, my mother in law, especially, because my husband and I, we have a four year old. And she's been there to help me since the day I came to City College, helping me baby sit her. And if it wasn't for my family, I wouldn't be where I am right now. So it's my family that is the major factor that has played a role in me being here and to get my education. (Rowley, 2003, pp. 150-151)

Mary talked about her grandmother's and children's support. She reflected:

> (They were) constantly on me. And I consider that support. So just saying, oh, how you doing in school? How much longer do you have? Oh, when's the graduation date? Where'd you say you were going after that? You know – just stuff like that. (Rowley, 2003, p. 23)

Meaning through Giving Back to Their Community

In addition to finding meaning in education through family, the participants discovered meaning through giving back to their communities. The participants in this study believed that being academically successful was essential for the progression and improvement of their communities. They maintained a fervent obligation to challenging negative perceptions of their respective community as well as facilitating positive perceptions. Robert stated:

> I take my education like knowing that if I get through this, I'm not getting through this for Robert; I'm getting through this for my community. So that I can help other Roberts make it. It's not like I'm just getting this so I can acquire a certain level of knowledge and degrees and incomes. (Rowley, 2003, p.73)

Monica discussed her commitment to assisting people in her community transition from a life of illegal activity to higher education. She realized the positive role education has played in her life and wants people in her community to experience the same.

She claimed:

> I try to push people off dealing drugs....We need to save our men, our boys. We need to save our boys from the streets...there lost over there. I pushed two people over here (community college). I'm standing by them, I helped them fill out their financial aid papers. I told 'em about EOPS. San Francisco City saved my life. (Rowley, 2003, p. 271)

Jay maintained:

> I work with ex felons in leaving one institution- prison and coming to another of a whole different light- the institution of education. It is overwhelming for a lot of these people. I mean, these are two completely different worlds – it's hard to explain what people have to go through to leave that life. You are in unfamiliar territory, and you need somebody to assist you... to help you. I'm getting to deal with guys and relate to guys that went through what I went through. Also, we're gonna start doing some outreach in the juvenile hall here in San Francisco. And that's kind of what I wanna work with after graduation, too, is the juvenile delinquents. I almost feel I kind of OWE that, you know, it's all part of my education- to prevent anybody from having to go through that institutional stuff alone. (Rowley, 2003, p. 211)

Five participants thought it was important to help their community by modeling positive behavior. This included attending and attaining a college degree. They described the attraction their community members, both young and old, had towards their participation and success in higher education. Their educational experience generated a curiosity about education in their community. Mary asserted:

> I'm kind of like a magnet and they just come and want to hang out. To see me go through it (higher education) was important. Even with my daughter's friend, I

> was able to just show them something positive, a little extra never hurts, you know, in a situation like that. (Rowley, 2003, p. 24)

Evette discussed the importance of entering and completing a college degree on behalf of her Latino community.

> Most people in the Latin community are not getting a college education. Because, maybe they don't want to, or maybe because of resources they don't go to school or they're afraid to get an education. Because of all that it's an empowerment for me as a Latina. It makes me wanna get ahead and get an education. So that makes me – that's the part that makes me feel I wanna be better. So given that, I mean, since it's clearly shown that a large number of Latinos and Latinas don't even enter the door of higher education. And when they do, they don't stay. So itself, and being from that community, that makes it even more important for me to succeed. (Rowley, 2003, p. 158)

Meaning through Serving a Greater Good

The participants in this study not only found meaning and purpose in education through their families and through giving back to their communities, but also through serving a greater good. Through the process of completing their education, the participants found growth in their personal lives. This growth has contributed to them being more conscious about themselves and their role in the world. As they developed throughout the process of higher education, they began to understand more what getting education means to them, and how that might serve the greater good, not just themselves. Mary stated:

> I've never been one to like the news. All that just never interested me. Now we are going up against a lot of things with the budget and the president. I have learned you NEED to vote, you know. Where before it didn't make a difference to me; oh, my little vote's not gonna count. Yes. Whatever you do counts. And that's what I have learned. You have a voice, whether you think people will dislike it or not, but you HAVE one and you need to use it. Or else you can't complain. And I really learned that. I have a voice. (Rowley, 2003, p. 27)

Robert asserted:

> NOW I'm much more conscious of like everything. Like how it affects me, like how that affects other people, other students. I'm much more interested in myself as a learner; how I learn, what I learn, trying to learn, not just memorize...Even though there's a lot of obstacles that are put up in front of you in terms of getting your degree, there's even something to be learned in those challenges. Even shit you might hate, you know, some book you might read that you consider offensive and racist like there's something you can gain out of that. I think that's my mentality now, that there's something I can like pull up from that. (Rowley, 2003, p. 76)

Evette pointed out:

> My brother always used to think, because I'm also very spiritual, your religion makes you think different, da da da da. And now when we talk on the phone, (he would say) 'Oh, my gosh, I can't believe you changed. You're so more open minded'... I'm going to this rally on Monday at Sacramento. (He said) 'Oh, my gosh, you're becoming an activist. You're becoming political'! And he's like – 'you've CHANGED'. I go, yeah, school has changed me. (Rowley, 2003, p. 160)

The participants grew because of their experience in higher education. This growth encouraged them to have a voice for themselves and others, be more conscious about their thoughts and actions and to be more open minded and political.

In addition to the personal growth experienced by the participants, they developed and maintained a strong desire to help others and to serve the greater good. This was one of the most evident pieces of information presented by the participants. Monica maintained:

> Education is very, very vital. I'll tell anybody and everybody that. No matter what you doin, no matter how hard the road may seem or whatever just go to school for SOMETHING. I have a couple of friends and they don't think they can do it and I tell 'em you can....It's better than the streets. I always tell 'em, hey, whatever you do, take three days out of the week and do something positive. Those three days is gonna add up. Whatever else you have to do with them four days, ask for forgiveness and pray, pray. (Rowley, 2003, p. 262)

Robert discussed his plans to return to CCSF and its community to teach when he completes graduate school. He asserted:

> Me coming back here (CCSF) and teaching, that's how it'll affect people. If I just get my degree and forget about all, like how people helped me, It think it'll be all for nothing then if I do that. And I mean, that's definitely not what I'm planning on doing. It really comes back to giving back to the communities, the knowledge you have, cause it's not just for you to have in your head and maybe sell it to people or whatever. Let people have it and SHARE it with 'em, you know. (Rowley, 2003, pp. 76-77)

Mary claimed:

> I'm a helper. So whatever I gain, I'm gonna give it to somebody else. I'm not gonna hoard it up and it's just MINE. No, anything I gain is for me to give back. You know, we don't just hold it so close to our chest – we share. Because the teachers, the counselors, they're sharing their knowledge with me so you can share with others. (Rowley, 2003, 28)

It was clear that the participants believed their education was not only to serve as a spring board for themselves, but also for others. Many of the participants planned to enter service careers such as social work, counseling, and education.

Participants' Recommendations

The participants had an opportunity to provide recommendations to improve services and the experience of low-income, first generation community college students at City College of San Francisco. The participants described what they believed to be an important opportunity to help future students with backgrounds similar to themselves. They provided specific suggestions for these students to create an environment that fosters resilience and academic success in higher education. In addition to offering suggestions to low-income, first generation community college students, the participants shed light on what role City College of San Francisco could play in promoting the success of these students.

Throughout the dialogues, the participants repeatedly demonstrated the importance of using their voice in the academic world at City College. Thus, the

discussion on recommendations gave them another chance to bring that voice alive and to engage in transforming their community college community. They knew that their thoughts were being documented and included in this dissertation and they felt heard even louder than ever before. Needless to say, this was an empowering and transformative experience for these participants.

Recommendations for Students

The following are recommendations for future low-income, first generation community college students:

1. Surround self with positive people and let go of negative people.

Robert: "Put yourself around people who have a similar goal, cause a lot of people are at college but a lot of 'em aren't trying to get through it". (Rowley, 2003, p. 74)

Monica: "Don't let anybody get in the way of their education. You need to eliminate negativity, stay away from negative people, stay around positive people". (Rowley, 2003, p. 269)

2. Develop relationships with and know instructors.

Robert: "Get to know your instructors". (Rowley, 2003, p. 75)

Monica: "Just develop relationships with your instructors and counselors. Seek out people that will push you. Try to stay up under THEM". (Rowley, 2003, p. 269)

Evette: "Definitely look into getting good teachers. Because good teaching motivates you, that will make you stay. Good teachers, very important". (Rowley, 2003, 159)

Jay: "I think it is important to have teachers that can understand people that learn different and do things differently". (Rowley, 2003, p. 226)

3. Develop a network and support structure.

Robert: "Having someone at an institution who knows you by your first name makes all the difference". (Rowley, 2003, p. 75)

Wes: "(Have) a support structure. Define what you need to be supported to go to school. I don't think anyone really does that". (Rowley, 2003, p. 122)

4. Do it for yourself.

> Robert: Let go of the whole being smart ain't cool thing cause so many people, especially low income, first generation student think this; that's just such bullshit. That will limit you your entire life; being smart and not displaying that in public. It's unfortunate because in a lot of our communities once you're smarter, people think you're trying to be BETTER than them or whatever. People should take pride in that you're DOING it. (Rowley, 2003, p. 75)
>
> Mary: Do it because YOU want to do it. Don't do it because society says this is the way to go, or your family pressures you. If you don't do it because YOU want to do it, it's not gonna happen. (Rowley, 2003, p. 27)

5. Maintain balance.

> Wes: (Figure) out what your outlet is going to be. You need an outlet, whether that means you're gonna get involved in student organizing on campus – but with a balance. You need to figure out what that balance is – I'm gonna join a club, I'm gonna become an activist, I'm gonna work in the language as a work study student. I think I'm better at assessing how much to take on. Better at balancing. (Rowley, 2003, p. 123)
>
> Evette: I would recommend time management. How to manage their time is very important to have good management skills, when to do what, when is the time for play, and when it's time to study, and when it's time to have fun. (Rowley, 2003, p. 159)

6. Have a purpose in education.

> Wes: It's important that people understand what they need from their education. I mean, we talked about this in orientation, it's like, and it's important that people really know why they're here and that you know what your goal is in SOME way. I think that I take more ownership of my education, take more ownership of my actions. (Rowley, 2003, p. 122)

Recommendations for CCSF

Although the participants provided recommendations that they thought would improve the City College of San Francisco, most of them thought the institution provided them with an extremely positive experience. Monica captured this idea by stating, "You guys saved me" (Rowley, 2003, p. 270). This was reinforced by Evette who stated, "They've done a LOT. It makes me very upset about the budget cut because City College is here to repair what K through 12 did not provide for students. City College provides services that were not given to me in high school" (Rowley, 2003, p. 164).

The following are recommendations for the City College of San Francisco to improve the educational resilience of low-income, first generation community college students at there institution These recommendations are not only intended for CCSF, but for all educators, faculty, and administrators who work with this population of students:

1. Shift in mentality towards students.

> Robert: City College has to change its whole mentality about their population. We can't be the future mechanics and we can't get railroaded into that. City College people really have to believe in their hearts that people from the trailer park or whatever, like they have to really believe this person can be the next doctor or chancellor of the CSU system... There's way too much just complacency with the status quo (p. 77)... people are just willing to work within their comfort zone. They're not willing to challenge their own reality, and their own prejudice and stuff like that and that's just, that's just what's hampering this institution ... there has to be a mentality shift in terms of how we're trying to serve our students. There's only a few people here who really feel it in their hearts that this is about serving students, helping people grow. NOT about just coming here to get a paycheck, you know. (Rowley, 2003, p. 79)

2. Have faculty increase their investment in students.

Robert: "I think faculty or whatever should be taking the time to get to know students". (Rowley, 2003, p. 51)

3. Be more open minded and accepting of low income students.

> Mary: I think that people need to be more open minded to the low income situation of people and not stereotype...they are mostly ex-offenders, ex-drug addicts, people that were I guess undesirable to society. Sometimes they would come here and be treated like they were undesirable...if we're (CCSF) gonna go out there and help, don't discriminate once they get here because it discourages them. Even the teachers, you know, and we need to be more open minded and learn about the population you're dealing with. Especially at this level, the community level, because that's what it is, it's dealing with all communities, not ivy league or you know. (Rowley, 2003, p. 28)

4. Present services to students early.

Wes: "There definitely would have been a lot more eyes on me if I had gotten into EOPS my first semester here so it's like opportunities being presented early on and students doing the outreach". (Rowley, 2003, p. 126)

5. Have instructors shift in instructional methods.

> Wes: I really dislike how our education is very lecture based and how – I mean there are a lot of instructors at City College that use interactive methods that use popular teaching methods, but for the most part I feel that our curriculum here is still very Eurocentric, still very lecture based and still not very connected to the larger population that's here. And I feel like for people who plan to go on to 4 yr colleges, for the most part they're gonna get that Eurocentric education and like there's requirements that you have to fill before leaving the four year system, and the majority of the 4 yr system is based on those teaching principles and I think that the community college system could to a better job at integrating more popular teaching methods, more mixed studies type programs and more ways that reach students rather than just a general lecture. (Rowley, 2003, pp. 109-110)

Summary

There were four central research questions that focused on the essential issues explored in this study.

Research Question # 1: What resilience attributes do low-income, first generation community college students identify as contributing to their academic success?

Research Question #2: What educational experiences have contributed to the attainment and development of these resilience attributes?

Research Question #3: What personal experiences have contributed to the attainment and development of these resilience attributes?

Research Question #4: What recommendations do these low-income, first generation community college students have for others?

It seems most appropriate to summarize the results of this study by the five generative themes elicited from the central research questions. The participants presented a massive amount of data through the dialogical process. Data analysis was conducted and five major themes surfaced from this process. These themes represented the participants' reality as low-income, first generation community college students who successfully completed their academic goals. These themes were:

1. Organizing their world,
2. Educational transformation: Reframing their world,
3. Originators of their support system,
4. Finding meaning in their world, and
5. Participants' recommendations.

The findings of this study indicated that low-income, first generation community college students who completed their academic goals developed a way of *organizing their world* in order to be successful. The participants possessed the qualities of a resilient person. The participants organized their world utilizing a set of skills and enabling characteristics that brought about resilient behavior. The participants displayed the resilience qualities revealed by current literature (Bernard, 1991; Garmezy, 1991; Graham, 1989; Mastin, 1994; McMillian & Reed, 1994; Rutter, 1987; Werner & Smith, 1992; Winfield, 1991). These included: determination, ability to plan, internal locus of control, ability to problem solve, finding balance, confidence, interpersonal ability, leadership aptitude, and an optimistic outlook.

In addition to those qualities, they displayed additional resilient qualities not currently reflected in the literature. The participants in this study developed a wide range of academic strategies such as the utilization of study groups, effective note-taking, and test-taking strategies. The participants also displayed a value of education. These qualities contributed to their resilience as successful students.

Overall, low-income, first generation community college students who have successfully completed their academic goals accessed numerous resilience qualities during their academic journey. Despite their situation or background, the participants had a set of qualities that encouraged their academic achievement. These qualities influenced the way in which they approached their academic world, and affected every aspect of their academic lives. In turn these qualities were shaped and developed by their environment.

The interaction between the participants' resilience qualities and education resulted in their *educational transformation.* This educational transformation enabled participants to develop an empowering and fruitful relationship with education. There were three foci involved in this transformation. (a) The participants needed to leave portions of their past which then allowed for them (b) to create a new and improved relationship with education. In order to sustain this process of educational transformation, (c) they developed mechanisms to turn adversity into motivation.

Kumpfer (1999) described the person-environment transactional process as the interaction between the individual and his or her environment. At this stage, Kumpfer's framework attempts to show "the ways that people consciously or unconsciously modify their environment or selectively perceive their environment" (p. 191). In other words, how do individuals in high risk environments develop more protective and successful environments? Kumpfer (1999) indicated some ways individuals can develop protective environments including: (a) selective perceptions, (b) cognitive reframing, (c) planning and dreaming, (d) identification and attachment with prosocial people, (e) active environmental modifications by the youth, and (f) active coping.

The findings in this study were parallel to Kumpfer's (1999) resilience framework. The participants' interaction with their environment encouraged the development of resilience. In essence, the more they interacted with their positive environment, the more resilience they displayed. The participants developed an environment that was both nurturing and protective. This was revealed in their educational transformation which assisted them in reframing their educational world. Also, the process of transformation required them to develop a new perspective on the

role of education in their lives as well as create mechanisms to assist them in enduring this educational journey.

In order for the participants to transform their educational realities, they needed to leave portions of their past behind. This reflected their ability to actively modify their environment to ensure their educational success. For some participants, this meant not engaging in criminal activities and for others this meant ending negative relationships. This letting go process provided the students an opportunity to change their relationship with education. It also gave the participants the possibility to further discover and grow their educational dreams.

The participants sustained themselves in this educational transformation by developing coping mechanisms. In the midst of a high risk environment, resilient individuals are capable of seeing themselves outside their bleak surroundings and finding alternate positive outcomes for themselves. One major coping mechanism developed was their ability to utilize cognitive reframing. The most apparent demonstration of this strategy was their ability to turn adversity into motivation. They were motivated to change their relationship with education and complete their academic dreams.

Overall, the participants engaged in some form of educational transformation. It was evident this transformation was often difficult for them. But it was even more evident their resilience qualities coupled with their positive environment facilitated this process for them.

In addition to educational transformation, the participants were the *originators of their support system*. They accessed support through student development services and through faculty. Not only did they access support, the participants fostered positive

relationships. Developing a network of support and encouragement contributed to the participants feeling connected to the institution. Overall, the participants were active in creating an educational environment that was invested in their personal and academic success.

These low-income, first generation community college students identified and accessed prosocial people and developed positive, mentoring relationships with them. All of the participants also asserted that prosocial people sought them out as well. In addition to accessing prosocial people, they took advantage of support services on campus. In all, the participants found support through student development services and positive instructors, counselors, and administrators. These meaningful connections with others offered them a sense of encouragement, support, and acknowledgment that played an essential role in their academic success at the community college. Thus, critical factors in the student's environment contributed to their existing resilient qualities.

Furthermore, it was important for the participants to *find meaning in their education*. They were not satisfied with being in college just to be in college. They needed to understand the purpose of education in their lives. Finding this meaning provided the participants with a drive to persist and complete their academic goals at the community college level. They found meaning through family, giving back to their community, and serving the greater good.

Although their definitions of support varied, it was evident that their families provided encouragement and support. This fostered one of the primary reasons they were engaged in higher education-- to make their families proud. They had an obligation to

their families to attain their academic dreams. In all, it was imperative for the students to complete a college degree not only for themselves, but also for their families.

In addition, the participants found meaning through giving back to their community and serving the greater good. The participants in this study believed that being successful academically was essential for the progression and improvement of their communities. Furthermore, as they developed throughout the process of higher education, they began to understand more about what getting education meant to them, and how that might serve the greater good, not just themselves. Overall, the participants displayed an altruistic attitude about the role and purpose of education in their lives.

The need for the participants to find meaning in their world was an unexpected theme that emerged from this study. From the researcher's experience in education, it is the perception of most educators that the purpose of education for most students is for economic gain. This was not the case for the low-income, first generation community college students in this study. Although the participants were not opposed to improving their economic situation, they all found a deeper meaning to the purpose of education. They were more motivated by enhancing their family, community, and society as a whole. These students also had a strong desire to truly learn; not only academically, but personally as well.

The participants provided recommendations to assist other low-income, first generation community college students achieve academic success in higher education. These recommendations were offered with the hope that the educational journey will be easier for students with similar backgrounds as theirs. The following are the participants' recommendations for other students:

1. Surround self with positive people and let go of negative people.
2. Develop relationships with and know instructors.
3. Develop a network and support structure.
4. Do it for yourself.
5. Maintain balance.
6. Have a purpose in education.

In addition to providing recommendations to other students, the participants provided recommendations to CCSF, educators, faculty, and administrators. These recommendations will be discussed in the recommendation for educational practice section in chapter five.

Overall, successful life adaptations are outcomes which indicate the individual has successfully adapted to a life challenge or stressor (Kumpfer, 1999). This in turn will nourish positive outcomes despite future negative life events or obstacles. This appeared to be true for the participants in this study. Therefore, these low-income, first generation community college students are viewed as educationally resilient individuals. Studies of resilience suggest that "When adversity is relieved and basic human needs are restored, then resilience had a chance to emerge. Rekindling hope may be an important spark for resilience processes to begin their restorative work" (Masten, 1994, p 21).

On the whole, this study has provided important insight into the realities of low-income, first generation community college students. It has exposed what these students bring to the educational process. In essence, it sheds light on the internal worlds of these students through resilience qualities they have utilized to be successful college students. This study also reflected on how the personal and educational environments of these

students fostered the development of these same qualities. Lastly, this study provided an opportunity for these underrepresented students to not only speak and to have a voice, but also to be heard. Their stories will be permanent in this dissertation and in my heart. Also, their recommendations will be presented to the community college population in order to create change in their community, our community.

The following chapter provides a summary of the dissertation and the final conclusions for this study. The conclusion explores the relationship between the findings of this research study and existing research in the area. In addition, this chapter provides recommendations for future research and educational practice, and reflections of the researcher.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The purpose of this inquiry was to investigate the role of resilience in first generation community college students who successfully completed their academic goals. Focusing on low-income students at an urban community college, this study extended previous research (Brooks-Terry, 1998; ERI & IHEP, 1997; Hsaio, 1992; Inman & Mayes, 1999; McGregor et al., 1991; NCES, 1998; Pratt & Skaggs, 1989; Riehl, 1994; Terenzini et al, 1995; York-Anderson & Bowman, 1991) by exploring the resilience attributes associated with resilience in first generation college students as they might contribute to student academic success.

This study also explored the personal and educational experiences that might have contributed to the attainment and development of these students' educational resilience. In exploring these experiences, this study also investigated possible relationships between these experiences and students' meeting their academic goals. Furthermore, this study explored how environmental factors affected their reported experiences and influenced the development of resilience attributes as they relate to success.

Lastly, this study investigated recommendations and suggestions of low-income, first generation community college students who have successfully completed their academic goals. These responses focused on recommendations for educators on how to enable similar students to meet their academic goals and dreams successfully.

This qualitative study was exploratory in nature. A participatory methodology was utilized to examine the role of resilience in the persistence and academic success of

seven low-income, first generation college students in a community college setting. Participatory research was most appropriate for this study because it explored the critical reflections and stories of first generation college students in a way that allowed the participants to transform and understand their realities. Maguire (1987) maintained, "Participatory research aims to develop critical consciousness, to improve the lives of those involved in the research, and to transform fundamental societal structures and relationships" (p. 3). A critical aspect of participatory research is to foster the development of the participant's voice to underrepresented groups and also develop a plan for action to transform their world.

The participants from this study came from various racial and ethnic backgrounds and ages, and identified as first generation community college students. Each participant had completed sixty or more units and was completing their last semester at the community college.

In regards to academic success, existing literature revealed that students who are the first in their families to partake in college bring with them many obstacles from their external and internal worlds. However, there were limited studies that addressed the educational and personal experiences that contribute to the academic success of first generation college students. This study attempted to investigate these experiences as they relate to resilience in the lives of these students.

The generative themes unveiled in the dialogues with seven low-income, first generation community college students shed light on the educational and personal experiences of this population. The themes reflected the participants' internal worlds as well as their external worlds. These themes indicated that the participants came to the

higher education process with resilient qualities that were fostered by their environment at the community college. Furthermore, it was apparent that low-income, first generation community college students entered the community college system with numerous obstacles compared to their counterparts. Although they encountered these challenges, the participants were able to negotiate them and meet their academic goals. Thus, for these academically successful students, the interplay between themselves and their environment appeared to be an important factor in their success.

Taking part in this research project proved to be challenging and rewarding for the participants. They shared stories that were both painful and empowering. It was apparent that this dialogical process allowed these participants to have a true voice; some for the first time. Sharing their voice encouraged the transformation and empowerment of the participants in this study. They were empowered by the reflection of their experiences and the understanding of the role they played in being academically successful students.

Conclusions

The findings of this study provided insight into the internal worlds of low-income, first generation community college students. These students do come to higher education with resilience attributes that contribute to their academic success. These attributes were divided into two areas: (a) skills and (b) enabling characteristics. The skills included determination, ability to plan, internal locus of control, ability to problem solve, academic strategies, and finding balance. The enabling characteristics included confidence, interpersonal ability, leadership aptitude, optimistic outlook, and value of education. The findings in this study indicated these resilience attributes do play an integral part in the

academic success of these students. Additionally, it was these same resilience qualities that allowed these students to fully engage with their external worlds.

The findings of this study also indicated that low-income, first generation community college students displayed both educational and personal experiences that fostered resilience in their lives. The combination of their educational and personal experiences fostered their resilience attributes and academic success. Additionally, the interaction between the students and their environments affected the students' experiences in higher education. Thus, the students' environments played a crucial role in their academic success. It was necessary for the students to have resilience qualities and positive environments to assure their success; both were essential.

Lastly, the participants' recommendations for other students at the City College of San Francisco centered on developing relationships with prosocial, positive people in both their academic and personal lives, as well as, understanding the role and purpose of education. The recommendations for the City College of San Francisco concentrated on encouraging faculty to increase expectations of and investment in the students they serve, and to provide services beyond the classroom or counseling session. In addition, they believed student support services need to be presented earlier to the student population.

In conclusion, there was a clear interaction between resilience and the generative themes presented by the participants in this study. Resilience is operating within each theme. Using the body as a metaphor in describing resilience as it relates to the themes, resilience is the "heart" of the students. The "heart" pumps blood and oxygen to the themes (body) that generate success. The themes are how the "heart" or resilience displays itself in practical, definable ways. The themes are the arms, legs, and brain of

the body which is fed by the heart. The heart, in turn, needs to be fed by "food". Resilience, like the body, needs food and maintenance which was displayed in the participants' internal and external supports.

In addition to the themes revealed in this research, this study was also about meaning and personal transformation, both in the participants and me. Most of the research reviewed for this study focused on variables such as economic, educational, career, and academic variables. These studies did not seem to adequately investigate the inner truth for low-income, first generation students. For these participants, their academic success went beyond earning more money, beyond earning high grades, and beyond career aspirations. It became clear by the end of this study that the participants' educational journey was about personal, familial, and even societal meaning. This was reflected in each participant's inspiring stories presented in this study.

Their meaning was created not by a desire for economic advancement nor social acceptance. A mentor of mine, Dr. Mark Doolittle, once told me, "Education is about an effort to improve humanity by improving one's own humanity". For these resilient, low-income, first generation community college students, it was about that very effort. They were improving their own individual humanity in an effort to improve humanity as a whole. In essence, hope and meaning are critical outcomes of this study. The participants' tears and struggles are not only for their own personal transformation, but for the symbol they provide for others like them.

Furthermore, the students in this study demonstrated the power and importance of having and using one's voice. Through exploring the personal and educational experiences of these students, the findings reflected their internal worlds. This experience

gave all the participants an opportunity to have voice and to tell their stories. Equally important, they were heard.

When the students were given this opportunity, they stepped up and took advantage of it. This demonstrates the need and desire for underrepresented groups to find their voice. The students engaging in this experience contributed to both their educational and personal transformation. It is the hope of this researcher to capture the realities and voice of these low-income, first generation community college students.

It was clear from the students in this study that community colleges played an instrumental role in their academic success. Community colleges have an opportunity to provide an environment that fosters and nurtures the resilience in each student who enters. The students who enter the doors are joined with numerous academic, personal, and professional obstacles from their external worlds. Community colleges are charged with an immense responsibility in the academic success of these students.

This inquiry demonstrated the strong relationship between the student and community college faculty and administrators, and its effect on student success. These relationships provided emotional support, belief in the student's ability, encouragement, and high expectations. Instructors, counselors, and administrators not only must be willing but also eager to assist the unique needs of each student. These students need community college members to be fully invested in both their academic and personal success. For these students, they are one and the same. Furthermore, the community college needs to provide an educational environment that promotes these positive mentor relationships between faculty and students.

Recommendations

The following section provides suggestions for additional research in this area of study. It also discusses recommendations for educational practice provided by the participants in this study.

For Further Research

This study focused on seven low-income, first generation college students at an urban community college who successfully completed their academic goals. Participatory research was the methodology utilized in this study and, by nature, this methodology consists of a small sample size. The sample consisted of three females and four males ranging from age 22 to 54 years old from different ethnic backgrounds (African American, Filipino, White, and Latino/a). They had an assortment of academic goals which included obtaining Associate degrees, vocational certificates, and transferring to a four-year institution.

This researcher would like to see further research in a variety of areas. Utilizing the same framework as this study but increasing the sample could provide additional understanding of low-income, first generation community college students. This researcher would like to see further research that incorporated a multitude of community college campuses, thus attaining a larger sampling of low-income, first generation college students. Additionally, it would be important to study this population with extensive exploration of the effects of age, gender, and ethnicity and race.

Furthermore, it would be interesting to explore the concept of resilience between the following low-income, first generation college student groups: (a) investigate similarities and differences of this student population at the community college level and

university level, (b) investigate similarities and differences of non-first generation college students and first generation college students at the community college level, and (c) investigate similarities and differences of low-income, first generation students who meet their academic goals compared to low-income, first generation students who do not meet their academic goals at the community college level.

For Educational Practice

The following are recommendations for City College of San Francisco and educators as a whole to improve the educational resilience of low-income, first generation community college students.

1. Shift in mentality towards students.
2. Have faculty increase their investment in students.
3. Be more open minded and accepting of low-income students.
4. Present services to students early.
5. Have instructors shift in instructional methods.

The participants believed most educators in higher education need to shift their mentality towards students, focusing on underrepresented students. They asserted that educators often maintain low academic and professional expectations of community college students. Robert felt that, "...people really have to believe in their hearts that people from the trailer park or whatever, like they have to really believe this person can be the next doctor or chancellor of the CSU system" (Rowley, 2003, p. 77).

In addition to raising expectations for students, the participants believed educators in the community college system need to be there to truly serve the students. Given that the community college often represents a large number of underrepresented students in

higher education, they believed the educators need to be present, involved, and active in this student population's success. In essence, they asserted that educators need to increase their investment in the students they serve both inside and outside the classroom.

Furthermore, the participants emphasized that educators need to be more open minded and accepting of low income students. They believed that low-income students in the community college system often come from less than favorable backgrounds. When these individuals enter the doors of higher education, often at the community college, they are sometimes treated as undesirable students. The participants recommend that educators learn more about the population they are serving, and from that understanding develop more open-minded approaches to working with this population.

In regard to educational approaches, the participants felt educators could be more flexible in their instructional methods. They recommended a shift from a traditional lecture-based approach to teaching with a more interactive approach. Wes asserted, "I think that the community college system could do a better job at integrating more popular teaching methods, more mixed studies type programs, and more ways that reach students rather than just a general lecture" (Rowley, 2003, p. 110). They felt if this shift occurred, it would facilitate a greater connection to the population at the community college.

Lastly, the participants recommended that student support services be presented to the student population as soon as possible. They also recommended these services be presented to students by more tenured students. They felt this would assist new community college students in accessing support services sooner. Their belief was that it would result in lower attrition rates for underrepresented students in the community college system.

Researcher's Reflections

Through the dissertation journey, I have gained new insights of what it means to be a successful, first generation college student. In numerous ways, I have participated in my own educational transformation. The participants in this study had never viewed themselves as "successful" college students. By the end of the research process, all the participants could state, although sometimes with hesitation, that they were "successful" college students. The participants struggled with what "successful" meant. In this process they were able to define for themselves what a successful student looks like. This allowed them to name their reality in their own words, and was an empowering experience for them. Deep down, it is this researcher's belief that these participants made a choice to be "successful" in higher education and put the effort needed to do so. This effort was reflected in their stories and by the choices they made for themselves each day.

I experienced this same process as well. Although I have completed this dissertation and my doctorate degree, I have not been confident in viewing myself as a successful student. The participants and process of this dissertation research have shown me many aspects about who I am as a student. I can say now, though with some hesitation, that I am a successful student.

In addition, my philosophy of education has been greatly influenced by participating in this research process. Overall, I have gained an improved understanding of my role as an educator. I reflected and, continue to reflect, on whom, how, and why I serve the students I serve. Engaging in this research study with the seven other participants has allowed me to dialogue and critically reflect on my personal, educational, and professional lives. The experience and exposure to this process has contributed to

my development as a researcher, student, and person. It has evolved my thinking, and provided me with a new lens to view education and the world around me.

I am forever changed by the extraordinary stories shared by the participants in this study. Their insightful perspectives, motivation, genuine honesty, and authenticity, give me hope as an educator. I have learned from my research and the participants that through dialogue, one can gain understanding, and then transformation can occur. The research process allowed the participants, as well as myself, to investigate our realities as first generation college students. Until this moment, I have not been able to fully grasp nor articulate my own experience as a low-income, first generation college student. I am forever indebted to the participants in this study who helped shed light on my reality and helped me name my world.

I discovered and experienced the true intention of critical pedagogy while utilizing participatory research in this study. After this study, I reflected on the research process and my role as an educator. Friere (1999) discussed the four strategies of an oppressive educator: conquest and domination, manipulation, cultural invasion, and the present world as a given. These strategies stood out to me because I have worked with many educators, at all levels, who utilize these strategies. It was displayed in how they described their students in meetings, how they interacted with students in their classrooms or offices, how they interacted with their colleagues, and did not get involved on campus. Sometimes these strategies were very overt but, most often they were covert and subtle. I have learned from this educational process that as a whole, educators need to provide students with the tools and encouragement to assist them in uniting, organizing, and striving for cultural synthesis. Most importantly, they need to let

students know they have CHOICES and options. In some way, this may counteract some of the oppressive strategies students experience daily.

For students to counteract the oppression they experience, they must dialogue. This study gave seven underrepresented students an opportunity to not only speak but also, to speak loudly about their realities. Furthermore, students must continue to dialogue and communicate with one another. This will allow them to define their worlds and reality, instead of someone else defining it for them. From there they can take action, and make choices to make their reality what they want it to be, thus, taking back their power, control, and rights. It is the responsibility of the community of educators to continually work towards providing underrepresented students the experiences and tools they need to pursue, realize, and achieve their goals both educationally and personally.

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APPENDIX A

Invitation To Participate in Informational Session and To Complete Questionnaire

APPENDIX A

Invitation To Participate in Informational Session and To Complete Questionnaire
University of San Francisco

Dear

This letter is to formally invite you to participate in research on the *Internal Worlds of First Generation Community College Students: Students' Critical Reflections on the Role of Resilience in Their Academic Success.* This research project is part of the requirements for my doctoral degree in International and Multicultural Education at the University of San Francisco. The initial format of the research will be completing a questionnaire.

Given the research, I am requesting your help by permission for us to meet for an informational session to further explain the purpose of my research and to have you complete a questionnaire on your experience in college. Your reflection on your personal and educational experiences as a first generation community college student who has successfully completed your academic goal at City College of San Francisco is valuable. Exploring your experiences will help in gaining a better understanding of this population of students, and how to provide improved resources and assistance to first generation community college students.

The informational session and completion of the questionnaire will last approximately one hour. You may attend on March 10th from 9-10 am or 12-1 pm. If you are unable to attend those times, I am open to meeting with you at a mutually convenient time and place. If you desire, you may withdraw from the project at any time.

My research will include writing and discussing with others what I learn about the role of resilience in first generation community college students who successfully complete their academic goals. In this process, I will protect your identity by using pseudo names rather than real names. While I may quote directly from your responses to the questionnaire, I will be attentive to protecting confidentiality. Research records will be kept as confidential as possible, with information coded and kept in locked file at all times. I will be the only one with access to the files.

While there will be no direct benefit to you for participating in the study, the anticipated benefit of this study will be the use of your experiences to help in the enhancement of services and support for first generation community college students. You will not be reimbursed for your participation in this study, nor will there be any costs to you.

It is important to note that PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. You are free to decline to participate in this study or to withdraw from it at any point. Your decision as to whether or not to participate in this study will have not influence on your present or future status as a student or employee of USF or CCSF.

I appreciate your consideration to participate in this study, and assisting me in learning more about the role of resilience in the academic lives of first generation community college students.

If you desire, I will be share the findings from my study with you. If you have any questions about the project, please feel free to contact me. I may be contacted on my cellular (415) 609-4290 or at work (415) 561-1867. My email address is: rowley_shaun@hotmail.com. Also, my mailing address is 50 Phelan Avenue, S125, San Francisco, CA., 94112.

Sincerely,

Shaun E. Rowley

APPENDIX B

Participant Questionnaire

APPENDIX B
Participant Questionnaire

Full Name (Last, First):_____

Age: _____ Number of Units Completed (Spring 2003): _____

Gender: _____ Race/Ethnicity:_____

Birthplace: _____ G.P.A.: _____

Academic Goal(s) completed (Associate Degree, Vocational Certificate, General Education for Transfer):

_____

Major or Focus:

_____

Number of semesters at City College of San Francisco:

_____

Parents' highest level of education completed:

_____

_____

Please answer the following question on the additional paper provided.

1. What *personal attributes* have contributed to you successfully completing your academic goals?

2. What *educational experiences* have contributed to you successfully completing your academic goals?

3. What *personal experiences* have contributed to you successfully completing your academic goals?

4. What *recommendations* would you make to other first generation community college students in assisting them to complete their academic goals?

Are you interested in further discussing the above questions? YES or NO
If YES, please provide the following contact information:
Phone: _____
Cellular Phone: _____
Email Address: _____

APPENDIX C

Information Sheet about a Research Study

APPENDIX C

Information Sheet about a Research Study

Mr. Shaun E. Rowley, a graduate student in the School of Education at the University of San Francisco, is doing a study on the *Internal Worlds of First Generation Community College Students: Students' Critical Reflections on the Role of Resilience in Their Academic Success.* He is interested in learning more about the first generation community college student and the factors that contribute to their academic success in higher education.

You are being asked to participate in this research study because you identify as a first generation college student at City College of San Francisco, and are completing you academic goal(s) at the end of the Spring 2003 semester. If you agree to be in this study, participants will be asked to complete an initial questionnaire and engage in dialogues about your personal and educational experiences in higher education. Also, you will reflect on the role of resilience in your academic and personal life.

Some of the questions in our conversations may make you feel uncomfortable, but you are free to decline to answer any questions you do not wish to answer, or to stop participation at any time. Study records will be used in any reports or publications resulting from this study. Study information will be coded and kept in locked files at all times. Only study personnel will have access to the files.

There will be not direct benefit to you from participating in this study. The anticipated benefit of this study is a better understanding of the first generation community college student experience and the use of your experiences to help enhance services and support for first generation community college students.

There will be no costs to you as a result of taking part in this study, nor will you be reimbursed for your participation in this study.

If you have questions about the research, you may contact the researcher at work (415) 561-1867 or cellular (415) 609-4290. If you have further questions about this study, you may contact IRBPHS at the University of San Francisco, which is concerned with protection of volunteers in research projects. You may reach the IRBPHS office between 8:00 am and 5:00 pm, Monday to Friday, by calling (415) 422-2416 and leaving a voicemail message, by emailing IRBPHS@usfca.edu or by writing to the IRBPHS, Counseling Psychology Department, School of Education, University of San Francisco, 2130 Fulton Street, San Francisco, CA 94117-1080.

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. You are free to decline to be in this study, or withdraw from it at any point. The University of San Francisco and City College of San Francisco are aware of this study, but does not require that you participate in this research and your decision as to whether or not to participate will have no influence on your present or future status as a student at City College of San Francisco.

APPENDIX D

Informed Consent Form

APPENDIX D
Informed Consent Form

PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

Shaun E. Rowley, a graduate student in the International and Multicultural Education Department in the School of Education, is doing a study on first generation community college students, which I am being asked to participate in. This study is for the completion of the doctoral dissertation at the University of San Francisco.

PROCEDURES

If you agree to be in the study, the following will occur:

1. I will complete a questionnaire with open ended questions about resilience.
2. I will participate in an initial dialogue with the researcher.
3. I will be asked to respond to questions regarding resilience, and personal and educational experiences related to academic success.
4. I will review the transcribed dialogue with the researcher.
5. I will participate in a second dialogue in which I will collaborate with the researcher on the general themes and ideas expressed.
6. I will clarify and reflect on the themes through the second dialogue.
7. If I agree, audiotapes will be made of these conversations.

These procedures will take place at a mutually agreed upon location and will take a total time of two to three hours.

RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

1. Some of the questions and reflections may bring up unpleasant memories or feelings, but I will be able to stop the conversation anytime I feel uncomfortable.
2. Some questions and reflections may make me feel uncomfortable or upset, but I am free to decline to answer nay questions I do not wish to or to stop the dialogue at anytime.
3. All data collected in this study including letters, consent forms, audiotapes, and computer disc will be kept in a locked file cabinet at the researcher's place of residence. Only study personnel will have access to the files, audiotapes, and transcripts. After the study has been completed and all data have transcribed, I may choose to have the audio tapes destroyed.

BENEFITS

The anticipated benefit of participating in this research study is gaining a better understanding of the educational experiences of first generational community college students.

ALTERNATIVES

I am free to choose not to participate in this study.

COSTS

There will be no costs for my participation in this study.

REIMBURSEMENT

I will not be reimbursed for my participation in this study.

QUESTIONS

I have talked with Shaun E. Rowley about this study, and have had my questions answered. If I have any further questions about this study, I may call him at work (415) 567-1867 or cellular (415) 609-4290. If for some reason, I do not wish to do this, I may contact the IRBPHS, which is concerned with protection of volunteers in research projects. I may reach the IRBPHS office between 8:00 am and 5:00 pm, Monday to Friday, by calling (415) 422-2416 or by writing to the IRBPHS, Counseling Psychology Department, School of Education, University of San Francisco, 2130 Fulton Street, San Francisco, CA 94117-1080.

CONSENT

I have been given a copy of this signed consent form to keep.

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY.

I am free to decline to be in this study or to withdraw from it at any point. My decision as to whether or not to participate in this study will have no influence on my present or future status as a student.

_____ _____

Participant's Signature Date

_____ _____

Person Obtaining Consent,
Shaun E. Rowley Date

APPENDIX E

Permission Letter from Institutional Management

APPENDIX E
Permission Letter from Institutional Management

January 16, 2003

Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
University of San Francisco
2130 Fulton Street
San Francisco, CA 94117

Dear Members of the Committee:

On behalf of City College of San Francisco, I am writing to formally indicate my awareness of the research proposed by Mr. Shaun Rowley, a student at the University of San Francisco. I am aware that Mr. Rowley intends to conduct his research by administering questionnaires and dialoguing with our students.

As the director of EOPS at City College of San Francisco, I give him permission to conduct research at this institution.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at (415) 239-3440.

Sincerely,

Alvin Jenkins
Director, Extended Opportunity Programs and Services
City College of San Francisco

APPENDIX F

IRBPHS Approval Letter

APPENDIX F
IRBPHS Approval Letter

From : IRBPHS <irbphs@usfca.edu>
To : shaun rowley <rowley_shaun@hotmail.com>
Subject : Re: IRB Application #03-014
Date : Tue, 11 Feb 2003 14:48:04 -0800

February 11, 2003

Mr. Shaun Rowley

Dear Mr. Rowley:

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS) at the University of San Francisco (USF), which operates under the rules and regulations set forth by the federal Office for Protection from Research Risks (OPRR) and the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), has reviewed your application for human subjects approval

Your Modification Application has been approved by the committee (IRBPHS 03-014). Please note the following:

1. Approval expires twelve (12) months from the date noted above. At that time, if you are still collecting data from human subjects, you must file a Renewal Application.

2. Any modifications to the research protocol or changes in instrumentation (e.g., changes in subject sample, wording of items, consent procedures, tasks required of subjects) must be proposed in a Modification Application, which must be approved prior to implementation of any such changes.

3. Any adverse reactions or complications on the part of human subjects must be reported (in writing) to the IRBPHS within ten (10) working days in the form of a Human Subjects Incident Report.

If you have any questions, please contact us at 415)422-6091.

On behalf of the IRBPHS committee, I wish you much success in your research.

Sincerely,

Terence Patterson, EdD, ABPP
Chair, IRBPHS
USF Department of Counseling Psychology
2130 Fulton Street
San Francisco, CA 94117

THE UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Dissertation Abstract

The Internal Worlds of First Generation Community College Students: Students' Critical Reflections on the Role of Resilience in Their Academic Success

In 1995-1996, 45% of all undergraduates in the United States were the first in their families to attend college (Education Resource Institute & Institute of Higher Education Policy (ERI & IHEP), 1997). There are more students entering higher education in the United States in the year 2003 than ever before. Although this number is increasing, there has been a decline, however, in the number of students who complete college with a degree (Justiz, 1994). These seemingly inconsistent statistics highlight an important challenge: how can educators help more students successfully negotiate their college experience and achieve their academic goals? This study underscored the need to investigate the internal factors such as attitudinal and experiential, and how those interact with environmental factors that affect their chances of success.

This qualitative study was exploratory in nature. A participatory methodology was utilized to examine the role of resilience in the persistence and academic success of seven low-income, first generation college students in a community college setting.

The results indicated that the participants came to the higher education process with resilient qualities that were fostered by their environment at the community college.

These resilience attributes did play an integral part in the students' academic success. Additionally, it was these same resilience qualities that allowed these students to fully engage with their external worlds. The findings also indicated that the students displayed both educational and personal experiences that fostered resilience in their lives. The combination of their educational and personal experiences fostered their resilience attributes and academic success.

Furthermore, it was apparent that low-income, first generation community college students entered the community college system with numerous obstacles compared to their counterparts. Although they encountered these challenges, the participants were able to negotiate them and meet their academic goals. Additionally, the interaction between the students and their environments affected the students' experiences in higher education. Thus, for these academically successful students, the interplay between themselves and their environment appeared to be an important factor in their success. It was necessary for the students to have resilience qualities and positive environments to assure their success; both were essential.

Shaun Rowley, Author

Rosita G. Galang, Ph.D.
Chairperson, Dissertation Committee