Tellin' It Like It Is: Disempowerment and Marginalization of First-generation, Low-income College Students: a Participatory Research

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TELLIN’ IT LIKE IT IS:
DISEMPOWERMENT AND MARGINALIZATION
OF FIRST-GENERATION, LOW-INCOME COLLEGE STUDENTS:
A PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH

A Dissertation
Presented to
The Faculty of the School of Education
International and Multicultural Education Department

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

by
Charlene P. Lobo

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This dissertation, written under the direction of the candidate’s dissertation committee and approved by the members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

Candidate Date 4/26/01

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4/26/01
Dedication

To my Elders who walked the paths before me. Your spirits live on in my work.

To my Parents, Carlos and Mila, for their support and encouragement, and cooking food for me on Sundays. Thanks for taking care of me all of these years; I hope I make you proud. I love you both.

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To my family for their love.

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And to Me. Told ya you can do it.
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In a true dialogue, both sides are willing to change. We have to appreciate that truth can be received from outside of—not only within—our own group. If we do not believe that, entering into dialogue would be a waste of time. If we think we monopolize the truth and we still organize a dialogue, it is not authentic. We have to believe that by engaging in dialogue with the other person, we have the possibility of making a change within ourselves, that we can become deeper. Dialogue is not a means for assimilation in the sense that one side expands and incorporates the other into its “self.” Dialogue must be practiced on the basis of “non-self.” We have to allow what is good, beautiful, and meaningful in the other’s tradition to transform us.

-Thich Nhat Hanh
CHAPTER I

The Research Problem

If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war. (National Commission on Equity in Education, 1983)

Introduction

At the onset of the new millennium, the faces of college students in the United States are rapidly changing. The diversity that reflects American society is increasingly evident in campuses nationwide. Students represent a diversity of languages, countries of origins, ethnicities, cultures, beliefs, lifestyles, abilities, and learning styles. As the composition of the student body becomes more complex than in previous decades, the challenges facing education also gain in complexity, as the skills required to work with a diverse student population multiply.

According to Olsen (1996), between the years 1976-1996, public school enrollment in California for white students has dropped from 75% to 40%. In some school districts in California, as many as 85% of the students are
English language learners. Over a hundred different languages are now spoken by the school children in California.

Now more than ever, education must evolve in its goals and practices if it is to meet the needs of all students and become an effective system of schooling. In the evolution of education's goals, educational equity must be considered to ensure an effective application of services. New diversities are reflected not only in shifting enrollments, but are also stimulating new social discourse about race and ethnicity (Olsen, 1996).

Framing educational equity as mere equal educational opportunity is inadequate. Serious issues are afoot nationally that reflect an attack on educational equity. Recently passed California legislation is evidence of this. Proposition 227, the Unz Initiative, mandated that children are mainstreamed into English-only classrooms after one year of intensive English language education was passed in 1988. Despite immense evidence that this was largely ineffective, and in some cases inhumane, this proposition passed overwhelmingly (Hakuta, Butler, & Witt 2000). Proposition 187, an anti-immigration initiative passed in 1994, proposed that public services including health care and education be denied to non-citizens of the
state. Again, despite the tremendous ramifications in the cases of denied education and health care, this proposition passed. Proposition 209, passed in 1996, banned equal opportunity programs designed to remedy race and gender discrimination in public employment, education and contracting. One of the direct impacts felt by first-generation low-income students is the recruitment programs used by public universities to attract underrepresented youth to college campuses. No longer able to operate in the interest of affirmative action, these programs would be dismantled. Mentoring programs would also be subject to dismantling.

These propositions are also being carefully watched nationally because the legal precedent of providing services to one while denying the very same services to another is very real. At this time, despite the successful passage of all three of these propositions, they are under court injunction. The undercurrents behind the three propositions are cultural assimilation and an extreme dislike of all characteristics that are not easily conformable to the so-called American identity.

The newest legislation that may cause many first-generation, low-income students to drop out of higher education in California is the California State
University’s Executive Order 665: Determination of Competence in English and Mathematics. Executive Order 665 requires new students to complete placement testing before the first semester of enrollment, and if found deficient, to enroll in remedial coursework in the first semester of attendance. Students at San Francisco State University (SFSU) are required to complete all of the requirements within one calendar year from the time of admission.

This new legislation was drafted with the intent of reducing the number of remediation-needy students in order to make room for the larger incoming classes expected in ten years, also known as "Tidal Wave II" (Brocato, 2000). Many of the students who are required to complete this requirement are forced to learn difficult material in a short time period or else risk disenrollment for the following Fall semester. However, at SFSU, 56 percent of its incoming freshman class in the Fall of 1997 required remediation in math. Forty percent of that same class required remediation in English (California State University Analytic Studies Division, 1998). Many first-generation, low-income students are required to take remedial courses, often more than one course as compared to non-first-generation students (NCES, 1998). Displacement is likely as academic achievement is lower in this
population (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 1998).

The crux of the matter of educational equity, for educators at all levels and those concerned with the practice of education, is the ability to serve students in a manner that is respectful of their rights as individuals in American society. Educational equity seeks to serve that purpose: to allow students to obtain an education with equal resources, experiences, and quality on par with those of their peers across the United States, regardless of location, ability, and income (Astin, 1985).

However, evidence of equity is severely lacking as shown by graduation and retention rates. Since the early 1980’s, there has been a disturbing regressive trend in enrollment, academic performance, and retention of minority students in the United States (Smedley, Myers, & Harrell, 1993). According to Astin (1985) the four largest disadvantaged minority groups in the United States – African Americans, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, and Native Americans – are underrepresented, relative to European Americans, at each level of degree attainment: high school completion, baccalaureate attainment, and advanced-degree attainment. Furthermore, practices such as tracking, resource ability, and grade retention promote lower order
thinking skills and discourage students from both thinking critically about the information they absorb and assessing the world in which they live.

At the university level, which is the main focus of this study, economics is an important factor to consider. The division between socioeconomic upper and lower classes correlates with academic progress and selection of academic program.

Of those freshman entering institutions at the top level [i.e. Ivy League schools, UC], nearly half come from families with annual incomes of $50,000 or more, and less than ten per cent come from families with incomes below $15,000 per year. Among students entering institutions at the very bottom of the hierarchy [where many of the students are first-generation and low-income], the pattern is reversed: less than ten percent come from families with incomes of $50,000, whereas two in five come from families with incomes of less than $15,000. (Astin, 1985, p. 10)

Economic footholds play a strong part in the educational experiences of first-generation low-income students, and poverty runs rampant in this student population. According to Miller-Lachmann and Taylor (1995), "Today, both poor children and children of color are overrepresented among the lower achievers and those who drop out before completing high school" (p. 70). In 1999, almost sixteen percent of American children under the age of 18 lived in families that were below the poverty line
(US Census, 2000). The factors that affect students from impoverished families are numerous. With respect to education, economic hardship, hunger, homelessness, and a lack of societal understanding for the difficulties which plague this population can lead to academic trouble, and very possibly, to dropping out.

First-generation, low-income college students are a special segment of the university population demanding attention if indeed they are going to succeed. Their needs place them in a category defined by many administrators and politicians as 'at-risk' for dropping out and academic failure. Bitting, Cordeiro, and Baptiste Jr. (1992) list attributes of "at-risk" students and "stigmatizations":

1. Quite commonly come from a broken home (without a traditional nuclear family, i.e., one mother, one father and siblings);
2. Are nonverbal and concrete minded;
3. Are physically less healthy than his or her middle-class peers;
4. Lack stable identification figures (role models);
5. Lack stable community ties because of constant migration;
6. Are often handicapped by his or her color, which provides him or her with a negative self-image;
7. Are handicapped in the expression and comprehension of language;
8. Tend to be extroverted rather than introverted. (p. 20)

However, the term "at-risk" is a misnomer. This is also a typical example of labeling used to categorize a
group of people and limit their range of expectation. This covert means of oppression, though seemingly innocuous, is one of the many ways in which power structures create division and borders between individuals and the institutions that supposedly serve them.

It is important to note that the term "at-risk" is used to identify the students, rather than the system that is creating a situation which places the students at risk. Labelling students not only serves to identify them, but also to blame them for their own problems, failures, and social standing. On a societal level, those who place the blame are at the heart of what is causing students to become disempowered and marginalized in the classroom and in the community. The label "at-risk" is a better reflection of students who are not served by public programs adequately nor readily.

It is important to state the belief that the term "at-risk" is an unacceptable means for identifying students because of the sheer amount of blame that is placed on them, as well as the stereotypes that are associated with that label. Labeling is a powerful dynamic impacting the lives of students, their families and their communities. Labeling affects self-esteem which may lead to serious problems. Being labeled "at-risk" immediately programs the
student to have a predetermined set of beliefs, practices, and culture. In turn, labeling denies the student his or her own individual identity and history. In many studies, the term “at-risk” is used to refer to many first-generation, low-income college students. However, in this study, the terms “first-generation low-income” will be utilized to reflect students’ realities, not their assigned position, as the term “at-risk” implies.

First-generation, low-income college students represent one of the many new faces in education who have their own special needs.

Many first generation students are less prepared for college - both academically and psychologically- than students who come from college educated families. They have typically weaker reading, math, and critical thinking skills as well as lower career aspirations. (Mitchell, 1997, p. 3)

They come from cultures diametrically different than their university cultures, and undergo different forms of stress than students from a mainstream culture (Malaney & Shively, 1995; Smedley et al., 1993). Much of the literature continues to blame the student for the cultural discontinuities that occur on campus (Sheets, 1995). The resolution of the differences between home and university cultures, the literature contends, depends on the student’s ability to assimilate cultural backgrounds and define him
or herself by the norms of the school. Blaming the victim does not allow for the environment and the beliefs of the university to be questioned or changed to meet the needs of the student. In addition, students from first-generation, low-income backgrounds may not have the financial support from their families that is crucial to their success. Often this leads to students having to work part- to full-time while also having full unit loads. Students may also be responsible for the economic well-being of their families. For many students, having to choose between having an education or having a job is a common dilemma. The multiple roles that first-generation, low-income students play lead to a complex situational negotiation of identities and stressors as decisions need to be made on a daily basis. To select one is to reject another, and the costs incurred can be both painful and very damaging.

Despite common stereotypes of first-generation, low-income students as solely being of color many are of European-American descent (Bitting et al., 1992; Roueche & Roueche, 1994; Saracho & Gerstl, 1992).

However, there are also many exceptions. It is important to consider the number of successful first-generation low-income students. Many first-generation, low-income students graduate from college with little
difficulty. While both scenarios are possible, it is highly likely that the former is truer to the current situation of the majority of first-generation, low-income students.

**Statement of the Problem**

Disempowerment, as defined in this study, is the deprivation of power, influence, and importance. It was also considered a discourse, or a practice, used to uphold beliefs and practices that reinforce power structures throughout this study (Cummins, 1997).

Disempowerment of first-generation, low-income students has been a major factor in their academic struggles, and marginalization as a result of their disempowerment has been an outcome. The effects of disempowerment and marginalization are far-reaching for students and their families. The impact of those effects on society is largely based on the students' experiences in the educational system. Disempowerment of first-generation, low-income students has deep underpinnings, namely the dehumanization of the student as well as the perpetuation of the marginalization that education purports to eradicate. Defining and identifying the factors of disempowerment and marginalization was helpful to identify the structures that provide a disservice to the students, their families, and their futures.
Underrepresented students attending a university have to deal with many factors which make their experiences much more difficult and radically different than that of mainstream students, yet little narrative research has been done to highlight their thoughts and voices (Appavoo, 1998; Davis, 1995). According to Appavoo (1998), while others have written on behalf of students of color, it is ironic that students themselves have rarely been directly engaged in critical action.

**Purpose of the Study**

This study endeavored to identify structures of disempowerment and marginalization at the university level as experienced by the students. Utilizing participatory research, five students and the researcher acted as co-participants in the study, seeking through dialogues the reasons for disempowerment and marginalization as well as reflecting on how to provide a channel by which improvements may be made at the university level and in the educational system as well.

**Research Questions**

Critical pedagogy and participatory research emphasize the importance of the emic perspective, i.e., the worldview and reality of the co-participants are as essential to the study as the information that is provided by the
research itself. The four components utilized here as well as within the Questions to Guide the Initial Dialogue (Part III), allow for the subjective nature of the experience of each individual to be highlighted and given its appropriate place in the study.

The research questions were divided into four major components: (a) naming or describing the issue; (b) relating the issue to personal experience; (c) critical reflection; and (d) awareness leading to action (Ada & Campoy, 1997). These are the four phases of the creative dialogue based on Ada and Campoy which highlight the process by which personal experiences, reflections, and interpretations are used to come to praxis - defined as an understanding of the construction of our reality which then leads to the impetus for personal and societal transformation.

1. How are first-generation, low-income college students disempowered and/or marginalized at the university?

2. How has the experience of being disempowered/marginalized affected first-generation, low-income college students?

3. What do the experiences of the first-generation, low-income college students reveal about the
conditions of the university and in which they live?

4. In what ways will the students be able to adapt to their environment at the university?

5. What are their recommendations for action?

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical frameworks serve as the backbone of the research. Two areas that are essential to understanding the methodology and the purpose of the study are: voice and liberation, and education and oppression.

Voice and Liberation

Our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or societies around them mirror back to them a confining, demeaning, or contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being. (Taylor, 1992, p. 23)

Utilizing voice allows individuals to experience liberation. Thinking critically allows individuals to name their experience, and identify oppressive structures, and break free from them. “Calling by name” (Freire, 1970) makes the abstract real and deconstructable. This study, utilizing participatory research, will allow students to share their experiences.
The nature of participatory research, which will be more clearly outlined in Part III, expands the limit of quantitative research methodologies and by emphasizing the importance of narrative and participant-focused studies rather than the objective and rigid results. The narratives provided by co-participants provide context to the study. The “lived experiences” (Ferguson, 2000) are reflected to the co-participants in the transcriptions provided which are then culled to derive generative themes.

Liberation for the co-participants of participatory studies lies in the process of sharing stories, creating relationships and communities wherein shared experiences are valued. Students no longer feel marginalized or ignored. McLaren (1999) writes that critical pedagogy is a creation of a collective based on the uniqueness of individuals; i.e., that community has its basis on taking responsibility for ourselves and each other through pedagogy.

**Education and Oppression**

A college education increases the probability of becoming a productive member of society and is a guarantee of greater participation in a credential-oriented society. This increased probability and guarantee of greater participation is especially true for those in society who have been historically oppressed and underrepresented in all segments, particularly higher education. (Lango, 1998, p. 70)
Davis (1995) considers the experience of Black/African students attending a predominantly White university to be an involvement "in a hostile experience." Other authors cite the experiences of students similarly (Bempechat, 1998; Ferguson, 2000; Greene, 1973). Education impacts students' self-perceptions, future orientation towards learning, and their views and participation in society. With such an important role in individuals' lives, it is all the more imperative that the quality of education be held to an extremely high standard.

Education, in one perspective, is a process of initiating young people (Greene, 1973). Teachers, by virtue of their position can impact the classroom experience by their definition of what is and is not important to be taught and learned (Ferguson, 2000; Greene, 1973). Ferguson goes further and contends that education becomes disconnected from the lived reality of the students, particularly in terms or race, class, and gender. Hegemony (Giroux & Simon, 1988) and marginalization (Ferguson, 2000) contribute to the oppressive nature of education.

Education, as it is currently practiced, presents a system that is both elitist and oppressive. Elitism exists in the prioritizing of schools and programs and promotes a
singular learning preference, and rewarding those that are able to subscribe to a particular methodology (Nieto, 2000). Those that are not able to negotiate the methodology and style are subject to failure. When the pathway to liberation and achievement of potentials is denied, it perpetuates oppression, denying the foundation for one’s future.

Educational equity does not exist for all students. There is a differentiation between schools that are from upper middle class and working class neighborhoods. Kozol (1991) best demonstrates this in his book *Savage Inequalities*. Astin (1985) acknowledges that students who are more affluent tend to attend top tier institutions of higher learning while students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to attend institutions that were less prestigious.

In this study, an effort to present the voices of the students from what Astin (1985) calls a “poor and less-educated” background will be shared. Traditionally marginalized and thus rendered mute and disempowered, students will be given the opportunity to discuss their experiences.

**Delimitation of the Study**

The participants of this study were selected from the
Student Support Services program at SFSU. That these students were already involved in a support program might differentiate them from other students who are not as concerned about support. The students who were already familiar with the researcher, and may have bonded enough to the researcher that they expressed freely their thoughts and ideas. Students who were not familiar with the researcher may have found themselves not readily able to articulate such personal material.

The nature of participatory research places the emphasis of the study on the individual: his or her individual position in society, beliefs and practices, and way of seeing the world.

**Limitations of the Study**

The goal of this study was to examine the disempowerment and marginalization of first-generation low-income students. Critical reflection, or conscientiazacao, is a process that takes more than two dialogues. Fully reflecting on one’s experience is a process that takes time. This study took place over six months, and therefore time was a limitation of the study.

A limitation of this study is such that the subjective nature of the narratives and experiences are unique to the individual. To generalize to a large group of students
would defeat the purpose of the nature of the research methodology.

**Significance of the Study**

This study contributed to the field of research on first-generation, low-income students by providing an increased representation of student voices in the research. This research may fill a void of students as active participants in research and provide a humanistic underpinning for previous studies.

The areas that could benefit from this research are college counseling, support services, student affairs, and educational opportunity programs. The study provided insights into the educational experiences of first-generation, low-income students, the factors behind disempowerment, and how to assist students in finding their own modes of empowerment to fully take advantage of their educational experience.

**Definitions of Terms**

*First-generation college students:* Students who are the first in their family to go to college; their parents did not attend college, but the co-participants' siblings may have/have not attended college. These definitions are currently in use in academia.

*Low-income college students:* Students who have been
determined to be eligible for financial aid by the Office of Student Financial Aid at San Francisco State University. The 1999 Annual Low Income Level, in the 48 contiguous states, identified low income as a family of four with an income of $25,050 (Council on Opportunity in Education, 2001).

Student Support Services (SSS): SSS is a federally funded program from the United States Department of Education, founded in 1965, created to serve the needs of first-generation, low-income college students to graduate from college.
CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

Introduction

The failure of students in the educational system in the United States should be a concern to all individuals in our society because of the implications that are set forth. The effects of a poorly educated citizenry are wide spread and far-reaching. The failure of students in universities concerns communities as well as parents. For example, in a basic economic sense, the entry to the workforce is largely based on one’s educational attainment. Academic success serves as a predictor for future wages. If education prepares students for jobs, the kind of education received reflects their potential earnings and ultimately their expected economic standing (Delpit, 1995). Going to college results in greater benefits to the public as a whole, according to Merisotis and Phipps (2000). Increased tax revenues, greater productivity, reduced crime rates, and increased quality of civic life are just a few of those benefits.

In identifying the factors for the failure of first-generation, low-income students, literature in the
following areas will be reviewed: (a) first-generation, low-income students: needs and concerns; (b) achieving voice; (c) educational equity and oppression; and (d) disempowerment.

First-Generation, Low-Income Students: Needs and Concerns

Most low income, first-generation college students have had poor academic preparation for postsecondary education and may have experienced a lack of success and encouragement in academic endeavors. (Hebert, 1997, p. 26)

As Hebert (1997) indicated above, first-generation, low-income students have some very difficult obstacles to face in post-secondary education. In a joint study, the Education Resources Institution (TERI) and the Institution for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) (1997) enumerated many of the difficulties experienced by first-generation university students:

1. Less direct knowledge of economic and social benefits of postsecondary education because their parents did not attend college,
2. Having to choose between fulfilling family expectations and obligations and the pursuit of a degree,
3. Failing to pursue college preparatory courses and college entrance exams,
4. Lower aspirations to apply and attend college and attain a bachelor's degree,
5. Lower cumulative GPAs and delayed enrollment in college. (pp. 20-21)

The difficulty of negotiating the process of a college education is further compounded by a low income. Thompson
and Tyagi (1993) note the severe reductions in federal and state funds for education which

make it virtually impossible for many working-class students to attend college. More and more students are forced to juggle their educational dreams with economic demands as they study while they are commuting to campus on the subway, when their children are napping, and during their lunch hours at work. (p. xviii)

College is simply very expensive: books, time spent studying instead of working, commuting back and forth to school, and buying supplies for class can be financially draining. In the case of selecting a major, these factors can lead to choosing a major that is less expensive such as Speech and Communications as opposed to Art with an emphasis in Photography - even if the first would have been the preferred choice. The costs incurred at the Bursar’s Office are very high; often it is the costs of expenses incurred outside of the classroom that are also crippling: i.e., supplies, books. Intangibles are sacrificed, such as time and values, as are relationships and dreams.

Low income is one factor significantly related to the educational aspirations and progress of individuals (TERI & IHEP, 1997). Dependency on financial aid is a characteristic of most low-income students. Without this valuable assistance, many students would not be able to attend school. Loans, while plentiful for this population,
are often declined because of the necessity to pay back the loans after graduation. Rather than accept loans which would be helpful for meeting the costs of attending college, many students confine themselves to grants, many of which barely meet the high cost of tuition. Because many low-income students must work to support themselves and their families and thus have additional time-consuming family responsibilities (i.e., child care for a younger sibling), often dependency on financial aid is the sole determinant to successful attendance at a university. Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, and Nora (1995) assert that while many students work during their college years, first-generation students work out of necessity and tend to spend more time working and less time studying than their classmates. Again Thompson and Tyagi (1993) point out "the very poor students do not borrow what to them are astronomical sums of money to embark on an activity no one in their family or circle of acquaintance has ever experienced" (p. xviii).

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reports that first generation students were more likely to take remedial courses when they began their postsecondary education, to attend school part-time, and to persist in lower rates than their non-first-generation counterparts.
The study also found that if first-generation students attained bachelor's or associate's degrees, they earned comparable salaries and were employed in similar occupations as their non-first-generation peers (NCES, 1998).

The NCES found that, in 1989, approximately 43 percent of the beginning postsecondary students were first-generation. With such a large number of students who are in the predicament of having little to no prior experience of higher education, understanding the needs of this population and the effective practices that are used to best serve them is crucial. However, this researcher found few studies addressing the concerns and needs of this group (Malaney, & Shively, 1995; Mitchell, 1997; NCES, 1998; Terenzini, et al., 1995).

Many universities, politicians and educators believe first-generation, low-income students are "at-risk" (Hebert, 1997; Kozol, 1989; Peart & Campbell, 1999; Ray, 1994). The researchers do not qualify the term in these studies. In fact, the term is used without definition (Peart et al., 1999) or without an explanation of the factors which place the students "at-risk" (Peart et al., 1999; Ray, 1994).

This fact is distressing as it sets up a label for
this population as "at-risk," limiting or negating the possibility that the first-generation, low-income student can also succeed, or be considered "at-promise." Johnson and Rodriguez (1991) discuss this through a power dynamic by which the dominant culture applies their preferences, values and meanings into the discourse of the hierarchy of power.

First-generation and low-income university students have many assets and deficits that contribute to their success and failure at the university. Aside from internal circumstances, many of the factors that prevent success are external, and in fact, are put in place by the university. One of the main assets many first-generation, low-income students possess are characteristics of resilient children. Garmezy (1991, p. 416) identified the key characteristics of resiliency:

1. Positive peer and adult interactions,
2. Low degrees of defensiveness and aggressiveness and high degrees of cooperation, participation, and emotional stability,
3. A positive sense of self,
4. A sense of personal power rather than powerlessness, and
5. An internal locus of control (a belief that they
are capable of exercising a degree of control over their environment).

Resilience is associated with positive coping, persistence, adaptation, and long term success despite adversity (Winfield, 1994). Effective practices also include support structures from within the educational institution and community from which the student comes. Developing resilience is important when considering the systemic barriers for "at-risk" students.

Hixson and Tinzmann (1990) outline three such barriers. Discrimination and differential treatment, particularly low-expectations, as well as inferior resources plague schools. Structural and programmatic barriers to full participation such as tracking and ability grouping, continue to separate students based on perception of ability, interest or potential. These programs do not promote improved educational attainment; instead they promote separation and stigmatization. Declining support for schools, children and families as reflected by insufficient funding, refusal to support "other people's" children, and a lack of want to change well-established and familiar patterns of behavior are key barriers to overcome in order to improve academic and societal conditions for first-generation, low-income students. By overcoming this
barrier alone, paradigms of thought can shift into supporting students who are in need rather than relegating them to second-rate schools and programs, and cease blaming the students rather than the system as a whole.

It is important to note that much of the literature focuses on deficit models, with students as lacking in a characteristic placing them at risk. However, a strength model based on many of the assets mentioned above would give a more accurate representation of students as resilient individuals with "funds of knowledge" (Moll, Amanti, Neff, Gonzalez, 1992). Moll's (1992) research revealed that many families had abundant knowledge that the schools were not aware of - and therefore did not use in order to teach academic skills. Bempechat (1998) reiterates this with the concept of emic concepts of intelligence: idiosyncratic and contextualized perspectives of the student self.

Mitchell (1997) and TERI & IHEP (1997) enumerate the challenges that face first-generation, low-income students. These barriers are explicit and implicit in their manifestations and need to be given attention in order to ameliorate the situation. With weaker reading, math and critical thinking skills than students who come from college-educated families, these students have many
difficulties in meeting the academic challenges that are set forth by the university. Familial and friend support, which is crucial to the success of the college student, is often lacking; in fact, many students may receive negative feedback from families and friends. School is seen as a frivolous activity, detracting from the responsibilities of the household and relationships. Resistance and resentment can be a mitigating factor in the decision not to attend school (Mitchell, 1997).

Many students considered "at-risk" are also of color, an underrepresented population in higher education. Dropout rates for underrepresented students are considerably higher than that of European American students.

Underrepresentation is of great concern given the consequences regarding the failure to attain an undergraduate degree or participate in the process of gaining an education. Astin (1985) suggests that the main reason that minorities and poor students suffer a competitive disadvantage in gaining access to the most selective institutions is that they tend to score much lower on college admission tests and to earn lower high school grades than do white students (p. 92).

Many students, however, are resilient, graduating from school whilst working full time or supporting children. Many students come from backgrounds that are filled with
violence in the home and on the streets and in their home countries, yet they are persisting. But the facts are that many more students, despite their dreams of attaining a college education do fail.

**Achieving Voice**

When we listen to students, affirm their concerns and mirror back to them what we’ve heard, we are giving back their own power and voice. . .if that’s all we’ve accomplished, that’s quite a lot. (Dundon, 1999, p. 34)

To deny a person the possibility to narrate his or her own experience is to deny a person’s human dignity. (Errante, 2000, p. 17)

“Giving voice” refers to the returning of voice to those who have been rendered mute by oppression or fear (Dundon, 1999; Ferguson, 2000; Johnson et al., 1991; Smith & Johnson, 1993). Once rendered mute, students, according to Appavoo (1998), are “invalidated in the capacity to name, participate or act in the transformation of their reality” (p. 28).

Garcia Coll (1988) suggests that language is used to control people. The ability to express oneself freely is a powerful act that allows an individual to express herself with self-selected terms that are appropriate in their usage and reflection. She is free from labels placed by others (Taylor, 1992).

Consider two of Ada and Campoy’s (1996) *Transformative*
Education Principles:

1. Human beings are the sole constructors of social reality;
2. Language is one of the strongest elements of self definition as well as one of the most significant element of a culture. (p. 1)

The ability to name ourselves and give a name to our experiences in and of itself is a practice in liberation (Johnson et al., 1991). The ability to “call by name” (Freire, 1970) and self-identify is empowering and reflects a critical consciousness which allows individuals to name their experiences such that they are able to identify oppressive structures and break free of them. The culture of the classroom brings to the forefront the “voice.”

Delpit (1995) asks the question “What happens when the self is defined and determined by others?” (p. 36). Assumptions based on perceptions are often wrong and inappropriate, and tend to say more about the person who holds them than about the subject of the assumption.

Mohanty (1993) suggests that classrooms colonize the hearts and minds of students – retooling pedagogies allow education to decolonize and liberate individuals. Students gain so much more from the freedom experienced by their expressions. They are given the message that they are “experts in their own right” (Bempechat, 1998, p. 125).” More importantly, as Smith and Johnson (1993) posit, “we
recognize students as separate, valued contributors within the classroom... with relevant opinions, ideas, concerns and experiences about the discussions made concerning what learning and activities they need to accomplish” (p. 362).

Nonparticipatory classroom strategies have a very silencing role in education. Riviera and Poplin (1993) argue that traditional pedagogies attempt to adapt learning and meaning making to dominant values. This alone suggests the influence that teachers have on their students.

The practice of implicit message sending is truly powerful as it indicts educators for their shortcomings and their failures. If, as Greene (1973) posits, “education...is a process of initiating young people into the ways of thinking and behaving characteristic of the culture into which they are born” (p. 3), then the attempt to confine and devalue students’ opinions conveys low value of their contributions and ultimately their self-worth.

Understanding the struggle for empowerment is crucial to the utilization of voice. To be able to speak not only involves the ability to articulate oneself in the language of the classroom. This process also involves inner strength and resolve on behalf of the students - to express oneself in a public fashion is to expose oneself to criticism. Mohanty (1993) adds to this argument that understanding and
theorizing questions of knowledge, power and experience in education are crucial to having an effect on pedagogical empowerment and transformation.

**Educational Equity and Oppression**

When children are unhappy, scared, anxious, insecure, learning cannot take place...Learning requires a restful spirit, an open mind, a willingness to receive and appropriate. Creating conditions of serenity, trust, confidence and joy are not superfluous gratuities, they are basic requirements to a successful learning process. (Ada & Campoy, 1997). (p. 3)

Educational equity involves the issues of fairness in educational opportunity and equal provisions of opportunity to students. Clearly, there is a difference in the opportunity between social and economic classes and between private and public schools (Astin, 1985; Kozol, 1991; Malaney & Shively, 1995; NCEE, 1993). However, it is important to discuss the goals or outcomes of education before entering into the realm of equity so that we may understand what is when it is achieved in the schools.

Education is described in many different ways. It is the transmission of culture (Greene, 1973); the building of citizens and leaders "of a cast pluralistic democracy in a world that is becoming more interdependent" (Hu-DeHart, 1993, p. 7), the means by which individuals from economically or socially disadvantaged backgrounds can
build the skills and credentials needed for successful adult roles in mainstream American life" (NCEE, 1993). Furthermore, it is understood that one’s opportunity in life is a function of one’s education. The profits of college, according to Astin (1985), are learning and knowledge. Therefore, to discuss educational equity, understanding the outcomes of such a system allows a clearer look into the methodology of education as administered in our nation’s universities and allows us to examine its role in the lives of the students as well as in society-at-large. Gaining an understanding of the mechanisms in place that dictate the essentials of education and the process by which it is dispersed to the students is to study the system of power and hierarchy in society as well as the determinants of the patterns of empowerment and disempowerment in socioeconomic sectors.

Educational outcomes are also about survival. Banks suggests that students

acquire knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to participate in the reformation of the world’s social, political and economic systems so that peoples from diverse ethnic, cultural and religious groups will be politically empowered and structurally integrated into their societies. (1997, p. 28)

To intentionally practice education with this in mind is to prepare them for the work that is required to bring equity
to the forefront and to assure future societies of their rights and dignities.

Astin (1985) provides the following definition of educational equity: [the] "goal of equality has been attained when opportunities are made available to all who deserve them and when no person is denied access to higher education because of race, gender, income or social status" (p. 18). Equity's place in the university must also be infused into all curricula and policy to ensure that it is understood by members of the campus community (Callan, 1994). Educational equity has been a topic of discussion for over twenty years, yet the outcomes are still the same for the students. In predominantly White colleges, students of color are less likely to graduate within five years, have lower grade point averages, experience higher attrition rates, experience frustration, drop out, and are subject to lower expectations from instructors and administrators alike (Saracho & Gerstl, 1992; Smedley, Myers, & Harrell, 1993).

Ogbu (1994), in his discussion of cultural reproduction and resistance theory, asserts that working-class youths and minority youths consciously or unconsciously reject the meaning and knowledge taught by schools and turn to working-class adults or to street people as a source of materials for resistance and exclusion...
[students] repudiate the schools by forming countercultures which eventually impeded their school success and employability in the more desirable sector of mainstream economy. (p. 166)

In this approach, the struggle to attain an education is met by attempts at usurping the system. Ogbu (1994) feels that this is “part of an evolved cultural pattern characteristic of the communities from which the students come” (p. 166). Because the educational system worked for Whites but did not work for Blacks, the oppositional stance to education was developed as a reaction to the material conditions as experienced by Black students. A “deep distrust” for the educational system and those in control of it arises from a long history wherein students behave as their parents did - with contempt.

Bitting et al. (1992), Hu-DeHart (1993), Thompson et al. (1993), and others enumerate the trend set forth by many educators and administrators: that the student alone is responsible for the change that is required to meet existing educational norms and standards of assessment. The impact of that statement alone on an individual student suggests that the failures incurred while in school are without doubt due to the student’s shortcomings. O’Donnell and Green-Merritt (1997) suggest that students need to initiate change rather than the institution proactively.
creating change:

When minority students sense the enthusiasm that emanates from creativity and the parameters of change [from a self-developed cohort group that they elect to be in rather than a university-wide community] there is a magnetic field generated that encaptures them, gives direction, and causes them to trust those who are in authority (p. 12).

To insist that students create communities to band together and adjust themselves to fit the mainstream or prefabricated norms places responsibility on the students, not on the institution, thereby creating a distance between then and not allowing for interdependent and mutual participation in the process to develop an acceptable environment. Nieto (2000) describes intense structural policies that perpetuate the “us” vs. “them” mentality in colleges: tracking, standardized testing, curriculum, pedagogy, physical structure, disciplinary policies, limited roles of students and teachers and limited family and community involvement. These practices have deep roots in racism and separatism and sadly enough, continue today (Malaney et al., 1995; Nieto, 1999; The Education Resources Institution & Institution for Higher Education Policy, 1997). Roueche et al. (1994) considers the reaction of institutions to be similar to the reaction that individuals have to the “grotesque”: "we turn them out, explain away their gravity, or we in some other fashion
reduce the discomfort that they create" (p. 3). Complacency runs rampant in the face of meeting the challenge of students who are seeking equity in the classroom. Status quo is being maintained, and changes that would benefit students and communities are not taken.

Increasingly, however, studies are presenting the need for the institution of education to undergo a radical change and paradigm shift (Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Myrick & Brown, 1997; Nieto, 1999, 2000; Olsen, 1996). Each study mentioned above cites a radical change in institutional thought and practices that is necessary to facilitate change. Institutions would then begin to accept responsibility and finally be held responsible for the transmission of culture and empowerment. Many of the changes require additional funding and institutional support to programs and schools that work with students; however, commitment to funding programs is rare (Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education, 1993; Kozol, 1991; Miller et al., 1995; Nieto, 1999; Nieto, 2000).

**Disempowerment**

Sleeter (1991) defines empowerment as the: capability of individuals to achieve their own goals, and civic empowerment is the ability of groups, working collaboratively, to improve
society for the betterment of all its members. In social studies and multicultural educations, empowerment is typically associated with developing skills to overcome social injustices and inequities (p. 1).

Empowerment is not an “inherent birthright or a capability acquired automatically as individuals move through life. Rather it results from teaching and learning” (Gay et al., 1999, p. 364). However, disempowerment as a discourse is important because of its impact on the societal power structure (Cummins, 1997). A discourse impacts institutional practices, attitudes and norms. In turn, these three factors affect students because the discourse becomes a philosophy used to administer services, form curriculum and develop support.

“Fixed notions of identities” is an example of one of the aforementioned institutional practices (Myrick et al., 1997). Constructs that support fixed identity based on race, gender, and sexual orientation disempower students via treating difference as a matter of norms dividing the right from the wrong. Denying students access to power via gatekeeper programs and processes also leads to disempowerment. Removing students from curriculum development and the curriculum itself leads to instruction that is not culturally relevant and results in nurturing out what is natural and replacing it with artificial norms.

Disempowerment does not allow for creation of individual meanings and reflections; rather, it imposes one system of meaning over another and suggests its validity and worthiness while the other is to be discarded and treated as contemptible and laughable.

Practices such as tracking, low funding for programs that serve underrepresented populations, segregation, low expectations of achievement and a creation of a “hidden curriculum” continue to enslave students into prefabricated castes and roles (DeSurra & Church, 1994; Kozol, 1991; Nieto, 2000).

A hidden curriculum, for instance, involves both positive and negative elements or messages that are not intended to be taught, both positive and negative, in the classroom (Nieto, 2000). In not teaching or avoiding topics, the teacher revokes value from the subject.

Delpit (1995) writes of a culture of power in the classroom enacted by this action. First, it is important to acknowledge that there is a culture of power in the classroom affecting not only what is taught, but also determining the rules of the classroom and who holds power. The rules of power are the reflection of the rules of the culture of those who have power. More importantly, knowing
what the rules are facilitates acquisition of power. Delpit (1995) suggests explicit presentation of the rules makes acquisition of power even easier.

For first-generation, low-income students, bridging home cultures and school cultures can be a difficult task. What is accepted at home may not necessarily be accepted at school. Accepting differences is not readily accepted in the classroom. Learning preferences or diverse backgrounds are viewed as deficiencies, and students are devalued (Nieto, 2000).

Gay (1981) theorizes that goals, behavioral patterns, cultural codes, value systems and background experiences affect the way an individual acts and reacts. Cultural discontinuities are a major factor in education; when students and faculty/staff are from diametrically different backgrounds, clashes are expected. Both have differing perceptions and act on them in any given situation. The influence of culture is evident in one’s actions, and punishment as a result of acting on one’s culture devalues and dehumanizes the individual (DeSurra & Church, 1994; Gonzalez, 1998; Sheets, 1995). The reason for students’ difficulties, in light of this practice, is that they are different and therefore are to be blamed. However, it is not the school’s fault that they struggle and ultimately
Wong Fillmore (1991) in her study of English language learners (ELL) and primary language loss, discusses a process by which students who are learning English are not allowed to speak their primary language, and soon learn to devalue it as well as the many of the cultural associations that are a part of that language. The ramifications for this practice ripple throughout the student and their families, even as far as the student's community. The signs and symbols from the primary language and culture are replaced by new ones and relationships change. Some are even destroyed.

Schools place pressure on students to assimilate culturally and linguistically (Nieto, 1999). They are encouraged so far as to alter physical features and cultural practices as well as to feel shame for their upbringing and their heritage.

A "cultural suicide" is crucial for success in the university (Gonzalez, 1998). A student must assimilate into the university culture in order to be successful and integrate. By preventing students from taking control of their own lives and assuming responsibility for the choices they make, universities disempower students, depriving them of the experiences crucial to adapt to the structures of
the dominant world (Tyler, 1986).

Teaching and learning empowerment stem from the pedagogical practices utilized in the classroom. Greene (1973) posits that only through education can people be given the tools to deal with their environment, and create positive outcomes in their lives and be given the opportunities to create a world that is consistent with their own meanings and definitions. The role of the teacher is essential in that he/she is responsible for assuring that these ends are not only met, they are understood by all in the classroom. The relationship between empowerment/disempowerment and educators is the importance of examining the roles of the student and the teacher as well as their respective cultures, or the constructs of education (Bean, 1992).

The limited roles of students and teachers are also a very important consideration in disempowerment (Nieto, 1999, 2000). By not allowing students to participate in school, become involved in activities and development of school policy building is to eliminate their voices and not value what they have to offer. Limitations of a student’s access by assuming intellectual capacity based on subjective measures are unfair and representative of a teacher’s inability to see other realms of intelligence.
that exist for students. Not only do these students come from "households rich in social and intellectual resources" but they need to be given the opportunity to have as high academic expectations as their peers (Moll et al., 1993). Yet the students are "alienated and frustrated" (Nieto, 2000).

However, merely attaining an education is not a goal; it is a process. Within the process, the individuals mirror existing power relationships in society, or the process itself transforms them (Brown, 1993). Transformation takes the form of a student being able to understand his or her reality and to create and shape a world that accurately reflects his or her reality, and ultimately share in the world with others. This relationship is dynamic and in flux, ever changes dependent on individuals and circumstances such as socioeconomic status, cultural, ethnic background, or immigrant status, to name a few. Achieving one's true potential, according to Greene's (1973) and Gay's (1999) assertions, one gains tools to shape and create one's own environment and life, and through education the goal of empowerment and the creation of a critical consciousness is possible.

Critically reflecting on the power differentials in society and the cultural differences that give meaning to
an individual's actions provides an individual with resources to work towards empowerment. The construction of meaning is also tantamount to critical reflection; it is safe to say that one does not exist without the other. In the observation of power, a consideration of oppression is warranted:

Oppression is a process; it is constituted within and through a complicated and dynamic network of asymmetrical power relations. Oppression is all about power...the power to main, physically, mentally and emotionally; and, importantly, the power to set the very terms of power. (Pellegrini, 1992, p. 53)

Implicit processes, such as a hidden curriculum, prove to be more destructive than the explicit; it is a discourse that perpetuates hostility and produces helplessness, perhaps despair.

To be meaningless, according to Bitting et al (1992), is a much more fundamental problem because individuals are not able to create for themselves a world in which they are fully realized beings. The struggles of students often found in that statement - that the opportunity for success lies in the ability to create a situation in which education possesses an individual meaning and worth. It is imperative to utilize a pedagogy that represents and respects the culture of the students while enabling each to become empowered within and outside of the classroom. This
practice allows each student to define his or her world as well as understand the worlds of others. Students are empowered to develop a positive cultural identity through interactions with their teachers experience a sense of control over their own lives and develop the confidence and motivation to succeed academically (Cummins, 1996).

Summary

Historical realities such as racism, unequal funding for the United States' public schools, cultural power and a failure of society to take responsibility for the ills that are being reproduced daily in the classroom are issues pertinent to the study of disempowerment and marginalization of first-generation, low-income students.

Furthermore, disempowerment as a discourse pervades higher learning, and in doing so, creates a gap that continues to separate the spectrum of students into distinct groups that are predetermined to succeed and fail. Students are denied not only their languages, but also their cultures, home realities, and ways of knowing. To participate fully, it is expected that students adhere to appropriate cultural practices, many of which are in direct opposition to their own.

In understanding the constructs of educational equity and disempowerment, it is evident and clear why first-
generation, low-income students are in a position to
deserve a new place at the head of the educational agenda.
CHAPTER III
Methodology

To educate as a practice of freedom is a way of teaching that anyone can learn. That learning process comes easiest to those of us who teach also believe that there is an aspect of our vocation that is sacred; who believe that our work is not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students. To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the soul of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin, (hooks, 1994, p. 13)

Introduction and Overview

Conducting research requires selecting a methodology that best serves the purpose of the study in more ways than one; the research methodology should cull the answer(s) sought by the statement of the problem and the purpose of the study. 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, but on a personal, level as well. Thus is the reasoning behind the selection of participatory research for this particular study.

This section of the dissertation will describe in depth the research design and the research methodology
detailed into specific sections.

Research Design

A qualitative design is appropriate for this study because of its strength in understanding a social process (Gonzalez, 1998). Quantitative designs do not allow for an in depth look at individual responses and reactions to events and histories as effective as qualitative research designs. Qualitative researchers demonstrate an interest in the personal narrative as a valid articulation of individual and collective experience with the social, political, and cultural worlds of education (Errante, 2000). In this particular study, participatory research was used in order to highlight the usage of voice and collaborative inquiry.

Participatory research. The practice of dialoguing with a participant is an exercise in learning and unlearning. We approach the issues together, learning and teaching simultaneously. Within the context of learning and teaching comes the arising of the consciousness from which we liberate from the trappings created by years of lack of use of one’s voice.

According to Park (1989), the dialogue plays a vital role in participatory research:

To dialogue means to talk as equal partners in an
exchange of not only information but also of sentiment and values. Dialogue is a means of discovering the sharedness of a problem, the connectedness of the lives, and the common ground for action. (p. 12)

The dialogue is a way for the researcher and the participant to become co-researchers. Instead of two separate entities, they become partners in a process, committed to the same goals from commencement to conclusion. Therefore, transformation, a key concept and outcome of participatory research, is shared, both researchers leaving the process changed as growth has taken place. In dialogue, the honesty and openness are found in the interaction and communication between people (Lango, 1998). Dialogue engages deep thoughts and emotions and allows for "naming one's world" (Freire, 1970 p. 69). In dialogue, each person reveals part of herself and enters the dialogue with hope and trust that people are capable not only of knowing but of knowing more profoundly (Ada, 1993).

**Critical Pedagogy.** Critical pedagogy as a form of cultural politics and praxis of transformation is an invitation to students to begin to reconstruct the world and (re)articulate their futures in hitherto unimaginin ways, so as to help them adopt new positions, new political
and politicizing engagements, and new mobilizations of memories, fantasies, dreams, and desires (McLaren, 1999). Wink and Almanzo (1997) state that critical pedagogy “forces educators to reexamine fundamental issues of power and its relationship to the greater societal forces that affect schools” (p. 210).

In this study, a dialogue regarding academia and first-generation and low-income students and the experiences inherent to each gave light to generative themes. This was achieved by utilizing a process of constructive listening and reflecting, as well as the researcher’s ability to be open and honest. Thus, the co-participants had the opportunity to articulate and rearticulate, as McLaren stated, experiences, events, and thoughts. Within those thoughts the generative themes emerged through the dialogue. Through dialogue, the researcher and the participant experienced a transformation. A generative theme is one that emerges from the lives of learners as they engage a course of study (Boyce, 1996).

Reza (1995) feels that in order to move toward a transformative emancipatory experience courage and strength are necessary in knowing and honoring one’s own truth and in overcoming the “truths” of the oppressor. Courage and
strength come from reflection. Maturana and Varela (1987) define reflection as

the process of knowing how we know. It is an act of turning back upon ourselves. It is the only change we have to discover our blindness and to recognize that the certainties and knowledge of others are, respectively, as overwhelming and tenuous as our own. (p.24)

Lango (1998) states that "reflection gives the insight to understand the origins and validity of their own particular truths. Through reflection one gains confidence and becomes capable of placing one’s personal truths in the context of other truths" (p. 31). Validity is important especially for the population represented by the co-participants: the underrepresented college students, many of whom do not have the resources to get support for their frustrations or concerns.

One of the major outcomes of participatory research is empowerment. Kieffer (1981) defines empowerment as:

development of a more positive sense of self, construction of a more critical comprehension of the web of social and political relations which comprise one’s experienced environment, and cultivation of resources and strategies, or functional competence, for efficacious attainment of personal and collective socio-political goals. (p. 31)

In the dialogue, the co-participants and the researcher will discuss power structures and empowerment. Ultimately, as in all participatory research, it is hoped
that the co-researchers will experience empowerment and develop within their communities the ability to critically reflect on their experiences and that of others to promote a socially just world.

Description of the Participant's Community

The participants are students at San Francisco State University (SFSU), a public, four-year university. In this community are 28,000 students, most of whom are commuter students, that is, those who come to school, attend class, and then leave for work or their home community. Due to the transient nature of the students at SFSU and the limited amount of time spent on campus, the formation of relationships between students and the university, as well as with each other, can be fleeting and difficult.

The students are participants in Student Support Services (SSS), a federally funded TRIO program for low-income, first generation college students. Originally formed with three programs in 1965, hence the name “TRIO,” programs such as SSS address the educational needs of underrepresented children. According to Mitchen, as quoted in Ray (1994), in order to qualify for Student Support Services Programs, students must first be accepted for enrollment at the college/university and need academic support. Many students in this program are considered
'special admit' status because of the lack of proper academic preparation in order to meet standard requirements for entrance into the university. Cross, also quoted in Ray (1994), found that students in the [Student Support Services] program had a higher rate of retention than did their nonparticipant counterparts. The study also found that although the Student Support Services participants were perceived as significantly less prepared and much less likely to succeed academically, they also performed just as well as and often significantly better than the control group of students, which was made up of nonparticipants. (p. 30-31)

Many of the students are from the Bay Area and live at home with their parents. They are the first in their family to attend college and are currently recipients of financial aid, which denotes their low-income status. The students in the programs are in their third year of study at SFSU and have completed anywhere from 30-90 units (freshman to senior status). However, because the amount of units that each individual student successfully passes each semester varies as does their enrollment, the status of the student is not indicative of the number of years that they were enrolled in the university. It is possible for a 4th year student to still be a freshman.

The community is also comprised of specially admitted students. This category contains students who are unable to
meet the normal admissions requirements set forth by the California State University system. These students were admitted to SFSU based on their potential for successful work at the undergraduate level based on promise and letters of recommendations to the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP). This population of students requires intensive advising via EOP, but because SSS (Student Support Services) has many students who belong to this community, they are bound to meet with SSS advisors every two weeks. They are required to go to tutoring, workshops, and advising meetings per an agreement signed upon their acceptance of the invitation to participate in the program. Table 1 presents a comparison between co-participant and program characteristics.

Researcher's Entry

The co-participants are participants of Student Support Services, a federally funded TRIO program at San Francisco State University. I have worked with these students for four years, since they were first year students at SFSU. Ease of entry into the community was based on understanding the student's experiences and their needs and having a similar educational experience and background as my students.

Knowledge of the community stems from research

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performed as part of my work as an advisor with Student Support Services. In the past four years much information gathering took place in order to observe trends in retention academic difficulty and needs and concerns of the population; however most of this led to quantitative research that did not look at the highly subjective experience of going to college in the form of narratives. Recognition of this fact led me to see that much of the failure experienced by the students is due in part to a lack of visibility that they have on their campuses and in the body of knowledge as a whole. There is also a power dynamic that exists at the university that creates priorities and divisions that impact students and the staff that work with them. What programs will get funding and which will be forced to close their doors? What curriculum will get approved? Which majors will fold? Which courses will be taught? These questions are matters of utmost importance, particularly to students who rarely have a say in the decisions that affect them.

Looking at both sides of the issue, as a student and as a former staff member, made my entry into the field essential and crucial to my work as an educator and as an individual who hopes to increase the retention and graduation rate of my students and those in my community.
Entry into the community involved the support of the staff of Student Support Services. Through their support and feedback I was able to formulate many of the research questions because, in fact, many of these questions we ask ourselves during formal and informal conversations.

Research Setting

The research took place at the Office of Student Support Services on the campus of San Francisco State University and other sites convenient to students, such as on the way home in a car, at restaurants, or classrooms. The students know the office as their home away from home, and many of the co-participants in the study spend their time in between classes in the office or in the tutoring rooms.

A sense of space was important for the students, and the staff feels that it is important for the students to have a place that is as their own. It is the belief of the staff that this space has helped the retention. The office space in which I used to work is also very highly personalized, and pictures of the students are taped onto the walls, making it literally a place where you can see yourself.

San Francisco State University considers itself the premier urban university, with a student body that
represents the Bay Area, one of the most diverse regions of the United States. There are 28,000 students at the university, with the average age of the student being 27. SFSU is a commuter campus; students usually do not stay on campus after attending classes, and many do not live on campus. The average length of matriculation until graduation is six years, and administrators and students alike cite the difficulty of obtaining classes as the main cause of the extended graduation dates.

Recruitment of Participants

The flier (Appendix A) was posted outside the SSS office, and in the spaces utilized by all SSS students, including advisor's offices, tutorial rooms and general SSS space. The staff was informed about the study and asked to help recruit students, and an announcement was made during the workshops administered during Fall 2000.

Informational meetings were held in November, and from those meetings the five students emerged as participants.

Description of the Participants

Students in Student Support Services are members of two categories: (a) to be first in their families to go to college and (b) to have low income. Because of these two factors it is understood that the students will encounter difficulties while at the university and are therefore
considered "at-risk." The drop out rate for this population can be as high as 50 percent after the first year (NCES, 1998). However after the first year, the retention for this program at San Francisco State University is 93 percent.

All co-participants are active members of Student Support Services (SSS) and are students at San Francisco State University (SFSU). They are all residents of the Bay Area and are either United States citizens or permanent residents; both are qualifications to be a participant in SSS. An effort was made to assure the similar compositions of the co-participant group and the SSS population. This is the reason for the stringent limitations given below.

There were five students in this study, two men and three women.

They were either Juniors or Seniors, the current student level of most SSS students at SFSU.

Ethnicity was not a control; however the students are of a population of underrepresented students in higher education, namely non-Asian (Filipino excluded) students of color. The reason for the Filipino exemption from the Asian category was because of the high graduation rate of Filipino students at the university.

The students in the program were between the ages of 19-41. The median age of the students was 21. All students
were eligible first-time freshmen at SFSU and ranged from recent high school graduates to re-entry students who have been away from school for a few years.

Of the five co-participants, three were specially admitted (i.e., have not met regular admission criteria or may represent a high-risk category student) and two were regularly admitted (met all criteria for admission). The special admission status reflects the student's high school preparation and inability to meet one or more of the admission requirements for SFSU. Often this means completing remedial courses in English and/or math prior to taking courses that will go towards completion of the baccalaureate degree. Regularly admitted students do not have these prerequisites or limitations.

Each participant was asked to draft their autobiography and tell their own story as they see fit in writing. These autobiographies are included in the text, verbatim, in Chapter IV.

Data Collection and Analysis

Participatory research involves the ability to speak and to articulate the reality of one's life and experiences, but it is also important to listen. Listening is essential because it allows two things to happen. First, the co-participant is given the opportunity to speak and
Table 1

Participant and Program Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Participant N=5</th>
<th>Program N=189</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Admit Status</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Special Admit</td>
<td>3 (60%)</td>
<td>100 (53%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular Admit</td>
<td>2 (40%)</td>
<td>89 (47%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>2 (40%)</td>
<td>87 (46%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
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<td>48 (25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>3 (60%)</td>
<td>40 (21%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3 (2%)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>5 (3%)</td>
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<td>4 (2%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2 (40%)</td>
<td>67 (35%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3 (60%)</td>
<td>122 (65%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

articulate what has not been previously spoken whether due to inability or lack of freedom to do so. Second, the co-participant is given control over her/his own dialogue in a safe place complete with trust and respect. The act of naming one’s reality with confidence is equated with empowerment.
It is in listening to the dialogue that the researcher as co-participant has the opportunity to listen deeper and with the intention of learning more. The co-participants also receive a copy of the transcription and are given the opportunity to make notes, clarifications and observations of the dialogue. A thematic investigation takes place and the uncovering of a significant dimension of the co-participants' lives becomes a primary task.

Data Analysis

The analysis uncovered dimensions of all co-participants' realities as well as highlighted their assets and deficits. Looking past the surface issues that are present in our lives, the "magical consciousness" requires critical and intentional reflection upon one's actions (Brown, 1993, p 49).

Park (1989) asserts that

the data are analyzed with the intention of discovering the dimensions of the problem under investigation and to come up with a guide to collective action. (p. 13)

Through the analysis the individual dialogue became a reflection of the societal fabric from whence the dialogue first comes, and then answers to the research questions were derived. The first dialogue generated clarity and an understanding of what was highly significant to
participants. Finding the generative themes in that dialogue led to the second dialogue which allowed for further clarification.

Before the dialogues, the process of the research was discussed at an initial meeting. The initial group meeting allowed students to spontaneously discuss amongst each other the questions I chose to guide the dialogues. The initial meeting also served to help in the clarification of the questions to be posed in the dialogues.

The First Dialogue

The first dialogue took place in the Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS) Building, Room 216, at San Francisco State University. This is the site of the SSS program, where the researcher was formerly employed, and likewise, where the co-participants are participants of the SSS program. The dialogue took place in the researcher's former office, a place where both the co-participants and I have met regularly for the last three years. Since trust had already been established, it was not be necessary to begin a formal trust-building process. However, because the context of the relationship we entered into was new, a complete introduction into the process and a description of the work we undertook was clarified. The co-participants were asked if they have any questions regarding the
process, and upon clarification, we began with much joy and anticipation.

The first dialogue was transcribed and a copy was provided to the co-participants for their review and consideration. They were invited to add information where they felt it was needed.

Questions to guide the initial dialogue. The following questions were created to guide the first dialogue. As described in Chapter I, the questions adhere to the principles of participatory research and critical pedagogy. The research questions are restated here to illuminate the construction of the questions to guide the dialogues.

Naming or describing the issue. Naming or describing the issue is based on the reality of the co-participants. Being able to name one’s situation as one sees fit and appropriate allows the individual to deconstruct it, and therefore creates a fitting beginning to the study. The rest of the study flows from this foundation.

Research Question #1 (RQ1): How are first-generation low-income college students disempowered and/or marginalized at the university?

1. What were your expectations of going to college?

2. What is your experience of going to college?
3. What kinds of experiences would define the college experience for you?

Relating the issue to personal experience. Relating the issue to a personal experience grounds the co-participants in the here and now and defines a specific instance or the parameters under which the study will be undertaken.

RQ #2: How has the experience of being disempowered/marginalized affected first-generation, low-income college students?

4. What is it like to attend SFSU?

5. How has attending college affected your friends/family?

6. What effect has it had on your friends who are just like you (or came from the same high school)?

7. Describe a situation when you felt like you were a part of the university community and one when you were not part of the university community.

Critical reflection. Critical reflection by the co-participants helped them to be able to recognize their reality and incorporate their meanings therein. In the context of this study and its research question, critical reflection is an in-depth look at the experience of the co-participants and the deeper meanings for them and society.
at large.

RQ #3: What do the experiences of the first-generation, low-income college students reveal about the conditions of the university and in which they live?

8. What messages do you get from the situations you described earlier?

9. What has had the most profound effect on you at this campus?

Awareness leading to action. Awareness leading to action is a hallmark of participatory research. The norm of quantitative experimental research is to separate the subjects from the outcomes of the study; whereas participatory research encourages individuals to work with the results and incorporate them into their lives and in the lives of others.

RQ #4: In what ways will the students be able to adapt to their environment at the university?

RQ #5: What are their recommendations for action?

10. What do you feel needs to be changed in terms of your experiences at the university?

11. Who do you feel is responsible for the changes that need to be made?

12. What do you feel you can do to make the future experiences of students better?

Closure. These questions were used to guide the
dialogue towards further discussion, and were not intended to end the session.

13. Is there anything you feel I left out, or that you need to clarify?

14. Is there anything you wish to add to the dialogue?

The Second Dialogue

The purpose of the second dialogue was to ensure that participants have an opportunity to read and assess what they have said - to clarify their thinking. It gives the participants an opportunity to reflect and elaborate on comments they have made and to determine whether they as individuals are in agreement with the researcher regarding generative themes extracted from the first dialogue. (Reza, 1995, p. 108)

The second dialogue took place the following week at the same office and at other sites convenient to the co-participants. We had an opportunity to reflect on and expand on the issues or clarify them as needed. This dialogue was also transcribed and shared for review by myself and each co-participant.

The following questions were used in the second dialogue (based on Reza, 1995, p.109):

1. What did you see as important in your first dialogue?
2. Is there anything you wish to clarify?
3. Did any thought or comment strike you as important enough to say again or to expand on?
4. Is there anything that you didn't say that you think is important?
5. What have you learned from this process?

6. What needs to be done to assure that first generation, low-income college students receive educational equity?

7. What have I not asked? What is the next set of questions that needs to be asked regarding this topic?

Protection of Human Subjects

In keeping with the interests of the co-participants and the research, an application for the Protection of Human subjects was approved at both the University of San Francisco (USF) and SFSU. Co-participants signed an informed consent form and were able to withdraw from the study at any time.

Forms and copies of the approvals from both campuses, informed consent, cover letters, and additional data collection material are provided in Appendix D.

The co-participants opted to utilize their real names in the study when given the option to have pseudonyms in order to protect their identities.

Background of the Researcher

A native San Franciscan, raised in Visitation Valley, in the southeast corner of San Francisco. I am a Filipina and second-generation American. I am currently employed at the USF, but this study comes out of my prior employment at San Francisco State University’s Student Support Services...
program, a federally funded TRIO program. This program was the source for the participants in the study.

Interest in this study stems mainly from my experiences growing up and attending school in San Francisco and attending the University of California, Davis, for my undergraduate degree. Many of my classmates at all levels of education have been, what I feel, marginalized by the system and found themselves 'not fitting in' socially and academically with other students. These situations caused many of my friends and colleagues to drop out of school or fail in the attempt to stay matriculated. Because of this, this study is a highly personal one. Retention of underrepresented student populations, particularly Filipino and Filipino American students, has always been of concern because of the high drop out rates at the university level.

Professional interests in the research topic stems from my work at SSS. As an advisor, I have worked with these students to provide academic advising and personal support throughout their college careers. The students, all low-income and first-generation have been working with me for the last three years. Throughout those three years, a few students have expressed their concerns about their readiness for doing college work, and concerns about their
'place' at the university. To better understand their needs, I performed, prior to coming to the USF, independent research to study the situation of the underrepresented student. This study yielded very little information and much frustration, motivating me to undertake the effort to better understand what the experience of going to college was like for my students, and for similar students throughout the nation.

A prior pilot study helped to clarify some of the research questions and identify areas of concern. The goal of this study was to examine the experience of participating in an American educational system for an immigrant student. Claudia, who is a co-participant in this study, participated in the pilot study and helped to form the foundation for this research endeavor.

Despite a new position at another university, I communicate regularly with many of my former SFSU students including the students chosen to be in the study. I still feel connected to SSS, and am hoping to be able to work with these students again in the future, I am more motivated to do well.

I very much enjoy spoken word, whether the performance is an actual poetry reading or the mere sharing of conversation. This led to my interest in dialogic research
methodologies. The curative nature, as experienced by naming and voicing abstractions in our daily lives, proves to be a very important part of my life as a counselor, an artist, and a human being.
Each participant was given the opportunity to write an autobiography for inclusion into the study. Simple guidelines were given to each participant, such as a brief family history and a glimpse into their lives as students:

1. What is your name and what does your name mean?
2. Where were you born?
3. How many members are there in your family?
4. Where do you now live?
5. How did you get to where you now live? How was that decision made?
6. What was growing up like for you?
7. Where did you attend school? high school? What were those experiences like?
8. Why did you choose to go to SFSU?
9. What is it like going to SFSU?
10. What other interesting things would you like to share about your experiences in schools?
11. Anything else you feel is important in understanding who you are and where you came from?

They were encouraged to write 5 pages. The guidelines were posted on a website where they could easily refer to while they were writing.

Inclusion of the autobiographies allowed students to utilize their own voices, providing a rich background to the details of the results of the study. All of the co-participants were encouraged to write freely and creatively
in their own voice. Table 2 presents a summary of the generative themes elicited in the autobiographies.

**Olvia**

My name is Olvia Angulo, I’m named after my mother’s grandmother who was of Italian and Spanish descent. I was born and raised in San Diego, California with three older brothers, one younger sister and a younger brother in a single parent home. My relocation to San Francisco was due to my choice of study. Since I was accepted to San Francisco State University (SFSU), relocation was the next challenge I faced after high school. San Francisco State University was my main choice of schools because I knew SFSU had an excellent journalism program. My mother also decided to relocate to San Francisco with me so that I wouldn’t have to work and study at the same time. Her sacrifice is very important to me because I know that not everyone is willing to make such a drastic change in his or her lives. But she made the sacrifice for me, for my education and for my future. Presently, she is employed full-time while I attend my classes and care for my younger siblings.

The transition was very difficult in the beginning since my mother had never lived outside of San Diego and my
older brothers lived in San Diego, so we would visit them frequently. My mother is now glad that she moved with me because she loves her work here and is considering buying a house in the Bay Area.

I'm a journalism and Spanish major because ever since the ninth grade, I knew I wanted to work in the journalism field. In high school, I was one of the editors for the school paper so I truly enjoyed writing for other people. I'm also majoring in Spanish because I knew I needed to improve my native language. Eventually, I would like to teach Spanish and journalism at the university and high school level.

I grew up in a very united and affectionate family where my mother solely raised my siblings and I so that we would grow into decent human beings. I certainly can't complain about my childhood since my family always made me feel special, especially since I was the youngest and only daughter in the family. Because I grew up being the only daughter, I became very close to my mother.

I attended high school in San Diego, California. My high school years were very interesting because I never thought I would go to college outside of San Diego. Everyone around me was either planning on attending San Diego State University or City College of San Diego. I
didn’t want to attend either school. I knew I was going to
go straight into a university but I wasn’t quite sure
where. Ironically, that was the first thing I did after I
graduated - I relocated to San Francisco.

My experiences in high school were again, interesting
because I was always part of a diverse crowd of friends.
Although my high school crowd is completely different from
my SFSU crowd, both groups are diverse in their way.
Fortunately for me, my friends at SFSU are consciously
aware of social issues that were never brought to my
attention during my high school years. Now, I have the
luxury of being aware and active in my surroundings.

However, when I go back to San Diego to visit my
family and friends, their level of awareness seems to be
paused in the same mode as when we were in high school.
Living life as unaware of their surroundings is not fair;
the realities they need to know in regards to their history
and culture aren’t a part of their identity. Reflecting on
such a thing makes me sick because I can’t imagine myself
not being culturally, politically, historically, and
socially aware of my identity.

I chose to attend SFSU because of the academic reviews
of the journalism department. I also wanted to go to
college where there was a strong market for diverse
journalists. San Francisco State University is, if not the most diverse, surely one of the most historically diverse and political college campuses in the country. I appreciate that culture because the college campuses in San Diego aren’t as politically and socially aware as the majority of SFSU students. How did I come to such a strong conclusion? Like I mentioned before, I’m from San Diego, so I am aware of the politics behind the system. Upper middle class white conservatives who have no clue about the ethnic communities there primarily dominate San Diego. The social awareness of the SFSU campus was a culture that I wasn’t accustomed to, yet it continues to fascinate me very much.

With having such a rich culture of diversity, the campus provides much more awareness, which leads to a greater enriching of education and tolerance. For example, I had the privilege of studying abroad in Zimbabwe, during my sophomore year. It was the first time I had traveled outside of the U.S. and I lived there for a month when I was 19 years old. As a young Mexican-American woman, I had a profound experience that opened my eyes to the raw reality of the world. In terms of being a woman, the Zimbabwean culture is highly male-dominated in every way. As I lived in the shadow of another culture, I found myself
trying to identify my position in life in this unbalanced world. After many different self-analyses, I came to the conclusion that there is still a lot of work for me to do as a young woman, in this world. When I returned, I was told many times that I returned a different person. My mother told me I returned very assertive and confident of whom I was and where I wanted to go. That life-changing experience turned my head to the rest of the world that doesn’t have a voice in the everyday routine of the U.S. I was very grateful for that opportunity to arise to be able to travel abroad and learn by living in another culture. I will always have a special place for Zimbabweans in my heart.

The following year, I had the privilege to study abroad to Cuba for a moving two weeks. That trip along with the intense coursework also opened my eyes to a very different and new mentality that I was never exposed to before. This was a very important transition because being in Cuba, cleared up my understanding of what it means to be a Latina in the U.S. In addition, I came to terms with my identity and my position in life, in this society, country and in this time period.

Since I didn’t always have a determined “title” for myself, I learned to identify myself as Mexican-American as
opposed to "Hispanic" which ultimately doesn't carry on a significant meaning to my experience in this country. For those reasons, I highly encourage students to take full advantage of the study abroad programs at SFSU. If it hadn't been for the availability of those programs, I would've never traveled as soon as I did.

I've always maintained acquaintances with my classmates at SFSU. However, when I had traveled to Cuba, all of that completely changed. In one semester, I had made lifelong friends that primarily share similar experiences as I do. Although I have encountered very ethnic-centric people with those types of ideas, I feel like I can express my opinion to the extent of simply sharing another point of view to another.

Those transitions in life were very difficult for me because there's a certain amount of negotiations that have to be made in order to succeed internal growth. For example, it was very difficult for me to see and internalize images of Zimbabwean children asking for things such as soap, candy, or even spare change. It was very difficult to see those particular images a few feet away as opposed to see them through a television screen. I just wasn't the same after that experience. There have been many important transitions in my life which contribute to
who am I today and who I aspire to be in the future, however, I will continue to educate myself and others in the most open-minded way possible.

Stephen

My name is Loi Huu Nguyen. I don't ever recall anyone in my family that called me by my first name, Loi. They always referred to me by my nickname, which means miniature penis in Vietnamese. It wasn't until the second grade that my mom filed for a change of name for my sister and I. From then on; people started calling me Stephen, except for my family members who still call me by my infant nickname. I was born in Saigon, Vietnam, which is now known as Ho Chi Minh City after the Vietnam War was over. I have three other siblings, all of which are female. Many people automatically assume that I get special treatment since I'm the only son in an Asian family. But it's not true; my mother treats and loves us all equally.

My family left Vietnam after the war in 1979, just a couple of months after I was born. I had an older auntie who married an American and helped my family get the proper paper work done in order to immigrate to the US. My family finally made it to America in 1983, and resided in the Tenderloin district of San Francisco. The Tenderloin is an
area known for South East Asian immigrant residency. We lived there for about 3 years, and then moved over to the Mission district. I guess my mom thought that it was too dangerous of a neighborhood to be raising children in. We lived there long enough to sense that it was a dangerous neighborhood. Usually children don’t take too much notice of events that happen around them, and even as a child I could tell that the Tenderloin was not a safe place to live in. There were a lot of thugs hanging around the street corners, drug dealers, and prostitution.

Altogether, my household consists of three family members, my older sister, my mom, and myself. My parents divorced not long after we arrived in San Francisco. My mom couldn’t really stand to live with her mother, who also came over during the same time we did, so she and my grandmother arranged for her to live on her own in a senior citizen’s apartment complex in the Fillmore.

I’ve been going to public school all my life. The elementary school I attended predominately consisted of Chinese and Caucasian students. It was really hard for me to adjust in the beginning. I did not know anyone that spoke Vietnamese, and there were no faculty or staff members from the school that spoke Vietnamese. I was forced to learn the English language. I don’t have much
recollection of learning English, though I know that I did not know too much except for things that I see and hear on TV. I remember being discharged from class from time to time on certain days to go with this woman to another room where it was just the two of us. She was basically my personal English and speech instructor. I was so intimated by her. I guess it was because I felt weird that no one else was leaving the class to go with this lady into a room that echoed. She would show me pictures of simple things like orange juice, and ask me to determine what the object or verb was.

At M. Middle School the student body was somewhat more diverse, more African Americans, and other ethnic groups than my elementary school was. The only group that was underrepresented was Latinos. Latinos and African Americans were the majority at the high school I attended. There were quite a few Asian students, but not as many as my middle and elementary schools had. I did not like any of the schools I attended except for my elementary school. If I could go back in time, I would definitely consider choosing alternative schools. I feel that I could have been better prepared for College if I went to the right high school, and most of my friends attended schools elsewhere so there was nothing much for me to look forward to at my high
school. I tried to transfer out, but the only alternative the district gave me was an even worse school.

My high school campus was an old elementary school’s campus with bungalows filling up half of the schoolyard. A good portion of the student body consisted of people who could care less about going school. It felt more like a county prison than a place for academic achievement for me. It was also geographically located in the middle of nowhere in the Sunset district. There weren’t many stores or food establishments close by, so our selection was limited unless we had our own cars. I feel that most of the courses I took in high school were way too easy. I didn’t think it was extremely easy at the time, but now looking back I think I could have gotten a 4.00 cumulative GPA with my eyes closed. It just didn’t seem or feel like a real or competent high school to me and after my first year at SFSU, my assumption proved me right.

I was very excited and happy when I finally graduated from high school, and knew that I was accepted to SFSU. For the first time in my life I actually felt like school was worth going to, and there was actually something that can be gained from going to school. SFSU is the only school in the CSU system that I applied for. I also applied to a few University of California’s (UC’s), but my cumulative GPA
and SAT scores were not adequate enough for them. But I don’t feel so bad about it, because I didn’t really anticipate going to college until a month or so into my senior year in high school. Everything was last minute and rushed, all my applications, financial aid forms, etc. Aside from being filtered from the UC’s, I decided to go to SFSU because I thought that it would be senseless for me to go to school outside of the city and pay for housing while I can pretty much get the same level of education in my home city. I was also the first one in my family to enroll in a four year University, so that was another thing that pushed me forward to go to SFSU instead of going to a Junior College first and then transferring out. I felt like there was a lot riding on me, like I was the leading role model in my family. It actually made me feel good that I got into SFSU, while my sister who graduated from Lowell high school was still attending CCSF. I was pretty proud of myself.

Going to SFSU wasn’t what I expected at first. I thought it was going to be very much like television world. I didn’t have any friends or family that go there, so I only expected what the media had already portrayed in my head. It was a really big transition for me from High School to College. People actually cared about school, were
smart, and went out of their way to get things done. Back in high school, just going to all of your classes was a big achievement.

I felt like I was doing pretty well for my first two semesters. But things got really discouraging during my second and third year at SFSU. I began taking courses in my major, and I completely drowned. I had no idea that the level of academia could be so rigorous. It took me my sophomore and junior years of college to realize that I was in the wrong major. Initially, I wanted to go into computer science because I always had an interest in computers. I didn’t know too much about the computer science major itself, but I figured that it would be something that I would enjoy learning. I didn’t know what programming was during my first three semesters at SFSU. But when I took my first programming course, I had a gut feeling that I would not like to do programming for a career. But I stuck with it for about another year, and eventually switched from computer science to business. After I petitioned for a change of majors, I let out a big sigh of relief. I felt like I just told the world of a secret that has been making me feel guilty for the past three years.

I was fortunate that I was in an educational assistance program that helped me through my rough times in
school. But even then, it was still difficult. I would feel like doing my homework when I’m in class and don’t know what the professor is lecturing on, and when I went to see my academic advisor. But when I was outside of school, I did not really have much support. I think I was lacking the support of peers who shared a similar lifestyle that I did. Most of my friends at the time were not going to school, or out working full time. I think that I also would have benefited from having a personal mentor in the same field as my major. There were certain subjects that I had a lot of trouble with, but there was no tutoring for those subjects, or there were time conflicts. A lot of the learning that I attained from college was a product of my own self-determination and motivation. I don’t recall them ever teaching me this approach in my grammar and secondary schools. They neither passed me because they think that I know the material, or that they felt I knew “enough” to move on.

When I was growing up, things didn’t seem so bad. I used to just think that if my family were financially content, then things would have been perfect. But now I’ve come to realize that growing up without a father, as first generation immigrants, and not much outside support made things really difficult. I have many friends that gave up
due to the fact that they don’t have enough support, or felt that they should prioritize work to survive or help out to pay bills, or for petty reasons such as not being able to spend enough time with their significant others'. My mom constantly urges me to do good in school and graduate. But that’s all she tells me. She automatically thinks that I will be well off if I graduate from college and begin to work. I also find it very frustrating that she and my older aunt don’t know how hard it is for me to keep up with my schoolwork and certain classes. They think that my all of my classes are equivalent, not knowing that certain classes are way more time consuming than others.

My grandmother would have to be the worst case. I guess I can’t really blame her since she’s never gone beyond grammar school. My grandmother thinks that just by attending school, that you’ll be fine. She thinks that it is pointless for me to do homework or do anything that has to do with school, outside of school. Her attitude really bothers me, and because of this indifference, we have not seen each other for months. I’m guessing that she’s been pretty depressed about me blocking her out of my life. But she has a tendency to drive all her close ones away, regardless of whether or not that person has done anything wrong. I got so angry with her the last time we talked.
about this that I just decided to give up on trying to explain to her why I am struggling and trying so hard in school. She asks me in such with such a hasty attitude, and when I try to fill her in, she just starts talking down to me. I felt so frustrated that I decided it would be best if I just stayed away from her instead of wasting my breath and arguing with an agitated elder in the family.

I really like talking to academic professionals about goals and what I should do to better prepare myself for the future. For the past couple of months, I’ve been really trying to plan out my schedule and courses that I have to take until I graduate. My long-term goal would be how to better prepare myself for the real working world. What jobs I should apply for, how to compile a professional resume, what kind of internships I should keep an eye out for, and what companies. I feel like I’m so close to that stage in my life, and maybe that’s why I’m starting to think more about these things. I guess I’m just frustrated and jealous of families who have parents or elders they can talk to about his kind of stuff, whereas I can only talk to people in school about my academic long-term goals. I think that if I grew up with parents that had a college education, I would be more academically oriented and more better prepared for college. I’m sure if my parents knew any
better, they would have made sure that I got into a decent high school and kept a close eye on my GPA so that I could keep my options open for applying and acceptance to different colleges.

Claudia

My name is Claudia Yanina Aguilar Carrillo. I was born in a small city of Guatemala. I immigrated to the United States on December of 1994 with my three brothers. We came to reunite with my mother who had immigrated six years before us. We are four siblings, and I am the second oldest and only daughter. My mother immigrated to the United States for personal reasons, after divorcing from my dad and obtaining full custody of the four of us. Since I came to the United States I have lived in San Francisco, and now I feel like this is my home.

I lived in Guatemala until I was sixteen years old. I completed up to ten grade of high school, where I was specializing in business administration and accounting. Before reuniting again with my mother I stayed with my grandmother and aunts and uncles. I have great memories of my childhood. I always knew that I was loved and cared by my family and all my wishes became true almost all the time. Most of my adolescence, I spent it under my
grandmother's care and her family. I could not relate to
them, due to the differences that existed between them and
my father. My father taught me to be independent, to follow
my dreams, to be honest and truthful to my beliefs, and to
always give myself other chance. Even when my grandmother
has some of the same values, she believes that women should
be submissive, dependent on males, and obedient.

On December 4, 1994, I came to the United States
together with my three brothers. My mother made all the
arrangements for the four of us to start attending school.
I attended N. High School when I first came to San
Francisco. I went there for two semesters and then
transferred to a regular high school. At my first high
school some of the classes were bilingual, since all the
students had just immigrated to the United States. The
majority of the students were either Latinos or Chinese
descent and a few from Europe. But there were differences
in how the students were treated according to their ethnic
background. Latino students were placed in lower academic
classes and blamed for almost anything that went wrong at
the school. Luckily, I met a great teacher; she guided me
academically and personally as well. She helped me to excel
at N. High School, and later to transfer to an academic
high school, I. S. Academy. She gave me the chance to prove
that a female, a Latino, a minority student was able to succeed, and be a good example not only to Latino students but others as well. At my new high school, I hardly had the opportunity to meet the high school counselor. She was barely available to students, and the only chance to talk to her was if you were in trouble at the school. Miss R., my teacher, became once again my guide. I always have wanted to obtain a higher education, but now living in a strange country I lacked the knowledge about the process of applications, and the required standard tests. Besides I wanted to attend UC Berkeley, which had become my dream school. I applied, took all the necessary tests, but I was not accepted because I have had less than a year of regular English. They offered to accept me as a junior if I attended one of their programs at City College of San Francisco and completed sixty units. I was devastated, one of my greatest dreams had been crushed. I had not applied to any other universities. I applied to San Francisco State University on the last week of April, and that because Miss R. insisted and one of the SFSU’s recruiters was on the school that day and took my application with him. I was accepted to San Francisco State University by the end of May.
My experiences at SFSU have been mixed. I have had the opportunity to test who I am and what I want to do. My first semester was a semester of learning and adapting. I was accepted to Student Support Services, a program designed for minorities, low-income and first generation attending college, and since then I have been one of the participants. My participation at SSS has helped to make my struggle easier. At SSS I have felt welcome and part of a family; sadly, I cannot say the same for the rest of the university. Thanks to SSS we have tutors, academic advising, financial aid, and best of all, its staff, people that I dearly trust and admire. I have always been inclined towards science and pursuing a career in Medicine. I had my first taste of college biology my first semester at SFSU, and I liked it. I told my advisor, Charlene Lobo, about my desire to pursue a major in one of the areas of biology. Charlene helped me to clarify my ideas and to select the best choices. I decided to pursue a major in Cell and Molecular Biology. All this was the easy part since with her I felt that I was able to make things happen. Things have been different on the classrooms, and with some of the instructors. Some of the instructors at SFSU tend to judge students based on their ethnic background, making our learning harder and our struggle
more valuable. Sometimes I felt that they did not believe that I have what it takes to succeed in my classes. Now, I am a senior at SFSU and with only a year ahead to complete one more step in my path to reach my goal, to become a pediatrician. I want to be able to offer an example to my younger brothers, and to make my parents proud.

Thongsamut or Sunny

Thongsamut is my name. Thong means gold and Samut means sea in Laos. My last name, Putthongvilai, is a combination of my father's parents' names that had been made up when the Immigration Service said that we needed a last name. In Laos, people did have last names unless they were considered important people or kings and queens. I am the youngest of five children and the only one to be born in a foreign land, Thailand, on July 25, 1979. My family is from Laos, a third world country, which became a communist country in 1975. My family was forced to flee their homeland when it became a battle ground for the Vietnamese, in which the North Vietnamese troops were battling the South Vietnamese army over control of the Ho Chi Minh trail, in southern Laos. My Father swam across the Mekong River, that divided Laos from Thailand, with two of my brothers, my sister and my mother, who was pregnant
with me, to get to Thailand. We fled to Thailand because that was where the camps were and the nearest airport.

I was a little over a year old when my family came to America, leaving everything behind, including their second born child who died from a fatal disease, to begin a new life in the Bay Area. My parents went into an adaptation shock, trying to adapt to an industrialized environment and the people. My parents did not know how to speak the language nor did they know how to read, so getting around caused a lot of problems. They were always taking a chance when they rode the bus, AC Transit, not really knowing its destination. They eventually went to an adult night school in Berkeley to learn English since the language they grew up speaking was now useless in America. My family depended on the welfare system until we were able to live on our own. Growing up with very little money was difficult, but somehow I was able to get past the tough times.

I grew up in many tough neighborhoods, learning a new address just about every other year, meeting new teachers, who slaughtered my name at schools I’d attended. We moved a lot for various reasons—financial, burglary, evictions. We have moved so much that I have lost count of the number of places I’ve called home. I’ve lived in apartments and housing complexes for most of my life, where the streets
are filthy and the pavement is marked with all kinds of tire marks. The streets are very dangerous at night because that's when the gangs all around the neighborhood come out. My parents were so afraid that I would get involved in the gangs and drug activities or become victims of the street, so we moved once again. This time we finally stopped moving in circles, between North Richmond and San Pablo, and moved to a house in Pinole because we were now able to afford the higher rent of nine hundred plus a month.

The beautiful house in Pinole, a single story with four bedrooms, two baths, and a view overlooking Pinole Valley High School, was on 2786 Clark Court. This was the first time we felt safe to be out at night and comfortable leaving our house on vacations. Before the first day of high school, I had decided to give myself a nickname, Sunny, so people can get to know me instead of figuring out how to pronounce my first name. My nickname made it easier on my friends and my teachers at school.

Once in a while my parents would share stories about their life back home to reminding me of their hardship as agricultural farmers. They grew rice fields and raised animals their entire live in order to survive; building their own house with bamboo trees and weaving their own
clothes. They did everything without the proper tools, electricity or shoes that is easily available and attainable in America. This was their way of encouraging me to do well in school, because they didn’t know how to guide me through school. They would tell me all kinds of stories in Laos, their native language, the only language in which we communicate with each other at home.

Home wasn’t always an easy place to live. Growing up at home was all about following rules and carrying out orders, because my parents are very strict. Lights must be turned off the minute I walk out of a room, because this was one way of keeping the utilities cost down. I was not allowed to play or watch television if my homework was not completed. If I buy food, I’m obligated to finish it since wasting food was definitely not allowed. The most difficult part about living at home was obeying orders I didn’t agree with.

I couldn’t even express my opinions because that was considered being disrespectful and that was definitely not tolerated, so their orders became my duties. I could not have an opinion or say in anything, whether it affected me or not. My thought had no value at all and the worst part about it was that I stopped having an opinion. I was discouraged to speak at home and I’m discouraged to speak
at school. Learning in school was very difficult without the help of my parents’ guidance and their lack of answers to questions I had. My siblings were always too busy doing other things and I was too afraid to talk to my teachers. The most difficult and most important thing I had to learn on my own was English. I didn’t understand the language, and I didn’t have anyone to turn to, but somehow I managed to pick it up. I still struggle with the language here and now.

I have juggled many jobs, finding a new job before leaving another one behind, as soon as I was legally able to work. My first job was at the age of fifteen, delivering the West County Time newspaper, where I earned about a hundred dollars a month. A few years later I went to work for Cinnabon making $4.25 an hour. Then I moved on to In ‘n’ Out, a fast food restaurant, for about two more years. My last employment was with Washington Mutual Bank as a teller. The money I earned were just enough spending money to help me get through school because my parents could not provide me with spending money. I didn’t have a choice but to be as independent as much as possible.

I feel anger inside when I compare my working life to my friends’ “party” life in high school and now in college because they’re being fully supported. However, being
deprived of the good life has made me more determined to attempt college after high school. I graduated from high school in the spring of 1997 and we moved again a year later to San Pablo.

The first day at San Francisco State University was the beginning of my true independence. My parents no longer told me what to do because I was no longer considered a kid, but an adult. I came to this school without knowing anything about it except for the fact that my brother was attending the same school. I was accepted to be a part of a wonderful program, Student Support Services (SSS), for low-income first generation students. The SSS program kept me on my feet and supported me in all of my decision, especially when I fell on probation. My grade point average fell below the minimum requirement of a 2.0 at the end of my third semester. I fell deeper into this hole at the end of my fourth semester. I had a really hard time adjusting to the new environment because my skills were not at the college level.

Feeling like a failure, I realize I was on my way towards an ejection from college, so I considered dropping out of college. I didn’t know how to get myself out of this hole and with no one to guide me, I felt like giving up. I tried to convince myself that I was not ready to
handle college work, but something inside of me would not let me give up. Believing that god only gives us what we can handle. I sat on my wooden chair in my small but cozy room one day and started reflecting on what was causing my grades to suffer. Then it hits me, I realize I was not interested or motivated to learn engineering. So I headed for the Business department the next morning searching for a new major. After taking some core business course, I found a major I was motivated in, finance. The massive numbers in the Wall Street Journal and the meaning behind those numbers just fascinated me. Staying in school was the biggest decision of my life and also the beginning of my self-directed learning.

A lot of things have happen in my lifetime; while some are more dramatic than others they are now apart of me. I never expected life to be easy, but I never expect life to get so tough. Then again things could have been worst, I could be living in Laos working from dust till dawn barefooted. I have no regrets and I have no shame growing up the way I did. I believe my experiences have made me a better person. I have grown to appreciate the smaller things in life. The greatest gift I have received is the opportunity to be living in America, a place where I have the chance to create and make my dreams come true. I
want to become a financial analysis for Charles Schwab as soon as I get my MBA from SFSU.

**Karina**

My name is Karina Vela. I am 21 years old, and the first in my family to go to college. My family migrated to this country from Guatemala in 1981 when I was two years old. I have been raised by my mother and grandmother in San Mateo, a quiet suburb about twenty minutes south of San Francisco. When we first came to this country, my mother and grandmother got work as housekeepers, it was about the only work they could do because neither of them spoke English or had the equivalent of a high school diploma. From the earliest moments of my memory, my mother and grandmother have told me that it was important for me to do well in school so one day I could go to college. They explained to one day, and me that if I prepared myself educationally all of my dreams could come true in other words, going to college was the key to all of my dreams realizing them. My family has always known that college would be the best way for me to become successful. Today, my grandmother who is 55, and only finished the fourth grade, still works as a housekeeper, and on this salary has purchased a home along with the help of my mother. My grandmother also still takes classes at adult school in
order to better her English. On the other hand, my mom
received her high school diploma in 1988 by going to adult
school, and in the early nineties started working for a
bank as clerk. After paying rent for over 15 years, my
mother and grandmother bought our first house in 1996. My
mother and grandmother have always have had big
expectations and dreams, and because of these expectations
and dreams have worked hard towards the “American Dream,”
of buying a house. Their hard work and belief that
education is important are things that have rubbed off on
me and have inspired me to want to succeed in life and
further my education.

Growing up for me was not easy, because I always felt
like an outsider. In elementary school, I was bussed
outside of my neighborhood and to a school where most of
the students were white, so it was hard to make friends
because I could not identify with them. Nevertheless, it
was also hard to make friends with the kids that were from
my neighborhood. Although they were right in my
neighborhood, I did not see them because I was always at
the babysitter’s. Being babysat meant not being allowed to
play with the other kids from my community because I had to
stay inside and watch television, where my sitter could see
me. Being isolated both in school and at home made it very
difficult for me to make friends. The social issues named above are what mostly led me not to like school and therefore, be unsuccessful in it. The thing did make me want to learn, and the one thing that I feel that has led me to remain in school today was being exposed to the arts. I was lucky enough to be enrolled in dance classes as another form of daycare. These ballet and jazz classes were the highlight of my day as child.

Through high school, academic success would come and go. My first year, I was about a 3.0 student, but as the courses got more challenging, my GPA started slipping. By my sophomore year, I had a cumulative GPA of 1.5. During this time, it was difficult for me to succeed in school not only because I had difficult time socially, but also just learning to relate to the material that was being taught in school. Courses like Algebra, Geometry, and Biology were not subjects that I could get help on at home. I was on a college bound track in High School, but I felt very little support from the school to help me stay there. In high school, there were no programs to help mentor me or help me feel a part of my High School. Until I went to a Latino students conference, I had no idea that I could one day go to college despite there being no outreach on the part of the school.
At this conference, I went to a workshop given by Dr. X., a dean at SFSU, it was entitled, “Step to College.” Here I found out about a program that targeted first-generation college students, students of color, and low-income students to help them enter college. I enrolled in Step to College, and that is where my not so bright academic life took a change for the better. I was learning to read and think critically through this Step to College class. This program also helped me fill out the admission application for my first year at SFSU. In the Fall of 1997, with the help of STC I was a student at SFSU.

It was exciting me to know that I would be the first in my family college to go to college, but I was completely terrified of not being able to make it through my first semester at SFSU. My fears were infinite. I was scared about how I was going to pay for school, I did not know what classes to take, did not know who to go to for advising, now that I was in college I didn’t know what to do next. Luckily, I heard about a program called Student Support Services, who targeted the kind of student I was. It was described as a program that would help me with all the challenges that I would face. The challenges that SSS helped me with were all those things that I feared right before starting school, and they also provided free
tutoring and advising. All the things that this program helped me with when it came to enrolling in classes and helping me through difficult courses and finding out what class I would take next. I could not replace it with any other program in the whole university. SSS has helped me survive the last four years of college and have prepared me well for the two that are still ahead.

Right now, I am a senior that will probably take about three more semesters to finish two degrees, one in Dance and the other in Liberal Studies. After graduating, I plan to study Mexican Folk Dance in Mexico and hopefully get to perform for a few years. After studying for a while, I to plan to teach elementary school and to teach dance. My long-term plan is to go back to school and get an MA in education or an MFA in dance; I’m not sure yet, but I definitely know that my education once I get me college diploma. To me success will be measured by what I will carry in my brain not by what I carry in my wallet.

Conclusion

This section is one of the most important pieces of this study, as it truly contains the voices of the participants and reflects their reality. The inclusion of the autobiographies paints not only a very intimate glimpse into the lives of the five co-participants. Table 2
demonstrates the deeper similarities they share. They allow
the next chapter, the Findings, to have a context and
foundation as well as present the co-participants’ voices
in their entirety.
### Table 2

**Generative Themes from the Autobiographies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Participant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Difficult transition</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goals</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unhappiness with educational experience</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School having an impact on relationships with friends</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profound experience led to reflection</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtractive experience/had to change something about self</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single parent family</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needed preparation for college</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School as a &quot;way out&quot;</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First in family to go to college</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presence of supportive program/family/friends</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial difficulty</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inappropriate support</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isolation</td>
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</table>

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CHAPTER V

Findings

Our effort to find ways of speaking about human experience in a manner that re-sounds it relational nature and carries the polyphony of voice, as well as the ever-changing or moving-through-time quality of the sense of self and the experience of relationship, has led us to shift the metaphoric language psychologists traditionally have used in speaking of change and development from an atomistic, positional, architectural, and highly visual language of structures, steps, and stages to a more associative and musical language of movement and feeling that better conveys the complexity of the voices we hear and the psychological processes we wish to understand. (Brown & Gilligan, 1992, p. 23)

Introduction

Through analysis of the dialogues and autobiographies, generative themes emerged reflecting the participants’ views and experiences. These themes addressed underlying issues in the students’ lives and their perceptions of the world.

The co-participants were able to draw from their many “funds of knowledge” (Moll, 1992) to reveal deep issues about the ways in which the institution they are attending
perpetuates disempowerment. However, their revelations also proved the strength of the human spirit when given an opportunity to thrive.

**Hearing and Listening to Voices**

During the dialogues students were at first very unsure about expectations. In particular, they were unsure if I was looking for something to be said, or if they were going to be right or wrong. The beginning of the dialogues was filled with clarifications about what was to be said. Some waited to get clarification prior to starting the tape, others went ahead, seeking clarification on tape. Once this was cleared up, the dialogues yielded many themes and revealed powerful experiences that happened during student’s lives.

After initial clarifications, each co-participant shared a moving experience: a teacher making a racist remark, the inability of parents to relinquish control, and the painful separation from other students because of different attitudes and cultural values. Because these were brought up early on in their dialogues, these significant events provided much of the foundation for the rest of the dialogues. Together, we explored the context in which these events happened, the outcomes, and possible solutions or interventions.
One of the commonalities that two students shared was the initial feeling that there was no disempowerment present in their lives. However, after exploring some of their experiences, their feelings changed. Both expressed a sense of heightened emotion about the situation, and the emotions ranged from sadness to rage. One student went back to state that he did not feel disempowered even after he identified a possible source of disempowerment.

The process of conscientization, or the "learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (Freire, 1993, p. 17) is one that is not always achieved in two dialogues. Conscientization involves reflection and dialogue with others as well as the self, and critical reflection can be difficult to achieve, especially during painful moments. Awakening to the realization of the oppression present in their lives can force many individuals into denial, or a safe place away from challenging domination. To challenge it is to engage in action that may be difficult and even more painful.

The following themes emerged in response to the research questions:

1. Creating the conditions for learning,
2. Silence, and
3. Resilience and persistence.
Each theme is comprised of minor themes that were culled from the dialogues of the co-participants.

For reference, the research questions are restated here:

1) How are first-generation low-income college students disempowered and/or marginalized at the university?

2) How has the experience of being disempowered/marginalized affected first-generation low-income college students?

3) What do the experiences of the first-generation, low-income college students reveal about the conditions of the university and in which they live?

4) In what ways will the students be able to adapt to their environment at the university or adapt to the university to meet their needs?

5) What are their recommendations for action?

Creating Conditions for Learning

Differences between Academic Culture and the Participant’s Culture

Many of the co-participants come from backgrounds that are different from those of the majority of the students at SFSU. This presents a situation in which many co-participants felt they were not a part of the university and/or high school because they were not “like me.”
Academic culture requires that students understand particular rules and behaviors for interacting in a classroom. Adhesion to these rules and behaviors usually guarantee success in the classroom environment, but such success must rely on the student's ability to comprehend the information presented and its applications. For first-generation, low-income students, however, this means unlearning behaviors in order to gain appropriate ones. It is learning a way of seeing the world that is further defined as the correct means. All other visions are inappropriate, or worse yet, devalued.

One co-participant, Karina, in describing a teacher review of a play that the class was required to see, spoke of the dichotomy between the professor and the students. The play was a recreation of Romeo and Juliet, but cast with African American themes and cultural attitudes:

I was hearing a teacher, a dance teacher, of mine, giving a hip hop version of Romeo and Juliet a bad review because she... felt that the way they expressed themselves about women was derogatory. You know, I didn't see the play, but the people who did thought that it was more of the way that they expressed themselves... because of where they came from... And she was basically cutting the play down...

Later in the dialogue, Karina felt some sadness about a class in which she had some difficulty:
In English class, I’d like have to like read. . . essays by people that didn’t have the same experience that I did. It was awful challenging to read stuff that I couldn’t relate to or didn’t understand what they were talking about.

Academic culture selects what is relevant and what is not, creating a hierarchy of languages, world views and theories. A hierarchy exists within the classroom that gives the professor a higher status than that of the students. This hierarchy suggests that professors exert power over his or her students in such a way that disempowers them. Claudia states:

He would try to like not motivate you but do the opposite like saying, “You sure you can do this?” He will question you like, “Oh, I don’t think that is the best you can do this”, or “I don’t think you’re ready for this.” . . . He would be very nice and supportive but when you actually sat and talked to him one on one he will actually make you feel really you know like nothing.

Stephen stated:

Nobody wants to ask a question because they know what he’s going to say, he’s not going to help. . . They [the professors] felt like their lecture was so superior that you should have gotten it down by the time they were done with the lecture. . . They gave you that look like “what are you doing here?” Insulted or felt like, “oh, you’re incompetent” or something like that.

Academic culture in American universities dictates that students alone are responsible for their own well-
being, academic preparation and success. This typically identifies students who are going to be successful: those who are able to "pull themselves up by their bootstraps." Having staff and faculty that were supportive was more the exception than the rule. Culturally, professors are not there to "take care" of the students. Karina states:

First you have to translate it into a language that you can understand, and then you have to translate into your own culture, how does that fit it? And then sometimes you just have to accept it and you're like, 'Okay, that's the way you do things.' Because our values are totally different than some of the values that are being taught...It's easy to fall into that [not getting your expectations up] when you are not surrounded by people who want you to progress.

When asked if students were to get more support from professors, Stephen replied, "I think they'd do a lot better." He continues:

I don't necessarily know the professors here care or not. I think some do, I think some don't... If they're not articulate when they're lecturing or something, I don't really feel like, "oh I should try harder."

This nature of not wanting to follow along with the class is consistent with Shor's (1992) study in which students who were not feeling emancipated in their education in fact
acted out against the norms of the class in order to gain a feeling of control over the situation.

There were constant remarks regarding their differences. Olivia repeated that she felt different than others because her experiences were unlike theirs. Sunny felt that he was ‘ripped off’ because his classmates were doing better and had better tools to do the work that was required. Stephen struggled with the idea that his classmates understood things that he could not. He would try harder than others yet get poorer grades. More and more the students were pushed out of the classroom because they were not understood, or felt they did not receive the support they needed.

Delpit’s (1995) aspects of power in the classroom place the co-participants at great risk unless they obtain norms and beliefs similar to that of the dominant university culture. More often than not, these norms are in direct opposition to their own cultural values.

Lack of Preparation and Perceived Options

One of the most difficult realities that affected many of the co-participants was the inadequate college preparation that they received in high school. Upon arriving at SFSU, many co-participants experienced failure and unexpected challenges in classes they had taken in high
school and received grade of A’s and B’s. This frustration, vented by many of the participants, occurred early in their college careers. Claudia shared:

I don’t know. Sometimes I actually think, "Oh, maybe I should go back.” Every time you see [this professor] maybe you’re not doing as well as you would like to but you can think back and think, “Well, maybe he’s right. Maybe I shouldn’t be doing this; maybe I’m not good for that” or something like that.

Learning how to learn was an issue that was echoed by many of the participants. This skill is a basic building block for education. However, many of the participants were sure that their high school experience was lacking in this particular skill. Self-doubt was an outcome of this particular theme.

Participants articulated ways in which they felt they were not prepared. Claudia, who works with high school students who are preparing to take the SATs, feels that they too do not have the right preparation. Claudia shared:

I guess you have to go back to high school, where the big problems are. . . maybe you have to go to grammar school. We get a lot of complaints saying that the teachers don’t know how to teach. If they ask questions, they don’t even know how to solve their homework.
Similarly, Sunny found that his high school experience left him ill equipped to do college work. In his dialogues, he expressed some trouble over not having the same experience:

> I think in a way I feel like I wasn’t challenged, but even if I were challenged I don’t think I would do as well as I want to because I wasn’t equipped.

High school did not prepare students to think on their own and take on the responsibilities for their own education. Managing oneself in the face of a large load of homework and increasing distractions is a crucial tool to possess even before starting college. Not knowing how to organize or discipline oneself in order to be a successful student can be detrimental to a promising college career.

Stephen stated:

> [In high school,] The expectations that the teachers had, I could easily cut class, not do any homework and get B’s and C’s in high school. But effort really counts. You have to actually be able to know the stuff. So you have to put in some effort and work into it.

Claudia’s experiences in the classroom have been significant, and there she has learned first hand the effects of teachers who do not support their students.

Claudia stated:

> They say [teachers] don’t relate to them. Or the books they’re using, “we don’t get it.” The student is supposed to get it and I think it’s kind of good
Stephen and Sunny also repeated this argument in relation to what they experienced at the university level.

For many students, lack of preparation led to a limitation of perceived options in their decision making process. This surfaced mainly when students were deciding on what college to attend or choosing a major.

Co-participants often watched what others were doing, using that to guide their decisions and formulate options. Karina watched many of her classmates become pregnant and leave school. Claudia watched her high school classmates behave in a way that their teachers would have expected. These situations encouraged co-participants to take the initiative to move beyond their limitations and create more options, including obtaining an education and taking advantage of its benefits.

Some co-participants attended SFSU merely out of limited options. They did not know what else to do because very few of their friends or siblings were either applying to go on to higher education or faced bleak options such as not attending college. These co-participants wound up applying to SFSU without much forethought into the process. Sunny shares:
My expectations for college weren't really anything. I didn't really check out any colleges or anything. I didn't think about it until I needed to and I guess in my junior year in high school, and I simply made my decision to go to this school solely because my brother was attending this school. It's like I don't know what to look for. I would never really fixate on going to college.

Karina adds:

My senior year, I was like, "Oh my god, all my friends had already gotten pregnant and left school." I don't want to end up like that.

Claudia’s counselor at N. High School did not help her pick a high school to transition into once her stay at N. was over. With the help of a teacher, she was able to find an alternate school where she felt she would get support academically.

Ill-prepared students believed they possess few options in life because their disempowerment limits their potential to believe in possibilities. Without this orientation, a capacity to create and define their reality is severely diminished.

Lack of Community

One of the most pertinent themes that surfaced during the dialogues was the lack of community and support networks. The co-participants found SFSU to be a diverse
place; however, for many, forming a community was difficult.

Forming a community allows students to build bonds with others, and find commonalities with others that normalize the experience of going to college. For many, forming a community or a support network is one of the benchmarks of a college education.

Community building comes from many sources: relationships from the classroom; from high school; from student organizations with like-minded individuals; and from staff and faculty. It is important to recognize the diversity of the student body at SFSU, and how it contributes to the flavor of the university. However, for some students, it further separated them from their peers.

Stephen expressed:

I'm a captive but I think this is a commuter school and all and, like, everybody just goes in, goes to class, does their thing, and then leaves and then they kinda don't think about school after that.

Sunny felt disappointment at not being able to have the "college experience":

The one thing that is disappointing. . . is that they say that the friends you make in college will be the friends for life kinda thing. Cause that's when you start learning.
Forming relationships with peers in classes, in informal study groups, creates a collaborative learning environment in which students learn from each other and create a network of support. This support is critical for the success of any student. The feelings of isolation and alienation is debilitating, and finding others in similar situations can be helpful in normalizing the experience.

For Stephen and Sunny, the college experience entailed a creation of a community that was closely bonded and supportive. For Olvia, this group would consist of other Latinas. For all three, however, connecting with others proved difficult.

Olvia encountered other Latinos on campus, but didn’t feel bonded to them because of “dissimilar experiences”. Claudia also experienced this with other Latino students, but because they were not following the same academic track as she was, she felt separated from them.

**Inappropriate Support**

Support networks are important to the survival of students in any university. These networks provide students with valuable information, sometimes as basic as class notes or assisting each other to find a possible faculty mentor. Informal networks created among classmates can take the form of study groups or telephone trees where knowledge
on a subject is shared with others. Formal networks such as student organizations serve students by providing a collective identity and allowing individuals to meet others with similar interests.

Networks also exist in the student’s home community. They can be formal, as in a family, or informal, as in groups of friends who do not attend school with the student. Information, such as cultural or traditional beliefs or practices, is passed down through these groups. Roles are also a part of the network, and every individual is prescribed with tasks to undertake or an expected role to fulfill.

Both of these kinds of networks, familial and friend-based, can provide students with positive support. They provide students with roles that are realistic and allow them to expand their horizons. These networks can be a foundation from which students can also fully realize their futures. However, these networks can be a strong source for stagnation and limitation. Karina stated:

Basically in high school, they didn’t care if I went to college. All they wanted is to make sure I didn’t end up pregnant. They didn’t care for my own empowerment, you know, they weren’t there. I don’t feel like anybody was there to empower me, you know. . . . the administration in terms of the higher ups, I didn’t feel like they wanted us
to go to college, like people of color. They didn’t care. . .

Many students did not receive support from the administration in their high schools and university. Claudia expressed her discontent with the ways that teachers taught because they do not “really have a lot of experience.”

Some co-participants felt that their families or friends did not understand how to offer support in terms of being role models or providing encouragement on the college experience. All of the co-participants’ families and friends wanted them to do well, yet they did not know how to support that goal. Stephen’s friends felt that his education was taking up their quality time:

They can’t understand why I need to study so hard and put more effort into it than them. . . “I’m taking twelve units, you’re taking twelve units, why are you having to put so much more time into it than I do?” . . . It’s caused a little bit of stress between me and my friends.

Sunny had serious conflicts with his family in that they “criticized” him for the difficulties he was experiencing. His feelings about the criticism mainly concerned his parents’ not understanding. Sunny stated:

They criticized me and said that I’m weak and that I must focus. I mean, there’s, that’s another factor that I
have to deal with, so it was hard. It’s hard. . . that’s ironic for them to criticize me in that way. In a situation they’ve never been through. . . It makes me want to laugh sometimes when they say it’s easy and if you focus you can do it.

Karina added:

I don’t know how to explain to her, you know, well there’s certain things that I have to do in order to succeed and you may not like them. Say if you are late or you know, if a study group is late or stay up until four in the morning because I don’t have time. . .

It was not easy for students to challenge their parents or friends’ thinking because of fear that the relationship would suffer. Some co-participants saw the good forms of support that their families were trying to provide, i.e., allowing them to stay out late to study or have a large table where they could work. They felt that negative forms of support, those of unrealistic expectations or a lack of awareness of the challenges facing college students, were largely instrumental in the push they needed to succeed.

They were able to find support from SSS advisors and peers to make up for the inappropriate support in their home.

Inability of Faculty and Staff to Work with Diverse Populations

Because SFSU is such a diverse campus, many co-participants expected professors and staff to be able to
operate in an environment that is sensitive and accepting. However, faculty and staff were seen as possible barriers to creating an environment conducive to learning. Stephen, Karina, and Claudia encountered professors who were not sensitive to their students’ respective backgrounds, student’s opinions or popular culture. This ranged in scope from a lack of sensitivity in communication to a stereotypical expectation made based on race.

This is a highly charged issue that evoked emotional response from the co-participants. Karina stated:

Most of my teachers are white. . . they’re open minded and they’re not racists, but they don’t understand. . . what I deal with everyday versus what they deal with everyday, you know, and you can’t teach somebody like that what a community is like. You can’t teach them understanding. . . It would have to come within them you know, and some people aren’t willing to do that. . . I do still feel like they don’t have the greater understanding of the whole student population.

Comfort in the classroom creates linkages to success. A student cannot learn if there is a threat to their safety or well being. To experience racism in the classroom is a difficult situation for the students.
Marginalization, or social outcasting, was felt by many of the students. This experience is, in fact, disempowering. Delpit (1995) suggests that

When a significant experience exists between the students’ culture and the school’s culture, teachers can easily misread students’ aptitudes, intent, or abilities as a result of the difference in styles of language used and interactional patterns. (p. 167)

Students are alienated when they are not recognized as individuals with unique traits. When their skills and abilities are not recognized, teachers may utilize inappropriate teaching strategies that could further marginalize the student.

It is understandable how students who are rendered invisible by teachers simply give up trying to get recognition from their teachers. Many of these students find themselves no longer a part of the school, and may stop going to a place where they are no longer recognized.

In order for teachers to effectively work with students of diverse populations, it is important that they come to the classroom equipped with knowledge of their student’s cultures.

Silencing the Voice and the Spirit

Lack of Safety
This issue was expressed by co-participants largely through metaphor. Undercurrents of racism or marginalization compromise the safety and security of the students. Ideally, classrooms are environments that are safe enough for students to make mistakes without fear of penalty or ridicule. However, some professors openly questioned the students’ right to be in the classroom, as well as in the university. Co-participants reported not wanting to speak up in class for fear of getting a wrong answer, or were bullied into speaking when unprepared. Stephen used to drop courses upon hearing that a speech was part of a grade. Olvia had classmates who felt they were being taught Spanish that was not their native form of Spanish:

One way of speaking Spanish was preferred over another way of speaking Spanish. . . the teacher was trying to speak castellano with everybody and the students were like, “No, that’s not right” and “That’s wrong.”

In that class, she felt as if the teacher did not represent her reality, as well as that of the other students. She did not feel comfortable enough to share in that class. She also did not feel comfortable revealing her thoughts around her classmates.

Ironically, there are only slight differences between Castellano and Spanish. The issue was made when students
were taught that what they were speaking was "wrong."
Language identity reflects personal identity, and a lack of respect towards one's language is disrespects and disempowers the individual.

True disempowerment is when a person thinks that she can only aspire to what she already has (Ada, 2001). Limitations of a person's capacity to enrich and expand her experiences are an outcome of disempowerment. Ada (2001) explains that disempowerment limits students by their own rejection of their right to be a part of the curriculum. In rejecting their own, they reject other forms of knowledge.

Safety, psychological and physical, is a necessary condition for students to feel that they can learn. Able to share in his speech class, Stephen felt safe because his teacher helped to create a good environment. Olvia, as mentioned earlier, tried to take part in a class where she did not feel safe to participate. However, she could not take full part in her education out of fear. Her professor, unlike Stephen's, did not manage a situation in which a safe environment could be built.

Sunny did not utilize his voice in order be safe. That is, expressing his opinion might have subjected him to disapproval similar to that he received in his home. His perception of safety also prevented him from thinking on
his own, something he felt he was not competent to do. Self-imposed limitations have their foundations in disempowerment because the element of possibility has been removed or rendered futile.

**Loss of Voice and Sense of Self**

Finding a voice is helpful for students because so much of the work demands them to step outside of themselves and interact with professors. Classrooms often require students to practice and reflect on the interactions that occur in real life. In one course, Olvia felt her professor did not assist in creating a safe environment. In this environment, she did not feel safe enough to share her thoughts for fear of retribution from her fellow classmates. She also felt as if "sometimes I have to censor myself."

Not being able to form opinions readily, Sunny had difficulty in classes where he was expected to express his viewpoints and support them. This class was in economics and he was required to answer essay questions which were a major part of his grade:

I told her, "I know what you are talking about, I can show it to you, but I can't put it in writing." And she pretty much she said, well, she just pointed out what I did wrong and said "You can do better next time" and then brushed me off.
This led to his frustration in this course, as well as in life, where he felt that language was crucial to him in gaining a sense of control in his life and being able to make his own decisions as an adult.

Claudia’s experience of a teacher’s insensitivity occurred when she felt that teachers made assumptions about her ability based on her appearance and ethnicity. She felt that one professor in particular, “knows a lot but I think he makes... too many assumptions.” However, now that she has persevered through all of her coursework and has advanced to upper division work, she feels that her professors realize how hard she’s worked and are now treating her as an individual rather than as a stereotype. This has kept her true voice and self from being recognized for its uniqueness.

In a discussion of the relationship between professor and student, Stephen expressed:

There’s just not enough interaction between the students and their professors and the students with their classmates, their peers. I think if everybody felt more comfortable around them... it would be a totally different environment. I would probably feel like I could speak my mind and everything... without that fear.
Not feeling safe with what he perceived to be strangers and placed in an environment that did not encourage students to collaborate, he felt that his voice was taken away.

Karina feels that separation from her culture is important to recognize. She described this as "culture eating." In order for her to do well in one of her classes, she was expected to align with her teacher. This meant that she would have to sacrifice her opinions and knowledge in order to succeed. She would have to silence her voice.

Silence is demanded in the form of conformity to professor’s opinions and values. It is a display of power that sends fear into the students that does not allow them to utilize their voice and be themselves. The disempowerment can be so painful as to block out one’s voice in order to produce a safe haven in a hostile classroom; so painful that disempowerment is not even seen or felt.

Important to note is the lack of urging for the university to adapt to meet the co-participants’ needs. All but one co-participant, recognized that they were in a system that was hostile yet they did not offer a solution for how the university can evolve to meet the needs of first-generation, low-income students. Claudia was the only one to offer a solution readily. However, it is important
to note that we did start our work together a year prior to this study in a pilot project. The primary focus was on immediate issues that perpetuated disempowerment, such as teaching practices or community presence. The underlying issues such as oppression and domination still loom, and these issues were not broached.

Internalized oppression is a state in which marginalized persons exist. They are unable to see the social institutions that profit from internalized oppression, therefore do not attempt to change the way in which it is perpetuated (Weil, 1998). The power dynamic is pervasive enough to limit the possibility of changing a system when it is easier to change or sacrifice yourself.

The educational system practices exclusion and separation, demanding that students conform to demands that often require that they give up or exchange their language, customs, cultures and experiences in order to succeed. Rather than allow for additive experiences, such promoting bilingualism and exposure to other cultures, in order to enrich their own language and culture, schools create subtractive environments: monolingualism and subtractive bilingualism. Inclusive experiences are frowned upon rather than valued, and the richness of their individualities is forsaken in the name of education.
School helps to shape individuals' consciousness, molds their image of themselves, their community, and others, and positions them in the social world (Walsh, 1991). However, the responsibility of hearing the silenced voice of first-generation, low-income students rests on the administration and faculty of the university. Until the university acknowledges the power dynamic and its own role in the perpetuation of the status quo, it will remain alive and well (Delpit, 1995).

Resilience, Persistence, and Hope

There are two sides to the themes of resilience, persistence and hope. One side reveals the struggle and seemingly impossible challenge that befalls students in a hostile environment. The other reveals the inner strength that is necessary to survive and thrive in an environment that can be unsympathetic.

Because this study's focus is disempowerment, it is important to list the factors of empowerment. Empowerment's source is internal, rather than external. However, there are several items below that originate from an external source, such as a support program or a mentor. It is what the student internalizes from his or her experience that makes empowerment happen and brings to life the praxis.

The Importance of Support
Lack of support from faculty and staff who do not possess the appropriate skills to work with students from diverse populations can be an obstacle to students' success.

Shor (1992) writes about how campus settings can be an obstacle to student learning. Although not an obvious means of support, it does help to create a culture of learning. When environment and location are unattractive, it will impact intellectual work (Shor, 1992).

SFSU is a microcosm of the larger realm of academia. Their experiences reveal that first-generation low-income students are faced with challenges to their person, intellect, and potential that can be difficult without support from all who are involved with their education. Similarly, while the university is a microcosm of society, life itself is difficult without a network from which one draws strength and support.

Support in the form of friends, academic programs and professors was seen to be crucial to the success of students. The program most co-participants felt was significant to their success was Student Support Services (SSS). Most co-participants felt that this program would have been helpful to many of their friends who were
undergoing serious academic difficulty. Karina discussed her experiences with SSS:

That was important for me. Like also having somebody here to listen to me, you know, like coming every two weeks to Leti’s, I feel it helped me so much. Like it’s given me sanity. . . I wouldn’t be, like, trying to fix things that I know aren’t wrong. I’d probably just go on ignoring it, like most people do and being in denial. . . It’s like waking up to who you are. . . I feel like coming to advising has helped me be more aware of myself you know.

Claudia stated:

Even if some people don’t notice us we can always go back and have the support that we needed. And I know a lot of people they don’t have that. . . You know where to go to rely, someone to tell you “No”, [or share that] “I feel like this”, “I feel like that”. And someone to tell you, “Oh I know what you’re going through.”

Sunny added:

I treated SSS kind of like an authority. . . I would try harder, you know, in my classes so I could have something positive to say. I’d probably just stay there. But that was a really big part of it. . . It’s nice to know that you have you know a program that cares about you. That’s there for you when you need them. . . It was a stabilizer in a way it kinda helped me focus and it kinda just kept me going you know, even when I wanted to give up.

Support programs allow students to gain a connection with the university and to serve as an important resource. More
than a program that helps by giving students answers, a common practice at SSS was to redirect questions so that students were able to find their own answers. This allowed students to build their own competencies and confidence.

Outside of the SSS program, there were supportive professors who truly made a difference in students' lives. Olvia had one professor that was helpful:

He knew my name and he knew my style, my weaknesses, my strengths, and that felt really good. You know, it's just so more a positive experience when the professor can say, "What's up Olvia?" I mean, you can just talk about this exam or you did better in this exam.

Similarly, there are supportive classmates. Stephen felt a 'bonding' with his classmates. This bonding was crucial because it contributed to the community that he was seeking to establish at SFSU. Stephen stated:

It would motivate me to go to class 'cause for me, I guess, it would seem like everybody's my friend and you'd go to class to see your friend. And you're all doing the same thing. . . I think that would be more of a benefit.

Support for the co-participants came in the form of making a connection with another person in an authentic manner in order to provide assistance, encouragement, and collaboration. Support reflects community building, an important factor in the success of first-generation low-income students.
Understanding of the Importance of Education in Their Lives

Each of the co-participants was aware that to succeed in life, an education was essential. Claudia understands that she must be a role model to her younger brothers in order to help them learn from her mistakes and successes. Stephen saw that his growth from his freshman year to his fourth year involved a great deal of his learning to understand his capabilities and potential. Stephen stated:

It’s caused me to feel like I need to make changes and stuff for the better. I feel that education pushes me to make changes and stuff in my lifestyle or in the way I behave or act.

In all, students were aware of the importance of attaining an education. Once the co-participants were able to understand this, they were able to better focus on the task at hand. They were able to re-prioritize their lives around their education and set goals to graduate. Students who at first refused to look at graduate school as a possibility are now considering it as a real possibility, not only because it is nearing graduation, but because they are feeling more sure about their place in the university.

As a child, Karina’s mother would require Karina to help with house cleaning jobs in order to emphasize the importance of education "in order to prevent doing this for the rest of your life." This stood out in Karina’s mind,
and helped to serve as a motivation to attend college. A few of the co-participants stressed the importance of college as a means to provide for oneself and his or her family, and also to provide role models to younger siblings.

Not only would their education affect their lives, but it would affect the lives of everyone in their family, and future generations to follow. To this end, the next section deals with how they hope to empower others.

The Imperative to Share their Knowledge

From the onset of this study, the co-participants were very clear about their interest in the outcomes. Part of the reason for many of the co-participants’ willingness to participate in the study was an interest in passing on their knowledge and in helping others who would be a part of SSS in the future. Karina shared:

I think that in order for students of color to, like, succeed we have to be empowered by everything in our school environment. Some teachers, you know, administration, and courses taught should be all about empowering the whole student population.

Owning the experience of going to college feeds the motivation to give back to their community. This theme is unique because the second dialogues revealed a stronger desire to help future SSS cohorts via mentoring or
guidance. This theme also revealed owning the responsibility to do something about the current experiences of first-generation low-income students, highlighting the possibility of empowerment not only for themselves, but for others.

Studies with populations similar in composition and background share the theme of “giving back.” Hernandez (2001), in her study of the influence of mothers on the educational attainment of second-generation Latina professional daughters of farm working family backgrounds, revealed that daughters and mothers were interested in taking the information from the study back to their communities.

An Enduring Hope

Throughout the dialogues, the co-participants remained hopeful that something positive would come out the study. Each co-participant invested a great deal of time and energy in the project and viewed it as an opportunity to create knowledge to help the incoming class of Fall 2001 that would replace them as SSS students.

Towards the end of each dialogue, each co-participant suggested something that he or she did or wanted to do to create a better environment for others who would come to SSS in future cohorts. They were attempting to transform
their environment around them, allowing praxis to take place in their own lives, and in the lives of others.

The second dialogues were different in tone. Each co-participant seemed to be more introspective and focused, and were deeply moved by reading their own words. It is important to note that each co-participant, after reading his or her own transcription, was surprised about what he or she was capable of articulating, and each expressed a deeper sense of what his or her experiences were. It was an emotional occasion for all, including the researcher.

The co-participants, through their dialogues, created a list of recommendations for students. Reflecting on their own experiences, they were able to create recommendations for others such as themselves in order to help future SSS students:

1. Find a role model or a guidance program like SSS that can help you succeed.
2. Learn to strike the balance between home and school.
3. Make your own decisions rather than have life choose them for you.
4. Build a support network in your classes and in your community.
5. Put your entire effort into school; it's important for you to get your education, even as early as high school and grammar school.

6. Capitalize on the differences between yourself and others.

This list is for the university community:

1. Encourage staff and faculty to learn how to work with diverse populations.

2. Be patient and get to know your students.

3. Encourage your students to learn and make it a safe place for them to be themselves.

4. Care about your students' successes and failures.

The co-participants felt it was important for the staff and faculty to understand that they were there to support student learning and student progress, not hinder it. Overall, staff and faculty need to be more supportive to all students and regardless of how hard it is, to make the effort to ensure that students get as much out of their education as possible.

**Conclusion**

Finding generative themes in the dialogues lead to an overwhelming understanding of the educational system's demands of exclusion rather than inclusion. Sacrificing one's language, culture and experiences are essential to
gain entry and successful passage to a university education.

The findings suggest that more work lay ahead in the form of research and reform. However, the findings also show the resilience of five first-generation, low-income college students in the face of adversity. Recommendations for future study and action are presented in the next chapter.
CHAPTER VI

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

...and then the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom. -Anais Nin (unknown)

Summary

This study endeavored to identify causes of disempowerment and marginalization in first-generation low-income students. Using participatory research, the study utilized dialogue with five students in the Student Support Services (SSS) program at San Francisco State University (SFSU) to identify sources of disempowerment and marginalization, reveal conditions that are present at the university, and elucidate the means by which the co-participants adapted to their environment. Two of the co-participants were men, and three were women, and they were either juniors or seniors. I have worked with all of them for the past four years.

The review of the literature suggests that first-generation low-income students arrive at four-year universities with lower academic expectations and skills. It also enumerates the factors of disempowerment and
marginalization that silence not only the voice but the spirit of students. Research is lacking in the area of how students gain their voices back, and what the process of getting an education involves in terms of resources, relationships and the changes that the students undergo as the progress through college.

The findings suggest that the co-participants found themselves in an environment that challenges their worldviews and ways of being. In order to meet those challenges, the co-participants have learned to develop positive coping mechanisms such as forming networks, working collaboratively with others, and accessing programs that can provide support, as well as engaging in goal-oriented attitude and behavior. The coping mechanisms served to provide the students with a means of building positive self-esteem, thus promoting resilience, persistence, and hope.

Conclusions

First-generation, low-income students are disempowered by many different factors. They are not academically and mentally prepared for the rigors of university-level work in high school either because the work they were given did not challenge them or the lack of resources at their respective schools negatively impacted their education.
They are expected to compete with other students who are far better prepared, and are treated with contempt by faculty and staff who do not possess the skills to work with them.

First-generation, low-income students, because of the academic difficulties and marginalization experienced at the university, may find themselves feeling very frustrated. They are not able to find their place or worse yet, feel they are not welcome at the university. First-generation, low-income students may feel that the university is a hostile place. Without a community or a network to support them, first-generation low-income students suffer poor grades, low self-esteem, and are further marginalized from the general student population.

The university reveals itself to be a place that is ill-equipped to support the development and learning of first-generation, low-income students. There are very few programs in place that can properly serve this population, and the blame for this population’s failures rest largely on first-generation low-income students’ shoulders. Society, in particular, the university, may not be ready to reflect upon and change its own practices and policies that serve to disempower and marginalize first-generation, low-income students and their families. These practices also
serve to disempower entire communities and future generations.

The recommendations for actions fall in two areas: action for students and the university community. Action for students involves proactive measures that ensure the successful negotiation of the college environment, including developing a sense of hope. Students are better able to adapt to their environment by finding support programs, creating learning and personal communities, developing a strong sense of self and forming goals. They are able to make sense of their environment by utilizing mentors.

Action for the university involves changing practices and policies that affect the way in which first-generation, low-income students are treated. It also involves inspecting philosophies and pedagogies and charging faculty and staff with the duty to care for the student. Faculty and staff should take the students’ interests as priority and use that principle to guide their work. Trainings to study students’ needs and concerns and in-services to discuss the environments from which first-generation, low-income students originate would be essential to adopt realistic policies and attitudes for those who work with this population.
**Recommendations for Further Study**

One of the potential areas for further investigation would involve the origins of disempowerment in first-generation low-income students who succeed in college. From early childhood, research shows the impact of encouragement and support on emerging learners. However, the roots for disempowerment also are ingrained at an early age. Studies have focused on the origins of disempowerment in students who stop out of school, however, the review of the literature done for the dissertation did not point to any of the specific successful practices that are in use with students from first-generation low-income backgrounds who are college graduates.

This study would utilize participatory research with students as well as parents and community activists in order to understand the support systems that have been important to many of the co-participants in the dissertation. Analyzing the foundations of disempowerment and the ways in which students have been able to overcome the challenges of low-income and balancing work-school priorities with the support of others would be an important piece of determining how to best serve first-generation low-income students.
In order to undertake this study, and to have parallel structures with the study on disempowerment and marginalization of first-generation low-income students, graduates will be sought out via contacts with the SFSU SSS program as well as other SSS programs. This is in order to start the process of looking at the larger population of SSS graduates to see if there are any commonalities in the way in which SSS as a treatment has a positive effect on students.

This study will further the research already completed on SSS students and look at concrete ways in which SSS can be a positive impact on first-generation low-income students. Because parents are such important persons in the lives of students, looking at the ways in which they supported students at home while SSS supports students on campus allows for a fuller glimpse into the lives of students. Community activists would be an important piece of the study because of the support they give in the form of advocacy in legislation and policy creation processes at the local, state and federal level.

Another area of further investigation would be the based the profound experiences that revealed themselves in the autobiographies. The autobiographies were very rich with information that revealed the students to have not
only dealt with significant transitions in life, but have had profound experiences that changed their lives and gave them the opportunity to reflect and form goals. With the same population, does the presence of a traumatic or profound event in one’s life lead to a more reflective life after the event occurred? What is the role of reflection in the lives of students, and how does it serve to create goal-directed behavior?

Goal-directed behavior is one of the most successful practices utilized by students who attain their degree. Discovering to what extent this behavior is fostered by faculty and staff as well as family and friends may help to provide an insight into the internal and external motivations required to be a successful student, and how those internal motivations are formed. One of the themes that surfaced in the study was an enduring hope that was present in each student. Hope as a motivation in and of itself is a factor that would be important to investigate as it has its foundation in self-concept, self-confidence and high self-esteem. To review how hope can be a construct of future-oriented behavior and how it impacts one’s locus of control will allow professional staff to better work with students in creating the goals that are necessary for academic and personal success.
This dissertation could have applications in programs such as the Educational Opportunity Programs utilized at many public universities or Minority Recruitment and Retention Programs utilized at many private universities. Staff whose primary goal is to serve and retain students of color or first-generation college students could utilize participatory research with their students and staff to identify the pressing concerns that face their students. In doing the research with students and staff alike, it will empower both groups to understand the work that is necessary for each to succeed in their goals: academic retention and graduation as well as awareness on the college campus of the concerns of first-generation low-income students.

This research could also be replicated with Upward Bound, another TRIO program focused on first-generation, low-income high school students. Because many SSS students were originally Upward Bound students, to do the study during their high school years and then do a follow up study when they transition to college would highlight the ways in which the population negotiates the college application process as well as college itself. Much of the foundation for the success in college relies on the constructs put in place during their high school years.
Because four out of the five students in the study come from single-parent families, this would be an important area of future research on the success of first-generation low-income students. This finding came from the themes of the autobiographies. The contributions that parents make towards their children are significant. However, if parents are not able to provide for their children due to commitments outside of the home such as work, upon what resources are children and their families able to draw upon? The importance of community and intergenerational support, the school-family relationship, and parent-child resourcefulness are potential foundations for resilience. This proposed study would investigate the importance and contributions of community agencies and intergenerational networks, as well as examine a systemic approach of supporting first-generation low-income students. This study may also reveal the positive, rather than the negative, aspects of single-parent families.

**Recommendations for Action**

The following suggestions for how students, particularly first-generation low-income students, can participate more fully in their college experience are based on recommendations made by the co-participants to fellow students and staff (refer to Chapter V).
Programs that are targeted towards specific populations, such as first-generation low-income students (e.g. SSS and Educational Opportunity Programs), underrepresented students (e.g., Minority Retention Programs), or first year students (e.g., Freshman Year Experience Programs), are very supportive in their structure and are great resources. These programs are able to assist in the transition between high school and the university, and many offer tutoring programs and advising throughout the student’s first year. It is during this time that many students encounter challenges that are difficult, namely transition, such as separation from family, self-reliance, and developing initiative, and time management as well as finding a community of students and staff that are supportive in an unfamiliar environment. Recommendations from fellow continuing students about good advisors and professors can be helpful, but it is important that students take the initiative to investigate why the advisors/faculty/staff members are good match for them.

The college transition involves a great deal of self-regulation: taking calculated opportunities and risks, developing initiative and new relationships with others, attending classes and forging new interests. Understanding one’s personal and academic limitations are difficult,
particularly attempting to do so by one’s self. Working with understanding staff and peers can be an effective way of testing limits by getting feedback and support through difficult challenges. For instance, one of the areas that many students struggle with is balancing obligations outside of school with having enough time to do homework. Spending too much time at work can leave limited time to do homework, but for many first-generation low-income students, working is a necessity. With trained staff, students can learn how to maximize their time by learning effective studying and test taking techniques, working in groups with other students and tutors, and time management techniques.

Taking responsibility for one’s own education means taking initiative to make connections with one’s faculty and peers in order to form support networks. Taking initiative can be a difficult process because it involves calculated risk-taking (e.g., taking courses that are challenging, meeting new people who can be supportive), but understanding that this is a skill that can be helpful for one’s academic as well as personal pursuits can encourage students to try this behavior. Problem solving, or critical thinking, is also a valuable skill for students to learn as
they learn to create options for themselves and understand the possibilities that exist.

Understanding the importance of education, not only for one's self, but for their family and community, can be a motivating factor in persisting through college. Taking advantage of the opportunities that arise in school to learn a specific content area within major as well as other areas contained in the general education curriculum allows a student to broaden his or her horizons. This effort, understanding the importance of education, takes place as early as grammar school: to invest oneself fully in education is a powerful experience that rewards not immediately, but in the long run. The doors that open via an education are countless.

However, the university community also has its responsibilities. The reality of the diverse population that promises to fill campuses is very real; yet training professionals to deal with students who are very different than them is not a reality. Mandated training in the form of workshops can introduce many of the skills needed to work with different student populations. However, this alone is not enough. Challenging faculty to get to know students as well as utilize materials and examples that are relevant to their realities is a form of active engagement
by presenting issues and problems that have personal meaning. Using outdated examples and modalities is the easiest way to disengage students, and can be a source of alienation rather than full participation. Resistance to this fact can lead to a lack of interest in a classroom that does not accept the student’s reality as its own. Retention rates are increased in relevant settings: if students feel like they are a part of the curriculum, they will feel a connectedness to not only the material and the professor, but also the university. Encouraging students to participate fully in the classroom means an increased workload for already overworked faculty. However, the risks involved in marginalizing students are heavy. Retention not only for the student’s class, but for one’s entire college career could depend on a professor’s attention and concern for her students.

Reflections of the Researcher

Partipatory research has as one of its core tenets that the researcher be transformed in the process as well as the participants. (Reza, 1995, p. 200)

The human connectedness that evolves through the dialogue process has the powerful potential of providing both the researcher and the participants with voices to express their inner thoughts and emotions; voices to those silenced by oppression and voices to

Knowledge makes a bloody entrance. - Unattributed

Reza's (1995) assertion that the researcher changes as do the participants holds true. Upon beginning the doctorate program, I found myself unsure of what steps I was going to take, what path I was going to take, and what I was truly capable of doing. At first my attempts at the process was rife with low-risk taking practices and timid steps. Now I find myself striding confidently into the end of this document, and with new insights about my co-participants, myself and the world in which we live.

In general, students and their advisors have a relationship that rarely broaches topics such as disempowerment and marginalization. More often than not, their relationship confines itself in the realm of school bulletins and policies. With heavy caseloads, advisors are often unlikely to get to know each student’s unique traits and values. Similarly, advisors can be too distant or busy to attend to each student’s needs. Often advisors are full-time faculty with other commitments that do not allow them to follow through as much as they would like. In some schools, advisors are not trained on how to best serve students.
I was fortunate to be a part of an SSS program that allowed me to engage in unique relationships with my students. With a philosophy of supporting student development in hand, I was able to engage my students and work with them in becoming productive and effective. However, there were students who were not able to make it past their first few semesters. The question of why they were not able to persist vexed me and charged me with finding sources and possible causes for dropping out.

This study is a direct outcome of that need, and I have come to this point with new insights, new knowledge, and new respect for those who are first-generation, low-income students.

Students everywhere need these three conditions in order to succeed. I saw it in my students, even in those who chose not to continue at SFSU. Persistence, resilience and hope are key tools to surviving at the university. However, these tools are often learned at a young age in order to overcome adversity in the home, as refugees, or as language learners. To think that students come to the university with those tools not intact is false. They have been using these tools all along.

Resilience, persistence and hope are important for all students to utilize and develop. With this study, I was
able to see the benefit that these qualities bestowed on students. I was also able to see what other university professionals were doing in order to foster it in students. It is my hope that all students, regardless of admission category, will be able to call upon professionals to support them in their endeavors to foster the keys for collegiate success.

This final theme came as a surprise. The more I listened to the dialogues and reread their contents, the more it was revealed. It encouraged me to hear that students developed these tools, and it was helpful for their success in the university. It has encouraged me to foster those conditions in my own life, and to help others to create their own tools to survive.

Listening is an action that is significantly different than hearing. By listening to the words that someone is saying, you not only are aware of their voice, but you are aware of the emotional content, the societal points of reference, a personal history and all the relevant background information from the speaker.

As a former advisor, I was able to get to know many of my students very intimately and utilize active listening to "hear" where they were "coming from." The commitment to
this kind of attention was not the same in other positions I have held in the past.

Other advising relationships were very limited in their scope and commitment to care for the students. As mere information providers, we were not able to truly listen to the students and be fully present. Instead, we attempted to provide whatever it was that they needed, bypassing connections and possibly whatever the true core of the problem was.

Participatory research has taught me to listen even more to the deeper messages that are present in the words of our co-participants. It has taught me to look at the structures that are in place that serve to perpetuate the oppression they feel. It has also given me the responsibility to dialogue with others on how to organize to improve conditions and ensure that student needs are met. Research of this nature encourages me to become an active learner in my environment and no longer walk away from difficult situations. I am committed to the pursuit of equity, and after this study, I am even more committed to the population of first-generation low-income students and their successes.

In retrospect, I would have liked to choose more participants. With such a small demographic of students,
the effect that one student dropping out has on the study was large. I could recommend that researchers consider working with ten students so as to offset any withdrawals. I also would have liked to utilize a reliable transcriptionist who can deliver transcriptions in a timely manner. I was not able to continue to work until I received the first dialogues, as they were crucial elements for the second dialogues. Although some researchers may feel that having two tape recorders at the dialogues would be overkill, this would have easily rectified having tapes getting lost in the mail or held up at the transcriptionist’s office.

One of the most significant transformations for me happened quietly and has its foundation in many years of self-doubt. I went through my education often unsure about the things that I wanted to accomplish and wondering if I was capable of attaining the things I wanted out of life. Working on this dissertation was a practice in self-confidence and self-discovery, as well as a practice in discipline and patience.

Throughout the dissertation process, building the foundation for a doctoral study involved asking questions, learning from others, and pushing myself to work when I was tired. It also meant I had to free myself from self-doubt,
and do what I had set out to do. When the work started, I found every reason to delay the writing. I wasn’t ready. I wasn’t completely sure about my study. Was it a worthy endeavor? Would it yield positive results? Am I smart enough to do this?

Finding support amongst my colleagues and friends was instrumental in my completion of this study. However, even more instrumental was my belief in my own abilities. As a working professional, many of my peers were older and more experienced than me, yet I was able to claim my right to be there alongside them.

It wasn’t until this study came along that I found my own voice buried underneath self-doubt. Realizing that years of hearing “You’re not ready yet” or “That’s not good enough” had done so much damage to me as both a person and as a student; yet it also provided the motivation for me to move through my fears and become who I was meant to be. It also helped me to heal old wounds that affected who I was and what I believed myself to be.

It wasn’t until I was encouraged to be creative in my presentations and research that I learned to not be afraid of the criticisms. My classmates gave me confidence, as did my professors. This is perhaps the greatest gift: That I am able to regain lost confidence in myself. I know in turn
that this will make me a better researcher and educator. It will make me better equipped to work with first-generation low-income students. It will give me strength and hopefully make me able to share that with all.
REFERENCES


A. F. Ada (personal communication, March 9, 2001)


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(Eds.), Beyond a dream deferred: Multicultural education and the politics of excellence (pp. 41-65). Minnesota, MN: University of Minnesota Press.


APPENDIX A

Consent to Be a Research Subject
Consent to Be a Research Subject

Purpose and Background

Ms. Charlene P. Lobo, a graduate student in the School of Education at the University of San Francisco is doing a study on the experience of going to college for first-generation, low-income students. Over the past several years, more and more people students from these backgrounds are attending universities around the United States and are presenting challenges to the current system of educational practices. The researcher is interesting in dialoguing with students who are first in their family to go to college and low-income in order to better understand their needs as individuals.

I am being asked to participate because I am a first-generation, low-income college student.

Procedures

If I agree to be a participant in this study, the following will happen:

1. I will engage in two dialogues with the researcher and share insights and experiences of attending a university during which I will be asked about my educational history and experiences, my educational goals, and my career aspirations.
2. I will complete a short autobiography for inclusion in the study.
3. I agree to be audiotaped and to have the tape destroyed after completion of the study.
4. I can choose a pseudonym to protect my identity, or use my own name.

I participate in the dialogue at the office of Charlene P. Lobo at Student Support Services, at San Francisco State University.

Risks and/or Discomforts

1. It is possible that some of the dialogue regarding my experiences at the university and my educational history may make me feel uncomfortable, but I am free to decline to answer any questions I do not wish to answer or to stop participation at any time.
2. Participation in research may mean a loss of confidentiality. Study records will be kept as confidential as is possible. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications resulting from the study. Study information will be coded and kept in locked files at all times. Only study personnel will have access to the files.

3. Because the time required for my participation may be up to 2 hours, I may become tired or bored.

Benefits

There will be no direct benefit to me from participating in this study. The anticipated benefit of this study is a better understanding of the experiences of going to college for first-generation, low-income students.

Costs/Financial Considerations

There will be no financial costs to me as a result of taking part in this study.

Payment/Reimbursement

There will be no payment/reimbursement as a result of taking part in this study.

Questions

I have talked to Ms. Lobo about this study and have had my questions answered. If I have further questions about the study, I may call her at (415) 422-6841.

If I have any questions or comments about participation in this study, I should first talk with the researcher. 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 by calling (415) 422-6091 and leaving a voicemail message, by emailing IRBPHS@usfca.edu, or by writing to the IRBPHS, Department of Psychology, University of San Francisco, 2130 Fulton Street, San Francisco, CA 94117-1080.
Consent

I have been given a copy of the "Research Subject's Bill of Rights" and I have been given a copy of this 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 or employee at SFSU.

My signature below indicates that I agree to participate in this study.

________________________________________________________________________
Subject's Signature Date of Signature

________________________________________________________________________
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent Date of Signature
APPENDIX B

Consent Cover Letter
Consent Cover Letter

05/14/98
Mr. John Doe
123 Sunny Circle
Anywhere, CA 90000

Dear Mr. Doe:

My name is Charlene P. Lobo and I am a graduate student in the School of Education at the University of San Francisco. I am doing a study on the experience of going to college for first-generation and low-income college students. I am interested in learning the impact of educational experiences and aspirations, the process of attending the university and what the needs of this population are.

You are being asked to participate in this research study because you are a first-generation, low-income student attending a university. Because you are a part of Student Support Services, I sought your participation in this study. If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to write a short autobiography of your experiences as a student and engage in a dialogue with me regarding your experiences at the university. This dialogue will be taped and transcribed.

It is possible that some of the questions in the dialogue 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. Participation in research may mean a loss of confidentiality. Study records will be kept as confidential as is possible. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications resulting from the study. Study information will be coded and kept in locked files at all times. Only study personnel will have access to the files. Individual information will not be shared with personnel of Student Support Services.

While there will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study, the anticipated benefit of this study is a better understanding of the experiences of
going to college for first-generation and low-income 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 me at 415-422-6841. If you have further questions about the study, you may contact the IRBPHS at the University of San Francisco, which is concerned with protection of volunteers in research projects. You may reach the IRBPHS office by calling (415) 422-6091 and leaving a voicemail message, by e-mailing IRBPHS@usfca.edu, or by writing to the IRBPHS, Department of Psychology, 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 to withdraw from it at any point. Student Support Services, SFSU, is 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 of Student Support Services.

Thank you for your attention. If you agree to participate, please indicate your acceptance on the enclosed form and place it in my mailbox at Student Support Services.

Sincerely,

Charlene P. Lobo
Graduate Student
University of San Francisco
APPENDIX C

Recruitment Materials
SSS Students
I Need Your Help!

What kinds of experiences would define the college experience for you? What are some of the challenges you've faced as a first-generation, low-income student? What were your expectations of going to college? What do you feel needs to be changed in terms of your experiences at the university?

I am in search of 6 students, three men and three women who are willing to participate in a study of disempowerment and first-generation, low-income college students. This study will utilize dialogues to study the role of disempowerment at one of the top urban universities in the nation. The study is a part of my dissertation for my doctorate at the University of San Francisco.

If you are interested, please sign up at the SSS front desk. I'll call you or email you to tell you more about the study and how you can be a part of a unique study of disempowerment of first-generation, low-income college students.

Thanks!
Charlene

There will not be any reimbursement for participation; you will spend a total of approximately two-three hours as a participant. For any further questions, please leave your name with the Front Desk and I will get back to you!
Information Sheet

Please fill out the information requested below. Any information collected will be confidential and at the end of the study, this sheet will be destroyed.

Name __________________________________________________________
Address

Phone
Email

Male  Female
First in family to go to college?  Yes  No
Financial aid recipient?  Yes  No

Age

Year: (based on units)
First Year (0-29)  
Sophomore (30-59)  
Junior (60-89)  
Senior (90 +)  

Ethnicity _________________________________
Place of birth _________________________________
If you were not born in the United States, please list the age at which you immigrated to the United States.________

Did you enter SFSU after high school? (Were you eligible as a first year student?)
Yes  No

Thank You!
If you have any questions regarding this information collection, or any part of the process of this study, please contact Charlene at charlobo@aol.com! Thanks again.
APPENDIX D

Institutional Approvals
TO: CHARLENE LOBO
880 CAMPUS DRIVE, #113
DALY CITY, CA 94015

FROM: Associate Vice President for Research and Sponsored Programs

SUBJECT: Protection of Human or Animal Subject Review of Research:

FACTORS IN THE DISEMPOWERMENT OF FIRST GENERATION, LOW INCOME COLLEGE STUDENT:

The Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (CPHS) or the University Animal Care and Use Committee (UACUC) have requested that you be advised of the current status of your planned research in terms of the protection of the rights of human or animal subjects. Please direct your attention only to the pertinent section(s) marked below. If you have any questions, please contact the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs. (338-2231.)

I. PENDING STATUS:

The CPHS/UACUC is reviewing your research project with respect to the protections planned for the rights of the human or animal subjects involved. To proceed with the review, it needs, as soon as possible, the material(s) checked below:

PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS — Materials Needed:

1. □ Completion of the attached Protocol Approval Form and all necessary signatures.

2. □ An abstract of 150-200 words that describes your planned research with specific emphasis on the provisions for the protection of the rights of the human subjects involved. Be as specific as possible.

3. □ A copy of the informed Consent Form you intend to use, as appropriate, in this research effort.

4. □ Other: __________________________________________________________________________________

PROTECTION OF ANIMAL SUBJECTS — Materials Needed:

1. □ Completion of the attached Protocol Approval Form and all necessary signatures.

2. □ An abstract of 150-200 words that describes your planned research protocol with specific emphasis for the humane use of animals. Be as specific as possible.

3. □ Other: __________________________________________________________________________________

II. RECORDED OR APPROVED:

A. Your Protocol Approval Form and supporting materials appear to be in order and have been recorded in the proceedings of the CPHS as noted below:

1. □ Exempt. Research may proceed.

B. The CPHS/UACUC has reviewed your research protocol and has taken the following action:

1. □ Approved, expedited review. Research may proceed.

2. □ Approved, reasonable risk. Research may proceed.

3. □ Deferred, see attached memo.

4. □ Not approved, see attached memo.

Include type of study and all forms of informed consent.
July 27, 2000

Charlene Lobo
500 Campus Drive #113
Daly City, CA 940115

Dear Charlene Lobo:

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 initial application for human subjects approval regarding your study.

Your Initial Application has been approved by the committee (IRBPHS #00-123). Please note the following:

1. Approval expires twelve (12) months from the dated 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 changes.

3. Any adverse reactions or complications on the part of Human Subject 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 Steven Del Chiaro, IRBPHS Coordinator, 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 School of Education, Room 023
Department of Counseling Psychology
2130 Fulton Street
San Francisco, CA, 94117
This study examined the origins and outcomes of disempowerment and marginalization in five first-generation, low-income college students who were participants in Student Support Services, a federally funded TRIO program at a large urban commuter state university. Using dialogic introspection and participatory research, the participants reflected on their experiences in the areas of disempowerment, marginalization, educational equity, oppression and the needs and concerns of first-generation low-income students. Generative themes fell into three areas: creating conditions for learning; silencing the voice; and resistance, persistence and hope. Themes that created negative experiences for the students included disparities between academic and personal cultures, lack of preparation and community, and the inability of faculty and staff to work with students from diverse backgrounds. These factors led to a feeling of lack of safety and a loss of voice and sense of self. The findings also highlighted the students’ understanding of
the importance of education, support, and hope in their lives as well as the imperative to share their knowledge with others. Necessary conditions for the success and empowerment of first-generation low-income students include a strong support system in the form of programs specifically targeting the population, as well as a faculty and staff that are aware of their needs and concerns. Future research should consider origins of disempowerment of students who successfully complete college as well as the development of goal-directed behavior; and the impact of traumatic events on the academic success of first-generation low-income students. Future research can be replicated with Upward Bound and Educational Talent Search students, two TRIO populations that graduate to become SSS students.

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