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Cultural Disparities: An Ethnography of First Generation Students of Rural, Generational Poverty

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Cultural Disparities: An Ethnography of First

Generation College Students from Rural, Generational Poverty

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative, ethnographic study was to identify the cultural norms, beliefs, languages, values assumptions and rituals of first generation college students from rural, low socioeconomic status in order to better understand how social and cultural capital create obstacles that affect persistence in rural, low socioeconomic status students. The study was conducted at one, liberal arts college in rural Pennsylvania. All participants were the first in their family to attend college, had grown up in two or more generations of poverty, and lived in rural areas. Data were collected in two phases encompassing two academic semesters. Participant observation, key informant interviewing and artifact investigation were the primary data collection techniques. Through the data analysis, five values assumptions emerged: (1) Previous Life Experiences and Home Life; (2) Fatalism; (3) Coping Skills; (4) Social Pressures; (5) Lack of Understanding and Trust. These values assumptions contributed to the participants' cultural capital, which functioned as a barrier to these students' success. The implications of this study show a great need for more support systems for this unique cohort of students. The results of this study were used to develop recommendations for higher education practitioners, academics, and educational policy writers.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of our beloved Chuckie (my favorite Chuckwagon)

and all of the others who believe death is the only answer. We miss you more every day.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction to the Problem

      This research, which was propelled by my lifelong experiences with students of rural, generational poverty, was designed to gather the collective voice of first generation college students from the culture and climate of rural, generational poverty and provide rich description of their experiences as they work their way through higher education. It is already known that these students complete postsecondary degrees at a rate far lower than their middle class peers and that they struggle academically and rarely become fully involved in the college experience. What was not known is how cultural capital affects these students' feeling of belonging and connectedness to their campus and how it affected academic achievement and degree attainment.

      These students often begin college with the hope of working towards a more sustainable future, but they are often ill equipped and lack the resources they need for the journey and leave school before earning their degree. This study adds to the existing research base by collecting the experiences of these students and providing needed data about the cultural mismatch they experience as they begin college. Using an ethnographic methodology designed to not only collect and share the voices of these students but also identify their behaviors, attitudes, beliefs, values and decision-making processes, this study provides information that will guide the administrators who accept these students and the faculty who teach these students towards better serving their unique needs. The conclusions generated from this study provide college administrators with the information they need to develop programs and faculty to integrate classroom exercises to help these students acclimate to an unfamiliar culture, thereby increasing

their chances of earning a degree. Further, by providing the stories of those who have gone before them, this study gives hope to those students who believe there are no options.

Background of the Study

Earning a college degree has been considered the key indicator of social and financial mobility since Colonial times and is believed by many to be a fundamental element of the "American dream" (Walpole, 2003, p. 46). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2014), postsecondary degree attainment, whether through college degree completion or trade school certification, is related to higher wage earnings, better employment marketability, and lower unemployment rates. Furthermore, the current labor market demands individuals with postsecondary degrees (Haveman & Smeeding, 2006). It is estimated that by 2018, 63% of all jobs in the United States will require some form of postsecondary education (Carnevale, Smith & Strohl, 2010), yet only one third of all students who begin a postsecondary degree finish within six years (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2013). For students from generational poverty, earning a postsecondary degree gives hope to breaking the cycle of poverty, yet the climate and culture of higher education is much different than the status quo found in the climate and culture of poverty; therefore, many of these students never fully acclimate to the college experience and often leave school without ever earning a degree.

While the middle and upper classes view higher education as part of normal life progression, those living among poverty view education as an abstract, out of reach concept (Marsh-McDonald & Schroeder, 2012). Although access to higher education has increased for students of low socioeconomic status (SES) over time, the unfortunate reality is that graduation rates for these students have remained remarkably low. In fact, in 2012, only 9.4% of all degrees

conferred were awarded to students whose family income was $33,000 or less (Postsecondary Education Opportunity, 2013). This disparity, according to NCES data, is greater than the gap between races. There were more minority graduates in 2012 than graduates from low SES households.

Students whose parents did not attend college are at an even greater disadvantage. They are often from a low socioeconomic background, and suffer financially, lack resources to navigate the college admissions process, are poorly informed about the availability of financial aid, and lack a support system to help them acclimate to the college environment (Haveman & Smeeding, 2006). These students rarely receive parental encouragement or support, as earning a high school diploma is considered the norm within these families whereas postsecondary education is considered part of the normal life progression for the middle class. Students from middle and upper classes are typically encouraged by their parents to earn a bachelor's or advanced degree (Walpole, 2003) whereas students from poverty may be criticized for their decision to attend college (Lucas, 2011). Additionally, students of low socioeconomic status usually attend lower performing high schools and are not academically prepared to meet the rigors of college coursework (Sirin, 2005). As a result, they, on average, have lower GPAs and score lower on national exams in both math and science (Haveman & Smeeding, 2006). Because they typically work 30 or more hours per week, they are less involved in campus activities, miss class more frequently, and often drop out before earning their degree (Duncan, Easton & Buckley, 2012).

Add the factor of geography, and the problem worsens. Students of rural generational poverty are among the most handicapped. There is, first of all, a lack of access to higher

education. Often, there are no colleges within commuting distance, and moving into dormitories or other campus housing simply is not an option due to financial strains and family responsibilities. Transportation to and from school is often an issue because public transit is rarely available in rural areas, leaving the students with no choice but to purchase a vehicle and pay for its upkeep as well as for fuel for the daily commute. Poor rural students typically receive a lower quality K12 education; therefore, their academic background is often insufficient compared to their upper-middle class peers, and the climate and culture of poverty, which they have been raised in, holds them back from fully acclimating to the college experience, which adheres to middle class values. These students often leave college without completing their degree (Walpole, 2003), which fuels the cycle of generational poverty and leaves little hope for a sustainable future for these students.

There exists a robust research base documenting the fact that low SES students finish school at a rate far lower than their middle class counterparts just as there exists an abundance of research that documents these students' academic struggles. However, their experiences are yet to be explored – their voices have not been heard. This study has added to the current literature base by documenting these students' experiences and providing thick description of the barriers they encounter, the obstacles they succumb to, the struggles they overcome, and the lives they live. This information is needed so that higher education leaders can begin developing initiatives to help these students better acclimate to their campuses in order to help them achieve their goal of earning a degree.

The increased importance being placed on attaining a college degree coupled with the current achievement gap between those from the middle class and those from poverty add to the

importance of this study. This study provided a detailed description of the lived experiences of first generation postsecondary students from a rural climate and culture of generational poverty as they acclimated to the climate and culture of higher education. It not only identified but also described the values assumptions that drive the thoughts, actions, choices, and behaviors of these students and determined the role these assumptions play in these students' decision making process.

Researcher's Background

Growing up in a poor, rural area where obtaining a college degree is often viewed as more a dream than a reality, I lived the life of a low-income, first generation college student. I was raised in a working class background and was the first in my family to attend college. Because I grew up in a rural area where everyone was poor, I did not realize I was poor until I began college where I learned that I qualified to participate in a state funded program for economically and educationally disadvantaged students. The grant was designed to provide participants with extra counseling, advising, and tutoring, but working a part-time job while taking full-time classes left me with little time to be fully involved in the program. I struggled academically. I changed my major twice and was placed on academic probation twice. I did not know what questions to ask my advisors; when I did ask questions of my professors, I did not understand their answers. They used words I had never heard. Eventually, I quit asking questions.

I also struggled socially. I never realized I was a "have not" before I met those who "had." While my friends planned overseas adventures for spring break, I worked on finding a ride home for the week because the dormitories were closed. They took frequent trips to the mall

to buy pretty things; I struggled to find money for supplies for projects. I felt out of place in the dormitories and eventually moved off campus and into a small apartment that I shared with two other young women who were like me. I felt comfortable with them, and they experienced the same struggles I did.

After seven semesters, I dropped out of college and had a baby. Being unable to obtain gainful employment pushed me back into school. Having my daughter helped me to realize the importance of earning a degree; I wanted to give her hope. I reenrolled at a different college, continued to work part time and raised my daughter. Seven years after beginning college, I earned my bachelor's degree.

Shortly after graduating, I was hired as a part-time writing tutor at a college in the same poor, rural area in which I was raised. The college has a liberal admissions policy and admits students who might not otherwise be given the opportunity to earn a degree. My tutoring position was funded by the same grant program I participated in during my first years of college. Through my work as a tutor, I met hundreds of students who struggled with the same issues I struggled with when I began college.

Most of the students that I worked with at the college were taking full-time classes while working. While most worked part-time jobs, many were working full-time jobs and nearly all of these students still struggled financially. I met students who were trying to take classes without textbooks because they did not have the means in which to purchase books. I met students who missed weeks of class because their vehicles were out of service or because they did not have money for fuel for their commute. Some were concerned because they did not have financial means to buy food to feed their families. Most of them did not have access to technology in their

homes and were attempting to do homework without a computer or access to the Internet. While the campus had plenty of computer labs with access to the Internet, most of them could not stay after class to use the computers because they had work, had to care for their children, or had other family responsibilities. As a result, they often turned in late, handwritten assignments and sometimes did not turn in assignments at all.

In addition to being financially poor, these students were also time poor. Working while taking classes left little time for them to devote to their education. Many of them were raising children of their own or caring for other family members. Because few of them were residential students, they also had to devote time to their daily commute to and from campus, which took precious time away from what little time they already had. Many of them were only on campus during their class times which left them little time to attend tutoring sessions, meet with their advisors, participate in campus activities, and so on. Their busy schedules often left them little time to devote to their schooling.

Working one-on-one with these students provided me with the opportunity to build a rapport with them. I was able to relate to the struggles they were experiences. They often confided in me, explaining the many different types of struggles they were facing. While a great deal of their barriers were financial in nature, they often struggled with problems that complicated their already difficult college experience. They told stories of drug and/or alcohol abuse, abusive relationships, psychological and emotional disorders that were being left untreated, family turmoil, and more. Many of them were in despair. They believed that they needed to go to college, and they were willing to fight to stay in college, but they lacked the

resources they needed to take into this battle. They wanted to succeed. They were hopeful that earning a degree would give them a better life, but very few of them persisted to graduation.

Over the course of 16 years, I have worked in various capacities at that same institution. In each of these roles, I have met and heard the stories of students who were raised within the culture of rural poverty. Time and time again, I have heard students explain the reasons they wanted to go to school, why they *needed* to stay in school, and time and time again, I have heard them explain why they could not stay in school. While a great deal of them did leave before finishing, many have persisted and earned their degree, and some who left eventually came back and completed their degrees. It is my hope that this study will uncover the driving forces that can either constrain them or nudge them towards the finish line.

Statement of the Problem

First generation students have been the focus of thousands of research studies that aimed to provide information regarding this population's academic preparedness, perseverance towards degree completion, campus involvement and so on (Choy, 2001; Hand & Miller-Payne, 2008; Kim, 2012; Stephens Fryberg, Markus, Johnson, & Covarrubias, 2012; Stuber, 2009). Students of low SES have been studied to better understand the financial and academic hindrances to their success; however, while it is known that socioeconomic culture affects academic success and persistence, little is known about the cultural values that contribute to this group's persistence (or lack thereof) towards college graduation (Walpole, 2003). Even less is known about low SES students from rural locations (Hand & Miller-Payne, 2008). Because the retention rate of these students is significantly lower than that of their upper-middle class peers, colleges and universities must move forward and not only admit these students to their campus but better

assist them in meeting their academic goals by supporting them as they acclimate to the world of higher education. While many institutions have adopted academic support programs geared to enhance this group's academic success and grant and loan programs have been developed to assist them financially, few institutions have incorporated a mentoring component geared to help these students acclimate to an unfamiliar culture because little is known about the cultural mismatch they experience when they enter the world of higher education. As a result, many of these students feel disconnected from their campus, never fully acclimate to the college experience, and leave school before earning their degree.

Students of low SES often delay admittance to college (Rowan-Kenyon, 2007; Walpole, 2003), and when they do begin, they frequently leave college before earning their degree. The lack of degree attainment among this group results in individual, institutional, and societal economic losses. The price of college tuition is increasing, and many students must borrow money to cover the related costs. Those with less access to financial resources carry the highest level of debt (Choy & Li, 2006; Houle, 2015). When these students leave college before attaining a degree, they are left in greater financial duress than before they began school (Hand & Miller-Payne, 2008; Stephens et al., 2012). They are often unable to repay their student debt, resulting in both personal and societal economic losses.

According to the United States Department of Education (2013), the number of student loans in default has reached an all-time high; as of fiscal year 2010, 10% of all student loans were in default within two years of beginning repayment, and 14.7% of all student loans entered default within three years of beginning repayment (United States Department of Education, 2013). This equates to over one trillion dollars of defaulted student loan debt (Hillman, 2014).

Houle (2013) reported that in 2013, the total dollar amount of student loan in default surpassed that of credit cards and car loans combined and is currently at the highest point it has ever been. Default rates vary between different sectors and are highest among community colleges (Hackett, 2014), the type of institution frequently attended by first generation students of low SES and often the only source of postsecondary education available to those from rural areas.

The default rate for individual schools is used by the Department of Education to cut funding to institutions that experience high proportions of defaulted student loan debt (Stratford, 2013). Colleges that experience a default rate of 25% or higher for three consecutive years could be barred from receiving federal student aid monies; colleges that exceed a 40% default rate within a single year could also face such ramifications (Stratford, 2013). Therefore, universities are not motivated to recruit from the low SES pool because of student attrition and default rate, regardless of the talent of those potential students who may just need a step up to succeed. This could result in lower enrollment rates for these schools, as students will not be able to secure the financial aid they need to attend school. This process fuels social stratification.

High attrition rates also result in a less talented workforce that earns lower wages (Engberg & Allen, 2011), as higher educational attainment is related to higher salaries. The National Center for Education Statistics (n.d.) estimated that between 2005 and 2011, the median income for a young adult with a master's degree was $59,200; for those with a bachelor's degree, it was $45,000, and it was $37,000 for those with an associate's degree. High school graduates earned, on average, just $27,900 per year, and those with a GED earned even less. While students of low SES frequently see earning a degree as a means to social and financial improvement, they typically leave college without a degree and with large amounts of debt that

they struggle to repay. This cycle augments social inequalities, leaving many without the means for a sustainable future.

The climate and culture of rural poverty differs significantly from the status quo of postsecondary institutions that function on middle class values. This cultural mismatch puts low socioeconomic students at a distinct disadvantage that many are unable to overcome. More understanding of the cultural mismatch that often becomes a barrier to success is needed in order to assist these students in meeting their academic goals. At a time when earning a college degree is vital to financial stability, colleges and universities must seek understanding in order to provide these students with the services they need to successfully complete their degrees.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify the cultural norms, beliefs, language, values assumptions, and rituals of first generation college students from rural, low socioeconomic status in order to better understand how social and cultural capital create obstacles that affect persistence in rural, low socioeconomic students. Greater understanding of these students' experiences will assist higher education leaders in developing measures to assist these students as they transition to higher education, which will ultimately increase the probability of degree attainment. The study was conducted at a small, rural, religiously-affiliated liberal arts college in Pennsylvania. The results of this study provide insight on how first generation students from the rural context of poverty acclimate to the culture and climate of higher education.

Rationale

Obtaining a college degree is becoming increasingly important yet students of low socioeconomic status are among the most handicapped of today's students. Current literature shows that students of low-socioeconomic status complete college less frequently than their upper-middle class peers. While federal programs have provided students from low socioeconomic status with better access to higher education, their unique needs are often unmet. These students are ill equipped for their journeys. They struggle academically and socially and often never fully acclimate to the college experience. They begin college as a way to escape poverty, but their struggles often overcome them. As a result, this group of students earns postsecondary degrees at a rate far less than their upper-middle class peers, thereby fueling the cycle of poverty. More understanding of the experiences of rural, low-socioeconomic students is needed in order to better support these students as they matriculate. By documenting these students' experiences and identifying cultural constructs that serve as roadblocks to success, this study contributed to the existing literature base by providing an explanation of this phenomenon.

A number of researchers have tracked this group of students' progression towards degree completion and documented factors that affected their achievement. Although this work confirms that these students struggle with their coursework, the cultural discrepancies that they face when they enter the middle class values system that is normative of American postsecondary institutions has been overlooked. While it is understood that these two cultural systems are very different, the variable of culture has not been addressed by existing research. This study identified the many factors that affect this group of students' persistence in achieving a degree.

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Understanding more about this cohort of students will guide those who lead them on their journeys to a more sustainable future, ultimately increasing the probability of their success.

Research Questions

The research questions were geared towards providing a cultural understanding of the experiences of students from rural poverty.

Two research questions guided this study. They are:

1) What values assumptions drive the thoughts, actions, choices, behaviors, and decisions of rural, low socioeconomic students?

2) What effect does social and cultural capital have on degree persistence in rural, low socioeconomic students?

Significance of the Study to the Field of Education

This study identified the cultural norms, beliefs, language, values assumptions and rituals of first generation college students from rural, low socioeconomic status. This information will provide better understanding of the role of social and cultural capital in rural, low socioeconomic students. While it is well documented that this cohort of students completes degrees at a much lower rate than their peers, Walpole (2007) noted that these students' experiences are not well documented in existing literature. This study expanded the existing literature base to include a documentary of these students' lived experiences in order to better equip colleges and universities to understand and assist this unique group of students.

The results of this study can help institutions better serve the growing number of low SES students who are the first in their family to attend college by providing insight into how this group of students views higher education and describing why they are or are not successful in

persisting to graduation. By understanding the cultural distinctions of this cohort of students and recognizing how those distinctions quickly become obstacles to success, faculty will be better equipped to provide classroom exercises that will assist this group of students in understanding middle class climate and culture, which will ultimately increase the probability that these students will persist to graduation. This study will also guide faculty towards integrating instruction of middle class values into their curriculum. While these values assumptions or "hidden rules" are well known to those raised within the middle class, individuals raised within generational poverty function by a different set of cultural norms and hold different values. Knowledge of middle class values will also increase these students' odds of finding gainful employment once they graduate as most companies and businesses function on middle class values.

Furthermore, student retention affects every facet of higher education, and colleges across the country are focusing on ways to better retain their current student population. It is well known that students of low SES are retained at far lower rates that their upper-middle class peers. This study provides insight into the reasons these students leave college, thus providing information on how to assist them in overcoming their obstacles. This information will assist administrators in building programs to serve these students' needs, ultimately enabling them to better retain this growing population of students.

This study will also benefit educational policy makers, as currently, the existing literature base fails to recognize the unique experience of this group of students in the postsecondary environment and instead focuses on their K12 experiences (Walpole, 2003). While college students of low SES became a focal point of educational policy after World War II with the

enactment of the GI Bill and public monies that were allocated to help increase the number of poor students who attended college (Walpole, 2003), in recent times, this group of students has not received sufficient attention from policy makers because they are less politically motivated and lack a collective voice. This study adds their voice to the current literature base by documenting their experiences, aspirations, and hindrances. College is seen by many as an escape from poverty; therefore, promoting this opportunity is critical to our society.

Given the current administration's focus on increasing access to and funding for postsecondary education to all students, it is now more important than it ever has been to not only reach out to students of low socioeconomic status, but also help them persist to graduation. This study will also benefit students of rural, generational poverty − those students who are at the greatest risk − by providing inspiring stories from peers who have gone before them and by better equipping the faculty and administrators with information that will allow them to serve the needs of this unique cohort of students. As a result of this study, these students will learn from faculty who will be better prepared to engage them in their classrooms. Their administrators will be armed with information to design programs to better retain them, and policy makers will finally hear their voice. It is the researcher's hope that the information from this study will ultimately reduce the stigma associated with poverty, thereby encouraging colleges and universities to search for the talent hidden within the pool of low SES students.

Definition of Key Terms

Code. Assigning an identifier, such as a word, to closely related categories or themes of information that is repeated throughout the data (Saldaña, 2009).

Coding. A process of developing categories or themes of information that is repeated throughout the data (Saldaña, 2009).

Construct Validity. The accuracy with which a study's measures reflect the phenomenon under study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Domain analysis. A process for reviewing data to discover the domains of meaning associated with the phenomenon under study and categorizing details of that phenomenon into domains (Saldaña, 2009).

Emergent theory. An outcome of research whereby a theory emerges through a process of data collection and analysis process called grounded theory (Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 2013).

Emic. An insider's perspective (Merriam, 2009).

Ethnography. A qualitative research strategy that is designed to describe a culture of subculture (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010).

Etic. An outsider's perspective (Merriam, 2009).

Field. The study's participants' natural setting (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010).

Field notes. The researcher's summary of observations, interviews, and artifact analysis (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010).

Grounded theory. A procedure whereby the researcher collects and analyzes data at the same time (Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 2013).

In-depth interview. Interviews in which the researcher talks with participants about their experiences and then probes into topics that arise as a result of the conversation (LeCompte & Schensul, 2013).

Key informant. A study participant whom the researcher has built a rapport with and whom provides critical information and explanations about the phenomenon under study (LeCompte & Schensul, 2013).

Life History. A biographic account of the study's participants that provides an in-depth description of their lives with emphasis placed on their own interpretations of their life events (LeCompte & Schensul, 2013).

Member checking. A technique used to establish validity of an account by having the participants whom initially provided the data review it for accuracy (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Observation guide. Lists of questions or areas of data collection taken into the field and used to guide data collection (LeCompte & Schensul, 2013).

Open-ended interview. Interviews that have no set agenda or assigned questions but rather follow a pattern of conversation between the researcher and participant (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Participant observation. A way of collecting data whereby the researcher spends a prolonged period of time in the participants' natural setting (Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 2013).

Subjectivity journal. A journal used by ethnographers to record their own thoughts, musings, and subjectivities while in the field; they are kept separate from the study's data (LeCompte & Goetz, 1987).

Triangulation. The practice of collecting information from multiple data sources aimed at confirming the same finding (Yin, 2014).

Assumptions

- Participants will not feel coerced to take part in this study. They will understand that the researcher will not be in a position of authority over them, and they will understand that they are free to withdrawal from the study at any time.

- Participants' knowledge of the study's purpose will increase their desire to provide accurate representations of their lives, and the data will provide the truest descriptions of their experiences.

- Participants will understand that the researcher will not have any influence on their academic standing in the research setting due to her position within the setting nor will they receive any preferential treatment as a result of their participation in the study.

- The researcher's role will be unobtrusive in the research setting, and researcher effect will be minimal.

- The researcher will remain unbiased throughout the study. The data that is contributed to this study will be shaped by the interactions of the researcher and the participant.

- The researcher's firsthand knowledge of being a first generation, low socioeconomic student from a rural setting will not influence the data collected as part of this study.

- The use of interviews will serve as a means to gather information about participants' experience in higher education.

- Member checking will ensure accurate documentation of participant experiences.

- The use of multiple data sources and multiple data collection methods will provide an accurate means of triangulating data.

- Theories generated through data analysis will contribute to the existing literature base by identifying the role cultural capital plays in the experiences of first generation students of rural, generational poverty.

- The results of this study will provide higher education officials with the means to better support students of rural, generational poverty.

Delimitations

- This study was conducted at one small, private institution in a specified geographic location. Results from this study are particular to the region in which it occurred.

- This study was conducted from 2015-2016, shortly after a national recession. The unique factors that were captured are timely and will be difficult to reproduce if the national economy improves.

- Given the Obama administration's focus on the importance of earning a college degree, this study was conducted at a time when more students of poverty were entering the postsecondary education system.

- This study employed ethnographic methodologies, which involved identifying and describing the behavior, attitudes, beliefs, and values of the culture of rural, generational poverty and determining how these variables relate to postsecondary degree attainment.

- The study was structured through Bourdieu's Theory of Social Reproduction and its relationship to the ways education systems reinforce social stratification.

Nature of the Study

Current research on students of low socioeconomic status quantified the problem by providing data regarding this group of students' achievement and degree completion rates, but

little is known about these students' personal struggles (Walpole, 2003). This study was structured using existing literature and theory concerning cultural capital. Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction provided a lens to frame the relationship between social class, cultural and social capital, and education. Current literature regarding social stratification outlined the differences in access to the various forms of capital between socioeconomic classes.

This study was designed using critical ethnographic methodologies. The goal of ethnography is to provide thick description of a given culture in order to better understand their behavior, attitudes, beliefs, and values (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010; Merriam, 2009). This study relied on significant face-to-face interaction with the population under study in their natural setting in order to document not only what was said but what was seen. The unique procedures that were used in this study relied on strategies of inquiry that provided information about topics that cannot be fully explained through quantitative methodologies. The research process was emergent and allowed for flexibility in the research plan in order to capture the most information about the problem. This study provided an interpretation of what was seen, heard and understood in order to provide a holistic account of the lives of students of rural, generational poverty.

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

The previous pages provided a description of the problem regarding the postsecondary education completion rates students of low socioeconomic status, particularly those students of rural generational poverty and addressed the need for more research regarding this group of students.

Chapter Two contains an exhaustive review of existing research about this topic. It begins with an overview of poverty and explains the differences between rural and urban poverty. It then provides a synthesis of existing literature on the culture of poverty and the culture of academia, detailing the ways in which these cultures collide. This path makes up the theoretical framework of this study, Bourdieu's Theory of Social Reproduction, which is also discussed.

Chapter Three explains the research setting and outlines the ethnographic methodology and procedures that will be used to collect and analyze data.

In Chapter Four, the study's findings are presented using thick description. Here, the experiences of the study's participants will come to life − their stories have been told, and their voices have been heard.

Chapter Five explores what was learned about these students and recommends the ways the information gathered in this study can be used to generate future studies on this unique group of students as well as provide information that can be used in developing programs to better assist these students in meeting their academic goals.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Overview of Poverty in the United States

In the earliest days of American universities, few families could afford to send their children to college. Earning a degree was reserved for the elite, privileged members of society. As such, postsecondary education was seen as a means to stratify society and perpetuate social order. As the nation evolved, society required a more educated workforce, so government programs were developed to make it easier to afford college, forever changing the landscape of higher education. While the make up of the student body changed, the highbrow culture of higher education has not, and although higher education has become more accessible to all, many students struggle to fit in within the culture of higher education. This is especially true of those students from rural, generational poverty.

While the term poverty is generally used in reference to one's financial capital, money is only one of the resources that those living in poverty often do without. While there is no clear-cut definition of poverty, in her book *Bridges Out of Poverty,* scholar Ruby Payne defined poverty as "the extent to which an individual goes without resources" (2008 p. 1). Those living among poverty not only go without money but also often lack physical ability, emotional support, mental/cognitive resources, spirituality, support systems, role models, formal language, and knowledge of society's hidden rules (Payne, 2005). The United States Census Bureau (2013) estimated that in 2012, the poverty rate in the United States had reached a 15-year high of 15%, and an estimated 46.5 million Americans were living in poverty with children under the age of 18 experiencing the highest rate of poverty. This group of Americans comprises a pool of students that requires special attention.

Situational poverty versus generational poverty. Poverty can be either situational or generational. Situational poverty occurs when life circumstances suddenly change and those who normally "have" quickly become "have-nots" (Payne, 2005). This can happen virtually overnight due to job loss, illness, death, divorce, natural disaster or other life-altering event (Payne, 2005). Situational poverty tends to be temporary because those who find themselves within this group generally only lack financial resources, and other resources are intact; therefore, they are typically able to reverse their situation on their own or with the help of their support system in a relatively short period of time.

Generational poverty, on the other hand, consists of those individuals who have lived within two or more generations of poverty and lack several resources. Theorists who have studied those individuals who live within generational poverty have found that this segment of the population has their own climate and culture, and prevailing attitudes, values, and beliefs are passed along from one generation to the other (Bourdieu, 1977, 1979; Iceland, 2006; Payne, 2008; Sharkey, 2008; Stephens et al., 2012). Individuals within this stratum tend to remain there for a decade or longer, sometimes never escaping poverty (Economic Mobility Project, 2010; Payne 2008; Payne & DeVol, 2005). Furthermore, when those who were raised within generational poverty do leave, their absence is usually only temporary and they eventually return to a life of poverty; even when these individuals "make it" out of poverty, the prevailing values they were raised with follow them (Iceland, 2006; Payne, 2008; Sharkey, 2008).

Finding a way out of poverty, though, has becoming increasingly difficult. Aside from marriage, many people living in poverty see education as the only pro-social option for economic and social mobility (Bailey & Dynarski, 2011; Marsh-McDonald & Schroeder, 2012; Payne,

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2005; Stephens et al., 2012), yet Payne (2008) found that most people living within poverty view education with respect but see it as something unattainable. The Pell Institute (2005) estimated that only 31% of students of low socioeconomic (SES) status enroll in postsecondary education compared to about 75% of middle to high-income students, and even fewer students from poverty finish their degree. These disparities perpetuate the reproduction of social inequality in America, and the result is a loss in talent among the American workforce that affects not only individuals but society as a whole (Engberg & Allen; 2011; Payne, 2008; Stephens et al., 2012).

Rural poverty versus urban poverty. While there is an abundance of literature concerning students living in poverty, much of the literature focuses on the issue of urban poverty or the issue of poverty within specific ethnic groups (for example, Native American, African American or Latino). Due to geographic isolation, national studies have often excluded individuals from the hard to reach context of rural, generational poverty. Few studies that focus on rural poverty exist, and those that do exist focus primarily on African American children (Brody & Murry, 2004; Brody, Murry, Kim, & Brown, 2002; Murry, Brody, Simons, Cutrona, & Gibbons, 2008) or those coping with sudden situational poverty (Conger, Conger, & Martin, 2010; Conger, Conger, Matthews, & Elder, 1999; Melby, Conger, Fang, Wickrama, & Conger, 2008; Surjadi, Lorenz, Wickrama, & Conger, 2011). Just like the college-aged students function differently than primary school children, the context of rural poverty differs greatly from that of urban poverty, so those from rural poverty must be studied in their own right (Vernon-Feagans & Cox, 2013).

The risks of growing up in rural poverty differ from the risks of growing up in urban poverty. A number of small studies have revealed that rural communities afflicted with poverty

are often characterized by having low educational attainment, poor housing, and lack of health care, and stressful home environments (Brody & Flor, 1998; Brody, Kim & Brown, 2004; Brody, Stoneman, Flor, McCrary, Hastings, & Conyers, 1994). Available employment opportunities typically are low paying and do not provide the opportunity for upward mobility. Jobs that were once obtainable in steel or textile mills and underground mining are no longer available in rural communities, and the technological boom that hit agriculture skipped over rural areas, so once thriving mining and farming communities are now economically depressed. These economic changes forced out the younger, more skilled workforce leaving behind a smaller, less skilled workforce that makes less money (O'Hare & Johnson, 2004; Weber, Jensen, Miller, Mosley, & Fisher, 2005).

The economic shift in rural areas brought about an increase in poverty in rural areas that ultimately increased the poverty gap among those living in rural areas. According to Rivers (2005), more than half of the children living in rural communities live within families below 200% of the federal poverty level (the level needed to qualify for federal aid) even though 80% of these families have one or more members who are employed full-time. Additionally, parents of these children often work irregular hours, work more than one job, and commute far distances to work.

Rural communities often face geographical isolation; for that reason, those living within rural poverty often face social isolation. Kohler, Anderson, Oravecz, and Braun (2004) conducted in-depth interviews of 90 families living within rural poverty to determine factors of home environment in these communities. They found that due to geographic isolation and lack of common urban resources, social networks within rural poverty are often kin-based. Many living

within rural poverty often know no one who lives outside of their community. Those living within a rural setting often live miles from their nearest neighbor, making developing a social network exceedingly difficult. Even when building a social network is desired, it can be so out of reach that it is nearly impossible. Access to social support organizations such as libraries, daycares, and even healthcare is also diminished in rural environments. As a result, those living within rural poverty often have no access to influences outside of their own community, so the influence of family is strong (Vernon-Feagans & Cox, 2013). These factors combined create unique cultural distinctions typical only of those from rural poverty.

Societal Perceptions of Poverty. One of the key issues surrounding economic mobility is societal pathology about poverty. Due to heavy media influence, society has ascribed stereotypes to those who are impoverished (Iceland, 2006). Society often assigns values such as laziness, ignorance, and stupidity to those living within poverty and views those who live within poverty as having the belief that society owes them something (Payne, 2005). McCombs (2009), a poor woman who sees herself as being "invisible" says, "People tend to think that because we are poor we are ignorant or stupid…we are seen as lazy because…we are unable to pick ourselves up by our bootstraps" (para. 4). Other stereotypes include the belief that the poor do nothing to escape poverty, that those who receive welfare benefits are dishonest and aim to cheat the system (Lott, 2002), that poverty mainly affects minority populations, and that poverty is an urban problem that often plagues addicts, alcoholics and gang members (Payne, 2005). This stigma affects these individuals' confidence, self-efficacy, and vocational aspirations (Terenzini, Cabrera, & Bernal, 2001).

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In reality, those who live within poverty generally do not live up to the reputation that society and the media have given them. While poverty is often associated with a lack of intelligence, poverty has little to no effect on intelligence (Payne, 2005). Intelligence Quotient (IQ) is a measure of acquired knowledge, and if one's environment does not provide that knowledge, language, or vocabulary, it cannot be evidenced by an exam. Additionally, poverty is not constrained by geographical, racial, or gender borders; in fact, the U.S. Census Bureau (2013) estimated that 67% of those living within poverty are white. While it is true that poverty is more prolific in certain races, the fact remains that poverty occurs in all races. Furthermore, poverty occurs across the country in urban, rural, and suburban areas (Iceland, 2006). While poverty is often highly concentrated in urban areas, it is equally dispersed across the country, occurring in urban, suburban and rural areas alike (Payne, 2005; U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). Finally, while poverty is often associated with laziness, many of people living in impoverished households are the working poor (Marsh-McDonald & Schroeder, 2012; Payne, 2005; Vernon-Feagons & Cox, 2013). In this case, individuals have access to monetary resources (although not always enough) yet still lack other basic resources necessary for survival.

Another societal perception is that upward mobility simply requires taking control of a situation and pulling one's self up by the proverbial "bootstraps." What often goes unnoticed is that this strategy is limited by an individual's access to resources (Marsh-McDonald & Schroeder, 2012; Payne, 2005). One must have not only financial resources to begin college or hold down a job; having reliable transportation, a healthy support system, role models, and in many cases, access to childcare is also necessary. Individuals living within the context of rural

poverty have little to no access to these resources (Iceland, 2006; Payne, 2008). Upward mobility is further limited by an individual's cultural and social capital (Payne, 2008).

Marsh-McDonald and Schroeder (2012) conducted a small phenomenological study to determine the relationship between societal perceptions of poverty, self-efficacy, and motivation. They determined that the social stigmas that are often associated with the poor affect their self-image, their feeling of belonging, and their sense of hope, which ultimately affected their social mobility. This is in line with sociologist Ervin Goffman's (1963) theory of social stigma. Goffman defined stigma as a gap between one's actual social identity and one's perceived social identity. According to Goffman, the shame that is felt when one does not believe they meet others' standards leads to the fear of being discredited due to one's shortcomings. This fear becomes so great that people will hide their shortcomings so as to avoid judgment. Goffman asserted that in an effort to protect themselves from judgment, people will project a persona that they think will be accepted. The stereotypes that have been ascribed to those living within poverty serve as stigmas, and as students enter the middle class culture associated with higher education, they often try to mask themselves as being from the middle class, but quickly realize they do not fit in (Pappano, 2015).

Social Theory and Hidden Rules

 Culture serves as a term that defines the way in which practices, rules, and habits are formed, and it regulates the ways in which individuals interact with and respond to the world around them (Bourdieu, 1977, 1979; Payne, 2008). According to the United Nations Economic, Social and Cultural Organization [UNSCO] (2002), "…culture should be regarded as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and

that it encompasses, in addition, to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs" (para. 5). Culture typically refers to a group of people's values, norms, institutions, artifacts, and language and symbol system (UNSCO, 2002). A common misconception about culture is that it is ethnic. That is not the case.

The term "culture of poverty" was first coined by anthropologist Oscar Lewis in 1959 in his book *Five Families: Mexican Case Studies in the Culture of Poverty*, and since that time, scholars, educators, and policy makers have discussed what it means to live within the culture and climate of poverty and determine how it differs from middle and upper class environments (Rosemblatt, 2009). What has been discovered is that those raised within generational poverty enact norms specific to the culture of poverty (Engberg & Allen, 2011; Hand & Miller-Payne, 2008; Iceland, 2006; Lewis, 1959; Payne, 2008; Stephens et al., 2012). The environment in which one was raised teaches a set of unspoken cues or hidden rules that outlines how people should relate to others and to the world. These rules vary among different socioeconomic strata (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986; Payne, 2005; Stephens et al., 2012).

Bourdieu's Theory of Social Reproduction. According to Bourdieu's (1977) Theory of Social Reproduction, the rules are learned through one's environment, specifically through parents. The environment with which one interacts with shapes the course of life, and there are significant differences in environment across different socioeconomic groups (Heckman, 2011; Lucas, 2011; Payne, 2008; Stephens et al., 2012). The norms of one's environment, according to Bourdieu (1977), are passed down from generation to generation, teaching specialized, insider knowledge that is not taught in schools or learned from books. These norms, referred to as

cultural capital, often include beliefs, attitudes, preferences, languages, and behaviors that are passed down from one generation to the next.

Cultural capital emphasizes the influence of family, community, and social support systems and is characterized by a status-defining system of characteristics including language, mannerism, and knowledge as well as the resources available to a family (Bourdieu, 1986). These influences, which are handed down specifically by parents, include parental education attainment, parental aspirations for their children, parental encouragement, parental level of education, and parental resources (Bourdieu, 1977; Hossler, Schmidt, & Vesper, 1999; Kim & Schneider, 2005; Stephens et al., 2012). Bourdieu (1997) classified three separate facets of cultural capital: institutionalized (academic credentials), embodied (disposition or self), and objectified (cultural "goods" owned). These three states, Bourdieu claimed, create natural cultural distinctions or "tastes" and in the process, create a form of intergenerational capital transmission.

According to Bourdieu (1977), this paradigm of class analysis explains inequalities in educational stratification. Bourdieu argued that in schools, both pedagogy and teachers' actions promote the cultural capital of the middle class; those exposed to middle class values within their home environments are at an advantage and understand the rules of the game. On the other hand, those who adhere to other values systems, specifically of the culture of poverty, are at a distinct disadvantage. They lack the necessary cultural capital and feel excluded. As such, schools perpetuate social stratification and as such they become agents of social exclusion and reproduction.

Bourdieu's Theory of Habitus. Bourdieu (1986) expanded his original Theory of Social Reproduction to include how one's perceived place in the world affects the deeply ingrained thought patterns, skills, and attitudes that are related to the type of cultural capital one can access. This "place in the world" is referred to as habitus, a cognitive system of structures embedded within society typically referred to as one's disposition or attitude. Habitus is a created through one's socialization with the world and is distinctive culture. Bourdieu suggested that habitus and cultural capital form together to beliefs, preferences, and assumptions that are indicative of culture; these "tastes" have the ability to constrain both thought and action. However, Bourdieu noted that that habitus is fluid; it is not so ingrained that it cannot be changed or adapted. The problem, however, is that it is often mistakenly believed that some people are naturally disposed to particular things. Bourdieu argued that this thought process seeps into education and further lends to social stratification. It regulates both objectivity and subjectivity – changing the way one perceives themselves and others as well as one's thoughts and actions.

Perna's Theory of Capital Deficiency. Sociologist Laura Perna (2006) expanded Bourdieu's theories to explain achievement in college and college choice. Placing the role of human capital at the center of her theory and surrounding it with the theories of cultural capital and habitus, Perna explained that the compounding factors of cultural capital and habitus come together to create human capital. Human capital, according to Perna, highlights how deficiencies in educational preparation and access to financial resources affect individual disposition or habitus, especially towards higher education. Perna asserted that these factors not only affect college choice but also play a role in academic achievement and educational attainment. Perna

believed that human capital is diminished in communities of low socioeconomic status, which further lends to societal stratification.

Capital and postsecondary education. Engberg and Allen (2011) studied the cultural capital factors that influenced postsecondary experiences in low-income students. Using data from the Educational Longitudinal Study, they studied data from over 900,000 students of low socioeconomic status from 15,000 different high schools. Their research revealed that the more low-income students surrounded themselves with social networks that encouraged postsecondary completion, the more likely they were to attend college. Furthermore, they concluded that students whose peers attended college were more likely to also enroll in college, demonstrating the importance of cultural capital in the decision to even begin a college career.

While Engberg and Allen (2011) found that when students surrounded themselves with positive role models who encouraged their college completion, Lucas (2011) studied social messages that occurred in blue-collar families and found that in low-income settings, social messages were not always encouraging. Using a sample of 25 families, Lucas studied social, specifically familial, messages regarding careers and education. She found that the social messages that are heard have a significant effect on career goals and affects the types of employment opportunities that are presented to children. Additionally, these messages implied whether or not a specific job was attainable and influenced children's educational aspirations. Those living in poverty had limited social capital and frequently, family, friends and neighbors serve as the primary social system of those living within poverty (Payne, 2008; Stephens et al., 2012), yet the social models in low-income settings generally did not inspire upward mobility (Lucas, 2011).

Rytina (1992) explained that decades of research have proven the theory of "status continuity" − that, rather than explore career opportunities, children have followed in their families' footsteps, often pursuing the same occupation of their family members, specifically the male parent. Using survey data from over 8,000 individual cases, Rytina explored intergenerational continuity of occupation. He concluded that socioeconomic status is a direct indicator of economic mobility or immobility, showing that the SES one was raised in is likely the status they will continue to live within, further limiting the social mobility of those raised within a culture of poverty.

Using longitudinal data gathered from nearly 5,000 respondents, Kraaykamp and Koen van Eijck (2010) analyzed the impact of cultural capital in the process of intergenerational transmission of resources. They reviewed all three states of Bourdieu's (1977) capital, institutionalized (academic credentials), embodied (disposition or self), and objectified (cultural "goods" owned), and studied the effects of each of these states as they have been transferred from parent to child. They found that a strong intergenerational transmission of culture occurs between parent and child in all three cultural capital states. They called this process cultural reproduction and cited several examples of this phenomenon. For instance, they found that highly educated parents provided their children with the resources that allowed them to do well in school, thereby promoting educational and economic mobility. Because those living within poverty often come from households lacking quality educational experiences, institutionalized cultural capital is often lacking.

Chantarat and Barrett (2012) studied poverty's effect on social networking and social capital. They hypothesized that social networks play a role in facilitating the escape from

poverty. Using simulated data for various economic predictors, Chantarat and Barrett used comparative statistics to determine the effect social capital has on economic mobility. They found that building a strong social network does facilitate economic mobility, but that it is oftentimes very costly and financially out of reach to those living in poverty. Additionally, they determined that the usefulness of social capital depends on the structure of the economy in which the individuals reside. In other words, building a strong social network within a community of poverty can multiply poverty's effects (Chantarat & Barrett, 2012). Since most people living within the culture of poverty reside in poverty-stricken neighborhoods, there is little value in social capital; people in this situation often opt out of social networking and instead choose social isolation. Chantarat and Barrett (2012) concluded that individuals living within poverty generally build their social network from within their own family and that those with poorly developed social capital are less likely to escape poverty.

The Hidden Rules of Poverty: Norms and Values

There are several differences between the values held by those raised in poverty and those raised in the middle class (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990, 1994). These differences are exemplified in almost all aspects of life, including such things political and religious beliefs, tastes in art and literature, job choice, even language and food preference. Central to this idea is the notion of habitus. Habitus and cultural capital are specific to the culture in which one was raised. The variance between the norms of the middle class and poverty affect the interaction between these two groups, and the result is a cultural mismatch that is often misunderstood.

Independence versus interdependence. In a collection of theoretical and empirical studies, Markus and Kitayama (2008) studied the notion of the self and how understanding of the

self is rooted in sociocultural norms. According to Markus and Kitayama (2008), the self develops through "…collaborative interaction with others and the social environment" (p. 421) and is strongly related to cultural values. Economic factors contribute to these values, creating patterns of independence and interdependence within different socioeconomic strata (Markus & Kitayama, 2008). One of the most significant differences between the culture and climate of poverty and middle class lies within the difference between interdependence and independence (Payne, 2005; Stephens et al., 2012).

In cultures of poverty, there is a strong connection and reliance on family, friends, and neighbors (Engberg & Allen, 2011; Hand & Miller-Payne, 2008; Stephens et al., 2012). This connection facilitates a culture of interdependence. Those living within poverty typically rely on their family and friends not only for financial support but also for advice, information, childcare, transportation, and emotional support and believe that returning this type of support outweighs independence (Hand & Miller-Payne, 2008; Payne, 2008; Stephens et al., 2012). In cultures of poverty, social interconnection binds neighborhoods together in an attempt to maintain safety and well-being (Cagney, Glass, Skarpuski, Barnes, Schwartz, & Mendes de Leon, 2009). This interdependence stems from the fact that financial resources are scarce, and to "make it," people need each other (Payne, 2008; Stephens, et al., 2012).

The deep interconnection in cultures of poverty places emphasis on the needs of others over the needs of the self. The "It's not all about you" mentality is typically inscribed in the mind of young children and follows them throughout life. In the culture of poverty, focus is on others rather than the self. Snibbe and Markus' (2005) study illustrates this point. Using educational achievement as an indicator of socioeconomic status, Snibbe and Markus (2005) studied

differences of preference as well as the reaction to choice in varied socioeconomic groups in over 14,000 people. Their results revealed that individuals from working classes react less strongly to having their choices denied than do individuals from the middle class; choice is not always given in working class environments whereas in middle class environments, it is expected. In poverty, emphasis is placed on consideration of others' needs, reaction to those needs, adjusting to others' expectations, and being a member of one's community (Stephens et al., 2008) rather than on the self.

The middle class, on the other hand, encourages independence (Engberg & Allen, 2011; Payne, 2008; Stephens et al., 2012; Stuber, 2009). Those raised within the middle class are encouraged to experience life on their own and are further encouraged to think for themselves, make their own decisions, and exercise self-control and personal choice (Engberg & Allen, 2011; Hand & Miller-Payne, 2008; Stephens et al., 2012; Stuber, 2009). Those within the middle class take pride in separating and distinguishing themselves from the rest of society whereas those living in poverty strive to just "fit in" (Engberg & Allen, 2011; Payne, 2008; Stephens et al., 2012).

Stephens et al. (2012) studied the difference in the cultural values of higher education compared to the cultural values of first generation students, who primarily come from a lower socioeconomic background. Using survey data from gathered from university administrators and incoming freshman students from 75 public and private postsecondary institutions, they found that independence (charting one's own course) is normative of the culture of higher education institutions and that interdependence (being part of a community) motivates first generation

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students. This cultural mismatch hindered first generation students' academic performance, creating a performance gap between middle class and lower class students.

Because the general feeling of those living within poverty is that of despair and there is little time to focus on anything other than survival, the belief in fate is strong; the notion of choice is rarely considered (Payne, 2008; Payne & DeVol, 2006). Decisions are made based on survival. Conversely, the middle class typically spends time planning for the future, and consideration to achievement rather than survival is vital within this group (Payne, 2008; Payne & DeVol, 2006). Those within the middle class also spend a great deal of time planning, as the general belief is that good or bad choices in the present can affect the future (Payne, 2008; Stephens et al., 2012).

The focus on interdependence affects the values systems of those living within poverty. Among those living within poverty, people are valued above all else, and much time is devoted to building and maintaining relationships between those who are like-minded (Payne, 2008). Knowledge of the hidden rules then becomes important because these rules affect relationships; when a hidden rule is broken, offense is taken, and the relationship cannot develop (Payne, 2008; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995). Additionally, because the underlying thought is that people need one another to get by, maintaining existing relationships is considered to be necessary for survival (Payne, 2008; Stephens et al., 2012).

The need for community is strong within the culture of poverty, but the need for a sense of belonging is even stronger. Due to the cultural mismatch and feeling of being misplaced, students from low socioeconomic status rarely feel connected to their campuses (Stephens et al.,

2012) and often feel a stronger connection to their "home" culture (Hand & Miller-Payne, 2008).

They often feel drawn back to their families and the culture with which they can relate.

Family structure in poverty. Family structure of those living within poverty is often much different from that of the middle class. In cultures of poverty, the family unit is typically comprised of children and one caregiver. Often, that caregiver is not a biological parent but is an aunt, grandparent, or cousin (Berger, 2007; Farah, et al., 2006; O'Connor, 1997). Single parenthood is very common, as is a parent-partner (non-biological parent) structure whereas middle class families are generally made up of a nuclear family structure (Berger, 2007). The family structure of poverty has a strong influence on the ways children are raised, their emotional and cognitive development, and their subsequent academic experiences. Several studies have been conducted on poverty stricken family units to better understand the difference between child raising in poverty and in the middle class (Berger, 2007; O'Connor, 1997).

To determine the relationship between socioeconomic status and level of parenting, Berger (2007) conducted over 25,000 child-wave observations of children who were identified through interview data collected by the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth. He found that in single parent households, the typical family unit of those living in poverty, level of parenting increases as income increases. Those living with little income generally provide lower quality parenting. Additionally, Berger (2007) found that as maternal work hours increased, the level of parenting given decreased; furthermore, children whose mothers worked long hours received a lower quality of care. Because those living in poverty often work low paying jobs and must work long hours, the lack of resources and stress of finances often interferes with the quality of parenting, which Berger defined as substandard parenting. Substandard parenting has been

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associated with a lack of parental warmth, limited outings, low cognitive stimulation, lack of learning materials, problems with the home's physical structure, use of corporal punishment, and frequent accidents requiring medical care (Berger, 2007). This type of parenting coupled with low socioeconomic status has a profound effect on neurocognitive development.

To illustrate the difference in neurocognitive functioning between socioeconomic strata, Farah et al. (2006), administered a battery of tasks designed to assess neuro-cognition to 30 low socioeconomic status students and 30 middle class students and compared their scores. They found that while the students of low socioeconomic status do not exhibit a lack of cognition, their neurocognitive abilities, specifically working memory, cognitive control, language and memory are often disproportionate to their middle class peers. These delays put children of poverty at risk of developmental delays and lead to lower achievement, poorer test scores, and below average school achievement, leaving children of poverty at a distinct academic disadvantage compared to their middle class peers (Farah et al., 2006).

The family structure of poverty also affects educational experiences. Parental involvement in schooling is associated with academic achievement (Hill & Tyson, 2009). This involvement can come in many forms including assisting with homework and school projects and participating in school events. Students whose parents are involved in their education earn higher grade point averages and experience a sense of accomplishment; experiencing academic success is a milestone in adolescence that is carried throughout life, ultimately affecting later academic experiences (Chen & Gregory, 2009). However, the stress associated with the culture of poverty often prohibits parents from fully engaging in their child's learning experience (Eamon & Altshuler, 2004). Additionally, studies suggest that in cultures of poverty, parents

may not have adequate resources like a computer or Internet connection, may lack knowledge of the subject material, or may be unavailable due to work scheduling (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2008).

Gordon (2014) conducted a nation-wide study involving data representing over 20,000 adolescent students to determine if community poverty affected school level parental involvement and adolescent academic achievement. Her results suggested that adolescent academic achievement is positively associated with school-related parental involvement, yet in communities of poverty, school-related parental involvement was less effective than it was in more affluent communities. As such, it can be suggested that parents are more effective in assisting their children in school when they live in more affluent communities.

Home life is directly related to habitus and available capital. Students who were raised within families of poverty develop a disposition towards education that follows them on their postsecondary education journey. This disposition is often stronger than their will to persist to graduation.

The language of poverty. In addition to cultural capital, Bourdieu (1990) proposed that cultures have their own linguistic capital as well. According to Bourdieu, linguistic capital is mastery of language and then means of communication acquired from and used around one's surrounding culture. Like all cultures, those living within poverty also have their own language characteristics, specifically in the areas of language acquisition, language diversity, vocabulary, register, discourse, and story structure (Dudley-Marling & Lucas, 2009; Hart & Risley, 1995; Payne, 2008; Payne & DeVol, 2006); however, there is a lack of empirical literature focusing on language acquisition and development in poverty. The language of poverty varies greatly from

that of the middle class, though, which can cause misunderstandings in communication and behavior. Children of poverty often acquire less than adequate communication skills, putting them at a distinct disadvantage in academia, especially in the areas of reading and writing.

Through their work with The Family Life Project, Vernon-Feagans and Cox (2013) studied the development of children of rural poverty throughout their first three years of life. The Family Life Project is currently studying 1,100 families in rural North Carolina and Pennsylvania who are at or below the line of poverty. Results from Vernon-Feagans and Cox's (2013) study of nearly 1,200 children showed that socioeconomic status and parental involvement have a direct effect on the acquisition of language. They found that maternal verbal behaviors are predictive of the way children learn language; the more children are spoken to through concrete language use, the earlier they begin talking (Abraham, Crais, & Vernon-Feagans, 2013). The problem with this is that their research also showed that maternal verbal behaviors in families of poverty often lack diversity and vocabulary development. Therefore, children of poverty are at a distinct disadvantage in terms of language development.

Recognizing that family risk factors associated with poverty and maternal education are strongly related to language development, Abraham, Crais and Vernon-Feagans (2013) along with the Family Life Project investigated the role these risk factors play with variation in early language. Using a sample of nearly 1,300 low-income children in six rural counties, they examined the role a chaotic life played in language development by conducting a series of home observations over the course of 36 months. To define chaos, the researchers examined the disorganization within the home, particularly density, noise, and messiness (which are typically observed in poverty stricken households) and the instability in the home (including changing

caregivers, moving households, and changes in people living in the household). Using indicators

of language development, they correlated chronic chaos' role in language development. They

found that children's exposure to a chronically chaotic household is related to poor language

development during early life, when the most critical language skills are developed.

According to Huttenlocher, Waterfall, Vasilyeva, Vevea and Hedges (2010), the most

important language skills are learned between 14 and 46 months of age. They studied the

relationship between caregiver speech and child language development using data gathered from

day-to-day observations of 47 families in order to measure the diversity of speech in children.

They found that caregiver speech, specifically related to lexical diversity (the number of different

words spoken), constituent diversity (the use of "optional" words like adverbs, adjectives, and

qualifiers), and clausal diversity (the different ways of combining clauses) correlated with child

speech patterns. They also found that socioeconomic status is a high predictor of language

diversity and that language diversities were often less likely to occur in households of low

socioeconomic status, thereby causing delayed development of language diversity in children of

poverty. This delayed development of language skills follows those from poverty throughout

their lives, ultimately affecting the ways in which these individuals communicate.

Perhaps the most profound difference in language between classes is vocabulary. Hart

and Risely (1995) discovered what they refer to as the "30 Million Word Gap." Over the course

of several years, Hart and Risely studied the vocabulary development of children living within

poverty, those raised within the middle class, and children living among the professional,

wealthy class. By placing recording devices within participant's homes, they collected

information regarding the kinds of words that were used within households of different

socioeconomic statuses. Through their study, they discovered that the number of different words spoken within the homes varied by socioeconomic status, clearly influencing the vocabulary development of children within these homes. Less educated parents displayed a more limited vocabulary and less complicated syntax. They found that children in professional families heard more than four times the words per hour than children of poverty and by age three children of professional families had a vocabulary nearly three times that of a child of poverty. They predicted that over the course of a lifetime, children raised in professional homes learn 30 million words more than those children raised within poverty. Lack of vocabulary development affects reading skills, which have often been cited as the key to academic success (Hart & Risely, 2003). Hart and Risley (2005) also concluded that children learn their language directly from their parents, and those children living within generational poverty experience a language breakdown compared to their upper class peers.

Children of poverty also have been shown to lack understanding of the formal register. Every language in the world has five registers: frozen, formal, consultative, casual, and intimate. Frozen register is language that remains unchanged (prayers, oaths, and so on). Formal register is the standard register for work and school; casual, on the other hand, is used between friends, while intimate register is used between lovers. Consultative register is used in conversations that utilize formal register but consultative register utilizes a different discourse pattern (Joos, 1967). While frozen, consultative, and intimate language registers are much the same between those in poverty and the middle class, casual register is the "language of choice" of those living within poverty (Payne, 2008). Although the middle class utilizes casual register in conversation, formal register is known and can be spoken and written; those living in poverty generally lack

knowledge formal register and must be formally trained in its use (Knestrict & Schoensteadt, 2005; Payne, 2008).

Knestrict and Schoensteadt (2005) observed children at one school in order to better understand the use of register in children. They found that teaching "code switching" − or the idea of changing registers from social to formal based on the situation − helped students to better understand the difference between registers. This, they claimed, is advantageous to students because the formal register is the register used in schools and on standardized exams. Because children of poverty rarely experience the use of formal register, this method of teaching assists these children to better understand the formal register and consequently helps them to experience greater levels of academic success.

The environment of poverty. Living within poverty often adds unique stressors to life (Hughes, 2013). Neighborhoods afflicted with poverty typically experience more crime, less employment, limited healthcare, insufficient housing, and malnutrition (Hughes, 2013). This can affect both mental and physical health and an increase of related health issues, anxiety, depression, and fear (Shipler, 2004).

The environment of poverty is one that is generally not healthy. Studies have revealed that poverty stricken neighborhoods are not as healthy as more affluent neighborhoods. Those living in poverty experience frequent illness, often lack medical insurance, and do not have easy access to healthcare facilities (Balfour & Kaplan, 2002). Within climates and cultures of poverty, it is often customary to seek medical attention only in cases of emergency (Shipler, 2004). This is especially true of rural populations where access to healthcare is diminished. Therefore, there

are higher incidences of untreated illness that leads to a higher mortality rate (Balfour & Kaplan, 2002).

Peña and Bacallao (2002) posited that poverty is one of the most prevalent risk factors for ill health due to related stressors and lack of nutrition experienced by those living in poverty. One of the main culprits for this decreased health, according to Peña and Bacallao, is under-nutrition. Under-nutrition affects the entire lifespan beginning in utero and following through adulthood. Due to unhealthy eating patterns, inappropriate diet, and a lack of physical activity, those living in poverty experience frequent obesity yet lack nutrition. The illnesses associated with under-nutrition caused decreased quality of life, impaired learning ability, and reduced productivity (Peña & Bacallao, 2002), yet getting adequate nutrition is only one of the many stressors associated with a life of poverty.

The immediate environment in day-to-day life is often difficult for those from poverty. In a survey of nearly 300 children living in rural poverty, Evans and English (2002) found that daily life environment presented multiple stressors that affected cardiovascular and neuroendocrine markers in children. The children who participated in their study reported living in lower-quality homes that were crowded and, in turn, very noisy. They were also more likely to experience more physical turmoil, violence, and family separation compared to their middle class peers. This turmoil causes psychological distress to those living in these situations, which eventually affects health. Individuals who participated in Evans and English's (2002) study experienced a higher resting blood pressure and produced higher levels of cortisol, a hormone associated with experiencing stress.

The chronic stress and psychological distress experienced throughout childhood follows individuals through their life, eventually having long-term effects on academic achievement. Evans and Schamberg (2002) tested the relationship of chronic childhood stress on working memory. They found that the longer someone is exposed to stress, the greater the reduction in working memory is. The constant cardiovascular and neuroendocrine elevations reduce working memory's capacity. For those living in generational poverty, who have experienced these stressors their entire lives, the constant stress has huge implications for information retention and thought processes.

Due to the unique living situations and associated stressors of living in poverty, poverty has long been associated with an increase in psychological problems. In fact, the Centers for Disease Control (2013) reported that those who live in poverty are twice as likely to suffer from depression. Even with the increased risk for mental health disturbances, those living in poverty rarely receive mental health treatment (Santiago, Kaltman & Miranda, 2013). The lack of childcare and reliable transportation coupled with work hours and fear and distrust of clinicians dissuade individuals from seeking care. As a result, those living within poverty often silently suffer from mental illness, further exacerbating their already stressful lives.

Education and Poverty: A Cultural Mismatch

Bourdieu (1979, 1997) and Bowl (2002) have argued that educational success is determined by the cultural capital available to the student. From the very beginnings of American higher education, universities have been places steeped in highbrow culture. According to Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), cultural capital can be advantageous in making a particular environment a familiar place and one in which the person can succeed. Students from

low socioeconomic backgrounds are not familiar with the same cultural capital as those from the middle class, so they experience a cultural mismatch when they enter higher education. Along with available capital is habitus. Habitus affects students' attitude and disposition towards education and can ultimately affect their ability to navigate the system of higher education (Stuart, Lido, & Morgan, 2011), as prior educational experiences affect students' disposition towards education.

The culture and climate of academia. American postsecondary institutions function on middle class values, which are comfortable to students of higher SES backgrounds but leaves lower class students at a serious disadvantage (Walpole, 2003). Because independence is considered to be culturally normative of American higher education institutions (Stephens et al., 2012) and interdependence is common within the culture of poverty, first generation students from poverty are automatically at a disadvantage and often experience difficulty in transitioning from one culture to the other (Hand & Miller-Payne, 2008). While colleges stress the importance of learning to express oneself, students from poverty believe it is appropriate to adjust and respond to the needs of others (Stephens et al., 2012). Additionally, while colleges emphasize the importance of personal preference, opinions and interest, the culture of poverty stresses the adage "it's not all about you" (Stephens et al., 2012). This impedes these students' ability to learn in classrooms that focus on independent learning as well as their ability to navigate the college experience (Stephens et al., 2012).

Many first-generation students of low SES report feeling torn about leaving their old culture behind (Hand & Miller-Payne, 2008; Marsh-McDonald & Schroeder, 2012). A component of interdependence is the need to fit in (Markus & Kitayama, 2010), and those who

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attend college are often no longer seen as fitting in with their families and peers who still live in poverty. However, these students also do not feel that they fit in at college. They report having stronger connections to their home and family life than they do to their campus (Hand & Miller-Payne, 2008; Stuber, 2009). According to Bourdieu (1977), individuals from low SES backgrounds view their group membership as important, sometimes more important than upward mobility.

These students also struggle with time management and often report not having enough time to participate in campus activities (Stuber, 2009) because it interferes with their work schedule (Kim, 2012). While they believe that college will ultimately increase their likelihood of greater financial success (Hand & Miller-Payne, 2008), they often report that completing their coursework is the only necessary requirement of a college education (Stuber, 2009) even though involvement in extracurricular activities positively predicts learning and personal development, is directly related to retention, and increases likelihood of obtaining employment after graduation (Stuber, 2009; Terenzini et al., 2001; Tinto, 1993). They often fail to see in the importance of building a resume in order to experience the cultural traits that influence career attainment (Stuber, 2009). While this belief is common among students of all SES backgrounds, it is especially true of those from poverty, as these students often work more than one job to pay for tuition, have children at home that need tended to, and often do not feel connected to their campus (Payne, 2008; Stuber, 2009).

Stuber (2009) examined the extra-curricular life of 61 students of both working class and upper-middle-class backgrounds from both large, public universities and small, private colleges. She found that upper-middle-class students were more likely to join clubs and organizations,

study abroad, participate in an internship, and join Greek life. She also found that while only 30% of these students worked during the school year, 82% of the lower SES students had a job. Furthermore, she found that when low-SES students did participate in activities, they often did not participate in the same types of activities as their more affluent peers. While upper-middle-class students begin college with the cultural and social capital necessary to succeed, low SES students struggle with fully adjusting to the culture and climate of higher education.

Additionally, many low-income students are also single parent learners who, due to their parenting status, often face additional obstacles. Using a multi-case study format to better understand the effects of single parenthood on academic persistence, Lovett (2009) studied 10 single parent learners at one institution. The results of this study showed that single parent learners often felt that earning a degree was necessary to better provide for their children and ultimately positively affected their desire to pursue postsecondary education; however, the complexity of their lives often interfered with their ability to become fully immersed in their education. Stress, parenting responsibilities, work hours, relationship issues, educational demands, and financial strain significantly affected the time they had to devote to their studies (Lovett, 2009).

Because low-income, first-generation students often struggle with cultural acclimation from an impoverished lifestyle to the lifestyle of a contributing, full-time student, they often do not finish school (Kim, 2011). Due to accrual of debt, they are often left in greater financial distress than they were before entering college (Hand & Miller-Payne, 2008; Stephens et al., 2012). Those first generation students of low SES who do finish and earn a four year degree are often still disadvantaged; while they have completed necessary coursework, they struggle with

entering corporate culture as they still feel rooted in the familiarity of the culture in which they were raised (Hand & Miller-Payne, 2008; Lott, 2002; Stuber, 2009) and often still lack the social capital necessary to enter the professional workforce (Stuber, 2009). According to Walpole (2003) low SES students often earn less that their middle-class peers even after finishing college.

Poverty's effect on previous educational experiences. Rising residential segregation by income has lead to concentrations of high and low-income school districts (Berliner, 2013; Duncan & Murnane, 2014). Students from low-income school districts suffer not only from social problems stemming from their low-income home lives and neighborhoods but also attend schools that have difficulty attracting and retaining high quality educators (Duncan & Murnane, 2014). Because teachers are frequently coming and going from these schools, these students also display a lack of trust towards educators (Stuart, Lido & Morgan, 2011). These schools are also underfunded and understaffed, and students who attend these schools have less access to up-to-date textbooks, technology, and library resources (Orfield, 2009). As a result, students in high poverty schools often receive a lower quality of education leaving them less academically prepared than their middle class peers. Students who attend these schools are likely to have experienced frustration during their K12 years, resulting from a lack of educational resources and low teacher expectations (Stuart, Lido & Morgan, 2011). These early experiences shape students' attitudes (habitus), perspectives, and expectations towards education, often in a negative way, and therefore affect their ability to navigate the world of higher education.

Ross and Kena (2012) found that school-level socioeconomic status had an effect on student performance, citing that students from low SES schools typically achieve less and frequently do not meet United States Department of Education adequate yearly progress (AYP)

marks. Farmer et al. (2006) studied the rate at which students earn AYP at 466 schools in 36 different states that qualified for the nation's Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP), a federal program designed to financially assist rural school districts in meeting the challenges specific to a rural geographical location. They discovered that 72% of the schools that participated in their study did, in fact, achieve AYP. While these results do sound promising, it should be noted a very small percentage of low-income rural schools qualify to be included in REAP. There are actually over 15,000 schools that do not qualify for the REAP program (Farmer et al., 2006). These schools are left to fend for themselves without extra financial allocations, producing a situation that is even grimmer for low-income students.

Students who attend low-income schools regularly score very low on benchmark exams. Berliner (2013) used information from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) exam to determine how students from the United States ranked among each other as well as internationally. Exam scores from the 2007 PISA show that U.S. students who attend schools where less than 10% of the student population qualifies for free or reduced lunch score remarkably high; however, those schools where over 75% of the student population is eligible for free and reduced lunch score incredibly low. Almost 20% of American youth, a total of about 9 million students, attend these high poverty schools (Berliner, 2013). Results from the 2009 PISA were no better. In fact, those U.S. schools with high rates of poverty score second from last internationally yet those schools with less than a 10% rate of poverty scored the highest in the world (Berliner, 2013). These data clearly show that America's upper- and middle- class schools achieve at high levels and those students in lower-income schools do not (Berliner, 2013). This achievement gap has lasting effects on the academic performance of low-income students.

The lower scores often earned by low SES students can keep them from being able to apply to college or even graduating high school (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2001). Upon following the educational achievement of 15,000 low-income students, Cabrera and LaNasa (2001) found that that only 73% of the lowest SES students even finished high school while 98% of the high-income students graduated. Of those low-income students who did finish, only 13% earned the qualifications necessary for acceptance at most four-year colleges, and only 21% of those who earned the necessary qualifications did, in fact, apply to college. On the other hand, 55% of their higher-income peers earned more than the necessary qualifications and 76% of these students applied to college.

As a whole, low-income students have a very different K12 experience compared to their middle class peers. They are often less academically prepared and lack the basic skills expected of college students. These less-than-desirable experiences affect their habitus and leave them with a mediocre outlook towards education and the future in general.

Future orientations and social mobility. Those living within poverty often feel as though there is little opportunity for social mobility. Much of this belief stems from the hidden rules of the culture. For decades, researchers have explored the concept of social reproduction and have found that it has a profound effect on vocational choice and college success. Upon surveying over 400 adolescents, Neblett and Cortina (2005) found that adolescent's perspectives of their parent's jobs often influences the way they think about their futures. In comparing those students whose family members hold professional positions to those students who come from a working class background, Neblett and Cortina (2005) found that students from working class backgrounds are less optimistic about their future. Those students whose parents often are out of

work, work long hours, and work under stressful conditions tend to have a negative future orientation and are less hopeful about their future educational or occupational opportunities (Neblett & Cortina, 2005). Neblett and Cortina (2005) suggested that they only way to buffer this negativity is for parents to support their children in the future orientation they choose.

Often, parents living in poverty do not support their children in their decision to attend college (Neblett & Cortina, 2005) even though Lucas (2011) discovered that parental messages regarding education could entice students to work harder towards attaining a degree. Low socioeconomic students who wish to earn a postsecondary degree often receive conflicting messages from their families and sometimes are even chided for wishing to attend college; this can dissuade them from wanting to attend college altogether (Lucas, 2011). The desire to attend college can negatively affect those seeking a way out of poverty because they are often viewed as leaving behind their social class and are completely rejected from their families; they also often report never feeling fully accepted into their newfound culture (Lucas, 2011).

Kim and Schroeder (2005) have linked the concept of aligned ambition, or the function of social capital, to students' future orientation, specifically educational expectations, educational aspirations, and vocational ambition. The issue becomes that parents in a climate and culture of poverty do not spend enough time articulating desired outcomes for their children (Lucas, 2011). It is often insinuated that attending postsecondary education is out of the question or something that should not be thought about. However, because cultural capital is limited in families of poverty, even when a parent is encouraging a child to attend college, the parents are often limited in their capacity to provide support and information to their children (Kim & Schroeder, 2005).

While the status quo for the middle class is to graduate high school and immediately begin college, in cultures of poverty, college is rarely discussed.

The first in the family. While individuals from the upper-middle class tend to see higher education as normal life progression (Marsh-McDonald & Schroeder, 2012), many students who were raised within a culture of poverty value education yet see it as being unattainable (Payne, 2005). Additionally, those whose parents never attended college often view entering the workforce upon high school graduation as the "right" thing to do (Hand & Miller-Payne, 2008). Parental education level affects students' decisions to attend college; students whose parents have never enrolled in any form of postsecondary education are less likely to enroll in college themselves (Hand & Miller-Payne, 2008) and those who do enroll are less likely to finish than their upper-middle class peers (Kim, 2012). First generation students are also more likely to delay college enrollment, entering college at a non-traditional age (Choy, 2001; Rowan-Kenyon, 2007). They take fewer credits, live at home rather than on-campus, work more than 20 hours per week, lack relationships with their faculty and staff, and attend lower quality schools (American Council on Education, 2006; Bailey & Dynarski, 2011; Engberg & Allen, 2011; Kim, 2011; Stuber, 2009). They generally require more tutoring, mentoring, and social support than their upper middle class peers (Kim, 2011; Stephens et al., 2012) but because of financial concerns, they must work and therefore have less time for campus involvement, tutoring, advising or extra academic support (Stuber, 2009). As a result, they often earn lower grades and experience higher rates of attrition (Kim, 2012).

Because first-generation students have parents who have not attained a college degree, they come from working class backgrounds and have fewer financial resources than their upper-

middle class peers (Bailey & Dynarski, 2011; Stephens et al., 2012). They also have less exposure to middle-class culture and therefore struggle with understanding "the rules of the game" that are normative of many American universities (Payne, 2005; Stephens et al., 2012; Stuber, 2009). This cultural mismatch can hinder their ability to navigate the collegiate system and prohibits them from taking full advantage of collegial opportunities.

Degree completion and outcomes. Both parental level of education and socioeconomic status affect persistence towards degree completion (Ross & Kena, 2012). Students whose parents did not attend postsecondary education typically are less involved in their child's decision to enroll in college. This causes many first generation students to delay entry to college and begin their education when they are older. The National Center for Educational Statistics purports that delayed college entry is directly related to less frequent persistence and degree attainment; when these students do persist to graduation, it typically takes them longer than their peers (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Those students who delay college entry occasionally drop out and reenroll at a later date, but generally do not return to college after dropping out (Ross & Kena, 2012). Overall, students of low SES complete college at a far lower rate than their middle and upper class peers (Choy, 2001). In fact, Bailey and Dynarski (2011) reported that only 9% of low-income students ever obtain a college degree.

In their paper "Gains and Gaps: Changing Inequality in U.S. College Entry and Completion," Bailey and Dynarski (2011) used nearly 70 years' worth of data from the U.S. Census and the National Longitudinal Surveys of Youth to describe the changes in inequality that are prevalent in higher education. In tracking these changes, between the years of 1960 and 1980, upper class students increased their rate of college completion by 18%. During that same

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time period, low-income students experienced an increase in college completion rate of just 4%. Despite efforts to increase postsecondary persistence for low-income students, they are still completing college at a rate far less than their upper class peers.

In order to better understand why low-income students often do not complete their degrees, Walpole (2003) compared roughly 2,400 low-income students and 2,400 high-income students to determine similarities and differences within their experiences in college as well as their life experiences nine years after college entry. Overall, she found that students from low socioeconomic backgrounds "work more, study less, are less involved, and report lower GPAs" than their peers from higher socioeconomic backgrounds (p. 63). Nine years after they enrolled, low SES students "have lower incomes, lower levels of educational attainment, and lower levels of educational aspirations" than those from higher social strata (p. 63). In terms of graduate school completion, low-income students fare far worse than their higher SES peers. Of Walpole's (2003) sample of nearly 5,000 students, far less than 1% of the low SES students had completed a Ph.D. compared to 2% of those from wealthier backgrounds.

Conclusion: Onward and Upward

First generation students of low SES are raised within a climate and culture that is very different than that of higher education. Their life experiences, lack of resources, lack of social and cultural capital, and habitus create obstacles that affect their academic performance and persistence to graduation. Major struggles include the transition from a culture of interdependence to a culture of independence, language deficiencies, high stress home life, lack of time to devote to school, feeling rejected from their friends and families and more. They also typically have less than favorable K12 experiences and often are not academically prepared to

face the rigors of higher education. These disadvantages are often greater than their capacity to persist to graduation, and first generation students of low SES therefore experience lower graduation rates. This affects society as a whole by producing a less talented workforce and further contributes to social immobility.

It is easy to see that low-income students finish school far less often than their more affluent counterparts. Their lack of degree attainment is easy to track. What is difficult to define is the experience of these students as they transition into a very new and foreign culture (Walpole, 2007; Stephens et al., 2012). Much of the available research provides quantitative measurements of this groups' attribute, there is a lack of qualitative research that seeks to understand these students. According to Walpole (2007), in a society that sees education as a means of social mobility, more understanding of low SES students' experiences is needed. The challenge is not in proving that these students finish college at a lower rate than their more affluent peers; the challenges are to understand why these students choose to leave college, to uncover strategies for helping them to be more persistent in the quest to earn a degree, and to inspire postsecondary institutions to seek out ways to retain this group of students. This study will gather the collective voice of low-income, first generation students from a rural context in order to document their lived experiences as they acclimate to the culture of higher education and identify those cultural barriers that deter these students from completing their degrees.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Philosophy and Justification

I have spent my entire life immersed in a rural setting and have worked among first generation students of rural, generational poverty for nearly 15 years. I have experienced and witnessed their struggles firsthand. While it is well documented that first generation and students from low socioeconomic status struggle academically and complete college at a rate much lower than their more affluent peers (Choy, 2001; Haveman & Sneeding, 2006; Kim, 2012; NCES, 2013; Postsecondary Education Opportunity, 2013; Stuber, 2009), little is known about these students' experiences and the cultural mismatch they experience when beginning college (Stephens et al., 2012; Walpole, 2007;), and even less is known about rural students (Hand & Miller-Payne, 2008). Westbrook (2008) explained that ethnography should be used to document the lives of those marginal people who are "inarticulate, outside society's interest, or even oppressed" to provide empirical data about their society and culture (p. 11). This study employed critical ethnographic methodologies including observations, interviews, and artifact investigation in order to gather the collective voice of students of rural poverty who are considered to be one of the most disadvantaged groups of students entering postsecondary institutions.

Through personal involvement in the study context, critical ethnography provided the opportunity to document behavior, attitudes, communication patterns, actions, thoughts, and identify and understand the relationship between social and capital culture and academic success (Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 2013). While understanding the experiences of others was complex, through thick description, participant perspectives and behaviors were accurately

documented in order to describe cultural domains and identify their relationships to the struggles experienced by this unique cohort of students (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010; Schensul & LeCompte, 2015). This approach was used to build theories of cultural capital and explain the ways first generation students within the context of rural, generational poverty think, believe, and behave. These theories guided the study towards defining a problem that had not been clearly identified and identified and described the cultural barriers experienced by students of rural, generational poverty (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010).

Aside from reporting details, this ethnography showed how these details create a web of meaning that builds cultural constructions, therefore generating the understanding of an *emic* (insider's) perspective (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010). Through an in-depth description of the everyday life and behavior of this particular group of students, the results of this study better explain the cultural mismatch experienced by students of rural poverty throughout their journey to attain a degree (Westbrook, 2008).

Research Questions

Obtaining a college degree is becoming increasingly important yet students of low socioeconomic status are among the most handicapped of today's students. Current literature shows that students of low-socioeconomic status complete college less frequently than their upper-middle class peers, but more understanding of the experiences of rural, low-socioeconomic students is needed in order to better support these students as they matriculate. By documenting these students' experiences and identifying cultural constructs that serve as roadblocks to success, this study contributes to the existing literature base by providing an explanation of this phenomenon.

The purpose of this study was to identify the cultural norms, beliefs, language, values assumptions and rituals of first generation college students from rural, low socioeconomic status in order to better understand how social and cultural capital create obstacles that affect persistence in rural, low socioeconomic students. The research questions were geared towards providing a cultural understanding of the experiences of students from rural poverty. Two research questions guided this study. They were:

1) What values assumptions drive the thoughts, actions, choices, behaviors, and decisions of rural, low socioeconomic students?

2) What effect does social and cultural capital have on degree persistence in rural, low socioeconomic students?

Theoretical Framework

This study was designed using Bourdieu's Theory of Social Reproduction and Perna's Theory of Human Capital. Bourdieu's (Bourdieu, 1977, 1979, 1986; Bourdieu & Passerson, 1977) theory offers a paradigm of class analysis that explains how persistent inequalities in education perpetuate social stratification. Central to Bourdieu's theory is the concept of cultural capital or hidden rules that are passed down from generation to generation. These attributes include parental education attainment, parental aspirations for their children, parental encouragement, parental level of education, and parental resources. This transmission of beliefs creates intergenerational capital transmission, which, in turn, creates natural cultural distinctions. These distinctions, according to Perna (2006), affect one's disposition towards education, ultimately becoming a stumbling block to many students from poverty.

Both Bourdieu's (1977, 1979, 1986; Bourdieu & Passerson, 1977) and Perna's (2006) theories have generated significant interest and have influenced the work of both quantitative and qualitative researchers for nearly 30 years. It has been used in both empirical and theoretical research across the globe, yet much of this research has focused on children. Numerous studies have quantified the difference in cultural capital between socioeconomic groups using a Bourdieuian framework (Engberg & Allen, 2011; Chantarat & Barrett, 2012; Kraaykamp & Koen van Eijck, 2010; Lucas, 2011; Rytina, 1992; Stephens et al., 2012), yet studies that seek to understand its implications on postsecondary degree persistence are lacking.

Using a Bourdieuian framework, this study used ethnography to document the lived experiences of students from rural, generational poverty and frame them according to the theories of social reproduction and cultural deficiency. This helped to describe the relationship between social capital and the persistence of low socioeconomic students from the context of rural, generational poverty as well as explain how the intergenerational transmission of culture influences the beliefs, language, values assumptions and rituals of first generation college students from rural, low socioeconomic status. In depth interviews and participant observation were used to provide a window into the world of low SES students.

Variables

Variables for this study followed the framework for identifying variables set forth by LeCompte and Schensul (2010). According to LeCompte and Schensul ethnography begins with initial variables that are identified through existing literature, and these variables are refined throughout the research process. For purposes of this study, initial variables were identified through existing literature about the culture under study and Bourdieu's and Perna's previous

work, and more refined variables were isolated throughout the data collection phases through the process of comparing and contrasting and watching for items that were similar and dissimilar, and separating those things (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010). This process was constant and recursive in nature. All variables − whether they were identified before data collection or emerged as part of data collection − were distinguished from one another to avoid making premature judgment regarding both the identification of and explanation of an item.

Using Bourdieu's (1977, 1979, 1986; Bourdieu & Passerson, 1977) framework of cultural capital and Perna's (2006) framework of cultural deficiency, initial variables relative to the culture and climate of poverty were examined and analyzed. Those variables included cultural norms, beliefs, values, attitudes, behaviors, language, and rituals, but these variables changed and became more refined as cultural patterns were discovered throughout the data collection phases.

Research Design Strategy

In order to capture a holistic account of the culture of rural, generational poverty as it relates to postsecondary educational completion, this study was designed using inductive ethnographic inquiry. According to LeCompte and Schensul (2010), ethnographic inquiry is an effective strategy "when the problem is clear but its causes are not well understood" (p. 37). The current literature base is focused on quantitative research and primarily focuses on the academic attributes that hinder students of low socioeconomic status; it fails to acknowledge the cultural and social factors affects these students' experiences. Along those lines, Merriam (2009) suggested using qualitative inquiry to "understand how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 5). This

study was built from the current literature by gathering the stories that cannot be quantified in order to identify and provide understanding of the values assumptions that serve as barriers to this group of students. The purpose of this study and the research questions fit the five purposes for qualitative research noted by Maxwell (2005):

- Understanding the meaning of events, situations, actions, and accounts of lives and experiences.

- Understanding the context with which participants act, and the influence that this context has on their actions.

- Identifying unanticipated phenomena and influences and generating new grounded theories.

- Understanding the process by which events and actions take place.

- Developing causal explanations. (p. 3)

With the study's purpose in mind, all data collected for this study was qualitative in nature. Data collection took place over the course of two 16-week academic semesters. I served as the primary data collection tool. In order to capture the truest representation of the culture being studied as well as add to the validity of the study, data were collected in multiple formats and from multiple sources including interviews, participant observation, and artifact investigation (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982; Merriam, 2009; Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). This methodological triangulation provided a more comprehensive insight to behavior, as "what people say about their behavior can contrast with their actual actions" (Reeves, Kuper, & Hodges, 2008, p. 514).
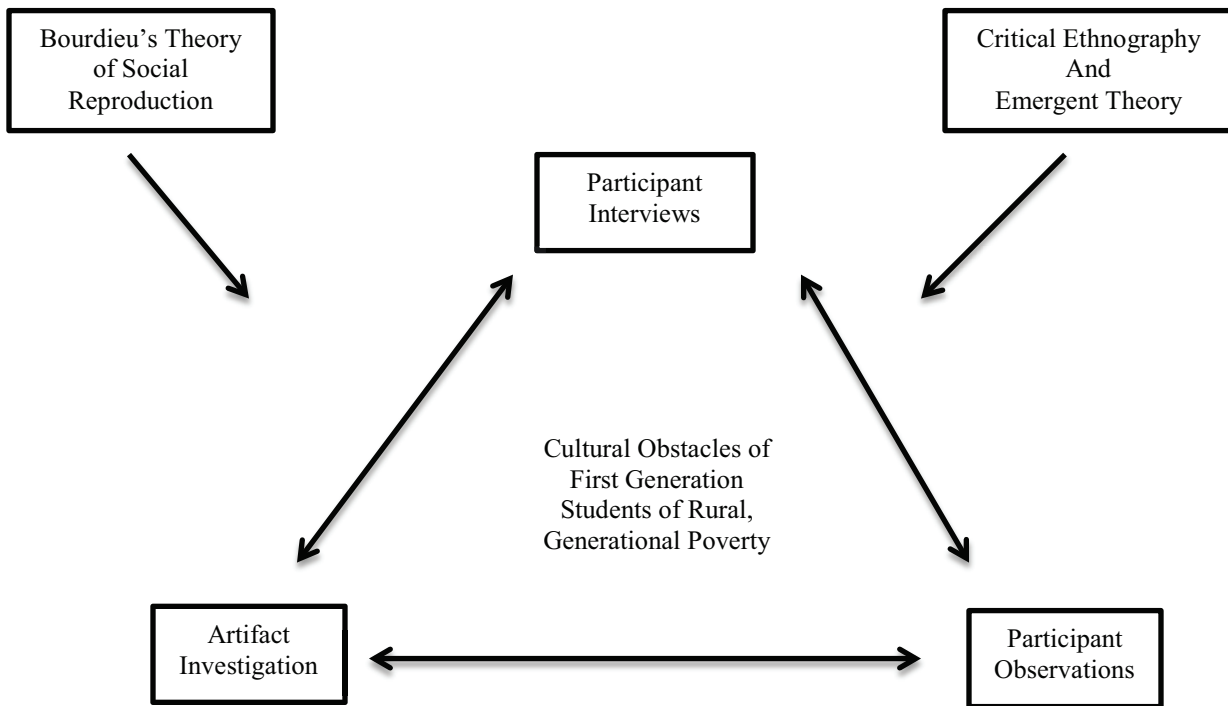
Figure One. Use of Triangulation of Data Sources

The first, large rectangle in Figure One depicts the use of Bourdieu's Theory of Social Reproduction, which provided the theoretical framework and guided the data sources for this study, which are represented in the smaller rectangles. The second, large rectangle portrays the type of data analysis that was used to generate a conclusion regarding the phenomenon under study.

Qualitative analysis software was used to analyze this data. Data analysis was recursive in order to allow themes to emerge naturally through a continuous refinement known as domain analysis.

Sampling Design

The study was conducted on the campus of one private liberal arts college in rural west-central Pennsylvania. It is accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. It is, and always has been, religiously affiliated and is owned by a religious order of Catholic sisters.

This particular institution was chosen due to the large representation of first generation students within its student body as well as its rural setting. Well over half of the roughly 2,500 students enrolled at this campus are the first in their family to pursue a college degree, and 94% of the full time enrollment at this school receives federal student aid or other forms of financial assistance. Additionally, this campus was selected due to its economically distressed, rural setting. The campus is located in the Appalachian Mountains, in a small town with a population less than 1,700. Over 60% of the total enrollment at this campus commutes from the surrounding small towns in the tri-county region. This particular area of Pennsylvania is economically disadvantaged, as the area's two main industries, coalmines and steel mills, closed in the 1980s, leaving the area with few economic resources and a high rate of unemployment and a low overall rate of education. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, only 9% of the surrounding area's population holds a bachelor's degree, and less than 5% holds a graduate degree. This is lower than both the state and the national average.

This study employed criterion-based sampling because it is strong in quality assurance and ensured all participants met the criteria for the study (Merriam, 2009). For the purposes of this study, participants were selected based on the three criteria: rural poverty (they must reside in a rural area or must have lived in a rural area before beginning college), generational poverty (their

family must have been living below the poverty level for at least the past two generations), and student status (they must be first generation students enrolled full time in a postsecondary education setting). For the purposes of this study, rural referred to both population (less than 5,000 residents) and proximity to more metropolitan areas (20 or more miles). The population for this study was comprised of first generation students whose family income was at or below the lines of poverty established by the United States Department of Health and Human Services. Students who were not the first in their family to attend college or first generation students who did not meet financial or residential qualifications were not included in this study.

Because ethnography calls for sampling contexts and behaviors rather than individuals, sampling was examined in terms of the number of interactions that occurred with this particular group of people rather than the number of people selected to participate in the study (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007; Onwuegbuzie & Leech; 2007). In line with Merriam's (2007) recommendation, this study included a minimum of 30 to 50 interviews and/or participant observations of the cultural group under study; however, interviews and observations occurred until redundancy was achieved in the data set. In order to keep the sample within a manageable range that provided enough description, new participants were invited to participate as necessary.

Information regarding students' socioeconomic status was difficult to obtain because it is protected as non-directory information; therefore, rather than rely on institutional records regarding family income to identify participants, a recruitment process inviting participants from the entire campus was used. All students were informed of the option to participate in the study via campus email and through fliers that were hung throughout campus. The researcher also reached out to campus faculty and requested to hold a brief invitational presentation in their

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classrooms. The presentation served as a means to provide students with pertinent information about the study including its purpose, the amount of time participation would take, anticipated risks, and use of results.

Students who volunteered were administered a short questionnaire to verify that their status met the parameters of the study. Those students who met the study's criteria were included. They received two informed consent forms and two documents giving the researcher permission to record interviews; one copy of each form was signed and returned to the researcher to sign and one form was retained for their records. They also each received a copy of the study's debriefing plan. This information included their rights as participants. Appendix A contains a copy of the informed consent form; Appendix B contains a copy of the study's debriefing plan.

Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected over the course of two, 16-week academic semesters: Fall 2015 and Spring 2016. These two phases of data collection utilized several different ethnographic data collection methods, specifically observation, informal and formal key informant interviewing, and artifact investigation (Schensul & LeCompte, 2015). The advantage in using ethnographic methods rested in the ability to gather rich description that described behavior that cannot be measured using quantitative methodologies.

Participant observation. This study utilized two forms of participant observation: observation from a distance and participatory observation. Data were first collected from participant observation from a distance, which was non-participatory and spectator-like. This type of observation was used as an orientation to the culture under study and to minimize my presence in the research setting (Schensul & LeCompte, 2015). This phase of data collection

occurred in locations across campus and included but was not limited to the library, classroom buildings, student centers, and cafeteria as well as at athletic and other campus events. Observation provided a firsthand account of behavior, communication patterns (both verbal and non-verbal), and other cultural traits. Data were collected via handwritten field notes and included descriptive details such as language, speech patterns, choice of clothing, and social interaction as well as social differences and cultural indicators of the group under study. A data observation checklist, based on categories of cultural capital identified by Bourdieu (1977, 1979, 1986; Bourdieu & Passerson, 1977) and human capital identified by Perna (2006), guided this process. See Appendix C for a copy of this checklist.

This study also included participatory observation, a type of observation that permitted observation of and interaction with the study's participants (Schensul & LeCompte, 2015). This type of immersion was key to this study because it allowed me to become involved in participants' routines, which provided the opportunity to gather information about the way things were organized and prioritized in the culture of poverty as well as address topics that may be otherwise uncomfortable (Schensul & LeCompte, 2015). Locations and events that were observed in this manner were determined as the study unfolded and became more focused on specific types of events or interactions that were specific to the study's theoretical framework. Data from this type of observation were collected in field notes, which were transcribed into an account of what happened as soon as possible upon the conclusion of each observation. Detailed field notes documented participant's experiences; individual participant's field notes were identified using only first names, dates, times and settings. In line with Merriam's (2009, pp. 128-129) recommendations, recording devices were not utilized during observations. Instead,

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notes were handwritten during the observation period, and as soon as possible after the observation, the notes that recount the session were transcribed.

Semi-structured and structured interviewing. Key informant interviewing occurred throughout the study in both formal and informal settings. Using key informant interviewing in addition to participant observation helped to corroborate findings and allowed participants to elaborate on findings witnessed during participant observation (Schensul & LeCompte, 2015). Informal key informant interviewing typically occurred spontaneously in the field and took place at any observation and occurred with individuals and groups of participants. Informal interviewing followed the lines of conversation and entailed questioning and listening. These interviews were used to explore themes, identify differences in opinion across the group, better understand the language characteristics used, and gather other data related to the study's theoretical framework.

Formal key informant interviewing, on the other hand, was more in-depth and was designed to allow the participants to speak openly about their personal experiences of adjusting to the culture and climate of higher education. This type of interviewing, according to Schensul and LeCompte (2015), was exploratory and open-ended. Using my field notes as well as the study's theoretical framework as a guide, I designed these interviews with a list of questions that were focused around themes that were identified and explored throughout the observation periods. These questions were used as a guide to probe deeper into cultural indicators that make up the theoretical framework of this study in order to paint a clearer picture of the cultural capital available to this cohort of students. Interviews were recursive in nature and provided the opportunity to engage in conversation with the participants in order to continuously modify and

clarify ideas about what was discovered (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010). These recursive interviews, much like conversations, began with a tentative set of questions and allowed the participants' responses to guide subsequent questions (Yin, 2011). Throughout these interviews, participants also reviewed field notes for accuracy and to provide the researcher with further explanation of observed behaviors. In order to capture participants' stories with accuracy, a digital recorder was used to record each interview and later transcribe the conversations.

Post withdrawal interviews. Given the nature of this study and the type of participants who were included, it was likely that some participants would withdraw from college before the study's conclusion. Students who withdrew from the institution were asked to contact me to inform me of their withdrawal. Those students who did not persist through the conclusion of this study were invited to attend one more key informant interview six months after leaving the setting to follow up on their experiences and better understand why they decided to leave college. While it was difficult to engage these participants after they withdrew, the data obtained from them highlighted the challenges that prohibited them from being successful college students. These interviews took place in locations that were convenient to the participant.

Artifact investigation. Timelines and life histories were collected from the study's participants in order to better learn their history and life experiences. These were written by the participants in narrative and/or list format and given to me to fill in blanks and better understand each participant's life story. These life histories also served as a means of identifying the cultural transmission of culture referenced by Bourdieu (1977, 1979, 1986, 1990, 1994, 1997) as well as how the participants' cultural values influenced their view of education (Perna, 2006).

Data Collection Timeline

Phase I: Fall 2015 (16 weeks)

I. Initiate contact with faculty to schedule short classroom presentations to gain access to research participants.

   a) The introduction to the study was presented in at least 20 classrooms in order to introduce the study to the campus community, explain the parameters for participation, and gain participants.

   b) Those who wished to participate in the study were asked to RSVP via email or phone.

   c) Those who RSVP'd were administered a short demographic survey to ensure they met the sample criterion.

   d) Distributed informed consent and debriefing plan to the sample.

II. Schedule Phase I interviews and observations

   a) Confirmed initial interview times for each participant.

   b) Confirmed observation sites with each participant.

III. Held initial key informant interviews

   a) Key informant interviews were held in private locations that did not reveal the purpose of the meetings.

   b) The purpose of initial key informant interviews was to gather life histories of the participants.

IV. Began observations

a) A minimum of 50 hours of observation occurred during the phase of the study.

b) Observations included both observation from a distance and participatory observation

V. Held follow up interviews

a) Follow up interviews were held in private locations that did not reveal the purpose of the meeting.

b) Follow up interviews consisted of member checking raw data and were used to explain any additional information that was needed.

c) Data collected during observations dictated how many interviews were held.

Phase II: Spring 2016 (16 weeks)

I. Contacted students who left the research setting after the first phase of data collection.

a) Scheduled post-withdrawal interviews with these individuals. These interviews were held in locations that were convenient to the participants; phone interviewing was an option for these participants.

II. Contacted students who were still at the research setting after the first phase of data collection.

a) Confirmed their participation in Phase II.

b) Determined if more participants needed to be recruited.

III. Scheduled interviews/observations for Phase II.

    a) Confirmed initial interview times for each participant.

    b) Confirmed observation sites with each participant.

IV. Held initial key informant interviews

    a) Key informant interviews were held in private locations that did reveal the purpose of the meeting.

    b) The purpose of initial key informant interviews was to gather life histories of the participants.

V. Began observations

    a) A minimum of 50 hours of observation occurred during the phase of the study.

    b) Observations included both observation from a distance and participatory observation

VI. Held follow up interviews

    a) Follow up interviews were held in private locations that did reveal the purpose of the meeting.

    b) Follow up interviews consisted of member checking raw data and were used to explain any additional information that was needed.

    c) Data collected during observations dictated how many interviews were held.

Pilot/Field Test

Upon completion of the questions that were used in structured interviews, I conducted a pilot study to ensure the instrument's validity and internal reliability. The pilot study consisted of a peer review of the instrument and a subsequent discussion of the instrument. I recruited five colleagues from the research setting who have experience with first generation students from rural poverty. These individuals consisted of both faculty and staff.

All participants of the pilot test received an informed consent form, were informed of their rights, and were provided the debriefing document. The purpose of the pilot test was to gather feedback about the instrument and to strengthen its validity by ensuring that the questions asked were essential in understanding the culture under study.

Data Analysis

This study produced a very specialized data set, and for that reason, it was analyzed in a specialized way. Raw data consisted of piles of material that were collected during data collection phases. Alone, these data did not create an ethnography. The raw data were analyzed into a story and then the story was interpreted to convey meaning to those who read it (LeCompte & Schensul, 2013). This interpretation provided an explanation of the results and took on both an *emic* (insider) and *etic* (outsider) approach so that it made sense to all consumers, whether they were an insider or an outsider to this culture. Data analysis occurred simultaneously throughout the data collection process and transpired both in and out of the field. Data collected for this study were analyzed and interpreted using the steps laid forth by LeCompte and Schensul (2013) and followed the study's theoretical framework.

Data analysis began with exploratory analysis in the field that was guided by both the study's research questions as well as its theoretical framework. This process helped identify, clarify, and modify initial impressions and descriptions (LeCompte & Schensul, 2013). It was recursive in nature; as data were analyzed, they were interpreted and put into the context of the research questions and theoretical framework (LeCompte & Schensul, 2013). To do this, data were examined in order to make comparisons, determine what had been learned so far, and decide if what has been learned answers the research questions. Those results were then further examined to see what was left to be learned, and the process began over and over again until redundancy was achieved.

Inscription, transcription, and description. The first steps in this process, inscription, transcription and description, required scrupulous attention to details. It was done to create the database of information from which data were analyzed.

The process followed these three steps:

- Inscription occurred in the field and included the process of thinking about what was observed and determining how it related to the research questions and theoretical framework. Short jottings were used to describe what was observed and was later expanded.

- Transcription was the word-for-word account of what was observed which included direct quotes and attention to the details.

- Description included fleshed out descriptions so as to capture the truest account of what was witnessed during the observation. This process included preliminary analysis and organizing notes around the research questions and theoretical framework.

Tidying up. Tidying up consisted of cataloguing data and served as a way to order the material to see if the research questions had been answered (LeCompte & Schensul, 2013). After transcription, all data were securely stored. Electronic data were stored on a password-protected computer; physical data were stored in a locked file cabinet. The data were ordered and filed according to the event that was observed or the individual who was interviewed. Personal identifiers were removed and random codes were assigned by the researcher. The data were indexed using an alphanumerical system. A data inventory checklist based on the indicators of culture as identified by the study's Bourdieuian framework and existing literature was used to map research questions against the data that were collected. This checklist also served as a means to refine and modify the types of events and interviews that were conducted as part of the data collection phase. For example of data inventory checklist, see Appendix C.

Qualitative Coding. Organized raw data were unhelpful in understanding and interpreting the cultural phenomenon being studied, so data were sorted so that theories and themes emerged (Merriam, 2009). Coding included the cyclical process of organizing data into categories related to the study's framework and research questions (LeCompte & Schensul, 2013). The purpose of this process was to identify cultural structures and patterns in the population under study. Data gathered for this study were read and re-read; phrases, ideas, and concepts related to the study's research questions and theoretical background were notated. These phrases, ideas, and concepts were identified as codes or categories that were applied to sections of data. When necessary, codes or categories were further broken down into sub-categories. This process facilitated continuous refinement of data sets. While much of this

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process was done by hand so that I could be fully immersed in data analysis, data were also be entered into the qualitative software HyperRESEARCH.

The coding process was initially arranged around the indicators of cultural capital identified by Bourdieu (1977, 1979, 1986, 1990, 1994, 1997) and Perna (1997) as well as the indicators revealed in existing literature, yet these categories were refined throughout the coding process. Appendix D outlines the preliminary coding categories that were used throughout data analysis. Spradley's (1979) "Domain Analysis" served as an analysis strategy. Domain Analysis is commonly used in ethnography as a way to discover patterns that exist in cultural behavior (Spradley, 1979). This form of data analysis took on an *emic* perspective and served as a means of identifying domains of meaning associated with the culture under study. Cultural indicators identified by Bourdieu's theory guided this process. Large categories of information were chunked together by identifying information that was related. The large chunks were examined and broken down in ways that followed the theoretical framework. Those chunks were further broken down until the data were saturated and could not be further broken down.

All codes were entered into a codebook that contained a list of the codes as well as the operational definition for each code. This provided a consistent set of definitions to use across the data set and served as a standard reference for remaining analysis. These codes served as variables, which were labeled, and entered into HyperRESEARCH.

Writing Results. Describing the phenomena was the foundation upon which this study was built (Cresswell, 2008). In this step I became the storyteller, and I wrote results in a way that invited readers to read what was witnessed in order to better understand the culture, values, and experiences of the study's participants. Data were written in a manner that presented a thick

description of the events, conversations, mannerisms, and other cultural identifiers observed during data collection. It provided a detailed translation of information about the research setting, the individuals involved, and the events that occurred during the study.

To do this, the coded and analyzed data was arranged into meaningful stories that were organized in a way that facilitated understanding of the culture under study (LeCompte & Schensul, 2013). These stories consisted of vignettes, explanations of social processes, summaries of interview data, quotations, and narratives and share an accurate account and full picture of the cultural scene of students of rural, generational poverty using the theoretical framework as a guide. This interpretation served as a means to best answer the research questions and spell out the significance of the findings.

Limitations of Methodology

- All research designs are limited in some ways. The primary limitation of ethnographic research concerns reliability, specifically with replication of the study (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010; Nurani, 2008). This study occurred in the participants' natural setting, and this setting would be difficult, if not impossible, to reproduce. However, this study provided an accurate portrayal of one cultural phenomenon that will hopefully stimulate future research questions rather than provide generalized information (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010). Still, to address the issue of generalizability, this study included a comprehensive description of the methodology and data analysis so that researchers who wish to replicate the study in another setting or context could follow the same methods and analysis. This will assist future researchers in conducting the same type of study in a different location and with a different group of people.

- This study was a highly localized form of research (Shadish, 1995), and it would be difficult to generalize these results so that they apply to the broader public. This study focused on qualities and patterns that were common to the climate and culture of rural, generational poverty rather than focusing on qualities and patterns that are common to the particular geographic area of the research setting. In doing so, the results were generalizable among many different rural areas, not just the specific area being studied. Furthermore, by providing a detailed description of the methodology used and data analysis, future researchers will be able to conduct this study on similar economic or cultural groups in different geographical locations.

- A third limitation of this ethnography was researcher bias. In ethnographic studies, the researcher is the primary data collection tool (Merriam, 2009). Field notes are a common method of data collection in ethnography. Because I was writing my own field notes, my own bias could have seeped into my notes. To eliminate this possibility, I engaged participants in member checking of both field notes and interview transcriptions to ensure interactions and responses are accurately recorded. To further eliminate the potential for bias, I participated in a series of bracketing interviews. According to Cresswell (2008), bracketing allows the researcher to bracket − or set aside and understand − their own preconceived ideas about the subject and enter the study without bias. I also kept a subjectivity journal, which Schensul, Schensul and LeCompte (2013) recommend to serve as a location for recording subjectivities and musings that are not included as part of the data set.

- A fourth limitation was the potential for the Hawthorne Effect. According to McCartney, Warner, Lilffee, van Haselen, Griffin, and Fisher (2013), Hawthorne Effect is a theory regarding how participants' involvement in research has the potential to change their behavior. While it is possible that participation in this study affected student persistence by way of Hawthorne Effect, throughout observation and key informant interviewing, data were collected and no advice was given. This practice was clearly stated in the informed consent form that each participant signed before the study began. Although no interventions were provided to the participants during any part of this study, any questions that were asked or advice that was solicited was tracked.

- A final limitation of this study was researcher positionality. I have been employed at the research setting for 16 years and am known by most students. This position of authority could influence participant responses. While LeCompte and Schensul (2010) recommended ethnographers learn as much as possible about their research setting before beginning data collection, they also caution that ethnographers learn to suspend their knowledge and enter the field as a learner. The bracketing interviews conducted before data collection began helped me to set aside previously known information about the setting. However, given that I am in a position of authority at the institution, there exists the possibility that participants felt coerced to "tell the researcher what they want to hear" (Schensul, Schensul & LeCompte, 2013, p. 34). To address this challenge, participants were informed throughout the study that their participation would have no bearing on their status at the institution. None of the participants were enrolled in any of my courses

or employed in my department. There was no reward or punishment the information provided. This information was clearly stated in the informed consent.

Ethical Considerations

This study required adherence to ethical guidelines to ensure both participant safety and reliability and validity of the study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Cresswell, 2008; Merriam, 2009). In qualitative research, however, validity and reliability rests on the ethics of the researcher (Merriam, 2009, p. 228). As such, the researcher must ensure that he/she is carrying out his/her study with integrity. Merriam (2009 p. 233) provided an ethical consideration checklist that qualitative researchers should adhere to when conducting their study. This list was followed throughout this study as described.

Given the nature of this study, there was little inherent risk to participants. At no time were participants in risk of physical harm. This study, however, required participants to call upon events that may be uncomfortable or emotionally unsettling. This risk was revealed to all participants during the recruitment phase. Due to the risk of unsettled emotions, this study included a debriefing plan, which was disseminated to all participants during the initial interview. Additionally, all participants had the option of withdrawing from the study at any time, and those who withdraw had the option to request that any data collected about them be destroyed. This information as well as the debriefing plan and an informed consent form was disseminated at the initial interview.

Data gathered throughout the study were kept confidential. No information that would reveal the participants' identity was included. Names were changed, and interviews were held in areas that did not reveal the purpose of the meetings. Participant confidentiality was considered

throughout all observations. Because the researcher is already known within the research setting, it is unlikely that her presence drew attention. To ensure that data remained confidential, all materials gathered throughout the study were stored securely so that no one other than the researcher would have access to this information. Electronic data were stored on a password-protected computer; physical materials such as field notes, interview transcripts, and interview recordings were kept in a locked safe. For publication purposes, all materials will be securely stored for five years after the conclusion of the study; it will then be destroyed.

Participants were continuously reminded that their participation in the study would not influence their academic standing within the research setting. The researcher did not, at any point, have any participants in class, be in authority to sway participant grades, give those who participate any preferential treatment, or employ any participants as student workers.

Chapter Four: Results

The ultimate purpose of this study was to identify the cultural norms, beliefs, language,

values assumptions, and rituals of first generation students of rural, low socioeconomic status in

order to better understand the obstacles that affect their academic persistence. The study utilized

critical ethnographic methods to determine how cultural capital affected the persistence of

economically disadvantaged students from rural areas. Data were collected from October 2015

through May 2016.

This chapter explores the study's results. It is broken down into three sections. The first

section contains excerpts of collected data that have been paired with the coding categories and

subcategories used to analyze the data. The second section further explains the dominant values

present in the data. The third section concludes this chapter and provides data regarding the

persistence rate of each student who participated in this study. To protect the privacy of each

participant, names were not included in the data; participants were instead referenced by a code

assigned by the researcher.

Section One: Coding Categories

Coping Skills: Ways participants dealt with stressful situations

Resiliency
- Her house caught on fire the week before Thanksgiving and the kitchen burned The family had no fire insurance. They lost their stove and all of their dishes, pots, pans, and most other kitchen wares. The other girls are questioning her about how her family will still be able to have a Thanksgiving dinner and she is trying to explain that the family is just happy to have survived. She tells them she's happy she won't have to eat the foods she doesn't like and that it will be cool to have pizza instead of turkey. The other girls don't understand. She keeps trying to tell them the family bounces back quickly.
- "What doesn't kill ya makes ya stronger," she says (EAVQ).

- Her daughter became pregnant at the age of 15. She and her three children were already struggling to get by. She was only 35 herself…an unemployed single mother. She first looked at the baby as "another mouth to feed" but once he was born saw the joy he brought to their lives and then realized he was "the silver lining" (PTHF). They are still struggling, but she says he (the baby) makes life worth living and gives her hope.
- She was 41 and pregnant when her 13-year-old daughter also became pregnant. They were pregnant together! She already had three other kids. She's explaining to a friend (who's young daughter just became pregnant too) that the baby will bring her family closer together. It will be okay she says. It will be great. You'll be so happy. She never mentions the struggle of raising two babies in the same house with one income but talks about the joy the babies bring to her family. "I just light up when I see them. No matter what happened that day those babies take it all away. I love them so much" (JTHB).
- He got fired from his job as a part time fry cook. He has two kids and his wife is pregnant. She only works part time. They already did not have enough money to survive. He doesn't care because now he will save money because he will save the money he had to use for gas to get to work.
- After failing a heavily weighted paper for writing class, she is scheduling two weeks of tutoring with the writing tutor. She is determined to not fail again.

Resignation
- His car broke down and he missed a week of class. He missed all of his midterms. He doesn't have a computer or Internet at home so he didn't email his professors to let them know what was going on. He met with one of them when he got back. She told him he should have let her know so that she could make arrangements for him but because he didn't, there was nothing he could do to make up the work. He figured all of the professors would say the same thing, so he is not going to bother explaining the situation again. He is okay with failing all of his classes.
- His father got arrested again. He is not sure why he got arrested. His father has been arrested many times and spent most of his life in jail. He did not even ask his grandmother why he got arrested.
- He came home early and caught his wife in bed with their neighbor. The wife is 25 and the neighbor is 56. He has caught her cheating on him many other times – he says more than 20. He is okay with this because she is going to do it even if he tells her not to and because she's not hurting anyone but herself.
- He believes his wife is having sex with other men for gas money and to have odd jobs around the house done. He does not seem to realize that this is prostitution. He is happy because at least his Blazer is filled up. He does not care at all. He is telling his friends this story like I would tell my friends what I have packed in my lunchbox. He is laughing!
- She wasn't going to pass any of her classes, so she just quit going to them. She was going to spend the next month living in the dorms. She did not try to ask anyone for help because "it doesn't matter anyway" (PEMD).
- Her son got arrested again. He had pills in locker at school. "I've given up on him. Nothing I do will change him. He does what he wants to do. He's not going down the path I want him to go down, but what can I do?" (PTHF).

- After finding out he will not be accepted into his major because of a low grade in a gateway course, he is so very melancholy. His friends are trying to cheer him up. One of them suggests retaking the course and trying for a better grade this time, but he tells her he will probably just fail again and thinks there is no sense in wasting more time.
- She quit going to class after she got her midterm grades. She had a 0.0 grade point average. She figured there was no sense trying to pull herself out of this now, so she might as well have fun before she had to leave campus. There are still 8 weeks left.

Escapism and Fantasy
- Several students are playing a role playing game on the computer. Another student comes in. She is visibly upset. She is explaining that there is another female student in her class that she does not like. She cannot figure out why she doesn't like this student but keeps repeating that she just doesn't like the student's face. The two students playing the game stop and create a new character. They act as though this new character is the girl their friend does not like. They proceed to allow the other game characters to rape the new player. They are laughing hysterically. The girl is no longer upset. She is encouraging the other players to use more violence and brutality.
- This particular group of students shares a common love for comic books, games, and Manga. They do not even know each others' names. They have given each other fake names based on their favorite Manga characters. They answer to these names. They introduce themselves with these names. It is like they have dropped their own identity when together and they become someone else. They have not once talked about school or their families. This little group is like a way for them to escape. Get away from what is really bothering them. They are always together yet they are never in reality.
- He drinks. Every day, he smells of leftover beer. "Yeah, I drink about every day. You would too if you were me. When I'm drunk, I don't give a shit anymore. The world could explode, and I wouldn't care. It's easier that way" (HGNB).
- He is sleeping on the couch in the lounge. He hasn't slept in three days because he was playing a video game. He would have stayed home to sleep, but he knew his wife would expect him to watch the kids instead of sending them to daycare. He set the alarm clock on his phone so that he wakes up in time to go home. He says he could not quit playing the game until he took over the kingdom he was trying to gain.

Anxious Avoidance
- He will not talk about his family. He commutes to school but will not say who he lives with. I have tried several times to find out who raised him or who he lives with. Any time I ask, he looks at the time on his phone and says he needs to leave.
- She will not talk about her mother. She said she left home at the age of 15 because "things were bad with mom and her boyfriend" (HTOG). She will not say what specifically was bad. "It was all just bad. Everything. It was terrible" (HTOG). She won't say anything else about it.

- Today they are talking about Christmas shopping. One student is having a hard time coming up with a gift idea for his mom. He asks if anyone has any ideas for a good gift for a mom. She doesn't say a word but closes her books, puts them in her backpack and walks away. Her husband asks this student to not talk about mothers in front of her anymore. He doesn't say why.
- She is studying in the library at 10pm. She has to commute home yet. I ask her if she has a big exam she is preparing for. No. She will wait until 10:30 to leave every night because her husband works night shift and she wants to get home after he leaves so that she doesn't see him. They will fight she says. She says she does this every day. She will either come to school or early or stay late so that she does not have to see him. She is fearful in her own home.
- She got an email from her advisor. She is failing some of her courses and the email said the advisor wants to meet with her to discuss changing her major. She is afraid the advisor will yell at her so she will not schedule an appointment to meet with him. She is asking her friends if there is a way to block her advisor's emails from showing up in her inbox.
- He says his father is an alcoholic who drinks from a coffee mug so that others don't realize he is drinking. He tells me his father did terrible things to his family. He won't tell me what. "It is easier to just never talk about it. No sense in rehashing it all. What's done is done. I can't move on if I keep talking about it" (QWRT).
- She didn't go to class last week because she knew she failed the exam and did not want to see her score.
- She found out that her father moved in with her grandmother. She hates her father, so she will no longer speak with her grandmother.
- When his friend asks him why he hasn't gone to class in two weeks, he explains that he quit going because the professor talked about a topic that made him uncomfortable. He can't attend a class that talks about such topics because they give him anxiety. The topic was gun control. His friend asks why that makes him anxious. He asks the friend if he feels like getting punched.
- She plagiarized a paper so her professor sent her an intervention that said she would be able to resubmit the paper for partial credit. She thinks he is mad at her for cheating so she has decided to not go to the class anymore.
- She is afraid her professors heard of her brother's crime on television, so even though she is coming to campus every day, she will not go to class. She does not want to talk to them about what happened. She is afraid they will ask her questions.

Rationalization
- He and his wife talk about where she has been getting extra money. She tells him she has been prostituting herself for two years with people from her workplace. He is okay with it because she already knows the people she is having sex with so it is not like she is "out fucking strangers" (RARW). He also thinks that in some ways it is a good idea because it is benefitting the whole family. She is using the money she makes to buy what their children need.

- It is okay that he is failing his statistics class because he can take it again. It does not matter that he has to take a higher-level statistics class for his major because he will eventually understand the class.
- He sleeps in and misses class nearly every day, but he explains that there's a reason for that. He doesn't own an alarm clock. He doesn't buy one because he doesn't like to know what time it is.
- Because her car did not pass inspection and she is afraid of getting pulled over, she takes back roads all the way to school so that she doesn't see the police. It adds a full hour onto her commute time each day, but even the wasted gas and extra time is not worth getting the muffler fixed so that she can just take the direct route to campus.
- She is screaming at her tutor. When her tutor asked why she needed to yell, she told the tutor that is what she does when she is frustrated.
- She is failing the course because the instructor doesn't like her.
- He got fired from every job he ever had because "bosses are dicks" (RARW).
- She had to steal the dress from WalMart because she did not have a dress and she needed one to go to the banquet. Everyone else she knew was wearing dresses and she did not have one and didn't have money to buy one.
- Even though he regularly misses class because he does not have money for gas, he drinks three Monster energy drinks per day. It did cost $8 a day, but if he did not drink them, he would not be able to stay awake. He is missing class though because he does not have money for gas.
- She had two black eyes. She said her husband hit her. She explained to her friends that he often got angry when he was drinking, but it wasn't his fault because he honestly did not remember it the next day. He would not have done it if he wasn't drinking, so it was the alcohol's fault, not his.

Entertainment
- She did not buy her psychology textbook because she wanted to finish her tattoo and did not have enough money for both. The tattoo was important because she always wanted a full sleeve. Her life always sucked so she deserved to have the tattoo because it would make her happy. She is a psychology major.
- He missed his night class and did not take his final exam because his favorite baseball team was playing in the play-offs and he needed to watch the game. He emailed his professor and told him that he was sick and asked to take the exam another time. The semester is ending tomorrow.
- He missed work because he lost track of time while playing a video game. His boss fired him.
- There was a concert in Pittsburgh that she really wanted to go to so she did not pay her Internet bill so she could afford to go. She did not think they would turn off the Internet if she only missed one payment. Now she cannot participate in her online class. She cannot stay on campus after class to use the library's computer because she can't afford to pay for the extra hours of daycare.

- Playing video games helps him relax so he plays every night. Sometimes he plays so long that he forgets to do his homework or he plays so late he sleeps in and misses class. He thinks this is admirable because he is "a die hard player and that takes dedication" (JPDN).
- She is upset because she was planning to tell her teacher that she was sick the night before and could not do her homework so that she could go to the basketball game instead of doing her work. When she got to the game, her teacher was there too, so she told her friends she just wouldn't go to class the next day since she wasn't going to do the homework and knew her excuse would not work.
- He could not study for his finals because he had to go watch his son's hockey practice and it was more important that his son knew he cared. He wasn't a hockey coach. He just wanted to watch the practice.
- Life has been hard for her, so she is saving her money to go to Florida to visit her cousin because she just needs a break. She is not eating lunch anymore because she needs the money for a plane ticket. If she saves her lunch money for ten weeks, she can afford the plane ticket. She is sacrificing food for fun.
- One of her goats died over the weekend while giving birth. She performed an autopsy on the goat because it was fun. "Well, it was fun to find out why she died" (BREA).

Aggression: Examples of participants exerting aggressive behavior
Hostility
- She is screaming at the library front desk worker because the staff member that she wants to talk to is not scheduled to be at work for another 30 minutes. She needs to speak to that person immediately. She is screaming at the staff member to call that person right now. The staff member is trying to explain that if she just sits and waits a few minutes, she will be able to speak to the person she is looking for. She does not have 30 minutes to waste. She does not understand why people cannot just do their jobs.
- She threw her laptop at the technology assistant because he told her he would not be able to fix her keyboard. It was missing several keys.
- Now she is yelling at a security guard because there is a scratch on her car. He is trying to explain that there is rust under the scratch so it must have been there awhile. It did not happen today. She is telling him that he is stupid and does not know how to do his job. She knew the scratch was not there and it must have rusted today because it was raining. He is laughing at her.
- She grabbed the papers off the tutor's desk and stormed away because the tutor told her she had done her homework incorrectly. As she was leaving, she was telling other students that she did not pay him to be humiliated. Tutoring is free.
- A group of students is sitting at a table playing cards. Two of the students are married to each other. She makes a play that he does not approve of, so he slapped her in the back of the head. The other students playing look shocked. It does not seem to faze her. She tells the other players she is used to it.
- She is screaming again. I can hear her even though I cannot see her. I do not know who she is screaming at because the door is closed, but I can hear her telling the person "You are stupid" (MIST).

- She is demanding the cafeteria worker allow her to pay for her meal tomorrow. The employee is telling her it is against policy. "FUCK POLICY," she screams, "AND GIVE ME MY FOOD!" (MIST). The cafeteria worker called security. She complied with them when they told her that she would be removed from campus if she did not leave the area.
- She is always angry and never talks to people. She always screams at them. Now she is screaming at the library front desk staff member again because someone else has today's newspaper checked out and she needs it right now!
- He just threw a pool cue at his friend over a football game score.

Bullying
- They are sitting in a circle pretending to watch TV, but they are making fun of every person who walks by. They are making fun of people's clothing and hairstyles. They are made fun of a professor. They really enjoy making fun of foreign students. They even made fun of a disabled person. It seems to make them feel good to point out other's flaws. They laugh and all of them are smiling. They are cheering each other on. There is pride on their faces when everyone laughs at what they said. This has been going on for 45 minutes. They have not talked about anything else. When no one is walking by, they are rehashing the previous remarks.
- She tells me she wants to "Tie the little fuck to a tree" when talking about her three year old cousin who lives with her family (EAVQ). Her friend tells her to be nice because it's a kid. She told her friend to shut up or she would tie her to a tree. Oddly, the friend complied and changed the topic of conversation.
- He makes fun of the traditionally aged students in his class because they were "…born with a silver spoon up their ass" and "…don't know what real problems are" (BJNC).
- She sits alone again – like always. When another student went to sit next to her, she grabbed her book bag off of the floor and threw it down hard on the seat next to her and glared at the woman who tried to sit down. She doesn't want anyone sitting near her.
- She was sitting at a table studying by herself. There are five empty chairs at the table, which is about 8 feet long. Another female student sat at one of the empty chairs. She screamed at the student and told her to go find somewhere else to sit.
- She is growling at the student who is sitting at the computer next to her.
- They are screaming "HEY BITCH" to every woman who walks past them.
- The two of them are in the cafeteria sitting next to a large group of lively girls who are laughing and having fun. These two girls are trying to devise a plan to make the larger group of girls unhappy. They do not think they deserve to be as happy as they are. They want them to be miserable.

Apathy: Behaviors observed that exhibit various levels of apathy
Detachment From Situations
- Almost every day, she says she can't wait to move away from here. She says she wants to be like her sister and never come back. She explains that her sister left 10 years ago and has not spoken to any of her family members since. She wants to be like that. She wants to go where they will never find her again. She doesn't want to be like them.

- She refuses to go home when her husband is there. She hasn't seen him in over three weeks.
- I have been observing him for ten weeks. I must have observed him 15 or more hours. I have never seen him smile. I have never seen him laugh. I have never seen him angry or upset. He seems to have absolutely no emotion whatsoever. He has never expressed concern over anything. It's like he is completely checked out from the world and is simply going through the motions.
- She is alone, always. She never talks to her peers, never talks to her classmates. She says she prefers to be alone.
- He tells is friends he purposely tries to not learn people's names. "Why bother" he says "They won't remember me anyway" (HGNB). He does not even know his professor's names.

Passive Indifference
- He does not seem to care about anything at all. He shrugs his shoulders about everything. He is checking his grades online and tells his friends his highest grade is a D. He shrugs and begins asking his friend if he wants to shoot pool.
- She is telling her friends that her professor advised her to begin covering her breasts when she went to class. The professor told her that last week one of her nipples was visible during class. She told her that people may pass judgment on her because of how she was dressing and may draw conclusions about her that were not true. She also explained that professionals would have a hard time taking her seriously if she was dressed this way. She tells her friends she doesn't care what people think of her and that her clothing was a form of self-expression.
- The students are talking about their grades. One says that she has all F's. Her friend tells her she will fail out of school if she gets a zero GPA. She laughs and tells her friend "It is what it is" (DVBB).
- "If I fail out of this school, I'll transfer to another. Doesn't matter where I go" (PEMD).
- He is not earning the grades he needs to be accepted into his major. He tells his friend "It'll work itself out and if it doesn't, it wasn't supposed to happen" (BJNC).
- Almost daily, she tells her friends "It doesn't matter anyway" (MIGN). She says this about everything. Her grades, her family situation, her financial situation. Everything. Nothing matters anymore.
- When the girls from her class find out that she has a two year old at home, they are very inquisitive and want to know exactly what it was like to get pregnant at such a young age. They want to know what she thought when it happened. She shrugs her shoulders and tells them "shit happens" (DPTT). Her friends want to see a picture of her son and she told them she would rather not.

Lack of Motivation
- He made a tutoring appointment but is going to skip it because he doesn't want to "…walk all the way up there" to the library (RARW). The library is about a three-minute walk from here.

- Her professor recommended she visit the school counselor to discuss her testing anxiety. She doesn't want to go because she thinks the counselor will think she is crazy. Her friend tells her that the counselor is nice. She tells her she doesn't want to meet her because all counselors are crazy.
- She got an intervention for her class. Her professor recommended that she get a tutor for the class. She says she is going to wait another week to get a tutor because she thinks she will be able to figure it out on her own. There are only three weeks left to the semester.
- She will not be able to do her observations for her class because she missed the deadline for turning in her child abuse history clearances. She said it slipped her mind. She cannot pass the class without doing the observations. She says it is no big deal and that she will just repeat the class another time.
- She tells her friends they study too much. Her friends explain that they have to study or they'll get bad grades. She tells her friends she can only study when she's in the mood to study, then admits she is never in the mood to study. She thinks this is hilarious.
- He hasn't been to his 8am class for two weeks because it is cold outside and it's too hard to get out of his warm bed when it is cold.
- He is trying to find out where the nearest food bank is. He and his wife receive food stamps for their three children. They are required to reapply every six months. They forgot to send in the papers, so they did not receive their food stamps this month. They had to make an appointment with their caseworker and the appointment is not for two weeks. Until then, they will have to rely on food banks to get food.
- He hasn't been to class in a few weeks because he doesn't find them interesting.
- He failed out of his major. The letter he was given said that he could appeal the decision by writing a letter to explain why he did not earn the grades he needed. He has decided to not write the letter because there was no sense in doing so.

Pessimism
- "It is what it is" (HGNB, JPDN, QWRT, PTHF, DVBB).
- "Of course I would fail. I've never passed a math test in my life and I probably never will" (RARW).
- "My entire family has bad luck. All the time. About everything. My grandma said someone cursed us years back. We can't do anything to do change it" (EAVQ).
- "My life has always sucked. It probably always will" (VFGH).
- "If shit's gonna happen, it's gonna happen to me. Been like that since I was little" (HTOG).
- "She told me to put one foot in front of the other. You know what? If you do that, you'll trip over your own damned feet" (PEMD).
- "If it's gonna happen, of course it would happen to me. I'm Murphy. I wrote that law" (MIST).
- "My life is so out of control, it'll never come back into orbit. I know that much for sure" (JBDE).
- "I guess it wasn't meant to be" (JPDN).
- "The gods just aren't on my side" (WTGC).
- "God helps he who helps himself? Really? God don't help no one" (TNKP).

- "Nothing has ever worked out for me. Why would it now?" (BJNC).

Trust: Examples of how relationships affected participants
Dependence
- Even though her husband is an alcoholic and beats her, she is living with him because she cannot afford a place of her own.
- He can only come to school when someone drives him because he has never had a driver's license. He misses a lot of school because of this. He lives about 35 miles from campus. He not think of this when he decided to commute to school.
- No one in her family works. She has three children and a boyfriend and no one can work so that she can be in school. She will not get her license back for one more year and needs a ride to school, so he quit work so that he could drive her because her "…schedule fluctuates every day and you never know what to expect" (OWRT). While she is in class, he sits in the library and waits for her.
- She has to spend 8 hours a day on campus because her brother has to drop her off at school on his way to work and then pick her up on the way home. She does not have a car. She couldn't live in the dorms because her mom needs her to help on the farm. So she has to get up at 4am every day to feed the animals, then she stays at school for 8 hours, then she has to clean up after the animals before eating and doing homework.
- She is upset because her mom is mad at her for going to school because she is needed at home to watch the kids. She thinks her mom purposely calls to give her a guilt trip right before exams because she knows it will upset her and she will do poorly on the exam. She thinks her mom is trying to get her to fail out.
- She believes everything her step-father tells her. He told her that JFK killed Martin Luther King. Her friend is trying to show her a YouTube video about this conspiracy. She is refusing to watch is and repeatedly tells her friend, "He wouldn't lie to me" (MING). She is becoming very upset. Her face is red and she is scratching her neck. Her friend won't back down.
- She let her drunk step-father drive her to school because she otherwise would not have had a ride.
- She is 19 and has started to date a 54 year old man because "he has money and I don't" (MING).
- She will not go home when her husband is there, but she stays married to him because otherwise she wouldn't have a home.

Interdependence
- Both the mother and the daughter quit working so they could go to school full time together. They believe they are encouraging each other. "I couldn't do it without her" (PTHF).
- She is passing up a paid internship. The internship begins at 3pm and ends at 7pm. She can't go to it because mom needs her at home to help on the farm. Her mom raised her and she needed to do what was right. She owed this to her mother.

- She tells me her only friends are her goats and she only trusts them. She likes the goats so much because they need her. She's the one who has their food, so they're always happy to see her.
- She is packing to leave campus because her aunt is sick and she needs to help her grandmother. There are only two weeks left to the semester. She has not yet taken her finals. She says she knows her finals are important but her family is more important. She plans to email her professors to see if she can take the exams when she gets back next semester.
- She had to skip class last week because her grandmother was in the hospital and she needed to be there with her.
- She doesn't like her boyfriend. He makes her have sex with him in exchange for rides to school. He is nearly 20 years older than her. She said he repulses her but she does it so she can get to class.
- On Tuesday she found out her friend's boyfriend broke up with her. She decided to go home for the week to be with her. She would be missing an exam and her work study job, but helping her friend was more important than her exam and that her professor would have to understand.
- She moved out of her dorm room to go back home and decided commute to campus the rest of the semester. She felt like she didn't fit in. "I never even heard of half the stuff they'd talk about. Don't care about makeup, don't care about boys. I'm just not like that. I don't feel comfortable. It's much easier at home. I don't belong here" (TVSS).
- Her boyfriend quit his job so that he could drive her to school. He stays in the library playing computer games while she is in class. They have no income right now. Her driver's license has been revoked for DUI.

Optimism and Hopefulness
- Some of the girls are discussing the future over lunch. The topic of conversation revolves around what will happen after they graduate. The general consensus is that they will all get good jobs that will allow them to buy big houses. One wants a house big enough for all of her kids (she has three) to have their own rooms.
- She tells me she wants to finish school so that she doesn't have the kind of life her mom and dad have had. They've both had to work hard and still made little money. Once her dad became disabled, her mom had to work two jobs and her older sister had to take care of them all. She doesn't want her kids to have to wear hand-me-down clothes or things that are too small. She smiles when she talks about this. I've never seen her so happy. She really wants to be able to be able to give her future family a good life – white picket fence style.
- She is sure that when she finishes school, she will be able to get a job that will afford her to get away from her husband. She didn't want to marry him in the first place, and now she just wants away from him. She explains that she doesn't want much, just a place away from him and the peace of mind of knowing she is safe.

- She dreams of buying back her grandmother's horse farm and restoring the old farmhouse. The farm had been in the family well over 100 years. It was her great- great-grandparent's. When her grandma died, her mom and aunts couldn't afford it and they let it go for taxes. She thinks it's important to keep the farm in the family.
- It is time to schedule classes, so she met with her advisor today. Her advisor told her that if she failed Bio I, it would be hard to get into grad school.
- She wants to own her own business. She doesn't know what kind of business she wants. She just wants to own a business that is all her own so that she doesn't have to answer to a boss.
- She wants to be able to afford things for her son on her own. He is two but she has never purchased anything for him with her own money.
- She wants to go to one of the country's leading agricultural schools for graduate school. She wants "only the best" (BREA).

Self-Reliance and Confidence
- In disbelief, he is telling his friends that his advisor told him to go to the school counselor for accommodations. He met with her to discuss his midterm grades. He told her he was doing poorly because he forgot to turn in assignments and couldn't remember what he studied because he had seven concussions in a five-year period. He is telling his friends his advisor thinks he's "retarded" so he wants to prove to her that he can do this by himself. He is explaining how he will get a planner and some flash cards to fix the situation. "I don't need help. I got this" (RARW).
- He is complaining to his friend that he can't do his homework without a book. (He has not bought the book yet.) His friend suggests to him that he ask his professor for a loaner book until he has the money to buy it himself. He tells the friend he will eventually get the money to buy the book. It's week ten of the semester.
- She is talking to the girl sitting next to her about their Biology class and is saying that she is struggling. She says she doesn't understand the material that well. Her friend tells her that she goes to extra study sessions that really help and invites her to join her. She doesn't need help, that she just needs to understand better, and that she will be able to "…pull it out in the end" (DVBB).

Disorientation: Situations that affected participants' understanding
Misunderstanding and Misjudgment
- Towards the end of the semester, her professor emailed her to find out why she had not turned in any homework all semester. She told him she did not know there was any homework due - that he had not announced any. He told her all homework was listed on the syllabus. She had never heard of a syllabus and thinks he made the word up.

- He was unhappy with his final grade, so he emailed the professor to see if he could still turn in three papers he had missed the previous semester (one was due in September, one in October, and one in December). The professor told him he should have turned them in when they were due. He can't understand why the professor won't realize that he's just trying to get a better grade because he didn't realize he would fail the class if he didn't write the papers. It was a writing class.
- He did not turn in his last paper. He got a zero on it. As a result, he earned a D in the class. On the first day of the next semester, he went to the professor to see if he could turn in the paper now and have his grade changed. He thought if he did not turn in the paper, the professor just would not count the grade.
- When he was unprepared to take an exam, he did not go to the class. He missed a total of 11 exams over the course of the semester. Now there is only two weeks of school left. He is planning to email his professors to see if it is too late to make up the exams now.
- She thinks her professor uses big words in class just to confuse her. She doesn't think anyone has ever heard these words. She cannot think of a specific example.

Unreasonable Demands and Expectations
- She does not understand that people work in shifts and are not available all hours of the day and night. She is (screaming again) lodging a complaint because the librarian did not answer her email last night at 11pm. She tells the worker when she is done with that, she also wants to talk to the tutor (who is on vacation) because he also did not answer her email last night.
- She wants immediate service everywhere she goes. She does not believe in waiting in line because she will "…only take one minute" (MIST).
- He can't understand why his professor said he was failing the class. He gave it his best shot and worked hard. He doesn't know why his hard work did not count for anything.
- This student wants to speak to the director because one of her staff members did not answer an email that he sent last night. He put the word "important" in the subject so that the employee knew the email needed answered right away.
- Why did homework count as a grade? She is paying her teacher to teach her, not give her work to do outside of class.
- She was upset this morning because she went to the President's office and wanted to meet with him right away, but his secretary said that he could not meet with her today. She does not think that anyone at the school cares about her.
- Her tutor was working with another student. She walked up to the tutor and told him she needed him now. He explained that he was busy right now and that if she took a seat and waited, he would be right with her. She told him she didn't have a minute and told the student he was tutoring to go away and come back later.
- She had an outstanding bill of $4000. She received a letter stating that until she paid the bill, she would not be able to register for next semester. She does not understand why they won't just tack the unpaid money onto a bill that she can pay after she graduates.

Lack of Understanding Academic Policies and Protocol
- He said he had not been to one class in almost two months. He thought that withdrawing from a class just meant not going anymore. He had no idea there was paperwork involved.
- He sincerely did not understand that college did not go year-round. It was the week before Christmas break before he knew this. He thought you went from one semester to the next without a break like K-12 students do.
- She did not understand that if she dropped a class and would not remain full-time that she would not be able to continuing receiving financial aid. She now lost her financial aid and does not know if she will be able to return next year.
- She did not believe that graduate schools would look at her first semester because it's a time to "just get started like a test run" (QWRT).
- He was in shock because his advisor told him that if he failed a class, the grade would remain an F. He believed that if he failed a class, he could take it again to make the F disappear.
- He did not know that he would lose his financial aid if he kept failing his classes. He thought that they would never take it away from him.
- He wants to know why his professor gave him a D when she knew he needed a C to get into his major. She knew he needed to get into his major soon so he could finish school quickly. Why didn't she understand that he had a family to take care of?
- She did not know that summer classes cost money. She thought they were free like the Bible school she attended as a kid.
- He wanted to add a class nearly halfway through the semester. He thought that the add/drop period (first six days of the semester) was "stupid" and should be "banned" (RARW).
- He only has one class in his major this semester and the other four classes are general electives. He doesn't go to the general elective classes because "they don't count anyway" (JAMB).
- She did not know that she could check her midterm grades.
- He thought his midterm grades were his final grades and that the spring semester would begin that week. It is October.
- She got an incomplete in two classes. She did not know that she had six weeks to make up the work or the grade would turn to an F.
- He came to the library the Monday of spring break. He did not know there was a break. He would have to stay there all day now because his ride couldn't come pick him up until about 3:00.

Connectedness: Ways participants connected or disconnected with those around them
Association With Family and Friends
- These three students have been friends since they were nine. They all attended the same boarding school for low-income families. All three of them chose this college together so that they could remain together. They are so used to one another that they can finish each other's sentences. It's rare to see them apart.

- She moved in with her boyfriend's family when she was 15. The two are now married but still live with his family. They have a seven-year-old son. He also lives with them. They live in a three-bedroom apartment? There are six adults and one child in a three-bedroom apartment. "We don't get much privacy," she said. "There are no secrets in our house" (HTOG).
- Her mother wants her to quit school and come home to help watch her brothers and sisters. Every time she has an exam, her mom calls her and cries to her about how she is needed at home. She thinks her mom is only doing this to distract her so that she fails her courses.
- The mother daughter duo is nearly never apart. They spend their breaks together. They eat lunch together. They don't have other friends.

Disassociation With Family and Friends
- She hasn't talked to her mother in 18 years.
- These three girls were sent to a boarding school for underprivileged youth when they were in elementary school. Two of them used to stay in the summer. They discuss how their house families were more like families than their regular families. One shows great disdain for having to leave home at such a young age. "My family was poor and my dad liked to do drink. With me there he couldn't afford to. So get rid of me. Then you can have your case of beer. That's what I am worth to them" (EAVQ).
- A single mother raised him and his brothers and sisters. They all have different fathers. None of them even know who their father is.
- He has never once mentioned anything about his family. He will not say who he lives with. He has never mentioned if he has brothers and sisters. He never says what happened that made him so quiet about his family.
- She lives with her grandmother because her mother was unfit to raise her. Her brothers and sisters still live with the mother.
- No one saw her for a week. No one heard from her. When her friends ask her where she was, she tells them her father died unexpectedly. Immediately her friends start asking her if she is okay. She begins laughing about the situation and tells them it is okay because "he was an asshole anyway and mom is better off without him" (BREA).
- He is telling his friend about his father's most recent arrest. He tells his friend "Fuck him. I wish he'd die so I didn't hear about it anymore" (HGNB) in reference to his father.
- She doesn't want to go home for spring break because her mom thinks she's different now that she went to college. Her mom told her she doesn't fit in with the family anymore. She doesn't have anywhere to go over break.
- His father has been in the hospital for about three weeks, but he still doesn't know why because they are not close.

Polarization from Colleagues and Peer Groups
- He is never talking with any other student. He frequently visits the library and sits alone and works or plays games online. He never walks with other students, smiles at other students, or even looks at other student. He is always friendly to staff and faculty, but it's like he wants nothing to do with his peers.

- These ten students hang out together every day. But they don't even know each other's names. They do not seem to know anything about one another. They only talk about games, comics, television, and how much they hate school.
- She literally will not allow anyone to sit near her…ever. She will put her foot on the chair, put her bag on the chair, or stare at them until they are so uncomfortable that they leave. In the rare even that anyone does sit near her, like now, she yells at them.
- He won't talk to any of his professors because they are smarter than him. They make him feel stupid.
- She won't go back to her dorm room because her roommate's friends are there. She feels bad when they're there because they talk about things she doesn't understand. She doesn't want to try to hang out with them because she thinks they can't relate to each other.
- She says she is leaving because she doesn't belong here. She doesn't want to grow up to be like the other people here. She calls them "snots" and says that she doesn't want to be like them.

Physical Being: Direct observations of physical characteristics of participants

Appearance
- She has grown thick facial hair. She is aware of it because she plays with it when she is nervous.
- She wears a lot of makeup that is applied in a haphazard way. Her eyeliner goes all the way into her nose.
- He has started to paint his fingernails black and wear thick black eyeliner. He also dyed his hair black.
- He forgot his dentures today. He is hoping no one notices.
- She shaves the side of her head so that her tattoo can be seen.
- He dyed his hair bright red – like Ronald McDonald. He is hoping people associate him with the Colorado movie theater shooter. He doesn't want anyone to talk to him.
- She is very bruised today. Her arms have finger marks on them and her lip is split open.
- Her entire arms are covered in small, thin scars – remnants of when she used to cut her arms with razorblades.
- His glasses are so broken they will barely stay on his face. Today he has them hooked around his ears with rubber bands.

Clothing
- His clothing is stained from top to bottom and looks like something a mechanic would wear to a garage. His coat is too small for him and he can't zip it. He is carrying a woman's backpack that is pink with flowers.
- It has been below zero for two weeks, yet every time I see him, he is wearing shorts.
- She only wears men's clothing because her clothing has become too small for her, so she is wearing her dad's clothes.
- He only wears black. Every day, he has on black. From head to toe.
- She dresses very provocatively. Her shirts are always extremely low cut and they are too small for her. Her bra is always sticking out the top of her shirt.

- Her sleeveless hot pink dress is two sizes too small for her and she can barely walk in her high heels. It is 20 degrees and snowing outside and she is not wearing a coat.
- His shirt must have ten holes in it.
- He wears a suit every day. There are two or three suits and he rotates them. They look like they are from the 60's – definitely not new. He also carries a briefcase instead of a backpack.
- He came to me and told me he wore this shirt just for me. The shirt said "I love hot moms."
- She is embarrassed because she can only afford clothing from WalMart. She wishes she could dress like her friends, but her family just can't afford it.
- I have never seen her without her camouflage baseball hat. The hat is covered with buttons depicting different Manga characters.
- She doesn't have a winter coat. Instead she wears two or three hoodies at the same time.
- She has started to carry a military issued backpack. It goes from her neck to the back of her knees. It looks like she is having a hard time carrying it.
- She wears an old gold locket every day. When she is nervous, she holds onto it with her fingers. She said it was her grandmother's.

Hygiene
- He has not gotten a haircut or trimmed his beard all semester.
- She has had the same shirt on for three days and there are visible sweat stains in the armpits. She keeps reaching her arms above her head to stretch and they are visible. She is not trying to hide it at all.
- She did not have to time to shower this morning after taking care of the animals, so her pants are soiled with animal feces. There is a strong odor of farm animals around her.
- He came into my office today. After about 20 minutes, I had to crack a window because his smell was beginning to overcome me.
- He has had the same clothes on every day this week, and they do not appear to have been laundered in between.
- He is missing nearly all of his front teeth. He tries to cover his mouth with his hand when he smiles.
- He frequently urinates himself. The urine marks are clearly visible on his pants yet he walks around like they are not there.

Brands and Labels
- He only wears Under Armor™ clothing. Even his socks are Under Armor™. How does he afford it?
- He only wears clothing with logos from sports teams from Pittsburgh.
- Every day, she wears a different Hollister™ hoodie.
- I have never seen him without a Monster™ energy drink in his hand. He says he doesn't like the generic brands. They don't taste as good.
- She is so proud of her new John Deere™ t-shirt that she came to my office to show me. It's all she wanted for Christmas.

Social Norms: Behaviors participants exhibited in social situations

Use of Profanity

- He uses the "F" word for almost everything. In just five minutes, he said it at least twenty times. It's his favorite adjective. He does not try to hide it from me. Sometimes he will look directly at me and says it. It is almost like he wants me to give him some sort of affirmation for cussing.
- She is having troubles with her Blackboard and has asked one of the tutors to help her. The tutor tried to explain to her that he is not sure how to do what she wants him to do – that he never did it before. She yelled at him, "Just fucking do it." He told her he wasn't going to help her if she kept behaving that way so she yelled, "Just do your fucking job! Aren't they paying you to help?" (MIST).
- She lowers her voices when she swears and always follows it with "excuse my French." Always. Yet she still swears a lot.
- Three students are in a heated conversation about a professor. The professor sent one of them an intervention form for using profanity in the classroom. They don't think this is right. They are adults and should be allowed to say whatever they want to say. This is the professor's fault for not being a "big boy" (HGNB). They are trying to come up with a good name for him because his current name is not good anymore. They think "Professor Candy Ass" is more fitting. They are daring the student to call the professor this to his face. One student said he would buy the other a pack of cigarettes if he did it.
- Today's lunch conversation is why you can't swear in papers. A professor docked points off of her paper for using the word "ass" in the paper three times. She feels that her right to free speech has been taken from her and thinks she should make an appointment with the dean to talk to him about this. It is her right as an American to say what she wants.

Loudness

- These three students hang out in this lounge nearly every day, and every day there are several other students that hang out with them. Many of the other students are doing homework. One is talking on the phone, quietly. These three act like they are the only people in this very small room. They talk very loudly. Always. They are getting stares from the others in the room. The girl on the phone just got up and left.
- This group of young ladies is sitting near a table of faculty in the cafeteria. They were speaking quietly about weekend plans until the faculty came in. They are suddenly talking very loud about why they think the college is a joke.
- I can always hear this group before I see them. Literally as soon as I enter this building, I can hear them. At this time of day, this building is very busy, but I can always hear them over everyone else.

- I was afraid I would not be able to find them at this basketball game, but as soon as I walked in the gymnasium, they started screaming my name. Now I am sitting near them, and they are screaming at every person who walks in the door – even people they do not know. "Hey girl in the yellow shirt" and then a huge wave. The girl in the yellow shirt looks completely confused. She doesn't know any of them, and I think she may be embarrassed. They think it is funny. When a faculty member walked in, they also screamed her name and one got up and ran through the bleachers at her. Again, the faculty member looked confused. Their screaming is causing awkward situations for people they know and people they do not know.
- When she is angry, which is nearly all of the time, she screams. Today she is screaming at a photocopier. It is not copying her jobs quickly enough. This is in a quiet library. She does not seem to even notice that everyone in the library is looking at her.
- The library was full of students yet quiet with the buzz of clicking keys and the printer going until these three girls walked in. They quickly began behaving like they were in someone's living room. They kicked off their shoes, propped their feet on chairs, opened a few books, and began talking. Talking about everything and anything but nothing about schoolwork. It took only ten minutes until a library worker came and asked them to quiet down and explained that others were working. As soon as she left, they began mocking her and within two minutes their roar could be heard throughout the building. This time they were asked to enter a study room if they needed to be loud, so they did. Although they are in the room with the door closed, I can still hear what they are saying.

Lewdness
- She has quit wearing a bra and has begun to grab her breasts and shake them at her friends when she sees them. They all think this is funny.
- He is picking his nose and wiping it under the keyboard in the computer lab.
- In preparation for a group oral presentation on autism for psychology class, he left the room to go ask the professor a question. When he came back, he was upset. His face was red and he was sweating. He was calling the professors names and saying she didn't understand what he wanted to do. He told his friends that he asked the professor if it was okay to mime the behavior of a cognitively impaired person while he gave the presentation and the professor told him that was not okay. "I want to act like a retard. That's psychology! People need to understand what retards act like!" (RARW). His classmates try to explain that it may be offensive to others in the room and they don't think it is a good idea either. He yelled as he packed up his personal items and told the group he wasn't going to work with them anymore because they were supportive of his ideas.
- He had to meet with "some big cheese" at the school today to discuss his behavior in a class. For one class, he has to volunteer for the school play. He is a non-traditionally aged student who asked a traditionally aged student if he could follow her into the dressing room so that he could see her in her underwear. He doesn't understand why the female student is upset and thinks that she should be happy that someone thinks she is pretty. He is now banned from the class exercise and will have to take a zero on this class requirement. He thinks this is unreasonable because he was only complementing the student who he thought was his friend.

Sense of Humor
- He caught his wife cheating on him again. This time it is a family friend. He is angry this time. He tells his friends he wants to tie her to a tree and make her have sex with a donkey. He thinks it would be a good idea to put her in a cage and only let her out to bring him a fresh beer. The friends are all laughing hysterically. One of them is a woman. She too is laughing. He is telling his friends that in the middle ages, tying women to trees and forcing them to have sex with animals was a common punishment.
- She thinks anything negative is funny. If it's negative, she laughs. Laughs hysterically. Not a nervous laugh. Tears laugh. Today, she can't control her laughter while her friend (who is in tears) told her she failed another Anatomy test. Her friend is bawling and she is laughing hysterically.
- She laughs if she failed a test. She's telling her friend she got a 42% on an accounting test and she's laughing at herself. She is genuinely laughing.
- Her older brother was arrested for domestic abuse this weekend. She thinks the situation is funny. She said, "He finally knocked the bitch out" (DPTT).
- They are talking about humiliating a professor. His class is hard and they are struggling in it, so they think it would be funny to humiliate him. Some of their ideas include entering class early and pasting the board with pictures from his Facebook (they can't find it online though) and making fun of his daughter that they see him walking to daycare.
- He caught his wife in bed with the neighbor. He is laughing because he saw the neighbor naked. He says he knows "my dick is bigger than his" (RARW).

Ethics: Observed ethical standards of participants

Work Ethic
- While taking full time classes, she has been working full time at a local convenience store and gives half of her paycheck to her parents to help out. "I do miss a lot of assignments and sometimes even class because I'm just too tired to do it. Sometimes I can't even hold my head up and I need to sleep before my next shift, so I skip out on homework. Someday I'll catch up with it. But my mom needs help. I owe it to her too. She worked hard to keep us kids and she taught us that live is about sacrifice. Sometimes you got to sacrifice for the order of the good. Like in my case, sometimes I got to sacrifice my homework" (EAVQ).
- She can't get a job because she will lose her food stamps if she does.
- This young man is complaining about not having money to do the things he wants to do. He wants to travel to Colorado but cannot afford a plane ticket and his car will not make the trip. His friend asks him where he works. He tells his friend "Working is for suckers. The key is finding a loophole like a wife who does the working for you" (RARW).
- She and her friend are talking about why they are in school. They are both non-traditionally aged students. They agree that they are tired of hard work and hope that being in school allows them to find a job where they're not on their feet all day. Neither is working right now so that they can focus on school.

- She stole her tutor's paper and submitted it as her own, but the professor recognized the paper and failed her for plagiarizing. She is apologizing to the tutor and explaining that she had to steal the paper because she was not sure how to do the assignment and did not have time to figure it out.
- She is used to not having any money, so she turned down the federal work-study position offered to her.
- He says he doesn't need to work because his wife does.
- She doesn't need to get a job because she could always sell her ducks if she needed money.
- She wants to go to school as long as she possibly can so that she can avoid having to get a job.

Time
- He has no concept of time. He does not own a watch. Although there is a clock in the room, he asks others what time it is. In a one hour, he has asked what time it is probably a dozen times then he said there wasn't enough time for him to get to class before it started.
- She will spend hours watching television in the lounge but then try to rush through a homework assignment an hour before it is due. She says she likes to spend her time at school doing what she enjoys since she can never enjoy time at home.
- They play computer games for hours upon hours each day. While they play, there is no communication other than the occasional shout at the computer.
- His tutor recommended he begin using a planner to better keep track of his assignments and better manage his time. He does not want to use the planner because he thinks schedules are too restrictive.
- He spends most of his day doing things he enjoys because life is too short to be unhappy.
- He prides himself on the fact that he is always late. He said when he's late he can make a big entrance and people notice him.
- He talks about assignments for hours on end but never does them until the last minute. He says talking about assignments help him to figure out what he is supposed to do and helps him to feel less stress over the assignment. But when he goes to do the assignment, he cusses and yells about the work. Mostly he quits halfway through and does not turn it in.
- She keeps saying she needs to go to see a tutor but she does not like to do things like that while she is on campus. She likes to enjoy her time on campus because she doesn't have to do motherly duties there.

Power
- In talking about her family farm, she brings up the goats, telling those with her that her best friends are the goats. She says the goats are happy to see her no matter what. She begins laughing hysterically then, saying that the goats are happy because she has their food. "If they don't see me, they don't eat. It's that simple. That's why they like me. Even if that is the reason, they're still the only people who are always happy to see me. My best friends" (BREA).

- She comes to campus every day but never goes to class. She hangs out in the student center all day. She has not been to class in over six weeks. She says she comes to campus because it is her chance to be herself and not live by everyone's rules. She gains power over her life when she is at school.
- She does not want to go to class because she does not like the topic they will be discussing. Instead of going to class, she has turned on the TV and is watching the Ellen show. She is in a zone watching this show. She is not answering anyone who speaks to her. It is like the only thing that matters right now is this TV show.
- She does not like her roommate and will not speak to her. Instead, she hides her roommate's things and then laughs because she cannot find them.
- He boyfriend did not want her to get a job so he poured bleach all over her only dress pants so she had nothing to wear to the job interview.

Theft
- She likes to give people presents. She often gives her friends candy bars, sodas or packs of gum. She secretly tells me she steals the items. She does not have the money to buy them, but she knows her friends enjoy these treats, so she steals them so that she can make them smile.
- She stole a bale of hay from her neighbor's farm so her goats could have a treat. She was going to steal some ducks too, but her arms were full.
- She broke her roommate's flat iron. She felt bad about it because her roommate did not give her permission to use it in the first place. She went to the local pharmacy and stole a new one to give the roommate. It was not "a good one" so it didn't matter that she stole it (EAVQ).
- She gained weight and her clothes no longer fit her. She cannot afford to buy new clothes so she has been going to Walmart, taking clothing into the dressing room, changing into it and leaving her old clothes on the floor. She said she does not feel bad about it because Walmart has lots of money.
- She stole her roommate's shoes. She does not feel bad because her roommate had many pairs of shoes and she only had one.
- He did not have money to buy his kid's Christmas gifts. He and his wife spent a week driving to different towns to steal toys so they had gifts for the kids for Christmas.
- He is telling his friends he is in "big trouble." (PPNG). He wanted to propose to his girlfriend and could not afford a ring. He was at his friend's cousin's house. His friend's wife took off her rings to wash dishes. While she was not looking, he stole one of her rings. He used it to propose to his girlfriend. His friend reported him to the police. He doesn't really understand why his friend is so angry because he didn't steal her engagement ring. It was "just a pink ring" (PPNG).
- They wanted to build a deck for their home but did not have money for lumber. He went to a local hardware store and bought one board, one spindle and one bag of nails. He took them to his car. Then he went back into the store several times to get more boards and lumber. Each time he showed the doorman the receipt from the lumber he paid for. He managed to steal enough wood for half of their deck that day.

- Her family did not have enough money for a turkey for Thanksgiving, so she stole one from a local grocery store. She was caught though and arrested for retail theft. She is hoping that when she explains that she was stealing the turkey so they could eat that the courts will be lenient with her.

Fate: Behaviors that exhibit participant beliefs in fate/destiny
- "I've been dealt a bad hand. You know, my whole family has. No matter what we ever did, we couldn't get ahead. We have bad luck, all of us" (WTJC).
- When talking to her friend about her son's bad behavior, she explains that her mother told her that someday, she would have a kid twice as bad as her. That's why her son is bad. Her mom wished it on her. No matter what she could do, her kid would still be bad because it was her mother's will. It was out of her control.
- One of the girls comes back to the lounge after working out in the gym. He asks her why she is working out. She tells him she feels healthier when she works out and tells him he should try it. He tells her he's supposed to be fat because his whole family is fat. He will get diabetes because his dad and brother have diabetes. So because he cannot control his weight, he will eat whatever he wants and get as fat as he wants because it is going to happen anyway. He slaps his stomach as he tells her this.
- Her court hearing for her retail theft case is tomorrow and she is discussing her situation with her friends over lunch. She believes that she got caught because she has bad luck. She is telling stories about other friends who have stolen much more expensive items and never got caught. She thinks she got caught stealing a turkey because it's her luck. "Of course I would get caught? Why wouldn't I? If someone is gonna get caught, of course it's gonna be me" (EAVQ).
- When asked why she's so angry all the time, she says, "Why am I angry? Better question is why ain't I angry. My life has sucked. I never had anything. No one gave a shit about me. Not my family, no one at school. I never had anything new until I was 20 and bought it myself. I got my clothes from my sister, she got them from my cousin and God knows where she got them. By the time I got them, they were 15 years old. And my sister, she's shorter than me, a lot shorter, so nothing ever fit. You know what it's like to go to school like that? Kids are mean. All I ever did was get made fun of, as long as I can remember. Like it was my fault my clothes were awful. Like I could help it. I was a kid. But the other kids, they always reminded me how much I didn't have. Never had a stable home. Mom's boyfriends always coming and going. Bringing their kids, taking their kids. Bringing their stuff, taking our stuff. Nothing was ever stable. So now, yeah. I'm angry" (MIST).
- She asks her friend if she will help her pack up her dorm room. Her friend tells her they don't have to take all of their belongings over spring break and explains that they will be in the same dorm rooms when they return. She tells her friend that she will not be back because she is not going to pass enough of her classes. Her friend tells her that there is still many weeks after break to bring up her grades. She tells her friend it wouldn't work, that she wasn't supposed to be in college.

- Several students are sitting outside talking about jobs they have had. He tells his friends he's had more jobs than he can count. He begins naming many different jobs. His friend asks why he's had so many jobs and he tells him he's been fired from every job he's ever had. His tone is very matter of fact. He is showing no emotion about it. He tells his friend he can't help it that he's a magnet for bad jobs with bad bosses.
- She is in an abusive relationship. Her father also abuses her mother. She tells her friend she was destined to be beaten.
- "If it's gonna happen to anyone, it's gonna happen to me" (JPDN).
- "I've had bad luck for so long that if something good happened to me, I'd probably drop dead of a heart attack" (HTOG).

Hopelessness: Behaviors that exhibit a sense of bleakness
Desperation
- It is apparent that she has been crying. Her eyes are swollen and her face is red. She says she cried the whole way to school. She says everything is falling apart. It feels like she has no control over anything. "My world is spinning and I can't make it stop, no matter what I do. Nothing I do changes anything no matter how hard I try" (JBDE).
- She is alone in the library stairwell, crying. Her head is buried in her hands and she never lifts it up. She says she is so overwhelmed and does not know how to fix it because she doesn't even know what is broken. Everything is broken.
- She hadn't been to school for a few days. She says she was so overwhelmed that she needed to take a few days off. Her friend told her that would just make things worse. She yells at her friend and tells her she knows nothing about her life.
- For the second time this month, her son has gotten arrested. She could not afford his bail money. She is going to try to sell her textbooks for money to get him out of jail. She says at this point the books will do her no good because she is too upset to use them.
- He has a look of despair on his face. He keeps pulling the top of his hair from his head and rubbing his face. He tells his friend he can't keep this pace up anymore. He has been working night shift as a nurse aid and coming to school. He hasn't slept in three days. He tells his friends if he doesn't work, his family doesn't eat, but if he works, he fails his classes. He says there is no end in sight. This wasn't meant for him.
- "I'm at the point of no return," she says. "I can't do this anymore. I just can't. I'm done" (EAVQ).
- She stole her roommate's paper and turned it in as her own but got caught. "I was that desperate to get it done. To just turn it in. I don't have time to do my own. I know it is wrong. I knew I shouldn't have done it but I couldn't help myself. I felt like crap when I did it, and now we are both in trouble. What can I do now? How can I dig myself out of this? I'm getting an F in my class and my roommate hates me" (PEDM).
- He has known for some time that his wife has been prostituting herself. Now she believes she is pregnant. They do not know who fathered the baby. "I just don't even know what to do or what to think. I throw up every time I think about this. Why did I just let it go? Why didn't I stop her? Now what am I gonna do? I never thought my life would be like this. Never. Here I am trying to do something with myself, and I'm married to a hooker. What has my life become?" (RARW).

- She was charged with drug possession over the weekend. She is now facing a jail sentence. This is her third time being arrested in two years. She tells her friends she is thinking about just leaving and going where police can't find her. Her friend tells her that's a bad idea. She replied, "What else am I supposed to do? I'm not going to jail again" (TNKP). Another friend recommends she quit using drugs. She tells her friend that at this point, she feels like using more.
- Crying. All the time. She is always crying. She sits alone and cries. She tries to hide her tears. Her face is always red.
- She has a breakdown while working with a tutor. The tutor asks her to focus and quit playing with her phone. She tells the tutor her life has fallen apart. That she is trying to focus on school but everything else in her life has fallen apart. She cries. The tutor consoles her. She tells the tutor he will never understand. He asks what is wrong. She tells him it doesn't matter anymore.
- She seemed okay today until her phone rang. She wasn't crying. It's the first time she wasn't crying in two weeks. She stands up and paces on the phone for maybe five minutes. She begins crying. She comes back and gets her belongings. She says she is sorry but she just needs to go home. Her friends ask her if she is okay. She tells her friends nothing is every okay.
- He still has not found a sustainable food bank. Last night, he stole food from his place of work to feed his family. He knows he will get fired if he gets caught. He says, "What else are you gonna do? I can't watch my kids cry anymore. They're hungry. We're hungry. I don't know what else to do" (RARW).
- Her brother's story of raping the young child aired for a week on every news outlet in the area. She has been inconsolable. She is withdrawn. She will not talk to anyone. She has been reading comments on Facebook about her brother's story and commenting back, trying to get the public to better understand her brother's story. She believes her brother was seduced by the child because he would not have otherwise raped a child.
- After leaving a counseling session, she returns more upset than when she left. She believes no one cares about her or her situation. "No one will help. No one cares about people like me. I mean nothing to them. No one here can help" (EAVQ).

Worry
- She has been sitting at the same computer for three hours. She has never stopped typing. Her friend stops by and asks if she wants to go for lunch. She tells her friend she is so upset about her schoolwork that she couldn't eat even if she wanted to.
- She frequently picks her nails until they bleed and bites all of the skin off of her fingers. Her hands are nearly always bloody.
- She tells her friends she let her professors know she may seem distracted. She wants them to know it has nothing to do with their classes but everything to do with a situation at home involving her brother. She tells her friends she is too embarrassed to tell them what he has done and that sooner or later, everyone will know anyway. She tells her friends she is so worried about her mother's reaction to the situation that she is afraid to leave the house. She doesn't want her mother to be alone.

- He is sitting quietly in the corner while all of his friends are playing their favorite game. His friends ask him to join several times. He tells his friends he has too much on his mind to play today. He isn't doing anything. He is just sitting in the corner staring at the floor.
- She has been sitting outside smoking for an hour – just one cigarette after the other. She appears annoyed when others come to smoke too. Her husband meets her and asks if her class was canceled, why she isn't in class. She tells him she has too much on her mind to pay attention and there was no sense in going to class.
- Each day, her appearance has gotten a little more disheveled. First, she quit doing her hair, then she quit doing her makeup. The worry is thick across her face, clearly visible.
- She has walked past our location at least ten times in the past two hours. She hasn't said anything, just walks past. Finally, one of her friends calls her over and asks her to sit down. She tells her friend she is too nervous to sit. That it feels better for her to just keep walking. Her friend asks what's wrong but she tells her she doesn't want to talk about it.
- He is sleeping sitting upright in the lounge when I get there. I sit down and wait. His head nods up and down a few times, but he never wakes. Just as I am getting to leave, his friends come in and wake him up. They're laughing at him for sleeping in such a position. He tells them he can't sleep at night. He is so worried about his brothers and sisters. How will he take care of them? What will they all do without their mother? He says he stays up at night going through the bills trying to figure out what he can sell to get the money to pay them.
- His friends say they have been avoiding him because all he ever does is talk about his problems. "He worries too much. He's a downer" they say.
- She picks at her food, throwing it here and there on her plate. She hasn't really taken more than a few bites. She tells her friends she's too worried to eat, that she feels like throwing up.
- She called her friend to take her to the emergency room because she feels like she is having a heart attack. She was exhibiting signs of a panic attack. She was short of breath and kept pacing around.
- She is dependent on Ativan – a prescription drug for anxiety disorder. She said she takes between 60 and 90 pills a month.
- A group of students are playing a board game. In the middle of the game, she bursts into tears and walks away. Her friends follow her. They don't come back.
- She says she doesn't sleep at night, that she waits up for the police to bring her son home. She is fearful that one day she will get the call that he has died.

Lack of Control Over Situations/Inability to Change Circumstances
- The students are talking about midterms. They are discussing their exam schedule. He tells his friends he is not going to study. His plan is to just go in and take the exam. He says even when he studies, he gets the same score.
- "I can't help what they do [speaking about her children]. They do what they want when they want. I can't control them. They'll learn their own lessons just like I did" (VFGH).
- "I'll probably end up like my mom. Working three jobs, never having money, married to a drunk and with a sick kid. It doesn't matter what I do. It's the way it is" (EAVQ).
- "I don't know what I was thinking when I came here. Why would I think I could do school? I can't do anything" (VFGH).

- "I don't know how my sister broke free. I mean, she's gone. Living her life with her boyfriend. She has a good job, has money. How'd she do that? Me? I'll probably live with my parents til I'm 40 or til they throw me out" (EAVQ).
- "I guess I was just born with a curse. I touch it, it falls apart. I try it, I fail. What am I supposed to do about it? Doesn't matter if I fight against it. Still happens. Just how it is for me" (JPDN).
- "Sure, I want to quit drinking. It's probably not healthy. My dad was a drunk. His dad was too. Probably his dad was and the dad before him. My dad's brother died of liver failure from drinking. It's in my blood. Why fight it?" (QWRT).
- I'll probably end up in jail like my dad" (HGNB).
- "If I don't work, I can't pay my bills. If I work, I don't have time to do my homework. I never been in this situation before. I'm screwing up at work because I am so tired and I'm failing my classes because I can't do my homework. It's beyond bad right now". I can't get ahead with either – no matter what I do" (RARW).
- "There's nothing I can do about it" (DPTT).
- "I'm going to lose my car. The bank is going to take it back. I can't get to school then. I can't get to work then. I'll lose what little I have. I can't make the payment. It's out of my hands now" (PTHF).
- "I'm damned if I do and damned if I don't" (DUBB).

Future Orientation: Observations of participants' future aspirations
High/Unrealistic Expectations
- This freshman biology major aspires to be a paleontologist. Some of his friends don't know what paleontology is. He tells them after he graduates, he's going to go on expeditions in Africa to search for dinosaur bones. He wants to find a new species of dinosaur by looking in a cave no one else has looked in yet. He knows he will have to go to school for a long time, but it will be worth it when they name a dinosaur after him "Man, since I was a kid, I wanted my own dinosaur" (HGNB). He is failing biology one but doesn't think that class is important because they don't talk about dinosaurs and he thought they would.
- They are talking about jobs and salaries. He tells them the highest pay he's ever received is $9 an hour. He is going to school because a website he read said that no one who graduated college made less than $80,000 per year. He thinks if that's the lowest end of the pay scale, he will probably start at $100,000 a year at least.
- At midterm, his GPA is 1.4. He thought it would have been a lot better than that. That he would have all B's. Last semester he finished with a 1.6 and he is on academic probation. He is going to work really hard so that he graduates with a 4.0.

No Expectations
- "It is what it is" she tells her friend when talking about what will happen after summer break. "I don't think I'll be back" she says. She is telling her friend that college wasn't for her. She didn't like any of it. Her friend is trying to give her a pep talk, but she won't hear it. "I don't like it here. This isn't for me." Her friend asks what she will do if she quits school. "I'll figure it out when the time comes" she tells her (BREA).

- He's just completed the paperwork to withdraw from school. He says he really didn't want to leave, but school isn't working out for him. He explains that he's had several odd jobs over the year. He will find something that will work for him.
- After packing up her dorm room, she stopped to say goodbye. She's going to go back to work at the convenience store she worked at over the summer. She doesn't seem happy about it. She explains that her mom told her she wouldn't be successful in school and she's just angry that she didn't prove her mother wrong.
- Her mother asked her to withdraw from school. There is an opening at her mother's factory and her mom wants her to take the job. She explains that she really doesn't want to leave school but that sometimes you don't get what you want. She is leaving to fill out her withdrawal paperwork.
- It's the week of spring break. He stops to tell me he's not coming back after break. He doesn't know what he'll do. He says he came to school expecting nothing and he got nothing out of being there.

Lack of Planning and Preparation
- She needs to change her major. Her major includes a clinical component that will require her to drive 35 miles to a clinical site. She doesn't have a car. She didn't realize she would need to drive to her clinicals. She thought the school would provide transportation like a school bus.
- To go to her observation site, she needs to get state clearances. These clearances cost a minimal amount of money. She doesn't have the money to pay for the clearances, so she can't go to the observation site. It is required for class. She has reserved herself to taking an F in the class since she didn't save money to pay for the clearances.
- He has four finals. His grades hinge on getting a C or better on them. The weather was nice last weekend, so instead of studying, he worked in his yard. Now he thinks he will fail all of the tests.
- He did not realize he would need to purchase his own scrubs for clinicals. He doesn't not have the money to buy them. His clinical starts next week and he still has not ordered his scrubs. They take three weeks to come in.
- Because he doesn't have his scrubs, he is not allowed to attend clinicals. He will not pass the class if he does not go to clinicals. He still does not have the money to buy his scrubs. He cannot withdraw from the class or he will only have a part time credit load.
- He did not realize that he needed to pass 24 credits in a year in order to keep his financial aid. He only passed 16 credits. He will lose his aid. He does not have money to take summer classes to help him meet academic process and keep his funding.
- She has no textbooks. She thought they were included in tuition, so she didn't save money to purchase them. It is midterm and she has no books.

Interference of Pride
- He is insulted because his advisor told him he needs to get a tutor. He believes he can do this on his own. He is going to ignore his advisor's advice so he can prove to her he can do it on his own.
- At midterm, her professor advised her to drop the course because there is little hope of her passing. She does not believe this is true and refuses to drop the course.

- Her advisor told her she would need to cut back on her work hours in order to have enough time to study. To prove her advisor wrong, she has decided to pick up five extra hours per week. "That'll show her" (EAVQ).
- His professor offered to meet with him during office hours in order to provide some extra instruction. He has decided to not go because he wants to show the professor he can do it on his own.

Traumatic Life Experiences: Past and present participant experiences

Sexual Assault/Molestation
- She has been having sex with her mother's boyfriend for the past 8 years. She was 12 years old the first time they had sex. She didn't think it was normal at first, but now she preferred sex with him over sex with her boyfriend. She says they "just have something" because they know each other so well (MING).
- He blames his wife's prostitution on the fact that a babysitter molested her when she was a child.
- Family services removed her from her mother's care when she was 9 because her mother was allowing her friends to have sex with her. She had no other family. She went into the foster system for a few years but ended up in a boarding school when she was 11.

Drug Use/Abuse
- The three of them are discussing their past, paying particular attention to stories about drugs. All three of them share several stories involving drugs. Drugs include marijuana, cocaine, LSD, mushrooms, prescription pills, ecstasy, and heroin.
- His friend overdosed and died at a party over the weekend. He was at the party.
- His mother is an addict. Because of her addiction he almost always has to take care of his younger brother who is six. He cooks, cleans, does laundry, helps his brother with his homework, and makes sure he brother is bathed. He enjoys helping his brother because he wishes he would have had someone to help when he was growing up. His mother has been an addict has long as he can remember. He had to learn to do most things on his own because of that.
- She had to go to the hospital over the weekend. When she was cleaning, she grabbed one of her boyfriend's needles and it stuck her. A few hours later, she developed red bumps going up her arm.
- His professor sent him an intervention because he has not completed the course's mandatory assistance at a campus event. He was unable to go to the event because it was at the same time as his group support meetings. He would rather take the zero on the assignment than risk his sobriety. He did not want to go back to rehab.
- He suffers long-term effects of concussion injuries. He has had a total of 7 concussions. He got one concussion at work. All others involved a story about taking drugs and getting injured. He thinks this is funny and part of growing up.
- She is a widowed single mother. She found her husband dead in bed with her last year. He died of a prescription drug overdose.

Serious Family Illness
- Her father is on disability. He lost both of his legs and his vision due to diabetes complications. He has not been able to work since she was 11.
- His father suffers from Agent Orange complications – specifically Parkinson's Disease. He has been in a wheelchair for over 15 years. He won't leave the house because of the wheelchair. "My dad didn't even come to my high school graduation because he didn't want to go in the chair. Mom took a lot of pictures and showed him. He doesn't go nowhere because of that chair. It's a lot of work for Mom, always has been a lot of work for her" (BJNC).
- Her friend tells her she has been saying she was tired for too long and that she should see a doctor to be sure everything is okay. She tells her friend she is tired because her boyfriend's sister had to move in with them. She had been living in a nursing home due to complications with obesity, but the insurance would no longer pay for the home. She is staying with them. She is bed-ridden and needs to be bathed, changed, and so on. She can do nothing for herself. She is 36 years old. She hasn't been sleeping in order to care for the woman and still manage to get her homework finished.
- Her sister is non-verbal autistic. She needs round the clock care. She will have to move out of the dorms early to go home and help her mother care for this child.

Incarceration of Family Members
- Her brothers recently plead guilty to raping a young, mentally disabled child. He was sentenced to 15 to 25 years in prison.
- His father has been in jail since he was two. He doesn't know why.
- Her mother has been in jail 12 times over the course of the last 10 years.
- His father was recently arrested. He does not know why. His father has spent most of his adult life in jail.
- Her mother was jailed when she was 3. Her father was already in jail. She had to live with family members after that.
- Her son has gone to jail twice so far this semester. He was arrested again last night.

Child Abuse
- Her aunt beat her when she was a child. Her hand is still partially immobile because a broken wrist was not treated so that the authorities did not find out about the abuse. Her mother continued to let the aunt babysit because there was no one else who could.
- His life has been hard since his mother was institutionalized, but he is happy to raise his younger brothers and sisters because now they won't have to deal with what he had to deal with when he was growing up.
- Her father never hit her but berated her and made her feel badly her whole life. Now she is afraid to speak to men. She is worried because next semester she will have a male professor and she doesn't want to go to the class. There are only male teachers in that department.

Victim of Bullies

- She bullies other students often. Nearly every day. She calls them names, yells mean things, calls her professors names. She says she became a professional bully because she was bullied her whole life.
- She said the hardest thing about growing up was being picked on because her clothes were too small for her.
- She was frequently called "stupid" because she had to take special education mathematics courses.
- His mother was known around town for sleeping with multiple partners and having many children with different fathers so kids in school picked on him about it. He is angry because he said it wasn't his fault his mother did these things. He also thinks that is why he is homosexual.
- When she became pregnant in 10th grade, her classmates picked on her so badly that she dropped out of school.

Inadequate Educational Preparation

- He was unable to keep up in regular coursework during junior high, so he went to a technical school. He has never heard of things like formatting a paper, doing research in a library, and so on. He feels like he is so far behind his classmates that he'll never catch up. He wants to leave the school because he feels like he's so far behind.
- Due to a diagnosis of dyslexia, she was in a special education classroom for most of her high school coursework. She claims she was never once given a homework assignment. Teachers guided her through all of her coursework. Now she doesn't know how to keep up with her peers.
- He has had many concussions throughout his life. He thinks they made him slow. His mother had him placed in special education coursework when he was in 11th grade. He said he was never able to catch up with his peers.
- She took the business curriculum in high school. She now wishes she would have taken the academic track so that she knew how to do some of the assignments her other classmates already knew how to do.
- He hated high school. Each year he missed just enough days to not get kicked out, but enough that he didn't go to school regularly. He thinks he missed around 40 or 45 days a year. He now wishes he had not done that because it is very hard for him to discipline himself enough to go to class. He is used to skipping school, so it means nothing to him when he skips classes.
- She never paid attention in high school. She graduated second from last in her senior class. Now she wishes she would have paid attention so that she knew what was going on in college.
- He didn't realize he was going to go into the medical field, so he didn't take any biology or chemistry in high school. Now he has to take remedial coursework to catch up before he can begin his major. He will be roughly one year behind his classmates so instead of two years for an associate's, it will take him three. He is worried about accruing so much extra debt.

- He always struggled with reading. He hated it. When teachers tried to get him to become a better reader, he would ignore them. Now he is struggling to read his textbooks.
- He never heard some of the words that are being used in college, not just in classrooms but in conversations, with his advisor, and with peers. He feels like he doesn't fit in. He doesn't talk much in conversations because he does not always understand what is going on.

Hunger

- One of his greatest concerns is being able to feed his family. He explains that he never had enough to eat growing up and he knows how that affected him, so he wants to be sure his family never goes hungry.
- He was caught stealing apples in the library during an open house. He was filling his backpack with apples when a staff member approached him. He explained to the staff member that his brother and sister didn't have any food at home because their mom had spent all their money on drugs. He was stealing the apples so that they would have something to eat for dinner that night. The library staff member went to the grocery store and bought him three bags of groceries. He was so embarrassed he didn't even thank her. He took the groceries and left.
- She was caught shoplifting food for her family's thanksgiving dinner. Otherwise, they would not have had food to eat.
- He regularly hunts rabbits to feed his family. Otherwise, they cannot afford meat.
- He tries to sneak into the cafeteria without paying. He knows it will be the only time he eats that day and he cannot afford the $7.50 admission fee.
- He is looking for area food banks so that his family can have food.
- Her family was low on food, so they killed one of her goats to eat.

Boarding School

- These three girls met in boarding school. They are like a small family. They are always together. They don't trust others, so they stay together and rarely make friends with others. One explains that their experience in boarding school is what made them so close. They were together all the time. They lived together. They spent holidays together. They were the closest thing to family that any of them knew. They also feel like no one wanted them and for that reason, they don't trust anyone.
- She says she is closer to her house mother from boarding school than to her real mother. She calls her house mother for advice. She never calls her real mother. If she has a weekend free, she travels to visit her house mother, not to her own home.
- She cries when she talks about her father. He is the reason she had to go to boarding school. He couldn't afford beer if she stayed at home. The free boarding school was one less mouth for him to feed, so he had money to buy alcohol. Of her three siblings, she is the only one who attended the boarding school.

- She explains that she never misses home and doesn't care if she fits in at college because she never fit in anywhere. She thinks she has always been an outcast. Her eyes well with tears as she explains this.

Suicide

- Most of his friends were in the military, as was he. He has been diagnosed with PTSD. He gets free treatment at the veteran's hospital. He worries because it is the same place his friends are treated for their PTSD. So far, two of his friends have committed suicide.
- He cries as he talks about his friends growing up. Four of them have committed suicide. He says, "Do you know what it's like to cut your friend down from rafters in a barn after he hung himself? To hold him as he dies? Not many people do, but I tell you, it's a sight they'll never forget. Four of my friends. Four of them. Life shouldn't be so hard" (RARW).
- She wears her family members' suicides like a badge of honor. With pride she explains how three of her uncles took their own lives. "Life is not worth putting up with, you know, so they got the fuck out of here" (MIST).
- After her brother's recent rape conviction, her mother attempted suicide. She found her mother overdosed on the bedroom floor this morning. She still came to school today.
- She has been committed to the psychiatric unit five times in the past two years for suicide attempts.

Widowed

- She is 41 years old and has been widowed twice. One husband was killed in a DUI crash; one overdosed. She has raised her son alone.
- Her husband died of a heart attack when she was 35. He was 38. She has raised their children alone.

External Stressors: Situations outside of school that affect participants

State Budget Crisis

- Rather than get a job, he planned to use his student loan refund money to pay his bills, etc. Because the state budget had not yet passed, he was unable to get his refund. As a result, his family has had no heat for two weeks because they could not afford heating oil. It is February. The average temperature has been in the teens. He is using three electric space heaters to warm his home.
- She has not had any books all semester. She needed her loan refund to purchase textbooks. She has been trying to photocopy the pages she needs for class, but she just went over the allowed number of pages. She now needs $15 to pay the fee to have her printing turned back on. She does not have it. There are still 13 weeks left for the semester. She does not have a computer or printer at home.

Lack of Reliable Healthcare

- His son had been sick for about one month. He finally took his son to the doctor and learned that the child's ear had been badly infected for so long that he suffered permanent hearing loss in that ear. He was unable to take the child to the doctor because no doctor in the area accepted the insurance provided by the state.
- He has not been taking his PTSD medication for over a month because he cannot afford the co-pay to pick up the prescription.
- His health insurance was canceled for lack of payment. He cannot afford to go to the doctor without insurance so he has stopped taking his antidepressants.
- The doctor who visits campus recommended she see a specialist for the continued stomach pain she has been having. She does not have a ride to the appointment so she is calling to cancel it. She does not think she will be able to get to see this doctor.

Lack of Sufficient Housing

- Four adults and six children live in their two bedroom apartment. "There's no privacy in our house," she says. (HTOG).
- Six adults and four children live in their four bedroom home. One of the adults is bedridden.
- Their roof has been leaking so badly that the upstairs of their home is no longer usable. The ceilings are caving in. "It's pretty hard to focus on your schoolwork when you don't know if you'll find your house caved in when you get home" (JPDN).
- For two weeks, she lived in her car. Her boyfriend threw her out of their apartment and she had nowhere else to go.
- He sleeps wherever someone will let him sleep. He doesn't consider himself homeless because he always finds somewhere to go, but he does not have a home to himself.
- They are being evicted from their apartment for not abiding to a no pets policy. They have nowhere else to go. Their son is only four years old.
- He came to the library over spring break to be able to stay warm. His heat has been shut off.

Psychosocial Issues: Psychological factors that affected participants

Fetishes

- Participant just disclosed that he is seeking psychological help for a fetish he suffers from. He wears adult diapers and defecates in the diapers. It brings him sexual pleasure. He does it in class. He explained an elaborate system for buying the diapers and disposing of soiled diapers. He will be attending outpatient treatment beginning today. He also said that he would kill himself if anyone ever learned of this fetish.

- Participant has disclosed that he suffers from altocalciphilia, a fetish that includes watching women who wear high heels get their heel stuck in gum. He confessed to skipping class in order to throw gum on sidewalks so that he can see women catch their heels in the gum. He spends his weekends at the mall doing the same thing. He has sought help because the fetish is now interfering with his job, as he has missed work to participate in the behavior.

Incontinence

- He loses his bladder when he becomes nervous. He is frequently observed with wet pants. He behaves as if nothing is wrong – like he doesn't even realize his pants are wet. He has been observed in nearly every campus building with wet pants. He has done this at every observation throughout the entire year.

Hypochondriac Behaviors

- She went to disability services today to see if she can get extended testing time. She believes she has a visual impairment in which she sees double. The staff at the office told her she needs to see a medical doctor and get paperwork before she can get accommodations. She does not believe in medical doctors but instead sees healers. She plans to appeal the counselor's decision to deny her accommodations.
- She has a sling that she wears almost every day, but she alternates what arm she wears it on. One day she has it on the right arm, the next on the left.
- Today she is on crutches. She said she needs the crutches because her feet hurt. She bought the crutches at a garage sale.
- She has a neck brace on today. The neck brace is old and clearly stained. She said that she got it at the emergency room last night. Two weeks ago she said she did not believe in medical doctors.
- Her arms are wrapped in ace bandages today, but she is not wearing her sling. Like her previous use of a neck brace, the bandages are old and dirty.
- She is on a website looking to buy a used wheelchair for herself.

Self-Inflicted Injury

- She has multiple lacerations on her forearms on top of old scars. She has begun cutting herself again. She has been meeting with the campus counselor for help with this. She said she has been cutting herself for around 20 years. Her only fear is that someday she will go too deep and bleed to death. "Cutting myself is physical manifestation of the pain that no one can see" (MIST).
- Her arms are covered in bloody gauze. She was cutting herself again last night.
- She only wears long sleeves now even though it is 90 degrees. She is trying to hide her lacerations.

Suicidal Thinking

- She emailed me to let me know she is on her way to the emergency room to admit herself to the psychiatric ward. Her sister found her this morning with a rope around her neck. She had planned to take her own life to escape her bad marriage. She is going to admit herself so that she gets the help that she needs.
- She is leaving here to go to the campus counselor. She has been having thoughts of ending her life. She explains that she can't handle what is happening and dying seems like the only option to make things right.
- He explains that he has been hospitalized five times for suicide attempts. "Once, I almost made it. I almost died. I was in the hospital for five days but I lived. I can't even kill myself right" (RARW).

Section Two: Dominant Values Assumptions

An analysis of the data provided five dominant values assumptions that attributed to the participants' lives and experiences at college. These values are outlined in the below section.

Previous Life and Home Life Experiences. Previous life and home experiences functioned as stumbling blocks to participants in this study. Participants recounted stories of abuse, neglect, intimidation and more. Previous childhood trauma continued to haunt students as they began college and prevented them from moving forward and living in the present. It also perpetuated self-destructive behaviors including suicidal thoughts and other psycho-social issues. Additionally, previous experiences in school negatively affected students' self-confidence and academic performance. Participants lacked the necessary academic background to success in college level coursework.

Participants' current home lives were just as troublesome as their previous experiences. While some participants came from nuclear families, all experienced significant issues on the home front. They had family members who were addicted to drugs and alcohol, had family members who were incarcerated, had family members who were prostitutes, were in abusive relationships, experienced teenage pregnancy, and more. They often viewed problems at home as more significant than problems at school, and school time was frequently sacrificed to deal with family life. Additionally, problems at home often interfered with their ability to concentrate and lessened their motivation.

Fatalism. Participant's traumatic life experiences and insufficient educational experiences triggered a feeling of inability to change current circumstances. Participants did not believe they themselves were responsible for changing the course of their lives but instead adopted a fatalistic mentality. While they had dreams and aspirations, their belief was that life would take them in the direction it chose for them and they were unable to chart their own course.

Coping. Poor previous and current life experience coupled with a fatalistic mindset led to an inability to enable healthy coping mechanisms. Rather than persisting when life became difficult, participants focused on what they believed should happen to them, avoided the stressor altogether, attempted to escape the problem, and more. They were unable to persevere through adversity and gave up when the going got tough.

Social Pressure. The participants also surrounded themselves in unhealthy friendships. Harmful partners, drug addicted friends, and more pulled participants away from school. These relationships were a game of give and take, where some activity or good was received in return for the unhealthy bond.

Lack of Understanding and Trust. As the first in the family to go to school, these students had no one in their families to lean on for support or guidance, and because they distrusted most campus figures, they rarely asked for help. As a result, they misunderstood many academic policies. From financial aid to classes, withdrawals, scheduled breaks and more, participants failed to understand the culture of higher education which affected their level of comfort.

Section Three: Persistence

Twenty-nine students participated in this study. At the conclusion of the data collection

phase, one student was still enrolled at the college. She was on academic probation and had

changed from a bachelor's degree program to an associate's degree program, but she was still

enrolled full time. All other students left the institution. The following outlines the reasons they

left:

- Six (6) students disappeared without withdrawing from school or letting the researcher know they were leaving. It is unknown why they left or where they went.
- Five (5) students were academically dismissed.
- Four (4) students left because they did not make academic progress and lost their financial aid.
- One (1) student left because her boyfriend insisted that she move to Florida with him.
- One (1) student left because her mother wanted her to take an open position at a factory.
- One (1) student left because his uncle was going to allow him to work at his auto body shop.
- One (1) student left because his wife had become pregnant with their fourth child.
- One (1) student left because her addiction had taken over her life.
- One (1) student left because she did not want to develop the type of attitude her roommates had. She believed that her roommates were arrogant.
- One (1) student left because her mother needed her to come home and help care for her siblings.
- One (1) student left because his family had been evicted from their home and they needed to find a new place to live.
- One (1) student left because she did not think anyone at the school liked her and believed that she did not fit in with any of her peers.
- One (1) student left because she became pregnant.
- One (1) student left because her husband burnt her textbooks and damaged her car so she could no longer drive it to school.
- One (1) student left because her father told her she would not be able to pass her courses.
- One (1) student left because she felt she was unprepared to succeed in college.
- One (1) student left because he wanted to be home with a sick family member.

Only two students responded to the request to participate in a follow up interview. At the

time of the interviews, one was working full time at a convenience store as a night shift clerk.

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The other student was still seeking employment. Neither said they regretted their decision to leave school and both said they regretted their decision to begin school in the first place.

In conclusion, this chapter presented the ethnographic data that were collected as part of this study. It emphasized the voices of the participants, told their stories, and shared their struggles. The excerpts in this chapter were collected from the participants themselves – the students who faced the daily struggles of a life in rural, generational poverty. Though much of the data highlighted the hardships these students experienced, it also reveals their immense desire to break free from poverty, to succeed in college, and to live a more sustainable future.

Chapter Five: Discussions, Implications and Recommendations

Introduction

This chapter is a discussion of the research study's findings. It begins with an overview of the study including the research questions that guided the research and the methods used to answer those questions. Next, the researcher summarizes the study's findings in relation to its theoretical framework. Then, the researcher provides a discussion of implications of the study's findings. The chapter concludes with recommendations for institutions with populations of first generation, low socioeconomic students. This chapter provides the opportunity for the researcher to share the voices of the study's participants, identifying their most troublesome obstacles, and propose solutions for helping these students succeed.

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify the cultural norms, beliefs, language, values, assumptions and rituals of first generation college students from rural, low socioeconomic status in order to better understand how social and cultural capital create obstacles that affect persistence in rural, low socioeconomic students. The researcher employed qualitative methods, specifically those of critical ethnography. The researcher conducted 120 hours of direct observation of 29 participants, 31 hours of key informant interviewing, two hours of follow up interviewing and review of 35 artifacts (timelines and life histories). Fifteen themes and 59 subthemes emerged as the data were analyzed. Appendix D contains a full list of these themes and subthemes.

This study resulted in the identification of six values assumptions that affected the persistence and ultimately the lives of first generation students of low socioeconomic status.

These six values assumptions drove the thoughts, actions and behaviors of the study's participants by influencing both their choices and decision making. These values assumptions align with the work of other researchers who have also studied these same types of students. Bourdieu (1977; 1979; 1986) developed a theory of social reproduction that offers a paradigm of class analysis and explains how inequalities in education perpetuate social stratification due to cultural capital that is passed down generationally. This transmission of beliefs creates cultural distinctions that affect one's perceived place in the world. Perna (2006) determined that these cultural distinctions affect one's disposition towards education and ultimately present barriers for many students from poverty.

There exists a robust research base that provides quantitative measurements of this student group's attributes. This study fills a gap in the literature by presenting the collective voice of low-income first generation students from rural settings. By presenting their lived experiences, this study documented the struggles these students faced as they attempted to acclimate to the culture and climate of higher education and identified barriers that prohibited so many of them from achieving their dreams. It provided a chance for these students, who are often overlooked, to share their experiences, express their concerns, and let others hear their voices. As one participant said, "No one pays attention to people like me. It's like I'm invisible or something, like my problems don't matter. How are people supposed to help me if they don't even know what's wrong?" (HGNB). This study highlights the problems rural, low socioeconomic students face and presents several recommendations colleges and universities can implement to better serve this population of students who so desperately need support in order to fulfill their dreams.

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Research Questions

Two research questions geared towards providing a cultural understanding of the experiences of students from rural poverty guided this study. They were:

1) What values assumptions drive the thoughts, actions, choices, behaviors and decisions or rural, low socioeconomic students?

2) What effect does social and cultural capital have on degree persistence in rural, low socioeconomic status students?

Conclusions

The 29 students who participated in this study were unique individuals with distinctive personalities, different family backgrounds, diverse career aspirations, and varied life experiences. Some were freshmen; others had been in school several semesters. Some were traditionally aged freshmen who graduated high school just a few months beforehand, and others were married with children and had previous work experience. As individuals, they were all very distinct; however, they were all raised in the climate of rural, generational poverty, and they were all first generation college students who experienced tremendous struggle as they tried to fulfill the dream of earning a college degree.

The data revealed the fact that these students lived very complicated lives. In addition to attending school full time, several were working, caring for children, and caring for family members. As one participant said, school was often like elevator music − something that he was aware of but wasn't paying much attention to (RARW). All participants lacked a support system and positive role models. With no one to lean on, most of them caved under the pressures of life, leaving school without completing their degree. At the end of the study, only one participant was

still enrolled in school. These results support Bourdieu's (1977; 1979; 1986) and Perna's (2006) theories of social reproduction and provide evidence of the cultural mismatch that students of low socioeconomic status experience at traditional higher education institutions.

Values assumptions. An analysis of the data in relation to the study's theoretical framework revealed five major values assumptions that existed within the climate and culture of this sample of students. These values dictated the responses the participants exhibited in relation to both their personal and academic lives. The following is a discussion of each values assumption.

Previous life and home experiences. All participants in the study lived tumultuous lives before coming to college as well as while they were enrolled. All experienced material deprivation. Some of their parents worked several jobs in order to make ends meet. Others' parents never worked, but instead, state subsidies and disability benefits were the main source of income. They shared stories of physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, hunger and intimidation. Some shared stories of living with alcoholics and drug addicts. Several were raised by extended family members or friends because their parents were incarcerated, institutionalized, or otherwise absent. They grew up with family members who suffered significant illness − both physical and mental. Due to family constraints, three were sent to free boarding schools and grew up without their families present.

In addition to describing traumatic experiences during their childhood, several participants reported inadequate previous educational experiences and did not feel as though they were prepared for college level coursework. Their families did not promote education as a valuable asset. They were not encouraged to earn high grades or attend school regularly. One

participant never graduated high school and instead earned a GED late in life. As a result, they reported feeling inferior to their college classmates and were intimidated by their professors. Many struggled academically. Several earned low grades; as a result, some were placed on academic probation, others were academically dismissed from the institution, and some did not complete enough credits to maintain their full time status in order to collect federal student aid monies.

Life outside of school was arduous for most participants. Just as all participants reported traumatic childhoods, all participants also reported experiencing disturbing incidents in their current family and home lives. Within the circle of their family and friends, there were issues with addiction, incarceration, prostitution, physical abuse, infidelity, hunger, suicide, and mental illness. Two participants were widows; several were single parents; one was raising his siblings. Many times, problems at home interfered with campus life, and school time had to be sacrificed to manage personal situations that were deemed more significant.

Living in stressful environments left participants with strong feelings of anxiety. Entertainment was frequently used as a way to escape harsh life circumstances. Several participants immersed themselves in video games, board games and comic books for large periods of time. In doing so, schoolwork and class time was frequently neglected, sending participants deeper into a hole they did not know how to dig themselves out of. An inability to cope with life propagated a chain reaction of more stress and guilt for these participants.

Worry and desperation were prevalent among the group. Participants were frequently observed crying over life circumstances, assignments, or family situations. It was common for participants to miss class because they were too overwhelmed to pay attention. "How am I

supposed to listen to a lecture when my life is falling apart? How am I supposed to do my homework?" (HGNB). Their physical appearance often suffered during these breakdowns, and eating and sleeping became unimportant. It was during these collapses that participants were likely to give up. Rather than persisting or seeking help or encouragement when things became difficult, giving up and going home seemed like the best solution. "I'm leaving. This place brings me unnecessary stress. I have enough going on without it" (DUBB).

Their families were often not supportive of their decision to attend college. Some had family members who tried to talk them out of going to college. "Mom thinks I'm wasting my time here. She said I'd be better off getting a job. You know, I'm going to do my best to prove her wrong" (MIGN). Sadly, that student's mother found her a job, and before the end of her second semester, she quit college to go to work at a job her mother found her. Others' family members chided them for their decision to attend college, citing that college would make them different. "My mom hates that I'm here. Her goal is to get me out of her. She doesn't want me to start thinking I'm better than her because I'm educated" (TVSS). She left at the end of her second semester because she did not feel like she fit in. Another participant left school because her father did not think she was smart enough to handle the work. Yet another left because her husband, who did not want her to be in school, damaged her textbooks and car so she would fail out. In these cases, academics were not a stumbling block; instead, a difficult life proved to be too much.

Fatalism. Previous life experiences were shown to affect participants' ability to deal with their present situations. Previous circumstances and an inability to control what had happened in their youth left participants with diminished life prospects. Their strong belief in

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fate proved to be a stumbling block that was often too big to be overcome. Participants' pasts continued to haunt them as they began college. This prevented them from living in the present and fully acclimating to college. A shared belief that things would not get better – even if effort was put into a task – was prevalent. Participants felt powerless to control what had happened to them in the past, which incubated a strong belief that things are predetermined and little (or nothing) can be done to change them.

Rather than having the ability to change one's circumstances, there was a sense of helplessness about the future. Although participants had dreams and aspirations, their belief was that life would take them in the direction it chose for them, and they themselves were powerless to stop it. Planning for the future was seen as unimportant because the future was already determined. When faced with adversity, participants felt powerless to change the outcome. "My entire life has been a smorgasbord of shit. Why would I think that would change now?" (PEMD). Little to no personal initiative to change one's circumstances was observed. Many times, participants blamed this on their family history. Upon receiving poor midterm grades, one participant said, "Of course my grades suck. My entire family has bad luck. If something bad is gonna happen, it happens to one of us. Why would I be any different?" (EAVQ). Little initiative to modify behavior and little responsibility in changing the course of life was evidenced.

Coping skills. Participants also demonstrated an inability to employ healthy coping mechanisms. Obstacles were viewed as insurmountable challenges. Rather than persisting when life became difficult, participants employed a range of unhealthy coping mechanisms further complicating their already complex situations. Some participants became immobilized, unable to

move forward, and gave up on their dreams. Others exhibited poor social behavior and psychosocial disorders.

Due to the effects of growing up in unhealthy environments and feeling unable to control the future, issues with fetishes, incontinence, hypochondriac behaviors, self-mutilation, and suicidal thoughts plagued many participants. These issues often interfered with their ability to attend class, concentrate, complete assignments, and integrate into campus life. Due to issues of mistrust, several participants reported not being treated for these matters and instead were trying to manage them on their own.

Growing up in an unhealthy environment also left several participants with a sense of anger. They exhibited aggression and hostility towards those they interacted with. Several were quick to shout at others. Bullying and name-calling was also frequently observed. One participant said, "If you lived my life, you'd be pissed too" (MIST). Anger and aggression led to socially uncomfortable situations on campus for the participants. Some did not have any friends, and some bullied their peers. One participant left the institution because she did not feel like she fit in with her peers. "I just don't belong here. I just don't fit in," she said (EAVQ). Others had difficulty interacting with campus faculty and staff. In one situation, campus security was called to remove a participant who was mistreating a staff member.

Social pressure. Participants often surrounded themselves in unhealthy friendships and were easily coerced into participating in behaviors in which they did not wish to partake. In most cases, doing what others wished for them to do was a means of obtaining a resource. Staying in an abusive relationship or having unwanted sex were seen as small trade offs for precious resources like a home to live in or a ride to school. Rather than advocate for themselves or search

for an alternative solution, participants gave into the pressures around them to get what they

needed. One participant explained that life was a game of give and take.

> Life is funny like that. It's not all about you or what you want, and sometimes you have
> to do stuff you don't want to do to get what you need. You got to give some to get some.
> Like my mom, she taught me this lesson. Once, we needed a new roof, so she dated a
> roofer. After a few months, we got the roof and mom left him. She didn't like him, but
> we needed the roof. Another time we needed our car fixed. She found herself a mechanic
> and stayed with him a few months. Car got fixed. You go into life thinking only of you
> and what you want, you ain't gonna get too far. (HTOG)

In other cases, doing what others wanted was a way to keep a family together. After

finding out his wife had been prostituting herself for years, one participant decided the best thing

to do was stay with her. "My kids. I can't imagine my life without them. And the courts they'd

probably never give them to me. I have to stay. They need me now more than ever" (RARW).

Still, other times, doing things that required personal sacrifice were a means of

reciprocating past favors. One participant explained that she was the only adult in a household of

six that had a driver's license. She was required to transport all family members anywhere they

needed to go. Often this meant missing school. "I have to," she explained. "They took me in

when I had nowhere else to go. I owe it to them" (HTOG).

Lack of understanding and trust. As the first in the family to go to school, the

participants had no one in their families to lean on for support or guidance. Their previous and

current life circumstances left them feeling distrustful of authority figures. They often did not

believe information that came from campus staff. Therefore, they rarely asked for help

themselves and frequently did not accept help that was offered. This led to considerable

misunderstanding of academic policies, which made navigating the college experience

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particularly distressing. From financial aid to classes, withdrawals, scheduled breaks and more, participants failed to understand academic policy and procedure.

Being raised in an abusive environment also left participants wary of others. Many struggled to find and maintain friendships on campus and were disengaged with their peers. Several showed apprehension when dealing with situations involving authority figures. Participants described feeling as though their professors and advisors were angry with them. They were fearful that they would be scolded or otherwise punished for performing poorly. When issues arose, some participants avoided their professors and even quit attending class because they feared being reprimanded. This led to several of them missing opportunities for improving their grades or even failing classes.

Access to social and cultural capital. The participants in this study all expressed the desire to break free of the lives they were accustomed to. They wished to escape the pain they had grown up with and give themselves and their children a better chance at life. When asked about their reason for starting college, all hoped for a brighter future. "I don't want to be like my mom, working two and three jobs at a time and still not having enough money to make ends meet" she said. "I want more for myself" (EAVQ). Others expressed concern about giving their children better lives. One participant said, "I know what it's like to go to bed hungry day after day. I never want my kids to feel that kind of pain. I never want them to come home and find the utilities shut off" (RARW). Many communicated that college was their only chance for breaking free. "This is my last chance at life. I have to make this work. Otherwise, I don't know what I'll do" (PTHF).

Poor family relationships left many participants without a viable support network. Several participants reported being estranged from their family. One participant left home when she was 15 years old. She had not talked to her mother in 18 years. Another married an abusive man when she was 18 in order to get away from her parents. Yet another had not seen his father in 16 years due to incarceration. One was raising his siblings because his parents were absent. Still, others were raised by extended family members and had no contact with their parents. A lack of family support left these students alone to deal with life's problems. Outside responsibilities also prevented them from fully participating in the college experience.

Without financial support from their families, something middle class students are generally accustomed to, most participants had to work long hours in addition to attending class. As a result, they often missed class or were too tired to complete assignments. Their work schedules also prohibited them from attending required campus events. Ultimately, the need to work left many of them with hard choices. "I have to work," one participant explained. "but when I do, I don't have time to study. It's like I can't have the best of both worlds, you know, like it's just too hard to be both. I either be a student or be an employee. I have to choose one" (JAMB). Sparse financial resources also led to hunger and housing issues. One participant reported that he, his wife and their three children had to live without heat during a significant winter storm because the gas company had turned off his utilities, and he had no means of having them restored. Another family had to visit local food banks regularly.

In addition to financial struggles, participants also lacked a network of social support. When her son became ill, one participant had to miss a week of class because she had no childcare. She could not rely on her family members to help. Often, finding a ride to campus was

a challenge. Unreliable vehicles and no one to offer a ride often prohibited students from making the necessary commute to campus. While a lack of access to these types of resources is critical to the success of any student, a lack of cultural capital compounded the participants' struggles.

Several participants' families and friends disagreed with their decision to attend college. Their family members told them they were not smart enough to be in college, that college would change them, or that they belonged in the workforce, carrying on family traditions. None of them reported having family encouragement regarding their decision to attend college but several indicated that their family members did not believe that college was a viable option.

When asked, only one of the participants mentioned growing up with a positive role. She reported that her boarding school house mother "was a great person who I always looked up to" (EAVQ). All others reported the opposite. One participant said, "My dad's in jail and my mom's a junkie. I'm the positive role model here" (HGNB). Several reported that they knew no one outside of the campus who had graduated college. Without positive role models or encouragement, participants were left on their own to navigate college life. They often felt that they did not fit in with their peers. They explained that their professors intentionally tried to confuse them. Their only inspiration for attending college was the hope of a better life. Sadly, that did not happen for most of them.

Without a positive role model, participants were left alone with little outside encouragement. Their previous experiences left them with low confidence and a lack of trust. Their professors' attempts to intervene were viewed negatively rather than as attempts to assist and were often ignored. "I know my grades are bad. Why does he think he needs to remind me?" (JPDN). Participants often believed their professors were the enemy rather than a resource.

None of the participants made strong connections with campus faculty or staff. They instead felt intimidated by the language that was used in conversations with staff. "I think she tries to confuse me. Like, speak English to me please. Otherwise you sound like the teacher in the Peanuts to me. Blah blah, blah blah blah, blah. I have no idea what that means" (RARW). This division interfered with participants' level of comfort in class and other situations involving campus staff. "I had no idea what he was saying. I didn't ask him to explain because when I do, he looks at me like I'm a dumbass" one participant explained in discussing a recent interaction he had with a campus tutor (BJNC).

At the end of the academic year, only one participant remained at the institution. While she aspired to go to graduate school for agricultural engineering, she was told that she would not be successful in her chosen career path and that graduate school was out of reach. "My advisor told me that if I have trouble in Bio I, I'll never get accepted to grad school. I guess she's right, so I'm just gonna do an associate's degree. A two year degree is better than no degree" (BREA). She changed her major to general studies.

The other 28 other participants left the institution. However, it should be noted that only nine students left for academic reasons, and six left for unknown reasons. In all other cases, participants left due to family and life circumstances. Pregnancy, addiction, family persuasion, family illness, and homeless were cited as reasons for leaving school. In other cases, students felt as though they did not fit in with their peers or felt underprepared for college coursework. Overall, with more than half of the students who left school before finishing their degree, access to cultural capital strongly influenced their decision. Academics played a role in only nine cases.

Implications

Students of rural poverty are often overlooked in educational research, yet they are a population of students that deserves consideration. This study devoted particular attention to documenting the experiences of first generation students of rural, generational poverty as they attempted to navigate college. Using observation and interviews as the primary methods of collecting data allowed the researcher to obtain thick description of the participants' lives, documenting their experiences as they traversed college. The students who participated in this study began their journeys with a sense of hope. They had big plans. They dreamed of owning horse farms and businesses, living in big houses, earning high salaries, and going to graduate school. They wished to break the cycle of poverty by being able to provide their children with better lives. To them, earning a college degree would provide opportunity and a better life.

Unfortunately, earning a degree was not feasible for the majority of the participants in this study. The participants who did not survive the college experience are now left with more debt and no degree. They began college with hope for the future but could not handle the pressures and are now, due to student loan payback, left in greater financial duress than before they started. In a follow-up interview after leaving the college, one participant said, "I feel like a fool for even starting. I was there only 16 weeks and now I owe almost $16,000. That's a grand a week. How am I supposed to pay that back now? My payment is $300 a month. That's a week of my paycheck" (EAVQ). Sadly, this will be the case for many of the participants.

To enhance the body of knowledge existing about students of low socioeconomic status, the researcher recommends the following topics for further research. Such research would

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broaden the data pool about this fragile group of students and thus better assist colleges and universities in meeting their needs.

- A similar ethnographic study focusing on low socioeconomic students in an urban setting would provide much needed data about urban populations of low socioeconomic students.

- While the majority of the participants in this study did not stay in school beyond their first year, a longitudinal study on these types of learners would track their experiences of several years – even after they left college.

- A quantitative study may be more appealing to students who may not wish to participate in observations or interviews.

- A mixed-methods approach may capture participants who were willing to only participate in a survey as well as those who were willing to participate in observations and interviews.

- A comparative analysis of first generation of students from rural middle class backgrounds and those of rural socioeconomic status would provide data on class-specific characteristics.

The results of this study have implications on every college and university that accepts low socioeconomic status students and every educator who interacts with these students. As Payne (2005, 2008) suggested, obtaining a degree is frequently seen as a means of social mobility; however, students of low socioeconomic status finish college at far lesser rates than their middle class peers (Haveman & Smeeding, 2006; Walpole, 2003). This study further contributes to this point, but also shows that students of low socioeconomic status do not always

leave school for academic reasons. The participants of this study lacked the resources they needed to succeed. They experienced a wide range of stressors during the research period, and could not find the tools they needed to persist.

Recommendations

Retention affects every facet of higher education, and all institutions are concerned with retaining as many students as possible. The results of this study clearly show a need for more support for students of rural, generational poverty. The following contains recommendations for colleges and universities, professors and academic staff, and educational policymakers.

Recommendations for Practitioners

- Colleges and universities should create student-mentoring programs for first generation students. In order to be successful, first generation students, especially those students of low socioeconomic status, must have a safe, positive role model. The data suggest that these students often do not feel comfortable with authority figures. Access to a peer mentor could help bridge that gap and provide these students with a role model they feel safe and comfortable around. Students could meet others with similar backgrounds, network on campus, meet friends, and learn about the college process.

- Hunger can be an issue for many low socioeconomic students. Colleges and universities should consider implementing campus food banks in order to help students in crises. Students could arrange food drives in the local and campus community as a way to stock the food bank. In order to avoid embarrassment, the process for obtaining food should be easy and anonymous. Students should be made aware of the food bank on campus at

orientation, and signs advertising this service should be posted in busy campus areas to ensure all students are aware of the resource.

- The data suggest that these students are unsure of the financial aid and class registration process. Institutions should consider implementing drop-in sessions with financial aid officers and advisors throughout the semester, not just at registration time. Holding a monthly drop-in session with refreshments in a commons area (such as the library or a student center) would provide students with a comfortable environment to meet campus officials, build trust, and receive answers to their questions. Offices should consider having literature available for students who have questions but do not wish to ask those questions or speak to campus officials.

- Campuses should develop registries of local social service organizations. Flyers listing contact information for local food banks, emergency relief shelters, psychiatric services, drug rehabilitation centers, county welfare offices, and local thrift shops should be readily available in every building on campus. Someone at the institution should be appointed to handle referrals if needed.

- Ride sharing boards should be placed on campus. Students who are either willing to provide a ride or students who need a ride could place their information on the board. This is a simple, cost effective measure to help students who are commuting.

- Institutions should create a student success team for each student on campus. Each team would consist of an advisor, a financial aid officer, and the names of other helpful college employees (school nurse, school counselor, tutors, and so on). At orientation, each student should receive a flyer with his/her team's contact information. Providing these

resources' contact information and personalizing each success team would give students a network to utilize when they are in need of support. This would cost the institutions very little, as all individuals would already work there.

- Colleges should consider implementing creative methods of anger and stress management. Utilizing non-traditional methods for helping students manage their anger and deal with stress. Expressive arts therapy workshops and visiting therapy dogs are cost-effective ways of providing students an avenue to decompress.

- Early intervention programs should be utilized to teach students about college. Admissions offices should use predictive analysis to target students of low socioeconomic status for placement in these programs. The programs should address the rigors of being a student so that students understand college expectations. They should address college policies and important dates. These programs could be offered throughout the first few weeks of school.

- Many students in this study attempted to attend class without the required textbooks. Campus libraries should work to create lending libraries of as many textbooks as possible by working with the campus bookstore to keep and maintain a lending library of current textbooks. This would require a significant financial investment for the college; however, state and private grants provide financial resources for such libraries. Books should be placed on reserve for in-library use only to ensure as many students as possible were able to utilize this resource.

- The participants in the study believed that no one understood what was happening in their lives. This study's data should serve as a building block for mandatory campus trainings

for advisors, tutors, librarians, and faculty. Knowledge of the types of struggles these students experience would arm employees with the information they need to not only recognize the struggles these students face but work with them to overcome these struggles.

- In order to finance the programs recommended in this section, colleges should seek grant monies to help cover related costs. State government grants for colleges that admit and retain economically disadvantaged students exist, and several private foundations offer similar grants.

Recommendations for Academics

- The data show that students of low socioeconomic status struggle with trusting authority figures. Professors and lecturers should strengthen their relationships with students by being open about themselves and making themselves as accessible as possible. These students are in strong need of positive role models, so creating an open atmosphere where students feel comfortable is critical to their success.

- The study showed that students of low socioeconomic status struggle with understanding assignments. Professors should be sure to fully explain the course syllabus and assignment requirements. Students should be reminded of due dates. Rubrics or exemplars should be provided whenever possible.

- Professors should consider holding office hours in places other than their own offices, so that students do not feel they must meet faculty on their territory. Places like the campus library provide a more student-centered environment that is less threatening to students who already distrust authority figures.

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- Vocabulary was a stumbling block for many students in this study. Professors should consider using language from the vernacular as often as possible as a means to connect with students. Vocabulary-building exercises should be built in to as many general classes as possible in order to help students understand words they may not be familiar with.

Recommendations for Policy Makers

- Grant programs should be developed to provide colleges and universities with the financial resources they need to better serve economically disadvantaged students. Grants should be competitive in order to provide incentive to not only admit these students but retain them.

- In addition to federal PELL grants, additional subsidies for high achieving low income students should be offered to help students finance their education and provide incentive for performing well and earning high grades. These programs could function like merit-based scholarships and grants, and only be awarded to students who met necessary academic benchmarks.

- Federal work-study programs should be expanded to include more summer employment opportunities. Because there is often not a great need for work-study students over summer breaks, these programs should distribute the funds to local municipalities to provide summer employment in local libraries and municipal and county offices. Such a program would not only help students financially and provide them with work experience but working in middle class environments would also provide them with further opportunity to learn about middle class values.

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Concluding Thoughts

The students who participated in this study began their college journeys in search for a better life. They saw college as a way to escape their troubled lives and as a means for gaining the stability they so desperately needed. They dreamed of giving their children more than they had, of leaving poverty behind, of making their families proud, and of starting a career. They were mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, sons and daughters who aspired to be business owners, nurses, psychologists, paleontologists, agricultural engineers, police officers, teachers, and more. They wanted to own homes, have enough money to pay their bills, go on vacations, and never worry about hunger again, yet all of them experienced a significant cultural mismatch when they began their college journeys, and unfortunately, most of the students who gave their time for this research were not successful in meeting their goals.

Their dreams of graduating college were quickly extinguished. Many did not survive the first semester. Only one survived the study. While some gave in to pressure from family and friends, others felt as though they did not belong with their peers and yet others believed that their professors wanted to see them fail. Their values assumptions, which conflicted with those of academia, prevented them from achieving their goals. Their troubled pasts and turbulent home lives did not leave them with the time and strength necessary to focus on their studies. Their belief in fate – the idea that life would never get better – was stronger than their desire to fulfill their dreams. These circumstances left them unable to cope with the everyday stressors of college. They resorted to unhealthy coping mechanisms that set them further behind. Rather than being surrounded by support and encouragement from friends and family, these students were left to figure out college on their own. They sacrificed their own dreams and happiness for others

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and often had to make tough choices in order to get the resources they needed. These circumstances, coupled with a lack of positive role models, left these students confused about college and wary of those who tried to help them. Their lack of cultural capital was the ultimate stumbling block.

This is not meant to deter colleges and universities from accepting these students; rather, the goal of this study is to show that this fragile group of students is capable of completing college if given the right tools. While it is true that only one student was still enrolled in college at the conclusion of this study, it is critical to note that the majority of students who withdrew from college did not do so for academic reasons. Instead, they were unable to cope with the stress of their day-to-day lives, caved under tremendous pressure, and forfeited their dreams. This must change.

It is not enough to simply admit these students; they must be supported as they acclimate to the culture of higher education. College administrators, program developers, professors, advisors and all college staff must do more to learn about and consider the experiences of these students in order to develop programs that provide them with the resources they need to succeed. Classroom activities must inspire them to flourish rather than make them feel inferior. Educational policy makers must consider the need to not only finance these students' tuition but also help institutions with grant monies to develop the programs these students need.

Within this student group is immense hidden talent and a real desire to triumph over life circumstances. However, this talent is often overshadowed by significant struggle that often goes unnoticed by colleges and universities. Even after coming from a low-income family and working with low-income students for my entire professional career, I was not fully prepared for

the situations that I witnessed and learned about. These students must succeed in order to break the cycle of poverty, and in order to help these students succeed, their needs must be met.

This bright, hopeful, and talented group of students must no longer be overlooked. Instead, everyone must do their part to help them overcome the cultural obstacles that have prohibited so many of them from achieving their dreams. Colleges and universities must become places for all students, regardless of their previous life circumstances. The information yielded from this study must be used to develop initiatives to help rural, low socioeconomic students achieve their academic goals because these students matter. They must be shown the path to success in order to successfully complete their college journeys. In order to do this, colleges must do their part to uncover the hidden rules indicative of social stratification and give these students the boost they need to succeed.

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Appendix A

Sample Observation Guide

Category	Includes	Researcher's Notes
Appearance	Clothing, age, gender, physical appearance.	
Verbal Behavior	Who speaks to whom? For how long? Languages or dialects? Who is not interacting? What do people do that may indicate their rank/status?	
Physical Behavior	What are people doing? Who does what?	
Personal Space	How close are people to one another? Who is close to whom?	
Mannerism/Patterns of speech that Stand Out	What is receiving a lot of attention?	

Appendix B

Preliminary Data Inventory/Coding Checklist

Category/Code	Data Location/Source	Researcher's Notes
Beliefs		
Attitudes		
Preferences		
Language		
Behaviors		
Mannerisms		
Parental Education		
Parental Occupation		
Parental Aspirations		
Parental Encouragement		
Social Network		
Qualities of Friendship		
Previous Educational Exp.		
Academic Preparation		
Assumptions		
Expectations		
Future Orientations/Goals		

Appendix C

Data Triangulation Chart

Participant: _____   Date(s): _____

Source #1	Source #2	Source #3
Interpretation:		

Appendix D

List of Themes and Subthemes

Coping Skills
      Resiliency
      Resignation
      Escapism and Fantasy
      Anxious Avoidance
      Rationalization
      Entertainment

Aggression
      Hostility
      Bullying

Apathy
      Detachment from Situations
      Passive Indifference
      Pessimism

Trust
      Dependence
      Interdependence
      Optimism and Hopefulness
      Self Reliance and Confidence

Disorientation
      Misunderstanding and Misjudgment
      Unreasonable Demands and Expectations
      Lack of Understanding of Academic Policy and Protocol

Connectedness
      Association with Family and Friends
      Disassociation with Family and Friends
      Polarization from Colleagues and Peer Groups

Physical Being
      Appearance
      Clothing
      Hygiene
      Brands and Labels

Social Norms
       Use of Profanity
       Loudness
       Lewdness
       Sense of Humor

Ethics
       Work Ethic
       Time
       Power
       Theft

Fate

Hopelessness
       Desperation
       Worry
       Lack of Control and Inability to Change Situation

Future Orientation
       High and Unrealistic Expectations
       No Expectations
       Lack of Planning and Preparation
       Interference of Pride

Previous Life Experiences
       Sexual Assault and Molestation
       Drug Use and Abuse
       Serious Family Illness
       Incarceration of Family Members
       Child Abuse
       Victim of Bullies
       Inadequate Educational Preparation
       Hunger
       Boarding School
       Suicide
       Widowed

External Stressors
       State Budget Crisis
       Lack of Reliable Healthcare
       Lack of Sufficient Housing

Psychosocial Issues
    Fetishes
    Incontinence
    Hypochondriac Behaviors
    Self-Inflicted Injury
    Suicidal Thoughts