Literacy Through Photography: Third-Year and Beyond, First-Generation College Student Experience with Culture and Academic Discourse

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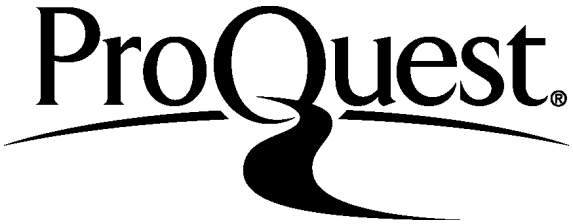

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Abstract

This qualitative portraiture study examines current issues that surround the experience of third-year and beyond, first-generation college students. There is a need to understand the self-perceptions of first-generation college students. Very few studies follow the group into the third year of college. Most programs track the population for just one year beyond matriculation. Success for first-generation college students is vital, as the group has been identified as a growing population with low college completion rates. This study is presented at a critical time, when the President of the United States claims a college education is necessary to live above the poverty line and achieve middle-class status. The United States government has based public policy and higher education funding upon both student need and institution completion rates. This study used arts-based research and literacy through photography techniques to explore the narrative experience of a small sample of first-generation college students while engaged in interpretative photography. The technique aimed to promote imagination, creativity, critical thinking, and personal reflection. The study engaged participants in literacy through photography and sought to synthesize data in the form of writing samples, interpretative photography, and transcribed interviews to uncover patterns that better explain the tenants of culture leading to academic discourse within a disadvantaged population. The portraiture method was used to provide rich and descriptive data by illuminating themes through participant-researcher collaboration with reflective and narrative components.

Keywords: photography, college students, first-generation college students, self-efficacy, literacy, reflection, arts-based research, portraiture, literacy through photography, college, qualitative, core curriculum, culture, academic discourse, power imbalance, longitudinal attrition, writing ability, advising, peer relationships, friends, persistence

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Chapter I. Statement of the Problem

Creativity is a driving force in forward thinking, leadership, and innovation. It picks the human spirit up when it is down, and it fuels the advancement of humankind. Creativity takes many forms and can lead to student engagement and achievement (Eisner, 2006). Creativity has also been known to increase levels of self-efficacy (Mathisen & Bronnick, 2009). First-generation college students could benefit from engagement and self-efficacy stimulated by creative activity.

"College enrollment in fall 2012 plunged by half a million (467,000) from one year earlier. This decline, which includes both graduate and undergraduate enrollment, follows a period of substantial growth—3.2 million—between 2006 and 2011" (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). One in three college freshmen is a first-generation college student, the first in his or her immediate family to attend college. "More than a quarter of these students don't make it past the first year, and almost 90 percent don't graduate within six years" (Greenwald, 2012). Their lack of success is due, in part, to low academic self-efficacy (Ramos-Sánchez & Nichols, 2007). Pike and Kuh (2005) also attribute first-generation student struggles to lower levels of engagement. Lower levels of engagement may be an issue, to some extent, due to cultural communication barriers between first-generation college students and the language of the academy. "Human beings … are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society" (Sapir, 1929, p. 209). A lack of ability to communicate could lead to decreased engagement. "Specifically, first-generation students were less engaged overall and less likely to successfully integrate diverse college experiences; they perceived the college environment as less supportive and reported making less progress in their learning and intellectual development" (Pike & Kuh, 2005, p. 289).

The study focused on first-generation college students enrolled in their third year or beyond. It explored the experiences of a group of these students who were engaged in literacy through photography activity. The study sought to better understand the culture and academic discourse of this population at a later stage in its college career. The participants in this study were enrolled in a communications, art, or English course.

In this study participants engaged in creative methods of literacy through photography. Practicing the visual arts can increase the ability to observe and understand the environment and the arts can also be described as a way to expand one's imagination. The arts lead us to new conclusions "and thereby increase the possible alternatives for acting" (Dahlman, 2007, p. 277). Ewald and Lightfoot (2001) state, "Even very young children, when encouraged, have the ability to express their complex emotional lives visually" (p. 7). In addition, students can model behaviors within a team environment while engaged in creative activity. According to Bandura (1977), "Similarity of experiences among people make consequences to others predictive of ones own outcomes, and is an especially influential factor in vicarious emotional learning" (p. 66).

Creative, aesthetic experience can be developed into a critical way of seeing. The manner in which an artist can interpret meaning through reflection and creation of images is a coveted skill in problem solving. Little, Felten, and Berry (2010) refer to an acute analysis with consideration of aesthetics as the ability "to look" (p. 46). Many education and art education theorists have focused on the ability of aesthetics to prompt critical analysis (Kraehe & Brown, 2011). Creativity and literacy through photography (LTP) are investigative practices, and they can promote educational growth.

> Literacy through photography assignments can help students create thoughtful self-representations; they cultivate critical thinking that encourages students to pay careful attention to what's in front of and around them, regardless of whether they have a camera in hand. (Ewald, Hyde, & Lord, 2012, p. 9)

The objective in LTP is not to support a story with photography; it seeks to reveal a story through photography. It reveals the way individuals see their world in an extraordinary way. "It is through gaining (creative) skills that leaders learn the wisdom, gain the experience, earn the confidence, and embrace the courage that it takes to behave creatively and lead creative actions for the betterment of society" (Harding, 2010, p. 53). Today's society is driven by images. The instant gratification of digital photography has placed photography in the hands of all citizens, as a means of communication and commonplace expression. Educators are turning to image-centered engagement in the classroom. "Relevant visual texts—particularly those produced by students—motivate youth to engage in reading and writing tasks, and adolescents' proficiencies with these texts promotes their sense of writing and reading efficacy" (Van, 2008, p. 13).

Literacy through photography supports the foundational academic core. The overarching goal of this study was to understand LTP engagement and its influence on culture and academic discourse, while being involved in the core competency of writing. This research focused on a population of first-generation college students. To comprehend the severity of this population's disadvantage, it is important to first understand the rate at which these students generally falter in literacy (Moore, Pyne, & Patch, 2013, p. 7) and feel disconnected from the culture of higher education (Davis, 2010; St. John, Hu, & Fisher, 2011). Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, and Terenzini (2004) report that "first-generation students are more likely to leave a four-year

institution at the end of the first year, less likely to remain enrolled in a four-year institution or be on a persistence track to a bachelor's degree after three years" (p. 250). This situation places particular importance on understanding the experience of first-generation college students in the latter part of their college careers.

There are various definitions of first-generation college students. For the purposes of this study first-generation students are defined as the "first person in the immediate family to attend college" (Balemian & Feng, 2013, p. 3). Neither parent of a first-generation student has pursued a degree (or the equivalent) beyond the high school level (Balemian & Feng, 2013). First-generation college students appear to have more disadvantages than their peers. First-generation students are less likely to graduate than peers who have at least one parent with a college education (Snyder, Tan, & Hoffman, 2006). According to Collier and Morgan (2008), first-generation college students have difficulty mastering "the role" of being a college student. Problematic areas of this role include understanding the expectations of instructors, time commitments, time management, and priorities. Students from college-educated families are more likely to have a built-in support structure to advise them as to how to act and what to expect in college, while first-generation college students navigate the experience alone. Low academic self-concept is "a cognitive and affective evaluation of the self that can influence actual academic performance" (Defreitas & Rinn, 2013, p. 58). It inhibits the success of first-generation college students. While students who were not first generation continue to "persist in the face of poor academic performance" (Collier & Morgan, 2008, p. 58), first-generation college students do not. Low academic self-concept leads first-generation students to question their place in higher education classrooms (Collier & Morgan, 2008).

Problem Statement

The nation's leaders are emphasizing higher education as an economic necessity to secure a place in the middle class (The White House, n.d.). President Barack Obama requested that every American commit to at least a year or more of higher education or career training for a better chance of securing employment. The White House (n.d.) notes, "of the 30 fastest growing occupations, more than half require postsecondary education." This necessity is a monumental challenge for first-generation students who comprise 24% of the undergraduate population (Engle & Tinto, 2008). First-generation students have lower college retention rates than those who come from educationally advantaged backgrounds (Collier & Morgan, 2008, p. 443). Institutions of higher education should understand how to meet the needs of this growing at-risk population, including the provision of opportunities for reflective, critical thinking that pertain to personal culture perception. The writing and the literacy through photography activity that was used in this study is an example of the type of experience that could benefit first-generation students as they navigate their college careers.

Purpose Statement

This study sought to understand the experience of third-year and beyond, first-generation students enrolled in college. This study was a synthesis of college student self-perceptions and their experiences when engaged in an LTP activity. Participants were first-generation college students, members of a group that has lower-than-average persistence and college completion rates (Greenwald, 2012). The study used data—writing samples, interpretative photography, and transcribed interviews—to uncover patterns that better explain the tenants of reflective critical thinking skills, culture, and academic discourse within this disadvantaged population.

Visuals have long been ingrained within the process of writing. When multiple forms of creativity merge, they can promote descriptive imagery in poetry, historical analysis in non-fiction, and fantasy worlds in fiction. These examples are all a part of a visual cycle, either inspired by, or inspiring, rich, visual concepts. Writers describe creative vision as the ability to "see" (James Baldwin, quoted in Elgrably, 1984). This ability to see can also affect creative cognition. O'Neil (2011) reports that writing stimulates analytical thinking and improves vocabulary. Writing skills have also developed in children of disadvantaged societies when paired with student-created photography (Ewald & Lightfoot, 2001). This success may be the overall result of creative, group activity or it may be a direct response to images. Sapir (1929) writes: "It is an illusion to think that we can understand the significant outlines of a culture through sheer observation and without the guide of the linguistic symbolism which makes these outlines significant and intelligible to society" (p. 209). In this study, through analysis of visual interpretations and written narratives, multiple literacies were analyzed.

Conceptual Framework

The framework of this study (Figure 1.1) was structured to facilitate the exploration of how LTP activities develop reflective, critical thinking skills in first-generation college students. It also examined their experience of culture and academic discourse through interviews, writing samples, photography and field notes.

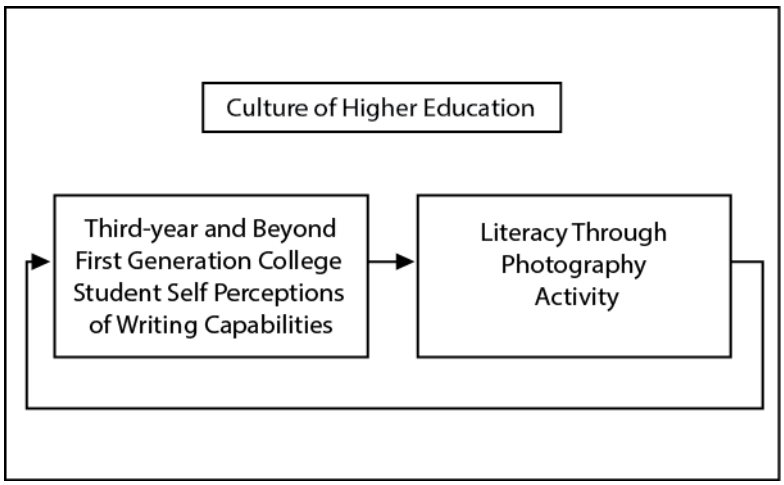

Figure 1.1. Study framework.

Using Bandura's social learning theory (1977), this conceptual framework is based on the understanding that first-generation college students enter critical, reflective thinking activities with individual self-perceptions. According to Bandura (1986), some perceptions of efficacy are based on vicarious experience. Observational learning and visual memory are present in vicarious learning experiences. They also appear in creative, visual group activities. Reflecting upon creative visual images can offer a new approach to critical thinking (Bandura, 1977, p. 172). Additionally, outcomes are influenced by first-generation college student self-perceptions within the culture of academia. Sapir believed human beings are "At the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society" (1929, p.209). This underrepresented population comes from a culture unlike its non-first-generation peers and academically inclined professors. Their narrative writings and visual creations reveal unique lived experiences within a culture that struggles to forge relationships of communication with faculty and staff members, advisers, and peers (Davis, 2010, pp. 79-86). Sapir (1929) believes, "Language is a guide to 'social reality,' and "The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached" (p. 209).

This framework sought to provide insight into the social reality within the distinct world of first-generation college students who have persisted to a third year of study. Horton and Freire's (1990) theory of education focuses on the importance of people's reflecting upon their experiences and analyzing connections between situations and solutions. Reflection by first-generation college students on their experience within the culture of higher education was foundational to this study's design.

Research Questions

The central research question of this study was: What are the experiences of third-year and beyond, first-generation college students engaged in a literacy-based photography approach? A sub-question for this study was: What are the ways in which third-year and beyond, first-generation college students utilize various forms of literacy?

The design of this qualitative study was portraiture with participant visual analysis of photography, supported by artifacts, interviews, and observations. The study aimed to understand the experience of first-generation college students while engaged in LTP. As a practice, LTP seeks to tell a story and show reality while collaborating with the world, often resulting in self-expression and growth (Ewald et al., 2012). Jordan and DiCicco (2012) suggest that visual media such as photography, painting, and film are valuable in literacy tasks (p. 27). Hyde (2010) suggests that activities involving children shooting photographs followed by written narrative reflections emphasize "critical thinking as well as visual, cultural, and written literacy" (p. 56). Zenkov and Harmon (2009) found positive results with urban youth reflecting upon personal photography assignments through writing. They identified digital photography as a tool of engagement in the classroom (Zenkov & Harmon, 2009, p. 583).

Portraiture is a qualitative method primarily used in educational studies and was created in 1983 by sociologist of education Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot. The goal of portraiture is to highlight the good from a social study in an educational setting. It was designed to uncover moments of resistance and negotiation that ultimately lead to success through rich, story-like data and participant-created images (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Participant photographs are paired with written narratives. Participants later summarize the experience with the researcher. Through collaboration one, final photograph, creatively directed by participants, emerges. Portraiture design is integral to this study because of its ability to capture personal meaning through creativity as a collaborative effort between researcher and participants.

Research investigating participants' experience of an event requires a technique that encourages participants to report personal recollections, including reflections that the participants feel are important to understanding their lived experiences through visual written and verbal voices. Encouraging participants to take their own photographs is a way for participants to communicate a subjective experience through personal recollections. These recollections create rich content due to the participant control of data, which in turn drives interviews (Smith, Gidlow, & Steel, 2012). Visuals provide an open communication platform for students with potential for the development of stronger writing or verbal skills.

Significance of Study

This study examined the experiences of five first-generation college students who were enrolled in the third-year or beyond of college. Most often primary and secondary school-age students engage in LTP activities and portraiture studies (Ewald & Lightfoot, 2001). Addressing the experience of underrepresented college-age participants fills a gap in the research literature that uses the portraiture method. In addition, focusing on persistence to the third year of college

addresses a void in current first-generation college student literature, as most studies on this population concentrate on its first year. The creation and reflection of images offers rich expression of the experience that defines the status of this infrequently studied population.

Bandura (1986) refers to image representations as "abstractions of events, rather than simply mental pictures of past observances" (p. 56). Photographic composition skills will be introduced at early stages of the study. Understanding these skills is vital to create intentional meaning behind photographic composition (Ewald & Lightfoot, 2001). Theorists such as Sapir (1929) believe: "Language is primarily a cultural or social product and must be understood as such" (p. 214). Cultural and social contexts will be revealed in written narrative translations of photography to understand culture and academic discourse of first-generation college students.

Ewald, Hyde, and Lord (2012, pp. 1-2) posit that student writing improves when it takes the form of narratives explaining personal photographic intentions. Thought generation attached to images "serves as a springboard for storytelling and writing" (Ewald & Lightfoot, 2001, p. 18). Findings of this study will be useful to educate college faculty, counselors, and retention specialists within institutions of higher education to better meet the needs of the growing first-generation population.

Summary

Chapter One of this study introduced the purpose of the study and the practice of LTP with first-generation college students in a college course. Chapter Two contains a review and synthesis of relevant literature with emerging themes supporting the purpose of the study and its focus on first-generation college students in the United States. Chapter Three provides an overview of the methodology for the study. Chapter Four presents data, emergent themes and

findings. Chapter Five provides a discussion of the study and suggests future directions for studies seeking to understand first-generation college students in their third year and beyond.

Definition of Terms

Academic discourse – "A discourse used when academics publish for other academics, the language of the academy" (Elbow, 1991, p. 135).

Academic self-concept – "a cognitive and affective evaluation of the self that can influence actual academic performance" (Defreitas & Rinn, 2013, p. 58).

Attrition – "Departure" (Tinto, 1987, p. 237).

Creative vision – Creative insight, also referred to by writers as the ability to look or see.

First-generation college students – "College students who are the first in their immediate family to attend college. Neither parent of a first generation student has pursued a degree (or the equivalent) beyond the high school level" (Balemian & Feng, 2013, p. 3).

Literacy through photography (LTP) – an educational method of learning and expressing oneself through writing and photography, addressing visual and physical surroundings while articulating and communicating something relevant about our personal and communal lives (Ewald & Lightfoot, 2001).

Matriculation – "to become a student at a school and especially in a college or university" ("Matriculate," n.d.).

Portraiture – "a genre of inquiry and representation that seeks to join science and art, a method of qualitative inquiry that blurs the boundaries of aesthetics and empiricism in an effort to capture the complexity, dynamics and subtlety of human experience and organizational life" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. xv).

Self-efficacy – One's beliefs in one's capabilities to exercise control over one's level of functioning and environmental demands (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996, p. 1206).

Chapter II. Literature Review

The population of students transitioning to college directly after high school continues to grow as parents and government officials stress the importance of a college education for survival in today's economy (Conley, 2007; Lee, 2011; The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 2009). First-generation college students present intriguing questions. These questions highlight high-school-to-college transition, retention, and success rates. This population is particularly interesting and valuable because it enriches the diversity of classroom perspectives with life experience, displays excitement and enthusiasm for learning, and believes deeply in the value of education (Moore et al., 2013). In addition, the genuine success of first-generation students is important to society. When this group achieves academic capital, cross-generational uplift— a form of social capital that improves life for individual families and the overall quality of society—occurs (St. John et al., 2011). "Since such students are most likely to advance economically if they succeed in higher education, colleges and universities have pushed for decades to recruit more of them" (Jaschik, 2014).

First-generation college students struggle more than the average academic population in core academic preparation in "math, reading and writing" (Balemian & Feng, 2013, p. 21). College curricula are typically structured to present first- and second-year core courses that focus heavily in these fundamental academic areas. Since first-generation students must immediately succeed in these identified areas of weakness in the core, it is not surprising that they are "four times more likely to leave college after one year of enrollment than non first-generation students" (Engle & Tinto, 2008, p. 11). Engaging first-generation college students through writing and speaking about being first-generation students may help foster confidence and aid in addressing the cultural, social, and emotional disconnect they find on campus

(Stebleton & Soria, 2012). A group exploration of this reflection can encourage the development of the academic concept of interdependence, a beneficial idea but common struggle for first-generation students in academia (Orbe, 2008). Personal reflection can provide a platform for the delivery of aforementioned elements that can improve first-generation college student success.

This study examined the experience of first-generation college students enrolled in the third year or beyond at a private university in the northeastern United States. Students were engaged in literacy through photography activity. Specifically, this research addressed this question: What are the experiences of third-year and beyond, first-generation college students engaged in a literacy-based photography approach?

This chapter presents a review of literature supporting the importance of understanding the experiences of first-generation college students who are engaged in innovative curricular techniques, such as literacy through photography.

First-Generation Students

In the United States, attending college is now considered a cultural "rite of passage" (St. John et al., 2011; Tierney, 1999), yet more than half of all Americans believe college access is problematic (Immerwahr & Johnson, 2009). First-generation college students struggle most.

These students must become cultural pioneers and reach beyond many obstacles to achieve the expectations of higher education. There are many definitions of first-generation college students. For purposes of this study, they are defined as individuals born to parents who have not pursued a degree (or the equivalent) beyond the high-school level (Balemian & Feng, 2013). They are less likely to graduate than peers who have at least one parent with a college education (Chen & Carroll, 2005). Although there have been improvements in terms of access,

equality in the attainment of four-year college degrees remains elusive for low-income and first-generation students (Engle & Tinto, 2008). "American universities increasingly admit first-generation college students" (Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson, & Covarrubias, 2012, p. 1178). Yet "the unavoidable fact is that while college access has increased for this population, the opportunity to successfully earn a college degree, especially the bachelor's degree, has not" (Engle & Tinto, 2008, p. 3). Understanding specific struggles of this population is a challenge since national data sets that track them only inquire about the first-year experience, making the data sets "less relevant for assessing attrition behavior for subsequent years, since one's level of academic and social integration may vary over time" (Ishitani, 2006, p. 865).

Some factors that inhibit the success of first-generation college students include graduating from low-income high schools with few college-preparatory courses, hesitation to integrate into academic communities, and reluctance to seek assistance from professors. In contrast, "college courses require students to be independent, self-reliant learners who recognize when they are having problems and know how to seek help from professors, fellow students, or other sources" (Conley, 2007, p. 23). This challenge may lead to a sense of alienation on campus, as first-generation students often feel misunderstood in class (Collier & Morgan, 2008).

First-generation students might feel that they do not belong because they find themselves in the center of a cultural divide between a less-educated family and a scholarly community. Researchers suggest that academic success can be dependent upon "non-curricular variables, such as peer influences, parental expectations, and conditions that encourage academic study" (Venezia & Jaeger, 2013, p. 117). First-generation students have little academic guidance at home (Collier & Morgan, 2008). Parents of first-generation college

students have limited knowledge about primary, secondary, and higher education. They may be unequipped to offer advice to their children because they do not have a full understanding of the teacher's role, purpose of schooling, available resources, and value of formal education (Davis, 2010). The inability of parents to guide and support their first-generation children through higher education is only one of the many problematic challenges this population faces.

Local and federal governments, K-12 schools, first-generation students and their parents must be engaged in plans for success. Lee (2011) suggests an emphasis on integrated social skills through teaching, outreach, and motivation to promote excellence in both schools and colleges. Such strategies allow students and parents to move beyond access barriers in an informed manner.

Inequitable K-12 Public Policy

First-generation college students are often from low-income households, having attended high schools with larger low-income populations (St. John et al., 2011). This starting point puts them at financial disadvantage personally and through public policy, even before they apply to college. They tend to experience less academic preparation in high school with little to no opportunity for Advanced Placement (AP) college-preparatory courses (Balemian & Feng, 2013). High schools that enroll a higher population of low-income students must focus on the maintenance of Title I Elementary and Secondary Education Act funding that serves to support the low-income population, rather than devote time, effort, and funds to the development of AP offerings. "Schools are now penalized by losing federal funding if they do not meet mandates for improvement, so they tend to target students at the margin, students with the best chance of meeting test standards" (St. John & Musoba, 2011, p. 23). This policy discourages focus on the general population of students, including low-income students, for which the funding was

originally created. Stretched school budgets also result in fewer hours allocated to curriculum that prepares students for college placement tests. Placement tests determine financial aid allocations. Low socioeconomic status (SES) ultimately affects the success of first-generation college students before they even choose a college or step onto a college campus. It determines their resources, renders them ill-prepared, and limits their choices.

"Many advocates for at-risk students argue that institutionalized standards articulated from the top down often fail students" (McCurrie, 2009, p. 35). At-risk students do not have an equal opportunity for quality education because they often come from low-income high schools that lack challenging college preparatory curriculum and college preparatory guidance. However, based on concepts of social and cultural responsibility, all children deserve the right to equality in educational programs. When society invests in the education of youth, it uplifts itself collectively as a whole.

Inequitable Postsecondary Public Policy

An investment in human development and learning through systematic reform would better serve social equity in the long term (Lee, 2011). For equal opportunities to exist, funding is necessary to supplement absent college funds of low-SES students who, despite academic ability, often set their sights low when selecting institutions of higher education (Bastedo & Jaquette, 2011). Even small amounts of aid will direct their decisions. An offer of just $1,000 in institutional grant aid increases the probability that students with low SES will choose that institution (Hurwitz, 2012).

More often, financial status prompts them to attend cheaper, two-year institutions. Low-income students who live at home and attend low-cost colleges often work excessive hours to meet their family responsibilities while saving to pay their tuition. These responsibilities

generally eliminate their engagement in personal and social campus activities. Without the cultural and social capital gained from these experiences (which are also more regularly offered at four-year universities), the development of academic capital and cross-generation uplift is impaired. Therefore, low-income students may achieve a shallow academic experience that will help secure employment while academic capital (germinated by social and cultural capital) is never truly gained (Lee, 2011). These students do not realize they are missing academic capital since they enter higher education without an understanding of it and how it is cultivated.

First-generation college students tend to work as many hours as they can at part-time jobs with expected debt upon graduation. This practice may lead them to believe that an investment of time while they accrue debt to earn a degree is an acceptable outcome. This acceptance results in failure to achieve cultural uplift through academic capital because they have less time to foster cultural and social capital. On the surface it appears that the nation has made monumental strides towards educational equality, but are we really there yet?

Students who find themselves among the large group of permanent first-generation college departures face a grim reality. “These students must pay back their loans without the extra earning power associated with attaining their degrees and without the parental or family resources that might be available to their more socioeconomically advantaged peers who leave in debt” (Engle & Tinto, 2008, p. 23).

New government policy that awards financial aid according to institutional ratings may appear fair to individual consumers, but it is a concern, in the long term, to society. By 2018 the President plans to implement higher education legislation that will allocate federal financial aid to individuals based upon their need and the score of the college they choose. Federal aid will

be connected to institutional performance so students are able to access aid at higher-performing colleges (U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

Self-efficacy concerns one's beliefs in one's capabilities to exercise control over one's level of functioning and environmental demands (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996, p. 1206). The shift may alienate low-income first-generation college students who have low self-efficacy (Ramos-Sánchez & Nichols, 2007) and most often choose less selective institutions. The same low-income, first-generation students who were left by the wayside in K-12 may again be excluded from equal opportunity to a quality postsecondary education, if the current trend for this population to choose less selective institutions persists. Despite access to more selective institutions, these decisions may occur due to the adoption of Time + Debt = Degree as their expectation of higher education outcomes over academic capital.

In the absence of academic, social, and cultural remediation that would support a successful higher education experience, low-SES first-generation students currently admitted to postsecondary education face neglect. Instead of offering comprehensive remediation programs, many institutions offer only one or two courses. In addition, students who beat the odds and remain enrolled, without intervention and student support programs, do so through a shallow educational experience, without expectations for academic capital (St. John, et al., 2011). They "often have more limited opportunities to engage in social and academic processes that build understanding of and commitment to uplift because they face greater demands to work while in college" (St. John et al., 2011, p. 199). They may not achieve a higher cultural identity because they are unable to invest time, concentration, and consideration to achieve a transformative scholarly experience. This situation can have an unfavorable impact on society in the long term

because “it can also ultimately lessen the desire to give back to society through taxes or charity” (St. John et al., 2011, p. 199).

Davis (2010) identifies the U.S. postsecondary education system as “integral to the success of the American economy, depending on universal access” (p. 206). Denying this large population equitable access to higher education will perpetuate a negative effect on society and the U.S. economy as a whole. Higher education needs to strive to serve this population in a proactive, rather than a reactive, way (Davis, 2010; St. John et al., 2011).

Retention issues for first-generation students. Inequitable access for first-generation students creates barriers that impact retention. Seidman (2012) writes, “it is especially important to identify the reasons why so many students are either not being retained or are taking longer and longer to graduate” (p. 134). The term “dropout” in reference to college retention generally signifies failure on the part of the individual student who withdraws from an institution; Tinto (1987) asserts that the term “dropout” is reflective of both individual and institutional failure. His conceptualization prompts the need for a better understanding of dropouts to ensure success for all key players—student, institution, and society.

According to Tinto (1987), college students continually evaluate the alignment of their values with an institution while they weigh feedback on their social and academic achievement from peers and faculty. Favorable feedback paired with matched goals and institutional commitments results in academic and social integration. Tinto suggests that this review is an ongoing cycle. Unmatched student goals, institutional commitments, and academic and social integration can prompt students to depart (Tinto, 1987).

Ishitani (2006) notes that many “precollege characteristics” that lead to first-generation college attrition: lower academic skills and class rank in high school, family income, parental

education level, race, and gender. Characteristics that lead to attrition upon college matriculation are reported as choosing a public or non-selective institution over a private institution, failing to maintain continuous enrollment, and failing to secure a work-study position (Ishitani, 2006).

Seidman (2012) suggests a formula for postsecondary institutions to use while striving to meet the needs of first-generation college students: Retention = Early Identification + (Early + Intensive + Continuous) Intervention, including full developmental program funds up front. In his model, early identification of first-generation student status is key.

Intervention programs. The federal TRIO programs are student outreach initiatives designed to identify and provide services for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds. They assist students from middle school through baccalaureate programs. Upward Bound is one of eight existing TRIO programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2014a). TRIO and Upward Bound programs motivate, engage, and educate first-generation students, bringing them to the doors of higher education institutions. TRIO programs have an illustrative history of success toward facilitating high school graduation among potential first-generation college students (Dansby & Dansby-Giles, 2011). After students have completed TRIO or Upward Bound, institutions can use bridge programs to better prepare and orient them during the summer prior to postsecondary matriculation. Bridge programs prompt first-generation college students to enroll, but their rate of completion remains an issue (Complete College America, 2012, p. 2).

The positive academic effects of bridge programs reportedly follow students into the first year and half of college (Barnett, 2012). St. John and Musoba (2011) conclude that "academic success within the first two years is crucial with respect to staying in college" (p. 161). Engle and Tinto (2008) and national data sets focus on first-year retention and attrition,

but students who persist past the first year continue to struggle. Ishitani (2006) found that first-generation college student departures persist in the third through sixth years of a bachelor's degree program.

Transition

First-generation college students must overcome obstacles of inequity. They face retention issues despite efforts of TRIO programs designed for remediation. However, they persist to matriculation where they encounter another obstacle, transition from home culture to the culture of academia.

Culture and self-efficacy. First-generation college students' "experiences underscore how different forms of capital in the educational system work to ensure success for some students while constructing obstacles for others" (Gardner & Holley, 2011, p. 87). They are lone pioneers in a quest for cultural and academic capital. This trek does not happen without consequences. Ultimately they experience feeling of isolation from their culture, as they undergo an academic transition, and isolation from academia, because they do not quite fit in with this new culture. First-generation college students struggle with cultural identity between campus life and culture, home, and family. In a prior study, they "discussed the need to be conscious of their language and behavior around their families and their peers, while others talked about the outright disconnection from their families and backgrounds" (Gardner & Holley, 2011, p. 88).

At the onset of a first-generation student's college career, separation requires individuals to disassociate themselves, in varying degrees, from the communities from which they came—most typically those associated with the family, the local high school, and local areas of residence. They differ not only in composition but also in the values, norms, and behavioral and

intellectual styles that characterize their everyday life. As a result, the process that leads to the adoption of behaviors and norms appropriate to college life requires some degree of transformation, and perhaps rejection, of the norms of past communities (Tinto, 1987).

Family members who have not attended college may have trouble fostering what they cannot understand. They may have difficulty grasping the significance of focus and time required by academic studies. In addition, they can become a distraction. St. John et al. (2011) state, "other forces pull students back, including an orientation towards work, expectations to living close to and contributing financially to the family, and connectivity to local values and culture" (p. 203). "Attending college can even require that first-generation students take sides against their family and friends, something almost every child is reluctant to do, and something almost guaranteed to produce anxiety and discomfort" (Davis, 2010, p. 60).

Beyond cultural struggles, this population can face internal, psychological struggles that affect their academic experience. These struggles are the result of being marginalized in two different cultures and accepted in none. Imposter syndrome is a phenomenon that can be applied to students with socio-cultural characteristics that differ from the majority of a larger population (Gardner & Holley, 2011, pp. 87-88). The imposter phenomenon has been connected to student self-concept and self-efficacy. "In relation to social capital this finding is particularly salient as these students strive to gain acceptance in the larger social network" (Gardner & Holley, 2011, p. 88). In a 2007 study Ramos-Sánchez and Nichols wrote: "It is noteworthy that the level of self-efficacy reported by non-first-generation college students was significantly higher than that reported by first-generation college students" (p. 13). Students with imposter syndrome tend to believe that they are not intelligent even if they are. They strive to hide their self-perceived

stupidity. This may lead to an experience of "intellectual phoniness" (Clance & Imes, 1978, p. 241) and isolation (White & Ali-Kahn, 2013).

Ramos-Sánchez and Nichols (2007) report a direct correlation between student self-efficacy and "its powerful relationship with college adjustment" (p. 13). Low-income minority youth "consider postsecondary campuses as alien territory, need to have teachers, tasks, and pedagogies that affirm who they are" (Braxton, 2000, p. 221). Norton (2011) suggests language is identity. The importance of maintaining a level of independent thought brings us to another first-generation college student issue: communication.

Communication

Culture. Culture clash can affect first-generation college students as they strive to gain academic capital. Writing and speaking in their native, culture-driven vernacular becomes an obstacle in academia. They may resist academic discourse for fear of "acting better than" their peers or family at home (White & Ali-Kahn, 2013, p. 31). They may feel as if they are betraying their culture, family, and heritage by adopting academic discourse. First-generation college students have "discussed the need to be conscious of their language and behavior around their families and their peers" (Gardner & Holley, 2011, p. 88).

Relles and Tierney (2013) claim that the academy promotes ideas of cultural diversity and enriching the academy with diverse personal, cultural identities. Gardner and Holley reference the experience of first-generation students when they (2011) state, "A common obstacle for students developed through language and communication" (p. 85). At the same time, however, college educators expect students to have expanded academic vocabulary and an understanding of both "literal meanings and connotations of words" (Conley, 2003, p. 17). Relles and Tierney point to first-generation college student writing deficiencies when they note,

"Writing with an academic voice presupposes that students understand the role showmanship plays in producing college-level work" (p. 497). The opposing expectations can seem confusing. White and Ali-Kahn (2012) recognize this opposition when they suggest that educators need to acknowledge power dynamics when teaching the conventions of academic discourse because ignoring them only serves to sustain inequality for first-generation college students.

The implications of navigating these mixed messages behind academic discourse acquisition are profound and could inhibit the success of first-generation college students who already struggle with writing, which is important to the academy. Moore et al. (2013) believe "writing is a primary gatekeeper to college achievement" (p. 4).

Self-efficacy. First-generation college students suffer from low self-efficacy. When it comes to academic discourse, it is as if these students were struggling to learn a second language secretly. Embarrassment or cultural resistance keeps them from reaching out for help. They may avoid speaking up in class because they fear sounding less than scholarly among their peers. Avoidance of interaction, discussion, and attention are symptoms of low self-efficacy that directly affect student success in college classrooms. In fact, first-generation college students prefer large lecture classes where they can disappear into crowds and are rarely asked to interact in class discussions (White & Ali-Kahn, 2013). Large format lecture classes require note-taking skills and selective refinement of mass amounts of materials. First-generation college students are likely to be poor note takers, often writing down every word, and thereby missing verbal emphasis clues from the instructor (White & Ali-Kahn, 2013). In smaller classes low efficacy and academic discourse keep them from defending their positions in discussions because first-generation college students avoid participating and speaking their mind publicly in a reflective

manner. Both large lectures and small classes present the discourse-related challenge of understanding literal meanings and connotations of words in readings and lectures. Alongside low-efficacy, academic discourse may represent an actual language barrier to these students. Despite being English speakers, they struggle to communicate due to the "tacit or hidden rules for college success" (White & Ali-Kahn, 2013, p. 30). If an awareness of cultural understanding were met with the concept that academic discourse is a "different language" that is necessary for academic survival, its role may be better understood and received. White and Ali-Kahn (2013) suggest teaching all college students "about the importance of language, discourse communities and identity… to give a voice to those who have been silenced for far too long at the university setting" (p. 39).

Academic discourse: A second language to first-generation college students. Since degree attainment is a large problem for first-generation college students, obstacles such as literacy acquisition in higher education must be analyzed. Achieve, Inc. (2005) points to ill-prepared high school students on college campuses as a barrier, but few have considered degrees of acceptance when it comes to cultural differences between high school and college. In high school, literary discourse is situational to cultures and communities surrounding the institution. However, in higher education the literacy expectations are primarily focused in academic discourse. This shift may have implications for the priority of heritage literacy, causing confusion to young adults trying to find and define themselves in the world.

In intersection: Academic discourse, literacy, and culture. According to Alvesson (2002), culture is "significant in the understanding the richness and variations of organizational life with centrality of shared beliefs, ideas and meanings for any coordinated action (p. 2). Academia presents its own culture. "Organizational culture is one of the major issues in

academic research and education, in organization theory as well as in management practice. There are good reasons for this; the cultural dimension is central in all aspects of organizational life" (Alvesson, 2002, p. 1). White and Ali-Kahn (2012) assert, "There can be no doubt that the academic discourse community is linguistically exclusive, it privileges one form of knowing and being over all others. In doing so it excludes myriad diverse and divergent voices" (p. 38). "The intersection of cultural studies and analysis of academic discourses is drawing more and more attention among linguists, educationists and professional researchers in many disciplines" (Duszak, 1997, p. 1). Literacy and culture are just as intertwined as academia and culture. Byram and Morgan (1994) write, "since language and culture are inseparable we cannot be teachers of language without being teachers of culture—or vice versa" (p. vii).

To be fluent in the language of academia one must master academic discourse. "Academic discourse … is characterized by variable amounts of modeling, feedback, and uptake; different levels of investment and agency on the part of learners; by the negotiation of power and identities; and, often, important personal transformations for at least some participants" (Duff, 2010, p. 169). Successful negotiations of power and identity must consider variables between instructor and student. These variables include generational, social, and cultural differences during the pursuit of academic discourse that may influence postsecondary experiences. With compassion, attention, and sufficient time, and without discrimination, students "become ready to disclose what they are thinking, doing and failing to understand" (Zenkov & Harmon, 2009, p. 583). When the walls built by defense and embarrassment come down, the learning process for first-generation college students may begin.

Reflective Critical Thinking and Literacy Through Photography

Bandura (1986) states, "Even after linguistic skills have been fully developed, visual imagery continues to serve as a significant retention aid for behavior patterns that are not easily represented in words" (p.58). A personal reflective approach to literacy with the inclusion of image creation may prompt students to be culturally expressive through engagement and personal meaning. Photography is an artistic medium that evokes personal reflection: "Photography is fundamental to the ways we define and understand who we are" (Heiferman, 2012, p. 17). Language is personal and situational. Its acquisition is heavily influenced by culture (Wasik, 2004). Comprehension is supported by understanding cultural connections and levels of interaction pictures may have with text (O'Neil, 2011). Literacy through photography (LTP) is an educational technique that marries critical thinking, photography, literacy, and culture.

Literacy through photography. "The centrality of images is a fundamental shift, not a passing fad" (Little et al., 2010, p. 44). College students define identity, on a daily basis, through profile pictures on social networking sites. They communicate emotions through visual emoticon graphics while texting and emailing. Berger (1972) suggests that infants can look and recognize before they can speak. "Language does not develop as an isolated mode of communication. Its relationship with visual imagery is primal" (Britsch, 2009, p. 171). Not only could LTP offer a new way of learning, it may reveal powerful conclusions. "The power of thought resides in the human capability to represent events and their interrelatedness in symbolic form" (Bandura, 1986, p. 455).

LTP is a student-centered critical pedagogy that integrates writing and photography into classroom instruction. Artist and educator Wendy Ewald at Duke University's Center for

Documentary Studies developed the method (Hyde, 2010). Philosophically and practically, it is about students' learning "by doing, by creating their own works of art … that combine words and images to express an idea and to tell a story" (Ewald et al., 2012, p. 12). It has educational value and the ability to bring self-confidence to students of all ages through self-discovery and examination of surroundings.

In the form of rhetoric, visuals are used to "influence and construct reality for diverse publics" and "cultural understanding" (Olson, Finnegan, & Hope, 2008, p. 4). An understanding of individual student backgrounds promotes engagement and opens doors to student-instructor communication. "Knowledge of students' backgrounds was critical for instructors as they helped students build a bridge from their home cultures to academic culture" (McCurrie, 2009, p. 37). Ewald, Weinberg, and Stahel (2000) believe LTP projects exemplify reflective, critical thinking. They are more than documentary accounts that are conceptual and emphasize "the idea and the process rather than the singular object" (Ewald et al., 2000, p. 10).

LTP resembles participatory action research. The act places students in the role of data creators, collectors, and collaborators. It benefits "individuals themselves who may feel acknowledged and empowered by the opportunity to collaborate on research rather than be the recipients of it" (Paiewonsky, 2011, p. 41), and in doing so, "gives voice to the anonymous" (Ewald et al., 2000, p.11). When paired, visual and literary arts complement each other. "The verbal and visual arts enhance and strengthen understanding and themes in each other" (Jordan & DiCicco, 2012, p. 31). In a study conducted by Zenkov and Harmon (2009), youths found it easier to write about difficult life challenges while reflecting upon personal visual (photographic) stimuli.

Reflective critical thinking. LTP *"*emphasizes critical thinking as well as visual, cultural, and written literacy" (Hyde, 2010, p. 56). We live in an image-based society. "To best prepare students for life in the twenty-first century, we must more deliberately consider how we help them learn to make meaning of images" (Little et al., 2010, p. 49). Some might argue that our world is so saturated with images that our analysis of them has become shallow. Careful analysis, however, fosters critical thinking. This sort of analysis is exercised in LTP. Jordan and DiCicco (2012) believe visual arts can motivate students and guide them to think critically and deeply. "Participants will come to a unique understanding of meaning not by looking at the images produced, but by dwelling in them" (Polanyi, 1966, p. 18). According to Eisner (1998) "criticism in the arts is not only a way of helping others see what they have missed; it is also a road to sight" (p. 13). Viewing the visual form promotes critical viewing skills and constructs meaning. It prompts careful scrutiny, which results in enhanced understanding and appreciation (Newfield, 2011). When this viewing takes a written narrative form it creates a spark that leads to a literary flame.

Analytical thinking requires analytical seeing. "Writing has been further linked to acute analysis of visuals through careful observation, which leads to analytical thinking and vocabulary extension" (O'Neil, 2011, p. 221). The act of reflecting on a personal creation introduces a deeper sense of awareness about self and the creation. Reflective writing helps students become more self-aware (Amicucci, 2011, p. 50). Moreover, reflection brings out understanding of self and unique style.

Imagination and creativity. "The best thing about LTP is how it allows teachers to see how their students see—and how they imagine" (Hyde, 2010, p. 56). Critical thinking and creativity promote the development of academic minds. "Students begin to see that creative

problem solving requires multimodal knowledge; this integration of one discipline's skill set to another uncovers new ways of thinking about and interacting with our intellectual world" (Walker, 2013, p. 39).

In Clover's (2006) participatory photography studies, women and children "made meaning of their realities and rendered them visible through a tangible object of imagination" (p. 284). Sharing photographic visions with the public makes the artwork more effective and powerful. "Drawing attention due to philosophical ideas about language, text and communicators, increase in cross-cultural relations, and role of language spreading knowledge while giving meaning to the relations of different groups" (Duszak, 1997, p. 1).

Skills cultivated by artists can encourage interdisciplinary innovations. Gardner (2007) has observed the ability for self and group criticism, essential for innovation, is more readily developed in secondary education art classes than in the standard college-prep curriculum. The arts teach complex forms of problem solving because they encourage the creation of multiple solutions from multiple perspectives and teach students to adapt to changing problems with a highly sensitive eye (Eisner, 2006). Critical analysis promotes innovation and problem solving in real-world situations and across the curriculum. Engagement through uninhibited self-expression is an outcome of the arts. Maintaining one's own voice while engaged in academic literacy may allow first-generation college students to preserve identity while achieving academic capital. "Pedagogical best practices become better when they adopt a component of self-expression" (Hardiman, Magsmamen, McKhann, & Eilber, 2009, p. 58). "It's exciting to realize that this kind (artistic) of exploration can lead young people to connect with what they care most passionately about" (Ewald et al., 2012, p. 1).

Summary

First-generation students may enter higher education with expectations of success. Situated within their home, community, or regional culture, they can easily communicate, reflecting intellect. However, many find that they are not prepared to face communication challenges created by academic discourse in higher education. Academic discourse is the language of academia, one that clashes with cultural norms. It has the ability to supersede situated cultural intellect, making students appear academically deficient.

A better understanding of cultural elements that promote success and persistence could help first-generation students succeed. Ishitani (2006) concurs by stressing the importance of comprehending, "longitudinal persistence behavior of first-generation college students and their timely graduation rates at four-year institutions" (p. 862). Seeking understanding with a group known for uncertainty and isolation presents a challenge. This study started the conversation with LTP.

Through LTP, students could use critical thinking and reflection to help tell the visual story of their experience in higher education, seeking academic capital. Tierney (1999) suggests that families and community can support a student's success, when integrated into the educational process, as opposed to Tinto's (1987) focus on the need for students to disassociate from these relations and on the burden of family pulling students back (St. John et al., 2011). "Participatory photography, with its focus on agency, is a tool of agency and identity" (Clover, 2006, p. 282). Photography created through lived reflection and translated to a written narrative allows students to express ideas in a deep, meaningful way as one form of personal reflection leads into the other. The use of the strength of documentary photography to "acknowledge the radiance of ordinary life in its glamorized randomness" (Ewald et al., 2012, p. 2) may help serve

as a segue in college classrooms, connecting personal meaning and culture to literary strengths, opening doors to recognize a power balance while approaching academic discourse to reveal personal experience.

"Visual methods are accepted tools for qualitative research and are increasingly used in a wide range of disciplines" (Pain, 2012, p. 303). Chapter Three includes an explanation of the qualitative, education-based design, portraiture, used to examine first-generation college students engaged in literacy through photography activity. Visual methods present "relational aspects between researcher and participants" and images that "facilitate and enrich communication thus enhancing the data" (Pain, 2012, p. 303).

Chapter III. Methodology

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of third-year and beyond, first-generation college students via a qualitative approach to data analysis. The aim of this study was to understand the experiences of first-generation college students engaged in a literacy-based photography activity. Secondarily, the study aimed to understand the ways in which third-year and beyond, first-generation college students utilized various forms of literacy.

Rationale for Research Approach

Qualitative research seeks to identify critical elements, deducing plausible interpretations from them without becoming obsessed with finding the right or ultimate answer, to find understanding (Wolcott, 1994). Qualitative inquiry is particularly appropriate for this study because it creates a clear depiction of participant experience, amplifies the voice of a silenced population, affords the research participants opportunity to collaborate on the creation of data with the researcher, and delivers the findings through less formal discourse that is more easily understood by the general public. The research community has called for qualitative studies with first-generation college students. Stebleton and Soria (2012) believe that there is a need for "more qualitative studies that explore the experiences of first generation students to learn more about their journeys toward higher education success" (p.17).

The exploratory nature of qualitative research presents a natural connection to the process examined and the method used to document it. "Qualitative research tends to address research problems requiring an exploration because little is known about the problem" (Clark & Creswell, 2010, p. 66). Experience is central to qualitative design. According to Merriam (2009), qualitative studies seek to understand personal interpretations of experience, how worlds are constructed, and how meaning is created through experience. When applied to

underrepresented participants, such as first-generation college students, qualitative inquiry is useful because of its focus on allowing "often silenced, marginalized voices to be heard" (Liebenberg, 2009, p. 444). Qualitative research "empowers individuals to share their stories" and minimizes "power relationships between researcher and participants" (Creswell, 2013, p. 48). ooi This flexible style has the ability to communicate findings, through open discourse, to populations beyond the academy in order to improve practice.

In addition, qualitative research has been known to accommodate participant and researcher collaboration in data collection (Creswell, 2013, p. 48). The creation and collection of participant artifacts provides "participants substance to work with, to generate data and increase subtleties of data" (Liebenberg, 2009, p. 459). Through LTP activity, the participants in this study shot interpretative photography that represented life perspectives of first-generation students from a variety of backgrounds. Images, when paired with interviews in qualitative studies, provide richness and clarity (Liebenberg, 2009). This study aimed to investigate culture and academic discourse in first-generation college students through a qualitative arts-based research method.

Research Design

The qualitative design used in this study was portraiture. Portraiture is a narrative form of research most often conducted in educational settings, making it appropriate for first-generation college student participants. It seeks to understand the story or experience of each participant. Through rich contextual clues the portraitist relays a human experience and perceived social reality that is framed and shaped by the setting and the behaviors of the actors (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). The central data take the form of co-constructed images by the researcher and participant paired with a reflective narrative (Lawrence-Lightfoot &

Davis, 1997). The active role of the participants allows their voices to be heard as the researcher uncovers the personal story of each participant. Participants compose images that speak to the study using metaphor, interpretation, context, balance, and symbolic meaning (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

This study was best suited for a portraiture design because images are beneficial to the growth of intellect and self-confidence (Anderson, 2011). Self-identified participants in this study came forth as volunteers. They shot digital photography representative of a self-perception of who they are as first-generation college students. Based on aesthetic composition, metaphor, context, balance, and symbolic meaning, participants and the researcher chose one illustrative photo. Participants wrote a written reflective statement about the photo. Each participant and the researcher collaborated on the composition of one final digital photograph. After discussing the reflective statement, the participant and the researcher planned the next iteration of the photo, based on participant technical and metaphorical goals. Next, the researcher interviewed participants (see Appendix B). After collaboration on the final photograph each participant was interviewed.

Site and Sampling

The site of the study was the campus of a private university in the northeastern United States. The study focused on five selected participants who were self-identified as third-year and beyond, first-generation students. Data creation took place in spaces chosen by participants. Data collection and interviews occurred on the campus where the students were enrolled.

The small number of participants was appropriate in reaching data saturation. Merriam (2009) suggested saturation happens when data becomes redundant. Saturation was realized in this study as the majority of participants reported prominent repeated themes. According to

Creswell narrative research can be conducted with as little as one or two participants due to the specificity and extent of details in individual narratives (2013). Creswell believes larger groups can be studied if the researcher wishes to develop a collective story. The five participants in this study satisfied both the narrative nature and the overarching story that emerged. The intimate sample suited the depth of the multi-layered visual processes translated into method. Purposeful sampling in this study presented criteria for applicable participants (Merriam, 2009). The criteria for participant selection included third-year or beyond first-generation status and being at least 18 years old while enrolled at the research site. Both male and female students were represented within this group. Although ethnic diversity and diversity of majors were sought, all participants were white. This result was expected due to the predominantly white population at the university. The majority of participants were communications majors; one was a biology major.

Data Collection

The researcher gained access to first-generation college students through her employment at the university. An introductory meeting with potential participants was scheduled through a guest lecture by the researcher in the select art, communications, and English courses she visited. After the lecture, the researcher's contact information and letter of invitation to participate in the study were distributed. Those self-identified individuals who came forward with interest in becoming participants received explanation of the letter of consent. Involvement in the study began with a writing exercise in which the participants addressed who they are as first-generation college students. Next they engaged in the creation of interpretative photography, producing a written reflection about one of their photographs. Then they recreated the chosen photograph with the researcher. Finally, they were interviewed.

Data were collected across four weeks. During data collection, participants met with the researcher four times. The first data collection task included a written narrative reaction to the question, “Who are you as a first-generation college student?” This step was followed by a lesson on photographic composition. Next, participants created 30 or more photographs that represented one singular or many themes representing who they personally are as first-generation college students. At the second meeting with the researcher, each participant reviewed the 30 photographs one-on-one with the researcher. The participant and researcher discussed and choose the 10 most intriguing photos. Through a collaborative effort, the researcher and participant then eliminated nine photos. The participant wrote a reflective statement about the meaning of the remaining photograph. In the next phase, the participant and the researcher co-constructed a recreation of the chosen photograph. Each participant and the researcher discussed a plan to recreate the final photo, eliminating technical barriers to reach metaphorical goals. Participants controlled creative direction of the photographic recreation. The researcher acted as the operator of the camera only, taking direction from each participant and shooting subjects suggested by the participant and offering frequent review of digital previews until the participant was pleased with the results.

In formal portraiture method the researcher creates a personal representation of participant art. However, due to concerns of participant and researcher power imbalance (English, 2000, p. 23), the final photographic collaboration was constructed in a manner that more closely suits LTP practices. A reflective writing piece by each participant and an interview followed the photography collaboration.

Photos were analyzed for visual codes, color psychology, pattern, and interpretative metaphors. The researcher took direction from participants while working with them

individually on the co-construction of one photograph that represented each participant's self-perception as a college student. Data included two writing samples by each participant, the researcher's field notes, interpretative photography, and a one-on-one interview.

First reflective writing. The first of four meetings included all five participants. The researcher request that each write an impulsive response to the question: "Who am I as a first-generation college student?" Reflective writings focused on each participant's journey. Due to personal experiences each participant brought to college, each journey was individual and unique. Participant writing samples and personal visual translations served as supporting elements to the interview questions presented. (See Appendix D.)

Photographs. Participants were able to choose to shoot the photography assignment with personal cameras or cell phones. All were asked to shoot at least 30 interpretative photos in their own time and in the setting of their choice. Participants and the researcher worked one-on-one at the second through fourth meetings. The second meeting was used to co-construct a photographic composition reflective of the students' perceived meanings of who they are as first-generation college students. This co-construction placed the researcher in the role of camera operator, under total direction from the participant. The collaboration was shot by the researcher and the participant at an agreed upon time and location. Each individual participant and the researcher selected 10 photographs and then examined the lot to decide upon the best one to recreate together. Selections were based on the foundational elements of portraiture visuals: aesthetic composition, metaphor, context, balance, and symbolic meaning (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). The final photograph acted as a visual translation of each participant's experience. Participants planned and stylized the photographic compositions. The researcher suggested props, appropriate lighting, equipment, and locations for each participant

to achieve their desired results while constructing meaning. The researcher shot photos, providing an instant digital review of all work, until the student was satisfied with the results. Due to issues of location light affecting visible clarity of the camera's LCD screen, photos were occasionally reviewed after the photo session on the researcher's laptop computer. The final compositions were saved in high-resolution, digital format to be printed in the study as visual data.

Second reflective writing. LTP involves students' documenting personal meaning through images and written reflection (Ewald et al., 2012). It prompts students to reflect upon their interpretative photographic creations in narrative writing. The act often results in students' finding the ability to write more written content as they explain their creative, interpretative intentions as opposed to narrative writing assignments without personal visual prompts. As a philosophy and practice, LTP is about students' learning by doing and creating their own works of art (rather than studying someone else's) that combine words and images to express an idea and to tell a story (Ewald et al., 2012).

Interviews. Each participant was interviewed. (See Appendix D for the interview questions.) Interview session times varied due to participants' willingness to respond when probed. Three sessions lasted approximately an hour, one session lasted an hour and half, and one interview was thirty minutes long. Interviews were held on campus after the LTP exercise. Participants chose the location. Digital sound files of interviews were recorded to a laptop. The digital sound files were transcribed by the researcher. The interview questions were open-ended, offering the researcher a guide from which to work but allowing flexibility to probe certain questions that may develop at different rates due to individual participant experience.

Documents and archival records. Additional documentation collected took the form of field notes. After each meeting the researcher created field notes in the form of a written document or audio file. Audio files were transcribed into written documents by the researcher. The notes summarized the exchange. As necessary in the portraiture method, the researcher's perception of visual descriptions, tone, mood, and conversation were noted to recreate the narrative description for each meeting. Field notes include a follow up email question to Participant 5. They also included a segment of Participant 1's interview that extended twenty minutes beyond the recorded session. The participant granted permission for use of the information obtained in the extended discussion. Notes were then cross-examined within the body of data for themes that presented repetitive refrains, cultural rituals, and prominent metaphors.

Data Analysis

For each participant the interviewer collected data from a one-on-one interview and reflective experience writing. The co-constructed digital image created by each participant and the researcher were also analyzed. Codes were created from emergent themes that surfaced from triangulation of transcribed interviews, reflective writings, field notes, and the final elements of portraiture. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) refer to triangulation as a layering of data from which emergent themes will arise. Design foundations (balance, repetition, framing, perspective, color, and texture); color psychology; and visual metaphor present in each photo were coded. Emerging themes from raw data were categorized in Nvivo software. Themes produced rich, descriptive data sets divided into codes. They were categorized to uncover each participant's experience and story. Interpretations of findings supported the composition of a written narrative formed by the researcher.

Literacy through photography naturally translates to the method of portraiture—a collaborative, visual creation. The process of literacy through photography informed the method. The relevance of visual and written artifacts in the production of visual data satisfies the suggested multi-layered depth of analysis pertaining to this sort of rich descriptive arts-based study (Manders & Chilton, 2013, p. 5).

The Creative Strategies and Objectives for Artistic Inquiry Translation model below (Manders & Chilton, 2013, p. 12; Table 1.1) suggests spill writing, free association, creative dialogue, poetry, story or fairytale writing, concept maps and diagrams, magazine collage, or other art forms to generate an abundance of creative material in an uninhibited manner.

Table 1.1
Creative Strategies and Objectives for Artistic Inquiry Translation

Strategies	**Objectives**
Spill writing (free writing) Write as much as possible about the artistic experience without concern for grammar, form or style	To increase creative flow To document the process To identify emergent thoughts To reduce anxiety
Free association Verbalize the first thing you think of about the images, metaphors and symbols in the artistic inquiry	To explore and critique the products of artistic inquiry To access "unconscious" material
Creative dialogue Ask: If this dance/artwork could talk, what might it say? "Dance, what do your movements mean for me?" Or, "Artwork, what is important about you?" and so on	To explore the dialectic between the researcher and the art To play with interviewing in art directly to access unconscious knowledge
Poetry Write in free verse, use found words, or use standard poetic forms such as the pantoum, tanka or cento	To use words to discover meaning through creative textual/verbal thinking
Write a story or fairytale Use a traditional fairytale format, beginning with "once upon a time" or remake the storytelling form to fit the needs of the inquiry	To use imagination to unlock new insights

Concept map or diagram Link word and sentence fragments together to map central elements of the inquiry	To visually contextualize and locate the products of artistic inquiry To make disparate connections
Magazine collage Cut and paste using a mix of word and images	To use creative means to transition from visual to textual concepts
Use another art form Create using a different art form with the intention to seek meaning or translate the previous work, e.g., Dance the shapes found in the art Draw images from the dance Compose a song to identify rhythmic and lyrical elements	To generate new insights To clarify and expand on data To use an unfamiliar art form to deliberately destabilize pre-formed ideas To transition through another art form which may be easier to translate

Note. See Manders & Chilton (2013, p. 12). Used by permission.

Once the study was supplied with data created by implementing spill writing and free association, as shown in Table 1.1, the data were examined for patterns to be further developed or coded. As suggested in Table 1.1, this study used the art forms of writing and photography to construct codes and develop another art form, portraiture.

Ethical Considerations

Approval of the data collection institution's internal review board (IRB) was received in response to a written proposal (see Appendix A). NIH certification was also required (see Appendix B). A verbal invitation of participation was presented to participants, students of 18 years of age or older, enrolled in select English, art, and communications courses. A letter of informed consent was provided to those who responded with interest (see Appendix C). The letter explained the rights of the participants, the central purpose of the study, data collection procedures, participant protection and confidentiality measures, possible risks of participation, projected study benefits, and an area to sign and date to acknowledge the areas mentioned (Creswell, 2013). Participants entered the study as volunteers with the ability to leave the study

at any time. Each participant was compensated with a $75.00 Amazon.com gift card upon completion of the study. Any participants who elected to leave the study before completion would not be compensated with a gift card, but all participants completed the study. No undue harm was brought to the participants, who may be, in part or as a whole, a vulnerable population. No screening was completed to confirm low-income status. However, low-income status was revealed by four of five participants. Numbers were used to identify participants in the study.

All digital sound files from interview recordings were destroyed. (See Appendix D for the interview protocol.) Photographs, transcripts and narrative writings in the form of digital files will be stored in an off-line encrypted file within a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home office for the duration of five years before being destroyed.

Role of Researcher

Though some analysts claim to be able to bracket their beliefs and perspectives when analyzing data, Corbin and Strauss (2008) have found this task impossible. They state, "bias and assumptions are often so deeply ingrained and cultural in nature that analysts often are unaware of their influence during analysis" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 85). They find it "more helpful to acknowledge bias and experiences and consciously use experience to enhance the analytic process" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 85). The role of researcher in portraiture is a co-creator of the data. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (2007) suggest that a successful portraitist "has not just drawn herself into this classroom scene—she has also revealed her inner stirrings, opening herself up for scrutiny and, in turn, allowing the reader the space to make his or her own interpretations" (p. 52). The researcher had a professional background in digital photography that drew her eye to the fundamentals of design in creative compositions. She was also a first-

generation college student. As an undergraduate she successfully completed a federally funded student support initiative, a subdivision of the federal TRIO program, during her enrollment at a public university. She progressed to a media design career in marketing and advertising. Her career included the production of mobile sites, print graphics, and traditional and digital photography; the management of retail photo shoots; coauthoring an advertising and design textbook; and eventual instruction of the aforementioned content, digital media, painting, and drawing at the college level at a private university in the northeastern United States. Through conducting this study she assumed the role of artist/researcher.

Reliability and Validity

The disclosure of the researcher's background presented an apparent reason why the researcher was drawn to the research topic. Her experience led to insight that allowed her to comprehend the experience of the participants and construct effective research questions. To effectively work within an arts-based method, Jaeger and Barone (1997) propose that researchers who experiment with alternative representations work with the guidance of an artist/researcher. To enhance credibility the researcher engaged in multiple bias minimizing strategies through triangulation, "making use of multiple and different sources, methods, investigators and theories to provide corroborating evidence for validating the accuracy of the study" (Creswell, 2013, p. 302). Methods of triangulation included cross-analysis of three different types of data: written reflections, interview transcripts, and interpretative photography. Transcripts and the final written narrative were offered to all participants for review, satisfying the act of member checking. The researcher also used peer reviewers to enhance credibility. Further, the researcher's personal memos and notation in Nvivo served as a detailed research

record or audit trail. Triangulation, active investigators, and member checking produced reliability within this study.

A research issue of which the researcher was aware was possible mistrust on the part of the participants, inhibiting them from sharing deeply personal, rich data. Qualitative researchers must be able to negotiate ethics while establishing sufficient trust, distance, and respect from participants. Particular qualitative methods are "largely dependent on building good interpersonal relations between researcher and participant" (Guillemin & Heggen, 2009, p. 292). The researcher worked diligently to develop a positive rapport with participants.

Another research issue of concern was a block in the free flow of creative ideas that would allow participants to compose interpretative photography. To address creative blocks, participants had time in their own creative environments to plan creative metaphors, props, lighting, style, angle, and frame through rough sketches or preliminary photographs. They then discussed and created their final compositions with the researcher.

Summary

This chapter provided the methodology used by the researcher to conduct this qualitative portraiture study. It explained how the study was implemented through a description of rationale and approach, research design, site and sampling, data collection, documents and records, and data analysis. In addition, this chapter presented ethical considerations and the role of the researcher along with reliability and validity concerns. Chapter Four presents the findings of this study.

Chapter IV. Findings

The private university in the northeastern United States at which this study took place has drawn an increasingly large percentage of first-generation college students in recent years. Specifically, in the past five years, nearly half of all incoming freshmen were first-generation students, with neither parent having graduated from a four-year institution. At the start of the fall 2014 semester 52.2% of freshmen were first-generation.[1] One might ask how so many first-generation students made the same choice.

A Common Place

While participants in this study initially said they arrived at this institution by chance, they were all seeking a university with similar qualities: a location "close to home in case anything would happen" and a "sense of community and nourishment…, that family bond." This concept resonates in the university mission, which notes a "commitment to individualized attention" and lists "mentorship" through "nurturing the individual" as its first value.[2] While students seek nurturing through individual attention, they must also become comfortable in the physical space of the campus. According to Davis (2010), "First-generation students need to become comfortable in the physical and social realms of the college campus and to understand that the two come together to form a single reality" (p. 72). Comfort can be found in finding places to socialize and study, and in knowing how to navigate through the campus.

As class lets out, students walk two-by-two, or in an occasional bunch of three, along the narrow paths at the center of a large lawn in the middle of campus. Observing the mass, one sees mostly white students and slightly more males than females. They walk briskly, many wearing winter parkas and boots to shield their bodies from the cold breeze blowing off the

[1] The first-generation student data provided here came from the university's 2014-2015 fact book.
[2] These quotations are taken from the university's mission statement.

nearby river. It has been a long winter at this campus in the northeastern United States. Despite the frigid temperatures and gusting winds, first-generation students in this study have found comfort here.

The researcher spent four weeks with five of these first-generation students. Time was allocated to an introductory meeting that featured a lecture on the basics of design fundamentals for metaphorical photographic compositions. Other sessions that followed included one-on-one meetings where the researcher and participants reviewed photos, participants submitted writing samples, the researcher and participants created collaborative photocompositions, and conducted interviews. Over time the researcher established relationships with these students as they shared their personal experiences as first-generation college students.

In an effort to achieve diversity, the researcher recruited students through art, English, and communications classes. The participants were five white first-generation college students enrolled in their third-year or beyond of studies. Three were female and two were male. Four participants were communications majors, and one was a biology major. Participant narratives can be found below. Analysis of metaphorical photocompositions follows the narratives. The chapter concludes with a summary of findings.

Seeing Oneself

The narratives found in this chapter tell stories of struggle, motivation, and perseverance. They illustrate an inside look at values, family structures, the meaning of friendship, determination, and hope. The personal accounts that follow depict the lives of five first-generation college students as understood through an LTP experience.

Participant 1 narrative. Participant 1 was a female communications major. Her friendly smile preceded her like an eager ray of hope. She had long, dark brown hair, usually

tossed up in a high bun on her head. She wore an army green utility-style coat and could often be seen in jeans and a tee shirt. She carried a shield of shyness. In initial meetings her expressions were energetic and responsive, but she remained silent, as if something were holding her back from speaking. Later, in the interview, she confirmed the researcher's earlier observation. She said, "You can just tell when I want to say something, but then I'm just like, 'No, I'll keep it to myself.'"

As a senior in high school, she applied to a small private university and a large public university. She was accepted to both. She wrote,

> I was ecstatic when I learned that I had been accepted to both. I still remember the looks on my parent's [sic] faces when showing them my acceptance letter. That letter wasn't just any letter but it was a document that provided me hope and encouragement to help succeed [sic] in the future and to show my family I was capable of in a sense, moving up the ladder.

She chose the private institution because of its size and proximity to home. She said,

> Because of distance and cost I decided that [University Name] would be a better fit for me. Not only that, but [University Name] had such a wonderful atmosphere when I had visited it for the first time and I was also happy about the smaller student population. I didn't want this experience to be too overwhelming.

Toward the end of her high school career, she had a falling out with friends. She looked forward to starting over with a new network of friends in college. Yet, as an undeclared commuter, it took two years to establish friendships. She described that time as being "alone" and "pretty bad." She explained,

> My first semester was rough. Being that I lived at home and not on campus made it really difficult to transition and get acclimated to the college environment. Getting to know anyone very well was a struggle being that I was a commuter. Again, being a commuter was not necessarily because I thought I would get homesick but because it was just a cheaper route to take overall. With that being said, I would assume that it would have been much better if I were to stay on campus and really adjust to receive that "college experience."

She strove to save money because finances in her home were a "struggle." She said,

> I mean, we're getting by. But, it's not enough to be comfortable. It's very difficult to come home and see that I'm trying to make my life better and then I see all these little set backs, just trying to pay the bills and everything. It's definitely hard.

To pay for constant bills like her car, car insurance, and gas, she worked 25 hours a week at a pet supply store. She feared taking any time off, even to study for her finals. She was adamant about being responsible. St. John et al. (2011) suggest first-generation college students with an "orientation toward work" struggle because that perspective is a force that can "pull students back" (p. 203).

Last year, Participant 1 lost her state-issued college loan. Her boyfriend's parents supported her with temporary funds. When the researcher asked what college debt meant to her, she said,

> It means that it's just gonna be more bills that I have to worry about after I graduate. [Laughs] I mean hopefully after I graduate I will find a job that is going to pay me a decent amount, where I can worry about paying for myself and taking care of my debt

> since no one else will really be able to help me with that. It's going to be a struggle, but I know I will get through it. I'll have to tell myself that at least.

She had low self-efficacy, but it had been more severe early in her general education classes, as an undeclared student. She reflected on that time:

> When I was in my general education classes though, I was very hesitant. I didn't know anyone. Being that I don't live on campus, that made it even worse for me. Speaking up in general education classes was hard. I couldn't do it.

She often doubted her own academic ability, even when professors gave her positive feedback. She said, "I'm not as confident as I should be. I hear from my professors though that I do have good writing skills, but I just don't see that." Her behavior exhibited what Davis (2010) refers to as the imposter phenomenon, which results in a student's personal disbelief when he or she achieves success. "If they receive a high grade, for example they cannot believe their good fortune. If an instructor makes a positive comment on a paper about a particularly cogent insight, they think the instructor is being kind" (Davis, 2010, p. 48).

Participant 1 said, "I like blending in and just going with the flow, with everyone else." She found a place where she could blend with little effort: the quiet floor in the library. As a commuter, she had blocks of unscheduled time. During those times, she submerged herself in an environment that prohibited communication. She was concerned about the opinions of others. She said, "I have a weird fear of being judged, which I know I can't control. I know it's going to happen to everyone."

However, one person who did not judge her is her adviser. She reflected on a recent meeting with her adviser:

> Oh man, well actually, my adviser, last week told me that I am a hard worker. She knows what I do outside of school in terms of working part time. She knows my workload so knowing what my grades are right now and how I am just getting through it all, she says I am a hard worker.

Participant 1 described herself as a "very dedicated" student.

In response to her feelings about writing she said, "As I am writing it is very difficult. I will second-guess what I am writing. Sometimes I will be halfway through a paper, and I will just start all over again because I don't think it's good enough." She continued, "I'm not as confident as I should be, but I don't know if that confidence in writing will ever come."

As a communications major, Participant 1 had to share her writing with the world, but she could keep other creative skills that she enjoys, such as photography, private. She liked photography but used it to create personal keepsakes. She said that she most often photographs pets and family, and she keeps the images to herself. She said, "Well, I know they make it easier now to just upload photos to Facebook, for example, but I just like keeping them for myself. Something I can just go back and look and go, 'Oh, yeah, that's a good picture' [Laughs]."

She believed photography had a role in communication. "Say you have the first page story in a newspaper. You want to make sure you get that great shot, the shot that everyone can match with the story." The shot that matched her story in the photographic portion of this study acknowledged the place where she spent most of her unscheduled time on campus, a quiet floor in the library. Her image portrayed a study table in the library, piled with massive books. Her lime green book bag, heavy with contents was slung over the jacket she wore to her part time job, on a chair. The depiction defined her as a commuter and as a first-generation college student.

Participant 2 narrative. Participant 2 was a female communications major. She had long, light brown hair. It was wavy, usually worn down. She often wore jeans with a tee shirt or a hoodie and boots. At first, she seemed to have a calm, quiet demeanor, yet she described herself as "loud." From the researcher's experience, this "loud" person did not make an appearance with strangers. She was strong-willed and could exhibit and experience great emotion, as evidenced in the data collection sessions. Until the researcher earned her trust, it was a challenge to read her emotions though body language or expression.

She reflected on the time in high school when she filled out college applications. It was a time of intense financial struggle for her family. "Having two parents out of work made the fridge empty and headaches much worst [sic]. My escape was the thought of going to college." She had no guidance from home, which is typical for first-generation college applicants (Tinto, 1987).

> I honestly didn't understand the whole obtaining loans to pay for college. I had no one in my family who went through the FASFA process or anything like it. I had to educate myself on it. I quickly realized that college was way more expensive than I thought.

She was accepted to five institutions and decided to attend a small private university. It was also her friend's choice. She wrote, "I didn't have the confidence in myself to go away to college by myself." She eliminated schools far from home. She said, "I knew I could never go far from my mom; she's my world." She liked the close proximity between home and the institution that her friend chose. She wrote, "[University Name] allows me to live on campus but be close to home if anything would happen."

Relationships with friends and family were essential to her. They were so important that she would sabotage herself if it meant she would save someone else. She wrote about her

willingness to sacrifice herself for her family. She felt obligated to be a positive role model for her younger brother, who was still in high school.

She lived on campus with her friend, and trying to establish new relationships in her general education classes was a challenge. She said, “School has always been easy. But I was really shy. Trying to become friends with people I have never met, that was a whole different learning experience because of the cultural differences.” She believed that her advancement to a leadership position in an extracurricular group improved her social self-efficacy. She spoke about this evolution: “I remember as a freshman, I was really lost. But now I tell people directions and that kind helps confidence. Like, yeah…, I have been here. This is my place.”

Although she found her place she still held a negative image of why she remained there. She wrote about her reality of college debt in her freshman year:

> Going into the spring semester of my freshman year I quickly felt the pressures of the cost of school. I did not register for spring classes until a week before classes started. I reached out to the financial aid advisor that I was assigned when I got accepted to [University Name] but he said he could not help me. This made me start hating [University Name]. I wanted to transfer to Temple University. I did the research on the school and filled out the application. My problem was that in order to transfer you need a zero balance to send your transcripts. I had under a thousand left, just under the mark to be able to register for the following semester. Ironically the reason I wanted to leave [University Name] was the reason I was stuck here.

She felt trapped at an institution that turned its back on her when she asked for assistance.

Looking to the future, she said that college debt means, “no money in my bank account for a long time. It is extremely stressful and I will probably be working until I am like, in my

thirties, hopefully to pay it all off." During semester breaks she returned home and worked up to 60 hours a week at a bakery, saving just enough, when paired with her financial aid, to get her though the next few weeks of school. "I put too much money into my education that I need my degree to get a job. I need to get a stable job to help my family and show that I could do better with my life."

When the researcher asked about professors' perceptions of her she said, "They would probably say that I am reserved in class and that my work is good and that I am confident in my abilities academically." She believed that she is a "dedicated student" and said, "I would agree that I am reserved in class and that I am much more sociable outside of class. I feel like there is [sic] two different faces you put on for school and outside." She continued, "When I go home, I am a different person than I am at school." According to Davis (2010), first-generation college students "work hard to keep the campus culture and home culture separate in terms of space and ways of thinking" (p. 71).

She loves writing but has encountered frustrations writing at college. She said,

> I have always loved writing. It has always been my forte. Actually, interesting enough, I loved writing when I was in high school. Loved it! So, I came to this university and I was kind of innocent in my writing. I used a lot of adjectives and humor. And the university was like, "No, don't write in first person, don't' use that." There were a lot of research papers, so it kind of killed my love for writing but now I am slowly getting it back. I am, like, I could incorporate some of my old styles back into serious writing.

She felt that her writing ability was advanced. She wrote often as an editor of the university newspaper. In the newspaper she also used photographs to "tell a story." When referencing the

photography in the newspaper she said, “I don’t personally take a lot of them, but when I have to, I could. I like photography.”

She believed photos were important tools of communication. She asserted, “You relate better when you see things, I think. I definitely think visuals help communicate.” She went on, “They always say a photo tells a hundred words or something like that.” Her words in the photographic portion of this study were represented by paper images taped to a bright orange classroom wall. The images were a falling girl, cut from a magazine and two anatomical hearts. The girl was placed below the hearts. The arrangement represented uncertainty. She explained,

> The falling girl could be interpreted in many different ways. In my college career, I feel like I’m just floating through the years. I’m a junior and I’m still not 100% sure what I want to do in my field of study.

Participant 3 narrative. Participant 3 was a female biology major and 24 year old nontraditional student. She had long dark brown hair, usually tied into a messy knot on top of her head. Her left arm was adorned with tattoos of the evolution of human skulls. She was active and energetic with a defined confidence. She was usually smiling. Her smile, like her personality, seemed genuine, intentional, and grounded. She always wore workout apparel in bright colors and bold prints. Her wardrobe fit her personality. She had a strong sense of humor paired with quick, witty sarcasm. She had lived independently from her family for many years but had a close relationship with her father. She was a self-proclaimed “daddy’s girl.”

In her first attempt at college, just after high school, she focused on psychology. One year after matriculation, she departed. Reflecting on the time she said, “I wouldn’t study so hard. I wouldn’t put in the effort. In high school I didn’t have to study. I went to a tiny high school. I didn’t need to do that. I had a big reality check freshman year.” When she spoke about

college she said, “This is a different place. It was hard seeing Cs and Ds on my report card. Then I got it together and realized that if I just applied myself I would get As and amazing 4.0 things.” Her revelation exhibited Bandura’s (1995) social learning theory that the influence of self-efficacy on motivation and achievement is pervasive (p. 226).

Despite her academic epiphany, she had to leave college due to mounting debt. During her time away, she worked as a casino bartender to pay off the debt and save for her education. To illustrate the differing perspectives and priorities of herself and her work colleagues, she shared,

> Oh, it hurts my heart [Laughs]. I think of seeing some of the girls that I work with, who don’t go to school, that just work as a bartender, and they have like eight different designer handbags. They are, like, “This one was $900.” I’m like, “Oh, my God! That’s two college credits!”

She kept her bartending job when she returned to college as a nontraditional student, working 39 hours per week. She said, “Now I’m back and dealing with an age gap as I’m sitting in a room with people six years younger than I am … or more.” She believed she just had to “budget her time” to “get everything done.” She said, “I have rent to pay, food to buy, a car to pay for, among so many other expenses. Free time is an almost non-existent phrase in my vocabulary.”

Her bartending job improved her self-efficacy, which was beneficial to her academic success. She said, “In high school I was really, really shy. I wasn’t introverted, but I wouldn’t want to speak up. In college I find myself raising my hand a lot more. I think bartending really brought it out of me.” She believes her academic and social confidence has improved “95%.”

If the researcher were to ask a professor what kind of student she is, she thought that the answer would depend on the teacher.

> My English teacher is really easy to talk to. He is really outgoing and he asks for feedback, and he won't talk until the class gives him feedback. I get a little sassy with him. Not in a bad way, just playful. Because he makes you think. But sitting in another class, a lecture hall, the teacher sees me once a week for lab. She … maybe just knows my name. She couldn't tell you who I am really. It's different. It depends on the professor.

She said her adviser knows her best:

> She knows everything from day one, what happened, taking the year off and getting back in. She knows how hard I work. I think she would say that I am driven but light-hearted.

Participant 3 perceived herself to be a "lackadaisical" student. She tries to "relax" and be "playful" in her general education courses. However, she was more diligent in her biology courses. She also "adores" writing.

> I always thought I was good at it. I'm not very good at structure like MLA. But if you sit me down at a computer and tell me to write a little story I could probably entertain someone.... I love writing handwritten letters. I love spilling out your mind on a piece of paper. But if I have to write a ten-page paper about which drug metabolizes thought which organ, I hate that.

She continued,

> If you give me a topic, I can come up with something but if I have to write an article about Lou Gehrig's disease or something specific, I can't do that. I think for my

> generation I have a relatively good vocabulary. I'm not crazy good, but I am a lot better than a lot of people my age. On a scale from one to ten I would probably give myself a 7.5.

She also believed that visuals were valuable in communication. She said,

> Seeing how a cell makes glucose in a paragraph makes no sense. But if you have a diagram that shows arrows and labels it makes perfect sense. People learn visually, by hearing and by doing, but I think everyone learns visually, they just don't really know it.

She personally enjoyed taking selfies and photos of her dogs. She frequently posted them to social networking sites and applications such as Facebook and Snapchat:

> I like to share pictures. It's weird to think that finding a picture of my grandma at my age would be a treasure to me. My grandkids, if I ever have them, are going to have like 8 million pictures of me to choose from, making dozens of different faces. It's a very huge cultural shift.

She reported that she uses photos "all the time."

For this study, she used a photograph to represent her experience as a first-generation college student. The composition she created was a scene from the casino bar where she worked. It featured three vivid, colorful, mixed drinks in martini glasses adorned with fruit garnishes. They sat upon on glossy bar in a dark room. The photo captured both the creative freedom and the darkness of her job.

Participant 4 narrative. Participant 4 was a male communications major and a nontraditional student. He had a tall, thin frame and short, light brown hair. Jeans, a tee shirt, a big snowboarding coat and sneakers were his regular attire. He had a serious demeanor. He was shy. Once the researcher got to know him, the researcher clearly saw motivation and passion,

too. He protected personal experiences and feared isolation. He said, “There is just a sense that if you say the wrong thing, that if you bring up the wrong experience, you will isolate yourself away from others.”

In high school, he dreamed of attending the University of Maryland. He was accepted to the institution but could not afford the tuition. As he understood, “Federal financial aid can only be stretched so far and out-of-state students are much less likely to be awarded proper scholarships, despite much higher costs for tuition.”

His academic confidence had been shaken early with a false start at a different university. A feeling of isolation made him leave. He said,

> I went from class sizes barely in the double digits to courses with hundreds. I was stripped of a name and any real interaction with my professor, with the only communication coming in the form of multiple-choice answers from my classroom clicker number.

He departed that university for a full-time warehouse job alongside his mother. The experience provided a clear picture of life without a college diploma. He believed the experience gave him drive for academic success. He said, “I have an unquenchable thirst to be as close to perfect as possible.”

His mother encouraged him to apply to the institution where he was enrolled at the time of this study. He returned as a nontraditional student and shifted to a communications major. He continued to reflect on his college departure as a failure, which according to Bandura (1977) is a typical reaction for a person who has given up on something prematurely (p. 80). After some time at the new institution, he was able to secure scholarships that allowed him to leave the

warehouse job behind. He knew he would have college debt but said, “The way I see it, it’s just one last struggle before something great, before opportunity.”

Participant 4 lived on campus and was involved in three extracurricular activities that complemented his major, holding leadership roles in some groups. He said,

> I expected to get a lot out of college, but I didn’t expect to become a leader in these different groups, which is a pretty amazing feeling because I am already feeling a sense of success and definitely a sense of pride in what I have been able to accomplish.

At college, he strove to set an example for his younger siblings. He explained, “With two younger siblings, I have always been sought after for advice. Now that my younger siblings are able to see me succeeding, they are aware of what they, too, will be able to achieve.” He wrote about wanting to remedy his mother’s worry of poverty and wanting to take care of her, some day, the way she took care of him:

> The struggles of poverty in a degree-free home have served as my ultimate motivation to succeed, not for myself but for my family and the woman who taught me that happiness and togetherness is worth more than anything else. She deserves to know what a life without financial struggle is like so that she may worry more about that sense of togetherness rather than the worries of overdue bills.

He had to excel in college to be the agent of change.

In the classroom, he believed that his teachers saw him as him as “respectable, yet, very opinionated.” Again, he used the word “perfectionist” to describe himself. He suggested that striving for perfection started in preschool, where he found a love for writing. He said,

> It's really a great escape and something that I have always been good at because it's something that I have always practiced since I was young. It stems from my mother and a great preschool program, really. I was writing pretty early on and just never stopped.

As an editor of the university newspaper, he exercised his love for writing through journalism. He said, "I have a high placement rate in area newspapers through public relations work. I am comfortable and confident in my writing." He also found writing to be therapeutic, using writing to help process situations that made him uncomfortable. When he had trouble sharing his feelings he could process them through writing.

For him, photography was another release. He said,

> When I want to escape, I will go on a three-hour drive to the middle of nowhere and that is where I escape and want to take pictures because it allows me to capture things in a way that makes other people see them with a different perspective. It's like my alone time. It gives me an opportunity to reflect on myself while capturing things in a less than ordinary way.

He shared few photos from his escapes because he was particular about his compositions.

> If I take something, and I think it's decent, then I will probably sit on it for a while. Nine times out of ten it won't end up getting posted anywhere because I could be critical. The exception is pictures of family, are always shared, mainly through Facebook and social media platforms.

He had trouble believing in his creative talent. He said, "It takes me a while to come around and go, ''Yeah, that is an awesome picture and I need to own this picture!?'" The photograph he composed for this study was a visual metaphor for the idea of leading the way for his siblings. It displayed an outstretched man's arm gripping the handle of an illuminated

pioneer style lantern. Soft light from the lantern reached areas of a wall in the dark room where the image was shot.

Participant 5 narrative. Participant 5 was a male communications major. He was tall with a stocky build. He had short dark hair and occasionally wore a beard with speckles of red. He was quiet, calm, and confident. He dressed in tee shirts and jeans or basketball shorts, with an occasional gold chain around his neck. He did not have an overbearing or dominant demeanor but he left little room for unexpected variables in the interview and photo shoot. It was difficult to read his emotions.

At a young age, Participant 5's older cousin, whom he admired like an older brother, inspired him to become a sports writer. He explained,

> I have always looked up to my oldest cousin. We were together a lot when I was younger because my mom would be babysitting them. I was growing up with him. He's maybe nine years older than me. He went to Pitt for sports journalism. He got me into sports and stuff too when I was little.

After he maintained the same major, communications, but changed his mind about his field concentration. He said, "I came here as a com [communications] major, and I switched what path I was going to do maybe 2-3 times, but I am doing what I definitely want to do now."

> Participant 5 was the only participant in this study who had financial security. He said, I'm fortunate where my dad is paying for it. So I'm not going to have to worry about that since he is taking care of it, but I know from talking to a lot of my friends who have to deal with that, it's a big stress and issue with them.

The majority of data collected from Participant 5 was divergent from that of the other participants in the study.

He was a senior at the time of the interview. He said, “I’m definitely more confident.” He had high academic self-efficacy but found the period when he took general education courses to be a challenging time. He said,

> Ehh, I have always been … kind of shy and stuff. But if it’s in the classes where I am majoring, my communications major, we obviously have to speak up. I am more comfortable with them since I have been with them for four years now. I don’t really mind that, but if it’s just a regular class or one of the general education classes back in the day, I usually would just sit there and be pretty quiet.

He also noted, “The first years were definitely pretty uneasy.”

He said professors like him, that he might be seen as a “teacher’s pet” or “professional.” He said he would personally evaluate himself as others would see him, “professional, reliable.”

He liked writing, describing himself as “a pretty active writer.” He continued,

> ’I think my writing ability is better than average for my age and level, since I have been doing it for so long. I have always been interested in it and kind of just have that feel for it. It comes natural to me now, I guess.

Participant 5 believed visuals play an important role in communication. He said,

> I do a lot more with video work, so not really much using a camera for taking photos, other than class work that I had to do that for. I guess if I see something cool, I will take out my phone and take a picture of it. Sunsets… I live on the tenth floor of a campus apartment building, so the sunsets can be pretty cool. I take photos of that every now and then.

He said, “I don’t upload to Instagram too often, but if I think a photo is really unique or interesting I will put it on there.”

As he mentioned above, Participant 5 does a lot of video work. Through the production of technology reviews he has gained YouTube fame. In his junior year, he became a YouTuber,[3] which was how he chose to define his experience as a first-generation college student.

For the photographic portion of this study, he created a composition that looked through a video viewfinder toward a computer screen and technical keyboard, a piece of equipment he recently reviewed in his position as a YouTuber. Light emitted from the keys on the keyboard. Two active computer screens behind the keyboard decorated the background with nondescript colorful images that created visual texture. He wrote, "Looking at life through a lens, viewfinder, mobile, or computer screen are all ways in which my future can be summarized by my past."

Depicting Oneself

Participant 1 photo analysis. The researcher met Participant 1 on the third floor of the library for the collaborative photo shoot. It was a designated quiet floor. However, a student was using the study table she had in mind, so the shoot was relocated to the second floor. The lighting was slightly different, but otherwise the space was also a quiet floor and a close visual replica to her original image.

In her initial photo, Participant 1 used a black coat hung over a chair at a study table (Appendix E, see Figure E.1). Her backpack was slung over the coat. She allowed open space of the room in the frame, creating a sea of lime green carpet. In this case, the contrast of the book bag was lost as it was also lime green.

In the collaborative shot (see Figure 4.1), she encouraged the researcher to tighten the frame on the subject. Tightening the frame and shooting the subject at a close range directed

[3] A YouTuber creates videos for publication on the YouTube social media channel.

more focus to the representational, personal belongings and supportive props on the table. She replaced the black coat with a bright blue pullover and included a nametag from her part-time job to represent the uniform she wore at work. The change added visual impact with a contrasting base for the lime green pattern of the backpack that hung over it. She filled the pack with books to create volume and stacked more books on the table to represent the "overwhelming feeling" she gets from schoolwork. She wrote,

> The backpack represents exactly what I do in the library for a good portion of my time. The backpack also represents the fact that I am a student and that I not only go to the library to read but to complete the homework I am assigned throughout my classes.

The final change she made in the collaborative photo was the addition of her car keys. They represented her commuter lifestyle. She explained,

> Again, being a commuter could make it difficult to find other things to do on campus or even just to go back home and take a nap before the next class. With that being said, a 25 mile drive one way is not convenient and it could eventually become costly. Therefore, sitting in the library and motivating myself to get my work done is the best way for me to let the day go by and to be productive.

She also observed, "As a commuter I don't really have options in terms of finding a place to relax on campus."

She directed the researcher to shoot photos from multiple ranges and vantage points—with a straight frame, diagonal frame, formal balance, and informal balance. Books were stylized in multiple ways on the table. She began pulling books from the shelves based on size and color to enhance the visual integrity of the photo. This experience was a learning moment for her. The researcher encouraged her ideas. She enjoyed the process.

The photo she chose had a bright blue, green, and brown color scheme. The focal point was the backpack hanging over the chair and the pullover. Her keys hung from her backpack, and books were stacked high on the table. The focal point occupied two-thirds of the frame, following the rule of thirds and concepts of informal balance. The frame was slightly diagonal, catching the diagonal lines of the bookshelves as they extended back into the library space. The space was important to her.

During her interview she spoke about the struggles of finding and knowing her place on campus. She said, "I think if you are living on campus, regardless if you are first generation or not, you just build more confidence because you are surrounded by everyone, you know everyone, so … you know your place, I guess." The library was her place.

Figure 4.1. Participant 1's final collaborative photograph.

Participant 2 photo analysis. Participant 2's initial image showed a paper graphic of a girl, bent at the waist with arms and legs in the air, as if she were falling (Appendix E, see

Figure E.2). It appeared to be cut from a print publication but also resembled a bent paper doll. The girl image was mounted on a white wall below two fine art prints of anatomically correct hearts. One heart was printed on white paper and the other was on pink. The image was shot on an extreme diagonal, with a tight frame, cropping off parts of each heart image, directing emphasis to the girl. It was shot from below. The composition and angle made the falling girl appear as if she were being caught just before she fell out of the frame. Participant 2 wrote, "To the average person the photo might look interesting but looking at it I see myself."

The researcher met Participant 2 at the researcher's office for the collaborative photo shoot. Although she wanted to keep the subjects in her photo the same, she also wished to implement some changes to the new iteration of her image (see Figure 4.2). She directed the researcher to a classroom where the researcher often taught. A wall in the room was red-orange. Her vision for the photographic portion of the study required color emphasis, using the bright wall as a background. Again, She mounted the two hearts above the girl. She wrote, "The two prints of two different designs of anatomical hearts were made by my best friend of 10 years" She associated one heart with her friends, the other with her family. She wrote:

> In the hearts I become reminded of all the things I hold close to my heart. Looking at them I think of my best friend who made them, that is followed my all my friends that are close to me. Without the small group of close friends I have, I would never be where I am right now in life. I would have probably dropped out of college by now. They push me when I need a push, encourage me when I'm depressed and stressed, and are always there for me when I need help. Since there are two hearts I associate the other heart to my family. My mom and four brothers are my everything. I would do anything and everything for them even if it causes me to "fall."

The girl represents the participant. She wrote,

> The falling girl could be interpreted in many different ways. In my college career, I feel like I'm just floating through the years. I'm a junior and I'm still not one hundred percent sure what I want to do in my field of study. I change my mind a lot and can't commit to just one focus. I'm very active in my department, so many of my peers ask how I do it all. Honestly I'm just waiting to fall one day. I already feel like I am in a never ending drift of thing to thing with no real light at the end of the tunnel. I thought by now that I would have landed something and discovered the thing that I am passionate about; that I would want to spend my life doing. I really would just like to travel the world and not settle down anytime soon. The girl also represents my want to be in motion from place to place.

The collaborative image was shot at mid range. It was photographed from above and had a great deal of negative space at the bottom of the frame. It led the viewer to imagine that the girl might fall forever, into unknown space.

A lime-green background was also explored, but Participant 2 decided that the red-orange suited her vision more appropriately. It provided an aggressive energy, which matched her statement: "If something goes wrong or not how I saw it going in a negative way, I will take the hurt and pain on myself."

The frame was shot on a slight diagonal with semi-formal balance. The perspective captured the vantage point of an onlooker. This perspective, from above, may be seen as a transcendental point of view. Participant 2 wrote, "I wouldn't say I'm religious but I'm very spiritual." She wanted her spirituality to be relayed in the visual metaphor that represented who she was as a first-generation college student. In contrast to the first image, the collaborative

image was shot in a portrait format, rather than a landscape format. The extra vertical space provided more space for the girl to fall endlessly.

Figure 4.2. Participant 2's final collaborative photograph.

Participant 3 photo analysis. The researcher met Participant 3 at the casino bar where she worked. Bartending enabled her to return to college. It defined her experience as a first-generation college student. At the time of the interview, she was 24 years old. She had been a bartender for six years. She wrote, “Being behind the bar at 18 years old allowed me to put things into perspective in a way many of my peers weren’t able to.”

It was lunchtime, and the casino was packed with elderly people. The researcher walked to the back of the bar and met the participant. She looked tired, not as bubbly as usual. Her mood seemed to match the weather. It had been chilly and raining for days. The researcher expressed surprise that there was a steady flow of patrons at the casino at midday. She said, “Yeah, it’s kind of depressing that it’s so busy.” She directed the researcher toward a bar area that was closed. There were three elaborate drinks in martini glasses waiting to be photographed.

At first, Participant 3 liked every photo the researcher shot. Once the researcher became critical, she became more at ease about being critical too. When she did not like a photo, she remained silent, uncomfortable in her role as the art director. As she gained comfort, she made lighting and vantage point suggestions. She suggested the researcher try a variety of lenses.

She requested changes from the first to the second iteration of the photo. Her initial image caught extra background lights and space in the frame (Appendix E, see Figure E.3). In the collaborative photo shoot, she asked the researcher to get closer to the glasses to eliminate the extra space. While more variety of color was present in the first image, the second image presented more contrast and emphasis on the subject and defined color scheme. As she and the researcher reviewed the images, they noticed some large light fixtures in the background pulling the eye from the subjects. She asked the researcher to take the emphasis away from the large

fixtures while allowing one to remain as a background element. Due to the changes, the collaborative image placed more emphasis on the drinks and the bar surface, while the first image placed emphasis on the drinks within the space of the facility. She wanted to emphasize the drinks to relay her enthusiasm about the job as a creative outlet. She wrote,

> It really isn't an easy job, but it allows me to vent creatively. Studying biology very rarely allows for that kind of release. My favorite drinks to make are complex martinis with more than a few ingredients. I take pride in what I am doing to get myself through school, and my customers love to watch me create new things.

The depth of field in the collaborative photo was shallow. The drinks were arranged so the colors of the beverages carried the eye into the distance, with a natural gradation of color moving from white to red. The red drink carried the eye to the edge of the photo frame. All garnishes were arranged on the left side of the glass rims.

At the end of the shoot the researcher handed Participant 3 the camera to review and compare all the photos. She immediately gravitated towards a photo that made the bar look warm and cozy. In a later meeting, she asked to change the photo to a darker image of the bar (see Figure 4.3). She decided she wanted the darkness of the place, rather than warmth, to be portrayed. She wrote about the bar being a "dark" place where she watched adults "throw away their money and act like fools." She seemed to take the good with the bad. She stated, "Don't get me wrong, it can be fun and very, very rewarding." The job provided financial support and encouragement she did not find at home. She explained, "My favorite regulars ask more about my classes and my grades than my parents do."

Figure 4.3. Participant 3's final collaborative photograph.

Participant 4 photo analysis. The researcher met Participant 4 at the researcher's office. She knew a space just down the hall could serve as an appropriate environment for his vision.

For the collaborative photo (see Figure 4.4) he requested lanterns. Participants were not directed to title their compositions but he titled his: "Leading the Way." He wrote, "This image is symbolic of my journey as a first-generation student and what it means to myself and the rest of my family." His initial objective was to present a dim leading light in a dark hallway, with a candle (Appendix E, see Figure E.4). He later decided a pioneer-style lantern would better suit the visual metaphor. He wrote, "In order to better demonstrate the meaning behind this photo illustration, I believe it will be beneficial to replace the flame with a lantern to further create the image of a pioneer." He referred to the concept as "a flame of hope in a dark unknown." The photos were shot in a small closet against a black-brown wall. He described the light as being

"hope" on a "journey." He explained, "College, after all, is unknown territory for those that have come before me." The researcher and participant tried two different types of lanterns, one with an LED light and one with a live flame.

The shot he chose featured his extended arm. It entered the frame from the right and extended left. His hand gripped the handle of a lit lantern. The researcher shot at a variety of angles and at as many ranges as the small space allowed. He chose a photo that featured the LED lantern. He preferred the soft wash of light created by the LED bulb and the pioneer style of the lantern. He wrote, "Symbolically, the image is also a representation of the way in which I am pioneering the way for my younger sister."

The color scheme included neutral colors; black and brown and blue. Horizontal lines were cast on the wall from the wires wrapped around the body of the lantern. Light was also cast onto Participant 4's lower forearm, suggesting strength. He wrote about his strength, "I lacked a close mentor during my college development and was forced to learn the norms of college on my own." The soft glow of light from the LED bulb was the focal point. It helped meet the objective to create a metaphor of darkness with a glow of hope. He stated, "By learning what it takes and being able to provide personal experiences, I hope to serve as loving and human resource to help guide her future." The image composition followed the rule of thirds, with the subject matter occupying two thirds of the image area. The image had informal balance and was shot at mid range.

Figure 4.4. Participant 4's final collaborative photograph.

Participant 5 photo analysis. The location that Participant 5 chose for his photo shoot was his on-campus apartment. The apartment was part of the university-owned student housing. He met the researcher in the lobby of the apartment building wearing lounge pants, a tee shirt, and a huge smile.

When the researcher entered the apartment, she encountered an open view at the edge of the living room. It was a wall of glass that led to a small balcony, facing one of the university buildings. Besides the view, it was a traditional college bachelor pad. Mismatched furniture and a few beer bottles were scattered throughout the common space.

Prior to the meeting, Participant 5 discussed his intent to make adaptations to his initial photo (Appendix E, see Figure E.5) for the final collaboration. During the selection of the concept he could not decide between two photos, one looking through a camera's photo view finder toward a computer work area vs. a close-range shot of a colorful keyboard. They keys of

the keyboard emitted a rainbow of color streaming from the negative space between the keys. For the collaboration (see Figure 4.5) he combined the two concepts, looking through a video viewfinder at the colorful keyboard. In the collaborative photo, he decided he wanted to focus on the video function of his DSLR camera rather than the photo function. To make this adaption, he pulled out the video viewfinder on the camera to represent the camera being in video mode.

He set up the photo shoot in his bedroom. The space was small but organized. There were no windows in the room. The door to the main living space remained open, which let in some uncontrolled light. The camera was on a tripod pointing at the keyboard. The participant had a professional three-point light system with soft light umbrella diffusers around the area he wanted the researcher to shoot. The equipment looked elaborate in the small room.

The keyboard was recently featured in a technology review on his YouTube channel. He wrote that it elevated the status of his YouTube channel, capturing “almost 900,000 views.”

The participant said he was happy with the sixth photo that the researcher shot. He was very involved, looking at a preview of each photo immediately after the researcher shot. She only took nine photos during the photo shoot. This photo shoot was the least collaborative experience of the five. The space was so small that it was impossible to position the researcher’s camera in another location in the room. The lighting was defined in a way that left little room for stylistic variables. The participant provided the researcher with instructions that indicated how he would like the photo cropped. Having control and maintaining his predetermined vision of the course seemed very important to him. This behavior was consistent with the way he left little room for unexpected variables during his interview.

Most common concerns of other first-generation college students did not affect him. He wrote, “Looking at the image through the viewfinder screen of my camera is the one image that I feel can represent my time as a college student almost perfectly.”

Figure 4.5. Participant 5’s final collaborative photograph.

Common Themes

The study presented prominent findings. All participant photos were revised after they were reviewed and discussed, although revision was not prompted. Visual metaphors created represented behavior known to hold first-generation college students back.

All except Participant 5 expected long-term debt but hoped to be change agents for their family cultures. Participants believed they were family “pioneers,” leading the way toward cultural uplift. They strove to lead the way for younger siblings and provide financial stability for their own families in the future. Parents of the participants exhibited alternative methods of

support, including modeling a strong work ethic, providing food, offering words of encouragement, and causing fear of disappointment.

Confidence for this group of first-generation college students was evolving. All participants reported improved self-efficacy since freshman year. Improved self-efficacy was directly related to establishing friendships. Two forms of confidence emerged: social and academic. Social confidence led to academic confidence, but academic confidence did not lead to social confidence. The participants cared what others thought of them. They all believed their professors or academic advisers thought of them as hardworking individuals. Most had positive self-perceptions, yet some had trouble believing that they possessed the abilities noted by professors, exhibiting imposter syndrome.

Participants used photography in two different realms: private and public. They all believed that visuals were important tools of communication. Participants enjoyed writing but became frustrated with academic formatting and style.

A Picture Speaks a Thousand Words

The collaborative photo experience in this study acted as a portal to communication between the participants and the researcher. After individual shared creative experiences, Participants 1 through 4 were at ease and comfortable in the researcher's presence. The connection benefitted the interview data.

Participants created visual metaphors representing their individual experiences as first-generation college students. They reviewed the photos with the researcher and discussed their intended goals. All photos were updated and recreated during the collaborative photo shoot. Compositions reflected work, the separation between home life and academia, and family responsibilities. The concepts that participants featured in their compositions focused on work,

friends, family, and commuting. Prior research has identified all these topics as forces that are known to hold or pull first-generation college students back (Davis, 2010; St. John et al. 2011). Participants 1 through 4 wrote reflective narratives about their photographic creations featuring personal struggles. Participant 5 was the only participant who wrote about and focused on the evolution of success. All participants planned changes for the collaborative photo after discussion and a reflective writing session following their personal first attempt. Most images featured informal balance, depth, perspective, and the rule of thirds.

Unexpected Detours, Big Dreams

All participants experienced unexpected detours in pursuit of their academic goals. Two participants departed from college and returned to pursue different majors. One participant remained undeclared for two years, basing her choice of major on a new friend who recruited her. The final two participants changed their concentrations of study within their majors.

Participant 3 told her story with wide eyes and a big smile. She exuded energy. When she referenced her prior departure from college, she joked of having a mental breakdown. Later, in a more serious tone, she described the experience as a chance to reevaluate her path, a chance to hit a metaphorical reset button. Her departure happened at the end of her first year. Her debt spiraled out of control. Time off allowed her work more hours at her bartending job to pay off the debt. After a year she returned to the same institution and enrolled in a new major. She was excited about her field of study. She decorated her arms with tattoos representing her love for her new major, biology. She was committed.

Participant 4 also departed the university setting. He continued to consider the departure a failure. He stated, “I had tried and I had failed.” He felt lost in the crowd at a large, public university. He described his departure as one that left him doubtful about being, “college

material" or "able to succeed." He wrote, "I was stripped of a name and any real interaction with my professor," which gave him a "1-in-100 feeling." After departure, he entered the workforce full-time, in a warehouse. He later returned to college as a nontraditional student at a new university. He started over, with a different major. He chose the university because it was close to home and promised mentorship. The idea of mentorship drew him in. It satisfied his "inherent need to find someone who he could relate to."

None of the participants lived out the dreams and aspirations they had in high school. They chose different institutions, changed majors and changed concentrations within their majors, yet all were able to persist and adapt to unexpected change. As they made choices for themselves and grew as individuals, actual and perceived pressures from home mounted.

Aspiring Hero in the Spotlight, the Experimental Trial

Participants in this study felt the pressures of being cultural pioneers. Participant accounts that follow explain the perceptions of individual first-generation college students as they faced expectations of parents, the watchful eyes of siblings, and concerns about their financial future.

Participant 1 sat across from the researcher at a table in a student lounge. In past meetings she brought a nervous energy to the conversation. But that day she was calm. She knew the researcher now, and the researcher sensed that Participant 1 was comfortable in her presence. When the researcher asked her what her college education meant to her parents, she smiled and looked up in thought, as if she could clearly relive a moment through a mental picture in her head. She talked about the pride on her parents' faces the day she received her acceptance letter in the mail. It provided her with "hope" and "encouragement" for a successful future.

Participant 4 stopped by the researcher's office early. His tall frame entered the doorway. He cracked a slight smile and made small talk. His shy, quiet persona needed time to assess the situation, the place, and the researcher's intentions. He smelled like he just smoked a few cigarettes. He explained coffee and cigarettes were his vices, his coping mechanisms. He looked tired. He appeared to have the weight of the world on his shoulders. Like all the participants, he knew his academic performance meant so much more than passing or failing. It meant uplifting his family's culture and quality of life. They were standing on the metaphorical sidelines, watching and waiting in anticipation. Participant 5 confirmed this metaphor, "Since I am the first in my family to do it, for them I am always in the spotlight because they're looking at me, and what I am doing." Participant 3 concurred. She described her first-generation status as being the "experimental trial."

Participant 2 believed uplift would provide validation. She wrote, "I need to show everyone that this decision to go to college was a smart one. I need to be better than the environment I grew up in." Participant 4 felt he must succeed for his family. He wrote, "My little sister is at an age in which she views me as a hero and I aspire every day to try and live up to the man she sees me as." All noted worry about disappointing family members.

As a result, for many, fear became a motivation for success. Fear prompted by parental expectations acted as an indirect motivator. Participant 3 wrote about this fear: "What I'm afraid of is disappointing them by not living up to my potential." All participants noted how hard their parents worked. Participant 4 spoke of the meaning of his college education to his mother. "I think in a large sense it means my mom won't have to worry about me as much. She won't have to work so hard and do so much because my successes are her successes. She is going to have a lot less worry once I make it." Vicarious learning, a concept within Bandura's (1986) social

learning theory, presented further indirect parent-to-child motivation. The importance of being a hardworking individual was the one certain, transferable piece of guidance their parents were able to provide. They learned values and work ethics vicariously, as modeled at home.

Siblings. Participants were motivated by responsibility to lead their younger siblings. Participant 2 sat down at a table in a small student club office to tell her story. Her long brown hair framed a seemingly obligated smile. She lived on campus, about 45 minutes from home. When she returned home, she was met by voices yelling, "She's home! She's here!" She smiled when she thought of the excitement and the reunion. The voices belonged to her four brothers. Three of them were older. She noted that they were "in and out of the house." One of them graduated from high school; the other two departed high school before graduation. She redirected the conversation to her younger brother. They are closest in age. The researcher asked if she felt pressure, being the only one in college. She said

> I put the pressure on myself because I want him [her younger brother] to follow me and not my older brothers, because he spends more time with them. He knows that he better graduate high school. I am not pushing college. I will be.

She did not want him to become "stuck" in his current environment. She felt guilt. "I feel bad, though, that I am here and not there. Because we are the closest in age since all my other brothers were older." She felt that she abandoned him and struggled, wanting to be in two very different places at once.

Participant 4 talked about his siblings often. Setting a positive example for them was his top priority. He said, "I think my biggest contribution to her [his younger sister] will come at a time when she is ready to enter the college process and can turn to me to help her along the

way." In the photographic portion of this study, he focused on the visual metaphor of "Leading the Way" for his younger siblings.

All five participants had a younger sibling. Being a role model presented additional pressure for the participants. Their goal was transformative to their family culture. Bandura (1995) stated, "The vastly enhanced human power to transform the environment can have pervasive effects not only on current life, but on how future generations live out their lives" (p. 1).

Wanting a more comfortable life. A direct association with financial troubles and discomfort was presented when participants addressed life at home. They perceived financial stability as comfort. Participant 1 said,

> Once I graduate I would like to find a job, of course, where I can start to hopefully live a more comfortable life to provide the hope and the lifestyle to my family in the future that I wish I could have grown up with.

She talked about not having to worry about paying bills and free time beyond the workday as elements that defined comfort to her. Although Participant 5 had no financial worries, he made a similar statement. His future goals included obtaining, then sustaining, a job to be able to "make enough money to start a family and just be comfortable." All participants had hopes of earning enough money to provide a better life for their current or future families. However, increasing their income was not just viewed as a way to elevate their economic status. Many of the participants also aimed to change the lives and perceptions of their families.

She Didn't Want Her Life to Be My Life

Four of the five participants (Participants 1 through 4) were from low-income families, and their parents could not help them financially. Although they could not provide college

funds, the emotional support that parents displayed was integral to the motivation and success of the participants. Participant 4 spoke about his mother's motivating him to return to college after he departed:

> A large part of it came from my mother, who was working along side of me. She pushed me. She didn't want her life to be my life. She was really a driving factor in getting me to come back.

All participants had a close relationship with one parent. Participants spoke of the pride that their parents had for their academic achievement.

Food is love. Another emergent theme was the importance of support that participants received from parental gestures of love, encouragement, and interest. Their parents were exhibiting behavior that, according to Bandura (1977), will help their children achieve goals. Moreover, Bandura (1977) argues that a modeled behavior can be learned through vicarious learning, and a parent's belief in their child's ability will affect the self-efficacy of the child. Progress was not easy for the majority of the participants in this study. They worked hard. In reference to hardships, Participant 1 and 2 noted that they would not choose to live the experience differently if given the chance. They acquired an appreciation for the evolution of their resilience. Bandura (1995) states, "If people experience only easy success they come to expect quick results and are easily discouraged by failure. A resilient sense of efficacy requires experience in overcoming obstacles through perseverant effort" (p. 3).

During the initial photo review meeting, Participant 4 told the researcher he lived on campus. His mother showed gestures of love by creating care packages of food for him at college. He said, "I don't need any more Rice-A-Roni, but I understand, food is love." He

cracked a smile, and the researcher smiled, too, to let him know that she understood. The researcher's own father showed love and support the same way.

Participant 2 said, "My mom has always been my number one fan. She goes to everything that I ask her to come to. She supports me in every way possible. She brags about me all the time." Participant 3 wrote, "Even though they couldn't contribute as much financially as some other student's parents can and do, they are the only reason I'm still here. I've always been pushed to do my best in school and to get good grades."

Participant 5 talked about the high expectations and rigorous study habits his mother instilled. As a commuter, Participant 1 talked to her father each evening after she returned home. She knew her parents did not understand her experience, but hearing about it was still their priority. She said, "I definitely let them know everything. I come home. You know it's like going through elementary or high school, you come home and you tell them about your day. I still do that."

Confidence: A Progression

Relationships impact the well-being of first-generation students (Wang & Castañeda-Sound, 2008). The support participants receive from home is essential to their quest. On campus the formation of confidence and relationships are equally paramount to this group.

It depends on the professor. All participants spoke of low self-efficacy in general education classes where they refrained from speaking up and had the ability to become lost in the crowd. When asked if the status of their confidence had changed, all claimed that it improved and was directly connected to the formation of relationships.

The participants cared about creating close relationships and about how others perceived them as individuals. An emergent theme that arose was their assumption that professors and

advisers perceived them to be hard workers. The concept of being a hard worker, to them, was important.

The researcher met Participant 3 on a Saturday morning at a donut shop near her home. As the researcher pulled into the parking lot, she saw Participant 3's thin frame, dressed in workout apparel, sitting on an outdoor patio pillar, swiping through screens on her smart phone. When the interview began, the researcher asked what kind of student a professor or adviser might say she was, she noted the varied levels of personal interaction and interest professors showed toward students in and out of general education classes. She said, "It depends on the professor." Later she said her adviser knew her best and would deem her to be a hard worker.

When asked the same question, Participant 1 said her adviser recently recognized her for being a hard worker. Participant 4 said faculty members would say he "isn't afraid to put the work in to get what they need to get out of it."

A little help from my friends. The majority of participants in this study claimed that a network of friends helped them gain academic confidence. They described relationships with peers when asked about their own personal confidence as college students.

Participant 2 talked about her friends as her family away from home. Her eyes became soft and reflective, leading the researcher to believe they were her central support system. She verified the interpretation of her expression by writing, "Without the small group of close friends I have, I would never be where I am right now in life. I would have probably dropped out of college by now." Tinto (2012) confirms the emphasis that she placed on her college relationships: "Student retention is also shaped, directly and indirectly, by social forces internal and external to the campus, especially those that influence students' sense of belonging and membership in the social communities of the institution" (p. 27).

Participant 3 indicated that the formation of relationships at her job led to improved self-efficacy, while Participants 1, 2, 4, and 5 spoke about their relationships with academic peers as leading to their elevated status. Participant 4 spoke about his friends as a form of therapy, aiding in his ability to handle academic stress. He said, "Sometimes, I take things too seriously and need to take some time out to be young. For me, this usually means going out for a few beers with friends." Participant 1 believed ongoing friendships would be among the greatest benefits she gained from college. Participants 1, 2, 4, and 5 shared the same college major, communications. They were all involved in extracurricular activities that complement the major. Forming and keeping relationships in their college major led to improved self-efficacy in four of five participants.

Participants 1 and 4 remained guarded among their peers but found improved confidence once they were accepted to a social group. First-generation college students could be slow to form new relationships because the process causes anxiety, as exhibited by Participants 1, 2, and 3. Yet once peer relationships were formed, benefits of vicarious learning through observation could become a support (Bandura, 1977).

Forms of Literacy

Photography. The participants practiced various forms of literacy in college. They believed visual literacy was essential to communicating through media outlets and learning environments. Participant 3 noted that images help her make sense of processes in her biology class. Participant 4 said, "I think the attention span of people is 2.7 seconds, so the visual makes your message easier to understand in a more memorable way." They used photographs and video images in professional, academic, and social realms. As was described above in the participant narratives, all participants regularly shot photos that they did not share or publish in

print or web format. Most participants said their photos were not good enough to share. All kept some images private.

The most common themes of photos that participants shared on social media forums were family and pets. Participants also shared visuals beyond social media forums. Participant 5 held a part-time job producing technology review videos for online publication. Participant 4 competitively submitted photos online, although he said he had low confidence in his ability as a photographer. Participants 1 and 3 said they liked to print and keep personal photos of friends and family.

Writing. The participants enjoyed writing, even describing it with "passion" and "love." Participant 4 used writing as a form of therapy. Participant 3 enjoyed writing short fictional stories. Participants 1, 2, 4, and 5 were all regularly engaged in writing news due to their communications major. Although they excelled at academics in high school, four of five participants appeared to experience success that did not prepare or challenge them for higher education. Their methods leading to success were effective in high school. However, in college a new writing norm resulted in confusion and strained engagement. A review of writing samples and a theme of resistance towards "academic" or "serious" writing in interviews revealed that participants were not prepared to engage in scholarly writing. Many struggled with grammar and structure.

Lack of preparation confused and frustrated participants. Within their previous academic communities they excelled. Upon entering the university setting, they experienced an abrasive disconnect, not realizing their high schools fostered and perpetuated academic discourse. Participant 3 noted, "In high school I didn't have to study. I went to a tiny high school." When asked about college writing, most participants found the university setting at fault for asking

them to act in a way to which they were not accustomed. Participant 2 said that college research papers "killed her love for writing." She referred to the writing that she was required to do in college as "serious writing." Participant 3 said she cannot write about research topics and that she struggles with "structure." Participant 1 said, "Sometimes I will be halfway through a paper and I will just start all over again because I don't think it's good enough."

Summary

Four of five participants' collaborative photos represented struggles. One participant, who had no financial obligations, focused on the evolution of a positive experience. Participants 1 through 4 expected to accumulate long-term debt in pursuit of a college degree and career. Although parents of participants could not offer financial assistance, they did have positive impacts on participant outcomes though other forms of support such as modeling behaviors, providing food, offering encouragement, and causing fear of disappointment.

The self-efficacy of all participants was affected by the formation of relationships, friendships in particular. When they were asked about their confidence as college students, all participants spoke about making friends, revealing the importance of peer relationships to the success of first-generation college students. All reported improved self-efficacy since freshman year. Participants wanted to be seen as hardworking individuals and believed that professors and advisers who knew them well saw them in that light.

In the participants' lives, photography was considered to have both private and public categories. They all believed that visuals were important in communication, yet they all kept photos they never intended to share. Some participants had trouble believing in their academic and creative abilities, exhibiting traits of imposter syndrome. Participants enjoyed writing but

did not come to college prepared for academic formatting and style, which resulted in frustration.

Participant 5 was an outlier. He approached the visual metaphor by depicting a positive scenario that brought him happiness and joy. Other participants represented scenes that relayed forms of struggle, metaphorical battle wounds. Participant 5 also shared and collaborated at minimal levels in comparison to the other participants.

Chapter V. Conclusions

A vast array of research exists about the disadvantaged population of first-generation college students (Davis, 2010; DeFreitas & Rinn, 2013; Ishitani, 2006; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Pascarella et al., 2004; Ramos-Sánchez & Nichols, 2007; St. John et al., 2011; Tierney, 1999; Tinto, 1987). However, few studies explain the meaning of participants' personal perspectives compared within the lived experience (Olive, 2008), and few study the population after its second year of college (a notable exception is Gardner and Holley [2011]). This study sought to understand the experience of first-generation college students in their third year and beyond, through engagement in LTP. Data were collected from five participants at a small, private university in the northeastern United States. Emergent themes arose from participant writings and photos, transcribed interviews, and field notes. The study aimed to answer the central research question: What are the experiences of third-year and beyond, first-generation college students engaged in a literacy-based photography approach? A sub-question for this study was: What are the ways in which third-year and beyond, first-generation college students utilize various forms of literacy?

As first-generation college students in their third year and beyond, the participants in this study had already found success, considering this population's documented high departure rate after only one year of college (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Most literature surrounding first-generation college students targets the first two years of experience. As part of understanding experiences of this population, the findings of this study offer insights into participants' emphasis on supports and continuing struggles following the first two undergraduate years.

Self-Efficacy, Adjustment, and Relationships

General education. Self-concept has a profound impact on the well-being of first-generation college students (Wang & Castañeda-Sound, 2008, p. 114), and self-efficacy can be a predictor of college adjustment (Ramos-Sánchez & Nichols, 2007, p. 13). Participants in this study discussed anxiety about their performance while enrolled in general education college courses. Four of five participants claimed to have exhibited behaviors of isolation, did not participate in class, and had difficulty forming peer relationships in their early years at college.

Peer relationships. The data showed peer relationships directly influenced first-generation college student self-efficacy. The data are reflective of Wang & Castañeda-Sound's (2008) findings: Perceived support from friends has a profound and positive association with first-generation college students' well-being (p. 112). The data are also reflective of the report by Ramos-Sánchez & Nichols identifying self-efficacy as a predictor of college acclimation (2007). The formation of peer relationships took more time due to circumstances such as living off campus, working, and anxiety in general education courses. However, once participants settled into majors, they forged relationships and experienced improved self-efficacy. Relationships resulting in improved self-efficacy allowed them to connect with and benefit from the culture of higher education. Hence, the findings of this study do support the theories in the framework of this study.

The present study's findings about peer relationships and improved self-efficacy contribute to an area of research where there is a dearth of existing scholarship (Davis, 2010). Davis (2010), St. John et al. (2011), and Tinto (2012) write about how isolation disrupts the success of first-generation students. However, most first-generation college student studies are limited to the first two years after matriculation. This study found that it took four out of five

participants longer to establish new peer relationships due to common first-generation traits: delay in choosing a major, departure, transfer and, anxiety about forming new relationships (Tinto, 2012).

Creative and academic self-efficacy. Participant experiences aligned with Bandura's (1977) social learning theory in that they entered the critical reflective thinking activity in the study with individual self-perceptions. Two participants exhibited characteristics of imposter syndrome (Gardner & Holley, 2011). Participant 1 discussed having anxiety about her academic performance. She did not believe positive feedback that she received from professors. Participant 4 enjoyed photography but did not believe that he had photographic talent, although a professional photographer on a photo blog featured his work. Both also had anxiety about sharing too much information with others for fear of rejection or isolation.

Participants gained confidence in their creative ability as the researcher focused on positive elements in their compositions. Participants also gained confidence about their ability to voice ideas, directions, and feedback after the researcher modeled the behavior, supporting Mathisen and Bronnick's (2009) concept that creativity can be taught by enhancing one's personal belief in ability. Three participants spoke early in the research about their inability to be creative; two later said they surprised themselves with their creative ability in the study.

Creative Outcomes: The Use of LTP

Engaging in a shared creative experience allowed the researcher to forge trusting relationships with each participant (with the exception of Participant 5). This benefitted the quality of data presented in interviews. Webb and Barrett (2014) believe, "Interpersonal communication is vital to student learning and building rapport has been shown to be an effective way of communicating with students" (p. 25). The sharing of personal experiences led

to participants' trust and comfort in sharing their experiences.

As an artist, the researcher entered the arts-based research method with expectations of visually stimulating data. However, she assessed the visuals as average and foundational. Many compositions followed the same stylistic recipe: repetition, depth, rule of thirds, informal balance, continuation, and line. Two participants experimented with light. Yet rich data presented itself in interviews after the researcher made personal connections with participants through the shared experience of artistic collaboration.

Forms of Literacy

Visual literacy. As Bandura (1977) stated, the reflection of creative visual images offers a new approach to critical thinking (p. 172). The first-generation college students in this study constructed forms of visual literacy in the study and within their lives. Participants used photography, video, and graphics. They believed visual literacy had value in their personal and social lives, educational environments, and future careers.

Reflective writing. Constructing and analyzing a metaphor through photography and discussion allowed all participants time to step back from the written literacy stage of the study to more closely consider their intentions and outcomes. The reflective experience was similar to that of Zenkov and Harmon (2009). It also aligned with Horton and Freire's (1990) theory of education, stressing the importance of reflecting on experience to analyze connections between situations and solutions. The opportunity for reflection and interpretation from visual to written literacy resulted in all participants' creating revisions to photographic concepts and writing shorter, more focused narratives in their second writing attempt. The revisions and shorter, focused writings exhibited an extension of reflective, critical thinking skills. Writing quality did not change from one written narrative to the next, but verbal communication increased after the

collaborative photo session and written reflection was complete.

Realities of writing ability. Different realities of successful writing were present in this study, supporting Freire's (1985) different realities of knowing. Students experienced situated success in high school as they were exposed to forms of writing. They felt unprepared for academic, college-level writing, supporting Achieve, Inc.'s (2005) research on college writing preparation. In turn they experienced frustration and confusion when engaged in this activity.

Limitations

The major limitation to this study is that all participants belonged to the same college campus in a single geographic area. Reflecting the student population and the surrounding area, all participants were white. In addition, four of five participants shared the same college major, communications. However, because struggles participants described aligned with the broader first-generation college student literature, it is likely that first-generation college students do experience these struggles in some form across race and major. Olive's (2008) data, for example found similar struggles among first-generation Hispanic college students.

Similarly, the benefits of peer relationships may be specific to the conception and administration of mentorship values on the campus where the study took place. However, with few studies reporting on peer relationships of first-generation students in the third year or beyond, these data can offer a significant contribution to the literature.

All participants fell short in creating the 30 photographs that they were initially asked to compose as part of the LTP activity. This limitation may have been a direct result of difficulty in understanding the directive: "Create a visual metaphor that defines you as a first-generation college student." Specifically, parents and family members of first-generation students have not "defined themselves in terms of college attendance" (Davis, 2010, p. 64). Thus, to this group,

contemplating self-definition by first-generation status could be an abstract request. A second iteration of the study may benefit from rephrasing the prompt. Due to the mentorship vision at the study location, a similar study at a larger public institution would be advised to uncover any campus-specific culture that may have affected data.

Implications

Recommendations for practice. Sapir (1929) asserts that different societies have different realities. First-generation college student do not simply comprise a type of college student. They must be recognized for their distinct culture. Their reality of success in a different style of writing must be recognized at the foundational level of change before their skills can be expanded.

Institutions of higher education could invest in prospective students by offering qualifying high school juniors and seniors courses in the language of academia and the social realities of higher education. First-generation students would benefit from discounted or free room and board for the first two years, contingent upon family income, and working with an adviser who is specifically trained to guide their population. These policies would allow them to better integrate into peer social groups, leading to higher self-efficacy early in their academic careers. This endeavor may sound expensive, yet as Tinto (2012) argues, retention is cheaper than recruitment (p. 97). In view of the extremely high failure rate of first-generation college students a period of discounted or free room and board might be considered in order to improve their outcomes.

Remediation via required courses after matriculation would not be advised. Schultz (2012) agrees that these individuals should not be funneled into programs that further marginalize or separate them from the university experience. Instead, they should be

encouraged to use available services (Schultz, 2012, p. 116). Remedial courses disengage first-generation students because the initial motivation and effort of being new college students is expended on a zero credit course experience that extends time to graduation. Remedial courses ultimately deplete first-generation college student motivation and often lead to departure (Complete College America, 2012). Summer bridge experiences may fall short because of the amount of work that needs to fit into a typical six-week program (Garcia & Paz, 2009).

Remediation through ongoing Upward Bound programs that recruit students in their junior year of high school may be one approach to address deficiencies, joining the efforts of government, high school, and college institutions. Upward Bound is one of eight government-funded TRIO programs. Upward Bound is hosted by universities that serve low-SES students, starting in middle school. It operates throughout the year and engages students, guiding them in an approach to higher education (U.S. Department of Education, 2014a).

Another promising practice at the high school level is the inclusion of "college language" in a series of college preparatory courses. This approach was noted in a study conducted by Davis, Soep, Maira, Remba, and Putnoi (1993) for the Harvard Graduate School of Education's Project Zero. The study followed the experience of Bill Strickland of the Manchester Craftsman's Guild in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He engaged inner-city high school students through art. Building upon an initial engagement, he taught students the language and social norms of academia. The approach was referred to as "Winning the Right to be Heard." Strickland modeled personal presentation, speaking, writing, techniques of communication, and conducting oneself in professional relationships. He guided students in the college selection and application process and remained with them until they were accepted to appropriate institutions (Davis, Soep, Maira, Remba & Putnoi, 1993, pp. 83-85).

Recommendations for future research. Further qualitative and quantitative research on first-generation college students in the third year and beyond is necessary to understand strategies that bring this group success. The literature about first-generation students presents a void concerning graduates. Since the study participants were in their third and fourth years of college, a sample of recent graduates is suggested. If a sample were drawn from a larger population at the third or fourth year, students may be far from graduation. Graduation statistics now focus on a six-year period (Seidman, 2012; Tinto, 2012). Recent college graduates could offer a holistic view of the first-generation college student experience from matriculation to graduation.

Literature that follows the same group into their careers or graduate school is also limited. Data in the defined areas could be explored as a continuation of the research presented.

Concluding Statement

According to Creswell (2003), "A qualitative study may fill a void in existing literature, establish a new line of thinking, or assess an issue with an understudied group or population" (p. 94). This study contributes to the body of research on the underrepresented group of first-generation college students. Through portraiture and LTP, it presents an understanding of student experience with a focus on perceptions of peer relationships and self-efficacy. It also presents a scene of situated writing ability in higher education.

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Appendix A

Wilkes University Institutional Review Board Approval

84 W. South Street
Wilkes-Barre
Pennsylvania 18766
570-408-5000
1-800-WILKES-U
www.wilkes.edu

Via e-mail (sara.moore@wilkes.edu*)*
Ms. Sara Moore, MFA
Assistant Professor
Integrative Media and Art department
Doctoral Candidate, Educational Leadership
Wilkes University

February 23, 2015

Dear Ms. Moore,

The Wilkes University IRB has reviewed your revised application entitled: *"Literacy Through Photography: Third-year First Generation College Student Experience with Culture and Academic Discourse"*. The protocol was determined to fall under the expedited review procedure as authorized by 45 CFR 46.101, for research activities that present no more than minimal risk to human subjects. The IRB approved this study and your position as a principal investigator for a period of one year from the date of this approval letter. As principal investigator, you are responsible for ensuring that the research activities associated with this study are conducted in accordance with the approved protocol documents and adhere to guidelines for the protection of human subjects and the conditions listed below.

There are five conditions attached to all approval letters:

1. No subjects may be involved in any study procedure prior to the IRB approval date or after the expiration date. (PIs and sponsors are responsible for initiating Continuing Review proceedings.)
2. All unanticipated or serious adverse events must be reported to the IRB within 5 days.
3. All protocol modifications must be IRB approved prior to implementation unless they are intended to reduce risk. This includes any change of investigator or site address.
4. All protocol deviations must be reported to the IRB within 5 working days.
5. All recruitment materials and methods must be approved by the IRB prior to being used.

Renewals or extensions of research that extend beyond the one year approval must follow Wilkes University IRB guidelines. Feel free to contact me at Linda.gutierrez@wilkes.edu or 570-408-4636 should you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Linda Gutierrez

Linda Gutierrez MD
IRB Chair
Associate Professor
Biology and Health Sciences
230 Cohen Science Center
Phone: 570-408-4636
Wilkes University

Appendix B

NIH Certification

Certificate of Completion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that **sara pisarchick** successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course "Protecting Human Research Participants".

Date of completion: 07/21/2013

Certification Number: 1215789

Appendix C

Letter of Informed Consent

Wilkes University
School of Education
84 W. South Street Wilkes-Barre, PA 18766

Title of Study: Literacy Through Photography: First-Generation College Student Experience with Culture and Academic Discourse

Principal Investigator: Sara R. Moore
Phone: 570-408-4484
Email: sara.moore@wilkes.edu

Dear _____,

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Sara Moore, as a graduate student to earn the Doctor of Education degree in Educational Leadership from Wilkes University. You should read the information below and ask questions about anything you do not understand before deciding to participate. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to sign this form, or offer verbal confirmation that you have read and understand the form. In either instance you will be given a copy of the form.

Background and Purpose of the Study: This qualitative study examines the experience of first-generation college students in their third-year or beyond of college. This study utilizes literacy through photography techniques to explore culture and literacy of first-generation college students while engaged in interpretative photography.
Study Procedures and Time Involvement: Upon agreement, you will be asked to participate in four activities over the course of four weeks. Meetings will last approximately one hour. A primary group meeting will be scheduled to gain an initial understanding of the first-generation college student experiences, culture and self-evaluation of writing ability. A second meeting will be one on one format with the researcher. Participant and researcher will co-construct representational photographic images led by the previously created concepts of the participant. At the third meeting a reflective writing about the photographic experience will be collected. At the fourth meeting the one-hour interview will be conducted where the participant will then begin to answer the research questions. There will be a list of predetermined questions that will be used to guide the interview to maximize time efficiency. However, questions may be asked by the researcher in secondary interviews if clarification or elaboration is needed to gain a greater understanding of the context. The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed after the interview. You will be asked to produce two 2-3 paragraph narrative, reflective writings. You will be asked to shoot a minimum of thirty interpretative photos with the researcher.
Benefits and Risks: There are no potential risks for participation in the study. Your identity, the identity of your university, and any personnel involved in the study will be kept anonymous. Participant numbers will be used for all participants and a pseudonym will be used for the

university. Any identifying characteristics of the people or the campus will be altered in order to hide the identity.

While there are no direct benefits for participation in the study, there are potential benefits to the field of educational leadership. The study will provide insight into the decision-making experiences an individual must assume in the field of educational leadership. Specifically, the effects of internal and external influences on the decisions of faculty, admissions, administration and first-generation college students and their families, especially in institutions that attract a concentration of first-generation college applicants.

A $75 Amazon.com gift card will be given to each participant at the conclusion of the study. If a participant withdraws early or does not attend all meetings indicated above, they will not receive a $75 gift card.

Confidentiality: Each participant will be assured that their identity and the identity of the university, or any personnel involved in the study will be kept anonymous. Numbers will be used to represent participants and a general reference to the size and region of the university will be used to represent the site. Any identifying characteristics of the people or campus will be altered in order to hide the identity. Audio files and transcriptions will be kept off-line in the researcher's home, and no one outside the researcher and her committee will have access to the data. After the study the data will be saved to a media drive and kept in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home for five years until it can be destroyed.

Participant's Rights: Your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. All photographic files will be returned upon withdraw. Participants who do withdraw will not receive an amazon.com gift card. You can choose not to participate at any time.

Contact Information: If you have any questions or concerns about this research study, contact the principal investigator, Sara Moore (570-408-4484 or sara.moore@wilkes.edu) or Dr. Erin McHenry-Sorber (304-293-2090 or ecmchenrysorber@mail.wvu.edu), or Dr. Dana Burnside (570- 408-4917 or dana.burnside@wilkes.edu) who are the faculty members supervising this research.

If you have questions, concerns, or feel your rights have been violated as a research participant, you may contact Dr. Linda S. Gutierrez, chair of the Wilkes University Institutional Review Board (IRB) at (570) 408-4636 or at linda.gutierrez@wilkes.edu.

Statement of Consent: I have read the above information and agree to participate.

Signature _____ **Date:** _____

Name (Print) _____

- ☐ I agree to be audio-recorded in an interview.
- ☐ I do not agree to be audio-recorded in an interview.

Signature _____ **Date:** _____

Name (Print) _____

Appendix D

Interview Protocol

Wilkes University

Literacy Through Photography: Third-Year and Beyond, First-Generation College Student Experience with Culture and Academic Discourse

Date:
Location:
Time:
Interviewer:
Interviewee:
Position of Interviewee:

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to understand the experience of students engaged in literacy through photography, in the later half of their experience in higher education. The central research question is: What are the experiences of third-year and beyond, first-generation college students engaged in a literacy-based photography approach?

Questions:

1. What does going to college mean to you?
2. What does your college education mean to your family?
3. How do you feel about speaking up in class?
4. What does the term "college debt" mean to you?
5. What do you hope to get out of college?
6. Explain your confidence level when you were in your first-year of college.
7. Explain your confidence now at college.
   If someone asked a teacher what kind of student you are what would a teacher say?
8. What kind of student would you say you are?
9. How do you feel about writing?
10. When do you most often use photographs?
11. Do visuals have a role in communication? If so, what is that role?
12. Explain your current writing ability
13. Tell me about your parent's involvement with your college experience

Thank you for your time and consideration pertaining to this interview. I will be contacting you via your preference of phone or email, within three days to clarify any questions or concerns regarding your responses.

Appendix E

Participants' Initial Photographs

Figure E.1. Participant 1's initial photograph.

Figure E.2. Participant 2's initial photograph.

Figure E.3. Participant 3's initial photograph.

Figure E.4. Participant 4's initial photograph.

Figure E.5. Participant 5's initial photograph.