EMBRACING “NON-TRADITIONAL” CAPITAL FOR BACHELOR DEGREE ATTAI NMENT: FIRST-GENERATION-TRANSFER STUDENT NEGOTIATIONS OF SELF AT A PUBLIC FOUR-YEAR UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

EMBRACING “NON-TRADITIONAL” CAPITAL FOR BACHELOR DEGREE ATTAINMENT: FIRST-GENERATION-TRANSFER (FGCT) STUDENT NEGOTIATIONS OF SELF AT A PUBLIC FOUR-YEAR UNIVERSITY

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This research is based on qualitative interviews conducted from the spring semester of 2012 to the spring semester of 2013 with 12 first-generation-transfer (FGCT) students and 3 transfer students on the Humboldt State University campus. The thesis addresses FGCT student’s postsecondary navigation experiences in relation to their self in transition from pursuing a bachelor degree. Analysis captures multi-dimensional understanding of a primary tension in self of being both similar and different as a college student, through FGCT student’s understanding of their postsecondary transitions from the intersection of institutional categories of First-Generation College (FGC) and Transfer student. A secondary tension in self of being both confident and doubtful of one’s place in the field of higher education arises as a means of persisting and navigating across institutions to a bachelor degree. Bourdieu’s conceptualization of field (1993) and habitus (1984) provide a theoretical lens for the analysis of data, representing the distinction held within the symbolic capital of a bachelor degree for both society and the self. The analysis also draws attention to the various “nontraditional” student categories of higher education as embodying new forms of symbolic cultural and social capital.
(Bourdieu 1986), represented through college student’s lived experiences. FGCT students straddle more than one cultural sphere of reality creating tensions in self. This research adopts intersectional multi-dimensional models as a means of studying college and university students in the twenty-first century who straddle multiple cultural spheres of reality, and offers recommendations for future approaches to educational research on both FGC and transfer student experiences. This thesis concludes with specific recommendations for Humboldt State University to assist FGCT students in their transition to the university by developing and enhancing current transitional programs and resources available to transfer students on the campus.
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Nam!
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Community colleges remain a viable avenue towards bachelor degree attainment, even if educational researchers have found a 14.5% less likelihood for students aged 17-20 (Long and Kurlaender 2009) to graduate with a bachelor degree by beginning their postsecondary access at a community college. As Cohen and Brawler (1987) explain, there is a “happy ending” for community college students who transfer since they do ‘quite well’ at the four-year institution upon arriving (100). Educational researchers need to understand community college students within distinct frameworks of the postsecondary intensions and behaviors. Cohen and Brawler (1987) describe this understanding by noting, “Transfer is an intention expressed by some students who take community college classes and a behavior manifested by those who eventually matriculate at a four-year college or university” (89). Therefore, the framework of research for understanding the transfer process contains not only the intention or aspiration to transfer out of a community college, but also the behavior to achieve such ends and reach a four-year university.

Individuals attend community colleges for a variety of general education purposes, including vocational training, adult education, and remedial coursework. However, the core mission of the community college as a postsecondary institution has been, and remains ever so today, offering opportunities to students otherwise historically blocked from educational systems, pathways, and pipelines (Cohen and Brawler 1987: 105), offering a “second chance” for these students to transfer onto a public four-year
university and attain a bachelor degree. Cohen and Brawler (1987) echoed this sentiment of the community college’s function as an alternative access point to postsecondary education long ago. They also note resistance by educational leaders, as stakeholders in the reproduction of the educational system, to adhere to a singular core mission within the community college system. They state:

Despite the many additional roles adopted by the colleges, that original function remains an essential component of their mission. It may be ignored by college leaders who would rather speak of their institution’s role in assisting regional economic development or in providing lifelong learning opportunities for adults, but to the students seeking entry to institutions of higher education, it remains a cornerstone of the community college (xi).

Cohen and Brawler (1987) describe the community college as “democracy's college” (2) since it functioned to provide access to higher education for a diverse group of students who may otherwise not attend.

In particular, community colleges act as an educational gateway for students from racial/ethnic minorities, low-income, and nontraditionally aged (24+) groups historically underrepresented at four-year institutions (Astin 1985). The community college as a postsecondary pipeline connector to public four-year institutions has led to the establishment of an array of articulation and transfer agreements between colleges and universities creating more viable and accessible pathways to a bachelor degree (Cohen and Brawler 1987: 148). Creating an awareness in transfer student’s positionality as social agents within the system of higher education, past research discovered community college transfers overrepresented in the social science areas and underrepresented in the natural sciences (Lunneborg and Lunneborg 1975). Furthermore, “community college
students typically major in sociology, society and justice, political science, etc. (Lunneborg and Lunneborg 1975: 7)”, transferring into a university not fully aware of career-related objectives to their majors. However, in moving later into the working world after graduation, and gaining social mobility through possessing a bachelor degree, these students often pursue careers related to their disciplinary degree. These careers therefore are a product of their disciplinary degree, and would not otherwise be attainable without the needed certification in U.S. society.

The community college transfer avenue to a bachelor degree represents a viable field of study in attempting to understand college student trajectories in the twenty-first century. According to American Association of Community Colleges, Overview of undergraduate enrollment Data Points, as of October 2013, “Community colleges represent 45% of all undergraduate enrollments in the U.S.” This information was previously validated by UCLA’s Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) report, Assessing the Climate for Transfer at Two- and Four-Year Institutions by Ruiz and Pryor (2011) citing 2006 National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) showing “approximately 40 percent of students entering higher education for the first time are doing so through a community college” (3). Almost half of the entering postsecondary education population in the U.S. thus resides in the community college system, with a majority of community college students holding aspirations towards bachelor degree attainment (Grubb 1991). Community colleges, and their core function of transfer, thus deserve further investigation. Furthermore, since almost three-quarters of students in the
public higher education systems in California are enrolled in community colleges (CPEC 2003), this state in particular represents an ideal setting to explore this shifting trend.

Between 1971 and 1998, the proportion of 25- to 29-year-olds who earned a bachelor degree or higher rose from 22 to 31 percent, as did the proportion who attended some college, rising 44 to 66 percent (Indicator 59, The Condition of Education 1999 as cited in Choy 2001). This shift in college student demographics has changed the notion of traditional and nontraditional college students. In today’s ever-changing contemporary, spatial and fragmented society, we can no longer rely on past models that assume a generalizable outcome across diverse groups. Rather, educational researchers need to begin to look at the present college demographic groups of the past, and begin to disaggregate their underlying information within data, seeking to understand the larger picture of higher education shifts, trends, and changes in the twenty-first century. One group that requires this focus is found at the intersections of First-Generation College (FGC) students- those who are the first in their family to obtain a bachelor’s degree, and transfer students- those who enter a four-year university by transferring from a community college. These new students, traversing multiple institutions to their degree, may soon be the majority of students (Jenkins 2012) entering public four-year institutions in the next decade. Understanding their college navigation experiences can prove beneficial in aiding institutions of higher education in their retention and graduation rates.

Increases in access to college and universities have changed the definitions of traditional and nontraditional college students, and their experiences navigating a
bachelor degree. According to the Condition of Education 2013 Report from the NCES, higher education is expanding like never before.

Some 10.6 million undergraduate students attended 4-year institutions in 2011, while 7.5 million attended 2-year institutions. At 4-year institutions in 2011, some 78 percent of undergraduate students attended full time, compared with 42 percent of undergraduate students at 2-year institutions (Characteristics of Postsecondary Students).

Within these percentages, “Total undergraduate enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions increased by 37 percent in the most recent decade, from 13.2 million students in fall 2000 to 17.6 million in fall 2009” (NCES 2013: Undergraduate Enrollment). Furthermore, “between 2011 and 2021, undergraduate enrollment is expected to increase to 20.3 million students” (NCES 2013: Undergraduate Enrollment).

Such increases in higher education are most likely to come from historically nontraditional student groups now accessing postsecondary institutions of education in greater numbers.

One such group that helps to represent multiple nontraditional college student categories is that of First-Generation College (FGC) students. Nuñez and Cuccaro-Alamin (1998) in their historic NCES report, First-Generation Students: Undergraduates whose parents never enrolled in postsecondary education, define first-generation college student status as: “those whose parents’ highest level of education is a high school diploma or less” (7). However, within their report they note “the defining eligibility for the U.S. Department of Education’s TRIO programs, ‘first-generation’ students are defined as students whose parents have never earned a bachelor’s degree, but may have some postsecondary experience” (1).
The majority of institutions of higher education in the U.S. use the standing definition of the U.S. federal TRIO program¹ as the defining characteristic for FGC student status (Sáenz 2007). Choy (2001) helped to further the usage of this definition for the category of FGC students by finding, “students whose parents had some college experience, but not a bachelor’s degree, did not appear to have an advantage over those whose parents had no postsecondary education” (8). Additionally, according to Chen and Carroll (2005) and their NCES report on FGC students from Figure A of their executive summary, the difference in bachelor degree attainment between students whose parents had no college (defined as first-generation in Figure 1 below) (24%) and students whose parents had some college (39%), was a difference of only 15%. Whereas the difference in bachelor degree attainment between students whose parents had some college (39%) and students whose parents had a bachelor’s degree or higher (68%), was a difference of 29%, almost twice that of the no college to some college comparison. So, some college of parents does not necessarily provide all the resources and knowledge transmitted to successfully attain a bachelor degree. Additionally, the achievement gap of bachelor degree attainment based on parental education can be seen between students whose parents had no college (defined as first-generation in Figure 1 below) (24%) and students whose parents had a bachelor’s degree or higher (68%), at a 44% difference in comparison of degree attainment for their children. These statistics highlight the

importance that having parents with a bachelor degree holds in relation to attaining a bachelor’s degree.

Figure 1: Degree Attainment Snapshot Based on Parental Education

![Graph](image)

**Figure A.** Percentage distribution of generation status in 1992 12th-graders; and of those who had enrolled in postsecondary education between 1992 and 2000, generation status by percentage distribution of postsecondary attainment and enrollment in 2000

- **First-generation students**
- **Students whose parent(s) had some college**
- **Students whose parent(s) had bachelor’s degree or higher**
- **No degree and not enrolled**
- **No degree, but still enrolled**
- **Associate’s or certificate**
- **Bachelor’s or higher**

ORIGINAL NOTE: Except for the first two bar charts, all figures included only students for whom complete postsecondary transcripts were available and for whom parents’ education was known. Standard error tables are available at http://nces.ed.gov/das/library/reports.asp.


Figure 1 is exactly replicated from Figure A on page iv of the executive summary to the 2005 National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Postsecondary Education Descriptive Analysis Report entitled, “First-Generation Students in Postsecondary Education: A look at their college transcripts.”

As a result of recent changes in postsecondary education access, FGC students have gained, in the past decade, the interest of educational researchers as they try to understand the varying nontraditional statuses and identities of college students. As one article from Inside Higher Ed, *First-Generation Focus*, discusses,

The topic of first generation college students is often linked to race, ethnicity, and affirmative action on many campuses. Programs that assist such students are frequently housed in multicultural or diversity education offices because minority students are also commonly first generation (Housel 2012: 2).
Housel (2012) explains that sharing her own “class experiences” gives FGC students the “courage to also speak” and “make their way in the world” (9). In her article, she calls for FGC students to be depicted as survivors overcoming the adverse conditions of their position within U.S. society. Therefore, educational researchers should look at FGC students as “Pioneers, Not Problems,” as Richard Greenwald (2012) explains in his article from *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Greenwald (2012) discusses the unique experiences of FGC students and their ability to persist, succeed, and overcome various obstacles in their path to a bachelor degree. As he explains, “We shouldn't expect them to choose between their past and the promise of the future, or make them ashamed of where they come from” (5). Rather, we should view such students as a building majority coming into postsecondary education, and working to diversity the institutions of higher education for the twenty-first century.

Often, FGC students begin their entry into postsecondary education at the community college. Alternate pathways of the community college to four-year university track are “becoming more important for students wanting to earn a bachelor degree and institutions wanting to diversify” (Roksa, Grodsky and Horn 2010: 109). Furthermore, the community college transfer pathway remains an underutilized avenue of access to public four-year institutions and revitalizing this pathway could help to improve educational outcomes, and increase “the diversity and quality of learning environments” (Roksa, et al. 2010: 118). Understanding the various pathways to a bachelor degree are needed, when students are beginning to take alternative routes. “In California, the
majority of students who transfer do not follow the designated transfer pathway” (Roksa, et al. 2010: 120). Focusing on transfer students in California already at a public four-year university therefore also helps to focus on URM (Underrepresented Minority) and low-income students and discover new ways to close the achievement gap in higher education.

Consequently, more research is needed looking at the community college to four-year transfer pathway and transitions involved directly from student’s experiences. This research needs to look not only at community colleges, but at the four-year institutional transition as well. As Bowen, Chingos, and McPherson (2009) note,

Focusing only on four-year institutions is not likely to be an adequate strategy, since large proportions of students, particularly those from traditionally underrepresented groups, begin their postsecondary journeys in the community colleges. Increasing educational attainment, reducing inequality, and fostering diversity in four-year institutions necessitate a more focused attention on community colleges as a pathway toward a bachelor’s degree (21).

Because of this reframing of postsecondary degree pathways, research focusing on the transition of community college students who are the first in their family to obtain a bachelor degree helps to understand different educational pathways in public higher education at the onset of the twenty-first century.

FGC students remain a vital component to the health and sustainability of the U.S. higher education system to satisfy national education goals established by the Obama administration in relation to addressing the further increasing college attainment gap appearing over the last two decades of educational research. According to the White House,
President Obama challenged every American to commit to at least one year of higher education or post-secondary training. The President has also set a new goal for the country: that by 2020, America would once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world (WhiteHouse.gov 2013).

Furthermore, the CSU (California State University) Chancellor Timothy White, has publically committed to assisting low-income, URM, and FGC students, like himself, in attaining a bachelor’s degree and meeting the graduation rates purposed by Obama and his administration. Chancellor Timothy White (2014) explains the CSU system as the “people’s university”. He elaborates on this concept noting:

> There are so many important to different ways we can characterize our students. Suffice it to say, they cover the spectrum of society on every imaginable descriptor (3).

Therefore, educational research that covers the intersectional common statuses held amongst FGCT students may prove beneficial to understanding institutional student categories of both FGC and transfer students to better align community college and university transition programs. Research on the lived experiences of this potential new traditional student of the twenty-first century, helps to illuminate areas of policy and structural change needed in public postsecondary institutions, both 2-year and 4-year, to adhere to not only their mission of access, but commitment to equitable outcomes as well.

My research question is: how do first-generation-transfer (FGCT) students define changes and/or shifts in their sense of self in transition as a student transferring from a community college to a four-year public university in pursuit of a bachelor degree? This specific area of research has only recently begun to be examined. Therefore, this research contributes to new knowledge on changing college student demographics by looking at
the intersections of transfer and FGC students while considering the proxy that this
intersection of student categories holds for URM, older (24+) students, and low-income
and working-class (i.e. Lower-Income) students. The intent of this research is to focus on
the changes, shifts, and (re)formation in a student’s sense of self (Cooley [1902] 2001;
forms of symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1984; Bourdieu 1986; Coleman 1988; Coleman
1990) in the field (Bourdieu 1993) of higher education. These interactions and new forms
of cultural and social capital (i.e. symbolic capital), develop new ways of thinking and
being for FGC students (Orbe 2004; Orbe 2008) who transfer into the university from a
community college in pursuit of a bachelor degree.

Furthermore, there currently exists a large population of FGC students at the
community college who fail to transfer to a four-year university, even given high
aspirations towards a bachelor degree (Grubb 1991). Additionally, many FGC students
may reverse transfer upon reaching the four-year university as incoming freshman,
returning to a community college, and then subsequently transferring back to a four-year
university for their bachelor degree at a later time. Better understanding of nontraditional
college student trajectories in postsecondary education across a more multi-dimensional
degree pathway, both structurally and individually, helps institutions of higher education
better adapt to changing student demographics.

When educational researchers examine postsecondary students in greater detail
and begin to disaggregate historical data that exists, applying a more multi-dimensional
approach of student’s experiences, utilizing theory and tools across social science
disciplines, we begin to see a global picture of higher education. This is a story of the collegiate experience where students swirl through institutions towards a bachelor degree, as opposed to having a linear and single best path to degree. Swirling refers to students unofficially moving back and forth between institutions of higher education, (Townsend and Denver 1999; Adelman 2006) and is something to consider when educational researchers look at recent information on student trajectories to bachelor degree involving three institutions across the span of 6-years (Shapiro, Afet, Chen, Ziskin, Park, Torres, and Chiang. 2012). In addition, Adelman (2006) found that formal transfer from community college to a four-year institution positively correlated to bachelor degree completion. Therefore, our understanding of students from a multi-dimensional perspective can allow colleges and universities to understand changing paradigms of higher education beyond dualistic notions of our past conception of traditional and nontraditional students. Adelman grasped a unique component to the U.S. higher education system in deconstructing the notions of access canonized in modern educational research (Adelman 1999; Adelman 2004; Adelman 2006). The same grasp in research is needed today by looking at the intersections of transfer and FGC students.

Furthermore, Paulsen and St. John (2002) found that educational choices are linked to policy, and therefore student choices are always contextual and situational. Student-choice patterns are diverse and as a result, research studies need to be conducted on diverse groups in their own context and experiential situation to capture valid and reliable information. Given the sheer volume of quantitative data that exists on both transfer and FGC students, qualitative approaches are needed more than ever today.
TRANSFER SHOCK TO TRANSFER STUDENT CAPITAL: HURDLES FOR TRANSFER STUDENT ADJUSTMENT

Transfer students caught the attention of educational researchers as “transfer shock” surfaced in their statistics (Hills 1965). Transfer shock is defined as a decline in student’s grades during their first term at the four-year university. This initial focus of educational research on transfer students was from a perspective of institutional outcomes for student performance. Later research continued to document this phenomenon (Hills 1965; Cejda 1997; Cejda, Kaylor, and Rewey 1998; Diaz 1992). Educational researchers then looked for ways institutions could ease the transitional processes of transfer students, and increase their overall persistence and success rates (Cejda 1994; Laanan 1995: Laanan 1996; Davies and Dickmann 1998; Davies and Casey 1999). Through much of the research focusing on transfer student adjustment, educational researchers discovered a need for institutions to begin focusing on student perceptions, calling for more qualitative approaches.

Townsend (1995) conducted one of the earliest qualitative studies on transfer student adjustment by looking at community college students transferring to a public four-year institution. She discovered that transfer students had a need to be self-reliant and that these students more often sought informal resources (i.e. friends and family) as opposed to formal systems for support and assistance in higher education. In addition, Townsend (1995) found that related to the phenomenon of transfer shock was the transfer
student’s perceptions of higher academic standards existing at the four-year institution than what they had grown accustomed to at the community college.

Laanan (1995) discovered that more “nontraditional age students (age 25 and over) are enrolled in community colleges and are in the transfer pipeline” (79). Laanan also (1995) identified “increased academic demands, large lecture classes, relocation to a new environment, coping with new services not provided to them” (81) (such as an assigned faculty advisor and an assigned academic counselor) were obstacles requiring an adjustment process for transfer students upon arriving at the university. Laanan (1995) was therefore one of the first educational researchers to call for a more complex framework to understanding the transfer adjustment process of transfer students beyond “traditional GPA indicators” and “toward a framework that encompasses social and psychological perspectives” (81). Incorporating more personal characteristics, as opposed to institutional outcomes, helped to broaden the understanding of transfer student adjustment and student transitions to the four-year university. Laanan furthered this perspective in transfer student research by looking at specific forms of academic, social, and psychological adjustment for students within the UCLA Transfer Alliance Program (TAP). The UCLA TAP allows honor students at the community college to enter honor department curriculum at UCLA post-transfer. Laanan (1996) discusses the main purpose of the TAP was to establish articulation agreements between community colleges and UCLA, as well as developed enriched curriculum at the community college to meet general education requirements at the university level. Such articulation agreements
helped to establish prerequisite courses for majors within the UCLA College of Letters and Sciences, and ease some of the transfer shock of students.

In later research, Laanan (1999) found that transfer student’s satisfaction in their academic and social adjustment at the four-year university differed significantly by race/ethnicity. For example, as a means of social integration into the new university environment, Non-White students experiences were extremely varied, with more time spent in clubs, organizations, and academic counseling centers as compared to White students who spent more time socializing with friends. Additionally, Laanan (1999) found that Non-White students had feelings of isolation and being overwhelmed by class size in greater proportions than White students. Laanan (1999) applied the same data analysis used for student’s satisfaction in their academic and social adjustment processes at the university by race/ethnicity to the variable of age. Laanan looked at traditional (24 and under) and nontraditional students (25 and older) to see if the same significance existed in relation to their levels of satisfaction. Although traditional age and nontraditional age students had different experiences, their transfer student adjustment process was similar.

When older students arrive at the four-year university, they have a distinct approach to learning compared to younger students. Perhaps increasing age is a motivating factor to stay focused and value available opportunities (Laanan 1999: 23).

However, it should be noted that Laanan (1999) found more profound differences existing between White and Non-White students, than from traditional and nontraditional age students. Laanan (1999) suggests that further research on transfer students be
qualitative and longitudinal in design since transfer shock occurs over time, and educational researchers may currently be missing a comprehensive look at these students transition over time, and beyond their initial period of adjustment at the four-year university.

In response to transfer student research, Harbin (1997) surveyed transfer students across four-year institutions that serve California Community Colleges. Harbin (1997) found that patterns in student’s behaviors at the four-year institution, such as continuing to commute to campus, only spending time on campus for classes, and studying alone, mirrored those of past behaviors at the community college. However, the behaviors of transfer students that yielded success in the academic arena of the community college, did not produce the same success and academic achievement at the university. This lack of adjustment in transfer student’s behaviors resulted in transfer shock and a dip in academic performance. This finding was significant in understanding the behaviors of community college students that followed transfer students into their new educational environment of the four-year institution.

The focus of transfer student adjustment research began to shift perspective from the individual student to institutional differences and significances placed on particular cultures within higher education. Consequently, student perceptions and experiences began to be more prevalent in research on transfer student adjustment. Davies and Casey (1999) compared transfer student experiences at their community college and university environments and found more difference than similarities between the two environments of higher education. They explain transfer students having positive experiences laced
with frustration and disappointment once finally arriving at the university. Additionally, Davies and Dickmann (1999) took an in-depth look at the experiences of community college transfer students across six general areas of: advising, academic life, classes, campus culture, instructors, and preparation. Davies and Dickmann (1999) found that all students experienced a form of “culture shock” their first semester after transferring into the university. Davis and Dickmann (1999) also discovered a difference in social integration for transfer students arriving at the university. Transfer students in their study found campus social life and extra-curricular activities at the four-year institution different from the community college. Students in their study noted that these activities took time away from their academic studies, the focus point of being at a university. Students also explained that the four-year institution stressed such extra-curricular activities too much.

Additionally, Harrison (1999) noted that transfer students initially felt alienated from other students on campus experiencing difficulties in the variation of institutional cultures at the community college and four-year university. She further posits in her qualitative dissertation that a successful transfer student transition to a four-year university relies on transfer students finding a niche in the new institutional culture that they can call and claim as their own. Harrison (1999) also found that community college transfer students did not intermix with returning students at the four-year university who began as incoming freshman. This lack of intermixing of student groups resulted from transfer student perceptions of returning students as privileged by beginning their postsecondary education at the four-year university. Even amongst these negative
feelings of privilege at the university environment, transfer students in Harrison’s study still valued and appreciated what their university education affords them. To remain successful at the four-year institution, Harrison (1999) recommends that transfer students overcome their initial period of “shock” and find their niche in the university for continuing their already established postsecondary success.

Berger and Malaney (2003) used quantitative methods to examine transfer student adjustment by looking at student experiences at both ends of the institutional trajectory. They looked at students’ pre-transfer experiences at the community college in relation to their post-transfer experiences at the university and attempted to measure (“by academic achievement and satisfaction with various aspects of the university experience” Berger and Malaney 2003: 2) the effects of the transfer adjustment process on student success at the four-year institution. This study revealed the horizons of the transfer student adjustment process beyond simply students’ post-transfer experiences at the university, and included their pre-transfer experiences at the community college as shaping their perceptions of the university. Both institutions, the community college and the four-year university, need to play an active role in assisting students make successful transitions across institutions to a bachelor degree. Therefore, more multi-dimensional approaches to educational research are needed, utilizing “individual student characteristics, community college experiences, and university experiences” if we are going to “better understand and improve the success of community college transfers in four-year college settings” (Berger and Malaney 2003: 3-4).
Berger and Malaney (2003) also found that “levels of involvement in community college had almost no effect on students’ satisfaction and academic achievement in the university setting” (18), calling into question the prominence of utilizing social integration modeling (Tinto 1975) for transfer students, and nontraditional students more generally. Such college integration models focus on retaining students at a single institution and fail to address degree attainment across and through multiple postsecondary institutions. Therefore, Berger and Malaney (2003) call for more research on transfer students “that help us to better understand how students persist across institutions” (19).

Following this multi-dimensional approach, Flaga (2006) identified 5 dimensions of transfer student’s transition: (a) learning resources, (b) connecting, (c) gaining familiarity, (d) negotiating, and (e) integrating. Transfer students navigated these 5 dimensions during their transitional periods of adjustment to the four-year university culture and lifestyles different from that of the community college. Flaga (2006) discusses transfer students moving through these dimensions as a continuum from basic to comprehensive knowledge towards the university and college culture. Through this continuum, transfer students are able to internalize their understanding of the academic, social, and physical environment of the university. Flaga clarifies that movement along the dimensional continuum might not always be linear in direction due to varying experiences, perceptions, and understandings. Flaga’s research then argues for a non-linear and multi-dimensional approach to understanding transfer students and their student adjustment process. Flaga (2006) posits,
There is no single best way to transition to the 4-year university. However, having an understanding of these dimensions [(a) learning resources, (b) connecting, (c) gaining familiarity, (d) negotiating, and (e) integrating] allows practitioners to convey this information to students in a broad way, emphasizing that they can be utilized to fit each student’s unique transition experience, and to help facilitate that process (11).

Flaga’a findings help to illustrate a non-linear and multi-dimensional process at work for students in transition, and finding ways that assist such students broadly, as opposed to specific strategies geared towards particular student categories. Flaga (2006) loosely describes her research as a “developmental model with identity transformation implications” (18).

Transfer student research began to focus on the success of transfer students. Research studies began to move away from deficiency perspective roots towards empowerment and discovery of struggle to attain a bachelor degree. Urso and Sygielski (2007) discovered that transfer students provide a segment of life experience to upper-level classes at their new institution. Transfer students bring with them to the university a different set of initial postsecondary experiences than that of incoming freshman, as well as personal adult life experiences from the real world, outside the institutional world. Urso and Sygielski (2007) found that transfer student’s mentality or philosophical orientation toward higher education developed differently and challenges their non-transfer student peers to think about course topics in new and innovative ways. Urso and Sygielski helped to illustrate the positive impact that transfer students, can have at the four-year university environment. Urso and Sygielski (2007) conclude their research findings by highlighting the important characteristics transfer students offer their new
four-year university. “These students, with new, higher expectations in tow, head off to four-year schools with the mindset that they have every tool they need to start changing the world” (17).

Transfer Students Transitioning Across Institutional Structures

Still looking at transfer students, Townsend (2008) explains the transfer process from a community college to a four-year university as containing two parts: the transition to the university and the adjustment process for students once at the receiving institution (69). She discusses the emphasis transfer students place on credits and units when transferring to the university, as well as selecting an institution based solely on major. Selecting an institution on major can be attributed to the focus on upper-division major coursework. Additionally, Townsend (2008) found that “whether they transferred from a community college or four-year school, they ‘feel like a freshman again’ in their lack of knowledge about how their new school works” (73). However, transfer students were explicit about not being freshman since they already knew how to be a college student. Yet, adjusting to the new distinct form present at the four-year university rekindled their feelings of being a freshman, as in being “fresh” to this new institutional culture. Townsend (2008) qualitatively explored the aspects involved in the transfer process and transfer student adjustment process finding that:

Transfer students are experienced college goers. However, at their new institution, they may ‘feel like a freshman again,’ because they need to learn how to be students in a new place (77).
Learning to be this new student based in a new place and cultural climate is important to continue the already established success of transfer students who reach the university.

Following the Townsend (2008) study, Owens (2010) looked at successful transfer students at the university and possible barriers to their adjustment process at four-year institutions. In her study, students describe experiences of marginality, difficulty finding guidance, and difficulty in learning how to navigate the university system. Owens (2010) also discusses a need for the research literature on transfer student adjustment process to incorporate more lived experiences, noting a lack of research studies that address issues relevant to actual students’ problems supporting their transition. Owens (2010) therefore attempts to identify supports and barriers to a successful transfer adjustment processes from the students who directly experienced such success.

Understanding student-perceived barriers and supports may suggest program and policy recommendations to higher education institutions leading to greater transfer student persistence and degree completion (94).

Owens explains transfer students hold concerns of fitting in to the university culture given their small amount of time at the institution. This can make it difficult to find a niche in the university community to belong, which is important for their continued success. Transfer students expect services from the university to help them overcome their transition and adjustment process. Owens (2010), like Townsend, concludes her research by calling for changes in the ways that institutions can accommodate transfer students, as opposed to looking at ways that individual transfer students can adapt to become better university students.
One way to enrich their journey and similarly enrich the academy is to draw on their cultural capital, bring their stories and lived experiences into the learning process, and allow them to voice and author their selves” (549).

Looking at students self in transition navigating to a bachelor degree helps to bring the stories of nontraditional students to the academy.

Owens (2010) calls for institutions to incorporate the cultural capital that FGC students bring with them into the academy. Employing strategies of “welcoming, valuing, and honoring FGCT students at four-year public universities may lead to more student self-reliance and persistence to degree” (123). But, for such policies to be effective and well informed, more research on the experiential perspectives of these students is needed. “The better higher education professionals understand transfer students, the better able faculty and administrators are to provide supports and recognize which policies may have detrimental effects” (Owens 2010: 122). Educational researchers need to understand what students needs are at each stage of their adjustment process, especially for those who are historically on the margins to the institution of higher education.

Looking at transfer students and their unique contributions to the university, Laanan, Starobin and Egglesstrom (2010) discuss Transfer Student Capital (TSC) (as defined by Laanan – cited in Pappano 2006) as:

How community college students accumulate knowledge in order to negotiate the transfer process, such as understanding credit transfer agreements between colleges, grade requirements for admission into a desired major, and course prerequisites (177).

Laanan, et. al (2010) notes that the research on transfer students has moved from its foundations in “transfer shock” to more complex questions using multiple paradigms to
explore these student’s transition and adjustment along different dimensions and environments. The author’s discussion states that,

Educational institutions are social organizations and are complex entities. Further students are complex individuals who bring diverse experiences to the college experience. Transfer and articulation policies are different across institutions and states. Taken together, these factors pose challenges for researches to accurately account for the factors that explain how and why transfer students are successful, not successful, and what or how the community college experience could facilitate or impede the success among transfer students at the senior institution.

Laanan et. al (2010) found that transfer students experienced stigma in their academic transfer adjustment. They found this stigma occurring from transfer students becoming aware and recognizing how the campus community (students, administrators, faculty, and staff) negatively stigmatized them for their transfer status, and origin of postsecondary education at the community college. This stigma impedes transfer student adjustment into the university (Laanan et. al 2010). Therefore, universities should focus on the assets of non-traditional forms of symbolic capital, such as Transfer Student Capital, that nontraditional students provide to campuses. Students who come to four-year universities pursuing a bachelor degree have already successfully managed the transition into postsecondary education from high school to community college. “The two-year colleges, in short, are a ‘sorting mechanism’ that works to the benefit of the four-year institutions to which their students transfer” (Bowen, et al. 2009: 143).

Transfer students and their unique forms of capital, may prove to be beneficial to diversifying the future of higher education. Bowen, et al. (2009) explain that transfer students who attended more selective universities in their study graduated at the same
rate as first-time freshman, and furthermore, transfer students at the less-selective universities graduated at higher rates than did first-time freshman (230). In both university types, selective and non-selective, transfer students achieved a greater percentage of degree attainment even in spite of entering the university with weaker pre-collegiate credentials than first-time freshman (Bowen, et al. 2009: 230). Even with weaker pre-collegiate credential and less likelihood of college readiness, transfer student still graduate at higher rates than first-time freshman at less-selective public four-year universities. This is especially notable given community college students are more likely to be from lower-income families, URM, and nontraditional ages (Cohen and Brawer 1987; Rendón 1995; Bowen, et al. 2009).

In their comprehensive examination of transfer students, Bowen, et al. (2009) explains that student retention is an ongoing issue and not just a first-to-second year transition.

Half of all withdrawals happen after the second year of college. This is an important reminder that ‘front-loading’ persistence efforts neglects an important faction of students that can improve graduation rates, even if it takes 6 years to complete (235-236).

As a result, transfer students need more assistance throughout their bachelor degree navigation to continue their persistence beyond just transferring to the university. Their initial adjustment is just the first step in the transfer process, and their own process of beginning to navigate the university setting and context with its distinct culture of academics.
Transfer students and first-generation college (FGC) students offer an interesting intersectional position (FGCT) to view new postsecondary educational pathways. Recent findings from the Advisory Committee on Student Financial Aid report (2010) entitled, *The Rising Price of Inequality: How inadequate grant aid limits college access and persistence*, has highlighted changes in higher education pathways, and the reduction in bachelor degree attainment rates that followed. Figure 2 below illustrates this shift and recent trends in higher education pathways to a bachelor degree, attempting to call attention to policy challenges. Figure 2 below also illustrates a trend in college student trajectory towards a transfer-university model as opposed to the past freshman four-year model.

Figure 2: Changes and Trends in Higher Education Degree Pathways

Figure 2 is exactly replicated from Exhibit Three on page 10 of the Advisory Committee on Student Financial Aid Assistance 2010 Report, “The Rising Price of Inequality: How inadequate grant aid limits college access and persistence.”
By researching college students’ who transfer to a public four-year college, and are also the first in their family to receive a bachelor degree, a window into the nontraditional students of the past is opened. Ruiz and Pryor (2011) found that more than half of the students who had transferred into the four-year school, 54 percent, had not participated in a transfer preparation program prior to arrival. Even more, 64 percent, had never participated in a transfer-focused program or activity since arriving on campus. Although 62 percent reported that they thought that campus administrators care about what happens to transfer students, about as many, 59 percent, thought that most transfer students feel lost once they enroll (6).

Looking through this window of transfer students, many of their characteristics appear similar or the same to those of FGC students. By analyzing this college student demographic through the intersection of these two nontraditional student categories, and their varying identities within, community colleges and four-year universities can better understand the experiences of students who have remained historically on the margins of accessing higher education.

Rendón (1995) identifies the general community college student profile as nontraditional (i.e. “first generation, part-time, employed while attending college, low SES backgrounds, poor to average high school achievement records” (3)), which is important given that transfer students move from the community college to the four-year institution for their bachelor degree. Therefore, when researching transfer students, it makes sense to focus on first-generation students who are more likely to possess intersecting identities within nontraditional student categories. Looking then at First-
Generation College Transfer (FGCT) students as a new student category offers insights towards today’s incoming transfer students.

Looking at FGC students at the community college hoping to transfer to a four-year university, Cohen and Striplin (1999) discussed the ways that both institutions can help to facilitate the transfer process. The transfer process then can be further defined to include the various ways students matriculate into four-year universities from a community college after earning a certain required number of units or credits to transfer (Grubb, 1991). Students in essence transfer to a university in order to obtain a bachelor degree, and the community colleges are the most common entry point and route to success for FGC students on this pathway. Yet, Cohen and Striplin (1999) highlight that the transfer process, and correlated adjustment once at the four-year university, is compounded by the facets of being a FGC student and the lower likelihood of success for these students. Cohen and Striplin (1999) found that FGC students “run a high risk of not transferring to a four-year institution” (4). They call for institutions to respond to the needs of FGC students stating, “In order for this group of students to reap the benefits of higher education, institutions need to keep these students on the route towards the baccalaureate” (Cohen and Striplin 1999: 4). The significance that the bachelor degree holds for today’s society, allows FGCT students to move beyond a location they once knew, and into the coexistence of living in the tensions of multiple cultural worlds.

2 Such facets can include poor academic preparation and low socioeconomic status. For a detailed description see: London 1992 and Terenzini et al. 1993.)
To further detail this phenomenon of FGCT students and their transition and dual world experiences while navigating postsecondary education, McCarron and Inkelas (2006) advise practitioners at both two and four-year institutions to:

Consider developing stronger partnerships to support the educational pursuits of these first-generation transfers via articulation agreements, scholarships, and guidance with transfer credits. Additionally, practitioners may reflect on providing more, ‘all-inclusive’ advising, bridge programs, part-time student support programs, more thorough orientation sessions, assistance with deciphering and obtaining financial aid, guidance for family and life issues, and clearer guidelines for success (Gardner 1996; Rendón 1995) (546).

Through such collaboration efforts as those described above, postsecondary institutions can not only bridge the experiences of transfer students at their two institutions, but educational researchers can also bridge the literature and traditions of research on transfer students and FGC students to construct new hybrid categories with more multidimensional understanding. Through future research efforts looking specifically at FGCT students navigation to a bachelor degree, public four-year universities can work to better serve both FGC students and transfer students, as well as the proxy category of URM that resides within such institutional categories.

First-generation students may face several academic and non-academic challenges on the way to achieving. However, it is to these students’ credit that they dream of attaining an education and pioneering beyond the bounds known to their families (McCarron and Inkelas 2006: 547).

In this pioneer action, and crossing of cultural boundaries and borders, FGCT students traverse an open prairie of unknown culture, language, and bureaucracies; all the while balancing tensions of their home and school to survive and persist to a bachelor degree. Consequently, the narratives and lived experiences of FGCT students offer a rich arena of
qualitative data to explore the ways that tensions in self are both navigated and constructed as a reflection of different types of culture embedded in the structures of society, yet reproduced by the social agents navigating these structures.
French social theorist Pierre Bourdieu theorizes that individuals possess agency to make their own choices in navigating society, but at the same time, their choices or decisions are dictated and formed by institutional structures that restrict the scope of that choice. Put another way, we are free as individuals to make decisions, but we can only make those decisions within the context and situations that are familiar or known to a person. Bourdieu believes individuals occupy a certain social location within multidimensional spaces, or what he calls fields (Bourdieu 1993). These various fields make up the basis for a society. Therefore, a person’s structurally-situated social location is not defined solely by social class membership, as Marx argues, but rather by the different forms of capital an agent can amass, utilize, exchange, and present while in interaction with others.

Bourdieu (1986) clarifies that forms of capital include a value from social networks that then becomes embedded in institutional structures. Furthermore, the preferred forms of capital represent a species of symbolic forms of capital functioning to reproduce inequality in society and maintain a hierarchical social order. Therefore, using Bourdieu’s theoretical framework of preferred species of capital, one can speculate in U.S. society a division of preferred elite/traditional capital over vulgar/non-traditional capital within its main institutions. Bourdieu furthered the understanding of capital in contemporary society, and social theory, by moving the concept beyond past notions of only material resources. Bourdieu (1986) expands capital beyond the economic realm of
money, to include other symbolic forms, such as social capital and cultural capital, as significant to a society and its reproduction (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977) of social structure.

Although abstract, Bourdieu’s conceptualization of the forms of capital provides a framework for analyzing the intimate ingrained knowledge needed to be a successful college student in U.S. society. Bourdieu (1986) describes capital in three forms as economic, cultural and social.

*Economic capital*, which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the forms of property rights; as *cultural capital*, which is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the forms of educational qualifications; and as *social capital*, made up of social obligations (‘connections’), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the forms of a title of nobility. (47)

Bourdieu therefore offers an understanding of the varying forms of capital: cultural, economic, and social, and their symbolic nature as traditional/elite or non-traditional/vulgar capital in a society.

Bourdieu expands on social and cultural capital showing the ways in which they serve as replacing economic capital to access non-material resources that benefit individuals within a society. Cultural capital itself has three forms: as an *embodied state* (i.e. dispositions of the mind and body), the *objectified state* (i.e. pictures, books, machines, etc.), and the *institutionalized state* (i.e. objectification of a presumed guarantee) (Bourdieu 1986: 47). Cultural capital may take on various forms depending upon the agent and institution in which the cultural capital is used. “Social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources” linked to a network created from
membership in a group, providing “each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a ‘credential’ which entitles them to credit” (Bourdieu 1986: 51) received through their membership in the group and network. Both social and cultural capital, and the accumulation of such capital, is a result of an agent’s social location within the greater stratification of society, and their access to others and networks possessing varying forms of capital. Hence, cultural and social capital, as in the case of economic capital, are accumulated and maintained through groups of agents who control access to resources and power in a society. By creating non-material forms of capital through the symbolic forms of social and cultural capital convertible to economic capital, groups and agents in power maintain power reproducing the established social order, stratification, and inequality.

Bourdieu (1993) elaborates on his concept of reproducing the established social order of a society by the transferring of social and cultural capital through an agent’s embodied practices, in his work *The Cultural Field of Production*. Bourdieu explains society as a range of various fields where social agents in relation and interaction with institutions struggle for control of the symbolic forms of capital. Bourdieu (1993) uses the term field to describe the social arena where agents exercise their use of symbolic forms of capital, reproducing the social order and hierarchy of a society. Each field resides in the multidimensional spaces of society and maintains a specific set or code of complex social relations agents engage in daily. Through daily practices embodied over time by agents, individuals develop a certain understanding of their own agency in society by interacting with inequality in social structure revealing their own limitations.
within particular fields. Bourdieu (1993) describes fields as autonomous independent spaces of social play. Field is therefore used as a conceptual tool for analyzing the systems of social positing internally embodied within agents from the existing power relations within a society’s structure. Fields are the location cite where social agent’s struggle over symbolic forms (i.e. cultural, social, economic) of preferred species of (i.e. elite/traditional or vulgar/non-traditional) capital.

Agents in a society therefore must constantly maneuver and interact with other agents in different fields, to pursue resources by using different forms of capital. Since fields are hierarchically structured, Bourdieu explains that the field of power exists horizontally as an alpha field intersecting all other fields of a society, including the field of higher education. Since power is the field of struggle over the exchange rate on the species of symbolic capital, the field of power traverses horizontally through other fields of a society. Different forms of symbolic capital perform in different fields, which in turn are defined by the power exerted through symbolic capital. These forms of capital, and more specifically their symbolic nature, are developed in individuals through what Bourdieu explains as an agent’s habitus, or put simply, a habit of the mind.

Bourdieu (1984) uses the term habitus to describe internalized structures governing an agent’s social relations. A habits is formed from the everyday practices of an agent navigating unequal social stratification in a society, and the resulting internalization of practices to navigate similar experiences in the future. Habitus then is defined as a subjective system of expectations and predispositions acquired through
experiences in social relation (Bourdieu 1984), or rather, the habit of ways of being that individuals develop and internalize over time.

The social location of an agent within a particular field is the result of interaction from the social stratification of society, capital possess by the agent, and the agent’s location in relation to the social ordering, stratification, or organization of a society and its symbolic forms of capital. This interaction helps to place significance on different species of symbolic capital maintained by a society. Consequently, a habitus is constructed in an agent from the interplay of their agency and an institutional structure across time, shaped by past events and experiences that then in turn shape current practices and behaviors. Hence, a habitus is created and reproduced “without any conscious concentration” (Bourdieu 1984: 170) exerted by the agent. Habitus is internal, unconscious, and yet dictates the practices and behaviors of agents within a particular field.

Habitus then can be viewed as an individual’s interpretive “common schemes of thought, perception, appreciation and action”; (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977: 196) largely unconscious, informing how the world of social relations works and offering a set of guidelines or guiding-choices. Habitus is more of a loose guiding set of principles or embodied form of knowledge…a geist of symbolic capital if you will, allowing individuals to strategize, adapt to new situations and develop new practices or ways of being. Habitus is both a product of social structure and itself a structure that generates social practices, hence reproducing institutional structures of a society. Habitus therefore,
is both micro (operating at the individual level) and macro (reproducing social structures) in both structure and process. As Bourdieu (1984) explains habitus, it is,

Not only a structuring structure, which organizes practices and the perception of practices, but also a structured structure: the principle of division into logical classes which organizes the perception of the social world is itself the product of internalization of the division into social classes (166).

As a result of this structure being internalized into an agent’s consciousness, habitus functions below consciousness and language more in the realm of what “some would mistakenly call values” (Bourdieu 1984: 466) or style/taste.

Coleman (1988; 1990) later linked Bourdieu’s theory of symbolic forms of capital into the context of educational attainment and student success. Both Bourdieu and Coleman argue that varying forms of capital are significant factors pushing individuals in a society towards educational attainment in the field of higher education. Consequently, FGC, transfer students, and their intersectional group of FGCT students experience a barrier to higher education due to the preferred species of symbolic capital of U.S. society. Placed into the context of postsecondary student trajectories to a bachelor degree within the field of higher education, symbolic capital allows U.S. society to treat

social gifts as natural gifts, pupils from middle class families come to be seen (by themselves, teachers, and other pupils) as more naturally intelligent; for this group of young people, privilege is translated directly into merit (Brooks 2008: 6).

Or rather, the field of higher education reproduces class domination by allowing the status quo or dominant culture to impose their preferred cultural values, standards, and styles/tastes on the whole society as normative, constructing cultural preferences as the standard and legitimate gauge for comparison.
Agency of the individual however is intuitive, strategic, and inventive; therefore, institutional structures play out as significant variables influencing the actions, or choice-making, of individuals in our contemporary society. As agents, we have individual choice, but we are limited by what choices are accessible, based on our own positionality within the larger class stratification of U.S. society. Thus, each class actively constructs their own habitus for navigating various fields through mutually shared assumptions and interpretations shared by group members and reinforced through group interactions.

Schools and institutions of learning are the chief structural mechanism for class-based reproduction and social stratification of society, through their assertion and “claim to a monopoly of legitimate inculcation of legitimate culture” (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977: 56). Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) explain that only

An adequate theory of the habitus, as the site of the internalization of externality and the externalization of internality, can fully bring to light the social conditions of performance of the function of legitimating the social order, doubtless the best concealed of all the functions of the School (205).

Taken in the framework of postsecondary education student trajectories towards bachelor degrees, one can begin to see a replication of systemic inequality through mechanism that “push” FGC students toward community college developing a different habitus for the field of higher education.
FGC STUDENTS AND CAPITAL DISTINCTIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

FGC students face intimate internal and external challenges of battling classism, sexism, racism, and overall alienation, in their educational trajectory towards bachelor degree attainment across postsecondary institutions in the U.S. Navigation of educational systems, and their varying trajectories, pathways, and pipelines, is something foreign to FGC students who may have not received the same U.S. K-12 pre-collegiate training and opportunities that most non-FGC students embody as a form of taken-for-granted assumption of postsecondary education knowledge. Additionally, FGC student’s high school curriculum may not have included “high academic intensity” or “high quality” (Adelman 1999) courses by offering Advanced Placement (AP) courses. Such AP coursework has been shown to be the most significant pre-collegiate indicator of academic preparation regardless of socioeconomic status or race (Adelman 1999). Such AP coursework however may not be available to FGC students, who are more frequently guided into vocational-based pipelines (Goldrick-Rab 2006) outside of AP courses. FGC students at community colleges are also often placed in vocational, technical, and/or remedial programs, resulting in an increased unit load, and impeding their progress towards a bachelor degree (Cohen and Striplin 1999).

A distinction (Bourdieu 1984) exists from the significance that a bachelor degree maintains in U.S. society, for both access to resources through needed certification in stratified labor markets, and becoming a distinct person in the perception of others. Therefore, the attainment of a bachelor degree provides access to symbolic forms of
social and cultural capital in the U.S. that may otherwise remain nonexistent to persons without a degree. Educational systems, and postsecondary education with the institutions of the college and university more specifically, act as stratification structures in our contemporary society that reinforce and replicate social, racial, economic, gender, and ability divisions of the greater U.S. society (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Willis 1977; Coleman 1988; Coleman 1990; Bourdieu 1988; Mohanty 2003; Goldrick-Rab 2006; Owens 2010) through the distinction held in the certification of a bachelor degree, both individual and societal.

Depending upon a given social situation and environment, some forms of capital may prove to be more advantageous than others (Bourdieu 1986), often dictated by the classification and certification within the greater structure of a society that influences its institutions. Put another way, the distinction (Bourdieu 1984) in U.S. society made towards beneficial institutional and educational forms of capital (Bourdieu 1986) is often one of historically symbolic elite capital over more commonly used symbolic vulgar capital. Consequently, preferred species of social and cultural capital function in U.S. society as the normative measures in which to construct traditional and non-traditional categories as a means of stratification and hierarchy.

Bourdieu (1988) attempted to analyze the academic world and all its distinction to understand the intimate workings of symbolic capital. In *Homo Academicus*, Bourdieu (1988) discusses these intimate workings through an agent’s habitus, or engrained assumptions and ways of knowing their social world. Bourdieu (1988) identifies Homo Academicus as the “supreme classifier among classifiers, in the net of his [her] own
classifications” (xi). The habitus of Homo Academicus classifies species of capital in the field of higher education into distinctions based in traditional/elite and vulgar/non-traditional capital. FGC students in the environment of the university, and within the context of traditional and non-traditional capital classifications, may therefore be at a disadvantage when it comes to the capital preferences in the field of higher education.

Berger, Paulsen and Milem (2000) argued in their research on college student adjustment and social class that habits as a conceptual approach to qualitative research helps to create an understanding of the interaction of social class and a student’s college experiences. Therefore, understanding the role of habitus for student’s college navigation is paramount to helping historically nontraditional students adapt, adjust, and augment higher education structures. Past research on college student experiences (Granfield 1991; Aries and Seider 2005; Lehmann 2007) discovered that nontraditional university students, whether first-generation, working-class, or low-income status, frequently incur an “acute sense of discontinuity between their social origins and their anticipated educational destinations.” (Lehmann 2007: 96). This acute sense of discontinuity can be viewed as dissonance in understanding symbolic capital and their preferred species within a field (Bourdieu 1993). The social location of FGC students, outside of the preferred forms of capital (i.e. traditional/elite) for the university and college environments, creates a feeling of being an imposter (Davis 2012), or a tension of confidence and doubt, reflecting traditionally held class-based distinctions embedded in U.S. culture, but being played out in the field of higher education.
Baxter and Britton (2001) found that FGC student experiences create a discontinuity between “old and newly developing habitus, which are ranked hierarchically and carry connotations of inferiority and superiority” (99). The connotations of inferiority and superiority can be seen as capital distinctions of non-traditional/vulgar and traditional/elite species of symbolic capital residing within a habitus of an agent. Therefore, the imposter feelings constructing confidence and doubt in FGC students are structural system byproducts reproduced in social agent’s habitus exposed from navigating the field of higher education as a nontraditional student. If such structural constraints are being reproduced in agents through their navigation of the field of higher education, then educational researchers might arrive at the conclusion that “potentially inequitable, tracks exist within the higher education system, beyond the two-year/four-year track division” (Goldrick-Rab 2006: 69). Therefore, researching the pathways of FGCT students and their postsecondary education navigation in the field of higher education in relation to their own sense of self can help to better understand the developing habitus and capital distinctions that reside within this field and its institutions of colleges and universities.
FGC STUDENTS: TRENDS, CHARACTERISTICS AND EXPERIENCES

Until recently, the FGC student category has been ill defined or coalesced into other categories such as low-income and/or transfer students. Thus, the past attention, and research, given to FGC students as a student demographic category has remained somewhat fragmented. Consequently, FGC students are still considered an oddly emergent student category. It is important to note that FGC student status and low-income student status, although overlap exists, are mutually exclusive statuses within college student categories; and thus, should be treated as such conceptually by educational researchers and members of a campus community.

Engle and Tinto (2008) found that FGC students who are also low-income students were nearly four times as likely (26% versus 7%) as their non-FGC, non-low-income counterparts to drop out after one year of study. This dual disadvantaged statuses should be understood then as having the characteristic difficulties of both low-income and FGC student and further supports the notion of educational researchers to begin looking at the layering effects of varies status intersections through the ability to disaggregate data more precisely. By beginning to disaggregate the data of our modern history, we can see more broad and accurately the widening-horizontal picture of the current situation of student’s college experience. This expansion of understanding therefore calls for an expansion of the ways in which we view student categories from an institutional standpoint, with the incorporation of First-Generation-Transfer (FGCT) student category.
In the last decade, the UCLA Higher Education Research Initiative (HERI) has issued a report on those who are *First in their Family* to go to college. The report explores the past 35 years of survey data collected through the Cooperative Institutional Research Program’s (CIRP) Freshman Survey from 1971 to 2005, comparing responses from FGC students and their non-FGC peers (Sáenz 2007). A notable finding of the report is the change in student values over time. FGC students are more likely to report “being well off financially” as a very important or essential personal goals (Sáenz 2007). During this same time, FGC students’ desire to develop “a meaningful philosophy of life” has declined in importance (Sáenz 2007). These two changes in responses by FGC students help to further illuminate larger social mobility reasons, such as desiring access to different forms of capital, for FGC student’s reasons for attending college.

Furthermore, Franke, Hurtado, Pryor, and Tran (2011) found in their HERI report, *Completing college: Assessing graduation rates at four-year institutions*, that bachelor degree attainment for FGC students continues to lag behind non-FGC students even as time to degree completion increases. Linda DeAngelo, assistant director for research at CIRP and lead author of the HERI report notes, “The gap between first-generation students and students whose parents attended college does not shrink after five or six years,” (HERI Completing College Research Press Release 2011). Even after six years, the degree attainment gap for FGC students as compared to non-FGC students was approximately 14%. Therefore, the status of FGC students can be seen as something that affects students towards degree attainment across time. Figure 3 below helps to illustrate this
phenomenon by showing the achievement gap for FGC and college-experienced students continues even to a 6-year degree timeline.

Figure 3: Bachelor Degree Attainment Rate for FGC and NON-FGC Students

![Figure 4](image)

Figure 3 is exactly replicated from Figure 4 on page 9 of the 2011 UCLA HERI Report entitled, “Completing College: assessing graduation rates at four-year institutions.”

FGC students are more likely to begin their postsecondary bachelor degree trajectory at a community college. Consequently, the imposter phenomenon (Davis 2012), with the creation of confidence and doubt, may be deferred until reaching the four-year, or “real,” university, as opposed to the “junior” college, or community college.

Furthermore, most FGC students are not aware of an intense lack of privilege that is most often associated with low-income students (Davis 2010: 62). FGC students with their intersections of different disadvantaged identities often hold varying forms of privileged status, while at the same time holding underrepresented status. Put different, they occupy
a liminal space from existing in a habitus outside the field of higher education. An example of this is the white privilege (McIntosh 1990) held by a working-class, foreign-born/now first-generation, older male student, who is the first in his family to receive a bachelor degree. Although within his racial identity, this individual is privileged, the same cannot be said for their income, national status, and age-based identities. FGC students therefore often face unique challenges in their pathway to a degree due to these conflicting views of being both privileged and disadvantaged, both similar and different, including: conflicting obligations, false expectations, and lack of preparation or support (Hsiao 1992). Going to college marks a significant separation from FGC students past lives (Hsiao 1992) as they cross a boundary of distinction in the field of higher education.

**College Readiness, Enrollment, and Working Patterns**

In relation to college readiness (Conley 2005), FGC students lack knowledge of time-management practices, college financing, and most importantly for understanding the “hidden curriculum” (Snyder 1970) embedded within the field of higher education—the general bureaucratic operations of higher education (Thayer 2000). In terms of college enrollment, FGC students are more likely to: attend part-time, live off-campus or with family/relatives, not be in a bachelor’s degree program, and even delay entering postsecondary education immediately after high school graduation (Nuñez and Cuccaro-Alamin 1998). They are also more likely to work full-time while enrolled (Nuñez and Cuccaro-Alamin 1998) in college. All of these characteristics of FGC students can have a negative impact towards bachelor degree attainment, including the fact that FGC students
tend to have lower levels of social integration (38% vs. 19%) (Nuñez and Cuccaro-Alamin 1998) when compared to their non-FGC counterparts. Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, and Nora (1996) found that when compared with non-FGC peers, FGC students had lower critical thinking abilities, less support from their family in attending college, and spent less time socializing with their peers and talking with their teachers in high school.

For FGC students beginning at 2-year schools and attending full-time at a 4-year school (FGCT), they persisted and graduated at the same rates as their non-FGC counterparts who began as incoming freshman at the 4-year school (Nuñez and Cuccaro-Alamin 1998). This finding helps to illustrate the importance in research towards looking specifically at the transitional period of FGC students from a 2-year institution to a 4-year institution.

**College Integration & Retention**

Past research has shown that early social and academic integration (Tinto 1975; Tinto 1993) is a key indicator of future success for college students towards degree outcomes. However, lower levels of social integration for FGC students was found to exist at both public 2-year institutions (48 percent vs. 29 percent) and at public 4-year (22 percent vs. 12 percent) institutions (Nuñez and Cuccaro-Alamin 1998). As a result of these lower levels of academic and social integration, advising throughout the academic career of FGC students is paramount to their success and persistence in college (Ishitani 2003).
FGC students struggle both academically and socially in their transition and adjustment during college. Terenzini et. al (1996) identified many characteristics that are specific to FGC students. These characteristics span across both cognitive and non-cognitive measures. For example, FGC students speak less frequently in class and have more frequent and intense negative feelings associated with academic success (Terenzini et. al 1996). Such experiences in the field of higher education can lead at times to feelings of being an imposter (Davis 2010: 50) or not belonging (Orbe 2004; Lehmann 2007) in a university climate and culture. Holley and Gardner (2012) found FGC student status was perceived as an “invisible, often unrecognized external component of a student's life” (119). Holley and Gardner (2012) also found that participants in their study perceived being a FGC student as an asset, even amongst their own internal discontinuity and struggles with self in transition. Students commented on their willingness to “work hard” or contrasted their expectations with non-FGC peers who enjoyed perceived advantages.

The strategies that are effective for increasing the persistence of FGC and low-income students were also found to be successful for increasing persistence in the general campus population (Thayer 2000). However, the reverse was not true. What is effective for FGC students, is effective for all students in the field of higher education, in part due to the intersectional composition of the FGC student category. Effective retention strategies in higher education need to be multifaceted, and assist students in developing a sense of security in their self, accompanied by a sense of academic competence (Thayer 2000).
Rendón (1995) discovered that offering opportunities, such as precollegiate programs, and traditional social integration (Tinto 1975; Astin 1984) is not enough for nontraditional students since they lack the distinct forms of cultural and social capital needed to make full use of their learning resources at the university. As such, a sense of validation in and out of the classroom is needed for FGC students to successfully transition into college life. This validation process results in transformational changes within the student and their sense of self. Rendón (1995) discusses this in relation to the transfer barriers, both institutional and cultural, present when nontraditional student transfer to a four-year university. Hence, nontraditional transfer students experience a form of adjustment to institutional changes, but also a culture shock from the discontinuity in their own life trajectory.

FGC students are also more likely to have lower retention rates than their non-FGC peers (Horn and Carroll 1997; Nuñez and Cuccaro-Alamin 1998), and therefore more likely to leave college over time. Ishitani (2003) found that after controlling for factors such as race, gender, high school grade point average (GPA), and family income, the risk of attrition in the first year among first-generation students was 71% higher than that of students with two college-educated parents (444).

Looking at retention as well, Rendón (1995) identified two critical phases that affect the retention of first-semester students: making the transition to college and making connections in college. Making the transition to college is especially difficult for FGC students since they often deal with changing identities, being perceived as different,
having to leave old friends behind, all on top of breaking family codes and ultimately residing between two worlds, home and school.

Nontraditional students who are the first in their family to attend college find the transition to college to be a disjuncture in their life trajectory. Traditional students consider college-going a normal part of their life experience (Rendón 1995: 3).

Having a disjuncture in life’s trajectory creates an adjustment process for FGCT students navigating various tensions between their dual worlds, present, past, and now future sense of self.

*Parental Encouragement As Support*

Although parental encouragement remains a significant contributor to FGC students (Sáenz 2007), beyond this encouraging ethos to attend college, family members of FGC students may not possess the knowledge of college systems, including financing, applications, and matriculation (Ishitani 2003). This information is beneficial when determining best fit of an institution for a student. Sáenz (2007) research findings around parental encouragement for FGC students are consistent with Billson and Terry (1982) and Choy (2001). Moreover, York-Anderson and Bowman (1991) found FGC students received less support from their parents in making the decision to attend college and enter postsecondary education. Terenzini, et. al (1996) found that FGC students received less support from their family to attend college compared with non-FGC peers. Further research on FGC students conducted by Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, and Terenzini (2004) emphasized the significance of family cultural capital to informing students about college enrollment, degree options, and demands of academic curriculum. This study was
significant due to the ways in which cultural capital began to enter the research of FGC students and move the focus beyond a deficit approach of difference to an empowerment approach that such difference offers in understanding how to navigate complex systems rooted in power.

Home & School Cultures

Looking at FGC students’ home cultures, Thayer (2000) found a large variance in experiences depending upon intersections of income and race. FGC students “come from diverse social class backgrounds, have different amounts and types of cultural and financial capital, and access and manipulate capital and financial resource differently in their persistence decisions” (Lohfink and Paulsen 2005:418). Although FGC students remain an eclectic student category across various intersectional statuses (i.e. Gender, Race, Income, Ability, Etc.), they all maintain a unique similarity in the foreignness of the field of higher education. Even across the various diverse backgrounds of FGC students, there remains a common element of having to “live on the margins of two cultures” (London 1992: 7). As a structural byproduct of having to straddle these two cultures of school and home, FGC students have noted a cultural conflict between home and college community (Thayer 2000). Furthermore, not being familiar with the field of higher education, FGC students spend additional time and energy determining the appropriate student roles needed to meet professor’s expectations effectively (Collier 2008), including those expectations within the hidden curriculum (Snyder 1970).
Chaffee (1992) explains that higher education remains an alien culture for FGC students. “For higher education, the critical question is how the development of first-generation college students can be fostered” (81). The life of the mind, or a philosophical-orientation to higher education, is not something FGC students may be accustomed to. Chaffee (1992) discovered the ways that language and communication barriers amongst FGC students, both foreign-born and national-born, created difficulties in career opportunities and potentially destructive stereotyping. Additionally, FGC students face breaking away (London 1989) from their families leading to biographical and social dislocation. For FGC students, often higher education comes at a cost of a “familiar past, including a past self…” (London 1989: 168). Breaking away thus creates not only challenges with completing one’s education and degree, but also in redefining relationships and self-identity (London 1992). London (1992) discusses this saying, These new students to higher education; are concentrated in community colleges. Any understanding of their experiences and any programmatic attempts to ease their transitions into higher education require that their stories, individually and collectively, be placed in the context of the cultural challenges they encounter (5). London (1992) found that all participants in his study had to “renegotiate relations with family members, friends, and, in a fundamental sense, with themselves” (6). Furthermore, Rendón (1992) described her own experiences as a FGC student as not being able to participate in the traditional college experience due to the concurrent conflict from living “simultaneously in two vastly different worlds while being fully accepted in neither” (83).
FGC students lack of traditional cultural capital places them outside the postsecondary “education pipeline” (Horn and Carroll 1997) to university access. Local recruitment from community colleges in high school may be FGC students only exposure to learning about college as an option. McSwain and Davis (2007) highlight that starting at a community college, being a FGC student, and long hours of employment are all factors that negatively correlated to college success. All of these variables are more likely to be present for both FGC students and transfer students. They therefore must traverse larger structural and cultural factors to overcome transfer statistics, in addition to cognitive barriers and various social identity threats that accompany their pursuit of a bachelor degree as the first in their families to do so.

For FGC students at the community college, Inman and Mayes (1999) found that a culture shock exists when they are first introduced into postsecondary education. Their data suggests community college is the primary, or one could argue only, postsecondary opportunity for many students. Thus, being foreign to the field of higher education, FGCT students first experience a culture shock first by entering into the community college and engaging in postsecondary education, and again when transferring into the four-year university. Inman and Mayes (1999) explain that previous educational research studies have shown that FGC students may not fit models for ideal student populations and traditional modeling. However, FGC students may be equally able to succeed, and the community college may be the ideal place for them to do so.

Looking at FGCT students helps to link two folds of literature on nontraditional students focusing on the varying identities they each hold and their intersectional
impacts. Inman and Mayes (1999) conclude their research noting their findings were consistent with surveys at four-year universities (Terenzini et al. 1996) and “other research from small samples, case studies, and focus groups” (16). Therefore, there is a valid and reliable educational research need in today’s climate of postsecondary education to begin looking at transfer students who are also FGC students and how they navigate dual foreign systems and the varying tensions presented to them in this dual adjustment process.
THE SELF & ITS (RE)FORMATION

The process of constructing an individual’s sense of self is actively managed in a perpetual state of flux. The self is both a subject, as in who I am as a person, and an object, as in how others see Me as a person. Charles Horton Cooley ([1902] 2001) was one of the first sociologists to discuss the notion of the self through his term the “looking-glass self” (293). Cooley ([1902] 2001) noted that the self had “three principal elements: the imagination of our appearance to the other person; the imagination of his judgment of that appearance, and some sort of self-feeling, such as pride or mortification” (293). These various facets of the self illustrate the interaction of agency and social structures within individuals in contemporary society towards framing their perceptions of who they are as a person, both subjectively and objectively.

Following Cooley, George Herbert Mead ([1934] 2001) discussed the self in depth explaining how it is both an object and subject simultaneously. Individuals experience the self both internally through the subjective standpoint of our social lens to view reality and the world around us, and externally through an objective standpoint from the reflection and information feed cast back to an individual. This reflection is in the form of interaction and social relations “of the same social group, or from the generalized standpoint of the social group as a whole to which he [or she] belongs” (Mead [1934] 2001: 289). The standpoint that one takes, therefore is associated with a person’s various status held in the social order and stratification of society. When agents interact with other agents and with varying institutions of society, these social structures and agents
influence the formation of self that arises from one’s social lens and standpoint. The self therefore is “essentially a social structure, and it arises in social experience” (Mead [1934] 2001: 290), by being reflected back to individuals their awareness of its formation, and the ways they are viewed socially as a person. This exchange or interaction of the objective and subjective facets of the self may result in a multitude of selves created for a slew of possible interactions, illustrating that the self is also situational. In the event of a structural transition, such as the entrance into a new institution within the field of higher education, the presentation of different selves is limited to those that have been lived or experienced by the agent in their navigation of institutional structures and interactions with other agents thus far.

The self therefore maintains a dualistic composition of both object and subject, validated through social relations and interaction with others. Through interaction, individuals not only become aware of who they are, or a sense of self-presented, but they also become aware of who others are, or their self-presentation performed in interaction. Erving Goffman (1959) explains that the presentation of self is akin to that of a “theatrical performance” (226). Goffman (1959) notes how this performance is a kind of symbolic interaction of the expression “given” and the expression “given off” (227). The expression given is that of the agent, and the expression given off is the reflection of society’s social order and classification residing within the structure, but objectified through agents in interaction.

Moving further into more recent social theory of the self, Ralph Turner ([1974] 2001) has discussed the ways in which the self is transformed in social relations and
through institutional structures noting an *institutional* self and an *impulsive* self. “The relationship between self and social order is put in more comprehensive terms when we distinguish between self as anchored in *institutions* and self as anchored in *impulse*” (244). Turner depicts the ways in which individuals as social agents may present a different self within an institutionalized structure, from limitations on available avenues in the environment of presenting one’s real self through an impulsive self. Turner questions what constitutes one’s real self given the flux in an agent’s sense of self based on their surrounding environments. This is especially true for students who are expressing a state of transition within an institutionalized field of higher education.

Turner ([1974] 2001) explains, “young people find self-realization in patterns that are view apart from their institutional settings” (250). Resistance to institutional settings, and the symbolic capital for success stressed in such settings, can be seen as a resistance of an institutional self and preservation of impulsive self, resulting from the self (re)formation that occurs within a time of transition. Turner ([1974] 2001) discusses this phenomenon stating:

> When the institutional framework is characterized by disorder and undependability, where it fails as an avenue to expanded opportunity for gratification, the true self cannot be found in institutional participation….The institutional order may still be relatively efficient and predictable, but the increasing time span between action and consequence and the increasing dependence on extrinsic rewards may contribute to a sense of unreality in institutional activities (255).

In the sense of unreality resulting from institutional activities and the limitation of constructing one’s real self, a liminal space of limbo occurs in which self (re)formation may occur for agents.
In the transition from the community college to the university, the tumultuous experience already traversed by FGC students comes once again to the fore of their sense of self, reconstructing the remnants of confidence and doubt, and being both similar and different in the new institutional setting. This period of transition can create a space of limbo where agents must actively work to restore and recreate their sense of self. Gay Becker (1997) has discussed this limbo state. “Following a disruption, people experience a period of limbo before they can begin to restore a sense of order to their lives” (119). In this space of transition, agents enter into environments and interaction as “one kind of person” and emerge “altered in some essential way” (Becker 1997: 119). In limbo, individuals navigate tensions within their sense of self across polarities with the result of a self (re)formation occurring.

Communication scholar Mark Orbe (2004; 2008) has researched dialectical identity formation of FGC students discussing “the great heterogeneity associated with the group” (2004: 131). His research approach to looking at dialectical tensions present within FGC student’s identity mirrors the self as holding multi-facets of both subject and object polarities. Orbe (2008) approaches the identity process of FGC students from an alternative paradigm of looking at dialectical tensions noting, “The majority of published research on FGC students has used quantitative methodologies to produce generalizations about this heterogeneous group” (92). Orbe’s approach to research on FGC student’s identity using a dialectical identity model touches on the intersectional tensions of FGC student’s various identities, thus supporting and validating the existence of these identities, while simultaneously maintaining the groups desire to remain heterogeneous.
Orbe (2008) explains his process of research on FGC students noting the emphasis on exploring one’s self.

At the core of the collegiate experience is an enhanced knowledge of self; in the process, one’s identity undergoes significant change. Because of this, an inherent tension for FGC students at home is negotiating the changes that come with a college education in a context where others do not share that experience. In this regard, there is a constant negotiation of established and emerging identities (87-88).

In this constant negotiation, with their feet in dual worlds and social realities of opposing habitus, FGCT students learn to pick and choose from a plethora of identity-options that function to (re)construct their sense of self in transition.

Orbe (2008) identifies six primary dialectic tensions of FGC student identity, and 12 secondary tensions, occurring at the home and school environments for FGC students. Figure 4 below illustrates these tensions as identified by Orbe (2008).

Figure 4: First-Generation College Student Dialectical Tensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 6.1. First-Generation College Student Dialectical Tensions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Primary Dialectical Tensions</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual ↔ Social Identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similar ↔ Different</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stability ↔ Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certainty ↔ Uncertainty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advantage ↔ Disadvantage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness ↔ Closedness</td>
</tr>
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Figure 4 is exactly replicated from Table 6.1 on page 85 of “Theorizing Multidimensional Identity Negotiation: Reflections on the Lived Experiences of First-Generation College Students.”
Through descriptions of FGC tensions, Orbe (2008) “illustrate how FGC student status, from the perspective of FGC students themselves, interacts with other aspects of identity” (84). Therefore, in using the tension-based model approach of Orbe (2004; 2008) for FGCT student’s sense of self in (re)formation, this research looks at the shifting tensions that surround the various identities residing in FGCT student’s sense of self.

By using a tension-based model to study the sense of self (re)formation of FGCT students, a tension is created in not only the processes analyzed, but also the awareness of students who are first-generation, and yet remain unaware of such a status or its meaning within the field of higher education and institutional student categories. Orbe (2004) discusses this occurrence within his research describing,

> Many of the participants of this study were conscious of the unique challenges that came with being the first in the family to attend college, yet were unaware (until learning of the study) of the existing language and research surrounding this phenomenon” (145).

In this constant self-negotiation process, with their feet in dual worlds and divergent social realities, FGCT students can pick and choose from a plethora of identity-options that work to construct their image of a new self through the attainment of their bachelor degree. This self (re)formation processes when discussed with groups of FGCT students can function as an emancipatory knowledge providing subsequent capital and power to overcome varying forms of oppression wedded to identity intersections.

For students who identify strongly with being an FGC student, sharing their experiences with others represents an important aspect of self-expression. The struggle is negotiating a need to make one’s field of experience visible with an opposing desire to just assimilate (Orbe 2008: 91-92).
FGC students continue to succeed and persist in higher education institutions, and may soon become the new majority at four-year universities (Jenkins 2012). The once nontraditional students of the past are soon to become the new traditional students in higher education. As a result, these past nontraditional students have begun to question the reproduction of exploitation and alienation embedded through knowledge and the sciences (Harding 1987), reflected as forms of symbolic capital in the field of higher education. With this shift in higher education demographics and attendance³, as well as innovative multi-dimensional approaches by educational researcher challenging our past notions of student categories (Askeland and Payne 2006; Abes 2009; Stephens, Townsend, Markus, and Phillips 2012; Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson, and Covarrubias 2012; Bastedo and Flaster 2014), the institutional categories of FGC students and transfer students deserve further investigation into the ways these historically nontraditional students have approached higher education in relation to their own sense of self (Cooley [1902] 2001; Mead [1934] 2001; Goffman 1959; Turner [1976] 2001; Orbe 2004; 2008).

³ For a detailed description of these shifts, see Shapiro, Dundar, Ziskin, Chiang, Chen, Harrell, and Torres 2013.
First-Generation-Transfer College (FGCT) students are a challenging student category to study. Research requires multi-systems of higher education to work together to record and track, student data and characteristics towards degree attainment. Being an FGC student affects every dimension of being a college student (Orbe 2004; Orbe and Groscurth 2004; Orbe 2008), and being a transfer student is no easy adjustment process (Laanan 1995; Laanan 1996; Townsend 1995; Townsend and Denver 1999; Townsend 2008). When combining these two student categories together, that of FGC and transfer students to look at FGC-transfer students (FGCT), the completion, and passage through the field of higher education appears as statistically amazing given the systemic and cultural reproduction present.

FGCT students must actively learn to be their self anew in a new academic-toned environment. Consequently, these students begin to bridge dual worlds, and navigate discontinuity that separates their past and future (London 1989: London 1992: Ishitani 2003; Davis 2012). Upon arrival to the new culturally distinct academic-toned environment of the university, FGCT students must quickly learn how to balance the uncertainty of constant change, adjustment, and develop a new habitus through the bombardment of unknown institutional norms, vocabulary, and policies, influencing and interacting with every essence of their being. This changes the understandings of what they previously had known of the field of higher education. This (re)formation of self
becomes much more intense at the four-year university, given the academic climate and
cultural elitism espoused in the distinction that the bachelor degree holds in U.S. society
and in the minds of individuals within the society.

Hauptman (2007) found that four decades since access and equity entered the
vocabulary of higher education, the achievement gap between rich and poor has widened
even further. Paulsen and St. John (2002) further examined this occurrence noting that
since 1980 the gap in college participation rates between low-income and high-income
students, as well as between minorities and whites, has widened substantially, creating
new inequality in college access (1). Looking at student categories of low-income and
URM statuses through an intersectional social lens, the common factors of transfer and
FGC students stands out with much overlap existing in the two categories.

Holly and Gardner (2012) discussed that an intersectional approach is key to
better understanding the interactions of statuses (i.e. race, gender, income, age, and
ability) within FGC students pursuing doctoral degrees. They explained how these
students approach the academy with “unique facets of an individual's identity—including,
but not limited to first-generation status” (116) playing a key role in participant
experiences. These facets, serving as proxy for multiple disadvantaged identities situated
within the matrix of domination (Collins 2000) encompass the varying statuses within
FGC students. Holley and Gardner note the layering effect that multiple disadvantaged
statuses can have stating:

“Issues of race and gender often amplified the challenges facing first-generation
transfer students. Several older women participants expressed the reluctance by
those in their families or communities to support their educational endeavors due to their gender status and sexist traditional family beliefs” (2012: 119).

Even amongst such varying forms of identity statuses however, the researchers identified throughout the data was the concept of being “first,” and what such a groundbreaking effort meant for not only the individual but also for those within his or her immediate family” (Holley and Gardner 2012: 116).

This type of overarching and intersectional status of FGC students then should be viewed more from the perspective of a shift in self, through the understanding of the field of higher education they must develop first at the community college and then later at the university. In this dual development, agents must adapt their habitus to their changing environments and in doing so learn the distinction that a bachelor degree holds for symbolic capital in U.S. society.

Within the alien culture of the university, FGC students navigate their social realities in polarized ways of being (Orbe 2004, Orbe 2005, Orbe and Groscurth 2004, and Orbe 2008), appearing perhaps disengaged in the presence of unfamiliar authority and intensely engaged when there is less at stake from being seen as a novice (Davis 2010). FGC students therefore occupy a middle ground of polarized shifts within the field of higher education, and this polarization is much more intense at the four-year university due to its emphasis on doing academics. This middle liminal ground position can be viewed as a form of transversal politics requiring “both/and thinking. In such frameworks, all individuals and groups possess varying amounts of penalty and privilege in one historically created system.” (Collins 2000: 265).

From this perspective of both/and thinking, an intersectional approach helps to provide a conceptual analytical lens to view the varying statuses that cross over the
institutional categories of FGC and transfer students. Collins (2000) explains intersectionality as referring,

To particular forms of intersecting oppressions, for example, intersections of race and gender, or of sexuality and nation. Intersectional paradigms remind us that oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type, and that oppressions work together in producing injustice” (21).

Collins uses the intersections of various oppressed identities to illustrate the forms of structural domination that we experience as social agents within institutions across the horizontal field of power in society. Collins (2000) discusses the matrix of domination, referring to how,

Intersecting oppression are actually organized. Regardless of the particular intersections involved, structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal domains of power reappear across quite different forms of oppression (21).

For FGCT students entering the university, their transition and adjustment process may be an experience of a matrix of domination, as they traverse new structure and foreign forms of symbolic capital in coming into contact with Homo Academicus (Bourdieu 1988) and classifications of distinction in the field of higher education.

The intersections that FGCT students hold allow them a multiplicitic social lens to view reality and their sense of self. Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) has discussed such collisions of the self stating they are, “consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference” causing “un choque,” or “a cultural collision” (100). The experiences of a cultural collision are the results of FGCT identities that reside on the historical margins of higher education’s institutional student categories. The two facets of self within FGCT students, a subject of their own, and an object within the field of higher education, remain in
perpetual opposition to one another, and thus create a way of perceiving the world through a continuum of tensions across polarities.

Thus, education becomes a central terrain where power and politics operate out of the lived culture of individuals and groups situated in asymmetrical social and political spaces. This way of understanding the academy entails a critique of education as the mere accumulation of disciplinary knowledges that can be exchanged on the world market for upward mobility (Mohanty 2003: 195).

This same upward mobility discussed by Mohanty (2003) is what draws FGC students into the community college seeking greater access to capital than the members of their families through the economic opportunity of having a college degree.

The social lens of FGCT students embodies the standpoint of multiple intersecting disadvantaged identities that lack the habitus (Bourdieu 1984) of higher education. Dorothy Smith (1974) has discussed such standpoints in relation to the field of objectivity within sociological studies. Smith (1974) argues that to understand the world around us we must first know it from within, in the ways in which it has been constructed by and for us. She articulates that “strangeness” itself can be a mode in which we experience the world, especially when one sits on the margins of society outside of the normative or status quo groups (Smith 1974), such as her occurrences as a female theorist in the male-dominated field of sociology. Patricia Hill Collins (2000) expands upon Smith’s concepts of standpoint theory by offering her own standpoint in Black Feminist Thought, as a means of articulating the reality of the institutional structures of U.S. society creating a dual disadvantage for black females along the race and gender intersection. Collins through the use of narrative, historical documents, and traditional academic knowledge,
illustrates the history behind groups on the intersectional margins of society and their access, or better yet lack of access, to having a voice in the process of self-definition.

Few research studies have explored the college navigation process from the intersection of two nontraditional student categories, that of student who are both FGC students and transfer students. Given much categorical overlap existing within these nontraditional student categories, concerning the composition of older students, URM students, and lower-income students, it makes sense to explore the transition and adjustment process for these students upon arrival to the four-year institution navigating towards a bachelor degree. FGCT students face institutional, intersectional, and internalized structures creating a primary tensions of being similar and different as college students leading to secondary tensions of confidence and doubt in their process of navigating the field of higher education. The result is a reformation of their sense of self and habitus defined in their differences of struggle and challenge to bachelor degree.
METHODS

The methodological approach to this research is phenomenological, attempting to better understand, through participant narratives of lived experiences, the unique tensions in self occurring for students who are “nontraditional.” Qualitative methodology offers a rich format for data engaging social processes, and in turn, constructs new forms of knowledge about our social world around us.

Qualitative researchers, then, are most interested in how humans arrange themselves and their settings and how inhabitants of these settings make sense of their surroundings through symbols, rituals, social structures, social roles, and so forth (Berg 2009: 8).

Through qualitative research, one can step into the lives of participants, and as social scientist, attempt to walk in the Other’s shoes and provide a snapshot of their social reality. “Doing qualitative research with subjects is more like being permitted to observe or take part in the lives of these subjects (Berg 2009: 71).” Complexities in social agent’s embodied and lived experiences cannot be captured through research assessment tools of surveys and questionnaires, and therefore warrant more in-depth methods of data collection such in-depth active interviewing (Holstein and Gubrium 1995). Through these more conversational, reflective and dialogic based forms of social research, social scientists can capture a slice of life of lived phenomenon.

In this research, in-depth active interviews were the main source of data collection used to elicit a free-flowing narrative of participant’s experiences. The taken-for-granted assumptions and everyday common sense that social agents embody as ways of knowing
and navigating their reality, is the focal point of this research. Topics may shift and transform as participants themselves shift and transform in their changing surroundings, cultures, and identities, buttressing the fluidity of self in transition. There are multiple ways to represent data obtained in qualitative research depending upon whose story is told. In this research, the story told is that of both my participants and my own self, as a researcher, social scientist, and student, simultaneously navigating with the same field of higher education through the institution of the university; yet, at different levels of intensity, crossing different boundaries of distinction.

Population & Participant Demographics

My participant population focused on FGCT students at Humboldt State University (HSU), a public four-year university in the California State University (CSU) system located in northern California. My data consisted of 15 participants who agreed to in-depth interviews conducted from the spring semester of 2012 to the spring semester of 2013. 12 (80%) of these 15 interviews were conducted with FGCT students, and the remaining 3 (20%) of these interviews were conducted with Transfer-Only students. The Transfer-Only student group within my participants helped to represent a conceptual control to the layering effects of being a FGC student, and a transfer student at the same time. This group of participants was used for comparison and validation practices in data analysis of participant’s narratives.

Table 1 below provides a summary description for the various statuses of the FGCT student participants in this research.
Table 1: Summary Description for FGCT Student Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptor</th>
<th>N = 12 Total</th>
<th>% of N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Age</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin@</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EOP Participation</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower-Income</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living Off-campus</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living On-Campus</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last Institution Region:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bay Area, CA</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern, CA</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern, CA</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: EOP Participation indicates formal enrollment in HSU’s Educational Opportunity Program for low-income and FGC students. Lower-Income includes both low-income and working-class socio-economic statuses due to their qualifying eligibility as FGC students.

Table 2 below provides a summary description for the various statuses of Transfer-Only student participants. Table 2 helps to highlight the areas of difference existing within the Transfer-Only student comparison group of my participants. This difference in various statuses prompted the use of Transfer-Only student group as a conceptual control to compare ongoing tension in self of being similar and different as a college student.
Table 2: Summary Description for Transfer-Only Student Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptor</th>
<th>N = 3 Total</th>
<th>% of N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Age</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin@</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EOP Participation</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower-Income</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living Off-campus</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living On-Campus</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last Institution Region:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bay Area, CA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern, CA</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern, CA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 below provides a summary description for the various Colleges for student’s majors for all participants.

Table 3: Summary Description for College (By Major) of Student Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College for Major</th>
<th>N=16 Total</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arts, Humanities &amp; Social Sciences</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Studies</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
These participants, albeit a small and non-generalizable group, were drawn in an attempt to purposefully represent the Upper-Division Transfer-FGC student enrollment demographics, including student’s last institution region before coming to HSU. Berg (2009) explains purposeful sampling as using “special knowledge or expertise about some group to select subjects who represent this population” (2009: 50-51). In capturing various participants for my in-depth interviews, I attempted to cover similar intersectional demographics and statuses present within the larger Transfer, FGC, and FGCT populations at HSU.

HSU’s FGC student population has been steadily increasing over the recent years. The last four years of institutional research student enrollment data illustrates this trend as depicted in Table 4 below. Furthermore, this trend is expected to continue with the percentage of FGC students rising further in the coming decade.

Table 4: HSU FGC Student Population Percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fall 2010</th>
<th>Fall 2011</th>
<th>Fall 2012</th>
<th>Fall 2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FGC</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not FGC</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Information obtained from HSU IR Data Enrollment Dashboard as of 2014.

In addition to the general increase in the overall FGC student population at HSU, Upper-Division Transfer-FGC students have increased even greater over the last four
years as depicted in Table 5 below. Furthermore, this trend is expected to continue with the percentage of Upper-Division Transfer FGC students rising in the coming decade.

Table 5: HSU Upper-Division Transfer FGC Student Population Percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fall 2010</th>
<th>Fall 2011</th>
<th>Fall 2012</th>
<th>Fall 2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FGC</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not FGC</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Information obtained from HSU IR Data Enrollment Dashboard as of 2014.

These increases in HSU’s FGC student enrollment population, demonstrate a research need to better understand this increasing student demographic entering public four-year universities via the community college system. During the duration of my research project, in the Fall semester of 2012, the Upper-Division FGC student population surpassed the 50% threshold for the first time in HSU’s enrollment tracking history. With this tipping point to a potential new transfer student majority in FGC students as of Fall 2012, HSU’s is an ample setting to study self in transition for FGCT students at a public four-year university.

For the origins of HSU’s Upper-Division Transfer students, the most up-to-date information, for Fall 2013 enrollment, shows Upper-Division Transfer student enrollment percentages from for the top five regions of California as shown below in Table 6.
Table 6: HSU Region of Origin Upper-Division Transfer Population for Fall 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region of Origin (IR)</th>
<th>Head Count</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles Area</td>
<td>282</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Diego Area</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern CA Area</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Area</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Francisco Bay Area</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Information obtained from HSU IR Data Enrollment Dashboard as of 2014.

To better represent HSU’s main regional locations of recruitment within the state of California, I collapsed the two institutional research data set regions of the Los Angeles Area and the San Diego Area to represent the greater “Southern CA Area.” Additionally, and applying the same logic, I combined the two data sets of the Northern CA Area and the Local Area to represent the greater “Northern CA Area.” The San Francisco Bay Area region remained the same as that of institutional research data, yet was renamed as the Bay Area CA region for consistency with other region descriptions. The consolidated breakdown of Fall 2013 enrollment data on the origin regions for Upper-Division Transfer students used in this research is shown in Table 7 below.

Table 7: Consolidation of HSU Upper-Division Transfer Regions for Fall 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region of Origin</th>
<th>Head Count</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Southern CA Area</td>
<td>368</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern CA Area</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bay Area CA Area</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Information obtained from HSU IR Data Enrollment Dashboard as of 2014.
The HSU enrollment information discussed above provides a backdrop for comparison of the FGCT student participants discussed in this research to that of the general student population at HSU. My attempt in recruiting participants for the research was to purposefully capture a representational cohort of FGCT participates.

Finally, it should also be noted that HSU has a unique geographical location, given its isolation, rural environment, and distance of travel to home for many students. This unique geography and isolation at HSU creates yet another dimension of difficulty to the boundaries of family, peers, and school; which can function to push or pull students into HSU, or back to their family and/or peers at home, depending upon the cultural preferences of the individual student (Saveliff 2003). This unique geographical location therefore makes HSU a more qualitatively intensified environment for dealing with experiences of adjustment, transition, and (re)formation of self that occurs for FGCT students.

Participant Selection

My participant selection, first identified students as transferring to HSU from a community college as an incoming Upper-Division student (i.e. Transfer Student), and then later in conversation with participants, confirmed their FGC status, or was provided self-disclosure of such status. Often, self-disclosure of FGC status by participants would come about from discussions around my research as a graduate student, and interests in studying inequality and structural equity in higher education. Moreover, discussions of my own experiences and struggles as a transfer student at UCLA during my
undergraduate study, resulted in talking points with participants on transitions, leading up to a request to participate in the research.

Conversations began with participants by discussing the difficulties of being a transfer student, and continued towards cultural differences existing for those who are the first in their family to attend college. As a result of such interactions, initial participants were identified for the first six exploratory interviews. Snowball sampling (Biernacki and Waldorf 1981; Noy 2008) from the initial four participants provided access to additional potential contacts via word of mouth. Snowball sampling was used specifically to attempt to locate students who were both Upper-Division transfer students and FGC students. Snowball sampling was adopted for locating participants because of limited institutional channels to access this intersectional group of students, and low attendance of FGC students to HSU campus transfer events. Berg (2009) discusses that snowball sampling may be the best way to locate participants with particular characteristics or attributes (51), and this proved true in this research.

Although past research conducted on FGC students relied upon access to this student group via campus programs such as EOP (Educational Opportunity Program) and Talent Search TRiO, these participant recruitment strategies were purposefully avoided in an attempt to locate participants who had fallen through the traditional institutional channels of support, were not aware of such programs, and/or purposefully did not participate in such programs for a distaste in the approaches used. However,

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4 For a detailed description of the CSU EOP Program see: https://secure.csumentor.edu/planning/eop/. For a description of HSU’s EOP program see: http://www.humboldt.edu/eop/index.html
snowball sampling alone did not yield enough access to participants to begin to “crystalize” (Richardson and St. Pierre 2008) data on FGCT student’s sense of self (re)formation. As Richardson and St. Pierre (2008) explain,

Crystallization provides us with a deepened, complex, and thoroughly partial understanding of the topic. Paradoxically, we know more and doubt what we know. Ingeniously, we know there is always more to know (479).

In order to reach this point of knowing and doubting what is known, and thus crystalize my data, additional outreach efforts were made in coordination with more institutionalized channels of HSU through the campuses’ transfer coordinator.

The transfer coordinator permitted me access to recruit transfer student participants at the campus’ Transfer Orientation Day known as HOOP (Humboldt Online Orientation Program) Connect Day. HSU utilizes an online transfer orientation program; however, they also provide a single 8-hour Connect Day of campus tours, activities, and community events specifically designed for transfer students during the first week of the Fall semester each academic year. I approached the HOOP Connect Day orientation held at HSU in the Fall 2012 semester to recruit potential participants for my research by requesting their contact information for follow-up at a later time. Follow-up emails were sent to all students providing contact information eight weeks after the orientation.

5 For a detailed description of HSU’s HOOP program and Connect Day see: http://www.humboldt.edu/orientation/hoop.php
Data Collection & Interview Practices

I utilized a dual-tier data collection approach. First, I used ethnographic observation data I obtained from my direct participation in a faculty and staff book circle on Jeff Davis’ text, *The First-Generation Student Experience* held in the spring semester of 2012. This ethnographic data helped to inform the formation of my active interview approach to follow. Next, I used in-depth active interviewing conducted with 15 participants to represent the core of my data used in this analysis.

My ethnographic observation data from the book circle consisted of memos, jottings, and fieldnotes obtained from my direct participation. My researcher role for engaging in ethnographic observation was kept covert from other participants of the book circle as to not affect their perceptions given in dialogue about FGC and transfer students. Fieldnotes were immediately recorded after interactions. These fieldnotes offered a way of “releasing the weight” (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw 1995: 40) of what I had experienced as a researcher in interactions and dialogue with faculty and staff on FGC student experiences. The discussions from the book circle, tended to focus around marginalized students in general, providing insight into the ways that FGC and transfer students are perceived by faculty and staff at HSU.

Through my participation in the book circle, as both a researcher on the topic of FGC students and a past transfer student, I was able to explore the theoretical and research literature surrounding FGCT student’s experiences. In this exploration, I discovered that the narratives of transfer students who were older (24+) seemed to be
missing. This puzzled me as a sociologist given the multitude of older transfer students I met since arriving at HSU in the Fall semester of 2011. Although this occurrence may be attributed to my own older age, this oddity drove my research inquiry further, and was spawned from my participation within the campus book circle. I therefore began exploring the processes at work for students who are both FGC students, and transfer students come from a community college to a public four-year university.

By using first person ethnographic writings from the book circle as data collected, reflecting both participant member and researcher simultaneously (Emerson, et al. 1995: 54), I was able to adapt my stance in the research project to focus on student perspectives as opposed to institutional outcomes. Thus, by using ethnographic data prior to beginning my in-depth interviews, I was able to enhance my researcher insights into the plight and struggles of FGCT students. My ethnographic data collection, with a focus on theoretical memoing and reflective writing inquiry, allowed me to explore the ways higher education institutions, and agents representing the institution and recreating its structures, work in concert together producing an outsider effect in attempting to understand processes foreign to their own self, but embodied by others. Furthermore, my experiences as a covert researcher in the book circle helped me see more clearly, an institutional categorization inferring FGC students as incoming freshman, and transfer students as absent from the struggles of FGC students at HSU. This realization lead me to develop my semi-structured interview guide (See Appendix D for full guide) looking specifically at the issues FGC students experience from occupying multiple cultural worlds, and the
tensions within their own self as agents from these cultural worlds, navigating and colliding in the field of higher education.

For my in-depth interview data, students participated in recorded interviews ranging from approximately 35 to 90 minutes in length. Initial participant interviews (first six) were often longer, approximately 70 minutes in length on average, due to the more exploratory nature of the research at that point of the study. Later interviews conducted (seven to fifteen) were more focused towards specific tensions occurring in processes of self (re)formation, and therefore shorter in length averaging approximately 45 minutes. For all interviews, students and I met in a mutually agreed upon space on campus in a designated private interview room without any distractions.

During in-depth interviews, students answered questions surrounding their education, family, and peer experiences in relation towards navigating community college and then the public four-year university to obtain a bachelor degree. Discussions of personal experiences in dealing with college cultures and structures were probed, with a focus to how these experiences occurred across institutions in relation to participant’s self in transition. During in-depth interviews, a semi-structured interview guide was used in order to maintain uniformity of questioning and flow of the interview process, creating a beginning, middle, and end to the interview process. This approach compared to structured interviews, allowed the researcher to probe deeper into the phenomenon of interest as they arose. Questioning approaches used in the interviews accepted assumptions to the embedded knowledge of FGCT students, and the ways they approach their college experience from this perspective (Berg 2009: 107). These assumptions
became more apparent, as additional Transfer-Only students were interviewed, and the questions within the semi-structured guide presented a struggle for participants providing responses.

The semi-structured interview guide therefore remained solely a tool when needed with adjustments made appropriately in different situations. Interview questions were consistently adjusted to appropriate language based on each participant’s interview climate and language used in initial open-ended responses provided. The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed the researcher to move freely through questions and associations to various intersections within participant’s statuses as FGCT students.

The first question for all participants of the interview process were asked uniformly to constructs a beginning to student’s narrative. This was expressed as: “Just to start out, can you tell me a little bit about yourself?” This open-ended approach to questioning allowed participants to drive the active interview process, as opposed to the researcher trying to maintain objective experimental controls. To further maintain uniformity in the interviewing process, and construct an ending point to participant narratives, all final questions of the in-depth interview were asked verbatim as: “Is there anything else that we have not discussed that you would like to share about your college experiences? Is there anything that you feel I missed in the questions that were asked? If so, what questions do you think would be beneficial in understanding first-generation transfer students?” Such open-ended questions at the end of the interview process allowed for participants to highlight key elements of their narrative, or to provide additional questions overlooked. Any additional questions offered by participants were
asked immediately, often to which they were not prepared to respond. Such open-ended participant-driven questions also helped to validate prior questions asked throughout the duration of the interview by using member validity checks confirming the process just discussed.

All sections of the semi-structured interview guide were addressed, however a linear focus of narrative progression was discarded in order to adhere to the natural ebb and flow of reflection that came from participants on collegiate experiences across times and spaces. This was somewhat frustrating to the researcher in the first four interviews, and then was viewed as more beneficial once a multi-dimensional framework was used conceptually, relinquishing needed notions of linear approaches. Nonetheless, the interview semi-structured guide provided an analytical framework from which to construct probes and follow-up questions during the active interview process (Holstein and Gubrium 1995).

Respondents’ participation in in-depth interviews was completely voluntary without any compensation received. Respondents’ voluntary participation and the focus of the research were explicitly made known to participants using a signed written consent form (See Appendix C for complete consent form). Additionally to set a mutually respectable research climate, respondents were always offered the ability to decline to enter into the study, or to decline to answer particular questions of the study, or even to exit the study at any point. However, none of these occurrences happened in any interviews. Participants overall enjoyed the process and opportunity to share their story,
with some experiencing an empowerment phenomenon through participation in research on their own experiences in postsecondary education.

Initial interviews one to six, provided a platform for exploring the intersection of transfer student and FGC student categories. The seventh interview proved a turning point in the research process, when difference (Collins 2001) in participant narratives were apparent between FGCT and Transfer-Only students resulting from internalized assumptions of the field of higher education, as well as acceptance of dominant societal narratives portraying traditional college student trajectory (i.e. incoming freshman out of high school on a four-year bachelor degree timeline.). This unexpected discovery proved fruitful in exploring specifically the impact on an agent’s sense of self as being a FGC student on a transfer student collegiate pathway to a bachelor degree. This occurrence of difference experienced in the interview process with FGCT and Transfer-Only students, helped to push the theoretical approach to this research towards exploring the phenomenon of self in transition for FGCT students from multi-dimensional perspectives looking at tensions in various identities making up their sense of self.

Memoing up the seventh interview provided exploratory conceptualization of the research project. Charmaz (2006) has noted that memos “capture the comparisons and connections you make and crystalize questions and directions” (72) to pursue in qualitative research. Memoing across the initial six interviews helped to solidify the research focus and direction for latter interviews. Initial memos provided a space for the researcher to become actively engaged, develop ideas, and fine-tune subsequent data gathering (Charmaz 2006: 72) focused on tensions at work in FGCT students.
(re)formation of self. Early memos (Charmaz 2006) focused on trying to understand the positionality of FGCT students from an intersectional lens of multiple statuses, and their actions and behaviors as agents navigating the field of higher education. Advanced memos (Charmaz 2006) then moved beyond exploratory understanding from participants and into more interpretive understandings of emerging and changing categories in the data, tensions identified through interview comparisons, and describing the back-and-forth/push and pull experiences of pursuing a bachelor degree.

After the seventh interview, advanced memoing (Charmaz 2006) began combining theoretical composition into participant’s narrative, moving beyond just data collection and into the inkling stages of analysis occurring concurrently with data collection, leading to literature saturation (Glaser and Strauss 1967) alongside data crystallization. The final interviews conducted in the research, interviews eleven to fifteen, focused specifically on exploring the unique tensions in self of participants. The arrival of this focal point in the research was determined through the methods discussed, with a focus on “the spiraling research approach” (Berg 2009: 26) of always taking a step back for two steps taken forward. Memoing throughout the research project allowed the researcher a reflective space to frequently step-back and assess the questioning used, interview process, practice of “holding place,” and data collection.

While conducting in-depth active interviews, “holding place” to maintain focus on participant’s verbal and non-verbal responses permitted me as the researcher to create a comfortable safe space for participants to freely share their story, including anti-institutional sentiments. Holding place is similar to what Berg describes as maneuvering
around a subject’s avoidance rituals in a manner that neither overtly violates social norms associated with communication exchanges nor causes the subject to lie” (2009: 128); yet, strives simultaneously to maintain a “Beginner’s Mind” (McGrane 1993) or “Zen Mind” (Suzuki 1970) in the application of such maneuvering by the researcher, avoiding preconceived notions of phenomenon, even from the existing literature. A Beginner’s Mind “doesn’t know in advance what it’s going to see and experience—it’s open, hollow, flexible, receptive, and tuned in to what is happening in the present moment” (McGrane 1993: 80). Therefore, when holding place as a practice for qualitative methods, using a Beginner’s Mind, allows the researcher to remain open to the present moment of the active interview, open to experiences espoused by participants, and move with respondents, as opposed to pushing them along the way.

Qualitative methods function in social research to deconstruct discourses and reconstruct them in new emerging categories of meaning from participant’s standpoint. Denzin and Lincoln (2008) describe using qualitative data as a “bricoleur, as a maker of quilts, or, as in filmmaking, a person who assembles images into montages (5).” Such montages tell the structural story of participants from their view as agents and illuminate the process by which individuals frame their own ways of knowing and navigating structure (i.e. develop a habitus). The theoretical bricoleur contains a wide knowledge of paradigms including but not limited to feminism, Marxism, cultural studies, queer, and constructivism used to analyze data (Denzin and Lincoln 2008). These multiple paradigms across disciplines, allow qualitative researchers to provide a slice of life that is often lost within the survey check boxes of yes/no responses and Likert scales. As Denzin
and Lincoln (2008) describe it, “The researcher as *bricoleur*-theorist works between and within competing and overlapping perspectives and paradigms” (8). Thus, the *bricoleur*-theorist approach to studying FGCT students encompasses multiple dimensions and paradigms offering the reader a more holistic analysis of the lived experiences of participants. Connecting the various parts of the whole in this research with both ethnographic data and in-depth interview excerpts, provides an image of navigating the field of higher education experienced by FGCT students without reducing them to mere data points; thus, respecting and honoring their experiences that traverses across multiple facets of identity bound within agent’s sense of self.

*Data Analysis Practices*

My data analysis began through a prolonged period of “continuous dialogue” (Becker 1998: 109) with ethnographic memos, research literature, student, faculty, and administrator interactions, in-depth interviews, transcription, coding, and participation in student activism on HSU’s campus; all coalescing into a greater understanding of the habitus needed to successfully navigate the university institution within the field of higher education. This dialogue combined research on FGC and transfer students in the last decade, social theory on capital and the formation of self, alongside multi-dimensional theory on the lived experiences of FGC student’s identity negotiations, to create a better understanding of the experiences of FGCT student transitioning to a public four-year university. From this point, further literature on challenging static notions of student development, college trajectories and degree attainment lead me as the researcher
to look specifically at a tension in self created by being both similar and different as a college student, and from this, experiencing a tension of both confidence and doubt leading to new forms of self-esteem in FGCT student’s (re)formation of self. This drawn out process of data analysis, extending from the spring semester of 2013 to the spring semester of 2014, allowed me as the researcher an intimate exposure to the data, ultimately leading to the production of emergent themes discussed.

The recorded interviews were first transcribed into text, and audio files destroyed within 30 days of transcription. In the data analysis of transcripts, narrative analysis was the focus, looking at participant’s college trajectory stories as objective data from their personal lived experiences (Riessman 1993). Riessman (1993) explains this form of analysis as when “respondents narrativize particular experiences in their lives, often where there has been a breach between ideal and real, self and society” (3), making for an optimal analysis approach when looking at the transition in self for FGCT students, embodying both perception and reality of the field of higher education. Furthermore, Riessman (1993) explains, “because the approach gives prominence to human agency and imagination, it is well suited to studies of subjectivity and identity” (5). Therefore, in analyzing transcripts from a narrative data analysis approach, I attempt to reveal social life and allow for the culture of FGCT students to “speak itself” (Riessman 1993: 5) through the excerpts of my participants. A reminder to the reader however,

A personal narrative is not meant to be read as an exact record of what happened nor is it a mirror of a world ‘out there,’ Our reading of data are themselves located in discourses (e.g. scientific, feminist, and therapeutic) (Riessman 1993: 64).
Combing various analytical methods into qualitative research allows researchers to grapple with larger philosophical issues of our contemporary society. Such a methodological standpoint can function to challenge dominant narratives in society, in this research, specifically how U.S. society views traditional college students and their degree navigation process. “The analysis of qualitative data allows researchers to discuss in detail the various social contours and processes human beings use to create and maintain their social realities” (Berg 2009: 9).

Through transcribing, three phases of in-depth interviews emerged. An exploratory phase in the first six interviews clarifying the questions, approaches with participants, and focus of the research investigation. This was followed by a more succinctly confirmatory set of in-depth interviews on the various tensions of self for FGCT students in the next five interviews. The final four interviews resulted in a validity focus of the phenomenon of tension in self as being both similar and different as a FGCT student and the recurrence of both confidence and doubt. These phases of data collection also proved beneficial for providing a framework of exploration (using a Beginner’s Mind/Zen Mind), saturation, and eventually crystallization in data.

Transcripts where first coded using a color scheme based on the main areas of the semi-structured interview guide. For responses matching to the literature on transfer and FGC students, text was bolded. Green identified participant responses towards the new four-year university environment. Yellow identified participant responses towards other students and peers inside and outside the field of higher education. Red identified participant responses towards their family interactions and family beliefs/values of higher
education and a bachelor degree. Blue identified racial and/or class cultural conflicts arising in the university environment, mainly from respect and trust differences experienced by participants. Pink identified participants’ unique responses to their own sense of self and statuses intersections driving their narrative. Finally, bold, underlining, and italics combined identified rich reflective processes from lengthy participant excerpts constructing new awareness in participant’s sense of self. At times, multiple colors were used in transcription segments that reflected crossover of these thematic categories. These multi-color coding eras help to reflect the intersectional nature of FGCT student’s narratives. As Charmaz (2006) explains,

codes emerge as you scrutinize your data and define meaning within it. Through this active coding, you interact with your data again and again and ask many different questions of them” (46).

By using project notes, interview notes, and ongoing transcription notes across the research study, constant interaction with data lead to the initial color coding schemas to organize excerpts for further analysis, given the non-linear nature of participant’s narratives. Once transcripts were color coded for themes, they were re-ordered based on coding groups. Both colors and styles were then compared across coding groups of all 15 transcripts.

Once transcription data was separated along color groups, initial coding of each group began looking deeper at what the data suggested, whose point of view it was from, and what theories of self were at work? (Charmaz 2006: 48). These questions prompted a step back in the data analysis to compare data across transcripts, memos, and fieldnotes collected, while returning to existing literature on FGC and transfer students to answer
arising questions in the research process around liminal notions of self in transition. Many participants discussed the experience of “culture shock” when initially arriving to the four-year university post-transfer to describe the difference of culture embedded in institutions within the field of higher education.

Through constant reflective questioning of data, coding, and themes, I was able to “saturate” my main themes of the research for focused coding as: Finally Doing “Academics”, Not Just “College”, (Re)building Confidence through New Forms of Self-Esteem, and FGCT Self (Re)Formation through Pride of Struggle and Challenge. Throughout focused coding, the blue theme of racial and class cultural conflict remained integrated. This infusion of intersectional statuses helped to further saturate coding towards the tensions in self for FGCT students self in (re)formation presented in this research. “Categories are ‘saturated’ when gathering fresh data no longer sparks new theoretical insights, nor reveals new properties of your core theoretical categories” (Charmaz 2006: 113), which was satisfied from the horizons of meaning (Holstein and Gubrium 1995) that resulted from focused coding, and are revealed in the narrative presented using excerpts across all FGCT participants.

By reviewing data and focusing coding to reflect more action verbs or gerunds (Glaser 1978) to preserve participant’s experiences, I was able to establish focused coding, and then from this focused coding, able to circle back and compare these more action-oriented codes within my transcription process notes. Thus, I applied my focused coding through comparing data to data, codes to data, and finally codes back to action-oriented codes (Charmaz 2006: 60). During the action-oriented or gerund coding process,
in vivo codes such as: “Finally doing it,” “Going to the real college,” “Getting into my Major,” “I can do this,” “I’ve done this before,” “Finding ground to stand,” “Becoming self-sufficient,” “Hungry for education,” and “It’s not about me,” were utilized whenever possible to establish the descriptors of self (re)formation discussed below. In vivo codes reflect FGCT explanations for the ways they define their self in transition from a community college to a four-year public university. The usage of in vivo coding allowed for data to crystallize” providing “an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities, and angles of approach. Crystals grow, change, and are altered, but they are not amorphous. Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities and refract within themselves, creating different colors, patterns, and arrays casting off in different directions” (Richardson and St. Pierre 2008: 478).

With the eclectic nature of FGCT students and the multi-dimensional approaches to understanding the fluidity of identity that resides in their self (re)formation, the crystallization of the data signaled an ending to the interviewing process and data collection, to which the researcher finally felt a sigh of relieve in the role and active commitment to participants in the research.

The resulting narrative that follows was constructed from ethnographic data obtained, alongside in-depth interview transcript data of student’s trajectory and perceptions of self. Combined together, these data elements form an association among the researcher's questions, the existing literature base of both transfer students and FGC students, and current sociological theory on capital distinctions, the self and FGC identity negotiation, describing the unique and powerful ways FGCT students define their own self in pursuit of a bachelor degree at a public four-year university. This definition of self
in transition is significant to understanding the ways the field of higher education changes an agent’s habitus through the distinction that a bachelor degree holds in U.S. society and an individual’s consciousness. Emerging from this intimate research process was a better understanding of student’s lived experiences in transition as an outsider to the field of higher education, resulting in an understanding of the usage of vulgar or non-traditional capital used by these agents as a mechanism for student success and persistence.

In analyzing this data, I attempted as the researcher to straddle the same tensions in self as that of my participants. In doing so, I tell a story uniquely intersectional, composed of my, theirs, and our stories coalesced. At times, as a graduate student navigating the field of higher education, I can see my struggles as my participants and vice versa; yet, at other times, participant struggles are unique to their intersectional identities held and the ways that our societal structures reproduce inequalities in relation such identities. For, I cannot lay claim to the FGC status, but I can to the transfer student status. As a researcher, I cannot know what being a FGC student feels like or what the experiences are, since I was unaware this category existed during my time at the university before embarking on this research in graduate school. Furthermore, I do not fit the definition assigned to the FGC student categories by institutions: neither parent holds a bachelor degree. My father has a bachelor degree, and his parents “some college;” however, my mother who raised me, does not, and her father possesses only a fifth grade education, while her mother did not finish high school. This class-based divide has been, and remains today, the reality of my own life as an agent navigating social reality and my own divided habitus, beyond that of solely a researcher role. These educational
differences of distinction are something that remains at the forefront of my own family experiences and my socialization. They are something that resides in my own habitus of straddling the class divide constructed through the distinctions held within the field of higher education.

As an ethically committed qualitative researcher to the representations of my participants, I can only personally know the intimate cultural divide and dissonance that occurs from the replication of the field of higher education and the distinction it holds, as experienced through my own family relations of those who have a degree and those who have do not. Consequently, in my own choices to live between worlds of distinction, honoring capital representations on both sides of the class divide, vulgar and elite…in existing in both worlds and belonging to neither…in coming to accept living between the margins of society in perpetual limbo, I have come to accept my own self in this research.

By seeing myself as a subject as well as a researcher, I am able to move from the distanced observer to the feeling participant and learn things I could not learn before, both about them and about me” (Ellis and Berger 2002: 858).

In doing so, my research not only represents the (re)formation in self of my participants as a result of navigating the field of higher education, but my own (re)formation as well in the process of this research, and new distinctions obtained from this research within the field of higher education.

Jehangir (2010) supports the emphasis on narrative analysis from her own research, noting,

The focus on cultivating narrative is suggested as one means of creating both ownership and place for students who have been historically marginalized in higher education” (535).
Both transfer and FGC students fall into this historically marginalized category, especially when viewed as a proxy for URM students in today’s unfortunate post-racial admissions climate, and therefore can benefit from the empowerment often experienced by participation in personal narrative research. Jehangir (2010) goes on to discuss the ways that utilizing narratives in qualitative research invite “a deeper, more authentic understanding of their identities” allowing students to claim “their many selves as legitimate sources of knowing” (547).

In selecting data excerpts to use for narrative process representing a community of members, researchers are representing both the academic traditions of our discipline and our community members. Holding this duality omnipresent in our minds as researchers is paramount to the ethics of not only conducting “no harm” research, but also preventing the perpetuation of stereotypes, hegemony, and dominance in research paradigms (Plummer 2008, Bishop 2008, Smith 2008, and Jones 2010). Managing this point of awareness as a qualititative researcher, and constantly being committed to holding place and approaching data collection with a Beginner’s Mind was the focus of my own role as a qualitative researcher representing this group’s story of navigation through the field of higher education to a bachelor degree.
Limitations of Research

This research, although powerful in the implications of findings and innovative methodological approaches used, is not without limitations. Results of this research should not be generalized to all FGCT students given the small number of 15 participants, and the unique exploratory nature and focus driving the research approach. However, this limitation does not preclude the effect that such research may have in offering a representational window towards better understanding the various intersections, dimensions, and process of attaining a bachelor degree for FGCT students. This window can illuminate insights into areas of our inequitable structures of higher education that students navigate today, and help to bring attention to the issues of class-based achievement gaps and student success.

Additionally, my participant’s mean age was 31 years old, reflecting a much older nontraditional student experiences than the majority of existing literature looking at students under the age of 25. Yet, within my participant’s excerpts, and FGCT story of self in transition illustrated, a parallel of the structural challenges faced by traditional aged (18-22) FGC students is reflected. Therefore, the older age of FGCT students may be a previous blind spot in research conducted on first-generation student experiences. This limitation of my participant’s mean age then calls into question the ways institutions currently conceptualize what an FGC student looks like, and how to best serve their postsecondary educational aspirations. Older FGC students may be missing out potentially on a number of support mechanisms at the university by coming in as transfer
students, such as EOP and other Student Support Services. They may be seen as transfer students, without an understanding of their struggles as also being the first in their family to navigate college and the university to a bachelor degree.

Furthermore, over 50% of the participants in the study were sociology majors (See Appendix E for complete details) from the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences. This limitation comes from a combination of the nature of my research approach and questions asked, student’s personal interest participating in research within their major discipline, and from using snowball sampling for locating participants. Upper-Division College students often segregate into disciplinary-based peer groups once they have become focused on their major, taking the majority of classes within a single department. The participant recommendations provided by initial participants who had majored in sociology, lead to an oversampling of sociology majors. Although this can be seen as a limitation into the degree process for FGCT students within the College of Resources & Natural Sciences, it can also be viewed for the uniqueness that sociology holds as a major for historically nontraditional students.

Finally, HSU is a small, rural, and geographically isolated public four-year university. Therefore, the phenomenon for the experiences of both FGC and transfer students from outside the regional area of HSU is often intensified due to this extreme change in environment and culture. Although HSU’s unique setting may not prove beneficial for comparison across institutions, it helps to illustrate exacerbation by institution as experienced by FGCT students navigating towards a bachelor degree. Even among such intense experiences across various statuses, FGCT students still persist to
graduation, and in doing so, resist the normative assumptions of college students in the twenty-first century, pushing the boundaries of educational access, equity and mobility in U.S. Society.
DISTINCTION: THE MEANING OF A BACHELOR DEGREE

FGCT students in this research navigated their higher education pathway to a bachelor degree, first through community college and then onto a public four-year university. In doing so, they cross a distinction (Bourdieu 1984) boundary in the field (Bourdieu 1993) of higher education established by the symbolic value of a bachelor degree U.S. society. By transferring from the community or “junior” college into the university environment, FGCT students experienced a primary tension in their sense of self as being both similar and different as college students. They are similar in their behavioral characteristics of FGC incoming freshman students for whom the ways of the university are foreign. After transferring, they must start over again at times, feeling like a freshman even though they previously conquered this experience at the community college. At the same time, they are different from FGC incoming freshman students in their sense of self already established given their older age, and varied experiences in the working world. Institutionally however, FGCT students are depicted as transfer students, which may lack an understanding to their struggles as FGC students foreign to the ways of higher education. This creates a tension of having confidence as a transfer student, and having doubt as a FGC student. By doing academics and not just college, FGCT students were able to understand the distinction of a bachelor degree within the field of higher education and towards their own understanding of self as a student navigating this field. FGCT students in attaining their bachelor degree cross this distinction boundary into a new way of being, and therefore live with “un choque” (Andalzua 1987), or the cultural
collision that is the result of having to live in different spheres of life, and yet belong to neither.

FGCT students begin the process of (re)forming their self by first coming to understand the distinction held by the university in the field of higher education. Participants explain this distinction as a “privilege.” These privileges explained by participants in the study, reveal a particular orientation to college and access to resources within the field of higher education otherwise unknown to FGCT students. By discussing the privilege of traditional college students, FGCT students developed a better understanding of the distinction that a bachelor degree maintains in the field of higher education and thus begin to learn the engrained knowledge needed for success in this new environment.

FGCT students also face a secondary tension in their self of having both confidence and doubt. They maintain the confidence established from successfully navigating the community college to transfer to the coveted university providing bachelor degrees. Yet, upon reaching the university environment, and interacting with new forms of elite culture that reinforce a class-based distinction in FGCT students, the reoccurrence of doubt emerges and confidence must be (re)built for persistence to be maintained. Students therefore begin to (re)build their confidence amongst doubt creating a tension in FGCT student’s sense of self. FGCT students (re)build confidence through informal mentor-guides and interactions with faculty developing new forms of self-esteem needed to successfully navigate the university environment.
The privilege experienced at the university as discussed by my participants, reflected a larger societal understanding of the distinction that a bachelor’s degree holds in U.S. society. Participant Janice Klaus, a 22-year-old-white-lower-income female coming from a community college in the southern California region, who already received her bachelor degree, but was completing her teaching credential now at HSU, discusses the distinction a bachelor degree holds saying:

When you get a (bachelor) degree, people look at you differently, or they have a different perception of you. Um, like they almost feel...the need to defend their own intelligence, I felt like. If that makes sense.

Janice describes the distinction of having a bachelor degree creates a need for those without this distinction to defend their own intelligence. Yet, Janice still struggled somewhat with this distinction since she was the first in her family to receive such a degree. She notes this immediately after the excerpt above stating,

Yeah, and I know like that my dad is one of the smartest people that I know, and he didn’t get that from a college education, he got that from, like life experience just his own.

Janice illustrates her understanding that the distinction of a bachelor degree holds, for her own self and U.S. society, but at the same time, she acknowledges familial life experiences as just as valid, noting the intelligence of her family. In acknowledging both forms of capital at work in the field of higher education, non-traditional capital obtained from marginalized family experiences and understanding one’s positionality in society, and traditional capital obtained through the distinction her bachelor degree holds as symbolic capital in U.S. society, Janice illustrates the ways she straddles this boundary of distinction as a FGCT student.
The university bachelor’s degree represents a distinction (Bourdieu 1984) in both the agent and society. Within U.S. society, the degree itself has meaning and this meaning holds power outside of any instrumental value of knowledge learned in the process of earning such a degree. Zane Saggehti, a 24-year-old-white-lower-income-male coming from a community college in the southern California region, in his second semester at HSU, explains this distinction of a bachelor degree through a philosophical-orientation towards college. When asked about his own “orientation” to college, Zane said,

Yeah, my father didn’t graduate high school. So, because they (parents) didn’t come from those backgrounds (college-orientation), I think we (family) just lacked the more specific appreciation for it (higher education/college).

In explaining his past lack of an orientation to college, Zane shows the distinction that holding a bachelor degree in U.S. society has for an agent attempting to navigate the field of higher education. This specific appreciation for college, or habitus, comes from having parents who hold a bachelor degree, and transfer their symbolic social and cultural capital needed for success at the university to their children in their habitus.

The distinction held in the bachelor degree is made further apparent by participant Ethan Hatchworth, a 40-year-old-white-non-lower-income-male coming from a community college in the bay area California region, in his first semester transitioning to HSU. Ethan explains reaching the university to finally be able to get his bachelor degree as feeling like “a stage star” who made it to Broadway, and notes that the bachelor degree is a “big thing.” Ethan elaborates on this in the following excerpt:
I mean, this was my goal (a bachelor degree). I’m on the road to getting my bachelors, you know. This isn’t community college anymore. You know community college is like practice, you know for the…if you think of it in actors terms, that’s (community college) off-Broadway, this (university) is Broadway.

By describing a bachelor degree as a big thing, and community college as practice, Ethan illustrates the distinction that such a degree holds in the field of higher education, and the university as the provider of such a degree. Ethan also accepts this distinction of the degree within his own sense of self with the excitement he exhibits by finally reaching the university. In finally reaching the university, and referring to it as making it to Broadway, Ethan depicts the distinction the bachelor degree holds in the field of higher education. In his interview, Ethan further noted that just by being in the university setting now, and interacting with his new environment in higher education, he felt as if it were “his time to shine”, and hopefully “make connections and mentors to last a lifetime.”

Participant Zane Saggehti also further discusses the distinction of the bachelor degree saying:

I think there are, you know, paradigms out there that say, you know, unless you’re a university student, you’re not a serious student. And I don’t think that everybody has that, but I was definitely affected by that, that sort of paradigm. I guess I felt that, until I got to the university level, that I was doing like piddlely stuff. Now again I don’t think that’s true, but that’s what I felt at the time.

Zane’s excerpt helps to reveal the paradigms at work making a distinction of the bachelor degree and the university as the “real” college, as opposed to only the “junior” college and the associate degree at the community college level. The distinction of the real college or university is the product of students being able to participate in doing
academics through upper-division coursework, academic research, and focusing on their major discipline.
FINDING SELF IN THE DISTINCTION: FINALLY DOING “ACADEMICS,” NOT JUST “COLLEGE”

Doing academics was described as becoming focused on school as opposed to work, becoming a full-time college student, experiencing upper-division major coursework, interacting with faculty, and finally being able to participate in academic research. All of these activities were behaviors that participants in my research did not engage in while they were at the community college. All of the sub-themes discussed by participants as doing academics illuminate the distinction of a bachelor degree in the field of higher education. By finally doing academics at the university legitimated through the increased presence of scholars engaged in the production of disciplinary knowledge, participants learned traditional forms of symbolic capital needed for pursuing a career, as opposed to labor, or skilled-labor. This can be seen as a distinction between the university and the community college provided from each of the institutions respective degrees. This distinction of the bachelor degree then is carried from the field of higher education to the field of labor through the agent. Thus, a career represents the return of symbolic capital from the distinction held in the bachelor degree, and skilled-labor represents the return of symbolic capital from the distinction held in the associate degree, providing differing forms of engrained knowledge transmitted in the field of higher education.

Doing Academics for participants was described as doing upper-division coursework, participating in academic research, and gaining access to the university as the production center of knowledge. Participants in the research expressed a feeling of
empowerment in finally doing “real” academic work. Doing academics also signaled passage through the field of higher education to new higher levels of distinction. Seeing this difference in resources, and now having a better understanding of the university after transferring than previously internalized, FGCT students frequently accessed campuses resources such as the learning center, tutoring, study groups, internship, and cultural clubs and the multi-cultural center to help their transition into the university environment. Ethan Hatchworth describes this phenomenon as being at the “center of research” and therefore having “the keys to success” on HSU’s campus. However, Ethan also noted, he needs to know how “to use them (the keys to success) properly,” illustrating that he is still learning how to use these new resources, but now is building a different orientation towards college. Ethan’s excerpt helps to depict the ways that social agents learn and adapt their engrained habitual knowledge of institutions, or habitus, while traveling through fields. Ethan also noted he will work on his “plan for success” by using the large amount of resources (i.e. social and cultural capital) on HSU’s campus, highlighting again his pleasure in finally possessing the keys to success in U.S. society.

Alex Sanchez, a 22-year-old-Latino-lower-income-male coming from a community college in the northern California region, in his first semester at HSU, described the difference in the community college and university through his participation in doing academics. He explains that students at the university “take it (higher education) more serious.” Alex depicts this seriousness as students studying all over the campus and being focused and passionate towards their major. This phenomenon, albeit something that would seem normal in the field of higher education,
was something not experienced by Alex previously at the community college. Hence, studying and becoming serious and passionate towards one’s major reflected doing academics and beginning to learn the cultural and social capital needed at the university.

Finding Self in Major

Doing Academics also contained a facet of participants exploring or tasting disciplines at the community college to decide their major for transfer to the university. In locating their major at the community college and declaring it for transfer to the university, participants discovered aspects of their established sense of self within their chosen major. Matt Geary, a 38-year-old-white-lower-income-male coming from a community college in the southern California region, in his first semester transitioning into HSU, explained this academic discipline exploration as “getting a taste of different fields” at the community college to find his major. In finding his major, it reflected his personal self-interest in helping improve social issues in U.S. society.

Yet another participant, Zane Saggehti, explained finding his major through self-interests exploring the writings of Karl Marx as a teenager. Marx’s writings offered Zane a social lens in which to explain more clearly his own social location and experiences within U.S. society and its inequality. Moreover, Alondra Grossmore, a 26-year-old-Black-lower-income-female, coming from a community college in the northern California region, in her third semester at HSU, explained her major as “all about me,” discussing the ways her major depicted her own pre-established sense of self, and life experiences with poverty as a Black female in U.S. society.
Vince Gomez, a 26-year-old-Latino-lower-income male coming from a community college in the bay area California region, in his second semester at HSU, similarly explains finding his major through his own life experiences before coming into the field of higher education. Vince explains that he choose his major since his family was impacted by social issues discussed within his discipline. Finding a major that reflect FGCT students own pre-established sense of self is important to these students success upon reaching the university, and its elevated position within the field of higher education in relation to community college.

Finally, Cliff Garcia, a 24-year-old-Latino-lower-income male coming from a community college in the southern California region, in his 4th and final semester at HSU, explains this phenomenon of finding his self as a college student within his major’s academic discipline saying:

I’m studying social work. And it straight up, explains to me why…because I’ve always known that everything was messed up. Even with my emotions, I could always tell…but it explains it in a way that I can use the words more, why everything is the way it is, or try to explain. I find that really interesting. Because, we learned a lot about families, who experience, maybe an alcoholic or a drug addict, and I’m like, oh, I can see, that’s me and my family right here.

In being able to see his pre-established self within an academic discipline of study, Cliff selects this discipline as his major. Furthermore, Cliff explains how his major studies the phenomenon of his family and his life, making it easier for Cliff to see the symbolic value in his own life’s different experiences. Doing academic work in his major of social work allows Cliff to view his family experiences in the academic process alongside his self as a new college student navigating a new space in the field of higher education.
Part of doing academics also involved becoming a full-time student after being a part-time student at the community college. All participants in the research discussed first beginning community college part-time without any real focus or direction illustrate their characteristics as FGC students and a lack of an engrained knowledge of college culture. Participants explained they did not become a full-time student until they reached the university, and began to focus on courses within their major. Becoming a full-time student signaled passage into the academic world for participants, and thus represents part of the process of doing academics.

Ethan Hatchworth described becoming a full-time student as “amazing,” but also having no excuse for his possible failure at the university. He states this saying,

My career is a student right now, instead of being, I’m a manager and student second, this is my primary focus. I think a healthy way to learn is when you don’t have the stress of, you know, a commitment of a 40-hour a week job.

As Ethan describes, being a full-time student is now his primary focus and a much healthy way to learn in college. Previously, he was always a worker first, and a student second. Now having become a full-time student, he expresses a healthy, or one could argue traditional, means of learning. He is now able to focus on doing academics first, instead of making it a second-place priority next to his means of income or job. This simple taken-for-granted notion of being able to attend college full-time, is something learned over time by FGCT students at the community college and then carried with them into the university upon transfer.
Participant Matt Geary described this phenomenon of being a full-time college student for the first time in his life as interesting, denoting a slight hesitation in his voice when responding. He noted how being a full-time college student allowed him something he did not have access to prior, time. Matt went on to express difficulties in adjusting his time-management practices to better structure his own time. Matt had grown accustomed to having someone else, either work or his single class at the community college, structure the majority of his time for him. However, upon transferring to the university, Matt begins to learn to manage his own time, something that will be needed in the distinction that comes with a career as opposed to labor.

*(Re)Building Confidence Amongst Recurring Doubt*

Participants expressed an ongoing tension of being confident and doubting one’s self by transferring to the university and finally doing academics. Participants expressed a feeling of confidence in finally transferring to the university and working towards the final stages of their bachelor degree. However, in experiencing transfer shock and the adjustment process to more academic rigor at the university within upper-division major courses, feelings of doubt previously overcome at the community college resurfaced for participants. Participants expressed doubt initially within their community college experiences and perceptions of low self-esteem. Such doubt reflects the characteristics of FGC students who battle with the feelings of being an imposter, and having to overcome stereotype threats within the field of higher education. Hence, participants struggled in transition to the university from the community college due to their confidence from
transferring and doubt from their foreignness to the ways of the university culture with its focus on academic achievement in the field of higher education.

Ethan Hatchworth describes his feelings of confidence once finishing his final pre-requisite math courses online to transfer to HSU. In finally transferring to the university, Ethan noted finally having the vision of the bachelor degree in sight helping to develop his confidence further and increase his motivation to succeed. However, once arriving at the university, his confidence was coupled with its antithesis doubt, due to poor performance on a mid-term exam within his major during his first semester transitioning to HSU, no doubt the result of transfer shock. However, upon receiving a 60% on his midterm exam within his major, which ended up being a C grade due to the curving of the exam results by the professor, Ethan describes a return of doubt, reduction in confidence, and questions his place at the university. As he puts it, it “messed with my head a little bit” by “shooting down the confidence.” By doing academics, FGCT students experience a tension in self of increased confidence and recurring doubts in their academic performance and abilities at the university. With increased confidence in finally reaching the university and doing academics, comes a return of doubt from not knowing the engrained knowledge of university culture.

Participant Alex Sanchez also illustrates this tension of confidence and doubt in self through doing academics from his participation in an academic peer circle at his community college. This participation in academics at the community college, gave Alex a taste of what was to come at the university. In being invited to participate in the academic peer circle by his professor, Alex expressed a feeling of confidence in the
professor selecting him, yet; he also expressed doubt since he “still didn’t know how to write at that time.” Alex felt he had great ideas, illustrating his confidence, but he still was learning the grammatical structure and organization of writing, illustrating his doubt, that he lacked from his different K-12 experiences. When asked how this feeling of confidence and doubt was experienced, Alex responded with the feeling of “intimidation” from doing academics and having to express his ideas in a concise and well-organized written prose. Alex further noted that doing academics still intimidates him today while at the university saying:

Because now it’s (intimidation by doing academics) getting a little better. But I still have this fear of writing that…that it doesn’t match up with the way I present the ideas, or, what I’m trying to say. So, how can I write in a way that’s really presenting what I’m trying to say…it’s an ongoing struggle.

Alex’s ongoing struggle reflects the tensions in his own self as reflected though his confidence and doubt. Alex holds non-traditional capital from his life experiences and standpoint. This standpoint allows Alex to grasp large-social issues like poverty, inequality, educational access, alienation, etc. However, Alex is still learning the finer-tuned skills of grammar and organization, engrained in agents through the everyday behavioral practices of the university. Such writing is needed to provide the certification appropriate for the distinction of a bachelor degree. This is an ongoing struggle for Alex to learn these new ways of being, including new means of communication through written thought.

(Re)building confidence for FGCT students is a process of overcoming their recurring forms of doubt from a perceived lack of privilege at the university, as described
in excerpts above, in understanding how to successfully navigate the field of higher education. FGCT student’s confidence in postsecondary educational ability builds over time at the community college. However, such confidence established is then again faced with a recurring doubt in the student’s ability to navigate the university. This back and forth movement of confidence and doubt within FGCT student’s sense of self constructs an ongoing tension that must be managed.

Participant Kimberley Simcoe, a 45-year-old-white-lower-income-female coming from a community college in the bay area California region, in her first semester at HSU, explains the confidence side of this tension when she sees that she is “actually kind of smart.” However, Kimberley follows this statement of confidence with an explanation of her recurring doubt attached creating a tension in her own sense of self:

See I don’t get that (You’re actually kind of smart) a lot. People don’t tell me. I mean it’s like oh yeah, it’s just in your head, or you’re goofy, or you’re silly or you’re just, you know, whatever. I mean I’ve actually had someone tell me that I didn’t understand jazz music because I wasn’t smart enough.

Kimberley’s excerpt depicts how her past experiences with the distinction in the field of higher education created reoccurring doubt in her own sense of self and postsecondary abilities.

From their tension in self of confidence and doubt, FGCT students in this research faced past notions of low self-esteem reinforced by their social location and potential marginalization at the university. Participant Nancy Zimbardo, a 48-year-old-white-lower-income-female, coming from a community college in the northern California region, in her sixth semester at HSU, explains this phenomenon stating:
Here’s a secret, I have really low self-esteem. So, I think, everybody thinks, you know…I don’t even want to vocalize what I think everybody thinks of me. Because they’re all negative. You know, it’s that negative, little nasty voice that sits on your shoulder when you, when you are raised like I was raised. I can say I feel like I’m a fraud here, that I feel that, you know, every day I’m going to be discovered that I really don’t belong here. (Nancy whispers this when she says it as if she doesn’t want anyone around to possibly hear the statement.) I’m not supposed to be here. I should be married. I should have a husband taking care of me. (Nancy again begins to whisper) I shouldn’t be here. Women shouldn’t be in school. (Nancy stops whispering). So, um, I’m like, fuck you (Nancy gives a slight laugh and nods her head up and down) I’m here anyway.

Nancy explains the ways that her gender, class status, and education-level work in concert within her own self perceptions to potentially lower her self-esteem, and further create doubt. She describes this as a product of her from her own family upbringing and socialization, or one could say habitus. However, this difference in upbringing also creates a form of empowerment for Nancy in overcoming her negative gender and education perceptions. Nancy illustrates this empowerment by stating, “Fuck you, I’m here anyway.”

*Faculty Interaction to Build Confidence or Doubt*

In the new location of the university environment in the field of higher education, the role of faculty involvement and interactions with FGCT students is important for validating their confidence. Alex Sanchez describes this phenomenon of validation as a particular professor “vouching” for him. The professor informed another faculty member at HSU that Alex would be a “great addition” to her course. This response from the professor was the result of commentary Alex made at a public event during International Student Week. The speaker of the event validated Alex’s comments and opinion, as well
as his articulation and presentation of such concepts. By the professor vouching for Alex, she helped to build his confidence in academic ability.

Although faculty interaction can rebuild confidence once FGCT students reach the university post-transfer, it can also reinforce doubt. Joe Rosen, a 34-year-old-white-male coming from a community college in the bay area California region, in his first semester at HSU, explains this phenomenon of faculty reinforcing doubt from his interactions with a professor in the business department who was pushing a particular program at HSU. Joe in the excerpt below depicts the ways that faculty interactions buttress the tension of confidence and doubt saying:

He’s (Business Professor) telling us his background, what he did when he was 20, and then he turned 21, and he kind of said, “They’re not going to hire people over 50,” and I’m thinking, what about over 40? And I thought, O.K. I’m on it.

Joe was then asked a follow-up probe if this interaction was discouraging at all, since Joe described his response as though he was on it, as if he was somehow already behind, or at least close to being behind given his older age. Joe responded to this probe with:

Yeah…it was really discouraging. I mean his class has got me thinking about changing majors.

Through a single interaction with faculty, Joe’s doubt is once again at the fore of his self as a college student due to his older age. As a result of this doubt, Joe begins to question his major, illustrating the significance that faculty interactions have on FGCT student’s self. Furthermore, finding a major, and finding self in a major, is a key component to FGCT students doing academics. Faculty interactions with FGCT students work to
reinforce confidence or doubt depending on the approaches used and perceptions held as a supreme classifier (Bourdieu 1988) in the field of higher education.

Through positive, confidence reinforcing interactions with faculty, FGCT students can (re)build confidence in their sense of self and learn the intimate workings, or habitus, needed for continued success at the university post-transfer. This phenomenon of confidence building through faculty interactions is depicted across the following four participant’s excerpts and exhibit the distinguished role that faculty interactions have towards (re)building confidence in FGCT students.

Alex Sanchez: I feel that I’m able to network more with professors and students across campus. So, now I can have a more efficient conversation with professors about my goals on this campus. And goals after I leave this campus. I feel more confident too.

Cliff Garcia: I had a few professors (at the community college) that…would take me out of their class and be like, Cliff, you’re really smart. You really need to do something with your life. Stuff that I’ve not really heard at all. For the first time ever pretty much! Well, since like elementary school.

Zane Saggehti: The first day I raised my hand, and we were talking about Marx a little bit, and I just wanted to talk about it. So, I raised my hand and clarified some concepts of his, and she (the professor) made a comment, that was really cool. And she said that as a teacher, in front of the class about what I said. It made me feel good. It made me feel like I have something to contribute. You know, like some knowledge to drop on my fellow students. She’s (the professor) given me compliments on my writing skills, um, as other professors have, which makes me feel good, you know. It makes me feel like what I’m doing is good and I’m succeeding, you know.

Jasmine Camacho: I feel like a lot of the professors (at the community college) understand where you’re coming from. But here (at the university) they (the professors) understand that you’re trying to make it through the system (of higher education), and so they’re going to try to help you. They’ll offer lots of help and stuff like that.
Weaving throughout these participant excerpts is a description of the different ways that positive professor interactions at the university function to build confidence in FGCT students. This action of validation in FGCT student’s abilities by faculty of the university helps to (re)build confidence and legitimizes their knowledge, ability, and place in the field of higher education. Through professor’s structural social location in the university and their connections as supreme classifying agents (Bourdieu 1988) legitimizing the process of doing academics, faculty function to bridge the different species of symbolic capital in FGCT students, and (re)build their confidence for their new sense of self emerging.

The Role of Informal University Mentor-Guides

Participants in the research discussed various ways that Informal University Mentor-Guides (IUMG) helped to reveal the habitus of the university, and were needed to help FGCT adapt to this new environment woven into doing academics. Alondra Grossmore discusses her IUMG in the excerpt below, depicting how she showed her how to “work the system.” When asked what “working the system” looked like, Alondra replied:

Like apply to a university, what type of schools I should be looking for, what I should be thinking about in terms of financial aid, and things like that. Like basically people that could help me be successful. If I didn’t have access to the people that can help me be successful in school, I probably would not have made it here. And I feel like that’s still the same today.

Alondra articulates the need for IUMGs to help FGCT students become successful within the academic-toned environment of the university. Alondra doubts if her success thus far
in the field of higher education would be repeated without such a guide. IUMGs help to provide the skills, through knowledge of elite species of cultural and social capital, and that are needed for FGCT students to be successful at the university, not only college. IUMGs may not be present at the community college, due to its distinction held in the field of higher education for remedial and vocational functions, resulting in student placement into skilled-labor occupations, as opposed to careers. Hence, IUMGs assist FGCT students in understanding the intimate workings of the institutional structures of the university, allowing these students the ability to work the system.

Matt Geary also explains his usage of an IUMG through a hometown friend. Matt’s friend completed his bachelor degree at UCLA while working and married with a family. Matt’s IUMG offered him the needed knowledge and understandings of the intimate workings of the university environment to be successful. Matt describes this knowledge by saying he needs to,

make sure I do my readings, make sure I stay on pace with the syllabus. Don’t be like a last minute student, you know. Kind of explaining that you gotta plan your time, last minute stuff just don’t (chuckles) cut it here, you know. So, he gave me like a lot of advice about concentrating on academics and having a goal.

Matt’s IUMG helped to provide him with information about how the environment of the university works in relation to managing your time. These tips for student success may be viewed as assumed college-going knowledge, but for Matt they are something that is learned through his IUMG.

Cliff Garcia also describes accessing IUMGs in his pursuit of a bachelor degree. First, this guide was in the form of a co-worker female met during Cliff’s distasteful time
spent with Americorp in the southern region of the U.S. After herniating discs in his back from prolonged labor with Americorp, regardless of Cliff’s complaints, his IUMG explained to him how her bachelor degree in accounting was going to “make her job easy” and not have to labor. From this comment, Cliff then decided to begin taking classes at the community college. Once transferring and reaching the university, Cliff found a similar IUMG in one of his really good friends he immediately met on campus. Cliff explains this IUMG saying:

> He always tells me study hard, do your homework, get more jobs, try harder. He’s always telling me, don’t be scared to talk to girls, don’t be scared to push your comfort zone. So he’s been sort of a mentor for me.

In having a IUMG that helps Cliff to “push his comfort zone,” it allows Cliff to begin to adapt his sense of self to the new environment of the university, and distinctions learned through this process. Or, put in the words of another participant, Zane Sagghetti, who describes his girlfriend as an IUMG, he explains how she is someone who helps him buckle-down and get focused to have the “clarity of mind to do the school thing.” This clarity of mind comes from an intimate understanding of the field of higher education and the distinction that a bachelor degree holds for accessing this engrained knowledge. IUMGs therefore provide a non-institutional avenue towards helping FGCT students learn the habitus of navigating the field of higher education, and develop a new awareness in their sense of self through this transition process.
NEW AWARENESS OF SELF THROUGH SYMBOLIC CAPITAL

FGCT students define their sense of self in transition to a four-year public university through a narrative rooted in overcoming challenges associated with being the first in their family to do “the college thing” and participate in academics. Participant’s narratives depicted their self in transition through a primary tension from being both similar and different as a college student. At times, participants felt similar to other FGC students at HSU, but simultaneously different by their incoming standing as juniors+, older age, and institutional perception as transfer students. This difference led to a secondary tension of struggling with confidence and doubt as an outside agent to the field of higher education.

Participants in this research explained their new sense of self as different by FGCT student’s ability to persist through unique struggles and challenges across institutions and locations. These unique struggles and challenges create a particular social lens and understanding of the field of higher education with its intersections to the field of power. Alondra Grossmore explains this difference saying:

I feel like, if you’re not a first-generation college student, then I feel like you didn’t go through the same struggles as a first-generation did. Like, you just don’t have the same…understanding.

This unique understanding comes from FGCT students having to struggle with their tensions in self, traverse new cultural worlds from that of their family, and battle notion of being similar and different, maintaining a tension of confidence and doubt. These
elements are at the core of the sense of self (re)formation process for FGCT students, defining their new sense of self as a college student in this difference-positionality.

In crossing the distinction point of a bachelor degree within the field of higher education and society at large, FGCT students cross a boundary of habitus that prompts a (re)formation in their own sense of self. By developing new forms of self-esteem and (re)building confidence through doubt, FGCT students are motivated by the acknowledgment of difference, challenge and struggle as a way to define their sense of self in transition. “A group’s presence or absence in the official classification depends on its capacity to get itself recognized, to get itself noticed and admitted, and so to win a place in the social order” (Bourdieu 1984: 480-481). FGCT students want to be recognized for their unique differences, and win a place for their self in the social order of the U.S. higher education system and college students, as opposed to being pushed into a preexisting institutional category of past perceptions of college students.

The results of their (re)formed sense of self for FGCT students produces a new understanding of life, or a new habitus, once they attain their bachelor degree. Cliff Garcia discusses this understanding by saying,

I’ve been able to use what I’ve learned in these classes (at the university) to help myself improve myself. And that’s kind of the biggest shocker that I had at college. That I was able to improve, or become better. But in a way that…not one of the, college pictures (or movies) ever told me, you know. Like, nobody ever told me that college was going to make me grow, but in a way that, I guess nobody knew.

This growth discussed by Cliff is interpreted as his new sense of self from his bachelor degree attainment. As noted, Cliff explained to me that he is no longer “normal Cliff,”
but rather “what am I going to do with my life Cliff?” In this single sentence, Cliff illustrates his past sense of self, and his newly (re)formed sense of self through the attainment of his bachelor degree and the distinction it affords him. New Cliff, then shares a brief story from his recent experiences of being able to use this new understanding of his self to openly access traditional/elite symbolic capital. He describes this process saying,

Cliff: The other day I was in Oakland (California), in a bookstore full of books that were fascinating. And I could read any of them. And I was next to this really beautiful women that really likes me a lot. And I feel strong and I feel that, before college, that would have never been it, that would have never been in my reality.

Researcher: Did you ever have that at the community college, or is that more kind of the university thing?

Cliff: More of the university thing. See, I had past that bookstore two drives to Humboldt State when I was coming from southern California. And I completely ignored it, like I disregarded it (existed). And then I was like trying to compare to like, Cliff from about to start Humboldt State just regarding books stores, to Cliff from, just about to start community college and couldn’t even fill out an application. And I was like, wow, this is different. This is crazy.

What seemed as crazy or impossible to old Cliff now is the reality for new Cliff who holds a broader understanding of the distinction that a bachelor degree holds, not only in society, but also in one’s self and habitus constructed. Cliff’s new sense of self has journeyed through the field off higher education further than his past habitus, as with many of the FGCT students who approach the silver-lined dream of obtaining a bachelor degree. In doing so, Cliff crosses the boundary of distinction within the field of higher education, and now has open access to both traditional/elite and non-traditional/vulgar species of symbolic capital, or social and cultural capital convertible to economic capital.
Resisting Institutional Student Identity Categories

Within the narratives of participants, was a resistance to a single master institutional identity based on characteristics of race, gender, class, ability, and sexual orientation. FGCT students in this research discussed their perception of experiencing internal dissonance to these institutional-driven identities that limited their self-definition as college students. Being older students, participants felt as though they had cemented their varying identities, knowing who they are as a person, but were experiencing a shift in the sense of self of that person. This experience of internal dissonance often came about when institutionally focused master identities overpowered participant’s conception of their self as a college student from their surrounding environment. Cliff Garcia describes this phenomenon by explaining his confusion with students at the university not understanding the difference in his class-based identity perceived by other students as a race-based identity. Cliff notes this phenomenon saying:

It wasn’t until I got into grad school on like Monday (one week prior to the interview), where people are like, oh yeah, he’s smart. Yeah, a lot of times people think I’m here on a minority scholarship or something like that. Or I only came to school because I’m a minority. And I’m like, nah, I only came to school because I’m like…I don’t get financial aid because I’m a minority, I get financial aid because I’m poor! And I kind of wonder. I mean that’s a big difference.

In his excerpt, Cliff illuminates the lack of understanding embedded in the habitus of traditional students at the university to the importance of difference held in his various identities. What is the product of his class-based identity, receiving financial aid to attend college, is transmitted through the field of higher education to traditional college
student’s habitus as a race-based identity. Cliff explains that there is a big difference between class and race-based identities overlooked by traditional college student’s habitus, and therefore the field of higher education constructing this habitus.

Parallel to Cliff, Alex Sanchez expresses his experiences of resisting institutional student identity categories more directly by stating that outside of his comfortable peer groups composed of FGC and transfer students, he is perceived as “just another Hispanic on campus with fancy brown glasses.” When then probed further by asking what this looks like, Alex responded by saying,

When I say another Hispanic student, just another one of those students…just…getting here, and…I don’t know that’s it.

Anger was present in Alex’s voice when asked about this topic so additional probing was not done. However, Alex’s excerpt in the context of this anger depicts the perception of Latin@ students and their institutional race-based identity connected to their attrition rates at HSU. Just getting to the university does not ensure bachelor degree attainment, or as Alex puts it, just getting here is it; degree attainment is not part of the perception of Latin@ students. These excerpts help to illustrate the ways that the habitus of the university within the field of higher education can limit and restrict different identities of FGCT students. Looking at FGCT student’s sense of self in transition, helps to encompass multiple identities within these agents, and offer a platform of self-definition.

The occurrence of resisting institutional-based identities was not solely present for class-based and race-based difference discussed, but was also depicted through sexuality-based identities, illustrating the role of the university environment as an institutional
pressure on college students’ self-definition. Ethan Hatchworth discusses this phenomenon saying,

You know I feel like, do I need, I’ve never been like a gay-activist. But do I need to be, go to the queer-community center, or do I need to go to the coming out day, and… I feel like almost I don’t relate to the gay guys here sometimes. Um…

In feeling the pressure of the surrounding environment of the university defining his self through a sexuality-based identity, but at the same time not relating to this institutional-based identity, Ethan illustrates the tension of being similar and different as college students at the university. Furthermore, the tentative hesitation phrasing of his excerpt of feeling “like almost” not relating to the gay guys on campus helps to show the secondary tension of confidence and doubt present in this self-perceptions of being similar and different as a college student.

Importance of Acknowledging Difference

The struggle and challenges at the core to the (re)formation of self in FGCT students was revealed in this research through participant’s explanations of having to constantly work hard, and struggle in life to overcome one’s social location and connected lack of understanding to the field of higher education and preferred species of symbolic capital. A motivation and persistence based in pride through life’s challenges of having to constantly struggle, helped FGCT students understand the larger abstract theoretical workings of society, including the differing habitus needed in the field of higher education to be a successful student. Cliff Garcia explains this phenomenon saying,
I understand more ideas then if I had to recite a poem. I probably could not do that (recite a poem). But, I could probably understand a huge idea of, the way society works. But, I can’t really understand, I don’t know why it’s just different.

This difference that Cliff notes is from his own struggles and challenge throughout his life experiences that developed his habitus thus far. His experiential knowledge of society comes from constantly having to work hard to access resources/capital as a marginalized agent, and helps to frame his awareness of symbolic capital in his sense of self through achieving the distinction of a bachelor degree. Therefore, Cliff’s understanding of himself as a college student is framed in overcoming struggle and challenges as he approaches his graduation from HSU. Cliff explains this saying,

I feel alienated because…um…they (Non-FGC students) don’t have to work that hard. Or they’ll probably never have to work that hard.

Cliff shows his self-definition as a FGCT student through his hard work as a comparison to Non-FGC students who do not have to work as hard at the university because of their habitus affording them a predisposition to the field of higher education. This is Cliff’s perception of Non-FGC students and helps to highlight his own self-image as an object of difference in relation to these students, and as a subject who must struggle to access a bachelor degree. Cliff therefore explains his new self (re)formed through narratives of struggle highlighting a tension of being similar as a college student, yet defined institutionally by his difference in relation to other college students.

Because of life’s struggles and challenges present in FGCT student experiences, and their habitus, one can often tell who FGC students are on a campus through a
different orientation to the field of higher education. Alondra Grossmore points this phenomenon out saying,

They (FGC students) work a lot harder than students who aren’t first-generation. Because in a sense they feel like they have something to prove, you know what I mean? For me, I know, I work really hard because I am the only one in my family who went. I mean, cousins, brothers, sisters. I’m the only one who’s in college, and there’s a shit-ton of us (laughs out loud). I feel like we have this appreciation…for college. I feel like we have a much deeper appreciation for education, than the ones (Non-FGC students) who…don’t really need to be here (at the University), and who are only here because their parents said, “Oh, you’re going to college and I’m paying for you to go.”

In Alondra’s excerpt, she exhibited a sense of pride in her voice when she discusses her differences in navigating the field of higher education compared with those who are not the first in their family to do so, by constantly having to work really hard. This hard work is interpreted as involving not only the process of studying and learning in higher education, but also the process of having to learn a new habitus for this field concurrently, and adapt to new species of symbolic capital. This hard work therefore provides FGCT students with a deeper appreciation for navigating the field of higher education, and an understanding of the distinction that a bachelor degree affords them. This distinction is not only for their new sense of self, but also represented as a form of symbolic capital transmittable to their family through FGCT student’s newly adapted habitus.

*The Bachelor Degree as Symbolic Capital for Family*

The distinction held within a bachelor degree, for both society and agents, extends beyond FGCT student’s sense of self providing a representational symbolic capital to
these students’ families as access to preferred species of symbolic capital in U.S. society. This representational value also validates FGCT students’ perceptions and experiences of difference and uniqueness within the field of higher education. Zane Saggehti explains this phenomenon saying,

The idea of a goal for getting a degree and using it to obtain an actual career, that’s something that nobody else in my family has done. Um, they basically just went into the workforce, you know, they just went into the private sectors and did their thing. Um, so, I’m unique in the sense that I…you know, after high school I had a job obviously already, but I started out at Community College with the intention of transferring. You know, with the intention to have it materialize into a bachelor’s degree.

This uniqueness or difference Zane discusses is paramount to ways that FGCT students define their new sense of self in struggle and challenge differently from Non-FGCT or traditional college students. This intersectional group of students across statuses of age, race, gender, class, ability, and sexual orientation, have learned over time to overcome barriers in both their surrounding institutional structures, at the community college and then the university, and their own sense of self. This occurrence results from FGCT students moving through the field of higher education and adapting their differing habitus as they encounter new preferred species of symbolic capital.

The distinction held within the bachelor degree then becomes a symbolic representation of the preferred species of capital in U.S. society, transmittable to one’s family through their own habitus. As Alex Sanchez describes this,

It means regardless of what your parents did…you know that you are doing what they would like you to do, and that you’re doing better than what they’ve done already.
Doing better than one’s family reflects the representational symbolic value that FGCT place on the distinction of a bachelor degree for their own self and to U.S. society. Vince Gomez further explains this representational symbolic value by saying,

Like, I’m going to be the only Gomez, as a male, to be the first guy to have a degree. So it’s like…it’s not about me, it’s about just doing that (getting the degree). And so the generations all after me, my nieces and nephews, they can say, at least he’s got a degree. I think that’s what it’s really about, you know, and how we’re getting there is being defined by being transfer student.

In his excerpt describing the representational value and meaning of his bachelor degree to his family, Vince makes a poignant comment illustrating the tensions in his sense of self from being both similar and different as a FGCT student. He explains this similarity and difference in the ways that FGCT students are institutionally perceived at HSU. To Vince, this is through his status as a transfer student, not necessarily highlighting his struggle and challenges as a FGC student foreign to the culture of higher education.

Transfer-only students at the university have a habitus developed for navigating the field of higher education, but FGCT students do not; yet they are institutional labeled as a transfer student limiting this significant difference in their statuses. The institutional labeling of FGCT students into the transfer student category, most likely due to their older age demographics, pushes their intersectional FGCT student status towards one side of their dual-disadvantage label, that of not being an incoming freshman, not necessarily to that of being a FGC student.

This mislabeling of transfer student for FGCT students maintains more similarity to the habitus of the university in the field of higher education than the difference revealed in FGCT student’s narratives on college experience as the first in their family to
obtain a bachelor degree. Yet, at the core of the narratives discussed across my participants, was an agent navigation process through the field of higher education that was representational for their family as the first to cross the threshold of distinction in this field by obtaining a bachelor degree. These responses from my participants illustrate the emphasis that FGCT students place on being the first in their family to obtain a degree, as opposed to an emphasis placed on being a transfer student beginning their long pathway to this degree at a community college. FGCT understand and accept the struggles and challenges they face in this longitudinal degree attainment process across institutions and identities, and utilize this difference as a way to better understand their tensions of self (re)formation as being similar and different as college students who battle an ongoing process of (re)building confidence amongst doubt instilled structurally by their status differentials as both a transfer and FGC student.
DISCUSSION

With postsecondary education student demographics rapidly changing in the twenty-first century, FGCT students represent a new category of student experiences that is becoming more and more common each day. Better understanding FGCT student’s perceptions of self, and the ways they navigate the field (Bourdieu 1993) of higher education can assist institutions in adapting to changing times. Since FGCT students span across various identities (racial, class, gender, age, ability, etc.) and share the common understanding of both transfer and FGC students, their narrative processes offer insights into the ways that the habitus (Bourdieu 1984) of the university may unintentionally replicate inequality in the field of higher education. This can be viewed numerically with the differential in outcomes of FGC and transfer students in relation to other student categories, but it can also be heard, and having conducted this research I would argue felt, through the narratives of those who experience such forms of structural-constraints first hand, and yet, still embrace their own “nontraditional” capital in their sense of self.

This new student category in postsecondary education, FGCT students, embraces the multi-dimensional characteristics needed for current educational research in today’s fragmented world. FGCT student characteristics should therefore be viewed and depicted in educational research as capital in their own right, discovering the ways that such unique difference can assist social agents in their navigation of institutional structures, working to overcome the replication of distinctions in terms of elite and vulgar, traditional and non-traditional. For without the vulgar or non-traditional capital of Marx,
we cannot overcome the plight of our structural and material era to then embark on new
critical frames of knowledge that push the boundaries of institutional power and social
control, and thus, the paradigms of scientific research.

Institutions, and people in power, rule and maintain inequality in part by hiding or
mystifying the workings of power. Understanding the political economy of higher
education at the beginning of the twenty-first century is about seeing and making
visible the shifts and mystifications of power at a time when global capitalism
reigns supreme” (Mohanty 2003: 171).

This research, and thesis, is my own attempt as an educational researcher to “create
dialogic spaces of dissent and transformation in this institutional climate,” (Mohanty
2003: 185) and perhaps make better-suited pathways to bachelor degree attainment for
FGC and transfer students alike. By revealing the workings of institutional power
involved in FGCT student’s navigation of the field of higher education, I hope to provide
a space in time to demystify the institutional workings of power, and reveal the inequality
of such systems through the lived experiences of social agents striving for mobility in
U.S. society.

Berger and Maloney (2003) cite a greater need in educational research “to learn
more about the experience of students who transfer from community colleges to four-year
universities” (5). Additionally, Flaga (2006) noted that it would be intriguing to capture
the perceptions of nontraditional aged FGC students in her research. Furthermore, Engle,
et al. (2006) identified a need in postsecondary education to ease the transition of FGC
students from high school to community college. Perhaps the same need can be said true
of FGCT students transitioning from community college to the four-year university.

Engle, et al (2006) also found students had more difficulty staying in college than getting
into college, negating some of the emphasis in the last decade placed on precollegiate programs as a method of closing the achievement gap in higher education.

In recent educational research on the lived experiences of FGC students, Jahangir (2010) describes student’s navigation through the field of higher education as being “on the margins of both one’s home and school world” as if existing “in a no man’s land—it is to be nowhere” (537). In this liminal space of neither here nor there, FGCT students, reflect tensions of being similar and different by existing in the home and school worlds, and their associated cultures.

The divided consciousness experience of many first-generation students on campus reflects the necessity for higher education to build bridges between their home and school worlds and to find ways to validate their presence in the academy (Jehangir 2010: 537).

The purposeful intent in this research project was to engage in not only understanding, but also validation, of FGCT students’ experiences by acknowledging the ways they embrace their own “non-traditional” forms of symbolic capital as a means of persistence to degree completion during a time of self in transition. FGCT students juggle multiple roles and identities within their sense of self as they struggle through challenges, both internal and structural, to obtain the distinction that a bachelor degree holds, and the upward mobility it offers.

In this research, I hoped to have provided a critical conversation to evaluate postsecondary education polices, practices, and institutional categories that are intended to benefit historically nontraditional students, may also provide an unexpected antithetical tension of marginalizing these students sense of self by removing their ability
to maintain a platform of self-definition. Therefore, this research is similar to that of Bergerson (2007) “in that it asks how higher education institutions function to reproduce social arrangements” where nontraditional students “are offered less opportunity to succeed. This critical view also focuses on the importance of the lived experience of individuals to illuminate larger issues and questions” (104) in our greater U.S. society. In line with Bergerson’s (2007) critical approach to studying nontraditional students in higher education, my research on FGCT students (re)formation of self, places a focus “on institutional structures, policies, and practices, critically examining how they privilege white, middle class students over those who have been typically underrepresented on campuses” (116) and calls for a change to such policies. Highlighting the difference and similarities of FGCT students helps to reveal the multi-dimensionality of student’s various identities across historically absent student groups, the fluidity of their self in transition, and the significance that such difference affords social agents in understanding the inequalities of contemporary society today.

Stephens, Hamedani, and Destin (2014) recently validated this understanding of discussing the tensions of self as similar and different as a means of statistically eliminating the social-class achievement gap of FGC and non-FGC students. They found that, “First-generation students in the difference-education condition more fully took advantage of college resources and that this behavioral change improved their academic performance” (948). Thus, acknowledging the similarities and difference within postsecondary education student’s backgrounds function as a means of agent empowerment over structural marginalization.
Stephens, et al. (2014) discusses this empowerment in research participants from acknowledging similarity and differences stating the benefits it hold for all college student’s development.

The intervention provided students with the critical insight that people’s different backgrounds matter and that people with backgrounds like theirs can succeed when they use the right kinds of tools and strategies. Because first-generation students tend to experience a particularly difficult transition to college and confront background-specific obstacles that can undermine their opportunity to succeed, this framework for understanding how students’ backgrounds matter is especially beneficial to them. Yet, at the same time, given the intervention’s clear benefits for continuing-generation students’ psychological health and levels of engagement, our results suggest that this difference-education experience holds the potential to ease all student’s transition to college (949).

Stephens, et. al (2014) call for future educational research on college student demographics and achievement gap improvements that focus on how educating college students on their similar and different backgrounds or identities can function to “empower other disadvantaged groups (e.g., women in predominantly male fields) to overcome background-specific obstacles” (951). In my thesis research, I have attempted to highlight the significance of such differences and similarities as provided by FGCT student participants, sharing their own struggles navigating the field of higher education to a bachelor degree.
RECOMMENDATIONS

I. Create a permanent location on campus for older transfer students (24+) to discuss issues of transitioning to a public 4-year university and being a FGC student.
   o Create a new transfer center within the Centers for Academic Excellence as part of campus strategies for Retention and Inclusive Student Success.
     ▪ Discuss study abroad options, communicating with faculty, access to student rights, clubs and organizations with higher older student participation, and community resources based on topics of interest to FGCT student in the first four weeks of every semester.
     ▪ Recruit volunteers from senior FGCT students in their final year at HSU who are willing to provide contact information for incoming FGCT students and act as Informal-University-Mentor Guides (IUMG) helping with their transition on and off campus.
     ▪ Work on strengthening articulation agreements with the top 10 feeder community colleges to HSU.

II. Increase access, outreach, and funding opportunities to EOP.
   o Separate EOP program for incoming freshman and transfer students to provide greater access to EOP for FGCT students who are eligible.
     ▪ Transfer students EOP program should be designed for adult learners (24+) with appropriate adult developmental models.
o Provide work-study options to EOP transfer students within the new Transfer Center to offset funding costs.
  ▪ Work-study should be separate from volunteer IUMGs.

o Create a University Experience course that helps to bridge the transfer student adjustment and address struggles and differences of FGC students. Similar to the First-Year Experience for incoming freshman but more focused to older adult students and upper-division coursework.
  ▪ Use Majors as themes in curriculum if possible.

III. Enhance and Improve Transfer-Student Orientation (i.e. Humboldt Online Orientation Program or HOOP) options offering more than a single mandatory online platform. This is viewed by FGCT students as too bureaucratic and provides a perception of the university not valuing transfer students, or viewing them as a second-class student in relation to incoming freshman.

  o Significant information about the university culture and transfer adjustment process is not being successfully transmitted through HOOP.

  o Offer more activities for Transfer students, providing better communication of events through the Transfer Center.

IV. Provide faculty development workshops on the importance of highlighting difference-education for FGC students as a means of persistence and success, and an institutional strategy to improving overall student performance.

  o Discuss the ways that faculty interaction can create internal issues of confidence and doubt as a tension within FGCT students.


Hauptman, Arthur. 2007. Strategies for Improving Student Success in Postsecondary Education. Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education: Boulder, CO.


postsecondary outcomes of students who transfer from two-year to four-year institutions.” Herndon, Virginia: National Student Clearinghouse. (http://nscresearchcenter.org/signaturereport5/)


Hi <Name>,

(Add intro depending upon the relation to the contact)

I am writing my master’s thesis in sociology on the perspectives of first-generation college transfer students, and I would really appreciate hearing what you have to say, and listening to your own story of transition. I feel that your perspective would be great in helping other transfer students coming into the university, and I would like to offer you the opportunity to share your particular story.

This is totally optional, I just wanted to see if you’d be up for it still. If so, feel free to shoot me an e-mail or give me a call and we can schedule something in the coming weeks.

Thanks for your time, and I hope all is going well.

Peace and Respect,

Taylor Cannon

MA Sociology Student

xxxxx@humboldt.edu

Cell #: (714) xxx-xxxx

P.S. If you know anyone else that may be interested as well, feel free to forward on this email.
Hi <Name>,

I am not sure if you remember me, but my name is Taylor Cannon and I am a graduate student in sociology here at Humboldt State. We spoke briefly at the start of the HOOP Transfer Connect day about the possibility of you participating in an interview on your college process as a transfer student. At that time, you had provided me your contact information to follow-up. I apologize to take 8 weeks to get back to you, but I wanted to allow time for you to get settled here at HSU. I have also been busy myself teaching a freshman course for the first 6 weeks of the semester, which has now finished.

I am writing my master’s thesis on the perspectives of first-generation college transfer students, and I would really appreciate hearing what you have to say, and listening to your own story of transitioning to the university. I feel that your perspective would be great in helping other transfer students coming into the university, and I would like to offer you the opportunity to share your particular story with me.

This is totally optional, I just wanted to see if you’d be up for it still. If so, feel free to shoot me an e-mail or text, or give me a call and we can schedule something in the coming weeks on campus, or even for the later portion of the semester if that is better, whatever works best for you…
Thanks for your time, and I hope all is going well with your transition to HSU.

Peace and Respect,

Taylor Cannon

MA Sociology Student

xxxxx@humboldt.edu

Cell #: (714) xxx-xxxx

P.S. If you know anyone else that may be interested as well, feel free to forward on this email.

C. Participant Consent Form

First Generation College Transfer Student Identity Negotiations and Experiences

Overview

This is a research study about the experiences involved in the transitions and reformations of identity processes within first generation transfer students. The research will look broadly at how first generation transfer students negotiate their sense of self in the transition from a community college to a four-year university in pursuit of a bachelor’s degree. Specifically, I will focus on the ways in which first generation transfer college students adopt new identity practices that aid in their adjustment process and
success at a four-year university. Taylor Cannon, a graduate student at Humboldt State University, developed this study. I may contact the researcher at xxxxx@humboldt.edu or (714) xxx-xxxx if desired.

**Participant Role**

My part in this study involves participating in a recorded interview ranging from 30 minutes to 1 hour in length. We will meet in a mutually agreed upon space in a public setting that offers privacy for our conversation. During this interview, I will answer questions about my education, family, and peer backgrounds, as well as my personal experiences in college and perceptions of myself.

**Risks and Benefits**

I understand there are minimal risks associated with my participation in this project: Often talking about topics and events important to us creates strong emotional responses and related stress. Yet, I also understand that these same responses to our conversation may offer benefits: Often talking with someone about important events provides a way to process the experiences and make sense of events in life. These benefits assist in understanding the identity process of first generation transfer college students specifically and add to the expanding literature on addressing the changing demographics of higher education student body.

**Voluntary Participation**
I understand that the interviewer will answer at any time any questions I may have concerning the study or the procedures used in the study. I also understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary. I may decline to enter this study or decline to answer particular questions for any reason. I may also withdraw from the study at any time without jeopardy. I also understand that the researcher may end our interview or my participation in this study at any time.

Confidentiality

My individual privacy will be maintained in all written materials resulting from this study. All references to my real name, as well as any other real names captured in the interview recording, will be assigned pseudonyms in any transcriptions and other written materials generated from those recordings. Recordings will be destroyed within 30 days of transcription. Records linking pseudonyms with real names will be kept in a secure location. This consent form will be kept for 5 years after study completion in a designated and locked file drawer controlled by the Department of Sociology.

Concerns

I understand that Taylor Cannon will answer any questions I may have concerning the investigation or the procedures at any time. I also understand that my participation in any study is entirely voluntary and that I may decline to enter this study or may withdraw from it at any time without jeopardy. I understand that the investigator may terminate my participation in the study at any time.
If you have any concerns regarding this project, or any dissatisfaction with any part of this study, you may contact the IRB Chair, Dr. Ethan Gahtan, at eg51@humboldt.edu or (707) 826-4545.

If you have questions regarding your rights as a participant, you may report them to the IRB Institutional Official at Humboldt State University, Dr. Rhea Williamson, at Rhea.Williamson@humboldt.edu or (707) 826-5169.

I understand the above and in signing below provide my consent to participate.

____________________________                                    _____________
Signature of participant                                                       Date

One copy of this consent form will be left with the participant.

D. Semi-Structured Interview Guide

First Generation College Transfer Student Experiences

Opener:

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself? READ VERBATIUM TO ALL PARTICIPANTS
Probes: student, age, college attending, major, occupation goals.

a. Follow-up Questions:

How old are you?

Where are you currently attending college?

What are you currently, or do you plan to, study/major in?

What do you see as your future occupation?

Rapport:

2. Are you originally from this area?

a. Follow-up Question: Where would you say you grew up?

Transition: Let’s talk a little bit more about your college experience…

3. How long have you been in college, including community college as well?

Key Questions:

4. Where did you initially begin attending college?

5. Can you tell me what you liked and did not like about that environment?
Probes: Teachers, Students, Belonging, Place, Acceptance of opinions/values/belief, ease of work, Friends and Peers.

6. How would you describe the students at that college in relation to yourself?

7. 
   a. **Follow-up Question:** Did you feel comfortable around the student body?
   
   b. **Follow-up Question:** Would you call these folks your close friends? How come?
   
   c. **Follow-up Question:** Do you ever feel like an “outsider” around these folks?

**Probe:** Can you elaborate on what it means to be “outside?”

8. How would you describe yourself as an initial student at college?

   a. **Follow-up Question:** How do you think other students at college would describe you as an initial student?
b. **Follow-up Question:** How would the professors describe you as an initial student?

c. **Follow-up Question:** How do you think your friends outside of college would describe you?

9. How did you feel when you transferred to the university?

   a. **Follow-up Question:** Did anything change for you on how you saw college previously?

   b. **Follow-up Question:** What did you like and dislike about your new college environment?

**PROBE:** LISTEN TO IDENTIFY THE KEY ELEMENTS IN THEIR PROCESS OF TRANSITION FOR PROBING. THESE ELEMENTS AND CONCEPTS WILL BE DEVELOPED BY THE RESPONDENTS.

10. How do you feel the university did or did not assist you once you arrived?

   a. **Follow-up Question:** Were any services provided to help you with school or work?
b. **Follow-up Question:** Were any classes recommended to you?

**PROBES BELOW: SELF-IMAGE, ACADEMIC, SOCIAL, ROLES,**

11. How would you describe yourself as a student at the university?

12. How do you think your fellow students would describe you at the university?

13. How do you think your professors would describe you as a student at the university?

**Transition:** I am interested in some information about your family as well to help me understand your college experience…

14. How would you describe your family?

**Probes:** Large, small, close, distant, “get together on holidays” only?

15. How does your family feel about you attending college?
a. **Follow-up Question:** How has this affected your view of college?

16. Who has attended college that is close with your family, or someone you would consider family even though they are not related by blood?

   a. **Follow-up Question:** How do you think these people have affected your college experience?

17. Other than the “family” we have discussed, who or where else do you turn to for information or advice about college?

**Transition:** I am interested in some information about your friends (peers) as well to help me understand your college experience…

18. How would you describe your friends?

**Probes:** Students, working, near campus, back home.

19. What do your friends think about your attending college?

   a. **Follow-up Question:** How has this affected your own view of college?
20. How do you think your friends outside of college would describe you when you were at community college?

Probe: Self-Image, Academic, Social, Roles, etc.

21. How do you think your friends outside of college would describe you at the university?

Probe: Self-Image, Academic, Social, Roles, etc.

   a. Follow-up Question: How do you think these people have affected your college experience?

ADD – IN OPTIONS

How did you feel about other students who are not first-generation students?

How do you feel about other students who are not Transfer students?

Do you ever feel like an imposter at college? How is this? Meaning?

Closing: READ VERBATIUM TO ALL PARTICIPANTS

22. Is there anything else that we have not discussed that you would like to share about your college experiences?

Is there anything that you feel I missed in the questions that were asked?
If so, what questions do you think would be beneficial in understanding first-generation transfer students?

Post Interview Notes/Themes:

**E. Complete Transfer and FGC Participant’s Description & Major Tables**

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<th>FGC STATUS</th>
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**MAJOR** | **#** | **COLLEGE**                  
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Sociology | 8 | Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences  
Business | 2 | Professional Studies  
History | 1 | Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences  
International Studies | 1 | Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences  
*Anthropology | 1 | Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences  
*Theater/Film | 1 | Professional Studies  
Social Work | 1 | Professional Studies  
Wildlife | 1 | Natural Resources & Sciences  

*Included as double major