

AS I SEE IT:

FIRST GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS & PHOTO NARRATIVES

**Office of Equity and Diversity: Data Deep Dive
National First Generation College Students Day**


**University of Minnesota, Twin-Cities
Friday Nov 8, 2019**

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-Signe Wilkinson



At home I could never get myself to talk about books or ideas that never intersected with the lives of my mother, brother, and cousins and extended family. To talk about my studies seemed ridiculous and stuck up at best in a context that seemed as mistrustful of academia as academia was condescending of it.

Leste-Law (1995)

In This Fine Place so Far from Home

FG STUDENTS: A SNAPSHOT

- ❑ FG students comprise one-third of today's college undergraduate population (Cataldi, Bennett, & Chen, 2018; Skomsvold, 2015)
- ❑ 29% of Minnesota undergraduates were FG in 2018, up from 26% in 2006 (attributed to increasing enrollment in refugee and immigrant communities) (Minnesota Office of Higher Education, 2018)
- ❑ FG students are disproportionately poor and working class (50.3%), female (60.2%), and students of color (42% of black students and 48% of Hispanic students were FG students, compared to 28% of white students) (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018)
- ❑ FG students tend to be older than their peers and were more likely to have dependents (The Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2018)
- ❑ English is not a first language for nearly 20% of FG students (The Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2018)
- ❑ The attrition rate of FG college students within three years is 33%, compared to 14% attrition rate for continuing generation (CG) students (Cataldi, Bennett, & Chen, 2018)
- ❑ Only 11% of low-income, FG college students will have a college degree within six years of enrollment, compared to 55% of their more advantaged peers who were not low-income or FG students (The Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2018)

The literature, the language, the narrative

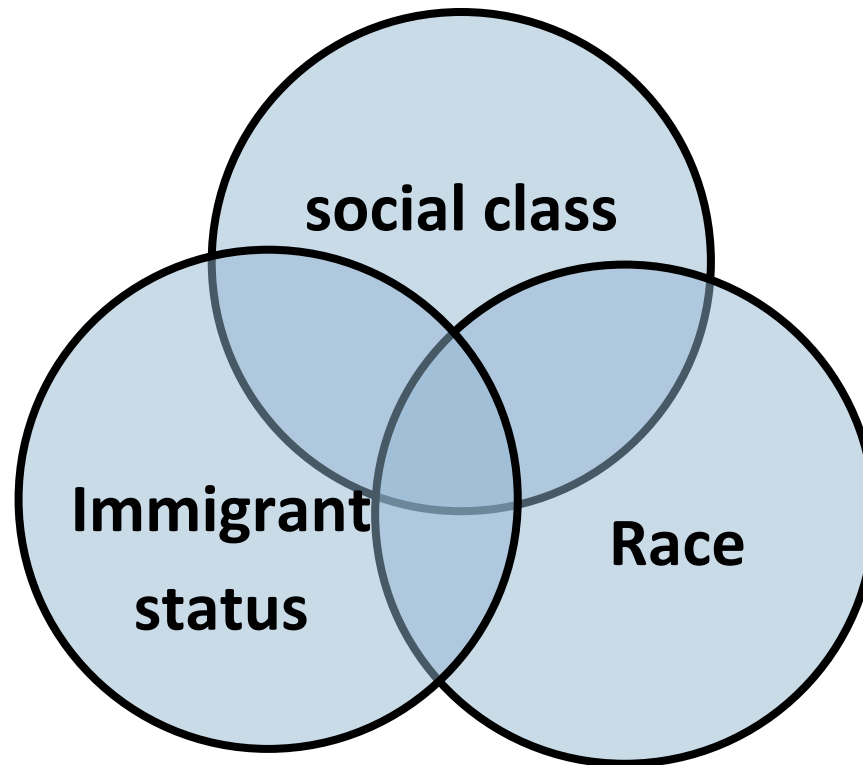
The primary reason that most students did not try to develop a rapport with their professors or class speakers outside of class or register with the career center was **lack of knowledge**. They were simply unaware of how such actions enabled access to social capital resources that could help their career trajectories" (Parks-Yancy, 2012, p. 519).

"Thus, the literature on first-generation college students paints a picture of these students as **lacking in both personal skills and social supports** that could contribute to positive academic outcomes in college" (Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005, p. 223).

"Students who were high in conscientiousness and agreeableness positively accepted direction from adults and utilized tutorial services more frequently. For that reason, **at-risk students who are conscientious and agreeable** tend to be retained and achieve higher college GPAs" (Laskey & Hetzel, 2011, p. 38).

"As researchers have repeatedly demonstrated, **first-generation students lack motivation and lack directions at home and within the postsecondary educational systems...**Overcoming intimidation and obstacles are skills that first-generation students lack but must learn in order to survive in college" (Petty, 2014, p. 257).

INTERSECTING IDENTITIES



INTERSECTIONALITY & POWER

“The way we imagine discrimination or disempowerment often is more complicated for people who are subjected to multiple forms of exclusion... The good news is that intersectionality **provides us a way to see it**” Crenshaw, (2017)

“To consider the first-gen experience through an intersectional lenses is to see that “ race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age operate not as unitary, mutually exclusive entities, but as reciprocally constructing phenomena that in turn shape complex social inequalities” (Collins, 2015, p. 2)

DEFINING PHOTO-VOICE

Photovoice is a form of participatory action research where participants or community members ‘visually document their social landscape through photography and reflect on their photographs to produce personal narrative’ (Allen 2012, p. 443)

Participatory Action Research : interdisciplinary ontologies including interpretivism, feminist and gender studies, documentary film and photography, and street art (Hergenrather et al., 2009)

Engages participants in the research process by providing an opportunity to address and explore an issue or community concern through the process of photo documentation (Hergenrather, Rhodes, Cowan, Bardhoshi, & Pula, 2009)

Relocates the power to the participant, encouraging them to “share knowledge about personal and community issues, and develop and host a forum for the presentation of their lived experiences and priorities through self-identified images, language, and context” (Hergenrather et al., 2009, p. 687)

Demographics

28 student participants, all TRIO members and students in the *Introduction to TRIO: Identity, Culture, and College Success* course

86% of the participants were from a low-income household and were Pell grant eligible

46% of participants identified as students of Asian descent,

25% of the participants identified as Hispanic,

21% identified as Black

7% identified as multiracial

The majority of participants identified as female (82%), which reflects the overall gender proportions of the TRIO program

Approximately 53% of the students identified as immigrants (including 32% Asian, 10% Hispanic, and 10% Black students)

86% of participants spoke a language other than English at home, with an estimated 28% of the pool speaking Spanish, and 25% speaking Hmong

PHOTOS AS TRUTH?

Photographs furnish evidence. Something we hear about, but doubt, seems proven when we're shown a photograph of it. In one version of its utility, the camera record incriminates.

Susan Sontag, excerpt from the introduction to
On Photography

National Geographic looks back- 2018

National Geographic decided to take a hard look at its' own history--

What John Edwin Mason found was a long tradition of racism in the magazine's coverage: in its text, its choice of subjects, **and in its famed photography.**

"The photography, like the articles, didn't simply emphasize difference, but made difference ... very exotic, very strange, and put difference into a hierarchy... And that hierarchy was very clear: that the West, and especially the English-speaking world, was at the top of the hierarchy. And black and brown people were somewhere underneath."

The role of the photographer & viewer

The photo and HOW it is framed shapes the lens, perspective and story in the photo

What is chosen?

What photos are on the front page of the paper?

Who chose them— what were their intentions?

Why (photo) narratives?



The story is concrete, particular, embedded in space and time. In stories we tell, as we cannot using abstraction, who we are, whence we came from, and whither we are going. Stories are about *this* woman, *this* university rather than others” Davies, p. 39

Source: Davies, G. (1991) The influence of public policy on the quality of higher education institutions of higher education”

Counter-narratives and currency

“The use of photographs is communicative currency that today’s generation of students are facile in using, sharing and deriving meaning from”

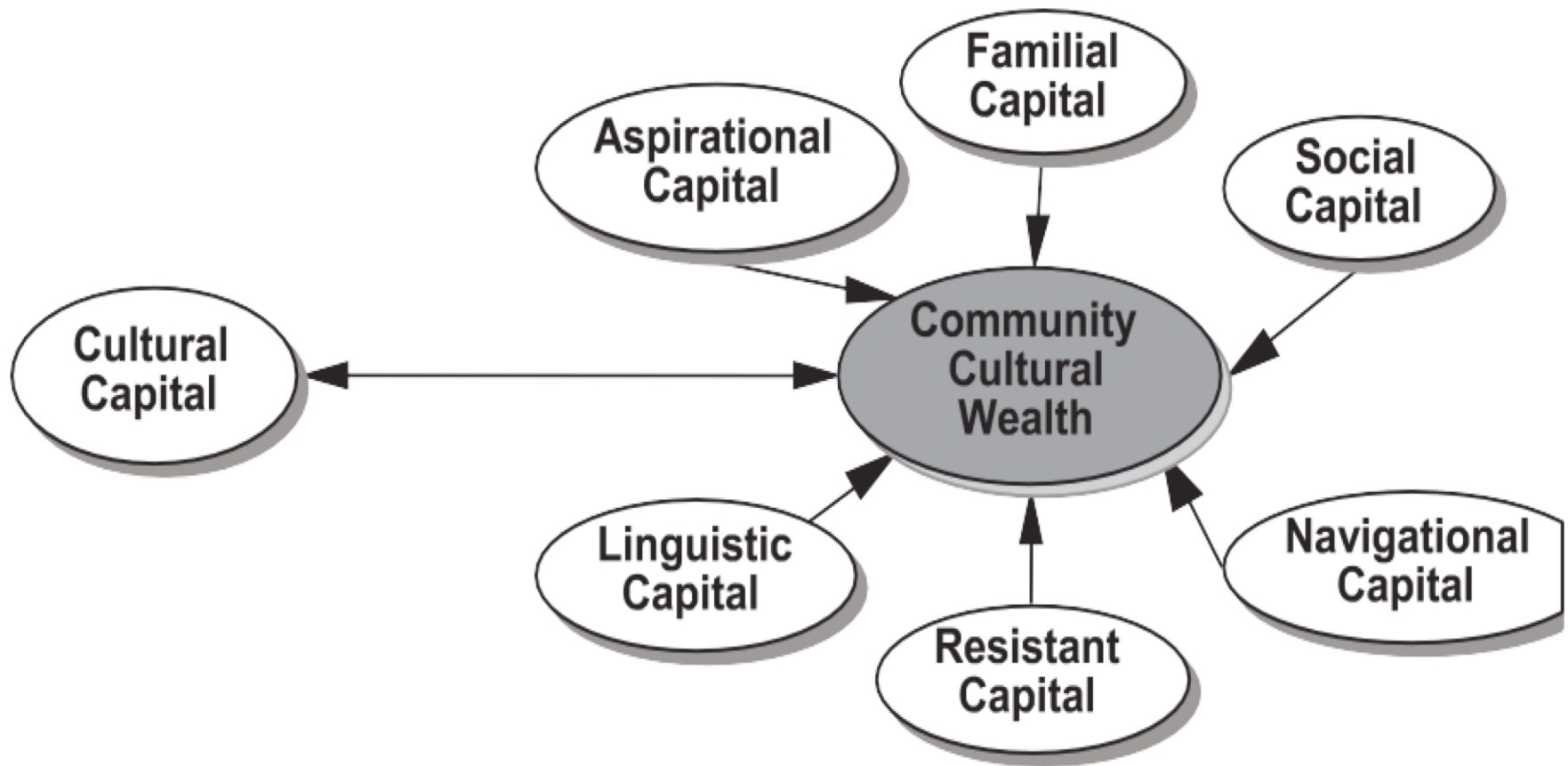
Students in front of and behind the lens provides
“counter-narratives-- evidence from students by students about the way they make meaning of their identities and what we can learn from them”

Source: Jehangir& Deenanath, p. 166, 2018



Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005)

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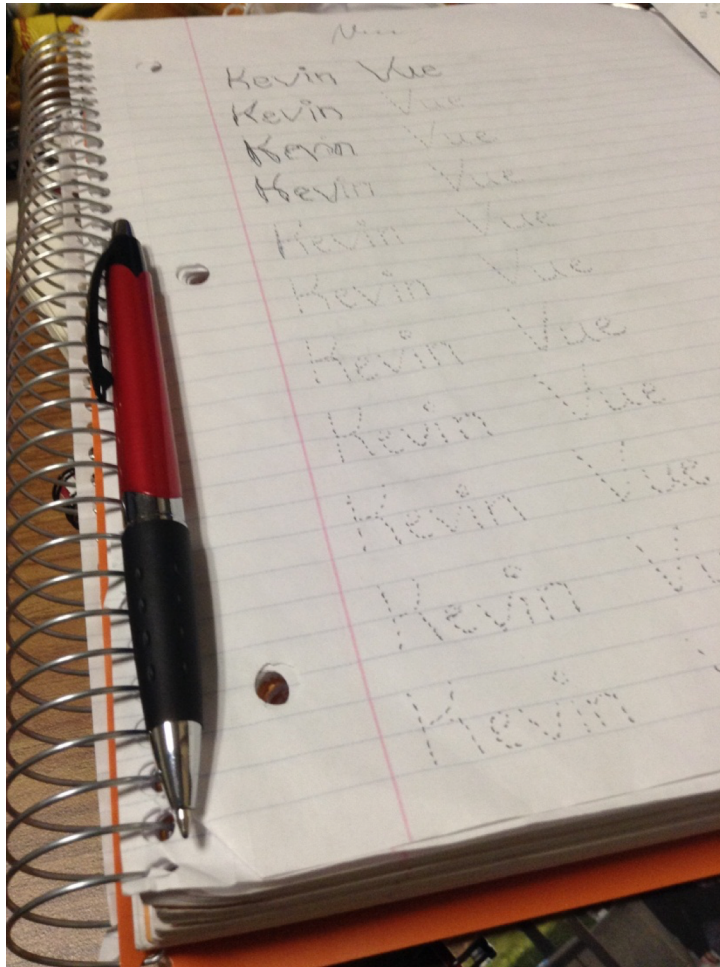


Use reflection sheet to enjoy the gallery



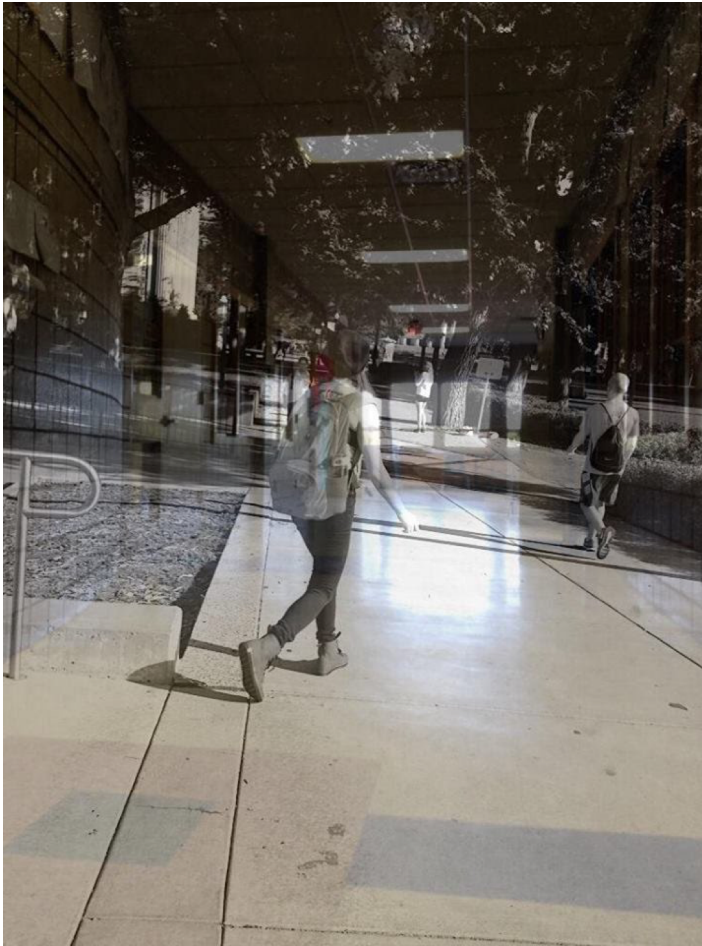
We only **see** what we look at.
To look is an act of choice

john berger



This identity of being a good brother leads me toward a vocational identity that I later want to be. I not only want to impact my little brother's life but other children's too. I want to teach them what I have.

Becoming a teacher who teaches kindergarten was dream that I never thought of before. I was always looking into engineering and arts because I am good at math and drawing. Those two field were the only ones that I thought of when I think of pursuing a major. I never thought of becoming a teacher at all; not until my little brother came into my life.



For some other students this could be the opposite. From my own experienced I have learned that sometimes the path you have chosen would not stay with you at last. I have not yet decided whether or not I want to pursue a psychology major. There are so many things to explore before I find my own path, for now I stay on the path of the unknown getting to know the world around me better.



When I thought about this project I decided to take pictures of all this hard working persons who work really hard for their dreams and the ones they love. I decided to take pictures these images during their daily activities/jobs. When I looked at my final picture I felt motivation of those working really hard at their jobs because they want to see their dreams and goals coming true.



For a campus that promotes diversity, usually what I see on a day-to-day basis is this picture that I took. This image makes me feel out of place and makes me long for a sense of belonging. Growing up as a person of color your forced to experience things differently and in my opinion, you have to get used to the stares and being unique and undoubtedly different.

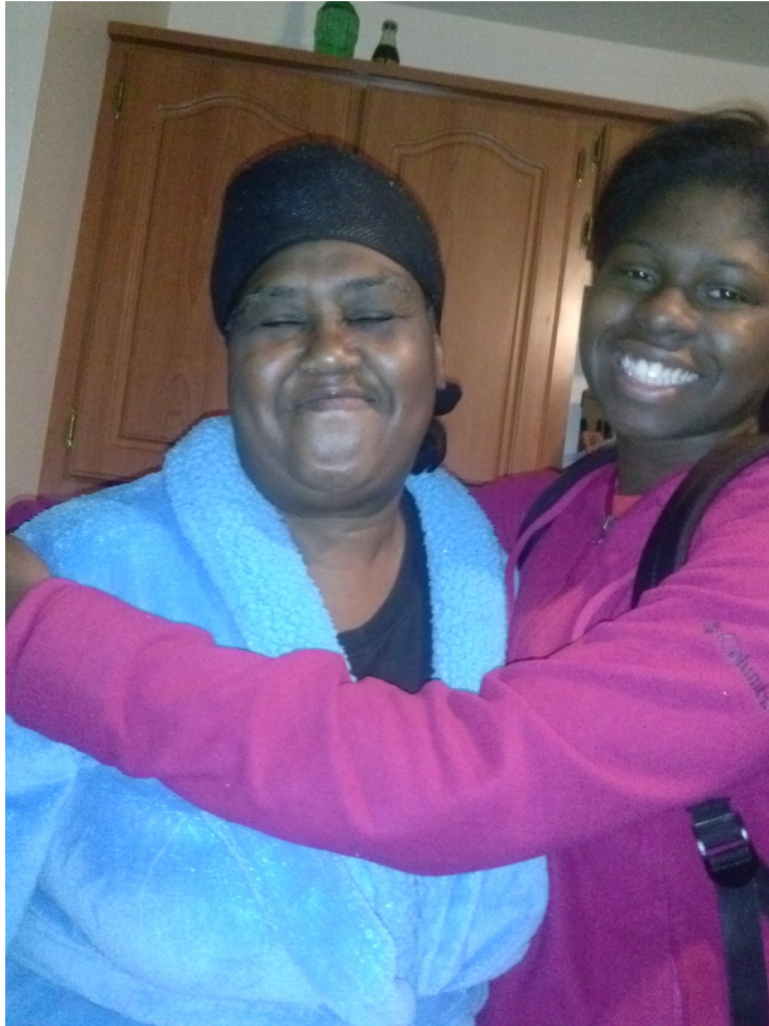
I want this image to tell others that although we have certain clubs and organizations that offer students to be in a more multicultural atmosphere than others, I believe our university still has a lot we can improve.



This is the bridge that I crossed everyday my first and second year of college. Whether you are living at Sanford or parking in Dinkytown you quickly learn that this bridge is the fastest way to get onto the East Bank campus. This bridge was not only a “thing” that I crossed everyday to go to class, but it was also a symbol of how I felt on a daily basis. Everyday I felt as though I was in limbo balancing between two worlds (school and home) that want the best for me, but know nothing of each other. At school I did not feel connected to my peers because of the way I spoke and where I came from. Yet on the other hand at home I also felt out of place because no one understood why school was stressful. No matter where I was standing on that foot bridge the outcome was the same; the closer I got to one side the further the other side got. But I found, that the sooner you get comfortable with that ambiguity, the sooner you begin to enjoy the ride. - Irene



This is a picture of my mom and I just weeks after I started college, and truth be told it is my favorite picture of us. Growing up my mother and I did not have the best relationship due to the fact that she was always working, and when she was around I still felt like she wasn't there. I felt this because she never understood what was going on internally within me in regards to social and academic contexts. Eventually with time this created tension and explosive arguments between us, because she had not realized that her baby had started to grow up without her there. Once I started college my mother realized that I was no longer a child, and in fact a growing adult who was ready to take her next big steps. Slowly but surely she has started to accept, respect, and trust my decision-making skills and this has helped our relationship grow. I know it has been hard for her to see her little girl grow wings, but the fact of the matter is that I still need her help and this is the reason that I cherish this photo. In this photo I am still under her "wing", but at the same time I am standing at a distance where I can still see and explore who I want to be. - Irene



My granny is my heart and soul. She and my grandpa raised me as their very own. My granny has taught me many things, such as the value and importance of education. My grandma was a woman who grew up in a time where she was not given the privilege of education. She and her oldest brother alternated days in which they could attend school. Times have changed and I am blessed with the leverage to attend school and become the person I want to be in spite of the discrimination my granny had experienced. Sydney



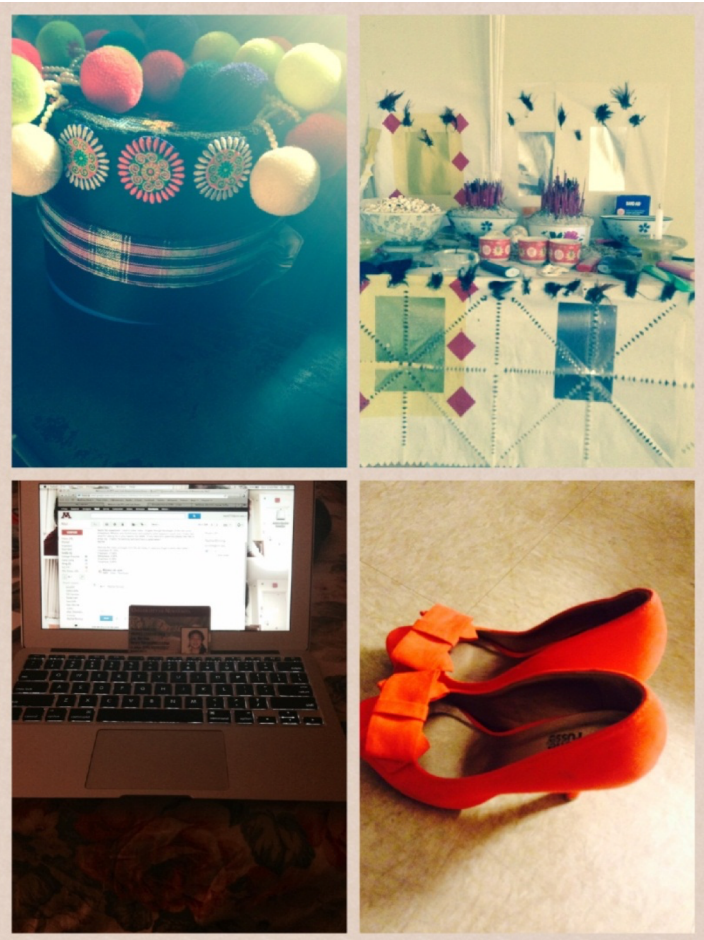
My top three identities are my race, class, and religion. If anyone comes to ask me about my identity, I would just simply tell him or her that I am Cambodian with my confident voice. As a Cambodian, my race has shape my social class and my religion. In addition, it shape who I am today as a person.



When I look in the mirror, I see an African American and Native American girl. I see a daughter of Dede and Willie Johnson, and sister of Martez Johnson. However, that's not all that makes me who I am today. I'm a University of Minnesota Freshman, a State Business Professionals of America Historian, a first generation college student, a dedicated and committed worker, and many other things that goes beyond what may lie visual to the human eye. The two identical pictures are there to show representation that I'm two people



People look at an individual and automatically assume that one is white, or black, or muslim, american, or hispanic and don't take the time to actually find out anything about the person. As a student here at the University, I've been asked "what language do you speak besides english?", "How long have you been in America?", and even "What are you?". It is these types of questions that gives me an opportunity to explain myself and create a different identity than the first judgement or thought one might assume about me. As we learned in class, diversity leads to a better well-rounded campus. It gives teachers experience and students knowledge. However if people are closed only to their intuitions then it's a hopeless cause. I feel this picture is a good example of the diversity that lies within this campus.



The class were doing activities in class, the activities was to put sticker on poster that is closer to our identities. A portion of students choose on religion, as I observed it appeared to be a little sad because religion had been a big part of me, and I wanted to tell how religion has been a big part in my life through my photo. For me there were four parts of my identities that tell me who I am where I came from. Some parts of this identities was traced back as far to when I wasn't even born yet. Those four parts of my identities are a Hmong traditional head wrap, a shaman ritual table, my Ucard, and last but not least a pair of high heel.



The upper flower resemble of an upper social class and the bottom flower resemble the lower social class. The colors of the flower are so different from one another, the upper flower is bright red and lively, beautiful and attractive while the flower in the bottom is old and about to die. This particular image that I take resemble my own social class and also the different between my social class and those of others.



My tree makes me feel spiritual and as a whole; it makes me feel great because even with all my multiple identities such as a first generation student, the oldest child, and a worker I still can balance myself. The roots of the tree represent how my granny raised me to be a strong person with a tough exterior just like the wood on a tree. When I look at my image I feel sort of spiritual because it truly reflects how I view my social class and my identity. It reflects how by me having all these different branches that represents all of my multiple identities makes me a whole person because all the branches are connected to one tree which represents me as a strong black woman.

- Sydney



My stepdad is a construction worker and he works in a refinery by my house and I really missed him when I came here. It was very far away from home, I always thought it was him, like he was there, or thinking he was there, and I could always go by and say hi. He is a really hard worker, sometimes I wish he was here building the bridge right here at the U of M. I feel like, the construction every day was different, there was something else added to it. I always like to see what's going on... that is the main thing that struck me with the university. Every day I would walk there and see something else change. Usually when I walked I would think of all the things I am learning, the things the teacher was saying, the things I am reading and the things I went through being an immigrant, being a person that wants to do something. I want to work hard, my desire is to find something that I really like and enjoy and I can benefit other people too. - Fabiana



As a child I always have felt like I was capable of accomplishing my wildest dreams and goals, but now as a young adult I question my dreams of going into STEM fields because I am a first generation student. I feel as though my future is not as crystal clear as other students with a history of prestigious jobs. I have taken a picture to reflect how I feel about coming into college.



Every morning as I wake up I cannot help but stare in the mirror and ask myself, why am I here? Looking around my dorm, I see books and notes leftover from a late study session and there in the middle of my dorm is the mirror; the mirror that I stare at each day as I put my make up on. Is this what people see as I walk around campus, a Hispanic female? Then the stereotypes hit me, which every Latina college student has heard. Maybe she works on campus, probably McDonalds or maybe she's lost? This awkward sense of not belonging lingers through my thoughts every day. I'll try to avoid by conforming into society, even if that means not speaking my native language.



This is a photo of my grandmother. She was someone who took care of me as a child. Even though she had Alzheimer's, she always remembered me. After losing my grandma I realized she never received the help needed. She lost her memories and daily lifestyle skills. She wasn't able to do things around the house by herself. While my grandma was going through this phase she never received the help to regain her daily lifestyle skills.

I also realized this after I started working at a senior home as a dietary aid. While working at the senior home I was introduced to therapy. That's when I started learning about Occupational Therapy. I then realized I wanted to pursue a career as an Occupational Therapist.

- Va



My image is showing stairs to a door. Steps can mean anything like a ladder step, stepping stone, stairs, and even social status. How can steps be connected to social status? I think social status is a step ladder where the people at the bottom are not educated and poor, and the top is where the rich and well educated people are.

- Houa



Every morning I got off the city bus and walked from the West Bank Campus to the East Bank Campus where all of my classes are. While walking I would always keep my head up and look straight forward, where I told myself, once I reach the end of the bridge I will have the opportunities to gain the skills to help me to become successful in life. The bridge represents the connection between me and my dream.

- Sunny



I learn from my bike. I go everywhere with my bike. I see it as something that will take me far. I have explored new routes and had rough patches but I have overcome through biking and releasing my stress. Family plays a role in my identity. Without them I wouldn't have a bike to get where I need to go. I wouldn't have this sense of independence. Sure it may just be a bike and not a car, but I don't mind because they have given me as much as they can. Without their influence and desire for me to do well in school, I wouldn't be biking to school or work.

- Nou



Walking down to the CEHD building, I saw a beautiful scenery that I just had to take a picture of. It is a picture of downtown, Minneapolis. The focal point of the photo is the gate in the very front. I see this as a metaphorical block that separates my social class to what looks like a prosperous and wonderful life. This image makes me feel weak and vulnerable, but it does not mean it does not fill me with hope that I will one day be living a life like those in far away beautiful buildings.

- Eve



The shoes represent two things: the one at the back represents all the steps that I went through to get here, like pushing myself to take advanced courses and getting involved, although a part of me was scared of failure. The other shoe represents my journey as a first year college student. It shows my college identity- stepping towards success. I have a great desire to succeed in life. I m excited to be here because I believe it is my time to succeed. However, there is a part of me that is scared of failing. I



I have chosen a picture of people from different ethnic backgrounds holding hands to help the viewer think about racial diversity. This photo is supposed to represent some of the different cultures at the University of Minnesota, and how ethnic background does not have an effect on how we treat one another. This picture makes me happy because it shows that we do not let the color of our skin affect how we view and treat one another.



Gardening reminds me of how far my family has come. My parents and family all lived by gardening in Laos, and now that tradition has been passed over to the US. I grew up in public housing and went gardening because there wasn't enough Food Stamps to be passed around for our large family of nine. I didn't realize how poor we were as a kid, but as I became more involved with the finances and helping my mom write checks, I saw that we were part of the 37 million who lived in poverty. The mix of nature with machine represents the two identities that I have within my social class. I have my past identity as a lower income person living within the cornfields and now as a middle class person who uses technology and living in the

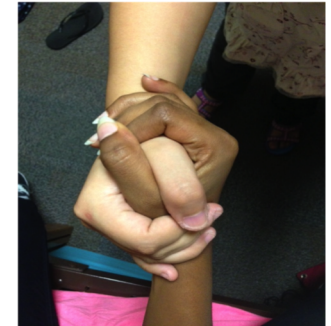
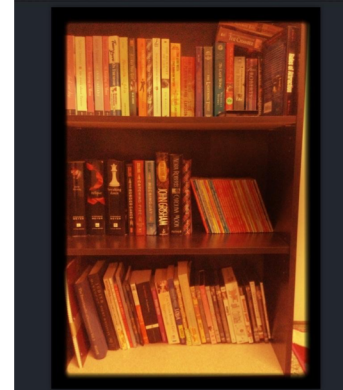
DIVERSITY

Harmony

Access

Belonging in culturally
validating spaces

Critical multiculturalism



MULTIPLE IDENTITIES

Negotiating multiple identities is process oriented

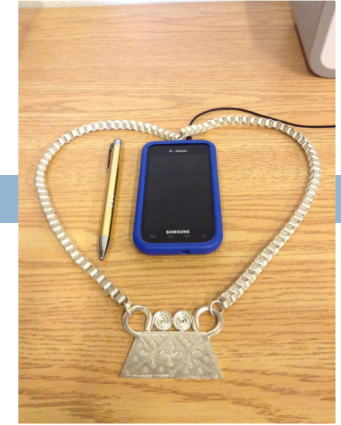
Centrality of race

Naming

Claiming

Relational identities (roles in family/community, gender roles)

Rootedness (pride in nationality/ethnicity; immigrant/refugee; religion/culture)

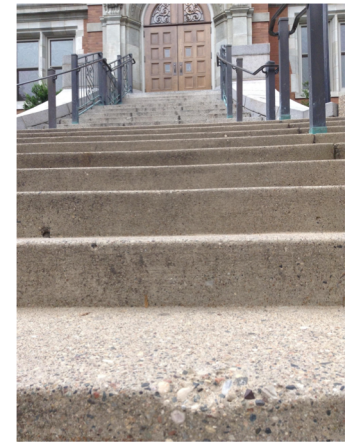
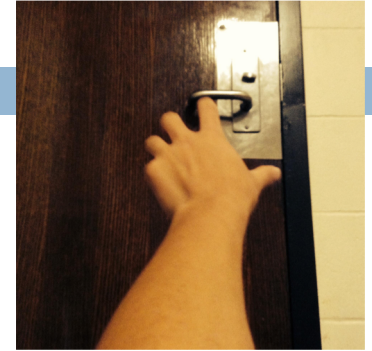


SOCIAL CLASS

Broken American
Dream

Honoring Family
Sacrifice

Lifting Generations



VOCATIONAL IDENTITIES

Envisioning a future

Embracing ambiguity
Visualizing and capitalizing on career

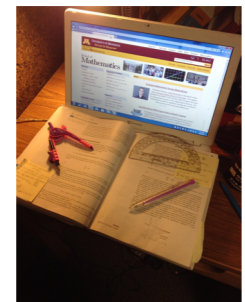



Competing motivations:

Intrinsic (joy, meaning, lived experience)
extrinsic (making parents proud, status, financial support) motivators



Being an agent of change:





Stories are habitations. We live in and through stories. They conjure worlds. We do not know the world other than as story world. Stories inform life. They hold us together and keep us apart. We inhabit the great stories of our culture. We live through stories. We are *lived* by the stories of our race and place. We are, each of us, locations where the stories of our place and time become partially tellable” (Mairs, 1998)

Practice your practice

Be contextual about your practice (questions, climate, campus issues)

Expectations: both explicit and implicit

Using **lived experience** as knowledge/ capital

Be open to collaboration and intentional supervision

Destabilize diversity discourses on campus (go beyond demography and development, center intersectionality and reflexivity)

Recognize shifting identity salience and fluidity

Seek an understanding of how students experience and embody diverse identities themselves (students are resisting being defined by spaces and programs of racial or cultural homogeneity, and are seeking the ability to articulate and cultivate a self-authorship around diversity)

Embrace new methods/approaches to assessing diversity within higher education (less focus on campus climate studies and diversity recruitment, more emphasis on student stories, perspectives, and experiences)

Closing reflection: Implications for practice

1. How has engaging with this photographs informed, reinforced, or challenged your understanding of experience of students who are first in their family to go to college? Any themes that have emerged?
1. How does their experience intersect with the work you are doing in your unit or program?
1. Brainstorm some ways in which this exhibit could inform policies, practice in your unit or your role as a student affairs practitioner?

TO CREATE AND SUSTAIN REAL ACCESS WE NEED TO MOVE POLICY (AND PRACTICE) AND IT'S ARCHITECTS TO DEFINE THE "COMMON GOOD" ABOVE AND BEYOND THE GOOD OF THOSE WITH WHOM THEY ARE MOST FAMILIAR AND COMFORTABLE.

