

Relational Dialectics Theory

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Study: “Understanding the first-generation student experience in higher education through a relational dialectic perspective”

- better understand first-generation college students’ experiences
 - have internal/external conflicts that result from being a part of a campus community
 - EX: Students may personally struggle due to a desire to maintain their cultural identity and working class, blue-collar reputation. At the same time, they also want to assimilate into the campus culture and fit in with their peers.
- This study aims to explore these internal/external conflicts by speaking with first-generation college students in dyads about specific experiences that they have had.
- This study hopes that colleges will be able to offer better support to these students.
 - First-generation college students face unique challenges, and colleges are poorly equipped to handle these challenges
 - EX. the study cites a lack of support, being underprepared academically, and financial hardship, among other factors.
- Argues many colleges offer support programs (SNC has one such group called “STAR”), these groups can have the opposite intention and create even stronger feelings of isolation and nonconformity.

Relational Dialectics Theory

- Centered on tension in a relationship between two opposing wants, ideas, or worldviews
 - Each of these wants, ideas, or worldviews struggles for dominance over the other.
 - Despite the constant tension and struggle within the relationship, the relationship is maintained and perhaps even strengthened
- This study utilizes relational dialectics theory by looking at the constant tension that exists within first-generation college students
 - These students have the desire to maintain their cultural and ethnic identities, but they also have the desire to succeed academically and fit in with other students, both academically and socially

Bob vs Helen Apply RDT

With a partner or group answer the following:

- Identify the conflicting interests



Research Questions

- RQ1: Do FGS experience internal intraindividual dialectical tensions within the collegiate setting? If so, how do students navigate them?
- RQ2: Do FGS experience external intergroup dialectical tensions within the collegiate setting? If so, how do students navigate them?

Article Type and Participants

- Seeks to discover the unique ventures of first-generation college students and to describe them
 - Qualitative
 - Personal experiences include first-generation students comparing their blue-collar upbringing to the collegiate intergroup.
- Analysis of the data, thematic analysis was utilized and emergent themes were created from participants' words and ideas.
- This study did not provide many details about the participants of this study
 - First-generation college students from a southwestern, American university
 - Four focus groups were divided based on gender, so it can be assumed that both males and females participated equally

Data Collection and Analysis

- Open-ended interviews with first-generation students
 - There were four focus groups
 - Divided equally based on gender identity
 - Took place over eight weeks
 - There were also individual interviews
- Focus groups lasted about 46 to 68 minutes, whereas individual interviews ranged from 19 to 42 minutes.
- Thematic analysis
 - Examination of the transcripts from both the focus groups and the individual interviews
 - Two main themes or categories were discovered for intraindividual dialectal tensions.

Results

- Research Questions

- (1) Do FGS experience internal intraindividual dialectical tensions within the collegiate setting? If so, how do students navigate them?
- (2) Do FGS experience external intergroup dialectical tensions within the collegiate setting? If so, how do students navigate them?

- In-group vs. out-group and talking vs. silence

- In vs. out refers to first-generation college students' desire to be “in,” or assimilate into the campus community, or to be “out” and remain separate
- “Talking” refers to the willingness of first-generation college students to speak up and self-disclose their experiences to non-first-generation college students, or to remain silent and keep their thoughts and experiences to themselves.

- Integration vs. segregation and assistance vs. resistance

- Integration = feel accepted and included in the campus community, and segregation = feel capable on their own without any support
- Assistance = accept help and support from college support groups, and resistance = refusal of these students to participate in these groups and attempt to succeed on their own

Takeaway

- Potential to aid colleges in bettering relationships with first-generation college students
 - First-generation college students have a fear of losing an aspect of their cultural and ethnic identity by adapting to life as a traditional college student
 - Less likely to graduate
- Colleges may attempt to provide support and special aid
 - Result in rejection because of the fears of first-generation students.
- Study offers a glimpse into the minds and inner thoughts of these students
 - Lessening the emphasis on labeling students as first-generation and creating trusting relationships between staff and these students

Discussion Questions

- What about this study do you find interesting?
- How can you relate to conflicting interests to your own identity?
- Do you agree or disagree with the previous slide suggestions of how to better relationships with First Generation College students?
- If you were in their shoes, what do you propose Bob and Helen do about their argument?

Bibliography

Lowery-Hart, R., & Pacheco, G. (2011). Understanding the first-generation student experience in higher education through a relational dialectic perspective. *New Directions for Teaching & Learning*, 2011(127), 55–68.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/tl.457>