

First-Generation College Students, Academic Libraries, and Social Reproduction: A Case Study of a University Library System

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ABSTRACT

First-generation college students (FGCS) are an increasingly significant population at institutions of higher education in the United States. While only one aspect of college student identity, first-generation students collectively enter higher education without parent(s) who have obtained, at minimum, a bachelor's degree. As such, FGCS tap into wider networks for advice and support in making the transition to college. In this way, tapping into one's social capital can contribute to college access, persistence, and success in the field of higher education. These terms – capital and field – are core concepts, along with habitus, that comprise Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical apparatus.

This dissertation applies Bourdieu's concepts of capital, habitus, and field to first-generation college students' attitudes, perceptions, and use of academic libraries within the general library system of a large, public, historically White university. The critical qualitative study adapts Phil Carspecken's (1996) 5-stage framework for conducting critical qualitative research and Bourdieu's (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) recommendations for conducting a study of field. The resulting analytical framework includes inductive and deductive coding, meaning field and reconstructive horizon analysis, and an analysis of system relations. Findings can inform academic library practice and are also applicable to higher education more generally, e.g., via early intervention for FGCS. Three primary themes emerged during the data analysis process: (1) perceptions of academic libraries as anxiety-inducing spaces, (2) perceptions of libraries as sites of assurance and comfort; and (3) the relationship between students' capital composition and their perceptions and use of academic libraries.

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ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS

Academic libraries; Sociology of information; Students; Specific populations; Information seeking.

AUTHOR KEYWORDS

First-generation college students; Library use; Bourdieusian analysis; Critical Theory.

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