



Research Articles

Learning through Protest: “Language of Critique” and “Language of Possibility”

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The purpose of this study is to explore student protesters’ motivation and behaviors during the spring 2016 protest against the budget cuts within the College of Ethnic Studies at San Francisco State University. Analysis of the student interview transcriptions revealed four overarching themes: articulation, community and organizing, empowerment and agency, and sustainability. The theme of articulation focuses on the participants’ abilities to articulate their identity, oppression and their resistance. Community and organizing analyzes the strategic elements that the students utilize and bonding through collective action. Empowerment and agency encompasses the students’ will and capacity to protest. Sustainability embodies the preservation of Ethnic Studies and the students’ pursuits of social justice. The study reveals the power of grassroots organizing in response to oppression; this protest is situated within a larger dialogue of oppression facing communities of color; and a counter dialogue of resilience, demonstrated by communities of color, is situated in response to oppression.

Keywords: critical pedagogy, protest, social justice

TThe purpose of this study is to explore student protestors’ motivation and behavior during the 2016 protest against the budget cuts of the College of Ethnic Studies at San Francisco State University through the theoretical framework by Giroux (1988). The language of critique refers to one’s ability to identify and critique the inequities within social structures. The language of possibility describes one’s ability to hope and feel empowered to act upon their critiques for a more just reality (Giroux, 1988). The ongoing conversation concerning the budget, and by extension—the survival, of the College of Ethnic Studies has been a politically-charged debate, spurring multiple protests throughout the spring 2016 semester. This study examines the students’ political power and participation, motivation, agency as stakeholders in shaping the priorities and direction of the university, and the effects that participation in the protests has had

on their educational experiences. My hope is to understand the resilience of this historic community within SFSU, and to document and contribute to the ongoing debate around the survival of Ethnic Studies as a field of academic interest by illuminating the struggle of identity and representation within academia for marginalized voices.

BACKGROUND

The formation of the College of Ethnic Studies is a milestone in SFSU history. In 1968, students at San Francisco State demanded the establishment of a college geared towards ethnic studies (Campus Commemorates 1968 Student-led Strike, 2008). Student protestors, in collaboration with various campus and community organizations demanded the university support equal access to higher education, hire faculty of color, and establish a new curriculum that would embrace different cultures outside of the traditional Eurocentric lens, which included people of color (Campus Commemorates 1968 Student-led Strike, 2008). As a result of one year of faculty, staff and student protests, SFSU founded the first and only Ethnic Studies College in the nation.

SFSU's political and financial landscape has changed since then. Throughout the spring 2016 semester, SFSU experienced ongoing confrontations concerning the funding, and essentially the survival, of the College of Ethnic Studies. The College of Ethnic Studies had been straining to survive with the shrinking budget due to the recession of 2008. This resulted in several cut-backs to help mediate the financial burden (Asimov, 2016; Barba, 2016a, b, c; Flaherty, 2016). The college had to rely on its reserved funds to continue operating. In February 2016, President Les Wong and other campus leaders announced the university could not fund the College of Ethnic Studies' deficit of around \$245,000 because the reserved funds used to pay for the college's extra classes and other expenses had been depleted, therefore the university would not supplement the college's fiscal problems (Barba, 2016a, b, c). Students protested the President's decision to not fund the already underfunded college at a public budget meeting on February 25th, 2016 at the SFSU campus. The protest resulted in President Wong promising \$200,000 to aid the college (Asimov, 2016; Barba, 2016a, b, c).

The \$200,000 dollar promise was only seen as a "bandage" to the larger fiscal problems of the financially-starved college. In response, a group of four students declared a hunger strike calling for President Wong and the university's administration to financially sustain the wellbeing and prosperity of the College of Ethnic Studies. The protestors called for \$8 million in demands, which would return the college to its pre-recession financial state in order for it to continue teaching and pioneering within the field of Ethnic Studies (Barba, 2016a, b, c). After the ten-day hunger strike, the administration gave in to the student's demands, agreeing to work with the college for the survival and prosperity of Ethnic Studies (Barba, 2016a, b, c).

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review consists of the following sections: a summary of the theoretical foundation related to the language of critique and language of possibility, the literature that supports and builds upon this theoretical foundation, and other empirical studies within the field of student resistance.

Theoretical Framework

My theoretical foundation, language of critique and language of possibility, derives from Giroux's (1988) interpretation of critical pedagogy. It divides the act of engaging in social change into two parts. Language of critique analyzes the various dynamics of power in institutions of learning. He divides the language of critique into three steps: 1) an examination of what content is present or excluded in the overarching curriculum; 2) an examination of how knowledge and information should be analyzed as a way to recreate the status quo of unjust power systems; 3) reviewing and understanding knowledge and information as a site of "collective learning process" (Giroux, 1988, pg. 135-136) relating to struggle and contestation within all aspects of society. Thus, the language of critique identifies and analyzes acts of silence and oppression.

Language of critique analyzes the various dynamics of power in institutions of learning.

Giroux also defines the language of critique as the New Sociology of Education, which primarily focuses on an analysis of unfair social structures (Giroux, 1988; Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). Thus, critique alone is not useful in terms of social change. With respect to resistance theories, many studies simply analyze the role of actors within the various protesters; not necessarily the movement's goal of reform and the cultural dialogue of oppression (Giroux, 1983; Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). In tandem, these observations suggest a shift in thought regarding the potential of resistance and education—from a pessimistic view on asymmetric systems of power, which reproduces oppression, to dialogue that makes social change possible.

The language of possibility, however, brings the necessary notion of hope and potential through civic action derived from structural critique.

The language of possibility, however, brings the necessary notion of hope and potential through civic action derived from structural critique. According to Giroux (1988), it intertwines the need to understand one's personal political positionality within the curriculum, school, and by extension society; and to use these understandings as the foundation "to define rather than simply serve in the modern world" (p. 135). In essence, this concept utilizes one's informed critique as the base of

civic engagement and social change. He summarizes this in two points: the need to "*work with* the experiences that people bring to the pedagogical setting...[and] to *work on* the experiences that constitute the lives of students," (Giroux, 1988, p. 135). The language of possibility aims to instill "the intellectual skills and civic courage needed to struggle for a self-determined, thoughtful and democratic life" (Giroux, 1988, p. 136). Thus, the language of possibility centers one's lived

experience and identity as the core of social progress and empowerment within one's studies and political participation.

Solorzano and Bernal's (2001) usage of Latinx Critical Race Theory provides a comprehensive understanding of student resistance within the educational setting because resistance theories have limitations in explaining the intersection of education, identity and resistance (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). Solorzano and Bernal argue "critical pedagogical techniques...place the lived experiences of Students of Color at the center of the teaching and research enterprise....we place Chicanas and Chicanos at the center of analysis and demonstrate how they engage in internal and external forms of transformational resistance" (p. 335). Likewise, language of critique and Possibility establish a theoretical frame that focuses on the individual's experiences and identity in the process of critiquing and activism within academia (Giroux, 1988). Thus, forms of critical pedagogy, particularly theories that share similar themes to the ones described, serve as a lens that focuses on the student and their narrative as the point of analysis, encompassing the actor's relation to the dominant ideology and their experiential knowledge and culture.

Transformative resistance occurs when the actor expresses, internally or externally, a critique of social oppression and is motivated by social justice.

To flesh out my theoretical frame, I use Solorzano and Bernal's (2001) transformative resistance because it offers a clear picture of the pre-meditative process of engaging in protest geared towards social reform. Transformative resistance occurs when the actor expresses, internally or externally, a critique of social oppression and is motivated by social justice (Covarrubias & Revilla, 2003; Delgado Bernal, 1998; Revilla 2004; Solorzano and Bernal, 2001). This concept builds upon the language of critique and language of possibility because it expands on the definition

of engagement through emphasizing an assessment of asymmetric structures and social justice. Transformative resistance is expressed externally by engaging in protest or other forms of overt behaviors; but it is also expressed internally through subtle actions of social justice. Solorzano and Bernal offer an explanation of the internal enactment: a student going to graduate school to engage in social justice efforts is also a form of transformative resistance because his/her actions are informed by social critique and motivated by social justice (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001).

In addition, Covarrubias and Revilla (2003) argue various organizations have used the concept of transformative resistance as a way to organize as well. They argue, that in the case of Raza Womyn and Public Allies, transformative resistance has a community building aspect for members—calling themselves Agencies of Transformative Resistance (ATR) (Covarrubias & Revilla, 2003). By emphasizing the importance of inclusiveness, these organizations provide greater possibilities for social engagement by educating new members on the intersection of their identity and the relationship to power.

Thus, transformative resistance broadens and clarifies the implications of the language of possibility to include subtle behaviors pivotal in the struggle for social reform and offers a way to build community. Together, language of critique, language of possibility and transformative resistance provide a thorough theoretical lens to examine the motivations and behaviors of the student protesters at SFSU.

Empirical Support

At the core of my research is the relationship between identity, pedagogy and educational experience, and resistance. Coupled with the abovementioned theoretical foundations, this portion of my literature review examines different articles that further develop my understanding of student resistance.

The student's understanding of self through pedagogy in efforts to inform resistance became a prevalent theme in this literature review. This theme explores how various researchers used either pedagogy to understand student protest, or to understand how students found various pedagogical theories and methods foundational in their resistance. Both of these ideas are closely intertwined to each other, as pedagogy is both a means of analyzing student resistance and a means to understand and critique society.

Solorzano and Bernal (2001) examine how students enact transformative resistance in response to social oppression through the narratives of students and professors. The methodology they used was qualitative. They collected data from interviews and narratives from students during the 1968 East Los Angeles school walkouts and the 1993 UCLA student strike for Chicana/o studies. Both of these protests were in response to the budget cuts or closure of Ethnic Studies programs within the school site. They found four relevant themes that emerged through applying Critical Race Theory and LatCrit Race Theory to the narratives of the student: 1) "the centrality of race and racism and the intersectionality with other forms of subordination" (p. 334-336); 2) importance of experiential knowledge; 3) the integral challenge to the dominant ideology; 4) the shift in thought regarding sites of deprivation to sites of resistance and empowerment (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001,).

They concluded that framing the relationship between identity, pedagogy and resistance through the lens of Critical Race Theory and LatCrit Race Theory, opens up the study of resistance as a site of possibility and hope (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). This work is not only part of my theory foundation, but it also provides insight into the narratives and concerns of student protesters who responded to university administration very similarly to the students at SFSU.

Revilla (2004) continues the discussion of pedagogy and the understanding of self to inform resistance by including this informal space of off-campus organizations affiliated with UCLA. By studying the Raza Womyn de UCLA, Revilla shows the empowering and organizing aspects of Muxerista Pedagogy, a form of culturally relevant pedagogy that centers social justice and the identity of Chicana/Latina, as it pertains to student activism and student retention within the informal educational setting of this organization (Revilla, 2004).

The action research case study was conducted for five years, during which the researcher attended organization meetings, workshops, community outreach meetings, protests and other types of social events. Over the course of her involvement, she conducted one-on-one interviews and focus groups to collect data. From her study, she outlines the 13 characteristics of the Muxerista pedagogy, including the importance of dialogue, the importance of lived experience, the rejection of patriarchy and patriarchal forms of oppression, the rejection of homophobia and heteronormativity, the importance of recognizing diversity within Chicana and Latina identity, narrative and culture, and emphasis of social justice (Revilla, 2004). Secondly, she outlined the

various stages of the organization through a historical account of its name changing, which emphasized Muxerista Pedagogy's value of self-defining and ever-shifting definition of one's identity and community (Revilla, 2004).

The findings argue Muxerista Pedagogy, as understood through the specific case study of Raza Womyn de UCLA, instills a strong understanding of a student's identity and increases social consciousness by providing a safe space and community for expression and coalition building (Revilla, 2004). This article further supports the theme of pedagogy's integral relationship with identity and resistance.

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Cabrera, Meza, Romero and Rodríguez (2013) provide another example of the Transformational Resistance through students' response to Tucson Unified School District's (TUSD) decision to stop the ethnic studies programs at their school. It documents the students' actions as they relate to the importance of culturally-relevant pedagogy within curriculum.

The researchers documented the event by collecting participants' (100 plus students and presenters) opinions and responses to an event called "The School of Ethnic Studies". This event was a student-led and designed day of curriculum based around the students' desire to learn about Mexican-American Studies in order to show the importance of Ethnic Studies to the school district. They invited scholars, artists and other professionals in the field of Mexican-American Studies (and similar disciplines) to teach curriculum considered "taboo" within Tucson (Cabrera et al., 2013). The common theme that was observed was that these students, professors from the University of Arizona's Mexican-American Studies Department and other presenters were painted as "rebels" and "criminals" for engaging in "banned curriculum" by the school districts. However, this study asserts that these stakeholders (students and presenters) were actually acting in defiance of racist educational policies of TUSD and views—presenting a counter-narrative to the district's rhetoric (Cabrera et al., 2013).

The findings argue that by presenting a counter-narrative in response to oppressive actions of the school district, the students engaged in transformative resistance by having a clear critique of oppression and a motive of social justice. Furthermore, by presenting the counter narrative and responding in such a creative way, the researchers argue that the ingenuity and imagination of the students need to be taken into serious account in designing a co-collaborated curriculum between student and institution (Cabrera et al., 2013). This article is aligned with my study because it shows that with a strong critique of social oppression and an act of resistance, these students are an example of what the language of possibility calls for--- a "self-determine, thoughtful and democratic life" (Giroux, 1988, p. 135). Through acts engaging in social justice creatively, these students built a space of possibility, potential and hope.

The second theme that emerged in this literature review is recognizing identity and resistance through a comparative approach. Literature for this theme was scarce. However, it does provide very useful insight into the struggles for communities of color through a historical lens. Thus, this

theme suggests that although methods of resistance have changed, the value of collective identity has stayed the same (Weiland, Guzman, & O'Meara, 2013). Secondly, comparative literature argues that studies on student resistance may implicitly suggest generalization because various themes emerge across different movements (Weiland et al., 2013).

Rhoads (1998) examines several different student protests through the 1990s. This study chronicles many student protests in the 1990s that were centered on cultural/ethnic, sexual and gender identity. The methodology used was qualitative. It was done over two years and included 110 interviews of students, faculty and staff of the various universities that were sites of the various protests. The researcher collected data at the following universities and events: the Mills College Strike in 1990, which focused on keeping Mills an all-women college; Gay Liberation at Penn State in 1992, which focused on LGBTQ rights; the Chicano Studies movement at UCLA in 1992-1993; the African-American Student Resistance at Rutgers in 1995; and the American Indian Protests at Michigan State in 1995 regarding financial aid (Rhoads, 1998). The findings suggest that all of these movements were tied to the common experience of identity struggle and meaning making through one's positionality shared amongst the students (Rhoads, 1998). Thus, Rhoads shows how protests, despite various forms, participants, and struggles, can indicate the commonality of identity development shared between students and the struggles that a given community faces. Thus, this study supports the various themes of my theoretical foundation regarding the importance of understanding identity and the relationship to oppression and power. Furthermore, Rhoads (2003) examines three different student movements that opposed the capitalistic agenda of globalization. In this study, Rhoads (2003) analyzes the students' critique of corporate capitalism's relationship to education in terms of "weaponizing" globalization through pedagogical strategies. The methodology was qualitative. The researcher interviewed students at UNAM, National Autonomous University of Mexico, the anti-globalization movement that encompassed three different protests (1999 World Trade Organization in Seattle, 2000 IMF- World Bank summit in Prague, and 2001 G-8 summit in Genoa), and the graduate student unionization in the U.S. (Rhoads, 2003). Although these movements seem disjointed, they all revolve around the similar theme of critiquing the corporatization of the university in response to the globalizing market. Thus, Rhoads links globalization and capitalism to pedagogy through the observation of how curriculum is informed by the culture and prescribed by the power elite (Rhoads, 2003).

Rhoads argues that globalization functions as a justification to corporatize the university because of the economic relationships between multinational corporations and the workforce educated through academia (Rhoads, 2003). The findings suggest that students collectively respond in protest through their shared critique of their social oppression, not necessarily rooted in anti-globalization but rather anti-corporatization (Rhoads, 2003). In that sense, the students had a clear critique of who was oppressing them and how. Thus, this study emphasizes the importance of understanding collective struggle and oppression and utilizing these ideas to bridge people and movements across multiple spaces.

The third theme of the literature review is the political impact of student movements on the macro-scale of society. This section incorporates literature about different student protests across the world that centered on the political impact of students' civic engagement in efforts to reshape and redefine their communities. Simbuerger and Neary (2015) explored the narratives of student protesters in Chile from 2011-2013 as they challenged the neoliberal ideals of their education

system. The researchers examined the student protesters' behaviors as they intersect with radical social transformation and political sociology. This study is an ethnography of the student protesters right before the November 2013 presidential and parliamentary elections. Essentially, the Chilean student protesters demanded free education and a serious political discussion about the underlying discourse about the neoliberal values embedded in the Chilean education system (Simbuerger & Neary, 2015). First, the researchers gave a comprehensive review of the political background of Chile, to give context to the student protest and tense Chilean cultural climate at the time. Second, the researchers gave an overview of political sociology, a theoretical frame that is centered on a critique of political economy. This theoretical frame focused on the relationship between the movement's creativity and charisma, social context, and opposition to neo-liberal ideology. Second, the researchers employed a convenience sample because they interviewed people right on the spot. Thus, this study aimed to capture the heat of the moment, the passion, bravery and charisma that these students exhibited in response to their political oppression (Simbuerger & Neary 2015). However, the fiery energy of the moment might have caused participants to think and respond out of intense emotions rather than calm, critical thought. Through the lens of political sociology, the researcher examines the students' collective actions in response to the political oppression of the government.

Students do exhibit social critique of the system through protest.

The findings suggest that the students do exhibit social critique of the system through protest. However, since the Marxist past of this country was often ignored or denied in education and curriculum, the challenge of neoliberal ideals

were hard for the students to articulate because of their lack of theoretical understanding of counter ideals and alternative views of society (Simbuerger & Neary, 2015). Secondly, the researchers found that the student movement revolved around various charismatic student leaders—thus focusing their voice of the movement. The students' charisma failed to win the favor of the larger society in terms of immediate change; however, they opened up new national conversations regarding their concerns for education (Simbuerger & Neary, 2015). Thirdly, the researchers also found that the debate between whether this movement is a revolution or for reform is pointless—the more pressing issue at hand is the collaboration between student and education in order to spur reform through education (Simbuerger & Neary, 2015). These involved students did exhibit some sort of critique of the system through academic discourse and student organization/solidarity/unity to spur social change.

Finally, Umemoto (1989) gives a historical overview of the 1968-1969 San Francisco State University strike, emphasizing the role of Asian-American students within the strike. By weaving together the narrative of Asian-American students throughout the story of the strike and the cultural and political context of the 1960s, the researcher aims to understand the growth of “political consciousness” within the Asian-American community. The researcher interviewed several Asian-American students who were involved in the strike in addition to providing an overview of the cultural context, at the university, in the San Francisco community, the tense political climate of the 1960s, and the Vietnam War. Through her data collection, she divided the historical timeline of the strike into four different stages: 1) 1964-1966: the initial years after Civil Rights movements 2) 1966-1967: implementation of community based resources and programs 3) Fall 1968/Winter 1969: the theme of “By Any Means Necessary” or the political boiling point of

the strike 4) Spring/Summer 1969: “repression of protest and continued ‘commitment to the community’” (Umemoto, 2007, p. 5). By dividing the timeline into themes, she provides trends that speak to the ideological development, tethering the progress of social consciousness within the Asian- American community. Finally, she concludes with a reflection and implications that the strike had within the Asian-American community in San Francisco, and on the next generation within communities of color.

Her findings are two-fold. The most obvious one is that this study provides a very clear and concise record of the strike, and the importance of how and why the College of Ethnic Studies was established. Although situated in a constant dialogue concerning the survival of Ethnic Studies, she argues that the College of Ethnic Studies at SFSU educates “the next generation of fighters” (Umemoto, 2007, p. 37). Secondly, she suggests that by participating in the strike, students exhibit more of a social consciousness which directly influenced many of their career pursuits through going into law or education or any number of degrees in efforts to help their communities (Umemoto, 2007). Thus, the SFSU strike of 1968-1969 instilled a sense of social consciousness within the community through the actions that established the College of Ethnic Studies. In summary, Umemoto (2007) provides the historical context of the college’s formation. Second, this study provides context to the cultural significance that is intertwined within the legacy of the first protesters. For example, the contemporary students paid homage to their predecessors by taking the name of “Third World Liberation 2016”. Third, it gave insight into the personal impact the strike had on the student protesters; which could be seen in their desire to continue helping their community. Fourth, it broadened the societal impact by documenting the formation of the first Ethnic Studies academic program.

Summary of Theoretical Foundation and Empirical Support

This literature review aimed to give an overview of the theoretical foundation used in this study, as well as literature surrounding the intersection of identity and student resistance. Language of critique and language of possibility (Giroux, 1988) provide a comprehensive understanding of student resistance. Language of critique encompasses the students’ ability to analyze systemic injustices. Language of possibility refers to the ability to apply their understanding of systemic injustices and their own lived experiences in efforts to redefine their community and environment (Giroux, 1988). Grounded in the language of critique and possibility, the reviewed literature expands understanding of student resistance through linking social critique and social justice as it pertains to student movements. Secondly, based on the reviewed literature, various themes that emerged were pedagogy as a method of resistance and as a way to understand resistance, the comparative analysis of student movements tethered together the commonality of identity and shared struggle, and the political impact of student civic actions on their communities. By finding inspiration within themselves, their communities and their shared struggles, the students in these studies expressed a sense of hope and empowerment grounded in their understanding of power and its impact on their marginalized communities. Now, I turn to my own research, which aims to understand the 2016 student protesters of the SFSU community.

METHODOLOGY

This study is a qualitative study in which I interviewed seven student protestors during the Spring 2016 semester at San Francisco State University in regard to their experiences, codified and analyzed their experiences, and made conclusions based on my observations. Thus, this study is based on personal reflections of the student protestors. I elicited their responses through semi-structured interviews to capture my participants' voices and experiences during these events.

Data Collection

I conducted interviews on the SFSU campus in quiet empty classrooms in Burk Hall with the approval of the SFSU's Internal Review Board, the College of Education and the Equity, Leadership Studies and Instructional Technology Department during fall 2016 following the protests. I developed my instrument of eight questions that guided my 30-minute interviews with the intent of understanding 1) their motivations to protest, 2) their experience of protesting and 3) what they learned from protesting. Semi-structured interviews allowed for flexibility to examine certain themes that emerged from the various participants. In doing so, I was able to ask additional questions to help clarify and elaborate the participants' statements during the interviews. I recorded and transcribed all the interviews.

After transcribing the interviews, I coded the student responses for certain themes that emerged through the interviews. My theoretical foundation provides the grounding necessary to situate this study in a broader dialogue of struggle. In combination, the themes and patterns derived from their responses allowed me to answer my research questions.

Sampling

The protests took place at SFSU campus. During the Spring 2016 semester, the campus was comprised of around 24,853 students—77.9 percent of students identified as a persons of color, divided amongst many different ethnicities including African-American, Asian-American, Latino, etc. 91 percent of students were from California, and 37 percent identified as first generation college-going students. The faculty is comprised of 1,728 instructors—44 percent are tenured/tenure-track and 55 percent are lecturer. Out of the 767 tenured/tenure-track faculty, 43 percent identify as persons of color, divided amongst many different ethnicities (San Francisco State University, 2016).

In terms of my specific sample population and selection process, I chose research participants using convenience sampling. Through my work with SFSU's Associate Students Incorporated (i.e.—student government, henceforth referred to as AS), I met many of the student protestors. In addition, I used snowball sampling by asking my initial set of interviewees for referrals to other student protestors. My sample consisted of three males and four females.

Participant Profiles

I interviewed seven students at SFSU who participated in the protests. Below is a short biography for each participant. I used pseudonyms to keep their identities confidential. All of the participants are aged 20-25. I interviewed three male students and four female students. All of the students identified as people of color. Two students identified as Hispanic-American. Four students identified as Filipino. One student identified as African-American. All of the students I interviewed were students at SFSU during the time of the protests, and all were affiliated with student organizations officially recognized by SFSU, which includes La Raza, Hermanos Unidos, Pilipino American Colligate Endeavors, League of Filipino Students, and more. All of the participants had taken Ethnic Studies courses at SFSU. Six of them had an Ethnic Studies major or minor. Two held positions in Associated Students during the Fall 2016 semester.

Student A is a fourth-year sociology major, who took many classes in the Asian-American Studies department. She identifies as Pinay, or as a Pilipino-American woman. Her parents went to universities in the Philippines; however their degrees were not valid in America. She is currently taking the semester off (Fall 2016) for financial reasons, but plans on returning in the spring as a full-time student to finish her degree. She is heavily involved with student organizations that center on ethnic and cultural identity such as the Pilipino American Colligate Endeavor (PACE) and Kappa Psi Epsilon (a Pinay-based sorority) (personal communication, October 10, 2016).

Student B is a fourth-year Biology major with a concentration in Physiology. He has two minors, Latino Studies and Health Education, and is looking to pick a chemistry minor as well. He notes that he still has a few semesters left at SFSU before he completes his bachelor's degree. After graduation, he aspires to be a doctor. He is on the board of directors for Associated Students Inc. He is also involved with La Raza and Hermanos Unidos (personal communication, October 17, 2016).

Student C is a fourth-year health education major and a Latino Studies minor. Although originally a nursing major, she sees value in health education as a vehicle for advocacy in low income and under-represented communities, much like the community she grew up in. She is one of the leaders for La Raza and part of other student organizations centered on the Latino community (personal communication, October 11, 2016).

Student D is a fourth-year Political Science major and Asian-American Studies minor. He plans to graduate in spring 2017. He identifies as working-class, and comes from an ethnically- diverse community in California. He is affiliated with PACE and the League of Filipino Students (LFS), a student organization that is affiliated with the anti-imperialist movement in the Philippines, which is known as the National Democratic Movement. He has worked with the Filipino community center and the National Alliance of Filipino Concern. He has a leadership position with the Filipino Youth and Student Network (personal communication, October 11, 2016).

Student E was born and raised in the Philippines. He started his college career in Asia and eventually came to SFSU. He is a Biology major with a concentration in Cell and Molecular Biology. He is not minoring or majoring in Ethnic Studies, but he took several classes in the

College of Ethnic Studies. He is currently part of the leadership team with the League of Filipino Students (personal communication, November 7, 2016).

Student F is a graduate student in the Ethnic Studies Master's program. During the spring 2016 semester, she was an undergraduate student completing her bachelor's degree. Her research focus is on trees and spiritually. Last semester, she was a teaching assistant in the Race, Activism and Climate Justice Course taught in the Race and Resistance department. She is affiliated with the Black Student Union (BSU) and was an officer in the Ethnic Studies Student Organization (ESSO) (personal communication, October 18, 2016).

Student G is a fifth year Asian-American Studies major, with a double minor in Race and Resistance and Education. She planning on graduating in the spring. She aspires to go to graduate school at UCLA to study education with an emphasis in Ethnic Studies. She is currently a leader in ASI. She is affiliated with numerous student organizations, ranging from various Ethnic student organizations to Greek Life. She is credited as one of the key leaders, spokespeople and strategist in the protest (personal communication, October 17, 2016).

Reliability and Validity

Throughout the study, I tried to maintain internal validity. I consulted with my peers, graduate students at SFSU, and various professors and staff across campus in regard to data collection, instrumentation, theoretical foundation, literature review and data analysis. This study is not aimed at examining the political impact/effect of the protest; rather, the goal is to understand the narratives and motivations of the students. Therefore, I avoid the bias of examining this study as a "right/wrong" or "good/bad" binary. Rather, I explored the students' experiences and how this particular protest explored the deeper underlying tension within the academic dialogue in regard to people of color. In addition, this study and all of the methods described were approved by San Francisco State University's Internal Review board at the end of the Spring 2016 semester in order to maintain ethical protocol.

This study does not have external validity because this study focuses on one specific event. The findings are only applicable to this specific university, this specific protest and these specific students. However, this study is of interest to other researchers who are exploring protest and social justice because this study is situated within the larger dialogue of struggle and resistance for students of color. While the various themes that emerged from this study cannot be generalized, it provides another instance of student opposition to oppression.

FINDINGS

Research Questions

The study addresses the following questions: What motivated students to participate in the protest against the budget cuts in the College of Ethnic Studies? How has participating in the protests effected the students' educational experiences and their sense of agency? How do students'

behaviors manifest the “language of critique” (Giroux, 1988)? How do students’ behaviors manifest the “language of possibilities” (Giroux, 1988)?

Themes

The interview transcript yielded four themes: articulation, community and organizing, empowerment and agency, and sustainability. The section that follows outlines these various themes through the voices and narratives of the students.

Articulation. The theme of articulation examines the students’ ability to identify and critique various aspects of their environment and their relationship to their environment. It is grounded in the importance of Ethnic Studies as an academic discipline; specifically in how the field gives students the historical and critical perspective of people of color, which is often ignored in the Eurocentric system of American education. This section is divided into three sub-themes: 1) articulation of identity—their identity and who they are, 2) articulation of oppression—their understanding of oppression and 3) articulation of resistance—their views of how they could affect, and potentially change, the systems of power.

Articulation of Identity. Articulation of Identity as a theme illustrates participants’ expressions of their identity as persons of color. Student B expresses this through the personal knowledge he gained through taking Latino/Latina Studies courses. He says:

I grew up Latino but I didn’t realize the implications of that and how society systematically puts us all at a disadvantage...Ethnic Studies really makes you cognizant of who you are as a person and your very unique culture and...the history of that but also how you fit into society as a whole—how we can change.

Student C and Student F reaffirm this idea by suggesting Ethnic Studies classes makes them feel a sense of belonging and “home”. Student F says “I feel like I have a real home [in the Ethnic Studies Department]. And I feel like when you are in an educational environment where you feel at home with, you are excel more.” Student G says understanding your identity is an empowering act. She says “you have that kinship and understanding of who you are...I feel by unleashing that and an understanding of both identities, you’re able to live a life of like self-reflection and self-love.” Thus, the idea of having a sense of self-awareness of who you are, and how you perceive and are perceived by society were important to the protest because this allowed the students to see themselves and their communities within the master narrative and within the system.

Thus, articulation of identity is integral to the language of critique and possibility because 1) it allows the individual to have a sense of “who one is,” which is an empowering act and 2) it exposes how one does or does not “fit” into society. Thus, understanding of one’s identity is the cornerstone to the language of critique and language of possibility because it gives students a heightened sense of political, social, and cultural awareness situated in the overarching narrative of oppression and the institutional structures he/she is critiquing as well as the self-awareness and experience that is integral to making civic action necessary for change (Giroux, 1988).

Articulation of Oppression. This sub-theme analyzes the students' awareness of oppression. The motif of "lost narratives" was prevalent because academia often ignores or distorts narratives of people of color to a very Eurocentric perspective. Student B notes, through learning about his culture, he had to reclaim some of these forgotten narratives. He says "I never got to learn about like Aztec or Mayan culture or heritage. I had to learn about Christopher Columbus like discovering America, even really like he didn't discover anything." Furthermore, Student A also expresses this same idea by saying "[Ethnic Studies] is not just about learning history from a white perspective, but from people who represent us truly, from people who look like us, who have very similar experiences...". Both of these students express their need to find these stories because of the lack of people of color in mainstream education.

Articulation of oppression is exhibited when the students noted the interconnectedness of the many political, social, and cultural concerns for communities of color. Student D says that the poor state of the public education system is the result of the market-driven agenda of the institution of academia. He says "Why is our education system made this way? Why do we have to pay thousands and thousands of dollars...whatever is invested, whoever is invested in education does not care for our communities." He speaks about the growing cost of higher education, and how it hurts his community. Secondly, he points out why it is so hard to protest. He says "This is the climate of neoliberal attacks on education in the sense that us, as students, don't have the free time or the luxury that students in the 60s had...many of us have to take up one, two, or three jobs. We are forced to take out loan." He argues resistance is difficult because of the financial burden placed on today's students. Given the market-driven agenda by society, students are confronted with the reality of finding good jobs to pay back their loans at the expense of endeavors concerning social justice. In essence, he is arguing that social justice agendas are necessary and great in theory, but these efforts are a luxury in light of trying to survive in the modern economy.

On a local level, many of the students were critical of President Wong and the administration. They expressed his actions were unfair. Student G says President Wong and the administration care more about SFSU profits than the students' education. She says "not all faculty, staff and administration are for the students...and these people are really willing to lose the legacy that we have of Ethnic Studies here, just to make money or just to get by or just to get more students to come to our school...I don't think it's ethical." Student C mirrors this critique of President Wong by emphasizing the interconnected problems related to the defunding of the College of Ethnic Studies. She says, "We felt that President Wong...did what he did to kind of shut us up...he's not seeing the bigger issue with that...Like we want much more than what you gave us." Student B offered a more hopeful response to President Wong's action. He hopes his and his peers' participation in Associated Students (Student Government) will influence President Wong's future actions. He says, "When we have our brown bag [meetings] with him... you are in that space...we have people who are outspoken and that passionate and who love Ethnic Studies and they can stand there and really tell them". Student B suggests a potential with collaboration with President Wong. Thus, these instances summarize the students' critique of President Wong and his action, but also offer a willingness to work beyond their differences for the betterment of their communities.

Stemming from their sentiments about President Wong, many of the participants expressed that the de-funding of the College of Ethnic Studies and Ethnic Studies as a discipline has a strong

connection to various other forms of oppression for people of color. Some of the examples the participants shared include the political climate during the 2016 American presidential election, and various forms of macroaggressions, stereotyping and tokenism in communities of color. Student D links this idea of the interconnectedness of profiteering from the 2016 American presidential election. He says “[Money Making agendas] is why we have folks like Donald Trump can run as president, we have warmongers like Hilary Clinton who have been war criminals who are running for president. It really...shows whatever is invested, whoever is invested in education does not care for our communities” Student G credits language as a form of oppression. She says “[Ethnic Studies makes you recognize] periods of time where you realize you're going through oppression...[the] little racist remarks or injustices.” All of these instances are various problems communities of color face.

Furthermore, the interviewees connect the concerns of this particular protest to other struggles against oppression. Some of the examples include the Black Lives Matter movement, Frisco Five, and the different movements happening in the Middle East. Student E offers an international perspective. He saw parallels between the crisis in the College of Ethnic Studies and imperialism in the Philippines. He says:

[The Philippines] share a common struggle...[of] imperialism and we can see...how it manifests in the campus space with the neo-liberalization of life of the institution, making tuition fees higher, privatization...when it comes to ethnic studies, I think studying counter-narrative to us imperialism. And so when [the administration] attack that counter-narrative, it's very easy to see [the problem]. When you sit in Asian-American class, they are other teaching you...‘So this is why this is our history is why things are the way they are right now’. When someone tries to take that away from us...it is defending the structure of racism in the United States. And as a result, it is an attack on our communities.

Thus, the students saw this particular problem of budget-cutting as another issue facing communities of color. Student A talks about this idea by saying “when we talk about the resistance for College of Ethnic Studies or even the Black Lives Matter movement...understanding that is all intersectional...we talk about the issues that are going on in the Philippine...connecting it to the struggle of Palestinians or Syrians...We are all oppressed people.” She goes on to finally summarize this point of interconnectedness, by saying “there is no one-dimensional fight and one-dimensional issue—we all must understand, again, how we are all connected” The interconnecting issues suggest the systematic oppression of people of color.

In relation to language of critique and possibility, understanding oppression is key to achieving social change. Understanding and analyzing oppression rounds out language of critique because the students are able to identify the problems and recognize these problems are part of a larger dialogue of oppression. Secondly, the articulation of oppression is the initial step to engaging with language of possibility because it identifies the experience that students *work on* and *work with*, in order to make social change (Giroux, 1988).

Articulation of Resistance. The theme of articulation of resistance emerged from the data through analysis of how students recognize forms of resistance in their own lives. First, Ethnic

Studies, as a discipline, provides a counter narrative to their oppression. In terms of curriculum, the College of Ethnic Studies offers classes on community organizing and resistance, which explore different movements and the different ways social movements respond to oppression. Student B and Student C took a Latino US healthcare perspective class in order to understand why their community is sick. Student B says “My sophomore year I was taking...a US Latino healthcare perspective class and the whole time we were breaking down why is our community is sick...it’s like our positions that we are placed in society, our communities don’t have access to healthcare, we don’t have access to fresh food. We don’t have access to a lot of things take, like more affluent communities, take for granted...That was a breakthrough because I made a connection”. Similarly, Student G echoes the importance of positionality within society. She says “Therefore, many of these classes provide curriculum that isn’t explored in traditional academia. By doing so, these classes resist the erasure of people of color by providing counter narratives to the hegemonic norm of academia.”

Secondly, the students articulated resistance by understanding the formation of the College of Ethnic Studies, particularly the student strike of 1968-1969. Student C gave an overview of how the strike of 1968-1969 set a precedent for culturally-relevant pedagogy. She says “[The strike of 1968-1969] was kind of like our people were teaching our own like about our history...and what role we play in society...” Student F echoes this same appreciation for the legacy of the 1968-1969 strikes by citing this college as being built by students. She says, “Even the origins of and the foundations of this college being built was students asking for culturally relevant education” Thus, much of the participants’ reflections credited the 1968-1969 strike as a foundation for their own struggles. Similarly, many of their actions also pay homage to their predecessors, like taking on the name ‘Third Liberation Front’ and organizing through the same historical student organizations that were instrumental in the original strike.

On the other hand, Student G notes protest is a difficult endeavor to take on. In her perspective, she relates to the paranoia and trauma that many of the 1968-1969 strikers exhibited during their time at SFSU. She says, “It was hard because the amount of paranoia that you develop and it’s not just like you know not feeling safe...You learn more about the ‘68 strike...and how it affected them.” Therefore, although the protest was a success on many levels, it also took emotional and mental tolls on the student protestors as well.

Lastly, an articulation of resistance recognizes more subtle forms of resistance than the act of organizing and mobilizing students to protest, aligned with internal transformative resistance (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). Student A expresses this idea as “this constant learning, relearning that when we take these classes, that this is a form of protest in itself and a form of resistance.” She reaffirms this idea of less overt forms of protest by stating the various ways in which we can create dialogues of social change through internal transformative resistance. She expresses this concept by saying:

[B]uilding a lot more (relationships) in terms of getting to know each other, even if it is simple conversations...about these things that very well affect us on a day-to-day basis or even if it is just for a paper or even a project...I feel like even that is a step.

The idea of internal transformative resistance is twofold:: 1) a critique of social oppression, expressed by having conversations that spur critical dialogue and 2) social interactions are in pursuit of social justice. Thus, the articulation of resistance recognizes that one's actions, no matter the degree of impact, can interrupt the cycles of oppression.

Summary of Articulation as a Theme. The theme of articulation examines the students' ability to identify and analyze the intersection of identity, oppression and resistance. The theme is divided into three sub-themes. Articulation of identity is the ability to recognize the importance of identity as it relates to protest. Articulation of oppression is the ability to identify acts of oppression the students encounter and various oppressive issues that are interconnected throughout society. Articulation of resistance is the ability to identify acts of resistance throughout history and actions the students can do to combat oppression.

Community and Organizing. Community and organizing as a theme explores the specific elements of this protest. The various aspects of this theme are the strategies used to organize the student protestors and the idea of community bonding in their act of resistance.

Organization. Many of the participants noted the historical organizations (La Raza, PACE, GUPS and BSU), the Ethnic Studies Student Organization and many other student organizations, including Pacific Islanders Club, Hermanos Unidos, and others, made up most of the protesting students. Student A and Student C felt their positions, being coordinators for PACE and La Raza, gave them the historical and interpersonal skills to organize students. Student C says:

I felt like it was my duty as one of the coordinators for an organization that was involved in the 60s strikes and so forth...to stand up for all my organization and stand up for all people that were being affected by this issue.

These various student organizations provided the existing social infrastructure that became the foundation for the protest.

The ways in which the protest was strategically designed, and the separation of roles were also important. Student B identified himself as a participant who dispersed the information. He says "[I] was trying to get out all the relevant information, trying to get everyone to know what was going on the same page." Student D was an advocate for the Filipino community who were not part of the many student organizations that made up the bulk of protest participants or who did not take Ethnic Studies classes. He says:

[my role] was really just insuring we can mobilize a lot of the Filipino students here on campus, those who are in our student organization and even the bigger pool of Filipino Students who are not necessarily in Asian American Studies/Ethnic Studies, but those who are in the STEM fields as well for them to recognize that is important for them to be able to take part in this

Student A, C, E and F had more political and social pull within their communities because they held leadership positions within their organizations and communities. Thus, the student participants divided the organization of the protest into leadership responsibilities and disseminated information to all members of the SFSU community in efforts to make the protest as effective as possible.

Student G was one of the key figures in the protest because of her political positions such as Ethnic Studies student representative on the Board of Directors for Associated Student (SFSU's Student Government). She said her role in the protest shifted during the course of the semester. During the first stage of the protest, leading up to the confronting of President Wong at the Seven Hills Conference Center on February 25th, she was an advocate for the students. In this stage, as Ethnic Studies representative, she initiated the first protest that ended with students rallying in Malcolm X Plaza, the center of the SFSU campus, calling for change. Later in the semester, the hunger strikes strategically began the day after she was inaugurated as AS President, giving her political leverage against President Wong and the administration. After the ten-day hunger strike, Student G acted as a mediator between the administration and the Third World Liberation Front to negotiate the welfare of the College of the Ethnic Studies. She notes the planning of the protest was a collaboration of students and organizations coming together. She expressed a sense of paranoia because she felt that she was constantly under attack from the administration. However, she said her efforts in organizing and being a key leader in the protest was worth the hardships. She summarizes the lesson she learned as a means of empowerment. She says "[This experience] changed the way that I viewed education and how important it is...to defend [your education] because that's the only thing that people can take away from you is your knowledge, your education...[to put your] body on the line for the education of not only yourself, but like the people in the future...Education is more than just you." This quote summarizes the emotional struggle and product of the protest as it speaks to seeing and going beyond one's studies for the greater good of society and future generations. Thus, the logistics of planning and executing the protests were very strategic and sophisticated in efforts to maximize their political impact.

Bonding in the Face of Resistance. This sub-theme also deals with the relationship building aspect of collective action. Many of the students suggested their friendships grew stronger during the experience of protesting. Student B affirms this idea by saying:

And I think [the protests] actually helped bring [the students] together....I feel like we have all these passionate people who are doing a lot of the similar, really cool things and there's this opportunity to really work together and create new and beautiful things...between our community.

Student B frames the protest as a platform for future endeavors between organizations. He says "I feel like [all the student organizations] have all these passionate people who are doing a lot of the similar, really cool things and there's this opportunity to really work together and create new and beautiful things as well, between our communities." Through these newly formed relationships, he sees potential in the collaboration of organizations that can build beyond the protest.

Subtle motifs of trust between peers were prevalent within this subtheme as well, signaled by notions of "an attack on one of us is an attack on all of us" and "I got their back and they got my

back”. Student F mentioned that the students had to depend on one another to work towards their goal. She says:

[Ethnic Studies] is not valued by the greater campus or education for that matter...so we kinda had a lot at stake, so that kinda makes you depend on people. You can't do something like that...at that capacity by yourself.

Student C extends this idea of trust in regard to representation. She says “If [student leaders]...were to go for historic organizations and say something on our behalf...I would trust that they wouldn't be like vain...You don't just look out for yourself.” These quotes speak to the level of trust between students. Furthermore, the idea of sharing both struggle and joy between different people and the motif of comradeship highlights the interconnectedness of issues concerning both oppression and resistance. Thus, this sub-theme suggests the protest brought together different people and communities.

Energy and Passion. The third sub-theme of community and organizing is the abstract idea of energy and passion that manifested within the climatic and spiritually-charged moments of the protest. Student B summarizes this in talking about marching through the campus and the rally in Malcolm X Plaza on February 25th. He says “the energy was so high. I felt like I was in a movie...and then [the student protesters] kinda took that and everyone was down and everyone was working together and everyone had the same goal...And that was like the exclamation point.” Student C also comments on this specific event by saying “I'm just never going to get over that moment where we all came together and we were like ‘No like this is what we want. This is what we believe. And this is what we're going to get.’” Both of these quotes speak to the current of energy that was shared during the collective resolve to act in defiance.

The theme of community and organizing is closely linked to the language of critique and possibility because the language of critique and possibility emphasizes the need “to forge democratic alliance, and point to new forms of social life that appear realizable,” (Giroux, 1988, pg. 136). Through the students' solidarity in resistance, they successfully made an impact on the university's decision to fund the College of Ethnic Studies and, in doing so, showed the potential of collective action.

Summary of Community and Organization. The theme of community and organization explores the emotional and logistical aspects the students utilized in the process of organizing themselves for the protest. The sub-theme of organization examines the different roles each student undertook during the protest. Bonding in the face of resistance examines the communal aspects of trust between peers during this turbulent time for the SFSU student body. Energy and passion attempts to summarize the collective emotional and spiritual “high” that was experienced during the protests.

Empowerment and Agency. The theme of empowerment and agency became evident in the student's motivation to protect and advance the College of Ethnic Studies. Empowerment is the feeling of self-actualization, to understand that one *has* the ability to act. Student exhibit empowerment when asked about what they learned from protesting. Student C says “[I learned to]

fight for what I believe in. So let's not be scared to speak out and to kind of like say my opinion and kind of like being involved" Student G shares this same belief of standing up for what you believe. She says, "To trust your struggle and always be grounded in your values and principles because people are going to test you" Both of these quotes speak to the empowerment the students felt in acknowledging their ability to challenge authority.

In relation to empowerment, agency refers to the capacity of students exerting political power—to understand that one *could* and *should* act. Student F cites the formation of the College of Ethnic Studies as a clear example of why student agency is prevalent within the SFSU community. She says:

this college is unique compared to other departments because it is from the ground up. And so that is why we defend this the way we do because we made this [College] in the first place. And so compared to other disciplines, the students have the power in this discipline

The College of Ethnic Studies was founded on student agency, in that the students wanted to replace Eurocentric agenda with culturally relevant curriculum—a clear pivot from the social norm of curriculum. Therefore, the strikers in the 1960s built a legacy of student agency. Student B continues this conversation by expressing how he feels that these students made an impact on their environment. He says, "It's this idea of standing up to authorities that is trying to do us harm or do our communities harm. It's like we can collective stand and say like 'no, we are not going accept this', that we can make tangible, real change for our environment." Through their collective actions the students felt they were both empowered and had agency to make a political impact on the SFSU community.

Stemming from agency and empowerment, the belief that change is possible is crucial. Giroux (1988) affirms this claim by saying "students to become active and responsible citizens; that is citizens capable of intellectual skills and civic courage needed to struggle for a self-determined, thoughtful and democratic life" (p. 136). He is speaking about being able to act on one's own beliefs and stand up for what he believes in. Student D summarizes this idea of finding internal resolve within their collective effort by saying:

this has given us the scope of being able to look at...what we can do in terms of student power, in organization, in terms of enacting genuine change that we want to see. And that change is more tangible and concrete than we may think.

The students recognize the main achievement, which came out of this movement, was the possibility for social change. Student G says "we opened up that question...that Pandora's box for all the other CSUs, nationally and internationally...we are still fighting and our students have the agency to do what they need to do in order to get equitable education." This quote speaks to the possibilities that became apparent through this protest—that students can determine their own education.

Sustainability. Drawing from this idea of agency and empowerment, the theme of sustainability deals with how the students engage, as agents of social change, in the larger dialogue

of oppression for communities of color. This theme is divided into two different sub-themes: implementation of Ethnic Studies and future endeavors.

Implementation of Ethnic Studies at all Levels of Education. All the students stated the significance of including Ethnic Studies curriculum in all levels of academia. Student A believes Ethnic Studies should be a general education requirement because this discipline provides intersectional context to many disciplines. She says

I think it [should] definitely be a requirement to have Ethnic Studies perspective just because again when we talk about this intersectionality or this interconnectedness. [These classes develop] interpersonal relationships...with one another from our understanding about not even just our own culture but other people's culture as well.

Similarly, all the student participants believe that Ethnic Studies is necessary at all levels, from elementary to college, because it provides insight into not only marginalized voices, but into larger discussions of oppression that cross different communities. Student G shares her beliefs by saying "K-12...there's always a spot for ethnic studies for everyone" At the core of these shared sentiments is the belief Ethnic Studies courses instill lessons that improve one's life through self-awareness and by consequence their communities and the lives of future generations.

Future Endeavors. This sub-theme deals with how students are using the lessons they learned during their time at SFSU to continue their pursuit of social justice for the benefit of their communities in their professional pursuits. Students B, C and E want to pursue careers in the medical field in order to better their community in different capacities. Students A, D, F and G want to pursue careers in the education system to help educate the next generation of students. Student B summarizes this point. He says, "[Ethnic Studies] is a component of what they are going to take to their workspace or career or whatever they end up doing. So we have these people who are on very different trajectories and aspirations and dreams, but we all have this same commonality which is this shared struggle" This statement speaks to transformative resistance and language of critique and possibility because it demonstrates 1) these students have a strong critique of systems of oppression and 2) they are motivated by social justice in order to pursue social change through their lives during their college careers, post-graduation and professional careers.

Summary of Sustainability. The theme of Sustainability examines the notions of protecting and pioneering the College of Ethnic Studies and the academic discipline of Ethnic Studies. The sub-theme of implementation of Ethnic Studies explores the various ways the participants wish to integrate Ethnic Studies into mainstream academia, especially general education courses and K-12 curriculum. The sub-theme of future endeavors identifies the various ways the participants will utilize their time at SFSU and their lessons in Ethnic Studies to better their communities beyond their college careers.

Summary of Themes. Based on the analysis of the transcribed interview data, four different overarching themes emerged: articulation, community and organizing, empowerment and agency, and sustainability. The theme of articulation centers on the participants' abilities to articulate their identity, systems of oppression, the interconnectedness of struggles for people of

color, and various ways they resist oppression. The theme of community and organizing recognizes the various narratives that the students shared regarding the actual events of the various protest. They utilized sophisticated levels of protest strategy to organize and mobilize the student organizations. During their organization, they also developed strong friendships and relationships that became the foundation for future collaborations. Lastly, the motif of energy and passion was very apparent as they explained their collective effort to protest against the actions taken by President Wong and his administration. The theme of empowerment and agency explores the aspects of how the students were empowered and acted upon this sense of empowerment. They felt empowered through: 1) their critique of social structures and recognition of their potential to act upon their critique and 2) the collective resolve to do what they believe in. They exhibit agency through understanding that they *should* and *need* to act. Lastly, the theme of sustainability embodies both the preservation and expansion of the field of Ethnic Studies and the students' professional pursuits of social justice in efforts to create substantial change for the betterment of their communities.

DISCUSSION

This study is underpinned by the theories of Giroux (1988). The students exhibit the language of critique through the theme of articulation. In this theme, I illustrated how the students articulate their identity, the various ways that they interpret oppression and their forms of resistance. The students follow the three steps of the language of critique in the following sequence. 1) They clearly identify who and what is and isn't valued in this institution. 2) They understand that this issue of not valuing the narratives of people of color is in relation to the cultural norm and the interconnectedness of other systemic problems concerning the oppression of people of color. 3) They understand power is dynamic and they have the ability to act upon this critique (Giroux, 1988). Thus, the results of the study echoed the theoretical framework outlined by Giroux (1988).

By utilizing manifestations of language of critique, the students were able to mobilize and engage in a language of possibility through their resistance to President Wong and his administration's decision to defund the College of Ethnic Studies. The students exhibit the language of possibility in two main steps: 1) they *work with* the various experiences they possess, through their critique of the institution and the various forms of community building and bonding and 2) they *work on* their experience, as students and people of color, through mobilization, protest and their constant pursuit of social justice (Giroux, 1988). Thus, the language of possibility is strung throughout this study through both their understanding what their experiences are and their actions "to define rather than simply serve in the modern world" (Giroux, 1988, pg. 135). The language of possibility proposed by Giroux (1988) is captured in the process of the strike, as perceived by the protestors.

The students exhibit transformative resistance in number of ways as well. They all possess a strong social critique of oppression and they all were motivated by social justice (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). Protesting is an external form of transformative resistance because this is a clear action of fighting against oppression. However, they also exhibit internal transformative resistance through many of their other actions. Some examples of this is the idea of collaboration between student organizations to produce novel projects; some of them wish to go to graduate school in an effort

to pursue social justice, and their professional and career goals are geared towards the betterment of their communities.

This study also reaffirms many of the key points I outlined in my literature review. Many of the studies illustrate various instances of transformative resistance (Cabrera et al., 2013; Solorzano & Bernal, 2001; Revilla & Covarrubias, 2003;). Echoing prior research efforts, this study is another example of how students enact transformative resistance. Secondly, this study is an example of identity as a foundational source of resistance (Rhoads, 1998; Rhoads, 2003; Weiland et al., 2013). In this study, one of the main reasons for the students to protest is the idea that the administration is trying to defund the College of Ethnic Studies. Thus, this protest was based on the students of color fighting for representation within their curriculum—to see the people they identify within their studies. Lastly, the theme of political impact of student movements (Simbuerger & Neary, 2015; Umamoto, 2007;) is evident in this study because these student protestors effectively restored funds to the College of Ethnic Studies. The themes are situated within a larger dialogue of student protests and agency.

However, this study also reveals this particular protest is situated in a much larger discussion of oppression facing communities of color. All the scholarly articles, such as the ones I mentioned above, only take into account the importance of Ethnic Studies and identity in the immediate context of the community it is taking place. These studies do not emphasize the interconnectedness of issues concerning communities of color that are outside of the context of the protest. Therefore, this study contextualizes the protest within a larger discussion of oppression, align.

CONCLUSION

Drawing from these four themes, I make three conclusions. First, the survival of Ethnic Studies is largely centered on the will of students to see value in its existence and to keep fighting for it—suggesting that grassroots organizing is truly powerful. Second, the motif of struggles for people of color being interconnected suggests this protest is a small part of a much larger dialogue of oppression. Third, since this protest is situated in a much larger dialogue of oppression, there is also an equally important counter-dialogue, a dialogue of resilience, centering on the lives and experiences of people of color.

In regard to the theme of sustainability, one is confronted with the question: can this movement and the outcomes be maintained? All the interviewees noted the survival of the College of Ethnic Studies is always going to be in question because it simply does not have the same political and financial weight as more conventional fields of study, like the hard sciences. However, the interviewees noted this movement is based on the will of the students. The College of Ethnic Studies was started by students in the 1960s, and it was protected by students again in 2016. Thus, the survival of Ethnic Studies is based on whether or not the students value this college; and if they are willing to fight to protect it, as opposed to the commercial backing of this discipline. Undercutting this idea is whether students will encourage future generations to organize at the grassroots level and mobilize. Thus, this study truly illustrates the power in the collective consciousness of the public.

Protest is centered in a much larger discussion of oppression because of the interconnectedness of silence, lack of representation and erasure of people of color within many facets of society, especially in academia.

Second, this protest is centered in a much larger discussion of oppression because of the interconnectedness of silence, lack of representation and erasure of people of color within many facets of society, especially in academia. Student D asserts this point by stating “what is a campus based issue is very much a community based issue...we cannot separate those issues, we cannot divide them because it is very much interconnected.” Thus, the interconnectedness of what it means to be represented within the society is a much larger discussion than just the locality of SFSU. These students noted they rarely encountered aspects of their culture in curriculum and mainstream society until they came to SFSU. Moreover, many of the students drew parallels to other struggles centering on the oppression and violence towards marginalized communities. Thus, when examining this issue regarding the budget-cuts of the College of Ethnic Studies, one must also take into account the much larger dialogue of oppression ingrained in societal norms.

Thirdly, this protest is situated in the long history of resilience by people of color. As mentioned above, many of the students expressed admiration to the legacy of student activists at SFSU. In addition, many of the student participants mentioned various social movements including Black Lives Matter and various social movements in the Middle East. They also cited activists including Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King Jr., and Cesar Chavez. The student protestors used the rich legacy of people of color resisting oppression as a blueprint and a source of inspiration, suggesting systematic change has been done before and can be achieved again.

The motif of internal transformative resistance, as argued by Solorzano and Bernal (2001), is also particularly relevant in this dialogue of resilience because it suggests small actions, motivated by social justice, are important as well—our actions on a day-to-day level are crucial in the grand scheme of dismantling acts of oppression. Similarly, the narrative of survival is also closely intertwined with the dialogue of resilience. Junot Diaz (2016) spoke about people of color overcoming hardships in his acceptance speech for the 29th Annual Hispanic Heritage Award. He said, “We are the people who survived. We survived everything—surviving even the surviving, which is the hardest survival of all. And even in the middle of that survival, some of us even learned how to live”. This idea is reaffirmed in the narrative of immigrating to America and creating a new life; students of color going through an education system designed to make it difficult for them to succeed, and other instances underpinned with struggle and perseverance. This dialogue of resilience is situated in the narrative of the American Dream and the pursuit of a “better life” for communities of color. Therefore, the dialogue of resilience is not limited to protest and other acts of overt resistance, but to acknowledge the challenges facing people of color every day and their constant efforts to resist oppression.

LIMITATIONS

This study is meant to explore only the narratives and motivations of the student protestors. Thus, I only interviewed students in this study. Future researchers should consider other narratives involved in protest, including faculty, staff and the administration. In doing so, those studies will have a more holistic understanding of all perspectives of student protests. Secondly, due to the time and resource limitations, I was only able to interview seven students. Future studies should incorporate a larger sample of research participants to further support findings through qualitative data. Finally, many of the interviewees cited much of their motivation came from the lessons they learned in Ethnic Studies classes. Thus, future studies on protests, regarding Ethnic Studies, should include a curriculum review of the various classes the students take in order to truly understand the impact Ethnic Studies courses have on students.

The findings of this study are not meant to be generalized because this study only pertains to this protest and this specific population of students. However, it does offer insight into a single instance of overt resistance. It should be seen as an example of student agency and empowerment and an illustration of what is possible through grassroots organizing in terms of political impact. The value of this study is in the questions it offers, rather than conclusions or answers. This study begins to open the “Pandora’s Box” of what could be substantial social change through understanding of identity and resistance. Therefore, I believe future conversations and studies of resistance, particularly concerning people of color, must be situated in the dialogue of historic oppression and the dialogue of resilience in order to begin dismantling the systemic problems within society.

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