

echoes of poverty

composing lives in higher education

PARTICIPANTS

- grew up in abject poverty
- undergraduate students from different disciplines
- at a large, research-intensive, western Canadian university
- met in-person multiple times over six to nine months
- Sarah, Margaret Rose, Mildred

METHOD

- narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly)
- studied experience and studied it narratively
- narrative accounts were negotiated between participants and the researcher
- participants self-identified with their subjective definitions of poverty

GOALS

- to make visible poverty-class students' experiences
- to reveal dominant narratives regarding poverty-class students
- to understand how universities may shape diversity policies

[the research project]

exploring how growing up in
systemic childhood poverty shapes
experiences in university

SARAH

*To stay with these hard stories
Stay with all these lived experiences
Not to lose yourself
Not to have a breakdown
Belief in change
Belief in hope for change*

MARGARET ROSE

Not drinking the colonial koolaid

MARGARET ROSE IS WONDERING

FINDINGS
as universities continue to grapple
with "widening access" and
creating sustainable EDI
landscapes, poverty-class students
must become a key source of
knowledge in shaping socially just
policies and pedagogies

MARGARET ROSE

*Wearing masks
A white mask
Masks to fake it
Killing my soul*

MILDRED

*I was confused—that's it
I was just confused
I'm still an undergrad
I wasn't treading water
I don't know what I was doing
You can define it
You name it*

MARGARET ROSE

*It's not their fault
It's not their fault
Don't turn away
Don't turn your back on us
Don't turn away from our experiences*

FINDINGS

while poverty is seen in a box,
systemic childhood poverty
cannot be erased from
participants' embodied selves;
that is, childhood poverty shapes
an entire life (Adair, 2003)

SARAH

*Low-income housing
In the city
No community
Government housing
Métis houses random
Area surrounds one school
Start to notice difference*

FINDINGS

administrators', advisors', and
professors' belief in participants
(Elbow, 2008) was a game
changer and crucial for their
survival in university

SARAH

*Hard to be the person of the minority
Being picked on
Being able to stand up
People on the outside looking in
"Actually, no!—you need to have this
conversation!"*

FINDINGS

participation was an act of
resistance to living in the
shadows and margins of higher
education landscapes because of
a fear of being outed and ousted
if their origins become visible

MILDRED IS DREAMING

MARGARET ROSE

*Sit beside me
Don't worry
I'll guide you*

MARGARET ROSE

*That moment when you're not alone
That silence
Broken*

FINDINGS

poverty-class students' lived experiences
are profoundly silenced on the university
landscape and within "widening access" and
"widening participation" to higher
education initiatives

MILDRED

*We dig for it
We scramble to get there*

SARAH IS SEEKING

MILDRED

*Can't tell their own story
Generalizations
Stories have to be told
A lot of stories have to be told
We tell their story
Easy at a distance*

WHY

- while countries such as Australia, the USA, the UK, and to a much lesser extent Canada, are adopting "widening access" and equity, diversity, and inclusivity (EDI) policies, researchers often ignore the very poor, instead focusing on the experiences of working-class students (Ivana, 2017; Lehman, 2013)

- research that does exist assumes a uniform effect of poverty and uniform experiences on higher educational landscapes (Aries & Seider, 2005; Krause & Armitage, 2014), which reduces students' lives to a single story (Adichie, 2009)
- the varied needs of students whose lives have been shaped by systemic childhood poverty are not being adequately addressed or reflected in current educational policies (Nesbit, 2006)

LET'S TALK

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