NEGOTIATING CLASS BOUNDARIES:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE EFFECTS OF POVERTY ON THE IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT OF COLLEGE STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Negotiating Class Boundaries: A Phenomenological Study of the Effects of Poverty on the Identity Development of College Students

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This study addresses how the process of identity development of college students is affected by low socioeconomics status (SES) through the exploration of individual student experiences at an elite public university in the South.

The legacy of the commitment to access and opportunity in the Higher Education Act of 1965 is evident in public policy today, although the college-going and completion rates for students from low SES backgrounds lag far behind those of their more affluent peers. Shifts in postsecondary finance policy and other political economic transformations in the higher education policy context have increased calls for economic affirmative action. At the same time, scholars have increasingly urged policymakers to once again turn attention to the low SES population.

Little research is available on low SES populations, particularly in the area of psychosocial development. Previous development research (race, ethnicity, gender, etc.) has helped researchers and policymakers understand differences in and among diverse populations and informed policy; however, while it is an essential aspect of identity and interacts with other identity dimensions, researchers often control for socioeconomic status. As a result, little is understood about how differences in SES may shape students'

experiences and outcomes and ultimately influence opportunity structure and social mobility.

Results of the study show that students are effective at masking their identity in regards to class status. Though this population of students experience college and develop their identity similar to other underrepresented populations, the central fact that poverty remains highly stigmatized in American society, and more specifically on college and university campuses, serves to foreclose the exploration of the social class dimension of identity development.

The results of this study have implications for policy and practice. The findings may influence theory, increase the knowledge base, and encourage additional research on unexplored dimensions of identity development with significant implications for student access, retention and success.

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APPROVAL OF THE DISSERTATION

This dissertation, Negotiating Class Boundaries: A Phenomenological Study of the Effects of Poverty on the Identity Development of College Students has been approved by the Graduate Faculty of the Curry School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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March 24, 2008 Date

DEDICATION

To my daughter,

Jillian Elaine,

who reminds me every day

of the power of love and support.

I said to my children, "I'm going to work and do everything that I can do to see that you get a good education. I don't ever want you to forget that there are millions of God's children who will not and cannot get a good education, and I don't want you feeling that you are better than they are. For you will never be what you ought to be until they are what they ought to be."

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, 1968

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Consider the following passage:

> People who truly want a college education have a ready and willing financial system to provide for them. Since committed students can attend college without aid, by borrowing, then the biggest beneficiaries are the less motivated students . . . .
>
> Financial aid encourages people who have no business being in college to attend. This causes two problems. First, bad students can be a drag on their classmates. Remember that guy from your hall first year who always tried to keep you from getting stuff done? Second, if everyone has a college degree, then our workforce will actually be too qualified to function properly. . . .
>
> There just doesn't seem to be a good reason to have so much financial aid. The $20 million that AccessUVa costs every year could get us a new physics lab or ten new, tenure-track professors. The only role for government is to ensure that students have access to credit and that loan companies are obeying the law. (Levy, 2007a).

The above passage is an example of the pervasiveness of class-based discrimination in American society. While the author would undoubtedly disagree with that point, and in

fact did in a later editorial responding to criticism from fellow students (Levy, 2007b), this passage, and indeed the full text of both editorials, serves to devalue, discount, exclude, and separate students from disadvantaged backgrounds who attend this particular university. The editorial, which is disapproving of a form of institutional financial assistance designed to provide academically qualified students with the opportunity to attend a highly selective university, uncritically advances the dominant social narrative that people who are poor are "uncommitted," "bad students," and have "no business being in college."

Classism, like other types of discrimination, is found in all areas of American society. In American higher education class, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and physical or intellectual adaptiveness are often lumped together in the monolithic notion of "diversity," effectively negating the concept of difference. Even when dimensions of diversity are addressed separately, social class is rarely discussed (Cookson & Persell, 1991; Jones, 2003; Ortner, 1991). As a result, commitments to increase a diverse academic community or develop educational objectives to enhance the understanding of the various forms of cultural privilege are often foreclosed because of the concurrent and wide-ranging strategies required to address all forms of diversity (Casey, 2005). When class is not addressed as a legitimate form of diversity and the stereotypes of class are not confronted within the context of higher education, the discrimination that results from classism is more likely to be tolerated and reproduced.

Higher education, as a social institution, is an important vehicle for social mobility and class maintenance, and provides a context for the exploration of the meaning and experience of social class among young people transitioning from

adolescence to adulthood. Because of the concentrated nature of poverty, resulting from economic reorganization and residential segregation (Iceland, 2006; Wilson, 1997), college may be the first time many college students come into close contact with people from differing social class backgrounds. Social class, then, becomes more salient when individuals are exposed to groups and individuals with class backgrounds different from their own (Jones, 2003).

Higher Education and Students from Low Income Backgrounds

The Higher Education Act of 1965 was introduced in response to President Lyndon Johnson's call for increased higher education opportunities for lower and middle income families as part of his Great Society domestic agenda (Easton, 1997). Subsequent access issues followed and were addressed: lack of academic preparation, underrepresented minorities and women, segregation, and motivation. Attempts to address the needs of diverse student populations were met with varying degrees of success; and while there have been significant gains overall, there continues to be an undercurrent of exclusion, both real and perceived, from four-year, private, and elite institutions for poor and minority students.

Students from low income families begin the postsecondary educational process at a distinct disadvantage. Not only do they have lower persistence rates, they have lower educational aspirations, academic achievement and college-qualifying test scores (Astin, 1993; DiMaggio & Mohr, 1985; Lareau, 1993; McDonough, 1997; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1987, 1993). Once in college, the experience and involvement in college differs among students from families with low incomes and their more affluent peers. Research on the positive effects of involvement during the collegiate years is

plentiful, and evidence has shown that students enrolled at more prestigious institutions are more likely to be involved, have a greater degree of persistence, and have higher education and career aspiration levels (Astin, 1975, 1985, 1993; Bowen & Bok, 1998; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Hearn, 1984; Walpole, 2003).

Walpole (2003) hypothesized that if one were to control for academic ability and institutional quality in a meritocratic system the experiences of students from differing socioeconomic levels should be comparable; additionally, a decrease in social class disadvantages should be evident in the lifestyles of graduates from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Walpole's longitudinal study found that first-year students with lower income levels spend their time differently than more affluent middle and upper class students—they spend less time engaged in student clubs and groups, more time working, and less time studying. Nine years after entering college, these students still have lower income levels, are less likely to have attended graduate school, and have overall lower levels of educational attainment.

In addition to the general on-going concern about the college-going pathway for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, there has been increased unease regarding economic access to America's so-called elite institutions[1]. Typically students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to enter postsecondary education beginning with community college and less likely to attend private or highly selective public four-year institutions (Tinto, 2004). Despite an increase in college enrollments between 1980 and 2000 for all income groups (up 16% for low income, 16%

[1] Bowen, Kurzweil and Tobin (2005) studied the relationship of socio-economic status to admission, enrollment and academic outcomes at 19 academically selective, or "elite," colleges and universities. While there are undoubtedly a number of additional elite institutions in the United States, data and information presented here are taken from this particular study.

for middle income, and 12% for high income), the gap between low and high income levels is still substantial—48% of low income students attend college compared to 77% of high income students (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2003). More troubling is the fact that the highest achieving low income students enroll in postsecondary education at the same rate (78%) as the lowest achieving high income students (77% attendance rate) (NELS, 1997). When it comes to attendance at the 19 elite institutions in Bowen's (2005) study, only 10.8% were from the bottom income quartile ($25,000 in 1995).

Although the criticism regarding access to elite institutions has increased in recent years, it is not new. In a 1990 article Astin observed, "Guaranteeing equity or equality of access must also take into consideration the quality of the opportunity offered" (p. 462). The argument is not much different 18 years later, however the gap between rich and poor students is widening when in comes to college attendance, and it is especially evident in the enrollment at elite colleges and universities. (Carnevale & Rose, 2004; Bowen, Kurzweil, & Tobin, 2005). Some institutions (e.g., Yale, Harvard, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and the University of Virginia) have developed more aggressive financial aid policies and outreach programs to begin to address these disparities.

While equality of access to all types of undergraduate institutions is an important concern, of equal importance is the parallel concern for the persistence and graduation rates of low income students. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2003) show that out of the 1995 cohort of students entering college only 29% of those students had earned a baccalaureate degree within six years, and 35% of that cohort had dropped out of college all together. Those statistics are more striking when income is

taken into consideration. Only 26% of students with dependent family incomes of $25,000 or less earned a bachelor's degree within six years. In contrast 65% of students with high income backgrounds ($70,000 or greater) earned some type of degree within six years, with 56% earning a bachelor's degree (NCES, 2003). Students from low income backgrounds who attended an elite institution faired much better with an 84% graduation rate compared to an 87% graduation rate for more affluent students (Bowen, Kurzweil, & Tobin, 2005).

Towards an Increased Understanding of Difference

Understanding that there is a significant difference in outcomes between students from differing economic backgrounds is an important step to understanding the needs of different groups of students in general. Identity development theory is used to attempt to explain how individuals face differing challenges and view life through unique perspectives (Evans, 1996). Identity development is central to late adolescence and early adulthood, but also a task that extends across the lifespan. While identity can be used in a variety of ways (e.g., global identity, core essence of oneself), Erikson (1968) defined identity as "a subjective sense of invigorating sameness and continuity" (p. 19). Key to understanding identity is its psychosocial nature, that is "[placing] the developing person in a social context, emphasizing the fact that movement through life occurs in interaction with parents, family, social institutions and a particular culture, all of which are bounded by a particular historical period" (Widick, Parker, & Knefelkamp, 1978, p. 1).

Identity development theories have their roots in Erikson's (1950, 1968) work in understanding the sequences of developmental tasks or stages that occurs throughout the lifespan. Erikson (1968) described the complexity of identity development thusly:

> [I]n psychological terms, identity formation employs a process of simultaneous reflection and observation, a process taking place on all levels of mental functioning, by which the individual judges himself in the light of what he perceives to be the way in which other judges him in comparison to themselves and to a typology significant to them; while he judges their way of judging him in the light of how he perceives himself in comparison to them and to types that have become relevant to him (pp. 22-23).

Erikson asserted that the process was, thankfully, largely unconscious except in times of identity crisis brought on by a high level of discontinuity between inner conditions and outer circumstances (1968).

Building on the work of Erikson, Chickering (1969) and, subsequently, Chickering and Reisser (1993) contributed to early identity development theories widely used by student affairs professionals. Chickering and Reisser's seven vectors of development include one focused specifically on identity development. They posit that, "Establishing identity also includes reflecting on one's family of origin and ethnic heritage, defining self as part of a religious or cultural tradition, and seeing self within a social and historical context" (p. 49).

As the diversity of colleges increased so did the need for the understanding of diverse student experiences. Gender and culture has been the focus of more recent work including Josselson's (1987) women's identity, Cross's Theory of Nigressence (1991), Phinney's ethnic identity development (1992), and sexual orientation identity models from the work of D'Augelli (1994) and Cass (1979). Models addressing the

multidimensional aspects of identity (Jones & McEwen, 2000; Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007) have explored the intersectional aspects of the dimensions of identity.

While these models provide a strong theoretical framework, one piece of the puzzle is missing: class status. In their 2003 article, Ostrove and Cole called for systematic research on the psychology of class-based identity to begin to engage the work of psychologists, just as previous work in the areas of racial, ethnic and gender identity had done beginning in the 1970s. The work on various dimensions of identity reflects the broader political movement in the United States of the time and coincides with the desegregation (along both gender and race lines) of American higher education. Ostrove and Cole theorize that the research on dimensions of identity was instrumental in raising the consciousness of the social identities of women and racial and ethnic minorities.

However, there has not been a corresponding political movement based on class. On the contrary, there has been less class-based unification and the organization that has taken place has not focused on identity (Cohen, 1985). In fact, Adair (2002) states that any systematic or communal organizing is discouraged, most prominently by social service agencies. This could be due primarily to the fact that the majority of Americans believe that upward mobility is a birthright (Hochschild, 1995). Regardless of, or perhaps because of, the absence of systematic organization, it is clear that individuals experience privilege or disadvantage based on their class status and would benefit from the same research as other dimensions of identity.

Purpose and Rationale of the Study

The purpose of this study is to understand how the process of identity development is affected by low socioeconomic status through the exploration of

individual student experiences. "One's social class is a very important variable that relates to one's identity and that interacts with other dimensions of identity such as race and ethnicity, ability or disability, and gender" (McEwen, 1996, p. 206). Research indicates that the experiences and outcomes of students from varying income levels are different. However, little is known about how low income affects identity development.

Through numerous studies (e.g., Astin, 1993; DiMaggio & Mohr, 1985; Lareau, 1993; McDonough, 1997; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1987, 1993; Walpole, 2003) the circumstances students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds confront are clear, but it is unclear *how* these students see and experience post-secondary education. That awareness can only be achieved by listening to students articulate how they comprehend their experience. At a time when there is mounting concern about access, resources, and support of students from low income families, as well as the diversity of the campus community, gaining familiarity with the experiences of all students is increasingly important. Seeing the university experience through the eyes of students from backgrounds of poverty places student affairs professionals in a position to support and empower them. Understanding the experiences of students from low income backgrounds can help increase the diversity dialogue and tolerance among students, faculty, and staff members; enhance the support structure for students who are economically disadvantaged; and give faculty and staff the tools to develop programs that enhance existing systems of challenge and support.

Design of the Study

The study of identity development of college students cuts across disciplines (sociology, psychology, education) and is subject to understanding the meanings

individuals ascribe to their experiences. Qualitative inquiry is, at its root, concerned with the meanings and order people make of social interactions and symbols and is, therefore, well suited to this type of investigation.

This phenomenological study was undertaken from the social constructionist perspective. The phenomenological method focuses on a concept or phenomenon and the meaning of the experiences of individuals with the phenomenon (Creswell, 1998), in this case the effect of socioeconomic status on identity development. In order to successfully conduct the phenomenological study, a core group of participants who have experience with the phenomenon participated in a series life-history and focused, in-depth interviews designed to explore this "complex issue by examining the concrete experience of people in that area and the meaning their experience had for them" (Seidman, 1998, p. 10).

The participants were traditional college students in the last semester of college and eligible to receive federal need-based financial aid at a highly selective, public university in the South. This university (hereafter referred to as the University) was an ideal site for this study for several reasons. First, there is a strong institutional culture with well established-traditions, both social and academic, which serves both as a backdrop for and a variable within the participants' experiences at the University. Second, although students from low income backgrounds historically have had lower persistence rates and educational attainment compared with their peers from more affluent backgrounds (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1987, 1993), students across income levels persist and graduate at nearly the same rate at elite, highly selective institutions, including the institution selected for this study. This fact suggests that students at all income levels have the same access to academic and social support

networks and benefit from those resources (Bowen, Kurzweil, & Tobin, 2005). Finally, at the University, students from low income backgrounds are an underrepresented population: 4.1% of all students come from families with self-reported income levels below $30,000; 17.4% of all students come from families where the father has not received a four-year degree (compared with 42% from a broad cross-section of four-year colleges) (CIRP, 2003). The exploration of the identity development of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds could not be undertaken without taking the context of their experience into consideration. The context of this particular institution, with its strong culture and minority low income population, was particularly salient to the experiences of the participants, and, indeed, the student population at large.

Guiding Research Questions

While I hoped to be able to enter the study without preconceptions, some framing was necessary in order to create an initial direction. The questions, therefore, are broad enough to give direction, but flexible enough to allow for exploration of the phenomenon (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Morse, 1994). With these parameters in mind, the following questions served as an initial boundary as well as a guide to this study exploring socioeconomic status and identity development:

1. In what ways do students from low socioeconomic backgrounds define themselves?
2. How does low socioeconomic status inform students' understanding of their identity?
3. What meaning does low socioeconomic status have for these students? How does low socioeconomic status inform their lived experiences?

4. Using established identity development models as a foundation, how do the socioeconomic-based developmental experiences of the participants add to or differ from dimensions of identity based on race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation?

Definition of Terms

Class: Although classically defined based on economic status, it is used throughout this study in its more popular form and widely-used lay term as a synonym for socioeconomic status.

Identity: A psychosocial theory based on concept of maintaining inner sameness and continuity.

Development: The process of becoming a more complex individual.

Low Income: The bottom quintile of income. See also: low socioeconomic status and poverty.

Low Socioeconomic Status (SES): The bottom quintile of SES as determined by a combination of family income, parental occupational prestige, and parental education variables. For seven of the ten participants in this study low-SES is synonymous with poverty (see definition).

Poverty: The poverty threshold defined by the U.S. Census Bureau is a combination of household income, size of family, and number of related children under the age of 18 residing in the household.

Traditional Students: College students between the ages of 18 and 24, living on campus at least one year, and attending school full-time.

Summary

bell hooks (1989) writes of her own experience as a student from a background of poverty attending Stanford:

> Class differences were boundaries no one wanted to face or talk about. It was easier to downplay them, to act as though we were all from privileged backgrounds, to work around them, to confront them privately in the solitude of one's room, or to pretend that just being chosen to study at such an institution meant that those of us who did not come from such privilege were already in the transition toward privilege . . .It was a kind of treason not to believe that it was better to be identified with the world of material privilege than with the world of the working class, the poor (p. 75).

hooks's own experience highlights the difficulties students from disadvantaged backgrounds may have when it comes to exploring social class differences. Research has demonstrated that this group of students is at a distinct disadvantage in all areas of higher education: educational and career aspirations, academic achievement, college-qualifying test scores, and persistence and graduation rates. While a great deal of research has been conducted to explore and understand the outcomes of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, to date there has been little research with focuses on the day-to-day experiences of these students and how those experiences may affect the development process.

The diverse nature of college campuses has led to research and an increased understanding of diverse student populations. Unfortunately, the understanding has not

extended specifically to social class. There may be a variety of explanations including the difficulty of identifying the population because of the lack of and discouragement of class-based organization or the inherent belief in upward mobility and the subsequent lack of identification with the lower-class.

However, just as it is impossible to dismiss the differing experiences of individuals based on race, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation, it is important to consider the challenges, academically, socially, and personally, students from disadvantaged backgrounds experience during college. The persistence of pervasive class-based discrimination adds to the urgency.

Kitchner (1984) cited four ethical principles that she found particularly applicable to student affairs: respecting autonomy, doing no harm, benefiting the other, and being just. In order to foster these values, adequate information must be made available on the development of students from a wide variety of backgrounds (Young, 1996). In some cases students will require challenge or support in order to overcome a crisis, in other cases they may need help grieving a loss of belief or long-held value. The effect of class status on student experience in higher education cannot be underestimated, and it is my hope that this study and the stories of the participants will provide an increased understanding of those experiences and give students the courage to confront their differences within a community of respect.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter, divided into four major sections, reviews the theories and background that frame the phenomena of lower class status and identity development of American college students. The first section explores the definition of class, the concept of class within American culture, and the consequences of classism. The second section is an overview of identity development theories and the role identity development plays in the lives of college students. The third section is an exploration of the process of psychosocial development. The fourth section outlines the conceptual framework for this study.

There is little research on the effects of socioeconomic status on the process of identity development. Theories of Black and White racial identity began to emerge in the 1970s in response to the Civil Rights movement (Helms, 1990). Subsequent theories have emerged to provide a context for the experiences of groups historically underrepresented in higher education, but have consistently overlooked students from lower income backgrounds as a group in their own right.

Despite the fact that students from low socioeconomic backgrounds have been underrepresented in postsecondary education, researchers often control for socioeconomic status (SES) (Walpole, 2003) ,which has resulted in little research on a population that has received increasing amounts of attention by both federal and state legislative bodies and individual post-secondary institutions. By examining previous

research on class, the consequences of low socioeconomic status, and identity, a framework for the study of the effects of poverty on identity development will emerge.

Class Consciousness and its Consequences in American Culture

An understanding of how class status affects identity development begins with an awareness of how class status is understood and reproduced within the context of American culture and more specifically in college and university settings. Providing a definition of class as it exists in the United States is paramount to understanding how it is experienced. Examining the role of class within the academic setting is of particular importance because it is during this time that, for traditional aged students, the transition from adolescence to adulthood occurs. Unfortunately defining class is not as straightforward as it would seem since there is considerable disagreement between and among disciplines.

The majority of Americans would probably agree that there are inequalities in the United States; persistent inequalities based on race, gender, and economic levels are evident in the media, if not in person, on a nearly daily basis. College campuses are not immune to these inequalities. Although Americans hear stories about and often discuss the income gap, the black-white achievement gap, and homelessness, the conversations concerning these inequalities are more often about race and gender rather than class.

Class then becomes hidden or spoken through other languages of social difference. Ortner (1998) asserts that the language and labels used by students in American high schools are a perfect example of the ethnosociology of class, where students are classified as "hoods," "jocks," "socies," "burnouts," et cetera, and the concept of class, and most especially income and money, is rarely referred to. Ortner

also identifies language used to categorize class difference through sexual virtue: girls labeled as "easy," "sluts," and "whores" are, more often than not, from working-class or low-income families.

The argument for the existence of class in America depends largely on the definition one uses, but the strict realist definition of class as an indicator of economic position has failed to provide a framework which includes the broader forms of social inequality that are inherent in contemporary connotations of class (Anthias, 2004). If we accept the basic premise that the United States, as a complex social society, is stratified—that is, there are two or more differently ranked groups with members that control unequal amounts of power, privilege, and prestige—and, as a result of stratification, prone to inequalities, then we have made a great step forward to understanding class as a social structure that is present in all aspects of American culture, college and universities included.

Defining American Class Structure

Class can be viewed as a "structured system of inequality, a cultural outlook, a mental landscape of the social world . . . a real economic phenomenon . . . [or], at the level of social action, processes [that] are implicated in the struggles for distinction in social life" (Bufton, 2004, p. 32). The influences of Marx, Weber, and Bourdieu, among others, contribute to the various definitions of class and can serve as a foundation for sense-making of the concept as it exists in the United States.

Marx's Theory of Social Class

Karl Marx offered no systematic basis for class analysis in his writings; however, his works provide a starting point for understanding class and stratification theory.

Critical to Marx's writing were his theories on class conflict, which he believed was the foundation of all history. Because Marx's work was based on the critique of emerging industrial capitalist society rather than socialist theories, his work on class was not fully developed (Levine, 1998).

Marxist class structure consists of a ruling class and an oppressed class, where the classes are distinguished from each other by differences in their respective positions in the economy. By social class, Marx referred to any group of people brought together through the performance of similar production functions, specifically work functions. The essential elements of the Marxist class structure are conflict over economic rewards, the physical connection of masses of people and the ease of communication among them, and the development of solidarity and political organization (Bendix & Lipset, 1966).

A key feature of Marx's work was his belief that a capitalist society must develop a class consciousness that would ultimately lead to proletariat revolution. Marx assumed that his work was a means to the development of class-consciousness, and denounced other philosophers of social science as serving interests other than that of the proletariat class, even while those scholars maintained an air of detachment from serving a particular class-interest (Bendix & Lipset, 1966).

Weber's Theory of Class, Status, and Party

In contrast to Marx, Max Weber provided a definition of class that is more closely related to what is currently referred to as socioeconomic status and takes into account a wider range of variables that determine an individual's class position. According to Weber, classes are stratified not simply by an individual's economic position but also in

terms of the production process and the manner in which good and services were acquired (Levine, 1998).

Unlike Marx, Weber did not define classes in terms of communities. Rather Weber stated,

> We may speak of a 'class' when 1) a number of people have in common a specific causal component of their life chances, in so far as 2) this component is represented exclusively by economic interests in the possessions of goods and opportunities for income, and 3) is represented under the conditions of the commodity labor market" (Weber, [1946] 1966, p. 21).

Again, with the reference to the current conceptualization of socioeconomic status, Weber supposed that one's market situation depended greatly on the extent of the possession of certain resources (e.g., skills, education, inherited wealth) and how those resources translated into power (Levine, 1998).

In contrast to his discussion on class which, in Weber's definition, is based on economics, possession of goods, and opportunities of income, Weber defined status groups as collectives of people with similar lifestyles which often overlap with economic class position. Status, often linked with class, is expressed through a specific lifestyle and certain status honors and privileges that are expected from those who wish to belong to a particular status circle. Status privileges include: honorific preferences such as wearing special costumes, eating special dishes, and playing certain instruments; status marriages, or marriages within one's own status circle, and preferential employment opportunities (Weber, [1946] 1966, p. 21). For college students in contemporary

American society, those status privileges might include material possessions, travel over school breaks, membership in certain social groups, or a higher level of disposable income.

Pierre Bourdieu and Forms of Capital

Marx and Weber provide the basis for understanding class in terms of economics and prestige, yet it is not completely clear how closely their conceptions of class compare to the term as it is used and recognized in contemporary American culture. That inadequacy is precisely the schism that currently exists between realist and nominalist theorists regarding the definition of class.

Kingston (2000), in his realism-based argument against the existence of class, highlighted the contours of the debate between the two factions in this way:

> I can summarize my position by saying that classes exist to the extent that class location—an objective position within the economic order—significantly shaped the fundamental content of social lives. To employ the well-known analytical distinction, I thereby take a realist rather than a nominalist approach. To be useful, class theory can't merely define specific social divisions as consequential; it must show that these divisions correspond to the collective realities that people experience and perceive (p. 3).

In contrast to Kingston, Devine (2004), asserted that Kingston's argument is outdated and did not take into consideration

> the body of theoretically and empirically informed research on class subjectivities which has examined working class and middle class

> identities. The evidence [which include the interplay between gender, racial and ethnic identities] suggests that peoples' everyday experiences in school, in jobs, in the communities in which they grew up and the ones in which they now live generate and sustain class sentiments and the lived experience of class shapes people's cultural values and practices (p. 141).

Indeed, Bourdieu (1983) posited excellent rationale for expanding the definition of class to include social, cultural and educational capital in addition to economic capital: "It is in fact impossible to account for the structure and functioning of the social world unless one reintroduces capital in all its forms and not solely in one form recognized by economic theory" (p. 183). Bourdieu (1987) argued that "any theory of the social universe must include the representation that agents have of the social world and, more precisely, the contribution they made to the construction of the vision of that world, and consequently, to the very construction of that world" (p. 10). Therefore, according to Bourdieu (1987), classes exists "by virtue of the fact that [individuals] occupy similar position in social space (that is, distribution of powers), are subject to similar conditions of existence and conditioning factors and, as a result, are endowed with similar dispositions which prompt them to develop similar practices" (p. 6).

The experiences of individuals is not limited to their economic or prestige levels, but, as Bourdieu stated, includes the additional forms of social and cultural capital. These forms of capital are, according to Bourdieu, "the factors of differentiation which account for the differences observed in a given social universe" (pp. 3-4). Bourdieu likened the forms of capital to aces in a game of cards, that is, the higher the levels of capital are the stronger an individual's position within his or her social universe.

Forms of capital. All forms of capital, according to Bourdieu (1987), are types of power in any given situation. Bourdieu identified three forms of capital: economic, cultural, and social. Economic capital refers to money or resources that have monetary value. Cultural capital is defined by the knowledge and familiarity one has with the dominant culture. Social capital is made up of social networks or connections of individuals.

The concepts of social and cultural capital are particularly applicable to higher education. In Bourdieu's framework, educational credentials are a result of an individual's accumulated cultural capital. Where a student attends college, for example, is a direct expression of his or her capital, and can, in turn, confer additional forms of capital. A student with less capital may attend a community college and though there might be a slight increase in economic capital resulting from credentialing gained by attendance, cultural and social forms of capital may not increase in a meaningful way. However, a student from a disadvantaged background that gains admission to a nationally recognized highly selective (i.e., elite) four-year institution despite a lack of all forms of capital will be rewarded with a greater set of advantages than had she/he attended a less selective institution (Horvat, 2001).

Concept of field. An additional key feature to Bourdieu's framework of capital is the concept of field. Bourdieu described the concept of field thusly: "Fields present themselves systematically as structured spaces of positions (or posts) whose properties depend on their position within these spaces and which can be analyzed independently of the characteristic of their occupants" (1993, p. 72). Horvat (2001), in turn, stated: "Thus, the concept of field as the embodiment of the rules of the game as well as the site wherein

the struggle to own or control these rules takes place, is critical to understanding Bourdieu's model of social interaction" (2001, p. 213). Therefore where social interactions occur (i.e., cultural context) and the rules of that culture are as important as the individuals interacting within that context. Social rules change depending on location (e.g., community college versus private liberal arts institution), and those rules are set by the dominant culture.

Summarizing Class Definitions

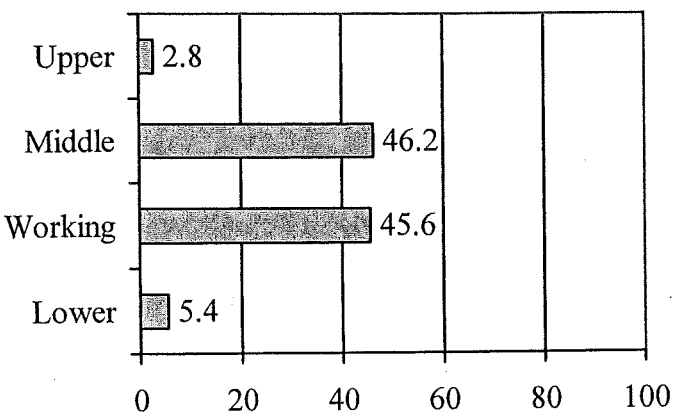
Considering that there is no agreed upon definition of class, and class is, generally speaking, a taboo subject among the majority of Americans, how then do we go about describing the system of class in the United States? Because the term "class" seems to be an inadequate and contentious term when used to describe the inequalities the unarguably exists, the concept of status has been proposed as one term that may "bridge the gap" between class-based social stratification and social inequality. Status is an alternative way of "relating to the overall structure of inequality along a range of dimensions" (Compton, 1998, p. 127) which may include economics, gender, ethnicity, race, and religion, among other characteristics.

The Bourdieuian framework of forms of capital situated within a particular field can serve to provide a more deeply contextualized and nuanced form of class analysis. Bourdieu's concepts seem especially suited to analyzing the experiences of students in educational settings, particularly higher education, because of the inherent need to look at the context of the interactions as well as the individuals that inhabit the field of interest.

Self-Identification of Class Status

In the 2006 General Social Survey an overwhelming majority of respondents (91.8%) classified themselves as either working or middle class (Figure 1). Despite the overwhelming tendency to place themselves in the middle and working classes, Americans still have a sense of class and what it means to identify with a specific class.

Figure 1. Subjective class identification (General Social Survey, 2006).



Devine's (2004) research showed that the identification with a particular class has much more to do with lifestyle (patterns of consumption, neighborhoods, cultural values, housing choices) than simply a shorthand for socioeconomic status. The interviewees in Devine's study placed themselves decidedly within the middle class because it is inclusive, rather than the exclusive upper and lower classes, which, according to interviewees, are composed of "the very rich and the very poor" (Devine, 2004, p. 161). Within Devine's study there was also an acknowledgement among most participants that regardless of the class level of their parents, interviewees were unquestionably better off than their parents. However, most respondents also placed themselves squarely in the middle class while growing up and as adults.

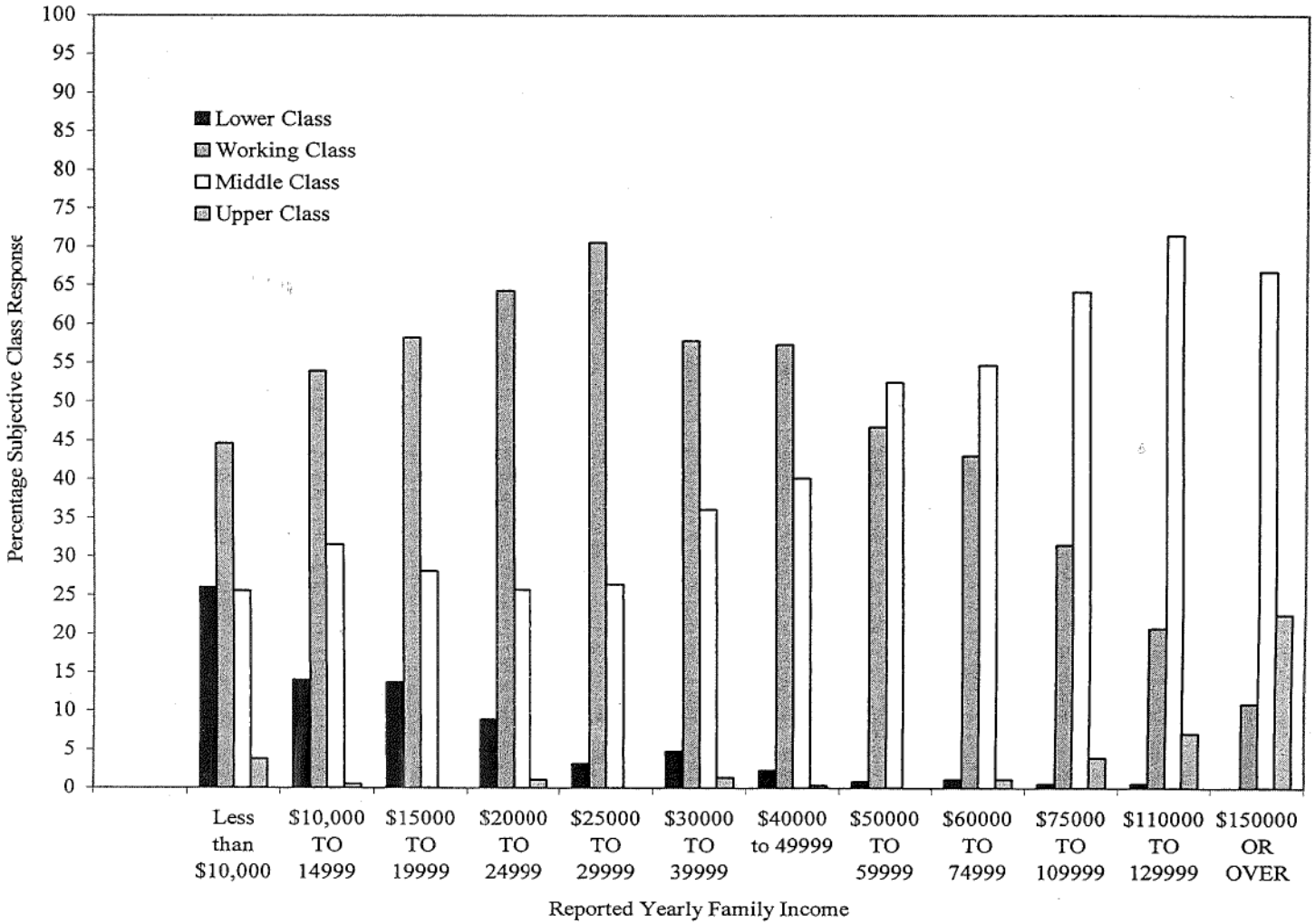
Earlier research by Jackman and Jackman (1983) showed similar results. In their study, Jackman and Jackman used racial identity as a comparison for class identity noting that:

> Racial identity provides a useful comparative reference against which the pervasiveness of class identity can be more meaningfully evaluated. At the same time, a comparison of the relative power of race and class affiliations in generating affective bonds and interpretations of social life bears critically on the long-standing issue of the relative significance of culturally and structurally based cleavages (pp. 42-43).

The comparison proved illustrative to the results: "Among poor and working-class whites, the figures suggest that class bonds are at least as strong as race bonds, if not stronger. For feelings of warmth, both of these groups show slightly more own-class preference when comparing themselves with the upper class than they shown own-race preference" (Jackman & Jackman, 1983, p. 48).

Even with the strength of class bonds, however, individuals are still reticent to classify themselves as poor or upper-class when given the subjective choice. Data from the 2006 General Social Survey (Table 2) show that the majority of respondents, regardless of income level, considered themselves to be working or middle-class. Individuals at the lowest income level ($10,000 or below) described themselves as lower-class and middle-class at virtually the same rate (26% and 25.6% respectively), while 10% of individuals with the highest incomes ($150,000 and above) still described themselves as working-class. It is particularly interesting to note that not until income

Figure 2. Subjective class response by reported yearly family income (GSS, 2006).



levels reached $150,000 did more than 7% of individuals describe themselves as upper-class, and even then it was less than a quarter of the respondents.

Taking a look at the survey respondents that fall into the lower income levels it is interesting to speculate why they did not identify with the "lower-class" classification. While Devine's (2004) study seems to point toward an American middle-class identity, and Jackman and Jackman's (1983) study revealed an affinity for one's own class, especially in the lower and working-class groups, rarely was there any mention of class disparities or any issues associated with mobility, although nearly all participants in both studies indicated a trend of upward mobility over their lifetime. There is, therefore, no real understanding of how individuals came to define themselves psychosocially as a member of a particular class, what it means to be a member of a group, or how individual's change their perception of group membership as their status changes.

Difficulties and Consequences of Mobility

Upward mobility, in popular American thought, may be considered a right or inevitability. However, studies show that it is more likely that people that are poor or in poverty are more likely to slip back after a period of economic gains; in 1995 the median length of time in poverty was 4.5 months. Roughly one half of those who manage to escape poverty sink back in within four years. Chronic poverty, which is the type of poverty most people tend to think about and at which most federal legislation (e.g., welfare) is aimed, in fact only affects half of the total poor population and just 5% of the total U.S. population (Lichter & Crowley, 2002).

While there is the desire to move up in terms of economics and social class it is often difficult to do so. The belief that hard work and effort will result in rewards

regardless of social background or inherited wealth is part of the culture of American ideals. Blau and Duncan's (1967) study of 21,000 men confirmed that "although social origins have an influence, educational background and training, and early work experience, had a more pronounced effect on chances of success" (Crompton, 1988, p. 209).

Dill's 1998 study of poor teenage mothers showed that they valued education for its own sake, as a source of personal pride and an example for their children, and a route to economic mobility. However, individuals in poverty seldom have the knowledge (cultural or social capital) to translate greater levels of education into concrete goals simply because access to educational resources is scarce or difficult to attain.

The inherent belief in America as a meritocratic system breaks down when applied to higher education, and more specifically the so-called elite colleges and university. According to Douthat (2007), modern meritocracy was supposed to be a force for near universal opportunity to higher education via identification of scholastic aptitude based on the SAT, need-based federal and government grants to ensure affordability, and affirmative action programs designed to diversify campuses and assist historically disadvantaged minorities. These policies achieved the desired effects except for students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds that still lag behind the graduation rates of students from more affluent families.

Indeed, the tide shifted for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, but not in the way the early architects of postsecondary opportunity hoped. Rather, among students who receive Pell Grants, the number of students attending four year colleges fell from 62% in 1974 to 45% in 2002 while those attending two-year institutions rose from 38%

to 55% (Douhat, 2007). Additionally, financial aid funds, both governmental and institutional, have increasingly been awarded to students from middle- and upper-income families, so much so that while students from families with income below $40,000 received less than seventy cents for every dollar increase in private college tuition compared to more than a dollar in aid for all other students, including those students from the wealthiest families. Meritocracy, then, is not passed on through genetics or determined by intellect; rather, meritocracy is passed on through wealth and culture (Douthat, 2007).

Regardless of the mechanisms of meritocratic achievement, whether it is through hard work or innate intellect, meritocracy is still viewed as an inherent piece of the so-called American Dream (Iceland, 2006). To that end, Blau and Duncan (1967) viewed the mobility created by education as "a good thing." Alternatively, Lipset and Bendix (1994) argued that the upward movement could result in status discrepancies, which they defined as the "varying consequences of mobility across the line between manual and non-manual occupations" (p. 255). Several studies (Hollingshead, Ellis & Kirby, 1954; Hollingshead & Redlich, 1954; Ellis, 1952; Durkheim, 1951; Janowitch & Curtis, 1957) suggest that status discrepancies "may cause difficulties in personal adjustment because high self-evaluations in one sphere of life conflict with low ones in another" (Lipset & Bendix, 1994, p. 255). Status discrepancy might also be attributed to the stress an individual feels when crossing from one status culture into another by virtue of persistent classism and negative stereotypes that exist.

Public Perceptions of the Poor

However small the population of chronically poor, it is that population that many think of when negative stereotypes about poverty emerge. In a 2001 poll conducted by National Public Radio (NPR), the Kaiser Family Foundation, and Harvard University's Kennedy School, respondents were asked, "Which is the bigger cause of poverty today: that people are not doing enough to help themselves out of poverty, or that circumstances beyond their control cause them to be poor?" The 2,000 respondents were roughly evenly divided in their responses; however when income was taken into account the division was more evident: 50% of affluent people believed the poor were to blame and 39% of the poor believed they were to blame. The poll also showed that about one-fifth of respondents believed that the poor had lower moral values. Additionally, the poll showed that 52% of the respondents believed that lack of motivation was the cause of poverty.

The persistent and negative stereotypes of the poor in America can be traced back to colonial times when the prevalent thought was that poverty was a result not of economic conditions but individual misbehavior. Although there were some poor populations deemed "deserving" (children and the elderly), most individuals in poverty were punished and bound to compulsory labor or indentured servitude (Iceland, 2006). As the population moved from primarily rural to urban areas during the period of industrialization, the concern over poverty, which was estimated at 13% of the total American population in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, grew due to the increased density of the poor in cities. In an 1854 annual report, Charles Loring Brace, the head of New York City's Children's Aid Society wrote:

> [The] greatest danger to America's future is the existence of an ignorant, debased, and permanently poor class in the great cities . . . .The members of it come at length to form a separate population. They embody the lowest passions and the most thriftless habits of the community. They corrupt the lowest class of working-poor who are around them. The expenses of police, prisons, of charities and means of relief, arise mainly from them (as quoted in Iceland, 2006, p. 13).

Unfortunately those opinions and stereotypes still exist today even among those in poverty. In fact, the NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School 2001 poll showed that the poor were more likely to blame drug abuse as a cause for poverty than those respondents who were more than 200% above the poverty threshold; nearly half of those below the poverty threshold believed that welfare encourages women to have more children; and 57% of the respondents classified as poor believed that a decline in moral values was one of the major causes of poverty. In many cases the responses of those in poverty mirrored and even exceeded respondents who were more affluent.

Classism

Lott (2002) defined classism as the distancing, separation, exclusion, and devaluing on the part of those who are not poor, together with stereotypes and prejudice. According to Kumashiro (2002) classism can also exist when there is continual citation of harmful and negative stereotypes of the poor and working-class. Frequent citation of stereotype (such as those by Brace, above) make these negative attributes seem correct because of constant reinforcement and general presence in the dominant (i.e., middle-class) narrative (Ryan, 1976). Langhout, Rosselli, and Feinstein (2007) posit:

> Stereotypes about the working class and working poor are especially likely to be reinforced when a group of people is thought to be "transcending" their backgrounds. College is an ideal place for this stereotype reinforcement to happen because some students from working class and working poor backgrounds are in the process of changing their class status (p. 149).

Status and Power

Just as Bourdieu (1984, 1994) argued that the efforts of distinction by various classes constitute a form of symbolic violence whose aim is to dominate other classes, Williams (1993) asserted that categorization of a population into inferior and superior groups is done by those who require such categorization in order to maintain power.

Sidanius and Pratto (1999) developed the Social Dominance Theory (SDT) as a framework to explain the outcomes of inequalities that result from stratification. SDT begins with the assumption that all societies are group-based social hierarchies. These social hierarchies consist of at least one dominant group at the top and a subordinate group at the bottom.

Sidanius and Prato identified three systems of social hierarchy in which every member participates: age, gender, and an arbitrary set. The arbitrary set, which is socially constructed and highly salient, represents a variety of characteristics such as nationality, race, and social class. All members of the society move through the hierarchical strata of age, and belong to one of the gender groups. In contrast, the arbitrary-set is more fluid and people can belong to several and have different places in the hierarchical structures.

This hierarchical structure results in systematic and learned oppression by the dominant group which is characterized by the possession of a disproportionately large share of positive social values such as political power and authority, good and plentiful food, and high social status. The oppressed groups have a disproportionately large share of negative social values (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). The result of the disproportion is a system of privilege and power that is oppressive and often invisible. "People do not choose to be poor or working class; instead, they are limited and confined by the opportunities afforded or denied them by a social and economic system" (Mantsios, 2004, p. 46). Poor and working-class college students are among those oppressed. The oppression is the result of lack of resources, education, or social capital which holds this social group "back from realizing their full potential as healthy, creative, productive individuals" (Mantsios, 2004, pp. 45-46).

Stereotype Threat

One way individuals experience classism is through stereotype threat. That is, when a widely known and harmful stereotype exists for a specific group it creates a burden of suspicion that acts as a threat (Steele, 1997). Croizat and Claire (1998) studied the intellectual performance of students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds and found that prolonged exposure to the stereotype that low-income is related to underperformance resulted in systematic poor academic performance. Students from low-SES backgrounds performed significantly worse than participants from high-SES backgrounds when presented with a test that they were told was a measure of their verbal intellectual ability. When presented with a test that was not presented as a measure of intellectual ability their performance equaled that of the higher SES group.

Microagression

Microaggressions are subtle insults that can be verbal, nonverbal, and/or visible (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Literature and research on microaggression (e.g., Davis, 1989; Pierce, 1974, 1995; Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez & Willis, 1978; Solarzano, 1998) has primarily focused on and been applied toward issues of race. However, the concept of microaggression as subtle forms of insults that accumulate in an individual's consciousness over time is particularly applicable to issues surrounding poverty and class status.

In their study on the experiences of African American college students, Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) documented the effects of racial microaggression in both academic and social spaces. The African American students in the study reported a variety of consequences stemming from the persistent, pervasive, and, oftentimes, unconscious words and actions of the majority White community in which they lived and associated, such as: dropping courses, changing majors, and transferring institutions.

Students from backgrounds of poverty might find these same types of microaggressions in the college culture. Assuming a student's tuition is paid by parents, a certain text has been read, an opera has been seen or heard, vacations are common, or certain types of foods are consumed are subtle ways that remind students from low socioeconomic backgrounds that they are in a culture in which they do not belong. Such microaggressions are often innocuous, yet the cumulative weight of such insults can be substantial. Pierce (1995) characterized the burden of microaggression thusly: "In and of itself a microaggression may seem harmless, but the cumulative burden of a lifetime of

microaggressions can theoretically contribute to diminished mortality, augmented morbidity, and flattened confidence"(p. 281).

Stigma

In his seminal work, Goffman (1963) defined stigma as a combination of the social process of devaluation and the emerging self-concepts of discredited individuals. Although he gave no specific examples in his work, Goffman (1963, p. 145) suggested that low class status was a potential stigma because of the real or perceived devaluation individuals often experience. While they may not feel stigmatized on a daily basis there is the potential for them to come face-to-face with an unexpected response based on their speech, dress, or manner, which can all be indicators of social class. Goffman wrote:

> This will be so if for no other reason than that almost all adults have to have some dealings with service organizations, both commercial and civil, where courteous, uniform treatment is supposed to prevail based on nothing more restrictive than citizenship, but where opportunity will arise for concern about invidious expressive valuations based on a virtual middle class ideal (p. 146).

Being the object of stigma can result in what Goffman termed spoiled social identity; that is, a discredited individual has the potential of being cut off from society unless he/she finds a sympathetic individual who shares the stigma or individuals who are willing to adopt his or her difference leading the individual to feel normal despite the socially perceived difference.

The results of stigma can have a profound effect on identity and identity development. This intersection is where the concepts of class and identity development merge, because, as Goffman (1963) wrote,

> Of course the individual constructs his image of himself out of the same materials from which others first construct a social and personal identification of him . . . The concept of social identity allowed us to consider stigmatization. The concept of personal identity allowed us to consider the role of information control in stigma management. The idea of ego identity allows us to consider what the individual may feel about stigma and its management (p. 106).

Summary: Class, Status Consciousness, and Consequences of Perceptions

While providing a good basis, class division on strictly economic terms is not adequate to describe the way Americans construct the concept of class in their lived experience. In order to accurately frame a picture of class as it is experienced in the United States it is important to take into account, as Devine (2004) suggested peoples' everyday experiences within a particular context. Bourdieu's (1983, 1986, 1987) forms of capital (cultural, economic, and social) then provide a framework for those experiences within a particular field.

Class division, or stratification, results in uneven distributions of power and social dominance (Sidanius & Prato, 1999) and the oppression of groups at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Oppression, or classism, can take the form of stereotype threat (Steele, 1997), microaggression (Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000), or stigma (Goffman, 1963) which can ultimately affect an individual's identity development. Saldana (1994), in a

study of 270 first-year students, found that a students' socioeconomic status was highly correlated with stress levels and can, therefore, mediate how students adjust to and experience college. Based on this and other studies examining the effects of classism (Karp, 1986; Wentworth & Peterson, 2001) it can be reasonably concluded that "specific interactions with the greater culture and with individuals situated within cultural and institutional contexts also creates adverse consequences related to social class" (Langhout, Rosselli, & Feinstein, 2007, p. 148).

Prominent College Student Identity Development Models

Roots of Identity Development

Identity development, rooted in psychosocial theory, is a process in which individuals develop a sense of identity or "a sense of personal sameness and historical continuity" (Erikson, 1968, p. 17). There are two types of identity development models: psychological and sociological. Psychological models tend to center on the changes individual's experience while sociological theories "focus on the impact of community, development of social roles, and managing stigma" (Evans, Forney & Guido-DiBrito, 1998, p. 91).

The major identity development theories from Erikson (1964, 1968), Marcia (1966), Chickering(1969), and Chickering and Reisser (1993) are based on dominant culture and provide a frame of reference as well as building blocks for the more complex concepts of gender, racial, sexual, and multi-dimensional identity development models. What is missing in the study of identity is the effect of socioeconomic status. Just as race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation can be indicators of social oppression, so too can socioeconomic status. In order to begin to understand the oppression and challenges

students from poor or working-class backgrounds face, it is necessary to have a deeper understanding of how socioeconomic status, and in turn classicism, affects identity development.

Erikson: Identity Development in Adolescents

Erikson's work (1964) is generally considered the root from which subsequent identity development theories emerge. Erikson believed that identities were formed through gaining a sense of who we are as well as who we are not, and was one of the first theorists to consider what role environment had on identity development (Torres, Howard-Hamilton & Cooper, 2003).

Erikson's theory stems from the *epigenetic principal*, which states that as all things grow they do so according to a plan which dictates the time of growth as well as the type of growth that occurs. The epigenetic principal is most easily understood through its application to *in utero* organisms; that is, a fetus grows and develops according to a biologically pre-determined plan. Identity development, according to Erikson, occurs in much the same way through eight pre-determined psychosocial stages (1968).

The stages in Erikson's model occur in succession, building upon or influencing each other. The stages begin at infancy and are characterized by polarized attributes (e.g., trust versus mistrust). Each stage occurs when an individual experiences an "identity crisis," which is not necessarily a major trauma but a time in which a decision must be made. The results of the decision can lead to 'virtues' or 'maladaptions.' Virtues accumulate over time and assist in further development. Maladaptions, on the

other hand, can hinder development. Table 1 details the crisis, relationships, modalities, virtues, and maladaptions associated with each developmental stage.

Table 1. Erikson's identity development worksheet (Erikson, 1980, p. 178).

Stage (age)	**Psychosocial Crisis**	**Significant relationship**	**Psychosocial Modality**	**Virtue**	**Maladaption & Malignancy**
I Infant (0-1)	Trust vs Mistrust	Mother	To get, to give in return	Hope, faith	Sensory distortion – withdrawal
II Toddler (2-3)	Autonomy vs Shame and Doubt	Parents	To hold on, to let go	Will, determination	Impulsivity—compulsion
III Pre-Schooler (3-6)	Initiative vs Guilt	Family	To go after, to play	Purpose, courage	Ruthlessness—inhibition
IV School-age (7-12 or so)	Industry vs Inferiority	Neighborhood and school	To complete, to make things together	Competence	Narrow virtuosity—inertia
V Adolescence (12-18 or so)	Ego-identity vs Role Confusion	Peer groups, role models	To be oneself, to share oneself	Fidelity, loyalty	Fanaticism--repudiation
VI Young adult (20s)	Intimacy vs Isolation	Partners, friends	To lose and find oneself in another	Love	Promiscuity—exclusivity
VII Middle adult (late 20s – 50s)	Generativity vs Self-absorption	Household, workmates	To make be, to take care of	Care	Overextension-rejectivity
VIII Old adult (50s-beyond)	Integrity vs Despair	Mankind or "my kind"	To be, through having been, to face not being	Wisdom	Presumption--despair

College student development generally takes place within stage five—ego-identity versus role confusion. It is in this stage that young men and women - establish their identity and which culture, environment, role models, and peer groups have the greatest effect. During this point in development, Erikson advocated for a "moratorium for the integration of the identity elements ascribed in the foregoing to the childhood stages" (1968, p. 128). In other words, Erikson believed that allowing adolescents some leeway to deal with any remnant of negative identity issues from previous stages would facilitate the development of healthy ego-identity. Without the appropriate leeway and guidance the stage could result in *identity confusion*, in which an individual could act out

in such ways as dropping out of school or, on the extreme end, experiencing borderline psychotic episodes.

In order to assist individuals through this highly chaotic time, Erikson advocated presenting "adolescents with ideals which can be shared by young people of many backgrounds, and which emphasize autonomy in the form of independence and initiative in the form of constructive work" (1968, p. 133). He recognized, at the time, that environment played an important role in providing the necessary support given that "the development of a self-reliant personality [is] dependent on a certain degree of choice, a sustained hope for an individual chance, and a firm commitment to the freedom of self-realization" (1968, p. 133).

Erikson's work, particularly in regards to Stage V of his model, provides the basis for much subsequent research. In working with a new population, such as students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds, it is instructive to understand that the development in each stage is in part dependent on the previous stages. Early life experiences and crisis and their resolution will be important background information to more recent life experiences.

Marcia: Ego Identity Development

James Marcia (1966) built on Erikson's work with the study of the two dimensions of identity development: the exploration and resolution of an identity crisis and a commitment to an identity after a period of exploration. Marcia's theory emphasizes the process of developing identity as opposed to the final outcome of development.

There are four dimensions to Marcia's model that hinge on crisis and commitment: foreclosure, diffusion, moratorium, identity achievement. The four dimensions can be arranged in a two-by-two matrix (see Table 2).

Table 2. Marcia's matrix of commitment versus exploration or crisis.

		Commitment?	
		Yes	No
Exploration or Crisis?	Yes	Identity Achievement	Moratorium
	No	Foreclosure	Diffusion

An individual who is *foreclosed* is described as someone who has not experienced a crisis in identity but has nevertheless made a commitment to an identity. Those in foreclosure have not separated from family and are not influenced by friends, peers or mentors. These individuals tend to retain family values and traditions without questioning them.

Individuals with *diffused* identities have neither experienced a crisis nor made a commitment to identity. It is rare that an individual would remain in this stage long as the college environment typically stimulates development (Torres, Howard-Hamilton & Cooper, 2003).

Individuals who have experienced exploration or crisis but have yet to make an identity commitment are said to be in *moratorium*. As Erikson suggested, moratorium identity is a period of time in which individuals are continuing to explore identity and work through a crisis. It is during this time that individuals may be especially sensitive to environmental or cultural factors as they are, in essence, seeing how different identities "fit" and gauging the reactions of others.

Finally, individuals are said to have reached identity achievement when they resolve identity crises and make a commitment to a specific identity. The commitment to a specific identity is characterized by the independence through which it is made (Torres, Howard-Hamilton & Cooper, 2003).

Marcia's work specifically focused and built on Stage V of Erikson's work. It takes into account an individual's family history, values, and ties as well as more recent experiences to create a picture of where an individual is in terms of development. Understanding where an individual is in terms of ego-identity is a helpful starting point when expanding the inquiry into forms of identity that may be the result of a specific characteristic, such as socioeconomic status.

Chickering and Reisser: Seven Vectors

Building on Erikson's work, Arthur Chickering (1969) developed a theory of identity development which took into consideration the environmental conditions that influence identity and intimacy. Chickering began his work at Goddard College where he was responsible for evaluating curriculum and student development. "Chickering saw the establishment of identity as the core developmental issue with which students grapple during the college years...[his] theory has been widely used in students affairs ... and has served as the foundation for extensive research as well as practical application" Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998, p. 36). In 1995, along with Linda Reisser, Chickering revised his theory to include additional underrepresented populations.

Chickering's theory consists of seven vectors that each contribute to the formation of identity: developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing

identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Although described as vectors, Chickering and Reisser posited that the direction of development is better described as a spiral or series of steps as opposed to a straight line.

The fifth vector, *establishment of identity,* builds on the work individuals accomplish in previous vectors and has the added complexity of acknowledging and accepting differences in gender and sexual orientation. Individuals who have established identity are comfortable with their gender and sexual orientation, and have a clear self concept and lifestyle. They acknowledge and accept feedback and their self-esteem is not based on comments of others but rather a clear sense of self-esteem and personal integration.

Chickering and Reisser have been diligent in updating and refining their theory of student identity development, however additional research on the identity development of women, racial and ethnic groups, age groups, and diverse sexual orientations is needed to continue to make the theory inclusive. Regardless, Chickering's vectors, and the subsequent revisions, have been a starting point for more specific identity development theories, and the findings are applicable to individuals from a variety of backgrounds, including students with low socioeconomic backgrounds.

Identity Development of Specific Populations

As the landscape of the American culture changed, and subsequently the higher education landscape, it became clear that identity development models did not take into account the specific experiences of underrepresented groups. Researchers began to look at specific aspects of dimensions of identity development and how they are socially constructed.

In many cases an individual will have several aspects of identity. In the case of identity dimension, "it is useful to think about the dimensions in terms of their social constructions. There are meaningful differences related to—but not based upon—these characteristics as they are constructed, experienced, and lived within given cultural and historical contexts" (McEwen, 1996, p. 192).

Josselson: Women's Identity Development

The early identity development theories of Erikson and Marcia were developed in large part through interviews and observations of men. As of 1971 little research was available on the identity development of women; and what was available was generally from studies of female psychotherapy patients which came to represent the experiences of all women in the literature (Josselson, 1987). Building on the work of Erikson and Marcia, Josselson (1987) sought to increase the understanding of the identity formation of women. Josselson's work is grounded in Erikson's theories and inspired by Marcia's structure, a fact evident in her patterns and nomenclature of development.

Josselson's identity states, which are similar in concept to Marcia's, are: Purveyors of the Heritage (foreclosers), Pavers of the Way (identity achievements), Daughters of Crisis (moratoriums), and Lost and Sometimes Found (identity diffusions). Because Marcia's and Josselson's stages are not viewed as permanent, Josselson conducted a follow-up study ten years after her original study to determine if and how individuals had changed during the intervening years (Josselson, 1996).

Josselson's research substantiates the differences in the development of men and women. Women, according to Josselson, are less likely to individuate, and the separation-individuation phase is critical to development. Women are more likely to

remain tied psychologically and emotionally to their mothers, inhibiting the degree of individuation that is common in men. For women, according to Josselson, the primary activities that underlie the formation of identity are "communion, connection, relational embeddedness, spirituality, and affiliation" (1987, p. 191).

Racial and Ethnic Identity Development

Like the research on women's identity development, the research on racial and ethnic identity was born out of the work of Erikson and Marcia. Helms (1990) defined racial identity and racial identity development theory as:

> A sense of group or collective identity based on one's perception that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular racial group . . . racial identity development concerns the psychological implications of racial-group membership; that is, belief systems that evolve in reaction to perceived differential racial-group membership (pp. 3-4).

In contrast, ethnic identity refers to a group of individuals who share a common origin and segments of a common culture, and who participate in activities in celebration of the origins and culture (Evans, Forney & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). Additionally, ethnic identity does not always or specifically place an emphasis on oppression; whereas racial identity presupposes oppression.

Models of racial development (e.g., Arce, 1981; Cross, 1978, 1991; Helms, 1993; Kim, 1981; Thomas, 1971) and ethnic development (e.g. Atkinson, Mortinson & Sue, 1993; Phinney, 1989, 1992) gained prominence beginning in the 1970s primarily in response to the Civil Rights Movement. Most of the models and theories were specific to Black identity development; additional work has been done in order to facilitate

understanding of white racial identity development, which is integral in understanding the movement toward the end of racism (Helms, 1990). Since that time a number of additional models related to specific groups such as Hispanics (Bernal & Knight, 1993; Casas & Pytluk, 1995; Padilla, 1995; Ruiz, 1990), Asians (Kim, 1981; Sodowsky, Kwan, & Pannu, 1995; Sue & Sue, 1990), and American Indians (Choney, Berryhill-Paake, & Robbins, 1995) have gained prominence.

The Cross Model of Psychological Nigrescence. The patterns of racial and ethnic identity development, while not wholly transferable between and among groups, share structural similarities which may be represented by an in-depth examination of one particular theory. The Cross Model of Psychological Nigrescence, or the psychology of becoming Black, has outgrowths of its own (Finnegan & McNally1987; Jackson, 1976; Helms; 1990; Hardiman, 1982), which is what makes it particularly interesting as a point of departure for the body of research on ethnic and racial identity development (Cross, 1995).

The Cross Model of Psychological Nigrescence consists of five stages: Pre-encounter, Encounter, Immersion-Emersion, Internalization, and Internalization-Commitment. In stage one, pre-encounter, individuals are described as 'race-neutral,' or, on the other end of the spectrum, anti black. In this stage individuals either adhere to the belief that race does not matter, or they may look at Blacks through the White racist lens and agree with racist stereotypes and the thought that whiteness is the preferred status (Cross, 1995).

Stage two, Encounter, involves a crisis, similar to that described by Erikson. The crisis alters the individual's identity and worldview. Cross described this stage as one of

disequlibrium, and one that does not happen in a single event, but rather over a series of events in which the individual begins to question the understanding of the long-held 'non-Black' identity. This stage occurs in two steps: the encounter followed by the effect of the encounter.

The third stage, Immersion-Emersion, involves first discarding the old identity and complete engagement in Black culture. This process generally includes changes in outward appearances and actions—hairstyle, dress, language use, participation in cultural events. Although the immersion is intense and deep, this stage is not characterized by acceptance of a new identity, rather the exploration of one and the shedding of the former identity (similar to Erikson's moratorium). The second step involves taking a more critical view of black identity where the individual begins to move away from dualistic views of race and begins to seek out ways to re-engage as a new identity emerges (Cross, 1995).

Stage four, Internalization, is the period in which the individual begins to gain resolution to the dissonance of Immersion-Emersion. "Blackness becomes a backdrop for life's transactions. . . One is Black, thus one is free to ponder matters beyond the parameters of one's personal sense of blackness" (Cross, 1995. pp. 113-114). Cross notes, however, that not every person in Internalization exerts their Blackness with the same prominence; the extent is based on past experiences within the previous stages. Some individuals spent the remainder of their lives in stage four.

Stage five, Internalization-Commitment, is marked by a long-term interest in "finding ways to translate [a] personal sense of Blackness into a plan of action or general sense of commitment" (Cross, 1995, p. 121). Cross acknowledges that little research has

been done on this stage of sustained interest and a deeper understanding of the stage requires focused empirical studies.

Sexual Identity Development

Sexual identity, according to Klein (1990), is much more than sexual activity; "emotional preference, social preference, lifestyle, and self-identification, as well as sexual attraction, fantasy, and behavior at different times in a person's life must all be considered to provide an accurate picture of sexual orientation" (Evans, Forney & Guido-DiBrito, 1998, p. 91).

Cass's Model of Homosexual Identity Formation. Like racial and ethnic identity development, sexual identity development models involve stages of pre-encounter, confusion, reflection, acceptance, and pride. Cass's (1979) model is based on interviews and work with gays and lesbians, and is applicable to the experiences of bisexual men and women. Cass's Model of Homosexual Identity Formation combines elements of both psychological and sociological aspects of development.

Cass's model has six stages: identity confusion, identity comparison, identity tolerance, identity acceptance, identity pride, and identity synthesis. Similar to Cross (1995), Cass's model includes periods of transition in which an individual will explore what it means to be homosexual and seek out people or groups with similar orientations in order to better understand oneself. The transition periods can be difficult and if an individual does not find support or acceptance may remain "closeted." Cass's final stage of identity synthesis is characterized by an understanding that sexual orientation is an aspect of identity as opposed to one's sole identity.

D'Augelli's Model of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Development. D'Augelli's (1994) model is more focused on the sociological aspect of sexual identity, with specific attention paid to the effect of environment, culture, and self-choice. D'Augelli argued that all persons essentially have a prescribed heterosexual identity at birth, and that identity must be given up, and in the process social barriers must be navigated.

D'Augelli put forth a development model with six interactive processes: exiting heterosexual identity, developing a personal lesbian/gay/bisexual identity status, developing a lesbian/gay/bisexual social identity, becoming a lesbian/gay/bisexual offspring, developing a lesbian/gay/bisexual intimacy status, and entering a lesbian/gay/bisexual community. Because of the inherent nature of the "invisibleness" of sexual orientation, D'Augelli believed the process occurred over a lifetime rather than something that could be ultimately achieved. The layered and nuanced model takes into account the fact of an intrinsically heterosexual culture and theorizes that much of the identity development must be done individually by defining what it means to be gay, lesbian, or bisexual.

Socioeconomic status, like sexual orientation, is essentially invisible. While there may be clues to an individual's status, they are not outwardly recognizable unless the individual is willing to "out" him or herself. For that reason, the subtle contours of Cass (1979) and D'Augellli's (1994) models can provide an additional frame of reference for the study of low-SES students.

Construction of Multiple Dimensions of Identity

In 2007 Abes, Jones, and McEwen proposed a reconceptualized model of the multiple dimensions of identity. A key feature of the model was the concept of the role

of social constructionism. Weber (1998) discussed the importance of considering the context in which the construction of identity takes place, specifically socially, historically, politically, and culturally. She argued that instead of assuming that the binaries defined by biology that characterize identity (e.g., men-women, white-non white) social construction can provide a more meaningful context in which to examine developmental issues.

Jones and McEwen's (2000) original model of multiple dimensions of identity described how the core of identity development (personal attributes, characteristics and identity) interaction with an individuals numerous identities (e.g., race, culture, gender, religion, social class) within a particular context (family, sociocultural conditions, current experiences, career decisions, and life planning). Jones and McEwen asserted that "no one dimension may be understood singularly; it can be understood only in relation to other dimensions (p. 410).

Abes, Jones and McEwen (2007) expanded on the concept put forth in Jones and McEwen's (2000) earlier model to incorporate meaning making. Meaning making allows one to understand the salience of an identity based on the context and the "filter" which allows contextual influence to pass through at varying degrees. The benefit of this model is that it is a holistic examination of development that takes into consideration the essential task of meaning making.

Summary of College Student Identity Development Models

The literature on identity development covers a wide range of experiences and dimensions, yet there are no models that specifically address the experiences of poor and working class-students. Given Jackson and Jackson's (1983) finding of class affinity and

their comparison with racial affinity, the Cross (1978, 1991) and Cass (1979) models are particularly salient in the understanding of socioeconomic identity development.

Individuals with low-SES status are, by nature of stratification, oppressed. "Class is about economic security, choices perceived and those available, and cultural background" (McEwen, 1996, p. 206). Most literature on racial, ethnic, and sexual orientation identity tends to omit consideration of social class, with the exception of the multiple dimension model. However, because of the inherent oppression, and the stratified nature of many colleges and universities, it is worth giving this population increased consideration (McEwen, 1996).

The Process of Constructing Identity

Erikson identified three levels of identity which are dependent upon their relationship to the intersection of self and context: ego, personal, and social. The ego identity is inherently personal and, arguably, unconscious. Ego identity is inextricably linked to childhood and parent-child relationships. Erikson postulated that the ego identity was resistant to change. Personal identity is at the intersection of self and context and includes the values and beliefs that an individual shares during interactions with others. Personal identity distinguishes individuals from diverse others and establishes him or her as an individual. Finally, social identity, the most contextual of identities, includes native language, citizenship, racial/ethnic background, and social class. Social identity is often referred to as group identity, and is the consolidation of ideals that the individual has internalized from groups with which he or she belongs (Schwartz, 2001).

Neo-Eriksonian researchers have further identified domains of identity development relevant to Erikson's original three levels of identity. The domain clusters

progress from the person outwards: psychological, interactional, and social-structural. "[M]odels oriented principally toward social identity often point to structural aspects of society and culture in which social identity is embedded, hence, the term social-structural" (Schwartz, 2001, p. 14). According to Schwartz (2001) there is still much work to be done in identifying and measuring identity domains, including the domain of class status. It is the intersection of all three levels of identity with which we are concerned here.

Limitations of Predominate Identity Development Theories

Until recently, most identity development models have been based on Marcia's (1966, 1980) model; however Marcia, like most researchers after him (including the bulk of research presented in the previous section), focused on personal identity, which Marcia (1993) subsequently admitted was a departure from Erikson's original model. Absent from much of the identity development research is ego and social identity. Cote and Levine (1988) and van Hoof (1999) have called for an expansion of identity development theory from the restricted model first put forth by Marcia. While researchers in college student development and student affairs are increasingly looking at holistic development models, few (e.g., Abes, Jones, McEwen, 2007) take the process of development within context into consideration.

Expansions and Extensions: An Overview

A number of alternative models have emerged since 1987; these models are divided into two categories: extensions, those which complement identity status theory; and expansions, those which may include identity status theory but go beyond Marcia's

conception of identity status and are generally considered more faithful to Erikson's original conception (Schwartz, 2001).

There are a variety of development models that fall under the umbrellas of expansions and extensions. Examples of expansions include Kurtines's (Kurtines, Berman, Ittel, & Williamson, 1995) co-constructionist perspective, which posits that development is a shared process between individuals and their social and cultural environment; Adams's (Adams & Marshall, 1996) social psychology of identity which describes identity as embedded in to contexts, the interpersonal micro context and the social and cultural macro process; and Cote's (1997) identity capital model which focuses primarily on the social viability of the development process.

Extensions of Marcia's original theory primarily focus on process or the "how" of identity development. Grotevant (1987) put forth a theory of exploration as the work of identity formation using two principal components: abilities and orientations. Abilities include critical thinking, perspective taking and problem solving. Orientation refers to attitudes that may affect an individual's willingness to engage in exploration given the uncertain and potentially stressful nature of cultural and social interactions.

Berzonsky's (1989) research also focused on the process of personal identity development which documented three identity styles (informational, normative, and diffuse-avoidant) which Berzonsky distinguished as characteristics rather than a skills. At the most basic level Berzonsky posited that personal identity is constructed through social interaction and the styles help individuals navigate the process of development.

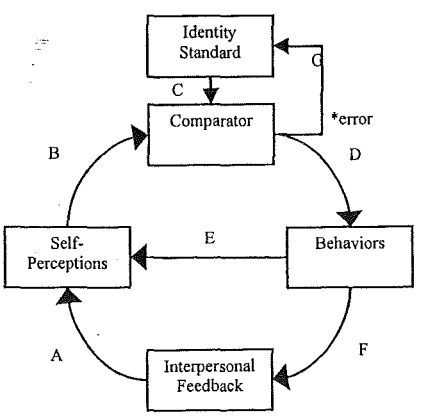
Kerpelman, Pittman, and Lamke (1997) built upon Grotevant's (1987) research by proposing a microprocess of identity control theory (Figure 3). Grotevant (1997)

approved of this extension of his model saying that it should "move the field ahead" (p. 356). The Kerpelman, et al (1997) model takes into consideration the

> constant interaction between the adolescent's developing identity and his or her social environment, and most particularly the congruence or incongruence between one's ego, person, or social identity and the feedback that one receives concerning those aspects of identity, are presumed to drive or inhibit the exploration process. If one's view of oneself is consistent with the feedback that one receives, exploration is unlikely to occur. On the other hand, if the feedback that one receives from significant others is not in concert with the identity that one possesses, then revision of identity (i.e., exploration) is likely to take place. (Schwartz, 2001, p. 28).

Rather than focusing on the outcomes with "commitment to identity treated as a single, terminal decision made in late adolescence following a finite period of information collection" (Kerpelman et al, 1997, p. 327), the Kerpelman et al model takes into consideration the multiple choices and changes of an individual during the infinite exploration of identity. Kerpelman et al. visualized the process in the following way:

Figure 3. The components of the identity control process (Kerpelman et al., 1997, p. 329)



The model works thusly:

> Interpersonal feedback is received (A) and interpreted to become a self-perception that is matched (B) by a comparator with input (C) from an identity standard. When the standard and self-perception are incongruent, and error/disturbance results that leads (D) to the enactment of *behavior* aimed at restoring the predisrupted identity. For this restoration to take place, cognitive behavior may shape self-perceptions directly (E), or social behavior may change the interpersonal situation (F) leading to new social feedback (A). The original identity standard is maintained when behavior produces congruence between self-perception and identity standard. However, when behavior fails repeatedly to result in congruence between self-perception and the identity standard, an alternate means of reestablishing congruence is to adjust the identity standard itself (G). (Kerpelman et al. 1997, p. 329.)

Kerpelman et al. used the analogy of a thermostat to describe the continual monitoring of the congruence between inputs and internal standards.

Summary of Identity Development Process Models

The expansion and extension models take into consideration Erikson's views of the process of identity development by delving into areas left out of Marcia's original model and models based on his initial research. The inclusion of ego and, most notably, social identity are especially relevant to the identity development of college students. As

well, the extension models delve further into the process of development and can provide an understanding of the mechanisms behind exploration.

Conceptual Framework

Considering the cultural context, process of identity development, and influence of class status, I developed a conceptual framework from which to analyze the phenomenon of the identity development of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds based on the Kerpelman et al. (1997) microprocess perspective of the identity control theory.

The Kerpelman et al. (1997) process includes five components: identity standard, comparator, behaviors, self-perceptions, and interpersonal feedback. When interpersonal feedback is received an individual receives that information as a self-perception which is then matched by a comparator with input from an identity standard. If there is incongruity then an individual will change his or her behavior in order to restore the predisrupted identity. Cognitive behavior or social behavior may change leading to new social feedback.

Adams (1997) called attention to two shortcomings to the microprocess theory. First, the origins of the identity standard are unclear. Kerpelman et al. (1997) responded that they are obtained through parental interaction or attachment theory and gradually replaced by feedback gained from interpersonal relationships in a cultural context. However, this was not intuitively present with the visual representation of the model.

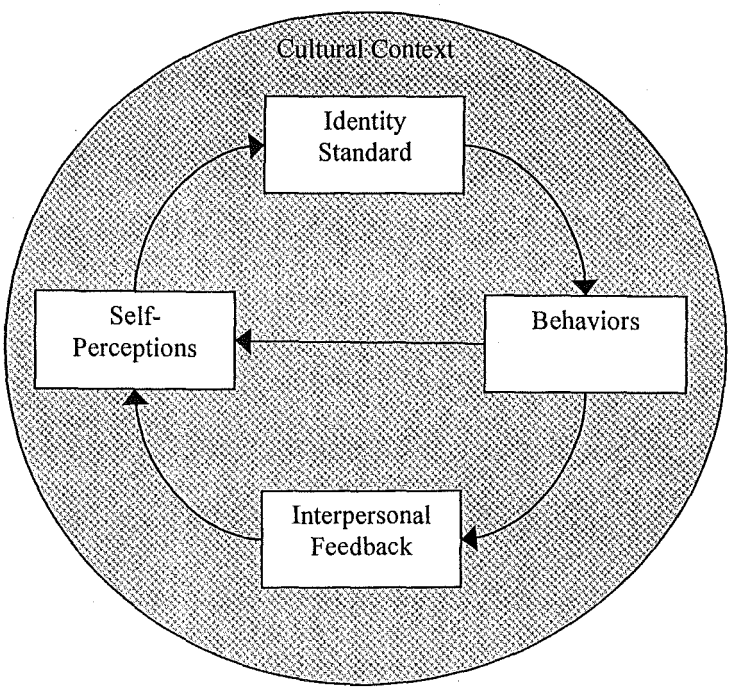
The second shortcoming identified by Adams (1997) was that the process was deterministic which was inconsistent with Erikson's view that behavior is choice-based. Schwartz (2001) contended that in light of Adams's (1997) criticism, it is difficult to

place the exploratory nature of identity development within the Kerpelman et al. (1997) process model. However, the Kerpelman et al. model does take into account the role of all three level of of Erikson's identity development: ego, personal and social. With Adam's (1997) and Schwartz (2001) criticism in mind, as well as the fact that class status, for college students, is not static, I have adapted the model (Figure 4) with four components of identity standard, behavior, social feedback, and self-perceptions placed within the social context in which development occurs.

The identity standard is based on the ego identity and is comprised of an individual's self-definitions based on childhood experiences and parent-child interactions. Self-definitions are values of varying worth; the more important a value the more salient it is to an individual's identity and more resistant to change. For example, an individual might be an athlete and consider that a highly salient part of their identity. That self-definition could be based on years of parental and/or other adult reinforcement throughout childhood. The second component, behavior, is predicated on the individual's identity standard. When entering a new social context an individual will behave based on their identity standard and the information known about the nature and context of the culture. The third component, interpersonal feedback, occurs in reaction to the behavior. Interpersonal feedback can either be accepting or critical of an individual's behavior. The fourth component, self-perception involves the information an individual takes in about their own behavior as well as the interpersonal feedback received. The self-perception will then either reinforce an individual's identity standard or reveal incongruence between the behavior as demonstrated within a cultural context and the

identity standard. At this point the individual must choose whether to reconsider their identity standard or their membership within the social group.

Figure 4. Conceptual model of the identity development process for college students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (adapted by Christian Steinmetz from Kerpelman, et al., 1997).



Summary

The intersection of class status and identity has not received attention from researchers in spite of the calls for increased research and the fact that class status continues to be a salient element of the American culture. The definition of class, as it exists with in the United States, is complex and encompasses ever-changing variables depending on who is supplying the definition. While the strict economic definition of class has its merits, it misses the subtle and real nature of the experiences of individuals and groups.

The concepts of capital (economic, educational, social, and cultural), as put forth by Bourdieu (1983, 1987), allow researchers to look at class in a more nuanced way. The forms of capital are, in essence, forms of power which dictate an individual's position within his or her social universe. Power becomes an important factor in the discussion of class because the networks of power that exist within the American class structure continue to perpetuate inequality and marginalization (Liu, 2006).

Oppression and marginalization, the results of power differentials, then result in classism, which can take many forms and manifest in a variety of ways, e.g., stigma, microagression, and stereotype threat. Just as the pervasiveness and persistence of racism and sexism can have negative consequences on individual's self-concept and development, so too can classism.

The psychological effects of classism have not been well documented despite calls for increased attention of class in research and clinical psychology (Ostrove & Cole, 2003). An understanding of the negative effect socioeconomic status has on stress levels and students' adjustment to and experience in college (Saldana, 1994) can assist researchers in the exploration of the phenomenon.

In order to understand the phenomemon of social class and identity development, it is important to take into consideration the identity development research that has come before. Work on the various dimensions of identity development, e.g., race and sexual orientation, are particularly salient and provide good models. However, it is also important to take into consideration the context in which the development occurs as well as the fact that identity development is a process that takes place over a lifetime of interactions, as opposed to the culmination of experiences in late adolescence put forth by

the majority of development models. By constantly examining and renegotiating one's identity with the established standard and the social context an individual can take into consideration his or her standing or power (or lack thereof) and adjust accordingly.

The development of a process model of identity development and social class is an important step in understanding how individuals negotiate relationships and understand their own self-concept and behavior within different cultural contexts. The need for this understanding is even more important for individuals, in this case college students, in the process of changing their social class because they must negotiate relationships within a new social class and yet remain tethered to their former class background.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

I've always loved the ordinary, the everyday—because I think that if you really look at them, they are so often the most astonishing things of all (Brassai, 1976).

Qualitative Design

In order to comprehend an individual's process of identity development, it is important to understand the social phenomena and cultural context from the individual's perspective. This perspective includes participant feelings, beliefs, ideals, thoughts and actions (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997). The study of the identity development of college students cuts across disciplines (sociology, psychology, education) and is subject to understanding the meanings individuals ascribe to their experiences. Qualitative inquiry is, at its root, concerned with the meanings and order people make of social interactions and symbols and therefore well suited to this type of investigation.

Since little research has been done to explore the effects of low socioeconomic status (SES), and class status in general, on identity development (Walpole, 2003), qualitative research allows for the casting of a wide net to explore the phenomenon. Qualitative research gave me an opportunity to collect a variety of "incidents, artifacts, and quotations that illuminate the phenomena" (Lancy, 1993, p. 9) of SES in a way that has not been previously explored.

Because the exploration of identity development in college students covers a variety of disciplines, multi-faceted issues cannot be reduced to one simple question. Like identity development, qualitative inquiry comes from no single perspective. Indeed, perhaps the greatest strength in qualitative research is its ability to overlap among differing frameworks of traditions, theories, and perspectives (Patton, 2002).

Qualitative, or naturalistic, inquiry allows for the study of phenomena in a real world setting. Naturalistic inquiry is neither controlled, manipulated, nor predetermined. As a result, the researcher is open to the inherent emergent design of qualitative inquiry, and allows the participants the flexibility to discuss interpretations of actions or events as they occurred, as opposed to forcing choices within artificial constraints. Certainly the presence of the researcher contributes to the quality or manipulation of the responses; however, along the continuum of research strategies, naturalistic inquiry is much less obtrusive than research conducted in a controlled laboratory (Guba, 1978; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002).

Researcher Paradigm: Social Constructionist

To a social constructionist, knowledge has its roots in shared communal meaning. Experiences take meaning from a variety of perspectives and are described based on an individual's perceptions as a member of one community or an array of communities to which they may belong (Crotty, 1998; Gergen, 1991; Gergen & Gergen, 2003; Schwandt, 1994).

For the social constructionist, there is no single "Truth," but rather many "truths" that are central to communities and cultures. In order to understand a particular phenomenon, a social constructionist will "attempt to capture different perspectives

through open-ended interviews and observations, and then examine the implications of different perceptions but not pronounce which set of perceptions was 'right' or more 'true' or more 'real'" (Patton, 2002, p. 98). While there are long standing theories on identity development that highlight individual stages and changes, each person's experience is different and there is no "right" or "wrong" way to develop.

Ontological Assumptions

The world view of a social constructionist is relativistic, no absolute Truth exists. While this view is met often with skepticism on the grounds that there are standards that all beliefs or judgments must meet, a relativist would argue that beliefs are defined by an individual's experience with and knowledge of historical, cultural, social, linguistic, or psychological backgrounds (Blackburn, 1994). By using a disciplined framework, such as a preexisting identity development theory or a combination of theories, a relativist can make judgments and assumptions about the nature of truth with the understanding that the framework used is entirely within the circumference of individual experience.

The constructions of relativists, therefore, are neither right or wrong, nor more or less true; rather the constructions are more or less informed or sophisticated. The social constructionist also understands that as individuals gain knowledge and experience, constructions may shift either to stronger or weaker positions (Guba & Lincoln, 2006).

Epistemological Assumptions

The social constructionist's epistemological stance is intrinsically linked with her ontological assumptions. Because the constructionist has already defined the nature of reality as relative, the epistemological questions, "What is the relationship between the knower or would-be knower" and "What can be known?" are already answered. The

researcher and the object of interest (e.g., individual, phenomena, etc.) are linked through interaction and work together to define or uncover the "truth" or reality as the inquiry proceeds (Guba & Lincoln, 2006). Participant interview became a discovery process for the students as they gained a deeper understanding of their individual experiences while, at the same time, I interpreted, documented, and described that experience.

As Gergen (2003) stated, "From the constructionist position the process of understanding is not automatically driven by the forces of nature, but is the result of an active, cooperative enterprise of persons in relationships. In this light, inquiry is invited into the historical and cultural bases of various forms of world construction" (p. 15). The epistemological assumption, therefore, is transactional (involving interpersonal and/or social communication) as well as subjective, "a subject's direct experience of itself, in contrast to experience of things and states external to the subject" (Mautner, 1997, p. 546).

Methodological Assumptions

For the qualitative researcher, conceptualizing the entire research process is fundamentally inductive. The methodology employed should allow the researcher to develop categories, meanings and clusters of meanings directly from the participants rather than beginning the research process with a set of expectations or categories. The process for the social constructionist is both hermeneutical and dialectical (Creswell, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 2006).

The modern hermeneutic method was developed by Freiderich Schleirermacher (1768-1834) who called the interpretation process the "art of understanding." Interpretation (of text, art, actions, utterances, etc.) is a circular and continuous process in

which the interpreter continually gathers increasing amounts of information based on increasing knowledge. Schleirermacher posited that through many iterations of interdependent interpretation the interpreter can come close to what may be considered an accurate and unambiguous understanding of an object of study (Schwandt, 2001; Reese, 1996).

Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) expanded on Schleirermacher's art of understanding by further developing the hermeneutic method as a way to provide the grounds for objectivity in the human sciences in contrast to the grounds for objectivity in the natural sciences. Dilthey maintained that meaning is hidden and must be brought to the surface through deep reflection. That deep reflection may only occur through extensive and intensive researcher-participant dialogue (Ponterotto, 2005; Schwandt, 2001).

As a social constructionist, I understand that intense dialogue with participants uses the process of discovery in the tradition of the hermeneutic circle. By constantly reviewing the information given and placing it within the larger context of the experiences of the participant, I was able to gain a more complete, and therefore truer, understanding of identity development and SES among the participants.

Phenomenological Research Design

Dilthey's contribution to qualitative research in general, and hermeneutics in particular, lies in the differentiating of *Naturwissenschaft* (natural science) and *Geisteswissenschaft* (human science), where the goal of *Geisteswissenschaft* is *Verstehen* (understanding) the "meaning" of social phenomenon. The method of *Verstehen* is a key element in both qualitative research and phenomenology. While natural sciences are

aimed at developing causal explanations, human science must be understood: "Nature we explain; psychic life we understand" (Dilthey as quoted in Schwandt, 2001, p. 273). Dilthey's contribution and understanding of hermeneutics directly contributed to hermeneutic phenomenology where in order to understand the meaning of a text or action, it is necessary to understand the intentions of the writer/actor and the nature of the world (Barritt et al., 2001).

Phenomenology, like hermeneutics, is both a philosophy and a methodology, and has gradually come to fuse with existentialism and hermeneutics. Originally conceived as a philosophical method, Edmund Husserl put forth the concept to illuminate the truth or rationale of immediate experience as a way to explain individuals' understanding of mathematical theory. Husserl posited that through analysis of consciousness as it exists in experience, once could discover the ultimate source of knowledge. Husserl's assertions regarding the phenomenological method were influenced by Descartes' ideology that "knowledge be clear and distinct as opposed to relying on any prior assumption that has to be justified elsewhere" (Bunnin & Yu, 2004, p. 516).

In its simplest form, phenomenology is the study of experience (Barritt et al., 2001). From its conception to its current form, phenomenology has been influenced by transcendental, existential, and hermeneutical philosophies. For Husserl, a transcendentalist, the goal was essence, not generality. For Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, existentialists, the goal was to illuminate the every-day world of experiences with meaning intact. For Heidegger and Gadamer, hermeneuticists, the goal was to understand the text/action through the writer's/actor's world, intentions, situations,

desires, needs and social world by placing oneself in the context that one hopes to illuminate (Barritt et al., 2001).

The phenomenological method seeks to answer the questions: What is this story about? Where did it begin? What are the significant parts and what is insignificant? In asking these questions, I had to understand that informants are "part of social worlds, caught in webs of meanings, which are part of their language" (Barritt et al., 2001, p. 220). To discover the answers to these questions, I had to be mindful of the central concepts of the phenomenological traditions: attention to the *thing* of interest; meaning in experience; wonder at the ordinary; language; and intentionality (Barritt et al., 2001).

In a practical sense, the phenomenological method focuses on a concept or phenomenon and the meaning of the experiences of individuals with the phenomenon (Creswell, 1998), in this case the effect of low socioeconomic status on identity development. In order to successfully conduct a phenomenological study, I identified a core group of participants who have experience with the phenomenon. I worked to develop a deep and meaningful dialogue with participants, while at the same time bracketing my own experiences, preconceived notions, and prior knowledge of the phenomenon studied.

While phenomenology was the primary method for this investigation, elements of grounded theory were included in the research design. Although the two methods are seemingly at odds (grounded theory is utilized to develop a theory while phenomenology focuses on the understanding of a particular phenomenon) I was able to find some middle ground for the complementary use of both methods. The two methods do share the commonality of setting aside preconceived notions and theoretical ideas in order to allow

the phenomenon and the subsequent theory to emerge. Grounded theory takes the concept of phenomenology one step further by generating a theory or "an abstract analytical schema of a phenomenon that relates to a particular situation" (Creswell, 1998, p. 56).

An important element of grounded theory employed in this investigation was the constant comparative method of data analysis. Initial categories were not formed prior to beginning interviews (true to the phenomenological method); rather, the categories were developed from the initial interviews and "field tested" with subsequent interviews of participants. This was not only a vehicle for the development of propositions, but also a type of member-checking within and among participants. Causal conditions, strategies, contexts, and intervening conditions and consequences were all explored among the entire group of participants in order to enlighten the central phenomenon of identity development (Creswell, 1998).

Research Questions

While I hoped to be able to enter the study without preconceptions, some framing was necessary in order to create an initial direction. The questions, therefore, were broad enough to give direction, but flexible enough to allow for exploration of the phenomenon (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Morse, 1994). With these parameters in mind, the following questions served as an initial boundary as well as a guide to this study exploring low socioeconomic status and identity development:

1. In what ways do students from low socioeconomic backgrounds define themselves?

2. How does low socioeconomic status inform students' understanding of their identity?
3. What meaning does low socioeconomic status have for these students? How does low socioeconomics status inform their lived experiences?
4. Using established identity development models as a foundation, how do the socioeconomic-based developmental experiences of the participants add to or differ from dimensions of identity based on race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation?

Site and Participant Selection

A phenomenological study requires the selection of participants who have experienced the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 1998). Miles and Huberman (1994) advocate defining parameters of site selection based on the fact that "one cannot study everyone everywhere doing everything, even within a single case" (p. 36). In defining the parameters of the site and participant selection, then, the researcher must give consideration not only to who will be participating in the investigation, but also the settings, events, and processes that surround the people and inform their experiences relative to the phenomenon being explored.

Because dimensions of identity development can be influenced by college environment (Sanford, 1966; Astin 1984; Schlossberg, 1989; Rodgers, 1990; Rendon, 1994), in this exploration of identity and low socioeconomic status, I was particularly interested in working with individuals from a single university in order to provide the cohesive frame of one institution's culture.

The University was an ideal site for this study for several reasons. First, there is a strong institutional culture with well established-traditions, both social and academic, which serves both as a backdrop for and a variable within the participants' experiences at the University. Second, although students from low income backgrounds historically have had lower persistence rates and educational attainment compared with their peers from more affluent backgrounds (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1987, 1993), students across income levels persist and graduate at nearly the same rate at elite, highly selective institutions, including the institution selected for this study. This fact suggests that students at all income levels have the same access to academic and social support networks and benefit from those resources at these institutions (Bowen, Kurzweil, & Tobin, 2005). Finally, at the University, students from low income backgrounds are an underrepresented population: 4.1% of all students come from families with self-reported income levels below $30,000; 17.4% of all students come from families where the father has not received a four-year degree (compared with 42% at a broad cross-section of four-year colleges) (CIRP, 2003). The exploration of the identity development of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds could not be undertaken without taking the context of their experience into consideration. The context of this particular institution, with its strong culture and minority low income population, was particularly salient to the experiences of the participants, and, indeed, the student population at large.

Sampling Strategy

Using a criterion sampling method and providing compensation for participation, I was able to recruit and work with 10 students in their final semester of college for the

duration of this investigation. Students in their final year have the experiences of transition to university life, renegotiated relationships with parents and peers, and a four year continuity of experiences they were able to recall throughout the course of the interviews.

Sampling Criteria

For a phenomenological study, it is essential that all participants experience the phenomenon being studied. By setting up criteria for sampling I was able to assure a greater level of homogeneity among the participants. There is no easy way to operationalize the all-encompassing variables of class status, and for that reason socioeconomic status is frequently utilized as a proxy for class, most often in connection with studies of low-income students and their families.

The most recent and comprehensive examination of student experiences which specifically looks at differences in SES was done by Walpole (2003). Walpole examined longitudinal data from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) sponsored by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at UCLA. Walpole's findings echoed those of earlier researchers: although low-SES students have a greater opportunity for upward mobility, high-SES students continue to have an advantage based on backgrounds and experiences brought to college. Furthermore, Walpole's study, while comprehensive, does not speak to the day-to-day experiences of students. It is the individual experiences that will help researchers begin to understand how low-SES students cope in an unfamiliar culture.

Socioeconomic status is defined as a combination of social and economic factors (occupation, income level, and education level) that provide an indication of a person's or

a group's effective social situation. Edwards, a census statistician, did some of the earliest and most influential work on socioeconomic status. Edwards developed a "social-economic grouping" of occupations which is used in occupational stratification and mobility studies (Blau & Duncan, 1994). In order to develop a scale, Edwards combined typical education levels and incomes of workers in the occupational categories with the thought that "education is a very large factor in the social status of workers, and wage or salary income is a very large factor in their economic status" (Edwards, 1943, p. 180). As a result of Edwards' work, SES is most often constructed as a combination of education levels, incomes, and occupational categories.

Because so few studies on SES and outcomes exist I felt it was important to use a pre-existing formula in order to begin to normalize the variables and provide some continuity in the national discussion. Throughout education literature the definition of socioeconomic status is nebulous. In the study on the *Condition of Education*, NCES defines SES based on parental education level, parental occupation, family income, and the possession of certain household items (NCES, 2005). Other educational studies use household income and parental education levels only. The selection criteria for this study were developed based on Walpole's (2003) quantitative study of SES and college outcomes.

To determine the SES variable in her study, Walpole used the components of parental income, educational attainment, and occupational prestige (as defined by Nakao & Treas, 1994) taken from the 1985 Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) survey. A continuous scale was calculated from mother's education (8 point scale, 1 = grammar school or less to 8 = graduate degree), father's education (8 point scale, 1 =

grammar school or less to 8 = graduate degree), family income (14 point scale, 1 = <$10,000 to 14 = $250,000 or more), mother's occupation (58 point scale [28 = laborer to 86 = physician]/7), and father's occupation (58 point scale [28 = laborer to 86 = physician]/7) (Walpole, 2003, p. 72). The sample set was then recoded into an SES variable with a normal frequency and distribution.

Access to Potential Participants

Low socioeconomic status is not necessarily visually recognizable and can carry a certain stigma, especially in an environment where students from low socioeconomic backgrounds are in the extreme minority; therefore, gaining access to potential participants at the University was a challenge. Potential participants were sent, via email, a letter from the Director of Student Financial Services which outlined the research and invited students to complete the interest/qualification survey (Appendices A & B) to determine eligibility and level of interest. A random drawing for a gift certificate to the university bookstore was used to encourage survey completion. The survey was available for a 14-day period.

Two days after the close of the survey, an email was sent to potential participants to determine availability and interest in involvement. Two to three interviews were scheduled based on the students' schedules and availability. The participants' confidentiality and anonymity were assured and an informed consent form was provided and discussed at the initial interview with each participant. The participants were given the opportunity to ask questions and/or make clarifications prior to and following each interview. Throughout the interviews, reviews of previous comments and statements were reviewed and discussed to clear any discrepancies or misunderstandings on my part.

Upon completion of the study participants received $150 for participation ($100 for interviews and $50 for journaling). Finally, if requested, copies of the results of the study were made available to participants.

Participant Selection

The Office of Student Financial Services sent, via email, 1,108 survey invitations to students in their last year of college who were receiving federal need-based aid (e.g., Pell Grant, federal work-study, subsidized Stafford Loans). Students responded to the survey at a rate of 15% (168). Of the 168 responses, 162 (96.4% of the total) were complete. One-hundred and seventeen students (69.6% of total responders) were willing to be considered for participation in the interview process.

The SES variable was calculated using the students reported family income, and parental education and occupation information. The SES variable rage was 9.14 to 46.14. The students with the lowest SES variable scores were identified and a selection was made based on their reported gender and race/ethnicity to insure a variety of participant experiences (see Table 3). All ten students contacted for interviews agreed to participate. Seven of the participants had SES variables below 25. The three with variables above 25 were chosen based on their gender and ethnicity in order to provide the greatest variation of participants. Rebecca (SES = 27.57) was the only survey respondent who identified as Native American. Chad and Tom (SES = 27.86 and 29.57 respectively) had the lowest SES variables for all white males in the pool of respondents.

Data Collection

Qualitative Interviews

Throughout the course of the "conversations" the interviewer's goal is, as Spradley (1979) so eloquently states, to learn from the interviewee:

> I want to understand the world from your point of view. I want to know what you know in the way you know it. I want to understand the meaning of your experience, to walk in your shoes, to feel things as you feel them, to explain things as you explain them. Will you become my teacher and help me understand? (p. 34).

Inherent in Spradley's statement is the phenomenological approach—setting aside all previous notions or theoretical understandings of the phenomenon and being open to learning about the experience from the participant's point of view.

The structure for in-depth phenomenological interviewing is a combination of life history and focused, in-depth interviewing techniques designed to explore a "complex issue by examining the concrete experience of people in that area and the meaning their experience had for them" (Seidman, 1998, p. 10). In order to understand the participants' experiences with a particular phenomenon, the experiences must be placed within the context of the participants' lives. Not only, then, were the interviews about the experience of the phenomenon, but what lead up to the experiences, the experience of the phenomenon itself, and the participants' interpretations of the experience and its effects.

Interview Protocols

Developing a strict protocol for the in-depth interview, while useful, can potentially be problematic; however, a general guide can help retain the focus of the

interview on the phenomenon under exploration. Because the in-depth interview is designed to ask participants to reconstruct their experience and explore meaning, a strict set of questions can limit the researcher's ability to follow up or explore an aspect that might have significance (Seidman, 1998). Kvale (1996) suggests a semi-structured interview protocol with themes and suggested questions as a way to facilitate the interview conversation.

Seidman (1998) suggests conducting three separate interviews: focused life-history, details of the experience, and reflection on the meaning. Using the Seidman model, I constructed interview protocols (Appendices C, D, E) for three successive 60-minute interviews. With the exception of three participants all the interviews took the entire 180 minutes of scheduled interview time. Three of the participants completed their interviews in 120 minutes.

The sequential protocols outline themes for each interview and include potential prompt questions. However, true to the nature of grounded theory analysis and emergent research, they were subject to change based on results of the simultaneous analysis. As themes emerged, they were vetted with participants in subsequent interviews. In this way, I was able to explore emerging themes and do initial member checking with students week-to-week (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

Participant Journaling

Participant journaling can offer the researcher insights into participants' thoughts, understandings and feelings in a uniquely intimate way. Additionally, journaling can offer participants an extended mode of reflection that "forces a structure on an otherwise overwhelming and oftentimes chaotic experience" (Esterling, et. al., 1999, p. 85).

In order to encourage increased insight and greater self-reflection, participants were asked to complete four journal entries (Appendix F). The journals were returned primarily in the form of typewritten essays. Because of time constraints in the interview process and the time of the semester in which the interviews occurred, students were given extended time to complete and return the journal topics. In the majority of cases, journals were sent within two weeks of completion of the in-person interviews.

Interviewer Self-Reflection

Interviewer self-reflection is an integral part of phenomenological research. Bracketing, or what Husserl termed *epoche*, allows the researcher to identify and then set aside assumptions made in everyday life. My own experiences as an undergraduate, an administrator, a graduate student at Elite Southern University, and prior work and research on identity development theory have the potential to invite premature theories or judgment during the interview and analysis process of the study. However, by naming those experiences and reflecting on commonsense assumptions about social reality, I was mostly able to suspend judgment and allow the lives of the participants, rather than my own biases, to illustrate the phenomenon in question (Schwandt, 2001).

To conduct the self-reflection I responded to the interview questions from the protocols before conducting each interview segment. This allowed me to explore my own potential answers and to consider any bias that I might bring into the interview. It also gave me the opportunity to set aside my personal thoughts and focus on the experiences of the participants.

Person as Instrument Statement

In a letter of recommendation my undergraduate advisor wrote of my background: "[She is] a child of an unhappy, failed marriage, and raised by elderly grandparents in the milltown of Klamath Falls, Oregon" (D. Axelrod, personal communication, November 1994). When, at the age of 24, I read his description, I was slightly taken aback and surprised to learn what he thought of me and his perception of my background and childhood. Although I don't think I actively tried to hide the fact that I came from a working class family, could I really have been that transparent? In reading his words, I wondered if I had been honest with myself and with others about who I was and where I came from. This realization was especially disconcerting because as a creative writing major I had written poetry and non-fiction prose that was very personal, but had not revealed overtly that I was working class. Clearly, however, my advisor knew who I was, but did I?

I carried those thoughts with me as I started my career in student affairs. As I was learning where I fit in the profession and the academic community at large, I began to feel unease about my background. I remember telling a friend that my biggest fear in life was someone thinking that I was "white trash," most especially the executives and senior faculty members that I interacted with on a regular basis. This fear came from a feeling that at any moment I could be unmasked, revealing a young woman from a poor background whose grandparents didn't attend college and worked in the auto body repair business. It didn't seem very likely that I would be admitted into the "ivory tower."

My work in student affairs, however, began to help me see that the very things that I had assumed were a liability were actually strengths. This was especially true as I

worked with students from working class backgrounds to be admitted to and persist in college. I found myself walking between those class divides as I navigated the academic world and went out into communities talking to students and their parents. My working class background gave me the credibility that said, "Even though I've gained entrance into this world, I remain attached to my past."

As a professional I worked with students who had backgrounds similar to mine. As a graduate student I became a voyeur into a world of undergraduate privilege and wealth. The undergraduate culture at the University was like nothing I had ever thought to imagine at my previous institution. I began to wonder what my experience would have been as an undergraduate in this particular culture. Would I have felt welcomed? Would I have found my place? Certainly those were questions that would never be answered, but I could think about my place in the University and culture of privilege as a graduate student.

My working-class background can be seen as both as a strength and a weakness in this particular study. Because I share a similar economic background with the participants I am empathetic and understand how the concealment of such a background works which enables me to have an inside view and probe deeper to search for meanings within specific statements. However, I also come into the process with a level of bias based both on my experiences from my work in student affairs as well as my observations of the undergraduate culture of the University. It was important not to project those biases into the interviews and instead work through them in my journaling process.

Considerations for Enhancing Trustworthiness

Just as with quantitative research, qualitative research comes with its own set of criteria for judging the trustworthiness of a study. Positivistic (quantitative) research relies on internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity to insure trustworthiness, and believability so that findings can be confirmed and affirmed by others. Naturalistic inquiry, in contrast, relies on a set of criteria identified by Lincoln and Guba (1985) which relate directly to the process of qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

Credibility in qualitative research is parallel to internal validity in quantitative research. Credibility provides assurances that there is a true representation and reconstruction of the participants' experiences in the presentation and analysis by the researcher (Schwandt, 2001). Credibility can be achieved in a variety of ways. To ensure credibility in this study, memoing, triangulation (Denzin, 1989), member checking, and peer debriefing was used.

Memoing is the recording of methodological and theoretical notes that can be taken throughout the data collection process. Memos may include descriptions of settings, participants, or emerging questions. They can also be used to capture developing patterns (Glaser, 1978).

In discussing triangulation methods, Fielding and Fielding (1986) put forth the thought that, "We should combine theories and methods carefully and purposefully with the intention of adding breadth or depth to our analysis, but not for the purpose of pursuing 'objective' truth" (p. 33). Taking this into consideration, along with my

philosophical stance as a social constructionist, two data collection methods were employed: interviewing and document review.

Member-checking is an additional way of generating data and insight (Schwandt, 2001) as well as an important factor in determining credibility in the study. Interviews were reviewed with participants, giving them a chance to expand on or change parts of the interview they felt weren't clear or accurate. Participants were also encouraged to reflect on the interviews in the journaling process.

Finally, two peers were available for debriefings in order to provide me with a sounding board for dilemmas or unexpected roadblocks. The process of peer debriefing is described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as "a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind" (p. 308).

Because my two colleagues were unofficial debriefers throughout the process of developing the study, they had an understanding of the questions and methodology, yet they brought a variety of strengths and perspectives that I lacked. Both were in the process of their dissertation work in Higher Education; one brought a strong quantitative and analytical background, while the other had a student affairs background as well as first-hand knowledge of the undergraduate experience at the University.

Transferability

Transferability parallels the quantitative research construct of generalization. The researcher must provide sufficient detail so that the similarities can be established

between replicated studies. Transferability is primarily achieved through thick description. According to Denzin (1989):

> A thick description does more than record what a person is doing. It goes beyond mere fact and surface appearance. It presents detail, context, emotion, and the webs of social relationships that join persons to one another. Thick description evokes emotionality and self-feelings. It inserts history into experience. It establishes the significance of an experience, or the sequence of events, for the person or persons in question. In thick description, the voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interacting individuals are heard (p. 83).

In this study, thick description is evidenced by the amount of transcripts amassed as well as the on-going memoing. Peer debriefing was also useful in order to gauge whether my peers were able come to reasonably similar conclusions regarding interpretation and meaning of findings (Patton, 2002).

Dependability

The focus of dependability is on the responsibility for insuring that the researcher's process has been logical, traceable, and documented. The primary strategy for meeting the criterion of dependability is the establishment of an audit trail. The audit trail is a systematically maintained documentation system. By organizing my collection of data, theoretical models, memos, coding processes, emergent themes, and on-going reflexive journals, I managed my own materials more effectively as well as provided a collection of evidence to my peer debriefers, and, most importantly, my dissertation

committee as they examined the dependability of procedures and generation of confirmable findings (Schwandt, 2001).

Confirmability

Confirmability ensures that the data presented in the research is accurate and true and not merely fictionally produced by the researcher. A reflexive journal was kept throughout the process of data collection and analysis in order to establish confirmability (parallel to objectivity). Reflexivity refers to the process of critical self-reflection of the researcher's biases. Journaling helped me to maintain an awareness of potential biases and how to control them. Additionally, the reflexive journal is a record of how I, as the researcher, established my own social network and influenced participants through establishing rapport and throughout the research process. Since the "researcher is instrument" in qualitative research, reflexivity throughout the process was "a very important procedure for establishing the validity of accounts of social phenomenon" (Schwandt, 2001).

Establishing Rapport

Establishing rapport with participants was critical to the success of this study since the contents of the discussions were exceedingly personal and potentially emotionally distressing. By providing an atmosphere of permissiveness, interest, and neutrality with respect to the topic, the participants were more likely to reveal information relative to the purpose of the interview (Kahn & Cannel, 1957).

Spradley's (1979) elements of ethnographic interviews are based on a model of trust and offer guidance for structuring interviews in order to facilitate rapport. Spradley advocates expressing interest, expressing cultural ignorance, repeating, restating

participant's terms, incorporating participant's terms, creating hypothetical situations, asking friendly questions, and taking leave. The last item is, I believe, one of the most difficult but important skills an interviewer can master. By allowing quiet moments that give participants a chance to reflect on the subject in question, a more thoughtful and complete response can be elicited. For my part, I hoped to make any silence patient, expectant, and warm (Kahn & Cannell, 1957).

Ethical Concerns

It was important to insure the students' anonymity and dignity as well as communicate concern for their well-being throughout the course of the interview and journaling process. Participation in the study was purely voluntary and participants were given the opportunity to discuss their experience as a participant with me at all points in the process. The purpose of the study was clearly communicated as was the assurance of confidentiality and the participants' right to privacy.

Because of the sensitivity of the issues that the participants revealed and the potential to reveal painful experiences, I was very aware of my role as a researcher and did not venture into the role of counselor. In anticipation of students revealing distressing or even traumatic memories or events and requiring a counseling atmosphere to work through emotions that surface in the process of the interviews, I contacted the director of University Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS), regarding the content of my study and the CAPS referral process. Based on the director's suggestion, each participant was provided with appropriate referral information, including urgent care services.

Coding and Analysis

Each interview was audio taped and at the end of each I listened to the audio and made notes and reflective summaries of each of the interviews. The notes informed subsequent interviews with additional participants and follow-up interviews with the original participant. The audio was then sent away for verbatim transcription.

Once the transcripts were received, I listened to the audio while reading the transcripts and making margin notes. I then loaded the interviews into nVivo, qualitative coding computer software. While nVivo greatly assisted with organizing, indexing, and retrieval of the data, I found that I was more efficient re-reading the printed transcripts and developing codes by hand then placing them into the transcripts in nVivo. However, nVivo was highly useful in assisting me in recoding, counting codes, and discovering patterns and themes within the codes. The journals were coded in the same way, however I took into consideration the fact that the participants wrote their journals after the series of interviews and had a significant period of time to reflect on our conversation and the concept of low-SES as it related to their experiences.

During the initial coding I identified over 30 themes. I began to think about those themes in terms of the process of identity development using my conceptual framework (Figure 3) as a guide and ultimately organized them into three main themes.

Participant Descriptions

Ten students participated in the interview and journaling process. The ten students had SES scores ranging from 9.14 to 29.57. Seven of the ten students came from families with income levels below the federal poverty level. (See Table 4.)

Jennifer is from an urban area within the same state as the University and attended an inner city high school. She is majoring in biochemistry and has been accepted to pharmacy school after graduation. Jennifer was born in France and immigrated to the United States at the age of three. Her mother was a Cambodian refugee who fled to France. It was there that she met Jennifer's father. The affair was brief and Jennifer has never met her father who was also a Cambodian refugee from her mother's village. Jennifer is an only child. When they first moved to the U.S., Jennifer's mother worked as a seamstress; she now works as a waitress.

Jared is an African American male from Mississippi. He describes his family as descended from slaves that most likely lived in Mississippi. Jared's mother is a housekeeper for private families. Jared's father, who was a janitor at a school, died when Jared was a junior in high school. Jared has two older sisters who moved out of the house before he was in grade school. Jared is double majoring in Politics and French.

Jesse, an African American male, is from a small town in West Virginia. Jesse was raised by his grandmother, has never met his mother and is just beginning to establish a relationship with his father. He has no siblings. Jesse is majoring in Biology and Pre-Med. He is taking next year to work as a research assistant and study for the medical school entrance exams.

Mary is a White, female, in-state student from a rural southern area. Mary has a younger brother in high school and an older half-brother that passed away during her first year of

college. Mary's mother is a department manager at Wal-Mart and her father is disabled but does not qualify for government assistance. Mary is double majoring in English and American Studies. She has been accepted in to a graduate program in student affairs.

Vanessa is a White female from a small town in southern California. She is a fifth year student with a major in Economics currently working on a master's degree in Social Foundations. She is an athlete who transferred to the University from a southwestern university. Vanessa's parents are divorced. Her mother works odd jobs and her father works seasonally in home construction. Vanessa has an older sister who is currently in graduate school.

Billy is a first-generation Thai-American male. Billy's parents immigrated to the United States before having children; Billy and his two older brothers were all born in the U.S. Billy grew up in-state in an urban area. His parents worked in a restaurant and also drove an ice cream truck during the summers. Billy's father passed away when he was a sophomore in high school. Billy is majoring in Business/Accounting and has accepted a position with an accounting firm after graduation.

Elizabeth is a white female who grew up about 90 minutes away from the University. Elizabeth has two younger sisters; one is still in high school and the other a works part-time at a child care center. Elizabeth's mother is a homemaker and her father is a foundry worker. She is majoring in Business.

Rebecca describes herself as White and Native American. She lives in-state two hours from the University. She is an only child. Her parents are older; they were in their forties when Rebecca was born. Rebecca's mother is a homemaker. Her father, who passed away just three months before our interview, was a long-haul truck driver. Rebecca is majoring in English and working towards her master's degree in elementary education.

Chad is a white male. Originally from Indiana, Chad's family moved to Washington, D.C. right before he began high school. Chad is from a large family where he is the youngest of five siblings. Chad's mother is a homemaker and his father is an auto parts salesman. Chad is married and, at age 24, is slightly older than the other participants. At the age of 19 Chad went to Chile as a missionary for his church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Chad is majoring in finance and has a position as a financial analyst after graduation.

Tom is a white male from upstate New York. He has one younger sister who is currently in college. His mother is a homemaker and father is an accountant who has been unemployed on and off for the last 10 years. When he first came to the University, Tom was part of the track and field team. He is majoring in Civil Engineering and has accepted a job in Florida after graduation.

Table 4. Participant Demographics.

Student	Gender	Race	Age	Family Income[1]	Mother's Education[2]	Father's Education[2]	Mother's Occupation	Prestige Score[3]	Father's Occupation	Prestige Score[3]	SES[4]	Poverty? Y/N[5]
Jennifer	Female	Chinese American	21	2	2	1	Waitress	26	N/A	0	9.14	Y
Jared	Male	African American	21	2	2	1	House Keeper	23	Janitor	22	11.43	Y
Jesse	Male	African American	22	1	3	3	Homemaker	51	N/A	0	14.29	Y
Mary	Female	White	21	4	3	3	Retail Associate	30	Disabled	36	19.42	Y
Billy	Male	Thai American	21	6	3	3	Waitress	29	Ice Cream Vendor	24	19.57	N
Vanessa	Female	White	21	2	5	3	Baker	31	Carpenter	54	22.14	Y
Elizabeth	Female	White	20	4	3	3	Homemaker	51	Foundry Worker	40	23.00	N
Rebecca	Female	Native American, White	20	6	6	3	Homemaker	51	Long-Haul Truck Driver	37	27.57	N
Chad	Male	White	24	4	6	6	Homemaker	51	Oil & Lubrication Specialist	32	27.86	Y
Tom	Male	White	21	1	6	6	Homemaker	51	Accountant	65	29.57	Y

[1] Income: 1 = Less than $10,000; 2 = $10,000 – 14,999; 4 = $20,000 – 24,999; 6 = $30,000 – 39,999.
[2] Parental Education: 1 = Grammar school or less; 2 = Some high school; 3 = High school diploma or GED; 5 = Some college, no degree; 6 = College degree (associate's, bachelor's).
[3] Nakao & Treas, 1994.
[4] I + MaEd + FaEd + MaOcc / 7 + FaOcc / 7 = SES
[5] Federal Poverty Level as determined by household income, size of family, and number of related children under 18 years (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007).

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

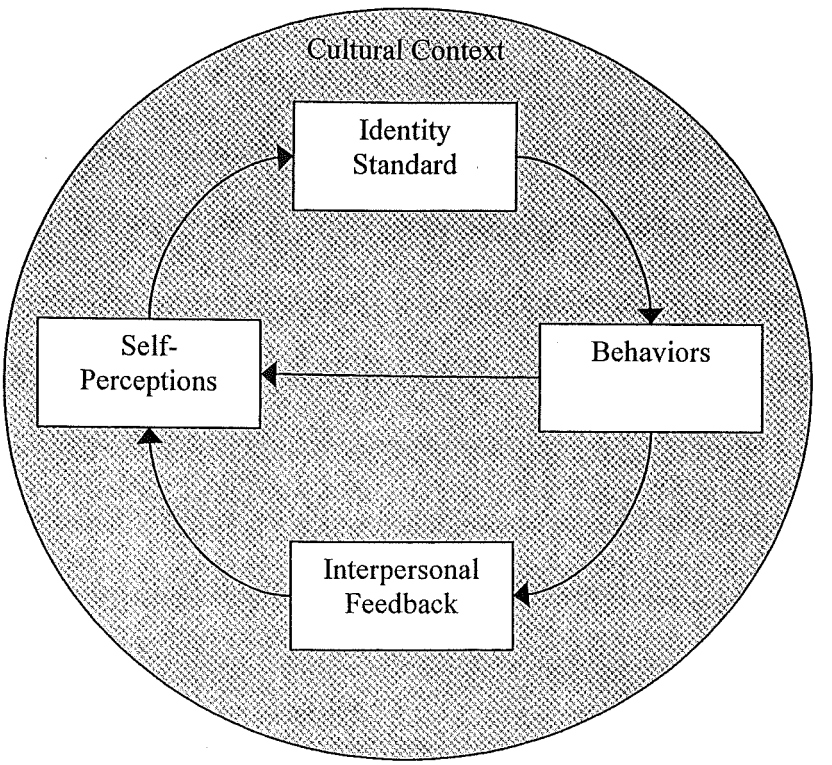
This chapter presents the findings from this phenomenological study of students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds and their identity development as undergraduates at an elite public four-year institution. In analyzing the experiences of the participants, I found that the process of identity development as it relates to socioeconomic status is less grounded in the psychological aspects of identity development of the individual and more relevant to their social identity development. Therefore, as I delved deeper into the phenomenon, I began to interpret the experiences of the students as a process of negotiating identity within a social setting, which, for this population of students, did not have a clear or even projected outcome. For the most part, the students in this study were not at the point, either socially or psychologically, where they were able to articulate how or even if their socioeconomic background had any bearing on their present identity status. Rather, the students talked about the importance of "fitting in" with the undergraduate culture of the institution and the challenges and opportunities that came along with the process of negotiating their place within the social and academic contexts of university life, while at the same time renegotiating relationships with family and home.

The analysis, therefore, is based on the process of negations that students articulated throughout the interview process. Using the identity control process

model (as described in chapter two, Figure 4) as the theoretical and conceptual foundation, I identified three overarching themes: (1) identity standard, (2) management of outward expressions, and (3) interpretations and consequences of social feedback. The first theme, identity standard, refers to the understanding that students have of themselves based on past experience as well as their interpretations of the social, academic, and cultural expectations of college life. The second theme, management of outward expressions, describes the ways the students in this study present themselves both in their homes and in an oftentimes unfamiliar society as they learning to navigate and, ultimately, fit into a particular undergraduate lifestyle. The last theme, interpretations and consequences of social feedback, describes how these students negotiate and react to the social and cultural information they receive from their peers, faculty and staff at the University as well as continued cultural and social influences from their families and hometowns.

What is important is not simply the themes as individual components of the model, but how the themes interact, respond, or change the process of identity development.

Figure 4. Conceptual model of the identity development process for college students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (adapted by Christian Steinmetz from Kerpelman, et al., 1997).



The theme of identity standard, of course, corresponds to the identity standard in the model and serves as the anchor or starting point for an individual's exploration of development. Behaviors correspond with the theme of management of outward expressions; these are the types of behaviors individuals consciously or unconsciously allow others to observe. The third theme, interpretations and consequences of social feedback, encompass both the interpersonal and self-perceptions that follow from managing outward expression and lead to the potential reexamination of the identity standard. The themes are placed within a social context. The context is primarily the University; however,

there are sub contexts that play an important role such as classroom and faculty interactions, and social and formal group interactions. Additionally, the participants' hometown provides an altogether different social context that must be taken into consideration.

In order to more fully explore and describe the three overarching themes they are each refined through subcategories that serve to highlight the phenomenon and the students' experiences in a way that is both tangible and accessible. During transcript analysis it became apparent that much of the data within the subcategories would overlap. While it may be possible to place any single piece of data in several subcategories because of dynamic nature of the social identity process and the way students experience the phenomenon, I have chosen to place them in discrete categories while, at the same time, acknowledging that there is overlap and the data presented in each subcategory may not be mutually exclusive to that particular subcategory.

Identity Standard

The identity standard is the self-definition that comprises a particular identity; it is comprised of the initial values used to begin the iterative process that assesses the congruence between these values and data received from a social context. The more important or salient the identity standard is for an individual indicates how much that individual values being a certain type of person (e.g., athletic, intellectual, socially involved). Analysis of the participants' self-defined identity standards yielded three identities consistent across all participant interviews: (1) middle-class, (2) motivated achievers, and (4) independent.

Middle-Class

Asking the participants to describe their class status in terms of economics revealed interesting responses. Although most students were willing to admit that their families did not have a lot of money as they were growing up (average family incomes were no greater than $39,999 a year), the consensus among the participants was that they were middle class, and only three participants described themselves as working or lower class. Interestingly, the 1999 median household income was $44,922; and, while a family making $30,000 falls into the lower-middle income bracket, only two of the participants fell into that category, the remaining eight fell into the bottom quintile of the income bracket; which based on family size, data from the 2007 U.S. Census Bureau's Poverty Threshold puts those eight squarely in poverty. Of the ten students, only two of the students' parents had attended college. The occupational prestige scale of the participants parents, which after dividing the raw score by seven, ranged from four to 12; only one parent had above a 7 and that parent had a long history of unemployment due to mental illness.

At the beginning of the interviews I talked to each student about what the study was about and why they had qualified to participate. When I described the criteria of low-income, parental education levels and occupational prestige, several of the students were incredulous and outright stated that they were not 'poor.' Jennifer's words effectively sum up all the participants' views on their class standing, "I don't say that we were like poor, 'cause then we wouldn't have a house to live in." Jennifer also equates being poor with "having no manners,

not being polite or respectful," and adamantly describes herself as a "polite and respectable woman."

Similarly, when Chad talked about the neighborhood where he grew up he said it was a nice middle class neighborhood surrounded by areas that weren't as nice:

> So the neighborhood was okay, but there were other areas right around there that weren't really that great, not like lower-middle class but probably upper-under class. My older brothers would get involved with some of the kids over there and they weren't really good influences, getting in trouble and things like that.

Yet earlier Chad described his home as "small, okay for area, but not that great." Chad also talked about being aware at an early age that in his family money was always, "tight." He talked about the need for his mother to drive a school bus as he and his four siblings got older, as well as his father, a traveling salesman, being away from home quite often. The most telling comment he made was about eating out:

> Like when we went out to eat, we'd hardly ever go out to eat. But when we went out to eat like at Taco Bell, my mom would order the food, just because she didn't want us to order the more expensive side of the menu, as expensive as Taco Bell gets. But I mean that's an indicator right there that we didn't have money.

So while he openly acknowledged that money was an ongoing concern for his family, he did not acknowledge that, in the economic sense, his family would have been considered a part of the lower class or in poverty.

The other participants willingly acknowledge that they had little money or that finances were always a concern for their families, but consistently described themselves as middle class. Even though there was an awareness of their financial situation growing up, most of the participants didn't realize how little money they had growing up until they actually came to college. Mary's experience was typical of most of the participants:

> I feel like I became a lot more aware of my family's income when I came to college. Growing up there were times like I knew that we always had like off-brand things. I knew that my grandma gave us money from time to time, and like would help out my mom, but it never sank in that we were poor or anything like that.

Additionally, all of the participants grew up not asking for anything extra. They seemed to have an inherent understanding that what they did get was what their family could afford and there was no money available for extras unless they had jobs and could pay for things themselves.

Vanessa talked at length about her mother's sacrifices to provide opportunities for her and her sister.

> She's just always been a really hard working person. Like wanted to provide for us what she didn't have. We were enrolled in everything possible, we were in every music, every dance, every . .

> . and in a lot of senses, she . . . if she didn't have the money, she would trade jobs, so at like the dance studios, she said, "I don't have the money to pay you but I'll clean your bathrooms late at night after I got off of work or while my kids are doing their lessons, and we'll trade," you know. So it winds, she just kinda did what she could to make ends meet.

The knowledge that her mother worked hard and made sacrifices to provide additional opportunities for her has contributed to Vanessa's worry that she is moving farther away from her mother in terms of class-status. Although Vanessa did not articulate the worry in terms of class, she was able to say that she does not want her mother to think that she has been surpassed by her daughters. Vanessa talks to her divorced parents on a regular basis, but considers her sister her main confidante because of their shared college experience:

> I think we, you know, have a lot of similar experiences the last four years, just with college and everything, and you know when we have trouble with my dad or my mother more than likely we talk to each other just 'cause I think we're more on the same page. Not that Mom and Dad aren't supportive, but I think that I just relate to her, or we relate to each other more, because in a sense, my parents haven't gone to college or haven't . . . my sister's also an athlete in college so we have a lot of similarities.

Vanessa goes on to mention that her mother has talked about how hard it has been for her that Vanessa and her sister are getting their degrees and,

in a sense, leaving her behind. Vanessa worries that her mother feels inferior and tries to avoid conversations about life at college.

The students had a difficult time even articulating the fact that in the end they would be better off than their parents and their lives would be markedly different. The difficulty begins with the inability to own the fact that, economically, they would be considered lower-class.

Another important aspect of the participant's middle-class views was their desire to shield their parents from their changing social status. Jesse said he though about that quite often, "I remember after being accepted to the University, my trigonometry teacher said to me, 'Don't forget where you come from.' This has stuck with me 'til this day." He went on to talk about the fact that he did not want his grandmother or anyone else to think he was different just because he attended college, and especially because he was attending a highly ranked university.

Similarly, at the time of our interview, Chad had not told his family that he accepted a position as an investment banker because he felt they would not understand why he wanted a job like that. Chad felt like his parents would disapprove of his choice of job because of the money he would make, which was considerably more than his father was making. When asked where he thought that concern came from he stated:

> Maybe it did come from my parents and understanding what they accept just as fine and knowing that I can have so much more if I just work harder and put my mind to it, and I can achieve so much

> more so why not just go ahead and do it. And not just be complacent with where I am at.

Shielding parents from their changing class status also included not disclosing information about activities that were above and beyond the regular cost of attending college. When Elizabeth decided to tell her mother that she was joining a sorority she omitted the financial aspect of joining:

> My mother was of course shocked at my decision, but ultimately supportive: the only ultimatum is that obviously I would have to deal with sorority issues on my own because I know that was one more [financial] thing my family could not deal with. So I jumped in, made some sacrifices, and there I was. Because it was so taboo for our social situation, it was something I never talked to my sisters about. To this day, if my sorority is mentioned, they would both find it hard to believe that I had joined a social sorority and not something to further my academic credence (like an honor society)—simply because in our home world, a social network was put on the backburner, and academics a priority; academics was all there was money for.

Elizabeth's experience was very common among the participants. Tom talked of taking a spring break trip without telling his parents because he knew they would be concerned about the money. Billy mentioned not being upfront with his mother about the cost of spending a semester abroad, as well as choosing not to

spend the money to join a fraternity because he could not ask his mother to make any more sacrifices for his college experience that was not related to academics.

Most of Jennifer's disagreements with her mother were due to financial issues. Jennifer has a job off campus at a local restaurant on Friday evenings and would like to work more mostly because, "they're very nice people, so it's like casual, like the most casual job, you can't even imagine how casual it is until you go in that restaurant, 'cause they keep—they just treat me like part of the family." Jennifer has found a support system off campus that she feels increasingly comfortable with and would like to spend more time there but feels doing so would be betraying her mother's sacrifices:

> She knows the reason why she's working so hard is that she can pay for my education and get me as far as I can. She's always been like "Oh I'm gonna pay for everything," like, "I'm helping you pay for everything." And she doesn't believe in me, like, working a lot to pay for things, 'cause she thinks that by working I would get distracted and I wouldn't do as well in my school work.

Interestingly, the students try to shield their parents from the knowledge that they are moving beyond the parents' education level and, therefore, class level. The students' concerns were voiced with both a sense of sadness but also with a sense of determination; they believe, after all, that this is what their parents want for them. And of course this is true; all the students said that their parents wanted them to be happy and successful, but, as Jared so eloquently stated, their

parents cannot fully realize the challenges and rewards that come with attending a highly selective university:

> My family never knew what it meant to go to college; they still don't know what it means. I could never really call home and tell them about the achievements that I had because they don't understand what it means to be at a selective university, they don't understand why it's hard for me to move beyond a 3.4 GPA. They don't understand the level of difficulty and rigor. My mother and grandmother are really proud of me, but they don't really understand the full impact of what it means to be part of this legacy of aristocracy and wealth. How what it means when you leave the University and can go anywhere. They can't really imagine what that's like . . . so that gives me a distance from my family.

Elizabeth's poignant journal reflection on her changing class status brought about by virtue of her education summarized what other participants had more trouble expressing:

> When I look at the changes I see in myself, it might make me wonder if I have left my past behind. But then I realize that it is more a reality of having my [hopes from the past] realized. I might have become more cultured, changed the way I dress, have different friends—but that is not a change in me or suppression of my past, it is just do [sic] to the fact that that personality and desire

> and longing has always been a part of me, but I've never had the means to realize it until given the opportunity of an environment such as [the University's].

Independent

The differences and distance that Jared and Elizabeth felt were echoed at various levels by the other participants. The students in this study had high levels of independence that began at an early age. That independence was reinforced through the college application, selection, and financial aid processes as well as the college experience itself. What was already a strong sense of independence became a highly salient, and therefore valued, piece of the students' identities.

For Billy, independence started at an early age because of his parents' work schedule:

> My parents were always working. They both did the ice cream truck for a while. So I was mostly around my middle brother growing up. They would have long, long days. They had to drive to [another town] to get the ice cream. Leave at 6:00 in the morning, come back and set up by 10:00 and then work sometimes until midnight. It was good money for them, but hard work and long hours.
>
> Because they were always working I never really had a close relationship. You know how people go home [from college] all the time, I never really did that. When I came here my first year people were always talking about being homesick, but I never

> felt that way. Growing up with my parents working so much I was really independent.

The childhood independence was echoed by the majority of the participants who talked about their parents' work schedules. Jennifer talked at length about how her mother's long hours of work as a seamstress led to a greater level of independence and, consequently, a strained relationship:

> I think I have like issues with her leaving me. Actually, when I was really young she didn't take care of me. She actually gave me to like another family just because she had to work all day as a seamstress, so that family took care of me. So it's not like we have a normal mother-daughter relationship. I think she could have raised me better with the way she taught me things because we just argue a lot. I think I got to a point in my age when I was kind of being rebellious and kind of like didn't want to listen to her because I felt as if I was grown up or knew enough already that I didn't need her to tell me all these things that I knew already.

Although not all students expressed a strain in relationships with their parents, they all indicated feelings of detachment with family. Most of the students' parents had little understanding of the students' lives and experiences in college. For some students that detachment was self-imposed. Jennifer mentioned that she does not offer any details about her life at college nor does her mother ask.

When Mary talks to her mother the conversation revolves around her mother's work and life at home:

> We'll talk about how things are going at work with my mom . . . I know everyone that she works with, and so. Getting caught up on all of the gossip at home. We don't talk about, like, actually school stuff.

The disconnect Mary began to feel with her family was somewhat self-imposed because of her fear of disappointing her family when she changed her major from pre-med to a double major in English and American Studies.

> I really just want to make sure that my parents were proud of me, like I always knew that they were, really, so like I was doing stuff like for them. I was pre-med my first year, and by the end of the first year knew that that was not what I was going to do. I didn't tell my dad until the end of [my junior] year. And so over those two years I kind of really grew into my own, and kind of found things that were really important to me, and not necessarily the things I thought my parents wanted me to do. [But] they were fine with it. I don't know what I was so worried about . . . their biggest question was what are you going to do with that . . . and so it was really hard to explain like that there are so many options out there, so I spent a considerable amount of time talking to my mom in particular about that, just her being worried what I was gonna do with two such Humanities-based majors. My dad was just kind of like, okay, well whatever makes you happy, I understand.

Feeling good about her independence was a revelation to Mary because up until that time she had really sought her parents' advice especially when it came time to make a decision about where to go to college:

> My mom and my dad, in particular, have always been very, like, hands off with my decision making. I asked my mom's advice, and sometimes she'll tell me what she thinks but more often than not, she's like, "no you need to make your own decisions." And so sometimes it's really frustrating because I just want someone to tell me what to do, and so having to make the college decision without my parents kind of weighing in on it was difficult. Ultimately my mom was like, "I'm really glad you pick the University over [the other one you were looking at]." . . . But really it was hard because I felt like I was making the decision all on my own.

Increasing their independence was not necessarily something the students sought, but often came from the fact that their parents were unable to visit the University and the students were not able to go home except during long breaks, mostly for financial reasons. Tom's parents had only been to the University for the orientation program and for drop-offs and pick-ups. Jesse's grandmother, who lived just two hours away, had never visited the campus. Elizabeth's parents, like the others in the study, had come to pick her up and drop her off from time to time. At the time of our conversation she had not been home for over two months because of gas prices. Elizabeth did not have her own car and she could not

justify asking her parents to make the three-hour trip up to the University and home twice in a weekend.

It was rare for students to make frequent trips home or even call to talk with parents more than once a week. When I mentioned to Tom the concept of "helicopter parents" (Kadison, 2006; Lum, 2006) and students that talk to their parents daily, often multiple times a day, he was incredulous, stating, "Why would anyone need to do that?" Although Tom regularly checks in with his parents the conversations are relatively short and void of personal information beyond how the week has been. All the participants commented on the fact that they felt they were more independent than a lot of their friends, and viewed this as something very positive about their identity. Although there were times when they felt they needed more guidance than their parents gave, they ultimately felt that their independence was one of their strongest and most valued traits.

Motivated Achievers

Each participant expressed the importance of motivation, but more specifically they talked about self-motivation. They had high levels of personal expectations particularly where academic achievement was concerned. A common theme was the importance of grades to the participants and, conversely, the unimportance of grades to their parents. All the participants echoed Tom's comment that for him grades were "pretty important" but his parents "never asked if I did my homework. They never saw any test that I got in high school, they just saw report cards."

Rebecca described a moment in her academic life that she felt clearly defined her drive for achievement:

> Grades were really important. I was a really good student. I remember, I was telling somebody this story the other day, in fifth grade I got my first B, and it was from my very favorite teacher like ever at that point, and she pulled me aside and she was like, "Rebecca I'm gonna have to give you a B in math on your report card, but if that's gone be something that's gonna make you really upset, I can change it to an A." And it was just this moral dilemma, like what could I do 'cause she was giving me an A just because she loved me, but I just, I think she knew that I was gonna be upset. I think I cried a little bit, but I was like, "Give me the B."

Although she talked further about how it felt when she knew her teachers were pleased with her work, she also said that she really felt that she did it because it was her own motivation that pushed her and she was aware that pushing herself both to get good grades and take challenging classes "would be something that would help [her] get into college." In fact, her parents, though supportive, did not place an emphasis on getting good grades but rather on simply doing the best that she was able.

> [Grades were] not important at all. My parents always acted really surprised that I got good grades. Like you know, "how did we get such a smart kid?" I had friends that would get a dollar for their report card or whatever, but my parents never had to do anything

> like that, 'cause I got good grades because I wanted to get good grades. They didn't have to do that. Especially my dad would always, you know, "We're still gonna love you even if you get an F." Like it really doesn't matter 'cause I would be crying over my math homework or whatever and they were like, "We don't know why you stress out so much." Because they'd be like, "It really isn't important to us," but it was important to me.

For these ten students motivation for achievement extended beyond grades. All the students with the exception of one, applied to the University with the confidence that they would get in. Three of the ten students applied only to the University and never considered that they would not be accepted or what they would do if they were not. In all cases they were mentored by a teacher who encouraged them to apply, and, again in all cases, their parents were fairly agnostic, some even discouraging, about where the students chose to go to college. Jared talked eloquently about his experience with his family as he applied to the University:

> So my senior year I met with a lot of opposition. There was the whole question about where I was going to go to college. I'd come to [this university] as part of [a leadership] program in the business school and stayed here for three weeks and decided this is where I wanted to be at, I wanted to be part of [the University], this was the place for me . . . but my family assumed that you know that I couldn't get any scholarships or that I was going to have to rely on

> financial aid and I should only go to a place that would give me a full scholarship, and the kind of schools that send you a full scholarship are sub par schools, like second and third tier schools. They were idiots, you know what I mean. I don't have to put up with a [sub par university] when I can probably go to [an Ivy League]. So [my family] has been very much detached from this whole experience and I have to kind of do it all alone. And my mother, she's been helpful but she's had her doubts . . . She doubted me along the way also, she wanted me to go to [the local university], and I mean it's a decent school but it's not [this university], you know, we both know that. So you know she doubted me all the way through too. She still has her doubts or her worries. So it really took a lot of my own initiative.

Jared's experience was a common one for this group of students. They all expressed the understanding that they had excelled academically and their own expectations were that they would attend a selective university because that would give them the greatest amount of opportunity upon graduation. Yet, as is common for low-income students, and particularly first-generation students, the parents of this group of students gave little advice, input or comments on the students' choice of college; and some, like Jared's parents, were openly skeptical of the decision to attend a highly selective institution. Consequently, the decision of where to attend college was left completely up to the students.

Managing Outward Expressions

Outward expressions are behaviors people exhibit in social settings. The purpose of the behavior is to deal with a mismatch between identity standards and self perceptions by eliciting interpersonal feedback that will support identity standards or by cognitively recasting self-perceptions without social input (Kerpelman, Pittman, & Lamke, 1997). In the process of analysis I identified four types of behaviors exhibited at various levels by all the participants in this study: (1) inhibiting, (2) imitating, (3) limiting, and (4) flaunting.

Inhibiting behaviors occurred when the participants were uncomfortable or were in social situations that threatened their self-perceptions and, consequently, their identity standards. Imitating behaviors were seen primarily in the first two years of college but remained, to some extent, in order for students to receive positive interpersonal feedback regardless of their own self-perception. Students practiced two types of limiting: limiting social interactions and limiting risk-taking behavior. Limiting is a form of foreclosing exploration and, in the case of the participants, occurred throughout their undergraduate careers. Finally, flaunting, the process of disregarding negative interpersonal feedback to social behavior, occurred rarely in the students first two years of college and only sporadically in the final two years of college.

Inhibiting Behaviors

For the participants in the study inhibiting behaviors took various forms both at college and when they returned home for breaks. For some it was a change of accent from deep Southern to a genteel Southern accent; for others it was not

sharing significant family stories or traditions; still others talked about not sharing life in college or academic life with family and friends from home.

A southern accent is often mislabeled as an indicator of lower class status. Several participants had clear southern accents and this became a point of discussion during the interviews. All the participants with southern accents indicated that they speak differently when they are at the University. They describe their natural accent as "deep Southern." Mary said, "I have a deep Southern accent, and like you can't tell now, but when I'm at home I talk entirely different."

Mary's comment was confirmed by Rebecca who talked about the difficulty transitioning between her hometown and the University. In addition to changing or softening her deep Southern accent when she returned to college after a visit home she also felt pressured to recapture the more prominent accent during phone calls or a trip to see her parents or high school friends.

> I've had friends [from home] tell me that when I talk on the phone here I sound like a different person, and that's kind of something that's interesting about going home, that my accent changes. It gets a lot more Southern in the summer when I'm down there. I work at a summer camp which is even further south than [my hometown], the next county over, but it's different. My accent just gets really deep, 'cause all the kids there are like, you know, country kids, they're farm kids. . . My first year here, people would be like, "are you from Georgia?" 'cause of the way I talk, so I have

> consciously changed my accent. That's something that I have talked to my friends about. Some of my friends here are like, "well, which is harder, like getting your [University] accent back after summer or like when you go home making sure your friends aren't asking you, 'why are you talking like a Yankee?'"

Changing accents, however, was just one way that students talked about inhibiting behaviors. As was highlighted earlier, students were very conscious about talking about their day to day academic and social experiences at the University when they were back home. There was a sense that they wanted to protect their parents, but they also held back information in order to protect themselves. Mary talked about feeling like a different person when she went home and having someone "call [her] out at the local convenience store as the girl who went to college." That, along with other experiences led her to feel a deep disconnect between home and school that was not particularly comfortable. Those feelings were especially present early in her college career when she could not talk about college life at home because she did not feel that they understood her experiences, and she could not talk about her home life at college because there was no one who really understood that part of her life. At that point it was just easier not to share anything at all. And while she felt, at the time of our interview, that she had moved past that, a new difficulty of explaining her goal of becoming a student affairs professional had come up:

> . . . my parents don't really know what I want to do, like it's hard to explain higher ed to someone especially if they've never been in

> the university setting and they've never been exposed to it, it's hard to say like now there's this whole like field that's out there. And I find that with a lot of people not just my parents, but trying to explain my passion for things at this university is just something that they can't really understand because they've never experienced it.

Just as Jennifer talked about the stereotyped mannerisms of the poor, Jared found that it was important that he make sure that he exhibited none of those mannerisms:

> People never treated me poor because I never gave off the sense I was poor. I was raised to carry myself so that people didn't think of me as poor. I never talked about Mississippi in the sense that I came from poverty.

In fact, Jared never talked about his family or his background to anyone until his junior year of college and when he finally did open up about his past it was to a friend who he felt comfortable with because of her difference—she was in a wheelchair. The constant inhibiting behavior took its toll on Jared:

> I would have felt exposed if people would have known that I was from a low-income family because it makes you feel so vulnerable and to how people treat you and you're so susceptible to their whims. I did feel like I was wearing a mask with the kinds of clothes that I wore and the way that I spoke. And how I had to act and carry myself. I never was really sure about the line between

> the real Jared and the Jared for presentation because I never really felt I could admit all that came along with being poor and black and from Mississippi to other people because of all the stereotypes that they would place upon me. I never could admit that standard American English was not my first language. I grew up speaking Black Southern English, that's my first language.

Billy also felt the effects of exhibiting certain behaviors. However, his conflict came when he was home with his friends from high school:

> There is difference because when I go back home and see people from high school it's a little different; I don't know what it is. Maybe I did pick up a bit of an air of condescension being here but when I think about it I'm like, "why am I doing that?" Maybe because I'm getting a good education and a lot of people who I went to high school with went to community college or [another state school]. Well maybe I'm really proud of my school because I feel like I've been able to benefit more.

Although Billy feels comfortable around his close friends from high school, he has a sense of disconnect with casual friends or acquaintances from his past because he is unsure of how they will react to him because of his experiences at the University.

> Rebecca is often careful about what she talks about when she goes home: I sometimes get so excited about what I am learning at school that I forget that my mother has not read Foucault and Derrida as I

> elaborate on my own literary and cultural theories. I want to talk to my friends [back home] about how beautiful the writings of Elizabeth Bishop are or about sociocultural theories of learning, but instead I have to remember they live in a world in which new husbands, babies and appliances are more exciting. There is a world in which I can discuss my academic passions, and a world in which I can discuss the latest gossip someone hears at the hardware store or the hair salon. I hope that over time these worlds will more successfully merge.

Mary would also like to see those two worlds merge, but the stigma of being poor she felt during her first year has really precluded that. She came to the University and, like most first year students, was excited to meet new people with whom she would share an amazing four years of fun, challenging academics and late night discussions of life. When she moved in to her residence hall, however, she quickly realized that wasn't necessarily going to be the case.

> My roommate and I came from very different backgrounds, so, well not very different, but different enough that it caused some issues from time to time. She was from an extremely affluent family and trying to explain financial aid to her as a [freshman] was very difficult and her first question was, "Does that mean you're on welfare?" And I feel like it's one of those things that just stuck with me like when I talk about financial aid I always go back to that story and how like that was just, I was really insulted by

> that. I was like, "No. Like I have financial aid but that doesn't mean like I'm like desolate, my parents don't have any money or anything." Like trying to explain myself and feeling like I had to justify myself to her and like what that meant.

That experience led her to later make excuses for choosing different or opting out of social activities such as going to the movies, the mall, or buying new University gear to wear to football games. While she would often go with her roommate she would never buy anything and justified it by saying that there wasn't anything that she liked or she couldn't find something that fit. She would never admit that she just did not have the money.

Tom spoke of his decision not to share the details of his family for different reasons, primarily because he does not want to say anything that would reflect poorly on his family.

> Only my really close friends know how serious the situation is. That might be two people . . . that might know my dad's not working. Other than that, I don't think anyone has a clue. I tend to be, if I'm in a bad mood, people won't know. For instance . . . my dad getting sick and things like that, people really had no idea that, not recognize the fact that I'm just not feeling well. If I'm in a funk, people tend not to know . . . . I'm fine with them knowing [as much as they know] because no, not one person ever knows the full, they only get parts of it, but there's always, you know, a part

here and a part there that they know, but that person doesn't, no one ever has the entire story.

By not sharing his entire story, Tom is able to shield himself from any interpersonal responses that might reflect negatively on him or his family.

Regardless of their reasons, all the students in the study chose to inhibit some or even all of their expressive behaviors that would give peers from college clues to their class status. Some even chose to inhibit newly acquired behaviors while visiting home in order to not be "called out."

Imitation

When I first met each student in the study I was struck by how similar they looked to every other student on campus. Yet the more often I met with them the more I could see details in their dress, behavior, and speech that were clues to their working-class background.

Elizabeth came into our first interview wearing a mini skirt, polo with "popped" collar, pearls and a fleece pullover. She looked like any other student at the University. Certainly I knew her class background and I was impressed with her ability to "fit in" to the current fashion. But the longer we talked the more I began to notice little things about this particular outfit that didn't conform to the unspoken dress code: her fleece didn't have the requisite "North Face" logo; the fabric of her skirt was somewhat uneven, a printed rather than woven pattern; her polo had no logo on the left hand chest; and the paint on her pearls was discretely peeling.

Jared came to each of our three interviews dressed in slacks, a button down shirt and tie. I asked him during one of the interviews if he had presentations on the day we met, hence his reason for dressing a little more formally than might be expected. He told me that his dress was what he wore on an average day. For Jared that choice of dress related directly to his desire to present himself in a way that didn't reveal his class background:

> When you're poor you sort of live on the periphery of society. But me coming in [to the University] as poor and in[to] an upper class environment, I really found that I needed to change the way I speak. I live between the class lines. I had to change the way that I would dress or talk in order to fit into this environment, to not represent my own poverty. The attention that I pay to my dress and the way that I talk is a part of who I am also.

The fact that he felt the need to change his dress and the way that he spoke had not occurred to Jared before he came to the university. Even he described the majority of his friends from high school as middle-class he did not see himself as any different until he began attending college. When asked how he knew what to wear Jared replied:

> I've sort of played anthropologist all my life. Watching people, learning how they dress, talk. Learning how they live and what it means to grow up in middle-class society. The only time I saw an upper middle class Black family and how they lived was the Cosby Show, and it really gave me a sense of how to talk, how to carry

> myself, because Bill Cosby always carried himself with a sense of poise and dignity.

Imitation, however, came with a price for some of the participants. For most of the participants it felt like being two people. By imitating they received the positive interpersonal feedback and reaffirmed their middle-class identity, but when they returned home that imitation was looked upon as disloyal or, as Jennifer stated, "uppity."

Mary, who was social in high school but was not part of the "party crowd," started to go to parties with her roommates during her first semester, but a family incident made her reexamine her choices:

> Towards the end of my first semester I'd started hanging out with my roommates at lot at parties and things like that and things that I didn't really consider to be my social scene, but I was really falling into this pattern with them of doing things that I didn't really think that I would have done. Like they weren't things that I considered part of me, but it's what they did and I wanted to hang out with them, because I didn't know a lot of people here. And so I started doing things that just, just didn't really feel right. And so when I came back to school [after my older brother passed away] I got more involved in the things that I felt were me before my first semester at college. I really, like I started out more like myself, and then was influenced by them and

kind of changed toward the second half of the first semester, did a lot of things that weren't necessarily things I would do now.

As she reflected on that first year experience, it was clear that her uncharacteristic behavior bothered her now and when I asked if she wished she would have done things differently she said that she wished she had; but when asked how she thought she could have done things differently she wasn't really sure because she did it primarily because she wanted to fit in with her roommates. After further conversation Mary conceded that doing things differently might not have brought her to the place she is now. Because she was able to have the experience of associating and socializing in a way that was new she was able to actively make a choice about what was ultimately right for her. Regardless of whether she had a different experience, it did not change the fact that at some level she felt that she originally bought into the Southern stereotypes and imitated the behavior and activities of people around her to mask those behaviors.

Billy says he is not class-conscious but has a good friend that is and, while Billy doesn't particularly understand his friend's outlook, he is influenced by him. When they socialize it is typically with his friend's more affluent friends ("from the rich fraternities") at fraternity parties or what Billy described as "the bar where all the rich people go." When Billy is with his friend's social circle he dresses different in an effort to "fit in" to the crowd. Although he described himself as "easy-going" and "comfortable in pretty much any social situation," he expressed a definite discomfort when he socialized with that particular group.

> Being out of my element hanging out with my best friend's friends is somewhat uncomfortable. It should be fine, but.... But he has like a wealthier social circle, and then he has a circle of friends more like the ones I have from high school and I'm more comfortable with them . . . I notice that there's not as many concerns [for people with more money]. When I'm in that social circle I don't have much to say, there's not much common ground. But I notice that him and his roommates they never talk about school or anything like that. Like it's not important to them. They mostly talk about going out and stuff, like having a good time.

Although Billy is willing to take on the characteristics of his friend's more wealthier social group it is not his first preference. At the same time he is imitating the dress and mannerisms of a wealthier group he is questioning his choice to do so because he does not want to portray himself as something he is not.

Limiting Social Interaction

The types of limitations exhibited by the participants, social interaction and risk taking, manifest themselves in a variety of ways, but ultimately resulted in the truncation of exploratory behavior. As the participants in the study established strong social networks and developed close friends they began limiting other types of social interactions. Most students explored the social scene of "fraternity row" their first and second years, but ultimately ended up rejecting it as something that was not right for them.

Jared had the most extreme example of limiting interaction. When he first came to the University he felt the need to get involved in a wide variety of activities and most especially with groups that had a long history at the University. He talked of "coming to [the University] on a mission, taking ownership of [the University] . . . I really wanted to take ownership of the school and take advantage of opportunities. It seemed like a leadership conference that would never end.

Unfortunately there was an incident during a Halloween party that made Jared reconsider his involvement and his reasons for being involved. One of the students came to the party supposedly as a statue of the goddess Isis, but had his face painted in dark gold paint. When Jared confronted him the student felt that Jared was overreacting. When another student got involved, a white student from Texas, Jared asked him what he thought and he said, "It looks like blackface to me, but it doesn't matter as long as we don't take pictures."

This incident along with the lack of support from his fellow group members shook him to his core and made him reassess exactly what he was doing with a group which was so unwilling to address the issue. Not long after the incident Jared participated in a summer study abroad in Morroco. He returned to the university feeling completely changed. From his experience in Morrocco and the time he had to reflect on his experiences during the previous year Jared had come to question his place within the University and within the groups he had joined. The feeling was equally about his race and his socioeconomic background. Ultimately, Jared remained a part of the group but only peripherally

and he reevaluated and dropped his membership from other similar groups that had a long history at the University.

> I didn't like going to [the group activities] because it was a whole bunch of white elitists who I was pretending to accept and who were pretending to accept me. I didn't like going to the formal dinners and cocktail parties, even though I really like dinner and cocktail parties, but I didn't like going because it felt so "them" to me. I felt so alien now. I really had to reassess my life.

The incident and the resulting reflection was so painful that he felt that he couldn't share his feelings with anyone because he didn't know anyone who would really understand or be able to give him guidance in how to deal with it. Instead, he chose to retreat and spend time with people and groups that had a culture of diversity, instead, as he said, "of a legacy of white elitist power and privilege."

Because the incident that precipitated his reflection and consequently his participation in high profile activities was racist in nature, as opposed to classist, I asked him if he could separate the two. Jared felt that he definitely could:

> It wasn't just the fact that it was racist. And it wasn't just the fact that it happened in a group of primarily white people. It was also the fact that I didn't feel like I could relate to the other Blacks on campus. They were in their own groups and I felt like they had such an advantage over me in terms of what they had grown up with. They had opportunity I didn't have. So I was an outsider

> among them as well. But it was easier to blame all of it on the white students around me. I was worried about both: the racial tension and the fact that I had lived in this glitter for so long that I forgot who I was.

Elizabeth's experience with a sorority also caused her to rethink her involvement with groups that she described as not holding the same values. In her first year, Elizabeth decided to join a sorority, although she knew her family would disapprove. Like Jared she threw herself into the organization and rose quickly to a leadership position. Also like Jared, she found herself in the middle of a controversy that sped out of control resulting in her deactivating from the sorority. Although she values the experience, it caused her to think about who she interacts with and why.

> I had [originally] chosen not to rush—sororities can be very expensive, almost like a second tuition, and I was at a point where I couldn't have even paid the mandatory fee required to rush. But when I received an open invite after rush was over, I felt like maybe that was something I did want to try—especially since by that time, a lot of my girl friends had been exuberant over their bids and new sisters. So I jumped in—only to reach another pitfall when my bid was placed and I realized expensive dues loomed on my horizon. In fact, I joined where I did because the dues were less expensive, even though it wasn't the best fit for me. On the outside looking in, people wouldn't know that—I was the face of

> my sorority, even working my way up to become president. But the sorority was filled with strife—and now, the sorority is no more. I look at that, and see a continuous pile of sunk costs—stress, time invested, money, money, and more money.

After the sorority was shut down due to a hazing incident and Elizabeth dealt with the fallout at the chapter and national level she decided to take a semester off to reevaluate what the choices she was making and the social circles she was a part of. The time turned out to be valuable. Of that time she said,

> I finally put aside what everyone would think or feel and decided I needed some "me time" to sort out the world, get things straight on all fronts, and be able to come back and excel with a clear head.

When she did come back Elizabeth's priorities had changed. She no longer participated in any Greek activities and she concentrated more on a smaller circle of friends, academics and her off-campus job.

Not all the participants had such drastic events that changed their view, for most it was a slower process of realization through cumulative experiences. For Billy it included a negative interaction at the bar with, as he called him, "a rich frat guy." For Rebecca it included the negative comments that she consistently heard about those "people from southwest Virginia who were accepted to meet a 'quota.'" And for Chad it was just the sense that, as a transfer student from a community college, he didn't quite fit in with his business class peers who started at the University as freshmen. While there was not one common experience that the participants shared, they all shared the sense of pulling away from the larger

University community and activities because of a sense that they just did not quite fit.

Limiting risk taking

Nearly all the participants described themselves as risk adverse. Only two participants had changed their major, although even in the process of change they thoroughly examined the potential career viability of their choices before ultimately making the choice. The other eight participants chose relatively "safe" career oriented paths that would lead to stable careers and financial security.

Billy is a business accounting major but has a deep interest in astronomy and philosophy. Billy made the decision early on that he would major in accounting regardless of his other interests. He just did not see either astronomy or philosophy as viable career paths. However he talked animatedly about his classes in those areas and it was clear that those were the subjects he truly enjoyed.

Elizabeth was one of the few students that had changed her career focus. Although she didn't change her major from English, she came to college with the intention of going into education, but found that she really was not interested in teaching. Instead, and based on her off-campus work experience, she was contemplating a second major in marketing. She knew that it would add more time to her degree, but felt it was a career that she was really drawn towards. This decision was not received well by her family, especially her mother who referred to her decision as "money focused." Even though Elizabeth was willing to change her focus, she realized that she had chosen something relatively safe.

When asked if she would have done anything different she said she wished she had taken courses that she was just interested in and not worried about the grade or how it would fit in to her overall academic plan.

Rebecca had a similar feeling. As an English major admitted to the Education program, Rebecca has had little room for "fun" courses, although she said she had taken a few. However it was more important to her to have a plan and follow that plan:

> I think I generally take the safe route and it's not necessarily what I want to do, but I think it's comfortable. I have a friend who is major in philosophy. Her parents who are both college professors urged her to do whatever she was interested in. And she's never worried about it. She just has this vague idea that if she did something she loved she could find something to do with it. The fact that she doesn't have a plan stresses me out.

Mary, the other participant who changed her major and career focus, described that decision as her biggest risk. She switched from pre-med to a double major in English and American Studies.

> Switching into a major that not many people have heard of and have no idea what its applicable value is in the world. I feel like that was a big risk for me because it was something where I was really afraid of not being accepted, just in general, I know my parents would be okay with it, but I didn't know if they'd be happy

> with it. And so that was a big change for me and kind of a risky moment.

Other participants saw being admitting and attending the University as such a major accomplishment that any sort of risk taking behavior, academic or social, had the potential of jeopardizing their hard work. Tom pointedly said, "Why would I want to risk what I've worked so hard for just to try something new?" And Vanessa echoed Tom stating, "When you risk something you risk losing something. That doesn't really appeal to me.

Outside of academics participants expressed similar behaviors. The participants took very few social risks and when they did it was because they were required to or were pushed into by their peers.

Elizabeth ran for class council her freshman year, something she looks back on with surprise:

> My [freshman] year I ran for vice president of my class at my suitemates' behest which is totally something I wouldn't ever consider doing even though I was a leader in high school. But they convinced me to do it. It was a good experience and got me involved. If I'm in a situation where I'm comfortable and I already have a presence then I feel okay about taking a leadership position, but generally speaking I'm not that comfortable with it.

Elizabeth expressed discomfort with, what she called, "normal college behavior."

> I remember the first time I walked through [one of the academic buildings] after 10 o'clock and feeling like I was doing something wrong . . . Just things like being okay about going out on a Tuesday night and feeling like, but wait it's a school night.

When Rebecca stepped out of her comfort zone her freshman year she had a very negative experience which forced her to reevaluate getting involved in areas that she was not absolutely sure she would excel in:

> When I first came here I tried out for the dance team and it was a terrible experience. First of all I felt like I was the fattest girl in the room, and I'm not fat and I don't think I should ever feel that way. Also, I felt like these girls had so much more training and opportunity than I had had, their technique was so much better than mine. It was really discouraging and I felt so awful that I never did anything like that again just because it was such a negative experience.

Chad talked about going out of his comfort zone in terms of meeting people:

> I've done things that have been uncomfortable, like trying to talk to certain people or trying to talk to a certain group. I really wouldn't say it was a risk though. Trying to speak with certain people that are kind of part of a different social group, that's kind of unfamiliar territory. I've tried to do it a little bit. I think of like certain companies or particular fraternities or sororities that have a

> certain stereotype. I've just never met anyone from that group, so just trying to reach out and talk to them.

What is particularly interesting about Chad's comment is that he spent two years as a missionary in Chile talking to people about his church. When I asked him if he had trouble approaching and talking to people there he said he did not because "they weren't all that different from me."

Vanessa, who was pretty pragmatic about taking risks stated:

> Just like with drinking, you risk losing control and something like that doesn't seem like something I am willing to do. Like I don't skip class unless I have a reason. It would make me anxious, like the professor will notice or I'll miss something important that will affect my grade.

Although most of the students felt satisfied with their choices, there was a sense that they *could* have done more or made different choices that would have ultimately been beneficial. Tom talked about that in terms of getting involved:

> I wish I'd gotten involved in more activities. At the conference where I just gave a presentation, some other students built a steel bridge for a competition, things like that. And in looking back it actually looked like a lot of fun. Um, so I wish I had gotten involved in maybe more in that area. But I look as risks as the potential to lose something you value. I mean something where your dignity or your identity's at risk.

Flaunting.

> I remember [my] first year feeling strangely proud when we had a [Southern] theme dinner at the dining hall and a girl in front of me wrinkled her nose and said, "Corn . . . pudding?" I said, "Corn puddin'" and got a big spoonful.

Although it was not common for students participating in this study to really assert their class background, there were times when they did and it generally made them feel good about themselves, as evidenced above by Mary's expression of enjoyment at seeing food from home. They felt stronger, more whole, than at any other time. However talking about their differences took a great deal of courage.

For Mary revealing her background became a priority when she started taking classes in the education program. That priority, however, took a while to realize because she had felt so out of place, disadvantaged both academically and economically, and insecure about her apparent inability to conform to the "University style." After four years she has come to see her experience as valid and valued.

> I think it's important for working-class students to remind their peers that not everyone has had the same privileges and opportunities, but that we're all here together now. Especially as an education major, I think it's important to make sure that my peers really realize that the students in their classrooms will not all have had the same opportunities they had growing up.

Elizabeth had similar feelings when a close friend who was from an affluent family and active in a group campaigning for better wages for University staff made a comment about the university's financial aid program for low-income students, essentially saying that the financial aid plan which eliminated loans for students below a certain income level was the sole reason for the tuition increase, so any one that was paying full tuition was actually paying for those "scholarship" students to be at the university.

As a recipient of that aid, Elizabeth's response in her journal was unequivocal:

> I have a very strong sense and surety that I have every right to be here, and it just furthers my confidence in myself to know that I matriculated here on my own right, despite coming from a family without means for private summer camps, tutors and classes; despite coming from an area without many of the opportunities that [more urban] schools have; and despite not have a legacy [to the University] . . . . It is times like that you may even WANT [sic] to "unmask" yourself—because if they can see your merit, which they know, it might help to break down those other stereotypes they hold.

Like Elizabeth, other students talked about feeling like they wanted to reveal their class background from time to time if only to disprove the stereotype, but very few of the students actually did. It was more common for the participants to feel good about what they had achieved so far but not sharing their

past and what they had overcome in order to gain access and succeed at an elite university.

Interpretations and Responses to Social Feedback

Within the identity development process model, how an individual interprets and responds to the interpersonal feedback received has a direct connection with one's self-perception, and therefore can lead to reinforcement or changes within the identity standard. In the analysis I identified three areas of interpretation and response that were significant to the participants: (1) interpreting social stigma; (2) rationalization; and (3) reconceptualizing identity.

All the students spoke of the stigma, or "undesired difference" (Goffman, 1963), that comes with being considered lower class or in poverty, whether or not they acknowledged that their own background could be described as such. Rationalization includes the participants' either validating or excusing their own behavior as well as that of their peers. Reconceptualization of identity consists of disengagement from or commitment to the working class background.

Social stigma. The social stigma that students from working class backgrounds feel is as painful as any other type of social stigma; and in some ways more so simply because the individual on the receiving end may not have chosen to reveal their class status. In this case the individual may choose to "out" themselves, conform to the behavior of those promoting the stigma, or remain silent. With the exception of two students, the participants in this study chose to remain silent.

Vanessa was looking forward to leaving part of her past behind:

> I do like leaving the part of my past behind that may have been embarrassing. . . I do like leaving behind the lack of opportunity because of lack of money. Such as a trip or going to a show, etc. I like having the option to do what I want instead of being forced into a category of what we can afford.

While she acknowledges that the lack of money and opportunity were "embarrassing" to her, at the same time she talks about taking strength from the experiences she had because of that lack:

> I take strength from my experiences and take pride in my background not shame or guilt. I do not feel that if people know that I had a poor household growing up, or that I have been through a lot of hard times they will think less of me. If people did know about my past they should be only impressed with my ability to overcome obstacles.

And yet, the most telling thing about Vanessa's comments is the fact that people do not know her background and she has never told any of her friends at college about her class background.

Professing allegiance to the values of their class background, and most especially their perceived benefits of their social class (e.g., hard working, honest), was common, but being able to openly state that they came from that background was quite another. Tom wrote of his comfort in being around those with a lower class background compared with those that were from more affluent backgrounds:

> After visiting Pittsburgh in the fall, I felt very comfortable with the other working class locals. I know what it was like to work a 75-hour work week hauling hay and washing dishes. Conversely there were times in London when I felt out of place because I didn't understand the ridiculous fashion of some of the youth and the amount of money that these people could justify spending on such outrageously pointless items of clothing.

Like Vanessa, Tom acknowledges his affinity for the working class (although the people he worked with could probably be considered lower class), and even identifies himself with that group when he says, "I felt very comfortable with the *other* working class locals." Yet there is something that permits him from sharing that perspective with his peers just a there is with Vanessa. Both talk about their hard work and their values, and both claim to be proud of that. Yet the question remains, if they are so convinced that others would be impressed by their resilience and the fact that they overcame obstacles to get where they are, why are they so unwilling to share that experience?

Elizabeth could more easily articulate her discomfort based on experiences of a classmate:

> A friend of mine who comes from a Southern school and a Southern family . . . is well-liked as a cheerleader and a member of the dance team, in my sorority, and drives a very nice car. But one day she was taken aside in a class where she was fraternizing with some of those "quota kids"—football players of a lesser

> background who are here in most's eyes to 'play the field and pass some GUT [sic] classes." And the professor and TA of her class discussed with her the importance of assimilating into a tasteful and more socially acceptable society—changing her dress (which was fine, just no pearls or country club sweaters), and shockingly in addition to that, changing her friends.

Elizabeth had heard the term "quota kids" before, but in reference to students receiving full grants from the university. Elizabeth herself is one of those "quota kids." She acknowledges that, "My close friends know I am here on scholarship—although they certainly don't know that much of it is a financial scholarship versus an academic scholarship." While, like Vanessa and Tom, she purports to be proud of her background and talks about possibly unmasking herself in order to breakdown stereotypes, Elizabeth has of yet been unwilling to do so.

The students in the study could easily talk about what was meant by the stigma of being poor or lower class, and each student recognized that by attending college, and most especially a highly selective institution, they were, in effect, erasing any difference that might exist. When asked, students had a difficult time thinking of any reason an individual would want to remain in poverty given the opportunity to move up and they attributed that belief to the value of hard work that were passed down to them from their parents. So, while they held the positive values that have been ascribed to their social class (hard working, not spoiled, unpretentious) they were adamant that they had more motivation and a

greater ability than others in their social class and if they didn't make use of that then they were wasting what they had cultivated in themselves.

Rationalization. Students in this study often excused or even dismissed comments or behaviors from their peers or influential others without really considering how those comments and behaviors would affect them psychologically or socially. There were instances where the participants even deferred to a wealthier peer in order to rationalize their behavior. Most often deference occurred in the first or second year. In some cases, students would even validate the offensive behavior, relying on the cultural norms as a benchmark for appropriate behavior.

Rebecca described feeling out of place her first year and attributed much of that feeling to a specific person:

> I tie many of my memories of feeling out-of-place my first year to a girl who lived on my hall. [She] was from the suburbs of Philadelphia and seemed to exemplify the ideal [University] student—she had gone to a private, all-girls school but was socially able around both male and female peers, she was blonde and thin, and had a great wardrobe of Lacoste polos and skirts. She had more than one Vera Bradley bag, had been to what sounded like hundreds of Dave Matthews concerts, and was elected as our hall's representative to First Year Council. Even though she'd come from another state, she seemed to more

> exemplify the culture at a school only two hours from the town I'd spent my whole life in.

That one person was the standard to which Rebecca held herself. Of course by those standards she failed, but according to Rebecca it was because of her own shortcomings rather than the advantages the other student came with. In purely materialistic terms she measured her own success as a freshman by her dorm room. She had decided to room with a friend from her hometown, feeling that by knowing someone right away the transition would be made easier.

> It made it a little bit better that my roommate was from my high school, like we had grown up together and were really good friends. We were both kind of like "Holy crap this is a different world." You know, how did everyone else know how to dress, I think was one of our biggest things, like how did everyone else know that they would need little ruffled skirts and Lacoste shirts and a Vera Bradley purse and whatever else you need to fit in at [the University]. I remember like you know we had worked so hard to like plan the best dorm room ever and I think all our stuff was Target and Wal-Mart stuff. Our room was so cute, it really was, but then across the hall the girls had planned to buy matching Pottery Barn room sets, so the one girl had the blue and the other girl had the pink and it was the same pattern, so everyone was like to us, "Oh your room is so cute." And my friend and I were just

kind of like, "Hmmm . . . our room came from Wal-Mart." I think that was the first time I was ever like, "Oh, my family's poor."

Rebecca felt the condescension that came from other people on her floor not because of how her room was decorated but because of where she bought her room décor; yet she accepted that behavior from others because she thought that the decorations in the other rooms *were* better, although before she came to college she had felt good about how she was decorating her room.

Jennifer felt the same disconnect her first year, and particularly her first semester. Her experience was so negative that she seriously considered transferring. She felt that she had come to a university that prided itself on diversity. In the first semester she felt that not only was the university not diverse racially, but there was no evidence of social diversity which was important to her coming from a large urban area.

> [The university] was my only choice and I'd never visited before, so wasn't really knowing like what to expect. My first year dorm was _____ Dorm, I don't know if you know, so it's like pretty much my hallway was like a lot of white girls and maybe like one Asian girl, but she was pretty much pretty white already and in a sense I could tell like how wealthy they are just by the way the dress, like the type of clothes, and like pearls, etc. So I guess it was kind of loud all the time and just party hard and I wasn't exactly that type of person. . . . All the girls from the hallway, I think like on the first day they already kinda like developed their

> own cliques, like, it's like obviously you're more comfortable in like, I don't want to say it, but like if you're white, you cling, you cling to, like, more of the white group, and then if I'm, you know, Asian, etc. . . . I was kinda like, it's really wrong judging them I guess, 'cause all they would do is like party really hard, like act like a fool all the time, like, like silly things, I mean, like you can have fun and you can be like dorky or stupid or whatever, and just like too much kind of like bothers me. I just didn't, there wasn't a click there, it was like we couldn't communicate on the same things or we didn't have the same interests maybe.

Jennifer did find when she visited another dorm that she felt more comfortable. There seemed to be a greater diversity in both class and race, but as a first-generation student she could not have known the differences in the residence halls coming into her first year. She then blamed herself figuring that she had just made the wrong choice both in terms of where to live and ultimately where to go to college. It wasn't until three or four weeks into the fall semester that she really started to feel comfortable and identify friends in classes as opposed to her living space. Jennifer felt it was wrong to judge people on their behavior or their choices, even though her feelings of disengagement were due in part to the cliques that had formed early on in the residence hall.

Chad as well had a difficult adjustment transitioning to the University. As a transfer student from the community college he felt some disadvantage in class because students that had began at the University as freshmen saw getting into the

business program as something they had worked hard and competed for during their first two years and Chad, as a transfer student, didn't have the same background or credentials to be in the program.

Although Chad was ahead of his fellow students in many ways (he was a few years older, he had been abroad and living on his own for three years), there were times that he felt disadvantaged, but put that down to his own choices of where to attend his first two years of college.

> It was difficult coming in like halfway through school. Most people have a group of friends that they know and they already have someone in each of their classes that they know. And I think it's because going into the [business program] you have to take a lot of prerequisites. So people had already had classes together. So kind of assimilating into the network was kind of difficult at first. And then there's always the issues of what did people think of you as a transfer student, you know like, "Why did you go to community college if you are supposed to be as smart as we are kind of mentality." So I think that's definitely faded like from the past year. I guess I've kind of proven myself in the sense that they know that I can do whatever the assignment is. I think building that trust was a little bit difficult at first. I was in a group of five and my group had three transfer students in it, so the other members thought that we were going to have a terrible group because of all these people coming in that don't really know what

they're doing. But we ended up getting the highest grades in our class. So it ended up working out well.

Chad excuses those first impressions by saying that since they didn't know him they couldn't be certain that he would be an asset to the class or his group. However, the fact that there is even the suggestion that he wouldn't be as prepared or "as smart" is a covert comment on his choice to attend community college first, which, in his case, was for purely financial reasons. It is interesting to note that Chad, more often than not, works with international students when he does group work. He commented that he seems to have more in common with international students that with the "traditional undergraduates."

Reconceptualizing Identity

Participants in this study ultimately reconceptualized their identity standard in two ways: disengagement from or commitment to social class. Disengagement was the most prevalent way students chose to manage the threats to identity. Only three students openly committed to their low socioeconomic status but were at different comfort levels in terms of openly sharing that commitment.

Mary, Rebecca and Jared were at the point of committing to their class status. However, Jared wasn't ready to advocate for students from a working class background. Before he left the University he had focused his energies on advocating for racial diversity and developing a program highlighting the experiences of students with disabilities at the University.

As an education major, Rebecca was well on her way to advocating for students from working class backgrounds. She actively advocates for students in discussions in her education classes and jokes about her "inside knowledge" of the working class culture:

> I sometimes very much enjoy asserting my working class background here at the University. I will share things that I know about industry because my father was a truck driver, or about the natural world because we live in a rural subdivision surrounded by farmland . . . Sometimes I'll mention a friend who's an Ag major at [another university] and people will look at me puzzled until I explain, Agriculture. At my high school we had Ag classes, and everyone knew what Ag was short for. We may not have had all of the AP courses that some of my friends had access to—and no one ever stressed that taking the AP test might have been helpful later on—but we sure did have a class about cows. It feels a little subversive to be able to do the same thing that I felt demeaned by, to talk about things you know a certain group wouldn't understand. And in my case, I can talk about things that privileged kids, private school kids just don't get—going to bull bucking, NASCAR, things that get mocking in the media but that I can both see the attraction to and repulsion of—and actually know what I'm talking about, where the privileged kids might just be repeating whatever they heard on the Blue Collar Comedy Tour.

Mary has also become an advocate for lower class students. Mary went from avoiding conversation about class backgrounds and feeling guilty about it to being conscientious about being honest and proud of her background in order to help shed the social stigma of coming from a background of poverty.

> I think the times when I have felt the guiltiest about trying to hide my past have been in setting where I was having a meal with important people at the University . . . During these meals I often felt like I needed to only tell part of the truth when answering about my family. Like, "my mom is in retail," instead of "my mom works at Wal-Mart." I felt really guilty about this and really got upset that I felt the need to avoid disclosing that around people. I want to be proud of my past, my parents might not be rich and they may be simple people, but I am so proud of them for what they have done for themselves and for my brother and me. I have no reason to try to hide my past so I am really trying to be more intentional about being open and honest about where I come from.

Mary went on to say, "I think I chose to leave [my background] behind for a while and that was part of my individual growth process." Mary sees herself as an advocate for changing views within the University, but is also realistic in her assessment in who is responsible for the change. She is clear that she believes that on an institutional level class is ignored at the University and issues arise because of that, however she also knows that the institution simply taking a stand will not result in cultural change. Advocating for change must come from the

individuals who are stigmatized and stereotyped simply because of their class status.

> I consider myself to be part of an invisible minority here at [the University]. People refuse to acknowledge that there are those of us here who are not from an upper middle class background and who rely on financial aid to keep us here. It is extremely frustrating that there are so many resources for people who are minorities in other respects. We have offices and deans who are assigned to cater to the special needs of individual populations, but there are hardly any resources for students who are from poor backgrounds who are trying to adjust to living in an environment where they are surrounded by such extreme wealth. I actually tried to find someone to come and speak at Resident Staff training this past fall about the special needs faced by students with class based adjustment issues. I could not find anyone; not even [the financial aid office] could offer any help in terms of knowing what support system there was for students who needed help adjusting because of their financial background.

The work that Jared, Mary and Rebecca had to do to get to the point of feeling comfortable with their social class background did not come easy and, at the time of the interviews, they were still struggling to integrate their emerging middle class identity with their lower class background. All three had plans to work in education and an interest in social justice issues.

The other students in the study were, at the time, content with the identity standard of middle class. Although they were able to express that they were proud of their achievements and most especially that they were able to attend and succeed at the University, they were not able to openly talk to their peers about their experiences as a student who came from poverty, they instead stood by the fact that they had very little difference from more affluent students and the differences they could identify were inconsequential.

Summary of the Analysis

The identity development process is inherently both psychological and social; however given the nature of class-status, social interaction dominates the influence of class on identity development. If we view class as social construct that has validity in everyday interactions then we can begin to place the process of identity development of students in poverty in a framework that takes into account both interpersonal and intrapersonal components. For the students in this study, the cultural context in which identity development occurred was one of the most important factors to take into account when exploring class status effects.

Not only did the context of the University play an important role, but the students' hometowns, families, and high school friends added an additional layer of complexity to the development process. The students in this study experienced a series of developmental negotiations that were sometimes at odds with each other. For example, the participants managed outward behavior both in the context of the University where they experienced upward class mobility and learned new cultural norms and expectations, while at the same time they

maintained ties to hometown and family where they had to either revert to an accepted behavior that was at odds with their changing identity standard or manage their behavior in a way that would not cause a great degree of dissonance in the personal feedback they received.

The change in identity standard coupled with the desire to maintain a certain level of relationship continuity with family often served to distance students from their support structures. Although none of the students in this study experienced a crisis of major proportions, it would be easy to imagine that if they had, the consequences would have been heightened compared to one experienced by their more affluent peers because of the lack of support. The lack of support was also in evidence in the participants' psychological inability to take risks. Although all the students acknowledged a basic level of support, any failed risk-taking, whether social or academic, would have constituted a crisis, which, again, they would have little or no support for.

The participants' identity development process in relationship to class status is, with a few exceptions, an unconscious one. Unless the participants made a change based on the identity standard of lower class or middle class, the majority of their behavioral choices and responses to feedback, while based in a lived reality, were not consciously based on their perceived social status. I would argue, however, that the choices of behaviors and interpretations of feedback were *unconsciously* based on perceived social status. That is, although the participants repeatedly stated that they were middle class or that class status was not a particularly important part of their identity they unconsciously made choices,

from dress to dialect to social networks, based on social class. Although the study participants wouldn't necessarily describe their experience this way, they have become very adept at "passing" and hiding information that would lead to clues about their social class. The level of passing, however, goes beyond purposefully hiding those potentially stigmatizing behaviors. Passing becomes so ingrained in everyday life that the participants may not even realize they are exhibiting passing behavior. Drake and Cayton (1945) describe the most extreme form of passing as the point at which an individual permanently takes on another identity through a "sociological death and rebirth" (163) which occurs when an individual breaks all social ties related to the stigmatized identity and creates new ones. Although none of the participants in this study took such extreme measures, they all had elements in their lives that involved distancing themselves from the past in order to more fully integrate into their present social context.

The students in this study, while open about their lives and experiences, had not, for the most part, actively reflected on what the upward mobility of their class status would mean in terms of interactions in future contexts. This is not surprising given the fact they had a difficult time articulating what that mobility meant within the context of university life.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Using a conceptual process model developed from Kerpelman et al. (1997), criticisms of the model (Schwartz, 2001; Adams, 1997), and the inherent social nature of class status, this study explores the phenomenon of the effects of poverty on the identity development of college students.

Specifically, this study addresses the following four research questions:

1. In what ways do students from low socioeconomic backgrounds define themselves?
2. How does low socioeconomic status inform students' understanding of their identity?
3. What meaning does low socioeconomic status have for these students? How does low socioeconomic status inform their lived experience?
4. Using established identity development models as a foundation, how do the socioeconomic-based developmental experiences of the participants add to or differ from dimensions of identity based on race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation?

The first section of this chapter outlines the findings of this study relative to the research questions. The findings are followed by a discussion of the phenomenon in relation to accepted theories of identity development and my theoretical construct

outlined in Chapter Two. Finally the last section of the chapter outlines implications for practice and suggestions for future research.

Discussion

Research Question One: In What Ways Do Students From Low-Socioeconomic Backgrounds Define Themselves?

Students in this study came to the University with well developed identity standards. They all described themselves as motivated, high-achieving, independent, and middle-class. Those identities were the ones to which they ascribed the highest value and strove to maintain during their four years of college. True to Erikson's (1980) definition of ego identity, these standards were those that were developed over years of interaction with parents and other influential adults and peers throughout childhood and adolescence.

The most significant change in identity standard occurred for those students who were willing to acknowledge their poverty status and openly discuss how it affected their college experiences and interactions within the college culture. However, characterizing this change is challenging. While the students were open to discussing their poverty status growing up, they still maintained their middle-class identity standard. Similar to Devine's (2004) findings, all the study participants acknowledged that by virtue of their education they would be decidedly better off than their parents, but could not conceive of the fact that their class status would potentially change from low to middle. Rather, just as Devine's participants, they were just moving up within the middle class.

Because the middle-class identity standard was one that they grew up with, status discrepancy then occurs between the original identity standard and the newfound knowledge that there was an incongruity between their identity standard and the reality of

their social status during childhood and adolescence. This is evidenced by the comment made by several participants, "I didn't know how poor we were until I came to college." How then to reconcile the knowledge of this discrepancy? For the three students willing to do so, the answer was to embrace and explore what it meant to come from a covert culture of poverty to the overtly affluent culture of the University. In order to do that the students had to explore what it really meant to be in poverty both during adolescence and in the current context of university life. Of the three students that had undertaken that exploration, Mary was most able to articulate the causes and consequences of poverty within the university setting as well as within a larger social context. However, even though she could discuss the subject she was not at a point developmentally where she could identify and objectively analyze the experience in her own life. Jared was openly willing to say that he did come from a background of poverty, but was raised with "middle-class values." Rebecca had recently begun advocating for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds in her education courses.

The experience is inherently different from what Cross (1995) describes in the third stage of "Immersion-Emersion" as well as the sexual identity models (e.g., Cass, 1979; D'Augelli, 1994). While lower class status shares the burden of stereotyping and stigma with race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, it is nearly impossible for an individual to immerse herself into the culture of poverty. Certainly an individual could live in a high-poverty area and interact within that social context, but she would bring with her increased levels of all forms of capital that others within the social context may not be able to achieve. So while she would share a common background with the

individuals in that specific culture, her increased capital could preclude full immersion into the community.

Research Question Two: How Does Low-Socioeconomic Status Inform Students' Understanding of Their Identity?

For all but three students, there was no clear answer to this question. Tangentially, the students talked about how their parents instilled in them the values of hard work, independence, humility and appreciation for what they have earned. For the three students who had come to terms with their lower class background it was slightly clearer that, as discussed above, they had to deal with a discrepancy between their identity standard and the reality of their low socioeconomic background.

Because the students viewed their status as middle-class that status was the lens they used to understand their experience within the University culture. None of the participants had feelings of entitlement to education or toward their admission to the University; they felt that they had earned the right to be at the University as much as their more affluent peers. Some even expressed that they felt they were more qualified because of their hard work and the fact that they had been admitted to the university despite not having access to the same academic and leadership advantages; several participants contrasted their background to the perceived legacy status of some of their more affluent peers. One student, Jared, was openly scornful of the "legacy of white elitist power and privilege" that he perceived at the university. Jared's perspective mirrors the experiences of Sennett and Cobb's (1972) participants who believed in the power of hard work to move them out of poverty. However, unlike Sennett and Cobb's participants, the students in this study did not directly express outward feelings of

inadequacy or imposter status. On the contrary, students in this study seemed to purposefully gravitate toward individuals more like themselves (i.e., sharing the same stigma) or groups that are willing to adopt their class difference as Goffman (1963) hypothesized.

Research Question Three: What Meaning Does Low-Socioeconomic Status Have For the Students in This Study? How Does Low-Socioeconomic Status Inform Their Lived Experiences?

Students in this study typically viewed low-socioeconomic status, low class status, or poverty in ways similar to the respondents of the NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School study (2001). They applied some of the same negative stereotypes (lower morals, less willing to work, higher drug use) as the respondents of the survey. This is not surprising given the fact that, in many ways, classism has not reached the same level of cultural acknowledgement and admonishment as sexism, racism and ageism. In fact, terms such as white trash, low life, slacker, and trailer trash are a few of the pejorative terms used to describe people in poverty and they are frequently used in popular media and conversations in ways that pejorative terms which refer to non-Whites or women would be considered unacceptable (Perrucci & Wysong, 2003). Even individuals who are in poverty use negative stereotypes to describe others in similar socioeconomic situations. These stereotypes serve to reinforce the misguided notion that poverty is an individual problem as opposed to one caused by larger social and economic issues. The notion of poverty as an individual problem also reinforces the idea that the potential of social mobility is a reality for any individual as long as they work hard enough (Iceland, 2006).

The students in this study identified with this line of thinking in regards to low socioeconomic status. Although all but three of the participants grew up with family incomes under the poverty threshold they could not identify with the social representations of the poor. Additionally, although they identified primarily with the middle-class they saw themselves as upwardly mobile, when, in fact, they have achieved more than do the great majority of those in poverty.

In regards to their lived experiences, although most of the participants were unable to articulate how their socioeconomic status informed their experience, clues were evident in the types of activities they chose, the friends they associated with, and the academic programs they chose because in the greatest majority of the cases those choices did not help them increase their social capital. Social capital, consisting of social networks or connections, is built when individuals interact and establish connections that may facilitate further educational, career, or social opportunities. When asked if he regretted anything during college, Jesse responded that he was sorry that he had not gone to his professors' office hours until his final year of college. By not taking advantage of those office hours he foreclosed a form of social capital he could have built that would ultimately serve to benefit him as he applied to medical school.

One of Jennifer's most important connections while in college was at her job at a local restaurant. She wanted to increase her hours because the people she worked for "felt like family." However, while that job was certainly important to her sense of belonging to the community it did little to build the social capital that was available.

Jared went out of his way to join well-established organizations on campus and enjoyed the opportunity and connections that he was making until a series of incidents,

both racist and classist, made him reevaluate his participation and question his own self worth. Jared felt what Goffman (1963) described as discredited and not a valued part of the social group he had chosen to be a part of. The stigma he felt made him question his place in the university as well as his own academic and leadership abilities that he had felt so confident of when he first arrived.

Research Question Four: Using Established Identity Development Models as a Foundation, How Do the Socioeconomic-Based Developmental Experiences of the Participants Add to or Differ From Dimensions of Identity Based On Race, Ethnicity, Gender, and Sexual Orientation?

Unlike race, ethnicity, and, arguably, gender and sexual orientation, social class is not a fixed identity status. Students, particularly those from impoverished backgrounds, come to college to change, which inherently means improve, their class status. This is not so with the other dimensions of identity, nor would we, as educators, expect a student to give up their race, gender or sexual orientation.

Like race, gender and sexual orientation, social class, and specifically lower class status, has cultural stigmas attached. However, lower class individuals are inherently devalued by the ideology of meritocracy. This is an ideology that asserts that social class is seen as the outcome of an individual's talent and effort as opposed to an inherent consequence of stratification and economic policies. In contrast to the stigmas assigned to the identities of race, gender and sexual orientation, the stigma assigned to those in poverty is not seen as being based on arbitrary evaluations but very real choices that individuals in poverty make which lead to their economic circumstance.

Additionally, in the fight against unjust treatment and unfounded stigma the lower class is woefully inadequate in combating the problem. Marx wrote of the development of a class consciousness that would inevitably lead to a proletariat revolution, yet so far this has not happened. While other stigmatized groups have "fought against the unjust system of devaluation which restricted their opportunities, reduced their humanity, and forced them to make adjustments, such as covering, passing, and careful disclosure, for the benefit of dominant groups" (Granfield, 1991, p. 347), there has been no such movement within the working class. Rather the stigma of the working class is considered to be just and overcoming that stigma is considered to be an individual rather than collective effort.

Work on identity development and social status benefits from the student affairs field moving toward a view of identity development within a socially constructed context. Identity development, as Erikson (1980) characterized it, is a lifelong process that is dependent on the social and cultural contexts in which it takes place; this is especially true for dimensions of development that expand on the white, male, middle-class models of development. Because individuals are required to interact within a dominant culture that does not reflect their own individuality, they must continually assess their behavior and the feedback they receive from members of the group and check that against their identity standard. Unfortunately the prevalent development models for race, gender and sexual orientation don't take the continual process into account. There is very little understanding of the "how" within the models. One exception, and it is most recent, is the multiple identity model from Abes, Jones, and McEwen (2007). This model takes into account how information is filtered and used.

However, there is a shortcoming to the multiple identities model in that as researchers we are well versed in the identity development based on race, gender and sexual orientation and can talk about how those dimensions interact with each other, yet lack a meaningful understanding of the effects of class status. Without a clearer understanding of the affect of social class on identity development it is hard to understand how the dimension of class interacts or intersects with other aspects of identity.

Just as the language of classism is often spoken through languages of other social difference (e.g., gender and race) (Ortner, 1998), identity development based on class is easily hidden by more prominent or visible differences. Because students are actively trying to change their social class, it is easy to dismiss classism as irrelevant to their experience. However the microaggressions that occur can build up over time. From my study it is not clear that the students had experienced class microaggression, or if they had they were conscious of it and subsequently able to apply the experience in any meaningful way to their own identity development. It is interesting to note that Mary, who was the most aware of the role class status played in her development, is a heterosexual, white female. In terms of multiple dimensions of identity, the task of development in terms of class was more relevant. Along the same vein, the two white males in the population were the most adamant in denouncing their lower class status. Based on their comments and our conversations I tend to believe it is because they have not identified classism in the dominant culture as a problem. As Chad stated, "If someone has a problem with my income level, that's their problem, not mine." Therefore, classism does not apply to him.

Limitations of Current Student Identity Development Theory:

Development as Process

With the exception of new emerging theories (e.g., Abes, Jones, McEwen, 2007) there are few college student identity development theories that incorporate the process, or the "how," of identity development into models. Extensions of Marcia's original theory primarily focus on the process, yet I was unable to find student affairs research that used the extension models of Grotevant (1987), Berzonsky (1989), or Kerpelman, Pittman and Lamke (1997). These extension models have the potential to provide a valuable layer of information to the currently accepted development theories as researchers work to understand how personal identity is constructed through social interaction. The Kerpelman et al. microprocess theory may be particularly relevant because it takes into consideration the developing identity within the context of the social environment. Most importantly, the microprocess theory explores the levels of congruence and incongruence an individual receives through feedback and how that, in turn, affects the identity standard.

Contributions of this Study to the Research and Literature

My conceptual framework for this study takes both the social context and the process of feedback into consideration. The students in this study came with a highly refined sense of identity and were highly resistant to exploration. Based on my analysis I believe that the resistance was due, in part, to the fact that the students were unwilling to risk what they had achieved up to this point; in other words, the students saw admission to the University as one of their greatest accomplishments and they didn't want to jeopardize their place by exploring areas unfamiliar or moving too far out of what was

comfortable. Berzonsky (1989) would term this behavior diffuse-avoidant. Phillips and Pittman (2003) theorized:

> [I]t seems reasonable to expect many poor adolescents to settle quickly into roles that fail to take advantage of all of the adolescents' potential, roles perhaps based on realistic appraisals of the opportunity structure or perhaps roles ascribed by the non-poor element of society. Additionally, this premature settling into roles should be expected to preclude future identity exploration (p. 123).

This seems to be the case for the students in this study. In order to be admitted to the University they overcame many obstacles, and once they arrived they felt they had overcome an incredible hurdle and therefore settled into a role that was comfortable. That settling, as Phillips and Pittman, hypothesized, resulted in foreclosed identity exploration.

When the students in this study received negative feedback or encountered uncomfortable situations they retreated. They took in the information and saw the incongruence and responded either by masking the difference that caused negative feedback or seeking out individuals with the same or equal stigma or individuals that would accept the stigma. This was evident in Chad's preference of working with international students; Jared's close relationship with the woman in a wheelchair and his advocacy for students with disabilities; and Jennifer's comfort with the staff at the restaurant where she worked. Other students in the study showed similar behaviors.

Opening up and exploring the process of identity development is not an easy task. Because the students have different experiences and operate in a wide variety of social

contexts within the larger context of the university culture it is virtually impossible to come up with a "typical" or "general" picture of how low socioeconomic status affects identity development. Rather what we can potentially generalize is the "how" of development.

Additionally, this study applies theories and concepts (stereotype threat, microaggression, and stigma) that have historically been applied to underrepresented groups, but have systematically excluded the lower class. By developing a body of literature that takes into account the experiences of individuals from low income backgrounds researchers have a foundation for studying the impact of these concepts on a viable yet understudied population.

Finally, although it is just a first step, this study strives to define low-socioeconomic status and low income within the field of post-secondary education. By replicating Walpole's (2003) methodology and explicating the definition of SES within my own study, I have begun to explore how higher education researchers and professionals can come to a standard definition that will benefit the field.

Implications for Practice

Based on the extensive research on the outcomes of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Astin, 1993; DiMaggio & Mohr, 1985; Lareau, 1993; McDonough, 1997; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1987, 1993) it is clear that these students have lower persistent rates, education aspirations, and achievement levels. The positive effects of college are also clear through evidence of students' increased involvement, greater degree of persistence, and higher aspiration levels when enrolled at more prestigious institutions (Astin, 1975, 1985, 1993; Bowen & Bok, 1998; Bowles &

Gintis, 1976; Hearn, 1984; Walpole, 2003). However, based on Walpole's (2003) study, it is evident that students from low socioeconomic backgrounds do not have the same outcome gains as their more affluent peers. In fact, nine years after entering college, these former students have lower income levels, are less likely to have attended graduate school, and have overall lower levels of educational attainment.

Understanding that there is a significant difference in the outcomes between high- and low- socioeconomic students is an important step to understanding the needs of different student groups in general. Through this study, I have found that students from impoverished backgrounds are more likely to be foreclosed in their exploration of identity. They are less likely to participate in programs, activities, and academic majors that will increase their social capital. While the students in my study have all graduated and benefited from attending an elite institution, they are not all fully able to see the social and cultural capital they have accrued simply because of their attendance, nor are they able to fully utilize that capital. This lack of understanding is evidenced in their choices of social activities and career choices. While their more affluent peers understood the greater opportunities available to them and the chance to influence or change social policy, the students in this study did not understand that these opportunities were available to them as well, simply by virtue of their increased levels of capital. I suggest three ways that colleges and universities can begin to address classism and support the identity development of students from low income backgrounds: institutional recognition of social class and classist behaviors and policies; enhanced support structures for students from disadvantaged backgrounds; and integration of social class awareness into the curriculum.

Institutional Recognition

Bowen, Kurzweil, and Tobin (2005) ask if elite institutions are engines of opportunity or bastions of privilege. Based on the low admission and attendance rates of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, it would seem that the latter is more likely the case. As a remedy the authors suggest a legacy-type boost for students that come from backgrounds of poverty. I contend that the boost, whether labeled as economic affirmative action or need-aware admissions, does not go far enough.

Beginning with recruitment and following through the entire academic experience colleges and universities must begin to examine their institutionalized policies for examples of classism. Some examples: Where and how does recruitment take place? Does the institution require standardized test scores for admission, and if so, what weight do they carry in the process? What are the "incidental fees" that a student might encounter? What is the average cost of textbooks? Are faculty aware of the total cost of required textbooks for each of their courses? Are several copies of textbooks made available in the library? What policies are in place to waive fees for students who may not be able to afford them? Are there academic penalties for part-time attendance or stopping out for a semester? Are there policies for emergency loans? Are financial aid staff trained to provide counseling not only on the various types of financial aid but also on debt management?

Reviewing the policies and procedures for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds will not only remove barriers to participation and persistence, but also send a signal to prospective and current students and their families that the institution is aware and responsive to the needs of students from low income backgrounds.

Enhanced Support Structures

Developing and providing support structures for students who are adept at concealing their difference is not an easy task. However for those students who are grappling with "what it means to embrace a critical identity that is, at best, filled with pride and share, with pleasure in 'self,' but desire to be 'other'"? (Fine & Burns, 2003, p. 856) a strong system of support is precisely what is needed. Colleges and universities have worked hard to provide "safe spaces" for members of historically underrepresented and stigmatized groups. These types of established support systems can serve as models for programs of support for students from lower social classes.

Mentorship programs are a fixture in many colleges and universities, although they are typically developed for racial and ethnic minority populations rather than economically disadvantaged students. However, students from lower class backgrounds could benefit greatly from such a program because they come to college with lower levels of social and cultural capital. Mentorship programs should focus on how students can take advantage of the opportunities, academic and co-curricular, at the institution; an increased understanding of the value of a liberal arts education beyond the career aspirations of students; and an opportunity to explore the traditions of the institution and academic culture in general.

As Jesse noted, it is important for students to make a connection with faculty members at the beginning of their academic career. Students should feel comfortable approaching faculty members for assistance with academic work, but should also feel that they can approach faculty members with questions regarding the academic field in general, research opportunities, educational advice, and other academic related questions.

By providing smaller group educational opportunities, such as involvement with a research project or faculty symposia, students can better understand where they fit within the university culture and appreciate that they have the credentials to participate at all levels.

Integrating Social Class Content into Curriculum

Many institutions have acknowledged the role of race, gender and sexual orientation in society at large through their commitment to the research and study of these particular social dimensions. In her interview, Mary cited a class she took on poverty as the impetus for exploring the implications of social class as well as how own background in poverty. Developing academic courses, presentations, and on-going dialogues which explore the causes and consequences of poverty and class in America is an additional way for faculty to take part in the support structure for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. It is also a way to increase the dialogue between academic disciplines and develop partnerships between faculty and student affairs professionals.

Summary of Implications for Practice

A strong system of support needs to be in place for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. It is not enough to merely admit students from low income families, colleges and universities must work toward creating a welcoming environment free from classist behaviors and language. Certainly students from low socioeconomic backgrounds are not easy to identify and because of the persistent and pervasive classism that exists on college and university campuses students may not want to be identified. However support for this population is absolutely critical so that they may have a safe place to admit or reveal the stress and pressures they may face both at college and when

they return home. Because class and classism are taboo subjects within American culture, classist comments and behaviors often go unacknowledged. Yet it is important to recognize that those words and behaviors have consequences often as serious as racist or sexist comments. Support structures can provide the necessary space to discuss classism, stereotype, stigma and microaggressions that students from disadvantaged backgrounds experience in every day life without further stigmatization.

Directions for Future Research

As stated in the introduction to this study, with the exception of Walpole (2003) there are few studies that explicitly examine the experiences of college students from lower class backgrounds. Walpole's quantitative examination of low socioeconomic students was an important step in understanding the outcomes of the student experience. This qualitative study is a first step in understanding how poverty affects the identity development of college students. But there is much more to be learned.

Defining what the postsecondary community means by "low income," "low socioeconomic status," "lower class," or "in poverty" is a necessary step in the further study of the experiences of this particular population of students. Class in itself is an amorphous term that takes on different meanings depending on the context and variables one uses. All too often Pell Grant eligibility is used to define this population. However eligibility for financial aid is only one of the indicators necessary to determine class status. Financial aid eligibility does not take parent education levels or occupations into consideration.

This study used low socioeconomic status replicated from Walpole's (2003) study. Certainly this is one way to describe class status. The SES variable calculated

takes into account family income, parent education levels, and parent occupation. However, there are other studies that include additional indicators: consumer goods, debt to earning ratios, home ownership, health care, child care, reported levels of hardships, and average time-on-job. The variables used are often dictated by the academic discipline (e.g., sociology, psychology, education) examining the issue. Postsecondary education would benefit from a consistent definition of what it means to be from a low socioeconomic background. A standard definition would inform reliable research and policy at every level.

This study was undertaken at a highly-selective, nationally ranked four-year university where support systems are plentiful and where the graduation rate of all students is high regardless of their background. It is equally, if not more important, to replicate this particular study at a less-selective institution where disadvantaged students are less likely to persist and graduate. Because the social context plays such a major role in identity development, replicating the study at a variety of institutional types will provide a wider picture of the development of this student population.

Additionally, work needs to be done to further integrate socioeconomic status into models which explore multiple dimensions of identity development. The more information that is available about how class affects identity, the clearer the multiple dimension models will be in examining all aspects of identity development.

Finally, this study touched on the effects of stereotype threat, microaggression and stigma on students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Further targeted research is warranted to understand how the effects of such pervasive behaviors might mitigate the

experiences and development of college students who are the conscious and unconscious targets of such actions.

Conclusion

Bourdieu (1998) wrote:

> Intellectuals are holders of cultural capital and, even if they are the dominated among the dominant, they still belong among the dominant. That is one of the foundations of their ambivalence, of their lack of commitment in (class) struggles. They obscurely share this ideology of competence (p. 44).

Educators who are willing to listen and understand the class-based experiences of college students cannot be naïve about their own participation and collusion in class formations, reproduction, and justifications. Examining institutional structures and assumptions for classism is just one way to reverse the trend.

Researchers, faculty, administrators and staff members must begin to examine their own behaviors and biases in order to combat the pervasive effects of classism. This examination should include not only subtle verbal, nonverbal, and visual behaviors that carry with them unintended insults, but also the often unspoken fantasy of academics to see the economically oppressed class rising up and confronting the very oppression that keeps them subjugated.

It is clear through this study and previous research that individuals from poverty yearn for mobility. However, the hard work required to achieve that mobility may preclude the confrontation of the dominant groups that impose the oppression of poverty. Researchers and the academic class must find a way to give students from low

socioeconomic backgrounds a voice and provide support for their dreams and endeavors without projecting their own desires of lower-class revolution.

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Appendix A

Survey Invitation

IRB-SBS #2007-0066

Dear <student>,

From time to time we are approached with requests to participate in dissertation research. Recently, a doctoral student from the Higher Education program contacted us about surveying and interviewing University of Virginia students that received need-based financial aid.

The on-line survey asks questions about your demographics, parental education and occupation, and family income. The survey should take no more than ten minutes. Upon completion of the survey you will be asked if you would like to be considered for inclusion in a series of follow-up interviews regarding your college experience.

All survey participants will be entered into a drawing for a $25 gift certificate to the University Bookstore.

You are under no obligation to participate in this survey and you may withdraw at any time. All information collected in the survey will remain confidential. The Student Financial Services Office will not see individual responses to this survey.

To participate in this survey, please to go:
http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.asp?u=98793281374

If you have any questions regarding the survey, interviews, or study please contact: Christian Steinmetz at 434-227-0398 or csteinmetz@virginia.edu.

With kind regards,
Yvonne Hubbard

Appendix B

Qualifying Survey

Thank you for your participation in this survey. The information you provide in this survey will be used to determine eligibility in a longer term study regarding college experiences.

The survey asks demographic, income and education information about you and your immediate family members.

Upon completion of the survey you will be entered into a drawing for a $25 gift certificate to the University of Virginia bookstore.

All information provided in the survey will remain confidential and used only to determine eligibility for further participation in the study. Upon completion of the study all identifying information will be destroyed.

Completion and submission of this survey constitutes consent to participate in this portion of the study.

If you have any questions regarding the study please contact:
Christian Steinmetz
csteinmetz@virginia.edu
434-227-0298

Again, thank you for your participation.

1. Gender (mark one):
   Male Female

2. Age (please enter whole number):

3. Citizenship status (mark one):
   U.S. Citizen
   Permanent resident
   Neither

4. How do you identify yourself (mark all that apply)
   White/Caucasian
   African American/Black
   American Indian/Alaskan Native
   Asian American/Asian
   Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
   Mexican American/Chicano
   Puerto Rican
   Other Latino
   Other (please describe) _____

5. What is your best estimate of your family's total income last year?

Less than $10,000	$10,000 – 14,999
$15,000 – 19,999	$20,000 – 24,999
$25,000 – 29,999	$30,000 – 39,999
$40,000 – 49,999	$50,000 – 59,999
$60,000 – 74,999	$75,000 – 99,999
$100,000 – 149,999	$150,000 – 199,999
$200,000 – 249,999	$250,000 or more

6. What is the highest level of formal education obtained by your mother? (mark one)
Grammar school or less (8th grade or less)
Some high school
High school graduate (diploma or GED)
Postsecondary school other than college (vocational, trade school)
Some college (no degree)
College degree (Associate or Bachelor's)
Some graduate school
Graduate degree (Master's, Ph.D., Ed.D, M.D., D.O., D.D.S., D.V.M., J.D., etc.)

7. What is the highest level of formal education obtained by your father? (mark one)
Grammar school or less (8th grade or less)
Some high school
High school graduate (diploma or GED)
Postsecondary school other than college (vocational, trade school)
Some college (no degree)
College degree (Associate or Bachelor's)
Some graduate school
Graduate degree (Master's, Ph.D., Ed.D, M.D., D.O., D.D.S., D.V.M., J.D., etc.)

8. Did either of your parents attend and/or receive a degree from the University of Virginia? (mark all that apply)
Mother Father

9. Mother's occupation (note: if your mother is deceased, please indicate her last occupation) _____

10. Father's occupation (note: if your father is deceased, please indicate his last occupation) _____

11. Would you be willing to participate in 6 - 10 hours of interviews and journaling regarding your academic and social experiences prior to and at U.Va.? All participation will be completely voluntary and confidential. Students selected for participation will receive $150 upon completion of the study.
Yes No

Contact information: (This information is requested in order to contact the recipient of the gift certificate and potential inclusion in the next phase of the study. All identifying information will be removed from the survey results upon conclusion of the study.)
Name:
Phone:
Email:

Thank you for your participation in this survey.

Winner of the bookstore gift certificate will be contacted by the end of March.

Students eligible and selected for participation in the interview portion of this study will be contacted in the coming weeks.

If you have any questions regarding this survey or the study please contact:
Christian Steinmetz
csteinmetz@virginia.edu
434-227-0398

Appendix C

Interview Protocol I

Themes: Family, Growing Up, Early Friendships, Values and Beliefs

Family

- Please tell me about your immediate family.
- How would you describe your parents? Your siblings?
- What is your relationship with your parents like?
  - How has your relationship changed since you have been in college?
- Tell me how you feel when your parents visit you at college.
- Please talk about what it is like to go home for vacation.
- How well do you feel your family understands you?
- What family member are you closest to? Why?

Growing Up

- What memories stand out for you while growing up?
- How did you know you would attend college?
  - How important were grades?
  - How important was going to college?
  - Who talked to you about college?
- What was your neighborhood like?
- What types of interaction did you have with neighbors?
  - How often, if ever, did you social?
  - What form did the social gatherings take?
- What did you know about your income level growing up?

Early Friendships

- Tell me about your friends that you had growing up.
- What similarities or differences do you remember you had with your friends?
- How did you feel when friends came to visit you at your home?
  - How did you feel when you visited friends at their homes?
- Describe a time when you felt like an outsider among your friends.

Values and Beliefs

- How important is religion in your life?
  - Why?
  - Do you attend church?
- How would you characterize your political beliefs?
  - How have they changed?
  - Regardless if they have changed or stayed the same, how did you come to the conclusion they were right for you?
- What are you passionate about?

Appendix D

Interview Protocol II

Themes: Adjustment to College, Academics, Co-Curricular Life

Adjustment to College

- Talk about how you chose to attend U.Va.
  - What sort of support did you receive and from whom?
- When did you first visit U.Va.?
  - What were your first impressions?
  - Did you have any concerns?
  - What most excited you?
- What specific memories stand out from your first year?
  - What was most difficult?
  - What part of the transition was easiest?

Academics

- What do you enjoy most about classes in college?
- What is the most difficult part of classes for you?
- How well do you think you are doing academically?
- What do you worry about?
- What are you excited about?
- What would you do differently, given the opportunity?

Co-Curricular Life

- Where do you live?
- If you have a roommate, how did you meet and how did you decide to live together?
- What do you do outside of class?
  - Work?
  - Clubs/organizations?
  - Social activities?
- How has your involvement changed since your first year?
- What would you do differently?

Appendix E

Interview Protocol III

Themes: Personal Interactions, Self Perception, Well-Being, Class Status

Personal Interactions

- What is your role in a group setting?
  - How do you socialize in larger groups?
  - How do you socialize in smaller groups?
  - Why?

Self Perception

- How would you describe yourself?
- How would others describe you?
  - Your best friend from high school
  - A close friend at college
  - A family member
  - A professor
  - Someone who just met you

Well-Being

- Describe a time during college that you have felt depressed.
- Describe a time you have felt anxious.
- When do you feel most happy or at ease with yourself?
- When do you feel most uncomfortable?
- What makes you angry?
- Describe a risk that you have taken while in college.
  - Would you take more or less risks?
  - Why?
  - What would you do differently?

Class Status

- What does class status mean to you?
- How much of your background do you share with college friends?
  - Who knows the most about you and why?
- Under what circumstances would you tell someone about your background?

Future Directions

- What are your ultimate plans for your education?
- What would you like to do after you graduate?
- What do you dream about?
- How important is financial stability?
- How important is having a family?

Appendix F

Journal Prompts

Prompt 1:
Our lives are a series of choices and turning points. Since you've been in college what have been some of the most critical choices you have made? How did you come to your decision? How did the people around you (family, friends, others) react to you choices? How did you feel before, during, and after making each choice? Please pick at least three significant choices to write about.

Prompt 2:
In an essay on college life and class struggles, Julio Alves wrote:

> Like so many other working-class, public-school-educated, scholarship kids in higher education, I lived in fear of being unmasked. We were quick to realize that we were getting a decent education, but we also suspected that our [more affluent] roommates were doing better, knew more than we did. I was afraid that the minute I walked into one of those fancy classes, everyone would see how little I know, and they'd think I was stupid. There was no way I was going to take that chance (Alves, 2006, p. B5).

How do you feel about this perspective? Have you ever worried that you would be "unmasked?" If so, what were the circumstances? If not, why?

Prompt 3:
In her book on class, bell hooks writes:

> Slowly I began to understand fully that there was no place in academe for folk from working-class backgrounds who did not wish to leave the past behind. That was the price of the ticket. Poor students would be welcome at the best institutions of higher learning only if they were willing to surrender memory, to forget the past and claim the assimilated present as the only worthwhile and meaningful reality (2000, 36 – 37).

Have you maintained ties with your past? If so, how? If not, how do you feel about leaving your past behind? Do you agree with hooks' assessment of class and college culture? Why or why not?