The Cost of Inclusion:
Race, Class, Gender, and the Social Dynamics of College Life

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A Dissertation Presented to the Graduate Faculty
of the University of Virginia in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Sociology

University of Virginia
December 2017

ABSTRACT

Sociological theory highlights the role of culture in reproducing social inequality, especially in educational settings. Existing research has focused on illuminating the role of exclusive cultural resources in facilitating success in schools. While offering valuable insights into the capacity of culture to exclude, prior literature has offered comparatively limited insights into the role of culture in finding inclusion.

Drawing on the insights of interaction ritual theorists like Erving Goffman and Randall Collins, I examine students' pursuit of inclusion in college. More specifically, I conducted an ethnographic study at a large, public university, observing three groups of college students over the course of an academic year and interviewing 60 first-year students during the spring semester. Through this approach, I sought to understand (1) how students pursue social inclusion within peer groups, and (2) how students make meaning of their experiences in these groups.

The results indicate that race, class, and gender intersect in shaping students' experiences with the social landscape of college in unique ways. Social class impacts students' approaches to locating social groups with the potential to offer social connections. While more socioeconomically advantaged students take an intentional, strategic approach, their less advantaged peers often engage in a more haphazard process of finding groups. However, beyond the point of locating groups, the impact of social class on student experiences is less evident as the influence of race and gender become pronounced when students seek to manage their social involvement and interact with their peers.

Within groups, students take on simplistic, culturally recognizable styles of self-presentation that correspond with distinct social roles. Each of these roles in turn require behaviors that link to feelings of value and belonging for their occupants. Notably, the styles of self-presentation characteristic of each role also carry raced and gendered associations that make some of the most central and highly valued roles inaccessible to female and racial/ethnic minority students. Conversely, White male students are allowed – and even encouraged – to take on styles of self-presentation that position them as central members of the group and amplify their sense of belonging. The roles students adopt allow them to become part of groups where they can feel connection, while simultaneously stratifying group membership. By bringing together two elements of culture – namely interactional styles as well as raced and gendered meanings – these findings offer new ways of understanding the complex role of culture in facilitating inclusion while maintaining inequality.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Having spent my time in graduate school studying and researching inequality in higher education, I have become increasingly aware of the ways that my own educational progress is the product of a variety of social forces that have acted in my favor. Perhaps most notably, I have been incredibly fortunate to have a wonderful network of mentors, colleagues, and friends who have offered much needed guidance and support throughout my graduate studies. This dissertation is a product of that support.

First, I am incredibly grateful to Josipa Roksa. Like so many who study higher education, my thinking about colleges and universities has been molded in significant ways by Josipa's scholarship. However, I have also had the benefit of learning from her as an advisor and mentor. My decision to pursue a PhD in sociology at UVA was made shortly after I first read *Academically Adrift*, and I was elated for the opportunity to conduct research alongside an advisor at the top of her field. Over the past four and a half years I have benefitted from Josipa's constant dedication as an advisor. While I have been fortunate to have many wonderful educational opportunities over the years, learning from Josipa has without a doubt been the most impactful educational experience I have had.

I also want to express my thanks to the other members of my dissertation committee: Allison Pugh, Sarah Corse, and Sophie Trawalter. Allison and Sarah have done so much to foster an inclusive community within the Department of Sociology and at the University of Virginia more broadly. As a graduate student I have been so thankful for their presence and constant support. It was Allison who taught me qualitative research methods at UVA, and who helped me (and so many others) to think critically about why and how we use interviews to generate knowledge about culture. I have been inspired by her efforts to encourage sociologists to take seriously processes of inclusion in a field where exclusion so often monopolizes our attention.

Sarah was the first person I met at UVA. I am thankful to her not only for her unwavering support and mentorship, but also for welcoming my cohort to the university. Her leadership on the Admissions Committee brought me and many of my graduate student colleagues to UVA. Since arriving on Grounds, Sarah has continued to be an incredible source of support, and I am especially thankful for the work she has done to support my research with Candace Miller. Her expertise in culture, art, and research methods proved invaluable in guiding our investigation into the relationships between campus space, art, architecture, and belonging.

Sophie Trawalter's research on interracial interaction, interaction in diverse groups, and inequalities in students' use of public space on college campuses has been incredibly generative for my own thinking. Her research encouraged me to explore new ways to study racial inequality in interaction.

Additionally, at the University of Virginia I have benefitted from the mentorship of other members of the faculty. Paul Kingston, Jeff Olick, Sabrina Pendergrass, Simone Polillo, Adam Slez, and Milton Vickerman have all been incredibly generous in providing feedback on my work. Paul Kingston and Jeff Olick were also important resources in my development as a teacher. It was a privilege to work with and learn from both of them in teaching undergraduates

at the University of Virginia. I am also thankful to Leslie Booren, Denise Deutschlander, Mike Ed Fowler, and Candace Miller for their kindness and the intellectual community they provided.

Over the past ten years I have also found an intellectual home at George Mason University. I am especially thankful for the mentorship of Zofia Burr, Dean of the Honors College, who taught my first research methods course and encouraged my pursuit of a PhD. Additionally LaNitra Berger, Donna Fox, Andy Hoefer, Todd Rose, Todd Stafford, Kevin Stoy, and John Woolsey offered their support for this dissertation in many forms, especially through their empathy and encouragement. Their understanding of the lives and experiences of contemporary college students provided much needed sounding boards for ideas and preliminary findings.

For their generous support of my education and research at the University of Virginia, I would like to thank the Jefferson Scholars Foundation, and its incredible staff, including Ben Skipper, Dr. Bill Wilson, Katie Cowen, and Karen Tapscott.

I am thankful for the students at East State University, who shared their lives with me over the course of an academic year. Each of them were incredibly generous and patient, allowing me to witness life within their social groups. Alongside their own quests for inclusion, as they navigated social terrain in a way that was frequently difficult and sometimes overwhelming, they made time to share their experiences with me.

Finally, I find that my education has left me without words that could do justice to express how grateful I am for my husband Nader, who I met during my own search for belonging as a first-year in college. He has been there for me with constant support ever since.

CHAPTER 1

BEYOND CULTURAL CAPITAL:

UNDERSTANDING CULTURE AND INCLUSION IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

After students arrived on campus and settled into their residence halls, East State University's Welcome Week greeted them with a heavily curated visual presence. Multicolored flyers adorned bulletin boards lining the hallways of academic buildings and the campus student union. Posters featuring the faces of smiling bevies of young people instructed students to "get connected" and "be involved." Meanwhile, faculty and students alike took shifts sitting vigilantly at tables scattered across campus wearing t-shirts stamped with the phrase "ask me about East State." Even the sidewalk, peppered with chalk graffiti, called out for students to "join us" for a variety of events and meetings. The painted signs, stacks of flyers, club fairs, and interest meetings formed the backdrop for a week that was full of new people and new opportunities to join a variety of different communities.

Over the course of this eventful week I met dozens of students who came to be involved in my research. With few exceptions, the message of getting connected resonated with these students; they were both anxious and excited about finding communities on campus. They told me about the quest for belonging that ramped up as college started, although in many cases it actually began well in advance of arriving on campus, as students investigated clubs, sports teams, and student organizations with their future social lives in mind. They described looking for "fit," "community," "a social niche," "a sense of belonging," and "connections" with other students. Finding connections was a time-intensive process that required marshalling knowledge

about the college social landscape to identify informal groups and formal organizations where students could meet others who shared interests, goals, or some other marker of commonality.

Among the students I met that week were Rhonda, Fred, Max, and Rebecca.[1] I first encountered the four of them during a class I was observing with ESU's Learning Community, a group connected by their shared passion for social justice advocacy. Rhonda was a less socioeconomically advantaged Black student. When she introduced herself to the Learning Community, she told the group about her passion for encouraging healthy relationships. Right away, Rhonda staked out an identity for herself as a caring person. In class meetings, group events, and casual hangouts in the residence halls, it was common to observe Rhonda offering support or comfort to other students. In the first month of the semester I observed Rhonda holding, hugging, and clasping hands with anxious or upset students on several occasions.

Through the care she offered others in the Learning Community, Rhonda came to occupy a central place within the group. Students frequently went to her for care and support, and at social gatherings she seemed never to be alone. However, maintaining a perpetually kind and caring style of self-presentation was not always easy. Rhonda described the ways she had to be cautious among her friends, monitoring her behavior with them. While caring for others cultivated intimacy and conferred the appreciation of her peers, Rhonda understood their affection to be contingent on her ability to conceal her education and avoid being too vocal. In describing perceived restrictions in the way she was able to present herself to others, Rhonda contrasted "speaking up" or "telling [people] something" with being caring, conveying her sense that she was unable to do both.

[1] To protect confidentiality, all participants are given pseudonyms.

On that first day of class, Fred, a less socioeconomically advantaged White student, sat across the room from Rhonda. In his introduction, Fred described his interest in a variety of topics ranging from politics to gender to literature, subjects he was highly knowledgeable about. Like Rhonda, Fred became a central member of the learning community. However, he achieved this centrality by doing the very thing Rhonda felt restricted from doing, namely sharing his education and knowledge with others. In short, Fred presented himself as an intellectual. In interactions with other students in the Learning Community, he was frequently the center of attention as others looked to him for wisdom and insight on a variety of topics. The Learning Community students attended public presentations Fred gave, and he frequently shared his creative writing with other students, who offered praise for his craft. Whenever he spoke, his peers listened intently.

When it was his turn to talk Max, a more socioeconomically advantaged Asian student, gave an animated introduction – joking with his roommate – that provoked laughter from the class. Like Rhonda and Fred, Max put forward a simplistic version of himself – he was the "funny guy." While he did not speak up often, when he did, it was usually to make a joke or give a humorous reply to a question from a peer, contorting his facial expression into his characteristic look of feigned shock. In a group that frequently focused on serious topics related to social justice and politics, Max used comedy to offer momentary respite from difficult conversations. However, although Max could be counted on for a laugh, he never became a central member of the group like Rhonda and Fred. Instead, he usually hung out on the margins of the community, sometimes sensing that he did not quite fit in – in his own words, feeling as if he was a "black sheep." His jokes sometimes offended, and even when they hit their mark, Max seemed to hold a very tentative sort of membership in the group.

Finally, Rebecca, like Max, was a marginal figure in the Learning Community, but while he occasionally elicited laughter from the group, Rebecca seemed invisible. Her peers rarely acknowledged her presence, and I have to confess that she also escaped my notice during that first class meeting. While she was certainly present, based on my headcount of the 20 first-year students, I have no recollection of what she said or did on that first day, nor is she mentioned in the fieldnotes I wrote after class. Rebecca was no less involved than her peers; in fact, she was part of three other student groups on campus in addition to the Learning Community. Rather, her style of self-presentation was unobtrusive, constituting a quiet presence in each of these organizations. At meetings and social gatherings, she could usually be found standing or sitting silently on the outer edge of the group. Rebecca herself was cognizant of her role in these groups, noting, "Sometimes if I have something I really want to say, then I say it. Otherwise I just kind of like to listen to everyone else."

Rhonda, Fred, Max, and Rebecca all came to the learning community to find connection with others who cared about social justice. However, there was an incredible amount of variation in the degree to which they were successful in their quest to be included within this social group. Sociologists have theorized the essential role of culture in shaping the contours of social life, typically focusing on the capacity of culture to exclude – and its associated role in reproducing inequality. Prior literature offers comparatively limited insights into the role of culture in accessing inclusion. Within educational settings in particular, classic scholarship on social inequality frequently found evidence implicating culture in processes of social reproduction and in generating barriers to mobility (e.g. Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Willis 1977). Subsequent research has produced noteworthy insights into how class-based cultural resources shape educational access (e.g., Dumais and Ward 2010; Griffin et al. 2012; Grodsky and Riegle-Crumb

2010; McDonough 1997; Stevens 2009), academic performance (e.g., DiMaggio 1982; Dumais 2002; Lee and Bowen 2006), and the receipt of favorable treatment in schools (e.g., Calarco 2011; Domina 2005; Lareau and Horvat 1999; Nelson 2010).

In attempting to understand the experiences of college students like Rhonda, Fred, Max, and Rebecca, existing research on the role of culture in generating educational disparities would direct attention to the influence of social class. However, while prior studies have documented the challenges faced by less socioeconomically advantaged students in the college environment (e.g., Armstrong and Hamilton 2013; Lee 2016; Stuber 2011), class-based differences cannot fully account for the disparities evident in their experiences. In fact, within the Learning Community, the social centrality achieved by Rhonda and Fred, two *less* socioeconomically advantaged students, contrasted sharply with the marginality of Max and Rebecca, both of whom came from *more* socioeconomically advantaged families.

These examples raise questions that cannot be answered with existing theories of class-based inequality in educational settings. For instance, how is it that race, class, and gender impact students' approaches to seeking social inclusion in college? Why do some of these students end up with a central place in their peer groups while others remain marginal? How do they interact within these groups, and what role does culture play in influencing their styles of self-presentation? Additionally, how do students from a diverse range of social locations even find groups like the Learning Community in the first place?

Given how little is known about the ways students seek out social inclusion, any consideration of the role of culture in pursuing inclusion within education settings must break new ground. This chapter reviews existing literature in the sociology of education, asking what we know about the role of culture in shaping students' social lives within educational settings.

Highlighting the dominance of Bourdieu's (1977a; 1986) theories of cultural capital and habitus, I argue that a focus on the ability of cultural resources to secure favorable treatment and subsequent success in educational institutions has stymied the development of knowledge related to the use of culture in pursuing inclusion as well as the role of peers and interaction in educational settings more generally.

Drawing on Goffman (1959; 1967) and Collins (2004), I examine foundational insights from theories of interaction rituals. Showing how these theories have been used to understand the pursuit of inclusion in social groups and how individuals seek out feelings of belonging, I suggest that such insights be applied to understanding inclusion among peers in educational settings. Finally, I argue for the need to include race and gender in any consideration of interaction in diverse groups. Specifically, I highlight the need for an intersectional approach (as described by Collins 2000; Collins and Bilge 2016) that considers the ways the confluence of race, class, and gender impacts social inclusion in higher education.

CULTURAL CAPITAL, HABITUS, AND INEQUALITY IN EDUCATION

In theorizing the relationship between culture and inequality, Bourdieu (1985; Bourdieu and Passeron 1977) implicated the process of schooling and the practices of educational institutions. Two central concepts have served as a foundation for understanding inequality in education: cultural capital and habitus. Bourdieu (1977; 1986) conceived of cultural capital – understood as familiarity and comfort with the dominant culture in a given society or community – existing in three main forms. These forms included (1) access to or possession of "objectified" cultural resources such as books, paintings, instruments, and other cultural objects that have symbolic and/or material value, (2) "institutionalized" forms, manifested in the recognition or

accreditation of cultural familiarity by formal institutions, perhaps most frequently educational institutions, as well as (3) "embodied" cultural capital, which can be observed when dominant culture becomes ingrained within a set of physical and mental dispositions possessed by an individual (Bourdieu 1986).[2]

Bourdieu (1977b) defined habitus as, "a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks" (p. 82-83). Habitus is made up of cultural dispositions of the mind and body that are often unconscious (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977), and it can be observed in classifying schemes, bodily habits, perceptions, mannerisms, and other cultural signals (Bourdieu 1980; Bourdieu and Waquant 1992; Horvat and Davis 2011; Wacquant 2014).[3] Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) posited that habitus tends to be durable, with the essence of one's habitus acquired in the home through early childhood socialization. Children of the middle- and upper-classes acquire dominant forms of cultural capital through socialization at home from parents, who themselves possess and convey familiarity with dominant culture (Bourdieu 1977a). While differences in the habitus and

[2] Notably, more recent scholarship has operationalized cultural capital in ways that may have diverged from Bourdieu's initial conceptions, but which have nonetheless been useful in thinking about disparities in cultural resources within educational settings (Lamont and Lareau 1988). For instance, some studies focus on cultural capital in the form of high-culture participation (DiMaggio 1982), classroom behaviors (Farkas et al. 1990), expectations for future education and careers (Barone 2006; Dumais 2002; 2006), as well as information and knowledge about educational institutions (Deutschlander 2016; Jack 2014).

[3] While some scholars have conflated cultural capital and habitus, others argue for the analytical use of each as a distinct concept (Edgerton and Roberts 2014). For instance, some scholars advocate for thinking of cultural capital as specific resources and thinking of habitus as one's predispositions regarding the use of those resources (e.g. Dumais 2002; Roksa and Robinson 2016). A close reading of Bourdieu (1986) would suggest that embodied cultural capital becomes inextricably woven into one's habitus, as cultural styles become part of embodied dispositions through early childhood socialization.

cultural capital of children emerge early on in life through parenting practices, they become highly consequential as they come into contact with formal institutions, especially schools.

Cultural Capital and Habitus in Education

Bourdieu's theories have achieved a centrality within sociological research on education (Roksa and Potter 2011), and Bourdieu himself described the "specific role of the sociology of education" as:

> [T]he science of the relations between cultural reproduction and social reproduction. This occurs when it endeavors to determine the contribution made by the educational system to the reproduction of the structure of power relationships and symbolic relationship between classes, by contributing to the reproduction of the structure of the distribution of cultural capital among these classes. (Bourdieu 1977a, p. 487).

Drawing on concepts of cultural capital and habitus, scholars have centered this agenda in studies of culture and inequality in K-12 schools.

Culture can play a role in producing unequal self-selection, whereby some students become disengaged or withdraw from educational institutions in anticipation of the improbability of success for those of their social class background (Bourdieu 1977a; Willis 1977; MacLeod 1987). For instance, research on students' habitus has examined the ways students' expectations about their future careers and educational trajectories function to shape their effort in schools as well as their aspirations for further education generally (Dumais 2002; Grodsky and Riegle-Crumb 2010). However, recent research indicates that students across class backgrounds have high educational expectations that typically include the pursuit of higher education (Reynolds and Burge 2008; Reynolds, Stewart, and MacDonald 2006), placing increasing emphasis on cultural capital in understanding continued disparities in educational attainment.

Cultural capital becomes important – above and beyond educational expectations shaped by habitus – in school settings through its role in shaping students' and parents' understanding of

and interactions with educational institutions. Middle-class parents, for example, deploy cultural capital to obtain advantages for their children (Domina 2005; Lareau and Horvat 1999; Nelson 2010). In addition, middle-class families transmit cultural capital to children, facilitating the acquisition of specific attitudes and behaviors (Lareau 2003). Middle-class children subsequently leverage these skills and strategies to monopolize the attention of teachers, gaining advantages in completing assignments and developing their linguistic competency, while simultaneously silencing working-class students (Calarco 2011; Streib 2011). Overall, the cultural capital literature has focused on the way students enter educational institutions with skills, dispositions, and attitudes informed by their upbringing in a particular social class location. Students with middle-class dispositions, knowledge, and behaviors, are rewarded by institutions (see a review in Lareau and Weininger 2003). Given these findings, cultural capital is understood as a mechanism reproducing class locations across generations.

While prior literature largely conceives of cultural capital and habitus as developed primarily in the home, some studies have considered ways in which working class students can acquire middle-class cultural capital within schools or in rarer cases, perhaps in the home from parents who themselves grew up in a different class location (Lamont and Lareau 1988; Roksa and Potter 2011). Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), however, claimed that even if working-class students could acquire such cultural capital, they would be unlikely be benefit from it, as the value of the capital depends on the social class of the individual holding it. However, other scholars have shown that working-class students can benefit from cultural capital. DiMaggio (1982) for instance found support for what he referred to as a "cultural mobility model," whereby cultural capital proves to be valuable for youth across class backgrounds and in fact, sometimes

offers the greatest returns for less advantaged students (see also De Graaf, De Graaf, and Kraaykamp 2000; Dumais 2006).

Higher Education

The inequalities produced by differences in exclusive cultural resources continue as students progress through the educational pipeline. For instance, McDonough (1997) illustrated the ways in which more affluent students acquire information about college-going from their families when parents share information about the college application process, different types of postsecondary institutions, and opportunities to improve their children's potential for college admission (for instance, by providing knowledge about the existence of classes and counselors to help improve SAT scores). Students' expectations about college attendance, manifested in a "college-going habitus" or lack thereof, shape whether they will apply to postsecondary institutions, and if so, which ones (Griffin et al. 2012; Grodsky and Riegle-Crumb 2010; Nora 2004). A number of studies have documented the importance of cultural capital and habitus for college access through a combination of quantitative and qualitative evidence (Dumais and Ward 2010; Lareau and Cox 2011; Lareau and Weininger 2008; Roksa and Deutschlander forthcoming; Stevens 2009).

Aside from considerations of application and entry into college, relatively little attention has been dedicated to the relationship between culture and inequality within postsecondary institutions. Like research conducted in the K-12 setting, the limited work produced thus far in higher education focuses on the role of cultural capital in generating inequality (e.g., Aries and Seider 2005; Armstrong and Hamilton 2013; Martin 2009; Stuber 2011). For instance, in their ethnographic study of 53 women at a flagship university, Armstrong and Hamilton (2013) documented the ways students' class-based cultural resources – manifested in their orientations

toward college and information about navigating college – impact their educational trajectories. The cultural resources available to more affluent students gave them the information and strategies necessary to align their campus living situation, social involvement, academic effort, and professional goals in ways that promoted success on university-facilitated pathways through higher education. Less privileged students on the other hand frequently experienced a mismatch between their orientation toward upward mobility and their (limited) information about navigating the college environment. Other scholars have documented similar struggles faced by working-class students as they seek to navigate postsecondary institutions (Jack 2016; Lee 2016; Stuber 2011).

Further, within higher education, scholars have illuminated the tension that can develop between the habitus of working-class students and the college environment. Using Bourdieu's (2004) concept of a "cleft habitus," which can develop when an individual begins to transition from one class-based social location to another, Lee and Kramer (2013) have shown that working-class students enrolling in elite postsecondary institutions experience the formation of a new habitus that conflicts with the habitus they developed during childhood. The resulting strain on students' relationships with their home communities and families can present challenges for working-class students in higher education. Scholars have highlighted the difficult emotional experiences of many working-class students who feel a sense of "fundamental[ly] breaking away" from their communities of origin, while simultaneously feeling that they do not belong within their colleges or universities either (Lehmann 2014, p. 12). Such experiences have been linked to decisions to withdraw from higher education (Lehmann 2007).

The Role of Peers in Higher Education

Although the literature on culture and inequality in higher education has paid disproportionate attention to exclusive cultural resources and the ways middle-class cultural capital is rewarded by institutions, scholarship in higher education has also emphasized the role of peers. Tinto (1987; 1993) developed a theoretical model of student retention emphasizing individuals' academic and social integration with their peers as central predictors of persistence. Subsequently, within interdisciplinary scholarship in the field of higher education, scholars have found correlations between relationships with peers and overall measures of adjustment to college, retention, academic support, comfort on campus/in classrooms, and the development of a "sense of belonging" (e.g. Gerdes and Mallinckrodt 1994; Berger 1997; Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow, and Salomone 2002; Hausmann, Schofield, and Woods 2007). Many have tested and extended this work on the importance of peer relationships in higher education, highlighting the benefits of frequent peer interactions (e.g., Astin, 1984; Colvin and Ashman 2010; Wilcox, Winn, and Fyvie-Gauld 2005). However, the majority of this research is survey-based and assumes that students should conform to dominant culture in order to integrate with peers in relatively homogeneous student populations (see critiques in Alvarez et al. 2007; Hurtado and Carter 1997; Tierney 1992).

Within sociology, consideration of peers has been limited to examinations of how habitus and cultural capital impact the selection of peers and interest in engaging in the college social scene (e.g., Stuber 2011), as well as the ways rhetoric, narratives, and semiotics structure the meaning students make of their social lives (e.g., Chase 2010; Lee 2016). In a recent study, Lee (2016) highlighted the rhetorical framing of peer groups at an elite liberal arts college, where working-class students are positioned as "providers of diversity," who are expected to "justify

their organizational membership" by sharing their unique experiences as members of a non-dominant social class (p. 76-77). Lee documented the subsequent challenges faced by working-class women in developing a sense of belonging, as they described feeling pressure to build relationships with more affluent peers by minimizing perceptions of their class-based differences, a strategy that Lee claimed resulted from a "semiotics of class morality" (p. 117-118). The same class-based cultural meanings developed around diversity that position some students as bringing a valuable perspective to higher education, also function to distance students who maintain identification with a working-class social class location, due to beliefs about merit that frame working-class students as unworthy.

A few sociological studies have considered the influence of students' peers on their academic success in college. The impact of friends on academic performance appears to be highly complex and variable. While certain social network types can facilitate academic success, the complexity of others can leave little time for serious academic engagement (McCabe 2016). Armstrong and Hamilton (2013) offered a glimpse into the ways class-based resources shape the relationship between social engagement in college and academic success, as different levels and types of social activity connect to more general pathways through college. For instance, within what they described as "the party pathway," more socioeconomically affluent "socialites" selected less rigorous majors and put in a moderate amount of academic effort to find social fulfillment in college while still completing their degree. Less socioeconomically advantaged "wannabees" on the other hand had difficulty navigating the social scene on campus while maintaining the baseline academic performance required to advance and persist in college (Armstrong and Hamilton 2013, p. 118-147).

The Limitations of Cultural Capital Theory

Studies documenting the use of exclusive cultural resources in educational settings have provided valuable insights into the role of culture in producing inequality. However, there are limitations that stem from the dominance of cultural capital in these conversations. First, the primacy of cultural capital as a theoretical frame has focused the attention of scholars on the ways educational institutions expect – and even require – certain middle-class behaviors, recognizing only dominant cultural approaches to education as valuable and functioning to exclude working-class students based on the perceived inferiority of their cultural styles. In doing so, educational institutions end up rewarding more affluent students with greater attention from teachers (Strieb 2011), additional classroom help (Calarco 2011; Jack 2016), better grades (DiMaggio 1982), and admission to elite colleges (Stevens 2009). In turn, focusing on institutions and institutional representatives has encouraged greater attention to processes of exclusion over inclusion. While exclusion is theorized and empirically examined in multiple, nuanced ways, inclusion appears as a byproduct of exclusion that only occurs within social class groups, not across class lines (c.f. Bourdieu and Passeron 1977).

A notable exception comes from Holt (1997), who noted that high-status signals can be used to gain entry into certain groups or institutions when cultural displays are used to demonstrate similarity. However, he remained focused on the way these demonstrations of similarity function because "elites have the power to set the terms through which tastes are assigned moral and social value" (p. 95), which in turn means that cultural consumption and tastes are frequently deployed as an "exclusionary resource." In this way, when elites coalesce with other elites who share these preferences, their practices of engagement also effectively

function to keep lower classes out of their social networks (Holt 1997).[4] Indeed, with the exception of a few studies of K-12 education (e.g. Bettie 2003; Pugh 2009; 2011), research has in large part neglected processes of inclusion. By focusing attention on the role of cultural capital in reproducing inequality, sociologists have missed opportunities to understand inclusion and belonging, especially among peers.

Second, the manner in which existing research on the role of cultural resources in educational settings has centered issues related to information, preferences, and skills has given little attention to interactional styles. Some scholars have critiqued the way Bourdieu and others studying cultural capital have framed culture as an outcome of material circumstance rather than considering how culture shapes social actors' behavior (Alexander 2003; Alexander and Smith 2001). In practice, the use of cultural capital in interaction is often assumed but left unobserved (Lareau and Horvat 1999; for a few notable exceptions see Wacquant 2004; Milner 2004). Instead, much of this work, especially in educational settings, makes use of surveys to quantify cultural capital and determine to what degree it correlates with various metrics of "success," thereby decontextualizing processes that can only be observed through the strategies social actors deploy in interaction (Lamont and Lareau 1988; Lareau and Horvat 1999).

[4] Notably, even the few scholars who have resisted the gravitational pull of theories of cultural capital in studying education have often drawn on other theories that emphasize exclusion. For instance, Milner (2004) makes use of Weber's (1968) theory of *status groups* to examine the peer culture of high school students. However, rather than focusing on students' efforts to achieve inclusion or belonging, Milner, like others, foregrounds the pursuit of social status and the exclusive use of consumer culture.

Several scholars have pointed out that cultural capital is often a prerequisite for inclusion in certain peer groups and that the activation of cultural capital should be studied in addition to its possession (i.e. Holt 1997; Lareau and Horvat 1999). However, to date little effort has been dedicated to exploring the potential uses of culture to seek out inclusion within educational settings. While a focus on cultural capital may have produced these blind spots, other sociological explorations of culture (often developed and applied outside of the realm of education) have made valuable progress in examining the use of culture in social interaction to pursue inclusion.

Scholars working in the tradition of ritual theory consider how social actors seek to forge connections and negotiate inclusion through ritualistic interactions. Such work often traces its origins back to Durkheim's studies of rituals and the experience of collective effervescence. Durkheim (1915) claimed that participation in rituals could generate experiences of collective effervescence and in the long-term produce a "collective conscience" that acts as the social fabric binding a group together. Specifically, collective effervescence is described by Durkheim as a state of shared emotional energy where the individual is transcended, and social actors achieve a sense of being part of something larger than themselves. The experience of collective effervescence subsequently produces a sense of group membership that continues even after the ritual itself has terminated.

Erving Goffman brought this understanding of rituals out of the narrower context of religious groups and into the more general micro-level, face-to-face interactions that occur in everyday life. Goffman (1959) examined interactions and the efforts of social actors to shape the perceptions of others, theorizing pursuits related to self-presentation. He defined interactions as

"the reciprocal influence of individuals upon one another's actions when in one another's immediate physical presence" (Goffman 1959, p. 15). In his work, Goffman (1967) advocated for a "sociology of occasions," (p. 2), which examines the sort of events that generate solidarity through the co-presence of social actors. Goffman's work supported the development of a vocabulary for interpreting and theorizing social interactions and the goals or perceptions of the individuals – who Goffman with his self-described "dramaturgical" perspective conceives of as "performers" – who engage in them, focusing attention on phenomena like "encounters," "defensive/protective practices," "face-work," "demeanor," "expressive control," "front/back-stage," and the adoption of "lines" to name a few (Goffman 1959; 1967).[5] Not all of these terms were coined by Goffman; however, he connected them to an analysis of face-to-face, ritualized interactions. In other words, this work provides a language and analytical leverage for thinking about self-presentation in social groups.

Goffman imagined that performers' relationship to their "audience" or "co-participants" could often be understood through the lens of a social role, which he describes as "parts [that] may be presented by the performer on a series of occasions" drawing on "pre-established pattern[s] of action" (Goffman 1959, p. 16). Based on the impression of themselves that social actors aim to convey to others during an interaction, they will often engage in a process of "impression management," through which understandings of the perceptions of one's audience are used to continuously calibrate and recalibrate one's performance. In doing so, these social actors are engaging in what Goffman (1970) called "strategic interaction," whereby they use the

[5] For the sake of brevity, I will not define each of these terms here. However, others drawing on the work of Goffman to conduct ethnographies that examine face-to-face interaction have found this vocabulary helpful for thinking about how social encounters occur.

back-and-forth of an encounter to present themselves in a positive light.[6] Goffman (1959; 1967) theorized social interactions to represent an accomplishment when performed in a way that allowed social connections to be achieved and face to be saved – in essence, when interactions were successful from the perspectives of each of the individuals present, and when embarrassment is avoided. Further, when an interaction is successful, social actors are able to present themselves as worthy members of a group. In other words, interaction rituals are the elements of social encounters that facilitate access to inclusion for those involved.

Examining Emotions and Sense of Belonging

Collins (2004) builds upon Goffman's work to direct scholarly attention to the role of emotions in encounters. He describes the ways interaction rituals are characterized by "mutual focus of attention" and a shared emotional energy or mood, the confluence of which he describes as the "mutual focus / emotional-entrainment mechanism." A series of interaction ritual chains then builds a "compelling emotional experience" that is actively sought by individuals in an emotional economy. In doing so, Collins joins a small cadre of scholars who study the role of culture in creating an emotional marketplace. He suggests moving beyond sociology's traditional focus on hierarchical status distinctions between groups and individuals to propose examining social actors' "sense of belonging or not belonging," (p. 115). This sense of belonging is achieved, according to Collins, in micro-level encounters through behaviors that facilitate inclusion.

For instance, Collins (2004) proposes that emotional energy builds with the support of "membership symbols" (p. xiv) when a shared activity or event serves as an "emotional

[6] While Goffman (1970) imagines this sort of "strategic interaction," often happens in situations where an advantage is sought over an "opponent," this concept can also be applied to the sort of self-presentation that paints one in a positive light in order to achieve social inclusion.

stimulus" (p. 48), giving people a sense that they are part of a durable social relationship with others in the group. Like Goffman, Collins offers a vision of what successful interaction rituals look like; however, where Goffman focuses on the ability of actors to self-present in a positive way and have their version of a situation adopted, Collins claims an interaction ritual is successful when feelings of membership or group solidarity are produced by the interaction. He offers examples ranging from a "victory pile-on" at a sporting event to a "cigarette-lighting ritual," among groups who smoke tobacco together. Such examples illustrate the ways interaction rituals occur both in moments of celebration and even in the most mundane of daily activities.

Collins' effort to emphasize belonging and the emotional economy for serious sociological consideration resonates with other research that attempts to address inclusion.[7] The concept of belonging has been used in scholarship that builds on ritual theory as well as the sociology of emotion more broadly to explore the social construction of belonging (e.g., Bollen and Hoyle 1990; Marshall 2002; May 2011; Pugh 2009; 2011; Yuval-Davis 2006). For instance, Bollen and Hoyle (1990) note that "a sense of belonging is fundamental to a member's identification with a group and has numerous consequences for behavior" (p. 484). Further, they show that belonging includes cognitive as well as affective dimensions whereby perceptions of one's role in a group produce an emotional response, generating a feeling that one does or does not belong. Others have described belonging as a sense of "emotional attachment" where group members can feel "at home" with one another (Yuval-Davis 2006, p. 197).

[7] Group membership or social connectedness is referred to in a variety of ways within this literature; for consistency, I will follow Collins (2004) in referring to this phenomenon as a "sense of belonging."

Examining consumer culture, Pugh (2009) demonstrates that children's search for belonging is negotiated in interactions by signifying shared experiences or skills with cultural commodities in what she refers to as an "economy of dignity." Considering "facework" as a tactic used by individuals (rather than as an element of conversation in the style of Goffman), she illuminates the ways that within this economy of dignity, "children do facework not just to 'save face,' to rescue the social citizenship that enables their sense of belonging in a group, but also to establish it in the first place, through varied and creative means" (Pugh 2009, p. 53). The concept of dignity is a complex one that contains the essence of Goffman's consideration of individual worth (as defined in interaction), Derber's (1979) conception of the visibility and value signaled by attention, as well as an element of tentative self-worth that Pugh describes as being "a mélange of pride, anxiety, and relief" (p. 81). When social actors seek dignity – be they athletes attempting to demonstrate their value to a sports team, or children claiming to possess the sort of toys that can facilitate connection with their peers – they do so in large part to be included.

Studying interaction can also facilitate understanding the way processes of inclusion work alongside exclusive practices that may occur within groups. While Durkheim and Goffman theorized the ways that rituals create inclusion, Collins suggests that even among those who are included as members of a group, exclusive practices serve to divert attention and emotional energy away from some and toward others. For instance, he notes that:

> Privilege and power is not simply a result of unequal material and cultural resources. It is a flow of emotional energy across situations that make some individuals more impressive, more attractive or dominant; the same situational flow puts other persons in their shadow, narrowing their sources of emotional energy to the alternatives of participating as followers or being relegated passively to the sidelines (Collins 2004, p. xiii).

Collins's claim that a variety of interaction rituals are "stratified" illuminates the ways in which inclusion does not necessarily imply egalitarian social relations.

May (2011) elaborates on this idea, arguing that there are "hierarchies of belonging," where "not everyone is allowed to belong" (p. 369). She claims that belonging can be thought of in both an affective and a political sense. Belonging is characterized by a feeling of fitting in that is also impacted by contests over recognition – in other words, a sense of belonging requires a certain degree of external validation (May 2011; see also Bell 1999). While not always theorized as belonging in an explicit way, such insights have existed within social theory for decades. For instance, Blau (1960) noted that "social integration" relies on external evaluative judgements, adding that sharing commonality with others offers a social actor "a goal yet to be achieved.[8] Only if he [sic] can make himself attractive to other members will he attain an integrated position among them" (p. 546). In short, through interaction, group members must demonstrate not only commonality but also their worth to other members of the group.

Goffman (1967) articulated similar ideas about the importance of external validation, saying, "the human tendency to use signs and symbols as evidence of social worth and of mutual evaluations will be conveyed in very minor things, and these things will be witnessed, as will the fact that they have been witnessed" (p. 33) While Goffman did not theorize sustained inequality in the same ways as Collins, he acknowledged the ways differential conceptions of worth could "drench a talk in judgmental significance" (p. 33). The collective insights of Collins, Goffman, and related literature, show how one can be a member of a social group but remain subordinate

[8] While some sociologists like Blau (1960) and many scholars of higher education such as Tinto (1987; 1993) have used the term "social integration" to refer to the development of relationships with a group of peers as well as feeling a sense of fit with the group (Wolf-Wendel, Ward, and Kinzie 2009), I prefer to use the term "social inclusion" here as I find it more clearly captures the elements of relationship and social connection, without the implications related to assimilation that are tied up in a word like "integration" (Alba and Nee 1997; Bowskill, Lyons, and Coyle 2007). While feeling included may sometimes require students to assimilate in various ways, this is not a necessary outcome of inclusion (Hurtado and Carter 1997; Tierney 1992).

to others in the group. This insight complicates the understanding of group membership implied by cultural capital theory, which would suggest that inclusion is obtained mainly through the shared tastes of members of the same social class.

BRINGING IN RACE AND GENDER

While ritual theory provides a more comprehensive way of thinking about inclusion, it has blind spots of its own. In particular, the focus on connection, inclusion, and membership hierarchies, leaves patterned inequalities comparatively underexplored. While a few scholars have examined social class inequality in interaction (e.g., Collins 2004; Pugh 2009), differences by race and gender are usually neglected. Further, this inattention to race and gender is shared by scholars researching and theorizing cultural capital and habitus. While efforts to understand the impact of culture on racial and gender inequality have made significant progress in certain areas of sociological inquiry, especially in studies of identity and symbolic boundaries (see for instance Barth 1969; Lamont 1999; 2000; Pachucki, Pendergrass, and Lamont 2007), progress in this direction within the realm of education has been limited.

There are however a few notable exceptions (e.g., Bettie 2003; Carter 2003; 2006; Youdell 2003). For example, in her ethnography of a group of high school girls, Bettie (2003) examined the ways students come to develop class-based identities that are shaped by race and gender. She illuminated processes by which perceptions of similarity and difference played important roles as students developed identities and social lives not only in relation to class-

based resources but also around other "axes of identity," as classed, raced, and gendered meanings became tied up with one another.[9]

Other studies have uncovered ways in which racial and gender identities have potential to impact students' academic and social engagement (e.g., Jones and Myhill 2004; Olitsky 2014; Pascoe 2011). This nascent body of literature takes as its focus the development of identity and conceptions of self to understand how these elements of culture impact engagement in primary and secondary educational institutions. For instance, a variety of studies find evidence of the impact of performing masculinity and/or femininity on students' experiences in schools and their academic success (Dumais 2002; Jones and Myhill 2004; Renold 2001a; 2001b). This literature also documents the role of the cultural understandings of race that students bring with them to schools in shaping academic engagement, as well as the way institutions in turn shape students' racial identities. Olitsky (2014) documented the deployment of symbolic boundaries by racial and ethnic minority students to develop "academic identities" in predominately White urban high schools. Carter (2012) brought in a consideration of school environments more broadly to illustrate the ways that policies and discourses around diversity and inclusion in secondary schools can sometimes unintentionally reproduce problematic "in-group" and "out-group" boundaries. In these settings, poorly conceived efforts at inclusion sometimes function to reify exclusive cultural meanings around race and ethnicity.

[9] Bettie (2003) even goes as far as to illuminate the ways the development of similar identities could forge "alliances;" however, like Simmel (1955), she shows these alliances emerging in the context of broader cultural conflicts. She documents these alliances primarily through students' meaning making, rather than interaction, focusing on how the girls in her study perceived "sameness and difference" (p. 167-189).

Race and Gender in Higher Education

Within higher education, a few studies examine the interplay between culture and racial and ethnic inequality in the context of identity construction and stereotypes. Recent research conducted by Wilkins (2014) suggests that certain racialized identity strategies may facilitate integration and adjustment to campus more than others. She finds that Black male students were "stripped of choice over their identities" (p. 185) by their majority White peers, who limited the scripts of Black masculinity available in the social arena of college. The identity strategies Black students were able to deploy conflicted with expectations in the college environment, having a detrimental impact on their transition from high school to college.

A separate yet related line of inquiry in social psychology examines the impact of stereotypes and interracial interaction on the disparate experiences of racial and ethnic majority/minority students (e.g., Barajas and Pierce 2001; Kao 2000; Torres and Charles 2004). For instance, Torres and Charles (2004) document the ways that metastereotypes, or Black students' understandings of the prejudiced ways in which White students perceive them, negatively impact Black students by encouraging them to spend significant amounts of time trying to combat these stereotypes. Other research demonstrates the power of stereotypes to negatively impact academic performance through a phenomenon known as "stereotype threat," whereby racial and ethnic minority students' perceptions of others' judgements of their abilities – and the fear of confirming negative judgements – creates cognitive hurdles to performance, for instance on standardized tests (Massey and Fischer 2005; Steele 1997; Steele and Aronson 1995). In addition, research indicates that interracial interaction can serve to deplete cognitive focus or "executive function" for racial majority and minority students and provoke anxious behavior from White students (Richeson et al. 2003; Richeson and Trawalter 2005; Richeson,

Trawalter, and Shelton 2005; Trawalter and Richeson 2008). While scholars have come to understand some of the social psychological factors that impact students' perceptions, cognition, and academic performance, sociologists have paid less attention to issues of culture and race within higher education.

A similarly sparse body of literature examines the role of culture in producing gender inequality in college student experiences. While female students now comprise a majority of the students enrolled in postsecondary institutions (DiPrete and Buchman 2013), signals abound that the experiences of men and women in college remain unequal (Armstrong, Hamilton, and Sweeney 2006; Jacobs 1996). Research demonstrates that the negative impact of stereotype threat impacts the performance of female students in certain academic settings (Spencer, Steele, and Quinn 1999; Steele 1997). Additionally, female students encounter different standards relating to sexuality than male students, generating an environment where women are held to rigid expectations around the performance of gender and sexual behavior, while the dominance of men is reinforced (Armstrong, England, and Fogarty 2012; Armstrong et al. 2014; Hamilton and Armstrong 2009). Again however, such insights stem from a very small number of studies on college and university campuses.

Despite the limited understanding of the role that race and gender play in shaping students' approaches to the pursuit of inclusion, interdisciplinary research has convincingly documented the existence of gender and racial differences in how college students perceive of and make meaning around their experiences. Survey-based research on campus climate in higher education indicates that students from sociodemographic groups that are historically underrepresented in colleges and universities have more negative social experiences than their peers from dominant groups. In particular, students' perceptions of college campuses as being

safe and welcoming places vary significantly by race and gender (Ancis, Sedlacek, and Mohr 2000; Rankin 2005; Rankin and Reason 2005; Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso 2000; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, and Solórzano 2009). On college campuses that have traditionally excluded them, these historically underrepresented students often continue to feel that they are not fully included.

Such disparities in student experiences can also be understood as resulting from a gap in cultural recognition. In her 2017 Presidential Address to the American Sociological Association, Michelle Lamont drew attention to the existence of "recognition gaps." Following philosopher Axel Honneth, Lamont describes recognition as "a social act by which the positive social worth of an individual or group is affirmed or acknowledged by others" (Lamont 2017). Those in a society or group who attain recognition achieve "cultural membership," as their presence in the community is understood to be valuable to the group. In many ways, the negative experiences of working-class, racial/ethnic minority, and female students in postsecondary educational environments can be thought of as the product of a "recognition gap," where the ability of marginalized students to feel a sense of belonging and mattering is frequently stymied.

While prior literature demonstrates the existence of disparities in the sort of cultural recognition necessary for students to access social inclusion by social class, race, and gender, sociological research to date lacks an understanding of how these disparities are produced, responded to, contested, or maintained. Further, these disparities need to be understood in more holistic and comprehensive ways. Rather than taking an artificially narrow scope to examine class inequality in relation to cultural capital and habitus or race inequality in connection with identity development and stereotypes, scholars would benefit from examining how race, class, and gender come together to shape social experiences in education.

Intersectionality

A case for the importance of considering race, class, and gender simultaneously has been articulated by proponents of intersectionality. This theoretical lens grows out of theory and research highlighting the ways in which various categories of experience or identities intersect in shaping lived experiences (Andersen and Collins 2010; McCall 2005). Crenshaw (1989) first used this term in referring to the way Black women's experiences in legal contexts could not be anticipated by the additive effects of their race and sex. Collins (2000) expanded the intersectional lens by incorporating the concepts of privilege and oppression, in order to understand how the distribution of power is influenced by the unique confluence of race, class, gender, and other sociodemographic characteristics. As Collins and Bilge (2016) note, "When it comes to social inequality, people's lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other" (p. 2). Instead of focusing on multiple social locations separately, those who advocate for the use of intersectionality promote examinations of the ways structural patterns link categories of experience to generate inequality through power structures that act as a "matrix of domination," which can impact interactions with institutions and in social groups (Andersen and Collins 2010, p. 942).

While a few studies have used an intersectional approach to understand identity construction in schools (Bettie 2003), perceptions of uncertainty in educational transitions (Silver and Roksa 2017), and experiences with school disciplinary efforts (Morris 2005), such a lens has yet to be applied to efforts that examine social inclusion among peers within educational institutions. In particular, the ways race, class, and gender might intersect in shaping students'

use of culture to pursue social inclusion – both in finding opportunities for inclusion and in peer interactions within social groups – remains unexamined.

OVERVIEW OF THE DISSERTATION

In subsequent chapters, I illuminate how college students use culture to seek social inclusion. Addressing the neglect of inclusion and the predominance of social class – and associated theories of cultural capital and habitus – in existing sociological research on education, I draw on the theoretical insights of Goffman (1959; 1967) and Collins (2004) to consider students' interactions with peers in the college setting. Additionally, I use an intersectional frame (Collins 2000) to consider the ways race, class, and gender come together to influence students' experiences and styles of self-presentation in social groups. In doing so, I aim to understand the processes by which college students from a range of social locations pursue inclusion through interaction in group settings.

Chapter Two offers an account of the methodological approach I took to study students' use of culture in college. Here I describe the contours of the ethnography I conducted, following three diverse groups of students over the course of an academic year, and interviewing 60 first-year students during the spring semester. In all, 138 students were involved as participants in the research as members of one or more of the three groups and/or by taking part in one of the in-depth interviews. This chapter discusses the benefits of combining observations of students' interactional approaches to inclusion alongside an understanding of the meaning-making they engage in around their experiences finding social groups and their experiences within those groups.

Chapters Three through Five present empirical findings drawn from the evidence collected during this ethnographic research. In Chapter Three I examine the processes by which students navigate the broader social landscape of college in search of inclusion. Students from across sociodemographic groups seek out connections – or a sense of having things in common with others in groups where they can feel a sense of belonging. However, their approaches and outcomes vary. This chapter illuminates key elements of variation by class, race, and gender, in students' experiences searching for connection on campus. Social class background plays a central role in impacting students' strategies for finding social groups. However, within social class groups, race and gender influence whether students find connections in these communities and the subsequent configuration of their social lives as they remain in, leave, or moderate their involvement in various groups.

Chapter Four pivots to consider the experiences students have within social groups as they deploy simplistic styles of self-presentation that align with specific roles as "associates," "caregivers," "entertainers," "leaders," and "educators." Each of these five roles is associated with specific types of contributions to the group. Further, the way students' contributions within these roles connect to articulations of value and mattering serve to mediate their sense of belonging. While some roles are highly valued, positioning their occupants as central members of the group, less valued roles leave students in marginal positions. This chapter pays attention to the production of inequality within student groups at the intersections of race and gender, as students take on styles of self-presentation with raced and gendered associations. Notably, although race and gender had an important impact on the roles students took on, the influence of social class was no longer apparent once students were within groups.

Chapter Five rounds out the empirical findings with consideration of students' maintenance of social roles as well as attempts to shift and change styles of self-presentation over time. I demonstrate the prevalence of a phenomenon I refer to as *role inertia*, whereby reinforcement and policing serve to sustain one's style of self-presentation. In the less frequent instances where change occurs, it is often seen in the social performance of students who start out occupying (or attempting to occupy) a role that clashes with expectations based on the raced and gendered associations of specific styles of self-presentation. In practice, this generates pressure that prevents female students and racial/ethnic minority students from entering more central roles that confer a sense of mattering, instead pushing them toward more marginal, less valued roles. I refer to this social force as *centrifugal pressure*. Conversely, White male students occasionally experience *centripetal cultivation*, responding to encouragement to move into more central roles that confer a greater sense of mattering.

Finally, Chapter Six concludes with an assessment of the broader contributions of this project. I describe how this research contributes to understanding the ways students from a variety of social locations navigate the college social landscape as well as the ways they use culture to develop a sense of belonging within peer groups. I also draw on the limitations of the current study to consider remaining areas for further research. Finally, I offer implications for practice addressed to faculty and staff in postsecondary institutions, suggesting possibilities regarding the use of these findings to inform work to support college students from a diverse range of backgrounds.

CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH DESIGN

In this chapter I detail the research design for this project as it relates to (1) approaching the study of culture at both a communicative and interactional level, (2) the research site, (3) the participants involved in the study, and (4) the method of data analysis. Given the mixed-method approach of this study, several of the components of the research design are described for both the ethnographic, participant-observation and in-depth interview-based portions of the study. Additionally, the site for the ethnographic observation was focused around three smaller groups within the much larger university. At times it is necessary to detail the nuances of these groups in order to clarify the approach employed to study each of them.

METHODOLOGY

Through the course of this study, I engaged in processes of theory-building alongside theory-testing in order to answer my research questions (Luker 2008; Ragin and Amoroso 2010). The way culture is used to navigate social inclusion can be examined at both a cognitive, social-psychological level and a communicative, interactional level (Lamont and Fournier 1992; Olitsky 2007). In terms of methods, this motivates my use of a combination of in-depth interviews and ethnographic, participant-observation. At the social-psychological level, the navigation of community membership and belonging has been studied through in-depth interviews that attempt to access participants' cognitive maps, rhetorical work, as well as the meaning they make of interactions (Weiss 1994; Lamont 1992; 2000; Swidler 2013). In-depth interviews can be used to understand how college students' culture informs their perceptions

regarding group membership and belonging as well as students' own understandings of their approaches to finding social inclusion.

At the communicative level, the process of becoming part of a community through interaction rituals can be studied with a symbolic interactionist or social constructivist perspective, which considers how social interaction facilitates the negotiation of meaning, including in the pursuit of belonging and other desirable social resources (Goffman 1967; Collins 2004). An examination of this communicative level of social inclusion necessitates ethnographic observations of student interactions, observing focused groups of students in sites that are integral to their experiences in college (i.e. dormitories, classrooms, dining halls, group study spaces, student group meetings, etc.). Based on these premises, I determined that it was necessary to study processes of social inclusion on both the social-psychological and communicative levels within the same study. Considering these layers of culture simultaneously can enable understanding how culture is deployed in group interactions facilitating social inclusion as well as in making meaning around community membership and belonging.

I also examined variation in the use of culture to navigate social inclusion by race, class, and gender. While many studies give priority to examining such variation along one of these dimensions, I sought to examine these sociodemographic categories of experience simultaneously, giving equal consideration to each. In this way I aimed to bridge both the studies of the college experience and theories about culture and inequality – which are often confined in scope to the consideration of social class or race, with few considering gender at all, and often holding gender constant (see for instance Armstrong and Hamilton 2013; Lee 2016) – to understand the pursuit of social inclusion in this environment in a more comprehensive way.

Research Site

To answer the questions posed by this project, I selected East State University as my research site.[10] This site was chosen for several reasons, perhaps most importantly for its diversity in terms of race and class as well as its large on-campus population. East State University has an undergraduate student body of over 20,000 students. Roughly 6,000 of these students live in on-campus housing, and each fall over 3,000 first-time first-year students begin their studies at the university. A large majority of these incoming students live on-campus as East State University policy dictates that with a few exceptions, first-year students are required to live on-campus.

The site is ideal for sampling observations and interviews to examine variation by race, class, and gender. Approximately 30% of the student body is Pell Grant eligible (meaning these students qualify for a grant for low-income college students), and roughly 40% of the first-year class each year is made up of first-generation college students. Racial and ethnic minority (REM) students make up the majority of the student body, which includes approximately 10% Black students, 20% Asian students, 15% Latino/a students, and 40% White students. Additionally, 10% of students identify as "other," "biracial," or "multiracial" and 5% are international students. In terms of gender, approximately half of the student body identify as women and half as men. Finally, 90% of students are state residents.

East State's campus is located in a suburb of a large city on the east coast. The largest of the university's three student union buildings, the ESU Student Center, sits at the heart of a campus that is expansive but cut-off from the surrounding city. Trees and student housing line

[10] "East State University" is a pseudonym, used here to shield the identity of the institution and maintain the confidentiality of my research participants. Additionally, I use pseudonyms for streets, buildings, organizations, and other spaces to add an additional layer of confidentiality.

the perimeter of "State Circle," a 1.5 mile loop that encloses the majority of the 100-plus buildings on the main campus. Within the past five years, the university has completed the construction of new buildings for three of their colleges as well as a new addition to the library. ESU boasts four gymnasiums, three of which were built or renovated in recent years. These new facilities have added to an expansive campus where students are offered a plethora of opportunities to learn and of course – as is increasingly the case at universities around the country – to have fun (Nathan 2006; Armstrong and Hamilton 2013). For students, a university of this size and scope holds the promise of "a place for everyone," where students can almost always find others who share their interests, passions, and social sensibilities. However, it also holds the potential for "getting lost;" existing at the periphery of a university of this size could generate a sense of isolation, despite being surrounded by tens of thousands of students, faculty, and staff.

DATA COLLECTION

I made use of theoretical sampling to determine which spaces and events to observe, as well as which students to interview. This sort of sample integrates the processes of collecting and analyzing data, by supporting continuous reflection and analysis throughout data collection, which in turn facilitates the ability to guide subsequent observations and interviews (Corbin and Strauss 2008). In short, observations, fieldnotes, sampling, interviews, and analysis were part of a continuous cycle until data saturation was achieved (Corbin and Strauss 2008).

Ethnographic, Participant-Observation

My research employed methodological approaches used in a growing body of ethnographic research on college campuses (e.g. Armstrong and Hamilton 2013; Stevens 2009;

Tuchman 2009; Binder and Wood 2013). In this portion of the study I conducted a targeted ethnography, seeking to observe specific groups of students within the larger university over the course of their first year. Rather than roaming the campus in search of efforts to locate and find inclusion with various communities, I focused my efforts on more circumscribed groups and settings in which students attempted to navigate social inclusion.

The observation of small groups has been shown to provide fertile ground in which to observe inclusion – through efforts to connect or belong – the often ignored side of the exclusion/inclusion binary (Fine and Harrington 2004; Pugh 2010; 2011; Wilkins 2008). My study involved observing three smaller groups where students socialized with one another across a variety of social and academic settings in the university. These groups were chosen to provide variation in group structure and the types of observable situations, while providing consistency in terms of diversity in race, class, and gender as well as students' year of study (ensuring a mixture of first-year students and those beyond their first year of study). This was important given that being able to observe these students as they moved through their living spaces, dining halls, and even the classroom allowed for the observation of their efforts to pursue social inclusion in a variety of settings. Further, this sort of targeted ethnography allowed me to triangulate my observations with students themselves as I came to know them over time and was able to clarify my observations, probe for their interpretations, and even ask about situations or events that I was not personally able to observe (Golafshani 2003).

Importantly, I sought to observe three groups where there was potential for students to pursue social inclusion in a diverse setting with variation by race, class, and gender. While prior research has examined more homogenous groups like fraternities and sororities (Hughey 2008; Pike 2000; 2003; Ray 2013; Ray and Rosow 2012) or identity-based student organizations

(Guiffrida 2003; Harper, Byars, and Jelke 2005; Harper and Quaye 2007; Reyes 2015; Sutton and Kimbrough 2001), less attention has been paid to the diverse settings and communities in which many college students on campuses like ESU spend their time. This is perhaps surprising, given the ways college students are encouraged to engage with diversity and form friendships with others from a range of backgrounds (Lee 2016; Warikoo 2016). Further, colleges tout their ability to facilitate interactions and learning in diverse settings as well as to help students develop an understanding of and appreciation for difference (Aries 2008; Aries and Berman 2012; Chase 2010). Therefore, I chose to study communities where students from across racial/ethnic groups, class backgrounds, and genders were represented.

During the summer of 2016, I gained access to three groups for targeted participant-observation by reaching out to group leaders and university administrators who could facilitate my entry into these groups. The three groups I selected were (1) a residence hall-based Learning Community, (2) the ESU Cardio Club, and (3) a student group called, "the Volunteer Collective."[11] I explore each of these groups in greater detail below, focusing first on their commonalities and areas of contrast offering analytical leverage before turning to describe the nature of each group in greater detail.

Similarities and Differences between Groups

These groups have important differences that provided analytical leverage; however, they also have several notable similarities. First, they were all co-ed, racially integrated, and represented students from across a range of class backgrounds. I used available information about parental education, occupation, and family structure to ascertain students' social class

[11] As with the name of the university and students, the names of these groups are pseudonyms. I have obscured some identifying details in order to maintain their anonymity; however the composition and general focus of the groups are maintained.

location. As Armstrong and Hamilton (2013, p. 264-265) rightly note, social class is often "messy," with many students not fitting into the "ideal types" employed in prior research. Students experience changes in parental class location, parents' divorce, as well as the death or disability of parents. Rather than eliminating students who do not fit into ideal types, I have attempted to cluster students as clearly as possible in the four social class categories outlined in Table 1 below. Given commonalities in experiences uncovered in my analysis, I often cluster working- and lower-middle-class students together in a "less socioeconomically advantaged" group, and middle- and upper-middle-class students in a "more socioeconomically advantaged" group in order to illustrate broader patterns around class advantage. I use this bifurcation because there tend to be commonalities between students who are and are not in a stable middle-class social location (perhaps the key factor distinguishing between lower-middle-class and middle-class students).

TABLE 1: Student Participants' Class Background

Social Class	Parental Education	Parental Occupation
Working	High school or some college	Firefighter, Bus Driver, Home Care, Maintenance, Custodian
Lower-Middle	High school or some college [a]	Administrative/Office Asst., Nursing, Technical Repair
Middle	At least one parent with a four-year or graduate degree	Govt. Employee, Teacher, Technology, Management [b]
Upper-Middle	Two parents with a four-year degree or at least one with a graduate degree	Architect, Lawyer, Technology Engineer, Upper Management [b]

[a] In a few instances one parent has a four-year college degree but is unemployed or divorced from the students' primary guardian and not living with the student growing up.
[b] Middle and upper-middle class were also distinguished by family structure and occupation. Students with two parents who worked in IT for instance would be categorized in the upper-middle-class, while a family with one parent working in IT and another as an administrative assistant would be categorized as middle class.

In terms of racial diversity, all of the groups included a mixture of students from across racial backgrounds, including Asian, Black, Latino, Multiracial, and White students. I use the descriptor "REM students" to refer to those students who identify with racial and ethnic minority groups. At the beginning of the year, these diverse groups generally had a fairly even representation of REM and White students (I elaborate on the sociodemographic makeup of each of these groups below).

Additionally, all three of these groups included a mixture of undergraduates in their first year of study and beyond. The students in these groups were almost entirely full-time enrolled, traditional college students between the ages of 18 and 22. The groups included student members and student leaders, with a limited degree of oversight from university faculty and administrators who were accountable in enforcing bureaucratic rules for the groups but not typically present in the day-to-day meetings/gatherings of the students. Finally, all three of the groups congregated in a variety of spaces, but had a base of operations on the main-campus of the university, and all three of these main meeting spaces existed within less than a square mile of one another. In fact, it was possible to walk from any one of these locations to any of the others in ten minutes or less.

Despite their similarities, the groups had a variety of differences that allowed me to include a broad range of situations and contexts in my sampling. First, in terms of focus and frequency of interaction, the groups varied significantly. The Learning Community students all lived on a single residence hall floor, took a class, and engaged in community service together. In essence, this group was in contact virtually 24-7 for the entire academic year. While living learning communities vary in structure at different colleges and universities, having a shared living space with a "linked course" is a common component of most of these programs (Inkelas and Weisman 2003; Stassen 2003). Members of Cardio Club met Monday to Friday each week

(a mixture of mornings and evenings) for team practices, and competed in fitness-related events like triathlons, 5k races, marathons, and other mixed fitness activity competitions during the fall and spring semesters, traveling up to 8 hours from campus by car for these events, which were typically held on the weekends. While they did not all live together – as the Learning Community members did – they spent anywhere from eight to 20 hours a week together. Existing on the opposite end of the spectrum from the Learning Community in terms of frequency of interaction, the Volunteer Collective's members, who focused on community service to benefit healthcare and education in developing countries, met once a week for a formal group meeting and had an average of two additional group events or activities each week.

There was additional variation in terms of the process for becoming a member of each of these groups. The Learning Community required students to apply to live within the community at least four months in advance of the fall semester, while the Cardio Club and the Volunteer Collective recruited new members each fall. Once students were members of the Learning Community, they would be part of it for the entire academic year. However, student members in the Volunteer Collective could come and go as they pleased, meaning that membership fluctuated over time and the boundaries of group membership were not quite as defined (for instance, it was often unclear whether someone who had only attended a few meetings was considered to be a full "member"). Again, the Cardio Club existed between the two in terms of required commitment and group boundaries. While students were technically free to join and leave at various times throughout the year, joining as a competitive member (one who could take part in club competitions) required getting a sports physical and paying membership dues.

Additionally, the groups differed in terms of the structure of supporting personnel. The Learning Community was facilitated by a staff program coordinator, two resident advisors, and

two graduate teaching assistants in a student affairs office and the housing office on the campus. While the resident advisors were second-year college students, the rest of the roles were paid, full- and part-time staff. The resident advisors developed programs for the floor, while the staff were in charge of the students' classroom experience. Alternatively, the Cardio Club and the Volunteer Collective were both led by students with indirect supervision from university staff (a director of club sports for the Cardio Club and a director of student activities for the Volunteer Collective who had to approve the group's budget and some activities like travel or fundraising).

In terms of the sociodemographic makeup of students and staff in formal leadership positions, the groups varied significantly as well. While the Learning Community had paid staff members including two White women and a Black woman, the group had just two students in formal leadership positions, namely the resident advisors – a Black male student and a Black female student. The leadership of the Cardio Club and the Volunteer Collective included a larger number of student leaders, who were predominately White. The Volunteer Collective executive board was composed entirely of female students – three of them White, one Asian, and one Latina student, Amira, who stopped coming to the meetings after about a month. The Asian student, Daniella, began attending meetings only intermittently, leaving the three White female students in formal leadership positions. Finally, the officers and practice captains of the Cardio Club were mainly White male students (six of them) as well as a Black male student, and a White female student.

In sampling, I sought out these forms of variation in order to gain analytical leverage to achieve insight into the ways students use culture to navigate social inclusion in different group contexts. I looked for such variation in part due to Goffman's (1959; 1967) claim that situational variation influences interaction as well as Collins's (2004) insights regarding the role of leaders

in shaping group interaction.[12] Below I describe each of the groups in greater detail. In particular, I focus on sketching the contours of their membership, activities, the spaces where they gathered, and common styles of interacting within these spaces.

The Learning Community

The 40 students who were part of the Learning Community occupied the third floor of a residence hall. The group included 21 first-year students and 19 students beyond their first year of study (mostly second- and third-year students). The Learning Community was the most evenly divided of the three groups in terms of gender, with approximately 60% of students identifying as female and 40% as male. Additionally, the community was almost evenly divided between REM students – including Asian, Black, Latino, and multiracial students – and White students. Table 2 below offers more detail on the demographics of the community. To live in the Learning Community, students had to apply by May the previous academic year. The Learning Community was billed by the ESU's administration as a place for students to grow and develop in a tight-knit, supportive community. Living on the floor came with responsibilities however; students were required to take a 1-credit course on leadership and community service (linked to the social justice theme of the community) during the fall and spring semesters and engage in at least one hour of community service each week during the semester.

[12] Notably however, there was actually surprising consistency in the ways culture was used across these groups. In short, situational variation and differences in leadership composition did not make a difference in the ways students drew on culture to pursue inclusion. I explore these similarities in greater depth in the findings presented in subsequent chapters.

TABLE 2: The Learning Community Members

Name	Year of Study	Race	Class	Gender
Sean (Resident Advisor)	Second	Black	Less Advantaged	Male
Zara (Resident Advisor)	Second	Black	More Advantaged	Female
Aldo	Third	White	Unknown	Male
Alec	Second	Black	Unknown	Male
Ali	Third	White	More Advantaged	Female
Amy	Second	White	Less Advantaged	Female
Andre	First	Black	More Advantaged	Male
Annie	Third	White	More Advantaged	Female
Becky	First	White	More Advantaged	Female
Caleb	Third	White	More Advantaged	Male
Cecilia	First	Latina	Less Advantaged	Female
Char	First	Black	Less Advantaged	Female
Colin	Second	Multiracial	Unknown	Male
Danae	Third	Black	Unknown	Female
Ellen	Fourth+	Black	Unknown	Female
Fred	First	White	Less Advantaged	Male
Jamie	First	White	Less Advantaged	Female
Jenna	First	White	More Advantaged	Female
Jerry	Second	White	Less Advantaged	Male
Karina	First	Asian	More Advantaged	Female
Kyle	First	White	More Advantaged	Male
Kayley	Second	White	Less Advantaged	Female
Lila	First	Black	Less Advantaged	Female
May	First	Asian	Less Advantaged	Female
Matthew	Third	White	Unknown	Male
Maura	First	Black	More Advantaged	Female
Mercedes	First	Black	Less Advantaged	Female
Max	First	Asian	More Advantaged	Male
Nina	First	White	Less Advantaged	Female
Paige	First	Black	Less Advantaged	Female
Paula	First	White	Unknown	Female
Paulo	Third	Latino	Unknown	Male
Raphael	First	Latino	Less Advantaged	Male
Rebecca	First	White	More Advantaged	Female
Rhonda	First	Black	Less Advantaged	Female
Sherry	Second	White	Unknown	Female
Terrie	First	White	Less Advantaged	Female
Tyler	Second	White	Less Advantaged	Male
Victor	Third	White	Unknown	Male
Will	Third	White	Less Advantaged	Male

The Learning Community occupied a vibrant floor in a relatively new residence hall (built around 2008). The hallway walls were adorned in posters, pictures, and informational bulletin-boards strategically crafted by the resident advisors. The hall was flanked by two large lounge rooms where students could study, meet in groups, or watch TV. These provided the central social spaces for the floor. All of the students lived in either a "double room" with two students sharing living quarters or a "suite-style room" where four students shared a bathroom with at least two separate rooms for the students' beds and desks. While the floor was occupied by male and female students, rooms and suites were single-gender, although this was evidently due to student preferences as ESU had adopted a "gender-neutral" housing policy two years prior to this study.

Because the community included returning members (beyond their first year of study), and new members (incoming first-year students), the Learning Community provided a campus microcosm in which it was possible to observe new students being welcomed and socialized into the broader campus culture as well as the more circumscribed Learning Community. Students took part in welcome events, orientation meetings, and community retreats. Additionally, first-year students were sorted into mentor/mentee pairs with second-, third-, and fourth-year students. These pairs – which the community referred to as "teams," complete with clever names – provided a foundation for many of the community events and social activities the Learning Community students engaged in over the course of the first semester in particular.

I met the Learning Community students on a Wednesday, during their first day of class. It was in this class that I introduced the study to them and learned about the structure of their community. From that point I spent time both in and outside of the classroom with the students. I joined them for group hangouts on campus, floor meetings, meet-and-greet events, meals,

watching TV, competitive events with the mentor/mentee teams (including a Jeopardy night, a "floor Olympics," and a gingerbread house decorating contest), and even an occasional quiet gathering for studying around exam times. Given that these students lived and learned together, the Learning Community often provided fertile ground for discussions about community, friendship, and relationships more generally. It was not uncommon to hear discussions about community "rules" and even broader philosophical conversations about what it meant to be a good community member.

The students welcomed me into the Learning Community and proved to be enthusiastic about helping me with my research. During the first few weeks of the study several students suggested additional ways I could learn from the group (for instance, Mercedes recommended that I join students for lunch at the dining hall and Alec suggested that I join the group for some of their community service events). After the first two months, the novelty of my presence seemed to wear off, with the rare inquiries about how my dissertation was going coming mainly from Sean and occasionally from Danae, both of whom were very interested in graduate school themselves and hoped to pursue graduate degrees in the social sciences.

The Cardio Club

Unlike the Learning Community, membership in the Cardio Club fluctuated significantly. At the start of the fall semester the club made efforts to recruit as many new members as possible, especially those who were interested in traveling to meets to compete as a team rather than just joining to "stay in shape." At the start of fall 2016, the Cardio Club had 27 regular members (those who attended multiple practices) as well as approximately a dozen occasional members who came only to one or two practices. I was only able to document the names and sociodemographic information for the 27 regular members as well as two additional members

who joined in the spring semester (detailed in Table 3 below). Notably, unlike the Learning Community, the Cardio Club (and the Volunteer Collective as well) had new members who were beyond their first year of study, in addition to first-year students. While the Cardio Club began as a predominately White and male group (with slightly more than 60% of students identifying as White and roughly the same percentage identifying as male), the team became even less diverse as the year went on. Within the first three months (when most of the changes in membership in the Cardio Club and the Volunteer Collective occurred), many of the regular members had left the team. The remaining 15 members were 80% White and 73% male.

TABLE 3: The Cardio Club Members

Name	Year of Study	New or Returning	Race	Class	Gender
Drew (President/Captain)	Fourth+	Returning	White	More Advantaged	Male
Alyssa (Practice Captain)	Fourth+	Returning	White	More Advantaged	Female
Adam (Practice Captain)	Fourth+	Returning	White	Less Advantaged	Male
Jack (Practice Captain)	Third	Returning	White	Unknown	Male
James (Treasurer)	Third	Returning	Black	More Advantaged	Male
Derek (Secretary)	Fourth+	Returning	White	Unknown	Male
Kenny (President Elect)	Third	New	White	More Advantaged	Male
Carter (Secretary Elect)	First	New	White	More Advantaged	Male
Ace	Fourth+	Returning	White	Less Advantaged	Male
Alice	First	New	White	More Advantaged	Female
Barry [a]	First	New	White	More Advantaged	Male
Cara	Fourth+	Returning	Asian	More Advantaged	Female
David [a]	Third	New	White	Less Advantaged	Male
Daniel [a]	First	New	Black	Less Advantaged	Male
Eva [b]	Second	New	Black	More Advantaged	Female
Francisco [a]	Third	New	Latino	Unknown	Male
Gabe [a]	First	New	White	More Advantaged	Male
Jared [b]	First	New	White	Less Advantaged	Male
Jessa [a]	Second	New	Latina	Unknown	Female
Joey	First	New	White	More Advantaged	Male
Johnny	First	New	White	Less Advantaged	Male
Leo [a]	Grad	Returning	Latino	Unknown	Male
Mindy [a]	First	New	Latina	Unknown	Female
Nick [a]	First	New	Latino	Unknown	Male
Ron	First	New	Asian	More Advantaged	Male
Sarah	Fourth+	Returning	White	More Advantaged	Female
Sasha [a]	Second	New	Black	Unknown	Female
Sydney [a]	First	New	White	More Advantaged	Female
Valerie [a]	Second	New	Black	Unknown	Female

[a] These students attended multiple practices, but left the group prior to the end of the first semester.
[b] These students joined the group during the second semester.

The Cardio Club met in front of the campus Fitness Center each day, Monday through Friday at 5:00 or 6:00 PM, with additional practices at 8:00 AM Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. The Fitness Center was a large, athletic complex complete with two floors of cardio and

weightlifting equipment, several rooms for group exercise (including Zumba and Spin classes), a sauna, as well as a full-size competition pool, and a smaller recreational pool. It was the sort of luxury athletic complex that has become a symbol of the "amenities arms race" engaged in by colleges around the country in efforts to attract students (Carlson 2013; Newlon 2014). Members typically gathered out in front of the Fitness Center near a cluster of tables and benches, stretching and warming up before practice began. On a cold or rainy day, the students would often huddle together inside the large glass-walled foyer, awaiting a declaration from one of the captains regarding whether the club would run outdoors or – if the weather was particularly bad – workout inside the gym itself.

When the weather was passable, however, the team captains often selected one of many local routes and trails for the group to run. If there were enough members present the team would break up into two or three smaller groups based on speed and distance. I was intentional about varying which groups I ran with on different days so that as time progressed I spent roughly equal time with each of the different groups. While all runs began on-campus, the relatively small loop of State Circle was not enough for the more experienced runners, so many of the club's most frequent routes involved running several miles away from campus to wooded trails and less trafficked roadways. In the winter when the sun set earlier the trails were replaced with sidewalks along roads that were better lit, but often brutally windy and cold without the shelter of trees. Additionally, at least once a week the team would have a "strength" workout. These occurred in two main areas, namely the ESU track, about a mile from the Fitness Center, and a quarter-mile incline below the track. On these days the team would do repeats on the track or hill – ranging in distance from 200 meters to 1-mile that emphasized speed on the track and power on the incline.

The boundaries of the Cardio Club were much more porous than those of the Learning Community. In addition to quitting or leaving the team entirely, members could come and go as they pleased. Some students would only practice with the club on certain days of the week (or perhaps only at morning practices). One student did not practice with the team at all, but went to races and club competitions regularly. Two students were almost never seen at practice, but hung out at the Cardio Club House, a nearby residential space for the team captains that served as the default location for weekend parties, and went to social events with the team. This meant that some of the members only knew each other on a fairly superficial level, while others were quite immersed in one another's lives (living together, eating together, and even choosing to take classes together). For my ethnographic observations, I mostly interacted with members of the Cardio Club at practices, on-campus events, and team competitions (local open races, competitions, or intercollegiate meets where the students competed against other collegiate club fitness teams), with occasional time spent around campus eating or socializing. I deliberately chose not to attend events at the Cardio Club House due to the frequent alcohol consumption that occurred there. While students would sometimes invite me to the house for parties, I always politely declined. Nonetheless, students often recounted events at the Cardio Club House for me and others in the club, so I did acquire many secondhand accounts of these events from those who did attend.[13]

Of the three groups, the Cardio Club was probably the least interested in my status as a researcher, allowing me to integrate within the group quickly and without much effort on my part. This likely occurred for two main reasons. First, the team was open to graduate students,

[13] Additionally, Vander Ven (2011) has conducted a thorough ethnographic study of off-campus parties, documenting the sorts of events that take place there through first-hand observations and interviews.

and there were at least three graduate students who attended practices at different points during the year, with one of them becoming a fairly regular member. An illustrative example occurred one day when I was explaining my status as a researcher to a group of students. As I introduced myself to a few of the members I hadn't met before and brought up the subject of my research, a Black female student named Valerie interjected saying, "Oh yeah, we've got another guy like you who comes [to practice] sometimes. His name is Leo. You should meet him!" Realizing that she was referring to a male graduate student who Drew had mentioned sometimes worked out with the Cardio Club, I thanked her for the referral, but emphasized that along with being a graduate student I was also conducting research with the group, trying to learn from them.

In addition to the presence of other graduate students, I found that my status as a longtime runner allowed me to integrate into this group more easily. Especially during the first few weeks of the semester, the students would feel one another out, trying to determine how serious about fitness and running new members were. Students would tell stories of good or difficult competitions, playing up their experience with various elements of cardio fitness. I seemed to pass similar tests on a few occasions when students asked me about my running in high school and college. After only a few days with the group, it was clear that while my status as a researcher was known, it was often unimportant to the team as they seemed to sense that I "fit" with the group.

The Volunteer Collective

As with the Cardio Club, membership in the Volunteer Collective changed significantly over time. During their first open interest meeting in early September, the group drew a crowd of almost 60 students. However, after the first two weeks, the collective momentarily stabilized at 29 regular members before declining again in November to finish the semester with 14 members,

roughly the same as the Cardio Club. The sociodemographic characteristics of this group are featured in Table 4 below.

Additionally, like Cardio Club, the group became more homogenous over time. This was surprising to me however as the group started out with the largest percentage of REM students of any group – 62%. While there were only two Asian American students in the body of regular members, the rest of the group was almost evenly divided into thirds by Black and African American students, Latino/a students, and White students. However, by the group's final two meetings of the fall semester, of the 14 students who remained, the group was 64% White and just 36% REM students. Additionally, the membership became slightly more female over time, going from 62% to 79% female by the end of the first semester. While the officers and membership of the Cardio Club were predominately male, the officers and membership of the Volunteer Collective were predominately female.

TABLE 4: The Volunteer Collective Members

Name	Year of Study	New or Returning	Race	Class	Gender
Beth (President)	Second	Returning	White	More Advantaged	Female
Whitney (Vice President)	Fourth+	Returning	White	More Advantaged	Female
Amira (Prev. Treasurer) [a]	Fourth+	Returning	Latin	Less Advantaged	Female
Victoria (New Treasurer)	Second	New	White	Less Advantaged	Female
Daniella (Secretary)	Fourth+	Returning	Asian	Less Advantaged	Female
Amber	First	New	Black	Less Advantaged	Female
Anthony [a]	Third	New	Latin	Unknown	Male
Carl	Third	New	Latin	Less Advantaged	Male
Cesar [a]	First	New	Latin	Unknown	Male
Fiona [a]	First	New	Latin	Unknown	Female
Genevieve [a]	Third	Returning	Black	Unknown	Female
George	Second	New	White	Unknown	Male
Henry [a]	Third	New	Black	Unknown	Male
Isabella [a]	First	New	Latin	Unknown	Female
Jacob [a]	First	New	White	Less Advantaged	Male
John	First	New	Black	More Advantaged	Male
Kelly	First	New	White	More Advantaged	Female
Luis [a]	Third	New	Latin	Unknown	Male
Leland [a]	Second	New	Black	Unknown	Male
Linda	First	New	White	Less Advantaged	Female
Max [a]	Third	New	Black	Unknown	Male
Natalie	First	New	White	More Advantaged	Female
Olivia	First	New	White	Less Advantaged	Female
Penny [a]	Second	New	Latin	Unknown	Female
Rachael [a]	Second	Returning	White	Unknown	Female
Raj [a]	Third	Returning	Asian	Unknown	Male
Rebecca	First	New	White	More Advantaged	Female
Tamra	First	New	Black	Less Advantaged	Female
Wren [a]	First	New	Black	Unknown	Female

[a] These students attended multiple meetings, but left the group prior to the end of the first semester.

The Volunteer Collective's meetings were held each Monday evening at 7:00 PM in the Campus Student Activities building. The group gathered in a large meeting room on the top floor of the three-story building. The room was big enough to hold about 80 students, although with the exception of the first meeting the group never had nearly enough members present to fill the

room. Instead, the officers decided to switch from the theater-style seating necessary to fit 80 students to a series of 6 smaller roundtables with capacity to seat 48 students (with 8 chairs at each table). The tables were pushed toward the front of the room, leaving about 1/3 of the room open for active icebreakers and other group projects/activities requiring greater mobility (like sorting donations or painting posters).

To mark the room and welcome students, Beth, the group's president, always left a large tri-fold poster out in front of the room. The poster was the same one the group used on tables at recruitment and fundraising events. It had large color photographs of students working with children on some of their volunteer trips. The flags of several countries the group volunteered in were pasted around the edges, and "VOLUNTEER COLLECTIVE" was written in big, bubble letters across the top. This poster became an important marker of the presence of the group at the events they hosted or attended. Its importance is conveyed in one of my observations from a meeting when Beth failed to bring the poster. As students were arriving and settling in for the meeting, the poster's absence caused quite a disruption. Beth defended herself, exclaiming with feigned exasperation, "I didn't feel like carrying it all the way across campus! I thought we could have a meeting without it!" Natalie told the group that Tamra had texted her, to say that she left the student union building when she did not see the poster. The group laughed and made a few lighthearted jokes about how amusing it was that she would leave the building without at least looking in the room to see if the meeting was going on. Two students sitting at the table next to mine admitted that the absence of the sign was disorienting, with one of them confessing, "I never tried to remember our room number because the poster is always there." A few moments later, Tamra appeared at the doorway, and made an exasperated face as she walked into the room exclaiming, "The poster's missing!"

In addition to the poster, Beth and the other officers always had a laptop strategically placed at the front of the room on a table so that students could sign-in on an Excel spreadsheet as they arrived. The laptop also served as a platform for their PowerPoint presentation that the officers used to start the meeting with logistical information each week, and it was usually connected to the room's speaker system, playing what the officers called, "cultural music," as students arrived. The variety of this so-called cultural music was quite limited however usually to Latin pop music and almost always involved playing the new Enrique Iglesias song, "Duele el Corazon" on a loop.

In addition to their weekly, Monday meetings, the Volunteer Collective students typically held at least two additional events or fundraisers each week. These included recruitment events to share information about the group with prospective student members, tables in the student union building, and even a "fall festival" where they hosted a table to raise the profile of the group. Additionally, there were a plethora of fundraising events, including: "bracelet sales," where the students would sell hand-made friendship bracelets for $2 to other students at a table on the main campus quad; bake sales in front of a local grocery store (given that the students were not allowed to sell home-baked goods on campus); and a "campus thrift shop" that they opened for a week in the fall and spring after soliciting donations from members of the local community. Most of these events were intended to raise funds for their volunteer trips to South and Central American countries as well as money to send to a school they helped to support financially.

Like the Cardio Club, the membership of the Volunteer Collective shifted over time, with many students leaving the group after a few weeks, and some joining later. Because formal meetings only occurred once a week, I found myself explaining my status as a researcher in

many one-on-one conversations with students, as well as twice during meetings to the entire group. Nonetheless, gaining rapport with this group was fairly easy as Beth and Whitney both functioned as welcoming gatekeepers. They both seemed to like me from our very first meeting. While the gatekeepers for the Learning Community and the Cardio Club both asked me lots of questions about my study, Beth and the other officers seemed thrilled that I was interested in studying their group. At our first meeting, they even thanked me for "including us in your study." Whenever I would talk about my status as a researcher, Beth would often add, "and of course you're a member too!" This comfort with my presence seemed to transfer to the other Volunteer Collective members, who were equally welcoming.

It is worth noting that in all three groups my access and rapport with the students were facilitated by students' perceptions that I was close to them in age. This topic came up several times over the course of my first semester conducting the ethnography. It was only at particular moments that the difference in our ages would become salient (for instance, when I confessed to not knowing what a "GroupMe" was during a Volunteer Collective meeting).[14] Most of the time, I was able to be a fairly inconspicuous presence within the groups.

Upon entering the field site, I worked to document my initial observations of the settings, individuals, and groups involved, with a particular focus on interpersonal interactions and the ways students negotiated community membership, belonging, and the distribution of other social resources. As I came to know the members of the three groups better, I also sought to understand their own interpretations of various events and interactions as well as their emotional responses

[14] GroupMe was a phone application comparable to a group text message that the students used to communicate with one another outside of meetings. While the Volunteer Collective also sent a weekly email, the GroupMe filled a need for quicker sharing of information, for instance when students were meeting to get ready for a bake sale.

to them. I found Luker's (2008) comparison of the process of entering an ethnographic field site to "deciding where to sit in the lunchroom on your first day in a new school," (p. 164) to be particularly fitting, and given that I was studying college students, sometimes quite literal. While I entered each site with the permission of gatekeepers who held power within the group, upon arrival I tried to be intentional about moving frequently among different circles within the groups. I would often workout with one cluster of students at Cardio Club practice on Monday and another on Tuesday, and in classes and meetings with the Volunteer Collective and the Learning Community, I took care never to sit in the same seat twice in a row. Moving among the students within each group helped me to learn their "power structure" and avoid aligning myself too closely with any one member or group of members (Luker 2008, p. 163-165).

Finally, throughout the study, I attempted to remain open to additional ways in which culture might be deployed by students to facilitate their social inclusion in college as well as to produce or contest inequality. As my observations continued over the course of the year, I began to focus on interactions or rhetoric that provided alternative perspectives or greater complexity to my preliminary findings – in essence, I began paying special attention to exceptions to the typical interactional patterns within each of the groups.

Each day while conducting my ethnographic observations, I made use of "jottings" in the field, to provide material for writing fieldnotes and to help with my recollections when I returned home from campus each day (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995). Jottings are used to quickly capture observations or quotes in the field site, often by momentarily finding a quiet space to write in a small notebook, or taking advantage of other technology to discretely take notes (McDermott 2006). At times when jottings proved to be impractical – for instance, in situations where writing would have been awkward (i.e., during some group discussions) or impossible

(i.e., during long runs with the Cardio Club) field notes had to be developed from memory later (Lareau and Shultz 1996).

Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) state that field notes are detailed accounts of ethnographic observation, typically drawn up at the end of each day, when the researcher has the opportunity to reflect on observations from the course of the day, putting them into prose in order to facilitate further analysis. These notes should focus on a variety of potential interpretations of the events observed in a given day, and typically "involve inscriptions of social life and social discourse… [that] reduce the welter and confusion of the social world to written words that can be reviewed, studied, and thought about time and time again" (p. 12).

In my own observations, I found that jottings allowed me to capture important clips of dialogue as well as keywords and phrases that I could use to jog my memory later. While some settings proved unsuitable for writing jottings, the nature of my study on a college campus meant that in many ways taking notes in the field was easier than in other settings (see for instance McDermott's (2006, p. 35-36) ethnography of work in two convenience stores). For instance, when I was in the classroom with the Learning Community or in meetings with the Volunteer Collective, it was not uncommon for other students to be taking notes on paper or on electronic devices, and so I was able to record jottings fairly inconspicuously. Additionally, the ubiquity of smartphones among the students I studied meant that even when it might have been disruptive to write notes on paper, it was fairly easy to take notes on my phone without drawing attention to myself. Writing my subsequent field notes gave me the opportunity to expand on these jottings, developing fuller accounts of the day's events.

In-Depth Interviews

In conjunction with ethnographic observation and interviews, I conducted a total of 60 semistructured, in-depth interviews with first-year students at ESU. While I was not exclusively interested in first-year students, these students were typically those whose experiences arriving on campus and searching for campus communities were most recent and hence easiest to recount in an interview. Additionally, within the groups I had the opportunity to observe, in contrast with other students who had been on campus and often within these groups well before I arrived, I had the opportunity to observe the first-year students during their first two semesters on campus in my ethnographic observations.

With these interviews, I attempted to access the social-psychological or cognitive dimensions of culture. In essence with the help of in-depth interviews, I aimed to understand a variety of phenomena, perhaps most centrally the ways students described their process of socially integrating on campus; understandings of their own and their peers' styles of self-presentation; the mental maps they possessed for thinking about their social landscapes and the meaning of their interactions; as well as their sense of belonging (or not) in social groups. The interviews attempted to understand these phenomena by asking questions related to students' involvement and social inclusion at college, the friendships they developed, as well as their perceptions of their value and fit within various social groups at the university (for more details see the interview guide in Appendix A).

While ethnographic observation provided an opportunity to understand students' experiences, interactions, and styles of self-presentation within particular groups, interviews allowed me to inquire about these phenomena across different groups. In addition to being able to inquire about students' perceptions and mental maps, interviews offered a window into the

broader social landscape of college and an opportunity to learn more about students' experiences in groups of varying degrees of formality. While the three main groups I studied through ethnographic observation were formalized within the university as "recognized student organizations" and a spatially-defined living learning community, students are also part of groups that they create outside of the bounds of formal structures: four friends who met at orientation and workout together at the gymnasium, a lab group of five students who work together in a biology course and meet regularly for lunch, or a cohort of students who play pick-up basketball. Understanding a range of student groups – formal and informal, large and small, higher-intensity and lower-intensity – helps to produce a clearer picture of the depth of students' social lives on campus.

Interviews are useful for developing an understanding of perceptions, processes, and answering "how" questions such as those posed in this study (Luker 2008; Corbin and Strauss 2008). In particular, they are effective in allowing researchers exploring culture to access four kinds of information (Pugh 2014). First, in-depth interviews have the capacity to elicit what Pugh (2014) has termed *the honorable*, which can be observed when interviewees engage in the sort of display work described by Goffman (1959; 1967), to present themselves in a positive light. In these moments interviewers can gain a sense of what sorts of behavior constitute an "honorable" sense of self. In the case of this study, information regarding the honorable can be used to understand the styles of self-presentation students deploy and how they justify their efforts in pursuit of belonging on campus.

Second, a type of information referred to as *the schematic* can be gleaned from moments in interviews where informants convey, "the frameworks through which they view the world" (Pugh 2014, p. 50). Understanding the lenses social actors use to make sense of the world can

provide insight into the ways people use culture to categorize themselves and others, determining identity as well as fit. Finally, *the visceral* and *meta-feelings* offer information on how respondents feel as well as potential distance between the way they feel and the way they sense is the "right" way to feel in a given situation (Pugh 2014). Importantly, by conveying the "emotional frameworks" (Pugh 2014, p. 51) they employ to navigate the culture in which they are embedded and the situations they experience, interviewees expose their feelings regarding issues related to belonging, inclusion, exclusion, inequality, etc. – all of which are emotionally fraught.

Sampling for Interviews

The participants in these interviews included a mixture of students within and outside of the three groups I observed during the ethnographic portion of the study. In particular, I sought to balance two goals: (1) being able to interview approximately half of the first-year students in the three groups in order to gain additional insight into the perceptions and experiences of students within these groups, triangulating my own observations, and (2) ensuring that the sample was not only representative of students in these groups, but instead would allow me to achieve data saturation among students with experiences in other formal and informal social groups at ESU, by including at least half of the sample from outside of the three groups studied in my ethnographic observations. In this way, I sought to observe greater variation in students' level of involvement and degree of social inclusion.

The interview component of the research was conducted from February 2017 through early May 2017, in the spring semester of students' first year. To achieve a balanced sample, I used two sampling strategies simultaneously. In terms of the groups included in my ethnographic observations, I employed two main approaches to recruit interview participants. Using verbal

announcements at group meetings as well as emails sent to group listservs that included students who remained in the groups throughout the academic year as well as those who may have left a group earlier in the year, I attempted to include students with a variety of experiences in the three groups. In total, 19 of students from one or more of the three groups were interviewed; these 19 students constituted 41% of the 46 first-year students in the social groups I observed.[15]

Additionally, I used two approaches to recruit outside of the groups included in my ethnographic observations, with a combination of flyers posted around campus and emails to departmental and student organization listservs. This resulted in an additional 41 students included in the interview sample. In total, this sample achieved both of the goals described above (interviewing approximately half of the first-year students in groups included in my ethnographic observations, while having at least half of the sample come from outside of these groups).

On average the interviews lasted approximately 70 minutes (with a range of 45 minutes to two hours). In addition to balancing the number of students within and outside of the three groups included in my ethnographic observations, I was also intentional about varying the sample by three sociodemographic dimensions, namely race, class, and gender. As with the student participants in my ethnographic groups, I used parental education, occupation, and information students reported related to family structure as a proxy for social class background, seeking an even representation of those from the upper and lower portions of the class hierarchy. Specifically I sought to achieve an even representation of less socioeconomically advantaged

[15] Having determined to seek a broader sample of interviewees that included at least one half of the students from outside of the groups I observed, I stopped recruiting from among the three groups after having achieved a diverse sample of 19 students within the groups included in my ethnography (as the total sample sought to include 60 students).

(working-/lower-middle-class) students as well as more socioeconomically advantaged (middle-/upper-middle-class) students.

Additionally, I tried to interview a sample that was balanced as evenly as possible between REM students and White students as well as between female and male students. With this sampling method, the interview participants were: 47% REM students, 53% White students, 58% female students, and 42% male students. Using the clusters of social class groups described above, the sample included 45% less socioeconomically advantaged students and 55% more socioeconomically advantaged students. See Table 5 for more details. Students were screened for the above criteria prior to interviews with the use of a pre-interview questionnaire (see Appendix B). Interviewees of varying sociodemographic characteristics were staggered in scheduling so that interviews with students at the eight intersections of race, class, and gender were conducted over the duration of the study. After students emailed to volunteer and responded to the pre-interview questionnaire, they were scheduled for interview slots in various weeks between February and May to distribute students with similar intersectional sociodemographic backgrounds evenly throughout the interview period, ensuring that when data saturation was achieved there would be a fairly even representation of students in the sample by race, class, and gender. In other words, rather than interviewing most of the more socioeconomically advantaged White female students in February and March and most of the less socioeconomically advantaged White female students in April and May, I used responses to the pre-interview questionnaire to schedule students with similar intersections of race, class, and gender across the semester. I also waited to schedule additional students with particular combinations of sociodemographic characteristics until there were fairly even numbers of students from other intersectional groups. In the end, data saturation was achieved at 60 students, producing a sample

size that is comparable to where others have reached data saturation in prior qualitative research on college student experiences (Armstrong and Hamilton 2013; Silver forthcoming; Silver and Roksa 2017; Stuber 2011).

TABLE 5: Participant Demographics by SES Background

Class Background	Less Advantaged	More Advantaged	Total
Overall			
	27 (45%)	33 (55%)	n=60
Gender			
Female	17 (49%)	18 (51%)	35 (58%)
Male	10 (40%)	15 (60%)	25 (42%)
Race			
REM Students	14 (50%)	14 (50%)	28 (47%)
White Students	13 (41%)	19 (59%)	32 (53%)

I audio-recorded each interview and subsequently had the recordings transcribed by a professional transcription company in order to ensure the accuracy of the resulting data. This resulted in over 1,600 pages of interview transcripts. Following each interview, I wrote analytic memos (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995), which attempted to capture details regarding the interview that would not typically show up in the text of an interview transcript. For example, I made note of the interviewee's body language, tone, and other non-verbal face-work. Additionally, I reflected on my rapport with the participant, their level of comfort with the interview, and any dialogue that occurred before or after the audio-recorder was turned on. Finally, these memos sought to connect each interview to others (and to the ethnographic observations) that occurred prior as well as to the theories and literature I engaged with for this project. In this way, I was able to synchronize my data collection and preliminary analysis to allow these processes to inform one another.

DATA ANALYSIS

Both the ethnographic observation and interview-based portions of this study required continuous reflection and analysis, placing emerging patterns in conversation with theory in order to ensure that the sample and questions asked throughout the research process aligned with emerging themes. Once the data-collection phase of this study concluded, I also engaged in a similar process for analyzing my ethnographic field notes, analytical memos, as well as the interview transcripts. I first conducted a review of all collected data, reading interview transcripts and listening to portions of interview recordings a second time as well as conducting a close reading of my interview memos and field notes. This allowed me to observe "the entire record [of the data] as it evolved over time" (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995; p. 171). Second, I conducted a line-by-line open coding of these documents. This portion of the analysis allowed me to identify and clarify ideas, themes, or patterns that emerge from the data (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995; Corbin and Strauss 2008).

Third, I followed my open coding with subsequent rounds of "closed" or "focused" coding, honing in on topics that were "identified as being of particular interest" (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995, p. 172). Once coding was complete, transcripts and excerpts of field notes were designated with sociodemographic variables in order to make comparisons across student experiences by race, class, and gender. As themes began to emerge in both phases of coding, I developed code memos (Corbin and Strauss 2008), which explored emerging findings in greater depth by linking and clarifying themes (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995). Finally, these processes were followed by an iterative process of using codes and memos to develop and expand upon emerging themes, placing them in conversation with the research questions raised in this study.

CHAPTER 3

IN SEARCH OF BELONGING:

FINDING CONNECTIONS ON CAMPUS

I arrived at the East State University campus early on a Thursday morning in August as first-year move-in was set to begin. On my way to meet with a group of officers for a student group known as the Volunteer Collective, I could not help but be caught up in the visceral excitement that pervaded the campus. As I passed alongside a row of three-story sienna brick buildings, I saw a line of cars stretching out of sight down the curve of a nearby hill. Shuttle-driving parents parked mini-vans and sport-utility vehicles on a small verdant patch of lawn that I suspected would not be so lovely the next day. University housing staff stood in a line on the sidewalk in front of the neighborhood commons, the small hut-shaped building where students were required to check in and pick up their room assignment and keys prior to heading into the residence halls. The staff, adorned in polos of ESU orange, waited smiling, laughing, with some excited chatter amongst themselves. As doors swung open, intensely focused parents sprung forth, offering a stark contrast to the bubbly demeanors of the housing staff. Mothers and fathers led the way as an eclectic mix of teenagers followed, with some appearing timid, some enthused, but many just looking sleepy.

Keys were collected, buildings located, and large royal blue canvas carts were crammed with belongings. These carts proved to be of limited value. I overheard a disgruntled father alert one of the orange-clad housing staff about the absence of elevators in the buildings. Within moments the stairways framing the ends of each building overflowed with parents, students, siblings, housing staff, and resident advisors, straining to transfer belongings to the second and

third floors. Up went lamps, television sets, microwaves, and various other items and pieces of furniture. Like the students who arrived with them, these accoutrements had been uprooted – from bedrooms and the shelves of big box stores across the region and transplanted to ESU's campus.

For most students, arriving on-campus at a four-year residential college or university implies a significant change in their social world. Leaving family and friends in their home communities, these students transition into a new community. Within this context, first-year students must make decisions that will shape their social lives on campus. As I spoke with and observed students throughout the course of this study, it became clear that belonging occupies a distinct place in the forefront of students' minds during this transition. When students described their experiences of arriving on campus, they spoke of their initial search for belonging in specific ways, as a search for "fit," "a sense of commonality," or – perhaps most frequently – as the pursuit of "connections" that could be found among their peers. These students began their quest to find connections by looking for social circles where they could meet others who shared similar interests or some other evidence of commonality.

For instance, a more socioeconomically advantaged Asian student named Chase recalled why he chose to join a campus Christian organization:

> Well, it gave me a sense of belonging, a sense of commonality, especially having the same religion, it's a lot I can relate to between [the students in the group]. I don't feel like I'm alone and I don't have any support. I have people here that I can go to and create friends, new friends. That's the most important thing. Since I'm going to be here for the next 4 years, so I want to get connected on the campus I will be studying on.

As Chase notes, upon arriving in a new place, finding "a sense of commonality" with others who have something in common (in his case, a shared religious faith), led to "a sense of belonging." This sense of belonging was deeply meaningful to new students like Chase who wanted

reassurance that they were not "alone," and that they could find a group of friends who would become the fabric of their new social world at college.

Students used a range of descriptors to characterize spaces where they could find connections. While Chase described seeking out "a sense of commonality," others talked about finding a social "niche." For example, a less socioeconomically advantaged Black student named Tamra noted that upon arriving at the university she immediately began looking into, "What clubs does East State have to offer? Because I've known it's important to find your niche." Similarly, a less advantaged Asian student named Joel talked about trying to find "a certain niche" where "I felt like I fit in." He went on to note that this process of finding a social home was something his peers engaged in as well, adding, "They're always trying to find niches and cliques."

The formal groups that students joined typically framed themselves as spaces for students to connect around shared interests. During my ethnographic observations, I noted the rhetorical pairing of common activities and interests with the potential for finding a community where one could fit in. For instance, my fieldnotes highlighted the mission of a campus theater group who advertised, "Our goal is to establish meaningful relationships between students interested in theater." Similarly, a flyer for a campus feminist organization offered students the opportunity for "mentoring and bonding with like-minded females" in order to "cultivate a supportive community," and another flyer for a choral group called out for students to "come have fun singing and bonding together."

Informal groups were also typically developed around shared interests or activities. Max, a more advantaged Asian student, contrasted his friends with other students who "are bit into parties." While Max initially worried about finding peers to connect with who had interests other

than partying, he was enthusiastic in describing the group of friends he eventually found with whom he perceived himself to share things in common:

> A few of the friends I've made are not like that [focused on partying], and enjoy similar things. I consider myself a slight nerd – I do enjoy a nice museum every now and again. I love seeing [the local city] and whatnot, and there is a group of friends that I have that do that. I really have become a lot closer [to them] in many regards just because of similar interests and what we like to do.

Max elaborated on some of these shared interests saying "[we have] the same movie interest, same museums, talk about the same things." While these friends shared several of the interests Max described that made him "a slight nerd," there was also another smaller group that included Max and three of his friends who "are all pretty big into fitness, so we all work out together." A shared interest offered the possibility of connection through which a sense of belonging might develop.

Prior research has documented the ways social class background shapes students' approaches to settling into campus life and finding ways to become involved (e.g., Armstrong and Hamilton 2013; Lee 2016; Stuber 2009; 2011). However, with a predominant focus on White (and often only female) students, such research has not yet taken an intersectional approach (Collins 2000; Collins and Bilge 2016) to students' attempts to find social inclusion on campus. In this chapter, I consider the intersections of race, class, and gender as students navigate the social landscape of college. I find that regardless of socioeconomic background, virtually all students sought belonging and pursued connections in both formal and informal groups. While all students pursued belonging, finding a "fit" was not by any means a guarantee. Students' experiences joining groups were often complex and sometimes difficult. While they shared the goal of finding social connections on campus, not all students sought connection in the same way or had the same outcomes, as evidenced by the configuration of students' social

involvement as they remained in some groups, left some, and moderated their involvement in others. This chapter explores how these inequalities emerged and documents how class, race, and gender moderated the process of searching for belonging.

ACADEMIC VS. SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

While higher education literature presumes that all students seek social involvement on campus and that becoming socially engaged is a key to educational success (e.g. Astin 1984; Berger 1997; Hausmann, Schofield, and Woods 2007; Kuh 1995; 2016; Tinto 1987; 1993), sociologists have been more skeptical of the role of social engagement, in part due to the potential for less socioeconomically advantaged students to be excluded (e.g., Armstrong and Hamilton 2013; Mullen 2010; Stuber 2011). For instance, Stuber (2011) highlighted class-based differences in "students' beliefs about the desirability and utility of cultivating social ties and having educational experiences that would take them beyond the classroom setting" (p. 69), whereby working-class students were often skeptical of social involvement in college. Similarly, Armstrong and Hamilton (2013) reported that lower-middle and working-class students were less socially engaged than their more privileged peers. Less privileged students had greater representation in a category of students the authors refer to as "social isolates," and they tended to become "strivers" who focused on employment and academic success as opposed to social engagement. Rather than being enthralled with the social scene on college campuses, sociologist have often portrayed less socioeconomically advantaged students as being more focused on academics, often to the exclusion of higher-intensity social involvement.

I found that only a small number of students (approximately 10%) did not join formal and informal social groups in favor of focusing on academics, and even these students became part of

smaller, informal groups with an academic or disciplinary focus, which they typically referred to as "study groups." Notably, rather than just being made up of less socioeconomically advantaged students, those who prioritized smaller, academic groups included students from across socioeconomic backgrounds. For instance, Aaron was a more socioeconomically advantaged White student who had chosen to attend ESU because he was accepted into the university's honors program. When I asked him about whether he had been involved in any extracurricular activities at ESU he responded, "Unfortunately I haven't had time." When Aaron described his social life and relationships on campus he noted that outside of his residence hall, his other acquaintances were mainly:

Aaron: [P]eople who share my major, which would be the engineering school and classes… I usually ran into people during class and we got along and we had similar interests and that's how we still hang out – we usually see each other in class.

BRS: When's the most recent time that you've talked with those folks, either in class or hanging out outside of class?

Aaron: Hang out with engineers? Well, the problem with people of my major is that we're usually too busy to get together unfortunately.

BRS: So if you see them it's usually going to be in the classroom?

Aaron: [Nods affirmative]

BRS: When you're there do you talk about things related to academics and the major? Do people talk about life outside of class at all?

Aaron: We usually do both, but since life in our classes is usually the most time consuming for us, I'm usually talking about that.

While he had a small informal group of friends that he sometimes hung out with on his dormitory floor, it was apparent throughout our conversation that Aaron's primary focus was his academic studies. Unlike the vast majority of his peers who worked to join formal and informal social groups and organizations on campus, Aaron's social life outside of the classroom seemed

to be more a byproduct of his living arrangement, not something that he focused time or attention on developing.

While a lack of extracurricular and social engagement is often framed in the literature as resulting from limited cultural capital (see for instance Armstrong and Hamilton 2013; Stuber 2011) in Aaron's case, it was apparent that he enjoyed being enveloped in a rigorous curriculum in a field that he was passionate about. As a more advantaged student, Aaron was familiar with the contours of ESU's social scene and extracurricular opportunities. He told me about a friend who had asked him to join the Student Senate; however, Aaron declined the offer.[16]

Aaron's academic focus was representative of a relatively small group of other students in the sample who focused the majority of their energy on activities related to their majors and other scholarly pursuits. Instead of expending effort on the cultivation of friendships and social groups, academically focused students dedicated their time and energy to studying, occasionally connecting with like-minded students in the classroom or in their residence halls. When discussing moments where they felt belonging or a sense of fit, it was often with the university more broadly as demonstrated through positive experiences in the classroom or in other academic work. Some students told stories of finding connections with peers in academic group projects and when talking one-on-one with classmates who shared their major. For example, a less advantaged Black student named Joan recalled a time, "In my Communication class when we had to present a speech, my teacher told everyone I did a good job." Joan reported that this experience gave her a sense that she belonged at ESU. For academically focused students, this sort of recognition of their work in courses and shared experiences in the classroom offered a

[16] While Aaron attributed his lack of social involvement to being busy as an engineering major, it is worth noting that throughout the course of the study I encountered many engineering majors who kept busy social calendars alongside their rigorous majors.

sense of belonging through validation of their worth as students as well as connections with peers in academic contexts.

While the experiences of students like Aaron and Joan should not be overlooked, they represent a minority of traditional-age college students in residential campuses. Contemporary college students more often could be described as *academically adrift*, focusing just enough attention on academic pursuits to get good grades in their courses, while spending significantly more time in social and leisure pursuits (Arum and Roksa 2011). College students on average spend just 16% of their time in classes, labs, or studying, while nearly 60% of their time is spent "socializing and recreating" or in "fraternities/sororities and student clubs" (Arum and Roksa 2011, p. 97). For most student participants in this study, social inclusion proved to be a (and often *the*) primary focus of their first year. While inclusion was a nearly universal pursuit for students, not all students approached the college social landscape in the same ways. As they sought to locate groups to become part of, students employed different strategies that corresponded to the intersections of their social class, gender, and race.

CLASS, GENDER, AND RACE: DIFFERENCES IN APPROACHES AND OUTCOMES

The central distinguishing feature in students' search for belonging related to their level of intentionality and independence in locating social groups where they could find connections with other students, which was strongly associated with social class. These social class differences produced two unique approaches to pursuing social inclusion at ESU. While more advantaged students entered social groups through a process I refer to as "strategic selection," less advantaged students approached social involvement through a process characterized by "trial and error." The outcomes of strategic selection and trial and error (seen in the resulting

configuration of students' social involvement as they remain in, leave, and/or moderated their involvement in social groups) varied at the intersections of gender and race within class groups.

Strategic Selection and Socioeconomically Advantaged Students

For more socioeconomically advantaged first-year students, the process of strategic selection began early. More advantaged students often entered college with expectations that they would be involved in both formal and informal social groups and find connections or a social niche on campus. For a substantial portion of more advantaged students, ESU's social and extracurricular opportunities had proven to be a significant motivating factor in their decision to attend the university. This was clear when I interviewed Carter, a more advantaged White student who I first met through the Cardio Club. While not typically verbose, Carter was always clear and pointed in conversation. In his typical, methodical way, Carter described his college choice process step-by-step:

> First, I considered what I wanted to study since you need to have a purpose in college, not just party all the time. Then I looked into the programs each college offered and how they ranked among each other but also what sorts of classes they offer. Then next I looked into extracurricular activities since I know I didn't want to focus my time just on studies. I wanted to explore different organizations and what not.

In particular, Carter knew he wanted to be involved in a group where he could continue with fitness training and run competitively. However, he also knew that he did not want to be part of an NCAA sports team. Instead he started looking at ESU's menu of intramural recreation sports. Carter elaborated:

> I looked up on the organizations website and I wanted to see if there was such an organization. I noticed that there wasn't something on the lowest level, which was intramurals. There wasn't anything on that level. Then I looked and then I saw the Cardio Club. I thought, "Oh, that's similar to what I've done in high school. I could probably continue into that."

Carter's quote here clearly illustrates the sort of cultural capital needed to navigate the social landscape of college in search of connections. While it was difficult to anticipate in advance which residence hall floor students would live on or which peers would become part of informal friendship groups,[17] connecting with more formal, social organizations was possible well in advance of arriving at college. Carter knew he could find information about the existence and nature of various student groups online just as he researched other factors related to the "fit" of various postsecondary institutions like the majors or academic programs offered by these institutions.

Other more advantaged students talked about the efforts they made to get involved immediately upon – or prior to – arriving at college. For example, when I asked a White student named Michelle about how she got involved with the ESU Democrats, she told me: "That actually started before I even got accepted to East State. I was looking through their list of 300 clubs and organizations as 'which things do I want to focus on?' and [political organizations] were the ones that I looked at." More advantaged students like Carter and Michelle often did this sort of research prior to coming to campus. The goal was to have opportunities for social involvement ready for immediate engagement upon arrival. For example, Janice, a more advantaged White student, told me:

> Right off the bat I joined ESU Guides, which is the tour-guide club basically. We give tours and then we work big admissions events on the weekends and things like that.

[17] Notably, even these factors were more manageable for more advantaged students who often used social media to coordinate class schedules with friends over summer and figure out which residence halls were more desirable (with better facilities or more active social scenes). Armstrong and Hamilton (2013) documented a similar phenomenon on the residence hall floor they observed for their study, where more affluent students and their parents were savvy about navigating university bureaucracy to select residence halls they had learned from their social networks would be more socially active, while less advantaged students were often reliant on room lottery assignments.

> [After receiving an email about joining over the summer prior to her first-year] I was like, "That's really cool. Sure I can go into college already involved in something."

The possibility of entering college and being connected with a social group right away was highly appealing, and more advantaged students were often quick and intentional in seeking out these opportunities. Alongside the ESU Guides, Janice also joined a religious organization that her father had been a member of when he was in college, noting that, "it was really cool to have that immediate group I could bond with."

A common element in Carter, Michelle, and Janice's experiences was the early stage at which they began planning their college involvement. They each described how they had been thinking about and researching which groups they would join in college prior to arriving at ESU. Janice claimed that even in high school she knew that finding these sorts of organizations was "goal number one of college." As his quote above illustrates, Carter also began exploring opportunities to get involved socially at ESU during his college choice process, and as he points out, part of his consideration was driven by "what I've done in high school." For more advantaged students, it was apparent that the sort of "concerted cultivation," that Lareau (2003) describes in her book *Unequal Childhoods* had primed them to look for opportunities to be active in college beyond the classroom or the library. Like the young people from middle-class families Lareau followed during her longitudinal ethnographic research, these students came to college with a perception that academic effort should be coupled with robust social engagement (see also Stuber 2011). Further, it is likely that students from more advantaged families had experience prioritizing the sorts of extracurricular engagement that could facilitate admission to selective postsecondary institutions (Stevens 2009). By strategically looking for colleges with bountiful opportunities for social involvement alongside one's program of study, more advantaged students worked to ensure they would make connections in college.

Having the information and dispositions needed to be intentional in their efforts to locate social groups in college was integral to more advantaged students' use of strategic selection. Instead of relying on chance encounters to find friends or social groups, these students used their familiarity with the college social landscape to identify areas and organizations where they could develop friendships alongside students with whom they had "things in common." Through the process of strategic selection, more socioeconomically advantaged students, who possessed greater stores of information about navigating the college social landscape, intentionally chose groups they perceived would "fit" them. While most of these students used a similar strategy to locate potential social groups, there was subsequently a great deal of variation in this process and its potential outcomes, namely what the resulting configuration of students' social involvement looked like as they remained in, left, or moderated involvement with social groups. This divergence could be seen most clearly in the experiences of two different groups: more advantaged White male students vs. other more advantaged students, including female students and racial and ethnic minority (REM) students.

Honing: White male students

Advantaged White male students paired strategic selection with efforts to hone their social involvement down to one or two high-intensity social groups. After choosing ESU because of its opportunities for involvement, Carter found the ESU Cardio Club to be a welcoming community. Additionally, he joined the campus Swing Dance Club, a Bible study group, and found an informal group of friends who lived on his residence hall floor. As time wore on, Carter began to focus more on Cardio Club and his Bible study group – describing himself as "pretty hooked on" these organizations – leaving the Swing Dance Club, which he noted "really didn't do a whole lot for me," and hanging out with the informal friend group less often together

(instead typically seeing these students occasionally in one-on-one situations). Students like Carter would often intentionally select a few groups before honing in on the more rewarding, high-intensity social experiences. While the Swing Dance Club only met for two hours one evening a week, Cardio Club and Bible study offered involvement in more tightly-knit communities that met multiple times each week. When we spoke at the end of the spring semester I asked Carter what his favorite aspect of college had been so far. Without hesitation he responded, "It's the organizations that I've attended and still attend to this day."

Zach had a similar experience. Like other more advantaged students, Zach described how his process of strategic selection began during his college application process:

> So, I came into the application process at college knowing that I'd probably end up [joining a fraternity] eventually. And I'm from around here so I know at East State there's not a lot to do unless you get really involved either on-campus or in Greek life. So I just showed up and immediately started getting into it.

Alongside his involvement in the fraternity, Zach also joined ESU's chapter of Model United Nations, an informal friend group in a local residence hall, and the Club Swimming team, which he subsequently left:

> Zach: Every practice was the same.
>
> BRS: It was pretty routine?
>
> Zach: Yeah it was really routine. It was just a basic workout.
>
> BRS: Were there any negative or difficult...
>
> Zach: No, there was nothing really negative with it. I just didn't have the time for it.

Although he had initially put significant time and energy in each group Zach eventually honed in on the fraternity, leaving the Club Swimming team as well as his informal friend group (who he determined were not as "fun" as the fraternity members) and saying of Model United Nations, "I

go when I can." While he found Club Swimming practice to be somewhat repetitive, Zach described how he came to feel very "close" to the fraternity brothers in his pledge class, who he now spent the vast majority his time with, adding, "they've become some of my best friends." This honing process, which occurred as part of strategic selection, was characteristic of the process by which more advantaged White male students often auditioned several groups before focusing mainly on one or two social groups. In the end, while these students typically entered between three to five groups, their most common outcome was high-intensity involvement in just one or two.

Some more advantaged White male students began with an even narrower range of groups. For example, a student named Grant described getting involved with an invitation-based, all-male Campus Ministry group:

> I actually had my first initiation ceremony two days before East State's freshmen move-in, which was very convenient timing. [The group leaders] were like, "Let's just get a couple of the people who can come together so we can get this done for this guy." I knew that Campus Ministry was the best way for me to get connected to [other students of the same faith].

Grant had researched the group and been able to get in touch with them prior to the semester starting, securing induction into the organization well in advance of the time others could receive invitations. Having been involved in a similar group during high school he was confident that Campus Ministry would offer a welcoming place for him to feel belonging. During our interview, he told several stories of times the group had provided a much needed source of support during his first year of college. Other members of the group would often check up on him to see how he was doing and to welcome him back to campus when he returned from trips home. Grant noted, "It was really nice to have that support from them" and went on to describe Campus Ministry members as "guaranteed family, 100 percent."

In sum, after initially exploring strategically chosen groups – frequently up to four or five – more advantaged White male students usually honed in on one or two of them over time. In doing so, these students strategically narrowed from a range of possible options to a smaller number of social groups where they perceived themselves to have a strong connection or fit and be welcome with other student members. By devoting their time and attention to the groups they enjoyed the most, these students often found that honing in on one or two groups was the most effective strategy for finding a connection and achieving belonging.

Partitioning: Female and racial and ethnic minority (REM) students

While honing in on one or two strategically chosen groups was an effective strategy for more socioeconomically advantaged students who were privileged in terms of race and gender, female and REM students experienced different outcomes in the configuration of their social involvement. Jenna, a more advantaged White student, and an ESU legacy, who I met through my ethnographic observations with the Learning Community followed up her process of strategic selection by partitioning her social groups. When applying to college she had decided to apply for the Learning Community for several reasons, including the layout of the residence hall space, which she thought would be more comfortable than the traditional "freshman dorms." Most importantly, she noted that "I liked the fact that I would be in a community... you have this set of friends or a community that you can be part of." Additionally, prior to arriving on-campus Jenna planned to join a sorority. While she described herself as a nontraditional candidate for a sorority, noting that "My style is very much, I'm wearing Metallica shirts and ripped jeans and bomber jackets – I'm not a sorority girl," Jenna claimed that she had still assumed she would join a sorority in college. She detailed her first visit to ESU as an admitted student:

> My mom was in a sorority when she was here… I definitely thought I was going to rush a sorority – I definitely had it in mind… I just remember I came here [for admitted students

> day] in April and [my mom] pointed to the Gamma's table and she said, "They have the cutest shirts" or something. I went over and talked to them, and then I ended up getting Mindy [an officer of the sorority] and everyone's numbers and stuff.

Finally, in addition to being involved in both the Learning Community and her sorority, Jenna joined a group of students who volunteered in a local low-income housing community. Becoming part of each of these groups simultaneously, Jenna cultivated a rigorous and time-intensive social life for herself at ESU. As it turned out, staying involved with multiple distinct social groups provided a form of social protection that was valuable for Jenna. Within her first few weeks on campus several students in the Learning Community began to ostracize her. Jenna described a painful experience being an "outcast on the [residence hall] floor," when she was targeted by other students who she perceived wanted to "make an example out of me." During this time Jenna spent as much time as possible with her sorority sisters to the point where she noted, "I was just never on the [Learning Community] floor."

Despite her negative experience during the first few weeks of the semester in the Learning Community, Jenna maintained her involvement there as well. Eventually she and the other students were able to "heal a lot of things." Later on in the year there was an incident involving Jenna's sorority that she described as "Twitter drama" where she was "called out on social media" by some of her sisters in a situation she described as "publicly embarrassing." Nonetheless, Jenna did not leave the Learning Community or her sorority when conflict arose, and even when she was socially ostracized. Remaining in these groups allowed Jenna to distribute her time in a way that provided social protection – allowing her to feel connected with different groups at different times. When she was marginalized by the other members of the Learning Community she could spend time with her sorority sisters, and vice versa.

Such an arrangement was useful because as Jenna was aware, these were not isolated incidents. Rather, occasional conflict or marginalization were occurrences that more advantaged female students and more advantaged REM students anticipated happening with relative frequency in a variety of social groups. Further, these students realized such treatment was not usually permanent. Jenna described the recurrence of the "drama" she experienced saying, "there's also a little bit of drama with people hooking up with people and obviously girl drama – there's always something like that… but it usually stops being an issue after a while. They just get over it." Relying on the temporary nature of this sort of "drama," students like Jenna chose to partition their social involvement, maintaining membership in several distinct groups, typically without overlap in members, to allow for shifts in involvement between these social niches when conflict or mistreatment arose.

A more advantaged Black student named Andre was similar to Jenna in selecting several groups to join based on his interests. During his college application process, Andre's mother told him about living learning communities and he began to research the different options available at ESU. After looking into the various residence hall floor themes and eliminating several he found unappealing, "Outdoor exploration? Outdoors is cool, but I don't know… that's not my thing. I don't want to live in the floor about outdoor exploration…" When he read about the social justice focus of the Learning Community, Andre decided that would be the best fit for him. He also noted that the community had an added bonus of being, "a really good way to, as a freshman, find a foundation or group of friends." Andre also joined the club baseball team and became involved with an informal group of a dozen male students who called themselves "the All-Star Freshmen," hanging out at the gym, playing pick-up basketball, and holding a regular

study group at the library. He described the group saying, “when I met [the All-Star Freshmen], we had like *so many* common interests.”

Despite the fact that Andre found connections in several groups, like Jenna, he was no stranger to mistreatment and marginalization in these groups. Near the beginning of the year Andre had an experience where he was marginalized by another male student in the Learning Community who facilitated other students’ mistreatment of Andre as well. Andre believed the other student had seen him as competition, and the result was that “a lot of people” in the Learning Community also “made everything really, really weird” for him. While that particular issue eventually resolved, others arose, creating a cycle where Andre observed, “there’s so much drama.” The pervasiveness of this “drama” occasionally caused him to alter his schedule, minimizing time with the Learning Community in favor of hanging out with the baseball team or the All-Star Freshmen. For instance, Andre noted that during one of the recent moments of drama:

> I got used to doing more homework, instead of hanging out with [my Learning Community] friends, going to the gym [with the All-Star Freshmen] for longer and that would take up the rest of the time I [usually] hang out with [the Learning Community]. It’s not like I hang out with them all day; everyone has a schedule, so if I hang out with them for two hours, that could just mean doing one more hour of homework and one more hour of gym time. So that’s just kind of what I did.

While he could avoid his peers in the Learning Community by spending more time with the All-Star Freshmen and the Club Baseball team, these other groups did not provide a safe haven from conflict. Andre was also frequently involved in disagreements among the All-Star Freshmen, who he noted had a lot of “strong personalities.” At times when there was conflict among other groups Andre could return to the Learning Community.

Jenna and Andre’s experiences both involved intentionally choosing three groups and remaining involved in all of them, despite experiences with marginalization. Other students’

approach to group partitioning was sometimes a bit more complex, involving joining, leaving, and even taking initiative to start new groups before settling on several for continued involvement. For example, a more advantaged White student named Ivy, became part of a variety of social groups on campus including the ESU Guides, a sorority, the Vegan Club, and two informal social groups – one that included 12 students living on her floor in Bowen Residence Hall and a separate group that included six students who lived in neighboring Hamilton Residence Hall. Over the course of the first semester she left the Vegan Club after having several ideas she shared with the group dismissed. After quitting the club, she subsequently began working with her friend Owen to create a new vegan and vegetarian themed group on campus. Similarly, after leaving her sorority that same semester she tried out for the ESU Dance Team. While Ivy had chosen both the Vegan Club and her sorority intentionally, and assumed based on her interests that she would find connections that would facilitate belonging in these places, she realized this was not the case. After noting that "I *should* belong [in the Vegan Club] because I'm a vegan," she reported feeling unappreciated, like people "weren't listening" to her, and being "shut down" in the group. Notably, Ivy also reported experiences with conflict and marginalization in two of the other social groups she joined; however, she maintained involvement in both of these. Unlike Jenna and Andre who stayed involved in every group they initially joined, Ivy was willing to leave groups when she felt it was necessary. However, upon leaving a group it seemed that Ivy quickly sought to replace it with another group, and throughout her first year she maintained involvement in five distinct social groups at any given time.

This approach to partitioning has some resemblance to White male students' description of leaving or scaling back on involvement in groups. However, White males reported that

leaving was the result of some groups not being "as fun" or in many cases to accommodate their greater involvement in a favorite or preferred group. This contrasts sharply with the experiences of female and REM students who often described leaving groups where they felt unwelcome or "out of place." Moreover, while White male students typically left groups in order to hone in on one or two favorite groups for high-intensity involvement, more socioeconomically advantaged female and REM students usually maintained involvement in three or more social groups, even if those were not the same groups over time.

In practice, this approach of partitioning involvement by maintaining membership in multiple distinct social groups produced what McCabe (2016) has described as "compartmentalized" friendship networks. McCabe points out that these networks can be useful for offering different types of friendships (for instance socially and academically focused groups). While presented findings corroborate that claim, they also illuminate that partitioning is not only a strategy for having a diverse social network that offers different types of friendships, but also a mechanism for managing marginalization. Students employing group partitioning were frequently those who had experienced exclusion or marginalization in some of the groups they were connected with. In this way, pairing strategic selection with efforts to partition groups served as a protective strategy for feeling belonging in at least one group at the time.

Notably, there were two less advantaged female REM students who joined the more advantaged students in using strategic selection with group partitioning. While there may have been a variety of reasons why these students differed from their other less advantaged peers, the most likely explanation is their involvement in ESU's first-generation student transition program. Both Lila and Tamra had been part of the transition program since high school. As they described the program, it involved both college preparatory work during their secondary

education as well as a summer bridge program prior to college entry where they were introduced to the ESU campus as well as available academic and social resources. Upon arriving, Lila became involved with the Learning Community, a student organization for allies of undocumented students, an informal group of friends who shared her Nigerian ancestry, and First-Gen-ESU, a student group that fostered community among first-generation college students. Similarly, Tamra joined the Volunteer Collective, the Latin Dance Club, the Black Student Alliance, a student group for REM students in STEM, and an organization volunteering with students with autism. Like their peers who engaged in group partitioning, both Lila and Tamra had experiences of being marginalized or excluded at times in various groups. Nonetheless, they maintained high-intensity involvement in several distinct groups, allowing them to shift their time between the groups as needed to feel belonging in some groups while others were riddled with conflict or awkward social situations.

Trial and Error and Less Socioeconomically Advantaged Students

The manner in which less socioeconomically advantaged students approached social inclusion contrasted sharply with the experiences of the more advantaged students described above. Fred, a less advantaged White student, offered a glimpse into this approach, which I term "trial and error," when describing how he had come to be involved in the Learning Community:

> I honestly had no idea [Learning Communities] existed up until when I went to go apply for housing and there were these Learning Communities. I wondered if any of them would apply to me... And then I read into it [the description of Learning Communities on the application] a little bit, even though I didn't get the full picture of what it was about.

While Fred decided to apply for the Learning Community and was eventually accepted to be part of the group, like other less advantaged students, he acknowledges coming across information about this community unexpectedly and applying despite perceiving that he did not "get the full picture of what it was about."

While some students seemed uncertain of their ability to find groups that would be welcoming or fit their interests, there were also students who seemed to struggle with finding out which sorts of groups existed in the first place. For instance, a less advantaged Latino student named Dylan told me about his frustration trying to find a group to play soccer with:

> There were not as many clubs as I was expecting. I thought that there would be more extracurricular activities at ESU. But again, it's my first year – maybe I wasn't looking at the right places. I usually see party flyers on campus, and the things that I was not interested in… I've seen some [other] meetings, some flyers on campus. I was planning to attend those, but all the days they didn't fit with my schedule. They were in a different building from where my classes were. So I had to pass on those. I was hoping to see more sport groups, like a soccer club maybe. I didn't see any of them… Maybe they are posted at [another area of campus], maybe I'm not visiting those spaces, and that's why I'm missing those opportunities, but who knows.

Notably, ESU did in fact have a club soccer team as well as intramural leagues for students to play soccer in the fall, winter, and spring. Additionally, there were numerous informal groups that met each weekday evening to play soccer on one or more of the fields outside the ESU Athletic Complex. However, as Dylan's quote makes clear, while he had a sense of the types of social activities he was interested in – namely sports and soccer in particular – he perceived that opportunities to get involved were not clearly advertised. Likewise, a less advantaged White student named Annette said:

> I feel like, honestly, the opportunities for [students] to get more involved is a little bit under the table. I feel like that's not really ever advertised as much. I feel like that should be something that could be pushed forward more so that [students] can find more places and find more friends and ways to fit in.

While more advantaged students expected to use social media, campus websites, parental knowledge/experience, and other available resources to locate and engage with social groups, less advantaged students like Dylan and Annette were not as prepared to navigate the campus social landscape, often learning about the groups they encountered by chance. Groups where they might have had an easier time finding connections frequently remained invisible.

In contrast to their more advantaged peers, less advantaged students were often unaware of opportunities for involvement upon entry to college. These students did not shirk the social elements of college life; they expected to make friends and have a good time in college, but they often had less information about how to navigate the social landscape of ESU. Additionally, less advantaged students often reported being uncomfortable entering social groups where they would have to meet "a lot of new people" at once. In addition to highlighting his lack of awareness of which groups existed, Dylan's quote above also shows an apparent discomfort entering social groups. While it is likely that as Dylan notes, some options for involvement with social groups conflicted with his schedule, he also claimed that he was hesitant to attend groups with meeting spaces that "were in a different building from where my classes were."

The discomfort of entering social groups was apparent in other students' comments. For instance, a less advantaged White student named Quinn told me about a time when she was invited by one of her friends to join a sorority, "but I wasn't really sure because I'm not that social like [my friend] is; like I don't go out and talk to random people, so it kind of made me a bit nervous." Quinn's discomfort meeting new people in groups made the socially rigorous experience of sorority rush – where prospective members meet literally hundreds of other female students in the span of two days – highly undesirable. Expressing a similar sentiment, Carmen, a less advantaged Latina student noted, "I feel like [people in social groups] have their own cliques full of people they know – I don't want to be alone."

While it is likely that many students across social class backgrounds experienced nervousness in the process of joining a new group, the more advantaged students I spoke to did not cite these feelings as a barrier to joining groups. Rather, from their descriptions it seemed that for many more advantaged students the excitement of "getting involved" on campus –

something they had planned on doing for quite some time – outweighed any concerns they might have had about meeting so many new people at once. Rather than being intimidated by the social landscape of college, more advantaged students anticipated that this wide-ranging landscape would be an integral – and desirable – element of their college experience. This contrasted sharply with the experiences of students like Dylan, Quinn, and Carmen, whose lack of middle and upper-middle-class cultural capital meant that they were much more ambivalent about entering an unfamiliar social group.

Because they often lacked the information about and comfort with the social scene in college that helped their more advantaged peers locate and enter groups, less advantaged students frequently depended on peers to act as sources of information or social guides. These individuals, who I refer to as "connectors," could facilitate their access to or comfort in entering a social group. For instance, Annette relied heavily on "one of my friends from back home, the only person I knew on this campus. She was part of the [equestrian] team, so I kept texting her and I was like, 'Hey, when's this happening? What do I need to know?'" For students like Annette, having a peer on campus from "back home" could be an important source of social capital, offering a link to opportunities for social inclusion. With the help of these peers, less advantaged students could get valuable information about how to become socially involved on campus.

Similarly, in the Learning Community, a less advantaged White student named Jamie described how she came to rush a sorority:

> At first I wasn't sure [if I wanted to join]. I was like, "sororities aren't my thing." You know, you hear stereotypes and I believed it. And since my mom never went to college I never heard about [sororities]. Jenna, my suite mate, and you know Terrie too. They were like, "Come on, let's go out for recruitment." They were like, "Come on, you're so much fun. This will be great!"

Without Jenna and Terrie's encouragement, it is unlikely that Jamie, who was initially averse to the idea of joining a sorority – based on "stereotypes" she described having heard from her friends and grandmother – would have attended recruitment and joined one.

Connectors were not only important because of the information they could provide. They were also useful in making the experience of social inclusion more comfortable for less advantaged students. Unsure of what to say or how to approach new groups, less advantaged students often relied on connectors to make this seemingly awkward process more comfortable. For instance, after noting that she often felt uncomfortable entering new groups, Carmen described how, "I usually go [to social group meetings] with somebody that I know" to avoid being "alone." Rather than feel awkward trying to make new friends on her own, Carmen attended group meetings alongside one of her two close friends on campus who took her to different organization meetings with them at the beginning of the academic year.

Like Jamie, described above, another student named Beverly was encouraged to join a sorority. She noted, "I had no intentions of joining a sorority. I got [to ESU] and I kind of had a hard time making friends right away so my RA pushed me to do it. She said, 'The worst thing that could happen is you go through and decide it's not for you, but you make friends.'" The encouragement of her Resident Advisor, who reframed sorority recruitment as a low-stakes activity with only positive outcomes, helped Beverly to feel more comfortable taking part in the "sorority rush" process and finding new friends among a group she initially "had no intentions of joining."

In the aggregate, these connectors facilitated less advantaged students' access to social groups by acting as companions or guides. While some connectors were more privileged students with a clearer sense of how to navigate the college social scene, this was not always the case.

Other connectors were similarly situated in terms of class-background, falling into the class-based groups (namely working and lower-middle class) I have categorized as less socioeconomically advantaged. Nonetheless, they acted as companions with whom to navigate the confusing and often intimidating social landscape of college, even when they did not possess a great deal of middle-class cultural capital themselves.

The trial and error approach employed by less advantaged students required an openness to trying out new things when opportunities presented themselves, as well as being prepared for things falling through. For instance, Mercedes told me about her outlook on finding social groups in college saying, "I'm feeling out everything. I want to try new things… I've just been doing things just to see what is it that I want to do. I wasn't very involved back home." Although she was ready to "try new things," Mercedes had not explored opportunities for involvement during her college application process, and unlike students using the strategic selection approach to navigating the college social landscape, she did not intentionally seek out specific kinds of social involvement. Instead, Mercedes told me about how she came to join the Learning Community after attending the ESU admitted students' day. At the event Mercedes described an encounter with another incoming student:

> [ESU staff] had just shown us the freshman dorms in ESU Square, and I was just like, "I'm not staying in this jail cell…" The girl [one of the other student's on the tour] is like "Well, have you considered the dorm at the Learning Community?" When she said that I was like, "No." I said, "Tell me more." She said, "Well, I'm in the Learning Community; the Learning Community is the best [residence hall]."

Upon hearing about the Learning Community's location in the "best" residence hall, Mercedes decided to apply for it, because as she noted, "I don't know why this was a deal breaker for me, but my living is very important for me, in order to be comfortable."

Upon entering the Learning Community, Mercedes found that while the nicer rooms initially provided a comfortable living situation, she did not feel a sense of belonging with her peers in the community. Although she had expected that the Learning Community "was going to be a group of students coming together," she realized that it "was different than what I envisioned it to be originally." In part, the community's focus on social justice did not offer a connection for Mercedes who seemed relatively uninterested in social justice, and in a few instances she reported that her own values were in direct contrast to such a worldview.

Additionally, Mercedes described several experiences during the fall semester where she was targeted by her peers with rumors and mistreatment. Several of these situations involved times when she felt her outspokenness was misinterpreted. In such instances Mercedes believed her words were taken out of context or spread to others in an intentionally misleading way. She concluded simply, "I don't fit into the Learning Community. I don't. Because the climate and the environment of the people there, they're like I said, that 'he said, she said' stuff. They're very into that drama." By the latter part of the fall semester Mercedes no longer socialized with other students in the Learning Community. While she technically remained in the community as she could not move off the floor or drop out of the class at that point, the Learning Community residence hall became a place for Mercedes to study and sleep, rather than the base of a social group.

After arriving at ESU with an internship working on a political campaign, Mercedes had a similar experience when she joined the ESU Democrats to find likeminded students with whom she could connect around political involvement. While she enjoyed her work on the campaign, in the end the ESU Democrats did not provide a social group for her, and after the November elections she was no longer involved with the group. Eventually Mercedes joined the Black

Student Alliance with one of her friends after the two of them attended an event for racial and ethnic minority students where the organization was recruiting members. While it was still a bit too early to tell if she would find a "fit" socially with the Black Student Alliance (at the time we spoke she had only attended a few meetings), Mercedes was cautiously optimistic. She described the group as a "community that understands," adding that, "it always feels good to have [a group] in which the people there understand you and what you feel, you know… it's definitely a comfortable place to be any time you need it."

A similar experience could be observed in Joel's attempts to find a social group on campus, which was also illustrative of the trial and error approach. Joel arrived at ESU unsure of how he would get involved on campus. Confessing that he had not done much research on the group himself, Joel described how he came to join a fraternity:

> One of my friends from high school came to ESU knowing he was going to be joining Greek Life. Right when he got to ESU he looked at all the fraternities, all the groups, every single detail so [he] would pick the right one. I wasn't into it… [He] was big on Greek Life and he invited me out to a bunch of pre-rush events. I decided just to go. I was never into it.

Notably, it was not Joel, but his friend who did the research, looking into "every single detail" of the Greek life organizations at ESU, and convincing Joel to join one with him. Although Joel noted that initially he perceived that "all of the guys [in the fraternity] were really nice to me and I really enjoyed being with them," he later realized that "there was just some guys I didn't like. We just had to deal with it if they didn't like us… [their treatment of Joel] would be like a joke to them." Joel noted that some of these "jokes" were funny, while others seemed mean-spirited.

Although his friend had done a lot of research into what the fraternity would be like, Joel had not and often seemed surprised by aspects of fraternity life, including how upset some of the other members became when he did not spend enough time "learn[ing] our common fraternity

stuff, like when this was created, when that was chartered, who was the founder." Eventually, due to a confluence of factors, which included learning about how much the fraternity dues would cost, Joel decided to leave the group. Subsequently, Joel had a better experience when he was invited by another student to join an intramural soccer team, which he continued to be involved with at the time of the interview.

Haphazard Connections and the Intersection of Race and Gender

As might be expected in the use of a "trial and error" method, there was variation in how many trials one had to make in order to achieve "success" in terms of finding a group where students were able to feel belonging through shared connections. Rather than such variation being distributed at random, it was apparent that the pace of finding social inclusion was patterned by race and gender. While less advantaged female and REM students often took part in more "trials" before finding a connection, less advantaged White male students usually experienced positive outcomes more quickly through the trial and error approach. The reasons for this disparity will become more apparent in subsequent chapters which explore the experiences of students within social groups, but first it is important to understand the initial process of finding groups and configuring one's involvement.

Mercedes and Joel, described above, both joined and left two groups before trying out a third. Other less advantaged female and REM students had even more arduous experiences, with many joining and leaving four or five formal and/or informal groups. For instance, Beverly, the Asian student whose Resident Advisor recommended she join a sorority after several failed attempts at finding connection, tried out four different groups prior to the sorority. After attempting to join a community service student group, and health-focused organization, and two faith-based ones, Beverly decided that each of those groups "just wasn't the organization for

me." Likewise, a White student named Susie tried out student government and several other activity-based student organizations at the suggestion of her roommate before finding pep-band and the Swing Dance Club. She even had the experience of becoming part of an informal friend group of students who met in her chemistry class, only to have the others pull away, "and I was just kind of left behind."

Another White student named Patricia left a gardening club and a faith-based group where she perceived that there "wasn't really a feeling of community… I felt like it was just random people." Subsequently, Patricia was also excluded from an informal friend group in her dormitory. Unlike more advantaged students who remained in multiple groups and partitioned their social lives to deal with moments of exclusion, Patricia decided to "pull back" her involvement with this friend group and live with a different group of students the following year.

While the trial and error process could often be prolonged and difficult for less advantaged female and REM students, less advantaged White male students' experiences frequently diverged. Despite being disadvantaged in terms of navigating the broader institutional landscape due to a lack of cultural capital, less advantaged White male students were privileged by their race and gender in a way that made finding social inclusion easier, even in groups that were not always selected with great intentionality. A student named Terrence provides an illustrative example of the qualitative differences between the trial and error experiences of White male students compared to female and REM students. Terrence made friends in college primarily through two groups he had joined. The first was the Student Senate, which Terrence became part of after meeting some of the students involved when he was assigned to write a paper about the organization. The second was a religious organization on-campus called

Christian Students Practicing Religious Tolerance, also known as C-SPORT for short. Terrence described how he came to be involved with C-SPORT saying:

> Terrence: So [the C-SPORT members] were actually having a couple socials in the [student residence hall area] where I'm living and a few other places on campus… I didn't know that they were a Christian group at first, I thought sports because "SPORT" is in the name. So originally I thought I was joining a group of guys who were going to play some sports, but I just really got into them, and I'm not an overly religious man myself, but I enjoyed hanging out with the guys – just got to know some good people through that… I just kind of stuck around.
>
> BRS: What was it like walking into the first meeting? That sounds fascinating.
>
> Terrence: Yeah it was interesting because we were going to a thing called "large group," and I'm like, "So this is where everyone who plays a sport gets together." And we got in and they were handing out pamphlets at first, and I'm like, "Okay." I saw they were doing this retreat and a Bible is required, and I'm like, "Okay… don't know how that plays into this." And I realized as we got into the meeting, we're standing, we're sitting, all this stuff, and I'm like the one guy who's not into religion and there's a ton of people surrounding me. And I'm like, "All right, let's see how this works."

As it turned out, despite noting that he was "not into religion," Terrence found that others in the group made efforts to include him, and as the semester went on he made some of his best friends in C-SPORT. Terrence noted that determining "fit" or finding a social niche could be fairly convoluted:

> But of course the flipside of that you know, I think with anyone is kind of judging when you fit in and kind of finding that niche 'cause you don't always find that "in" so it's an interesting Catch 22 of kind of figuring out where you stand with certain people and how that all works out. But I think for the most part at least for those two groups [the Student Senate and C-SPORT], I've definitely been accepted well.

Despite the complexity Terrence perceived in finding a "fit" or "figuring out where you stand with certain people," he acknowledged that things had worked out well for him. Despite not fully sharing in the other C-SPORT students' passion for religion, Terrence was able to feel belonging with these students.

Similarly, Fred, the White less advantaged student described above, found a welcoming social group in the Learning Community, despite having – as he acknowledged – discovered the group unexpectedly and joining even though he felt that he did not have "the full picture of what [the Learning Community] was about." White male students like Terrence and Fred seemed to find belonging even in communities they entered fairly haphazardly with incomplete – and in Terrence's case completely inaccurate – information or understandings. A student named Ollie summed up the experiences and perceptions of many less advantaged White male students. When I asked him if there were times when he had felt like he did not fit in, Ollie reflected for just a moment before responding confidently, "No, not really;" adding, "I kind of fit in everywhere." While students like Terrence, Fred, and Ollie differed from their advantaged White male peers in their approach to entering groups, they still had the privilege of feeling like they were able to connect with others in a variety of circumstances, and they rarely reported being the targets of the sorts of mistreatment that negatively impacted female and REM students.

While nearly all participants in this study who described using the trial and error approach were less advantaged students, there was one notable exception. Turner was a more advantaged Asian student. While his father had attended college and his family was relatively affluent, Turner came to ESU from India as an international student. He was excited to make new friends upon arriving at ESU; however, he was unsure about how to approach and integrate into new friend groups. Shortly after arriving on campus, Turner tried to get involved with an informal group of students who played basketball each day on an outdoor court near his residence hall. He described the process of trying to connect with them:

> I tried getting into a basketball thing, because I play basketball, but I couldn't get into it. Because, you know, I couldn't interact with people… I met them at the basketball court over [near my residence hall]. I just went over and I saw people playing over there. I found a guy; I went to him. I was like, "Okay, can I get a ball?" He was like, "Sure, you

> can get a ball." Then I start practicing. I thought I could mingle with them – I could like get along with them – but they had their own groups. They already had their groups and didn't want to interact much… I tried two times – like twice or thrice I tried. I went to them, I spoke to them like, "Hey, when you make a team can you just put my name onto the list?" And they were like, "Okay bro, we'll put your name and all." But when the teams were announced they didn't put my name [on the list]. And so that was when I felt like I shouldn't be going more, I shouldn't be asking too much, it's their choice. They don't want to pick me and they didn't pick me.

The pain of that moment was clearly still fresh for Turner. His face was sullen as he summed up his story, "That was a moment where I felt like I couldn't fit into these people." Notably, unlike the less advantaged students who due to limited information were often unable to find shared interests in the social groups they joined, Turner had assumed he would find a place to feel belonging playing basketball, a sport he had played often before coming to ESU.

While it is difficult to sort out exactly why Turner was excluded in this way, his own description makes apparent that part of the explanation likely has to do with cultural capital, or familiarity with the norms of interaction and accepted ways of entering a new group. Despite being a more advantaged student with a college educated parent, having come from India, his lack of familiarity with the ways students interacted in an American college context acted as a significant barrier to social inclusion. However, it is also worth noting that this type of experience with exclusion was shared by other REM students who grew up in the United States – even those from more advantaged backgrounds. In short, Turner's experience may have been the result of the interaction between a lack of (American) cultural capital and his racial/ethnic background.

After giving up on joining the group of students who played basketball, Turner tried connecting more with his roommates. Despite not initially getting along, the three of them eventually formed a more cohesive, small social group. Turner described when things between them began to change, saying, "After three months or so I started being open. I started roaming

around with them… After three months I was able to get along with them. Now I have two of them who are very close to me." Subsequently, at the recommendation of one of these roommates, Turner found a welcoming community in the Sikh Student Association. He noted, "I found out [about the Sikh Student Association] from my roommate… He knew from somewhere on social media, like Facebook and all. He just told me, 'you can join this.' And I gave it a shot." In this way, his roommate not only became part of Turner's social circle, but he also served as a valuable connector.

As his story makes apparent, Turner's approach to navigating the social landscape on campus was more similar to less advantaged students than others from more advantaged families. In addition to not intentionally seeking out opportunities to get involved himself, he initially lacked the cultural capital to – in his words – "interact with people" (including the group playing basketball and his roommates). Further, were it not for the chance of having been paired with a roommate who discovered the Sikh Student Association on social media, he may not have become involved with that group either. Like Mercedes, Turner had only attended a few meetings with the Sikh Student Association so far, and so it was unclear whether this group would provide a long-term community for him.

The above examples illustrate the haphazard, trial and error approach of less advantaged students as they sought connection in social groups. Without the requisite information and cultural resources to navigate the complex social landscape of college, accidental encounters offered a chance to find connections, but no guarantee of success. In these circumstances, connectors played a complex role in this process. In some instances, they provided valuable cultural capital, facilitating entry into social groups. However, in other instances connectors chose groups that *they* wanted to join, leaving the students who relied on connectors in social

groups and situations that often did not fit their own interests. In short, the support of connectors, while helpful in entering new communities was often simply part of a broader, haphazard approach to social involvement, where less advantaged students joined and left several formal or informal groups before settling on one or two for sustained involvement.

While students across socioeconomic backgrounds were excited about the social scene in college, the approach of less advantaged students differed markedly from their more advantaged peers. Rather than entering a group with a clear sense of what involvement in the group would entail or whether there would be a shared connection with others in the group, these students encountered and entered groups by chance, hoping for the best. Further, in some instances, as Mercedes and Turner's experiences above highlight, it was still unclear at the time I interviewed these students whether they had in fact found a connection in a community they could remain with long-term. In many instances, because they had only recently joined their current social group, it is possible that these communities represented yet another "error" in the trial and error chain these students experienced.

Identity-Based Groups: Creating Belonging for REM students

Regardless of whether they relied on strategic selection or trial and error strategies, some marginalized REM students eventually joined more homogeneous and/or identity-based groups such as ethnic religious groups (like the Vietnamese Buddhist Community or the Sikh Student Association), other race and ethnicity-based organizations (like the Black Student Alliance, the Japanese Student Association, or the Hispanic Student Alliance), and LGBTQ student organizations. For instance, as Mercedes noted above, after finding the Black Student Alliance she perceived a sense of belonging in "a community that understands." She went on to elaborate on how this social group was able to provide that sense of being understood:

> Like I said, going back to the Black Student Alliance, anytime you see African Americans, men and women, doing something positive, because you are the minority, it feels good. That's real, and so having that community that understands, because we grew up in a similar culture, because African American culture is something similar in ways. To have that, kind of like a comfort zone for you, is very important for any culture.

Like Mercedes, other students described their paths from diverse groups to more homogeneous groups based on identity or culture. For example, a less advantaged Asian student named Ines told me about the diverse friend group she became part of at the beginning of the year that along with, "my roommate Janelle, we have a [group] like the four of us: Kaylee's my best friend from high school. Then I met Gary through her." While this friend group had initially provided a supportive social environment, lately Ines had begun to have concerns:

> I think sometimes that I don't necessarily feel that I fit in with my friends always. Because there will be times when like Janelle and Gary will go to [the dining hall] without me… I think they just often aren't necessarily thinking about other people. Sometimes when I don't get invited it starts to feel like, "oh, maybe they don't necessarily like me," or like I'm not as friendly with them as I think that I am.

Eventually Ines decided to join the Chinese Student Association. "I'm also taking Chinese. One of the students in my class is, I think maybe events coordinator or something so she always announces when they have events. So I went to one last semester… I'm in the Facebook group now, so I get notifications when they have things." Ines later cited the Chinese Student Association as a place where she felt like she belonged, adding, "with the Chinese Student Association, when they were going over the things that I grew up with, I guess that made me feel like, 'Wow, this is what my culture is like.'"

In a similar way, Paul, a less advantaged Black student initially joined a religious group he heard about from a friend. While this group was in Paul's words, "heavily diverse" in terms of race and ethnicity, he eventually "kind of stopped going." While Paul noted vaguely that he "wasn't really feeling [the group]," when I probed further he elaborated, saying that it seemed

like the other members were not as interested in getting to know him. He claimed that while other students did not go out of their way to talk to him, he also took some of the blame, saying, "It was kind of on my side too for not actually talking… But it was the second week of the first semester. I was still trying to get comfortable with the campus life as well." He described feeling similarly "awkward" with another informal social group that had some "Asians, Latinos, or African Americans," but where "people from the White race [were] more dominant."

While Paul did not find a sense of belonging with either of these groups, he was able to begin taking part in the Black Student Alliance (BSA) with the help of a connector. Paul described this connector as, "a friend who goes here – he's a junior here, but we went to high school together… so that's how I kind of first found out about [the BSA]." Finding groups like the Black Student Alliance often proved to be a highly influential moment in the college experiences of marginalized students. For instance, Paul noted: "I know within the BSA organization I feel like easy. I can just go in there anytime and not feel restricted." He noted that at one point during the first semester, "I just got tired of school, but I couldn't go home, so I just would be able to go talk with them and hang out with them – just debrief."

For some students, identity-based or culturally-based groups provided a sense of belonging through a sense of "sameness" or shared experience. Prior research has confirmed the positive role played by identity-based groups in helping students adjust to college and create a network of peers who share their identity. In particular, this research finds that identity-based groups offer an important outlet for the development of cultural and/or racial identities, professional networks, and sometimes shelter from a "chilly" campus climate at predominately White institutions (Guiffrida 2003; Harper, Byars, and Jelke 2005; Harper and Quaye 2007; Sutton and Kimbrough 2001). Presented results contribute to this literature, illustrating a process

through which students often began by seeking belonging in more heterogeneous groups. However, for some REM students, identity-based groups offered the potential for finding a connection after diverse groups failed to provide enduring community.

CONCLUSION

Upon entering a new social landscape, students had to make a variety of decisions about how they would approach social involvement in college. While more socioeconomically advantaged students arrived at college ready to intentionally find and engage with social groups (sometimes having chosen to attend ESU because of specific opportunities for social involvement), less socioeconomically advantaged students often deployed a more haphazard approach to joining groups. These class-based differences produced two unique approaches through which students pursued connections in order to feel belonging at ESU. While more advantaged students entered social groups using a process of *strategic selection*, less advantaged students approached social involvement through a process characterized by *trial and error*.

Prior research has reported that less socioeconomically advantaged students encounter difficulties becoming socially involved in college (Armstrong and Hamilton 2013; Lee 2016; Stuber 2011; Walpole 2003), and the presented findings imply that this may in part result from the approaches utilized in pursuing social involvement. Moreover, presented findings complicate prior understandings of the factors influencing social involvement in college. Prior literature is embedded in the cultural capital tradition and thus emphasizes the role of class in shaping social involvement (e.g., Armstrong and Hamilton 2013; Stuber 2011). As the presented findings show, class is not the only factor related to students' experiences in the college social landscape.

Following the intersectional work of Collins (2009; Collins and Bilge 2016), presented findings illuminate variation by race and gender within class groups.

Whereas White male students frequently found welcoming communities in places where they shared connections with other members, female and REM students often encountered more difficult social terrain. Even in groups that held the promise of a connection based on shared interests or activities, many female and REM students found conflict and mistreatment – in their words "drama" – directed their way. More advantaged female and REM students were able to manage temporary bouts of marginalization by partitioning their social groups and fluctuating their level of involvement in each in order to avoid groups where they were currently being ostracized or targeted for mistreatment. On the other hand, less advantaged students from these demographic groups more frequently left formal organizations and informal friendship groups when they were marginalized in this way, looking for new social circles.

Presented results also show that simply examining the numbers of groups students participate in hides the complex underlying processes that lead students from different sociodemographic groups toward a particular configuration of social involvement. While existing research sees greater involvement as a positive sign of social integration (Astin 1984; Tinto 1987; 1993), the experiences of students in honing, partitioning, and haphazardly repeating "trials" complicate this understanding. Although some students involved in only one or two groups were struggling with a trial and error process to finding connections, others (namely more socioeconomically advantaged White male students) were honing in on the groups they found most enjoyable for high-intensity involvement. Conversely, some students involved in many groups (typically more advantaged female and REM students) dealt with frequent challenges. While McCabe (2016) has highlighted the way a "compartmentalized" social network

configuration is useful for providing different types of friendships, presented findings show that partitioning involvement in this way is also a protective strategy for students who encounter frequent mistreatment in their social groups.

For some REM students, more homogenous identity-based groups eventually offered feelings of belonging through cultural connections that were perceived to be durable. However, although identity-based groups provided a much needed source of support for marginalized students, nearly all students at some point attempted to integrate into one or more social groups with diverse membership, not based on shared cultural, racial, or ethnic identity. Therefore, it is worth examining what happens within these more diverse communities.

Finding a group formed around some sort of commonality offers a potential solution to the "connection" problem. Shortly after arriving in new groups students are able to clarify whether they do in fact share interests with others in the group. If such a connection is confirmed, students may remain in the group, and perhaps develop a sense that there is a fit between themselves and their peers. However, it is important to ask whether these shared connections are enough to provide belonging over the long run? Is a shared interest in volunteering, fitness, or shopping enough to sustain a sense of belonging? In the next chapter I take a closer look at these diverse groups to try to understand what it was like for students from a variety of social locations as they interacted with peers of different races, ethnicities, genders, and social class backgrounds within the same social groups.

CHAPTER 4

SELF-PRESENTATION, SOCIAL INCLUSION, AND BELONGING

Inside the residence hall lounge, the floor-to-ceiling windows let in a soft natural light, and in a rare moment of serious reflection, the students in the Learning Community were taking part in an activity where they shared their life goals with one another. A White student named Jamie, whose turn it was to speak, explained to the group that she wanted to become a kindergarten teacher. In the meantime, she was getting some hands-on experience serving as a classroom assistant at an after-school care program. Reaching into her faded pink handbag with a grin, Jamie pulled out what appeared to be three books. She passed the stack to Rhonda, who sat to her right, as she explained that two of these were picture books she read to the children at the program. The third was actually a photo album that had been given to her by the teacher she assisted. The album was filled with crayon-scrawled notes and pictures from the children. As students passed the books and album around the circle, Jamie concluded by pulling out a handful of sticker sheets. Holding them up she announced, "And I have stickers – I love to give [the children] these when they do a good job or for arts and crafts."

It was in moments like these, where students sought to portray themselves to their college peers, that the use of culture to facilitate social inclusion became highly visible. These students are engaging in practices that Goffman (1959) has described as "impression management." Perpetually cheerful with a distinctly southern style of speech and mannerisms, Jamie put forward a version of herself that was straightforward and simple: she was *the sort of person who cared*. She cared about children, her family, her boyfriend, as well as her peers in the Learning Community. Attentive, thoughtful, and kind, Jamie was someone other students could count on

for support at any time. Jamie frequently told stories of the volunteer work she did at the after-school program and the care she provided at home for her four younger siblings. For her classmates who were tired or overwhelmed, Jamie also offered support and a listening ear.

On this same day, a Black student named Andre sat across the circle from Jamie. Andre in many ways provided an illustrative foil for Jamie. Where she worked to show the group how much she cared, Andre demonstrated to his peers that he was unenthused and steady, going with the general flow of the group. When it was his turn to talk about his life goals, Andre spoke for less than a minute. He wanted to work in physical fitness, perhaps becoming a trainer. Even as he described fitness as a passion, Andre spoke in a quiet, even tone. He was calm and collected, a consistent, but quiet presence in the group. While individuals exhibiting such behavior are often thought of as shy or "introverted" (Collins 2004), Andre, like Jamie, was in fact conveying an intentional style of self-presentation. Describing himself to me later in the year, Andre said, "I'm really cool. You won't catch me going out of the box. I stay cool, give a cool answer, give a cool response to whatever you say. I don't give too much most of the time."

Both Jamie and Andre had found a group of students with whom they connected over a shared passion for social justice, and this connection provided most students in the community with a sense of "fit" or belonging with their peers. However, in addition to being a member of the community, Jamie and Andre had also come to occupy very specific roles within the group. These roles were performed through distinct, simplistic styles of self-presentation. Jamie took on the role of a *caregiver*, characterized by a traditionally feminine, warm and nurturing style of self-presentation. Meanwhile, Andre performed the role of an *associate*, taking part in group activities, going with the flow, and exuding a calm, quiet presence.

Students' styles of self-presentation became important in a variety of ways, perhaps most notably for how they linked to the ways students felt like they mattered (or not) to their peers. Because of her contributions as a caregiver, Jamie's friends often articulated appreciation or used gestures to convey gratitude, helping Jamie to feel like a valued member of the group. When reflecting on her place within the Learning Community, she noted:

> I definitely feel like the people that I've met value me... I feel like friendships [with other students in the Learning Community] are one of the most important things to me because I see them as my family and there are times when they are like, "Thank you. I love you. You're awesome" and those make me definitely feel like I belong and I have a place.

Through her role as a caregiver, Jamie came to see herself as a central member of the Learning Community – a group she perceived to be like "family." The appreciation her friends articulated served to enhance her sense of belonging with the group. In other words, for Jamie this external validation of mattering acted as an amplifier for the sense of belonging she had begun to develop through connections and shared interests with her peers.

The same could not be said for Andre. Despite his consistent presence and willingness to follow the general direction of the group, his peers did not express appreciation for him. While Andre's style of self-presentation allowed him to share a sense of commonality with others who were focused on social justice, he remained marginal to the group. Near the end of the spring semester, Andre confessed to me that "sometimes I don't feel like I belong [in the Learning Community], like it's not my group of people." However, he had trouble identifying why he had this sense, given that in his words, "they're not mean people and nothing [bad] really happened." Andre noted that he "didn't really get that far" in getting to know others, and that of the 40 students on the floor, Nina was really the only other student with whom he felt a sense of being "close." While the frequent expressions of appreciation that Jamie received from other students helped her to feel sustained belonging in the group, Andre could only recall one person – not

another student but the Learning Community course instructor – articulating appreciation for his presence in the group.

For students like Jamie and Andre, even after they solved the problem of "connection," locating groups where they shared interests and activities with other members, their search for belonging was in many ways incomplete. As the previous chapter illustrates, many students left social groups or momentarily had their sense of belonging called into question due to experiences that occurred within these groups. Once commonality and fit was established with their peers, students in diverse social groups often turned to look for external validation of their belonging. Understanding how and why this occurs requires considering the ways impression management links to the monitoring of external assessments of value.

Goffman (1967) defined a "line" as "a pattern of verbal and nonverbal acts," through which an individual "expresses his [sic] view of the situation and through this his evaluation of the participants, especially himself" (p. 5), and he described the corresponding concept of "face" as "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself [sic] by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact," (p. 5). In other words, Goffman imagines that the impressions individuals create of themselves within a particular situation say something about how they conceive of themselves, and that in doing so they simultaneously seek to establish a particular "social value" or worth for themselves.

In this chapter, I draw on Goffman's (1959) framework for examining the presentation of self in social groups and its relation to value or mattering in these groups. In particular, this chapter examines within-group dynamics to understand how students' styles of self-presentation in social groups related to their sense of mattering within the groups they joined. I illuminate five different roles that students took on, and their perceived value (or lack thereof) to students'

peer groups. I also examine the ways these roles and their corresponding styles of self-presentation were both raced and gendered.

BEYOND CONNECTIONS

The experiences of Jamie and Andre, were illustrative of a broader phenomenon. As students interacted with others in diverse social groups, there was a pervasive strategy of deploying simplistic, commonly recognized forms of self-presentation. Through their interactions with peers, students socially constructed styles of self-presentation corresponding to particular roles in the social groups they joined. These roles are made up of what Goffman (1967) describes as "lines" – a script or consistent style of self-presentation. The simplistic modes of self-presentation students adopted seemed to serve a function of allowing them to integrate into new and diverse groups where they did not yet know others well. In essence, these roles acted as a short-cut to fitting in within a new environment, by enacting a safe and commonly recognized social performance. There were five clear styles of self-presentation, corresponding with five distinct roles occupied by students. These roles included (1) associates, (2) caregivers, (3) entertainers, (4) leaders, and (5) educators.

One of the reasons social roles are noteworthy is the predictable behavior they produce (Biddle 1986, p. 68). Being situated within a specific role means consistently displaying the style of self-presentation expected for occupants of that role. Notably, self-presentation was one of two main dimensions that shaped these roles. The five roles were not only performed in recognizable ways, but they also elicited patterned responses from others who attached value to the corresponding functions of each role. It was the interaction between self-presentation and the way these performances were viewed and valued by others that facilitated the social construction

of the five roles. Table 1 offers a brief overview of each of the roles, addressing their characteristic styles of self-presentation and the corresponding value of each.

In addition to self-presenting within the confines of one of these roles in the groups I observed, it was clear from students' descriptions of their involvement in a variety of groups that when they were members of multiple formal and informal social groups, they adopted the same role across all of them. In fact, of the 138 students who took part in this study, it was possible to categorize 128 (93%) clearly within one of these roles. Overall, the role of associate was the most commonly adopted at 38% of the sample, with a plurality of the members in each group taking on this role. After associates, students occupying the caregiver role were the second most common, with 20% of students presenting within this role. Finally, the remainder of the participants included 16% leaders, 14% entertainers, and 6% educators.

TABLE 1: SUMMARY OF THE FIVE ROLES

Role:	Self-Presentation:	Value:
Associates	Following directives, quiet presence, existing on the periphery of groups.	Often unnoticed or unremarked on. In most instances peers do not express value or appreciation for associates.
Caregivers	Caring, kind, warm, thoughtful, supportive, nurturing.	Valued for offering care, support, understanding, and empathy to peers in their groups.
Entertainers	Fun, funny, joking, carrying out pranks, telling stories, performing or doing tricks.	Occasionally acknowledged with laughter or attention when telling a joke or performing for the group. In most instances peers do not express value or appreciation for entertainers.
Educators	Intelligent, smart, wise, sharing knowledge and insight, engaging in intellectual discussion.	Valued for the ideas, perspective, and knowledge they offer their groups.
Leaders	Confident, assertive, giving directives, planning and carrying out events.	Valued for the direction they provide in shaping and executing group activities.

The distinctness of each of these roles was evident in my observations throughout the year. However, it is also worth noting that students themselves recognized these roles, using many of the simplistic, unidimensional modifiers in the table above to characterize their classmates. For instance, when Carol described her closest friend group, she referred to her three friends as, "the mom of the group," "the most out there person I have ever met… just funny [and] really quirky," and "really quiet… kind of lurk[ing] in the background." Zach described the members of his formal and informal friend groups in a comparable way, talking about some friends who were "fun," some who were "interesting," and some who were "just around." He described his own role in the group as the one who is usually "planning everything." Finally, Annette described herself in relation to the other students in her informal friend group saying:

> Jeremy and I are definitely *the planners*. With that, we also butt heads sometimes because we want to plan two different things so we're like, "Wait, no what about this one or this one?" Justin and Sarah are *very passive*. Both will just kind of go with anything. Sam will help to *give ideas*. [emphasis added].

Such descriptions were common among students. It was as if in the minds of their peers, these students had been distilled from complex people into ideal types. Caregivers were never described as "wise" or "taking charge;" and conversely, educators were not usually described as "funny" or "kind." These simplistic styles of self-presentation came to be seen as the whole of the person in question.

As Jamie's example at the beginning of the chapter illustrates, some of the five roles linked directly to a contribution to the group that carried social value. Value was often signaled by expressions of appreciation or positive attention. Charles Derber (1979) has described attention as "a unique social resource" (p. 2), which is given like a "gift," making social life possible. Students occupying certain roles were frequently the recipients of the "gift of attention" (Derber 1979, p. 38-39), as they gained recognition of their contributions to the group. The

recognition of their peers in the form of expressions of value or appreciation contributed to students' sense of mattering. In effect, positive attention served to center students within groups; as the object of their peers' appreciation and affection, it was possible to conceive of oneself as a central or important member of the group. Further, perceiving oneself to matter – by feeling like a central, important, or valued member – functioned to amplify students' overall sense of belonging in the social groups they joined.

However, other roles more often experienced the converse, "invisibility," which "occurs when the norms of face-to-face behavior offer insufficient protection against being ignored or overlooked [and] the 'invisible' person does not gain even the minimum attention required to feel that his or her presence has been acknowledged and established" (Derber 1979, p. 15). In this way, neglect could serve to marginalize some members of a group, despite sharing a common interest.

Below I explore each of the five roles in greater detail. The discussion of each role highlights the style of self-presentation adopted by those occupying it as well as how this performance was responded to by other members of social groups, unequally distributing feelings of value and mattering. I also address how the performance of these roles was associated with students' sociodemographic characteristics, with race and gender intersecting to shape students' options when taking on a style of self-presentation. As the previous chapter documents, social class was highly influential in shaping strategies in joining groups. However, once within groups, social class was supplanted by race and gender, which played the primary differentiating role.

THE FIVE ROLES

Associates

Carter, introduced in the previous chapter, attended his first Cardio Club meeting during the first week of the fall semester. His style of self-presentation within the group clearly fit the parameters of the associate role. The first mention of Carter in my fieldnotes failed to even make note of his name, as he did not introduce himself to the group as many of the other students did. Instead, he simply showed up for a practice and ran with the fastest, 8:00-minute mile pace group. As that day's practice concluded and the students were cooling down, I took note that "one of the runners, a White male student whose name I didn't catch, seemed to be new to the group." I had not noticed Carter with the Cardio Club before, and as far as I could recall he had not spoken at the beginning of the practice. In fact, it was Drew, the president of Cardio Club, who brought him to my attention. I heard Drew telling Carter about the club's competition schedule for the fall, something that he often did with new students who he perceived to be 'fast enough' to compete in some of the endurance races. Carter, who was thin with a small frame, stood a bit awkwardly at the top of a short flight of stairs with his hands on his hips, elbows jutting out to the side. Drew had momentarily stepped away from the main circle of students completing their usual cool-down rituals to join Carter on the stairway. During his conversation with Drew, Carter mostly listened, speaking only when Drew asked a direct question or replying with a brief, affirmative "yeah." As I was reflecting on my notes after practice, it occurred to me that this may not even have been Carter's first day with the club, as he could have been present at previous practices and simply avoided showing up in my fieldnotes.

Even after I took note of his presence, Carter often seemed to escape my attention during the first month of the semester. His ability to blend into the background was apparent in one of

my observations later that same month, during a practice where I ran with the 8:00-minute pace group on a six-mile run to and around a wooded trail at a local park. Midway through the run the students began boasting about difficult workouts or races they had done outdoors in snow and thunder storms. This sort of discussion was a common occurrence where students could connect over their shared experiences with cardio fitness. Out of the six students running in the group that day, I noticed that Carter was the only one who did not engage in this conversation. A student named Ace was the last to join in, recounting a time he had run in inclement weather as well, so that Carter and I were the only non-participants in the rhetorical bonding ritual. It was difficult to tell if he was too shy to contribute an example of his own or whether he simply did not have an experience to share. Nonetheless, it was clear that he was paying attention to the other students' stories, and he would occasionally contribute an encouraging "wow" or "oh man!"

This was my only observation about Carter that day; the rest of the fieldnote I wrote after the practice almost reads as if he was not there. Importantly, I also noticed that I was not the only one guilty of such oversights. When talking one-on-one or with smaller groups of students, I often asked for individuals' interpretation of events that had happened with the group. It was very common for those who occupied the associate role to be left out of recounts of events, even when I knew for a fact that these students had been present. In group interactions, it sometimes became evident that others – even the officers of these groups – had yet to connect with or even learn the names of many associates.

Students in the associate role existed quietly and attentively on the periphery of the groups of which they were members. In a meeting they could often be found near the edges of the room or sitting in the back, and at a practice for the Cardio Club associates often stationed

themselves on the outer edges of the group circles that would usually form during warm-ups and cool-downs. Shortly after my arrival at a Volunteer Collective meeting one evening, I took note of these spatial relationships. A student named Linda came into the room and took a seat at the table next to Beth, who served as President of the Volunteer Collective. The three of us began talking about projects we were working on individually and as a group. A student named George showed up next carrying snacks, and sat down to Beth's right. A few more students arrived, including John and Amber, who both occupied the associate role. Unlike the others, John and Amber sat at the table behind the one Beth, Linda, and George occupied, even though there were still three seats left at the first table. They did not talk to one another, but instead turned to listen to Beth, despite the fact that her back was towards them.

This arrangement was fairly typical for associates – in effect, they were close enough to hear and respond when needed, but not spatially central in the group. Associates were characterized by their quiet presence; they usually followed directives, taking part in group activities without drawing much attention to themselves. Associates described their role in social groups using phrases like, "laid-back," "chill," "quiet," and "just a regular old member." A Black student named Paige elaborated on her self-presentation as an associate saying, "I'm not a person to do a lot of talking. Really, I just listen, I just really keep to myself. If I have something to say, I put in my input and then that's it. I'm just the one that's always engaged, so I really don't talk. I just listen. I absorb information." While Paige acknowledged that she would speak if she had "something to say," for the most part, associates emphasized that they spoke infrequently, instead acting as engaged listeners.

Similarly, Rebecca, a White student who occupied the associate role, noted, "Sometimes if I have something I really want to say, then I say it. Otherwise I just kind of like to listen to

everyone else." Their descriptions and my own observations made apparent that associates rarely had a substantive impact on the day-to-day activities of the groups to which they belonged. Instead, they were liminal figures in their social circles, who could even step out of group gatherings without being noticed. For instance, a Black female student named Grace described how she could move in and out of her informal friend group: "When we're all hanging out, I'll just kind of stand to the side and listen… I'll probably just listen and watch because there's a lot going on, or I'll probably leave."

Their nondescript social performance made it possible to overlook the presence of associates. However, given the nature of my study, whenever possible I went out of my way to talk with these students, trying to interact with them as much as I did with students occupying other roles. When I was able to converse with associates, I found that their styles of self-presentation were nuanced in subtle ways. Some gave off an air of polite amicability, while others seemed skeptical or aloof. Regardless of these degrees of variation however, most of the time they appeared generically reserved but responsive. When directives or instructions came, these students were ready to comply. As Nina put it, "People have said so many times that I'm a very go-with-the-flow person, which I am. I really am, like 'all right, let's do it.'… but I go with the flow." Nina emphasized that while others might view her passive approach to interaction as evidence that she did not care, this was not in fact the case. She clarified, "but I do care, I care a lot." Rather, as a "go-with-the-flow person," Nina tended to let others take initiative for dictating group activities and making decisions.

Associates were no less active or involved on-campus than students occupying other roles. For instance, Rebecca, quoted above, was actually a member of both the Learning Community and the Volunteer Collective. She attended nearly every class, meeting, and event

for the two groups. Rebecca displayed a quiet positivity, often smiling, but rarely speaking. I had seen her with the Learning Community as well as at the Volunteer Collective meetings (she was the only student in more than one of the groups I observed), but we did not discuss this until much later in the year. However, I did hear Rebecca mention her membership in the Volunteer Collective one day to some of her Learning Community classmates during a small group discussion. The students were instructed to have a discussion with their peers about how active they were in community service or promoting social justice. There were six students involved in the small group discussion I was observing, and they went around the circle, each offering some input, with most students making a list of the ways they contributed to various causes.

When it came time for Rebecca to speak, she told the group that she was passionate about "hunger" and "education." She wanted to be involved in both of those causes, so she volunteered at the local food kitchen and noted that she was "also in the Volunteer Collective – it's a really good group." Rebecca's tone was positive, and her expression earnest as she made this statement. It was clear that she valued her membership in the Volunteer Collective, and had a sense of connection with the mission and values of other members of the group. Nonetheless, at meetings it seemed that others rarely took note of her presence. I often observed her sitting on the outside edge of the same table along the back wall at the Volunteer Collective meetings, and I realized after hearing her talk in the small group during the Learning Community class that this may have been the first time I had heard her speak – in the middle of the second month of the fall semester – aside from the first class meeting when all of the students introduced themselves.

Connection without Mattering

Notably, the functional invisibility of associates limited their sense of mattering in the group. Given that others took little note of associates, the lack of positive attention they received

was also reflected in the degree to which they perceived themselves as being marginal to the groups they joined. For instance, a White female student named Gwen described her experience being a member of the campus student tour guide group:

> So with [ESU Tour Guides] I don't talk a lot because I kind of stay in the background in that sense. I just kind of don't want to be brought into attention… I'm not part of any of the larger known cliques so I don't fit in. I tried to become friends with [one of the cliques]. One of them I was pretty good friends with at the beginning but it just didn't work. It was like I was always an afterthought for them.

Although Gwen felt she had made a concerted effort to become closer with some of the members of ESU Tour Guides, her sense that she was "always an afterthought for them," called into question whether she mattered to her peers. She even noted that there were moments during the second semester when she still felt like, "[the other members] didn't really recognize who I was," despite the fact that she had been part of the group for over six months. Although associates still described themselves as "members" of groups, their sense of being valued or appreciated was typically limited. Other students did not go to great lengths to include them as central components of the group, and when signals of belonging were distributed (literally and metaphorically), associates were often left out.

Joey, a White male student in the Cardio Club, described his role as an associate, saying: "I try to be a good running partner, just someone to pace with… I try to be a good friend. I try to participate as much as possible." Later in the interview I asked Joey if he had a memory of a time he felt appreciated or valued. He replied saying: "I can't really say I have. Again, I don't really have a lot of attention on me normally. I'm just here to be a supporting role type person." Notably, Joey was not the only associate who was unable to think of an instance where he felt like he was valued or appreciated in his social circle. A Latina associate named Wendy responded similarly, saying, "I don't know if there is anything specific." Likewise, a White

student named Debbie was unable to recall feeling valued, saying, “Hmm… Um…Yeah, I don't know,” and an Asian student named Chase looked sullen as he confessed, “Not during this freshman year. I didn't have any experience like that.”

Additional insight into the undervaluing of associates was offered by a White student named Quinn. When asked about times she had felt valued or appreciated among her peers, Quinn responded:

> I don't know really. I can't really say. Maybe when we have floor meetings, and they take the time to ask everyone how they're doing, if there's anything that they need. But for the most part, I don't think there's been any particular experience that's made me feel [valued or appreciated].

Quinn’s informal friend group all lived on her residence hall floor, and they were in frequent contact. However, she was unable to recall a time when they had made her feel valued. The closest she had come to feeling appreciated was during floor meetings, where everyone present was given a structured opportunity to express how they were doing and “if there’s anything that they need[ed].” While her friend group was present during these meetings because of their co-residence on the residence hall floor, it is worth pointing out that this structured opportunity to feel appreciated came from her resident advisor, who led the floor meetings, not one of the students in her informal friend group. This was a fairly common occurrence for associates. While many were able to point to moments where they felt valued in the classroom setting or with a faculty or staff member, such feelings in social groups were rare.

While the quotes above represent students’ own perceptions and recollections of not mattering or being undervalued by their peers, through my ethnographic observations, I was able to triangulate these claims. Put simply, others rarely seemed to value the presence or contributions of associates. As noted above, because of their unobtrusive style of self-presentation, many associates often went unnoticed or at least unremarked on by others in their

groups. It was clear in my observations and in associates' own words during interviews that such experiences limited their sense of mattering in groups. For instance, these students used phrases like "*just* a member" and "*just* participating," to minimize their contributions to the groups with which they were involved. As Gwen noted, being an associate meant that it was easy to feel like "an afterthought" to other members of a group. While most of these students found a social connection in some group or groups – and they often took pride in their membership – associates recognized that they were not the most central members of these groups. While following directives was not usually very taxing, it was also not as rewarding as the other styles of self-presentation could be.

Caregivers

Jamie, described in the opening of this chapter, was emblematic of the caregiver role, which was characterized by a gentle, warm style of self-presentation and behaviors that served to care for and provide support to others. In the spring semester I had the opportunity to sit down with Jamie at the ESU library for an in-depth interview. During our conversation, she described her role within the Learning Community, saying:

> I'm the mom of the group. I like to make people feel loved. That's my thing. I'm a touchy-feely kind of person. I'll hug you. I'll tell you I love you. I'll give you snacks. If you need band-aids, I have band-aids. I have an extra pair of shoes. I have everything. I'm like a pharmacy. I have Tylenol, Benadryl, whatever you need I have it. It's just cause I have so many younger brothers and sisters. I'm used to it. I'm just pretty emotional too. I latch on. If they're nervous, I feel it.

As we talked, Jamie presented artifacts to demonstrate the veracity of her claims to being the "mom of the group." Opening her bag, Jamie's pulled out a box of band-aids, a bottle of Tylenol, a packet of Benadryl, and a pair of flats. Illness and injury – or the occasional loss of footwear – could strike unexpectedly, and if they did, Jamie was prepared to offer support to her friends whenever they might need it.

The care Jamie provided for her peers functioned to offer support and understanding to those in need, and it extended well beyond kind words and gestures. When Nina used the group messenger to inform the Learning Community that she had sprained her wrist, multiple students responded to offer their sympathy. However, Jamie was the first to reply with a specific offer of help, writing, “I got you! I’ll make you food. I love you.” Jamie followed through on this offer, going out of her way to make sure Nina was well-fed while her mobility was limited.

Jamie’s friends in the Learning Community recognized her role in the group and often recounted times when they had looked to her for care. After benefitting from Jamie’s nurturing and cooking skills during her injury, Nina described Jamie as “the sweetest person ever.” Similarly, Jenna told me about the day-to-day support she received from Jamie:

> Jamie in the morning is like, “Jenna, I have sweet tea.” She'll bring home donuts for me… Jamie’s done a lot of stuff for me, that's been really nice. Jamie’s taken me to the hospital and stuff. There's a huge level of trust… Jamie is such a mom. She wants to parent me, but in a nice way. She's not one of those, “Oh you shouldn't be doing that.” She's like, “Are you okay?”… Also, she cooks and cleans as a stress reliever.

Due to her contributions, Jenna recognized Jamie as a central member of the social group within the Learning Community. The “huge level of trust” she described stemmed from the sort of intimacy that was produced through caring for others in such significant ways. Cooking, cleaning, and being there to take her to the hospital were the types of care Jenna associated with a mother.

Along with Jamie and Jenna multiple other students described the caregiver role as “the mom of the group,” with several describing themselves or their friends as group “moms” or less frequently, the gender-neutral descriptor “parents.” For example, after describing how she helps some of her friends with their homework and offers rides when they need it, Dara summed up her role noting: “I’m the mom of my friends.” Similarly, Carol said:

> Alexis, she has the car, she's the mom. That's just like all I can describe her as, she's just like the mom of the group. She's like, "Okay guys, we're going to Target." Or she's like, "Oh you need to talk to your roommate if you're having a problem." She's just like the one guiding us through everything. If we're stressed, she's like, "It's okay, it's okay." I'm in Chemistry and she took Chemistry last semester, and she's like, "I can help you, it's fine." And she's just like that support, that mom. She's that constant person you know you can go to and she's got you.

Carol's description, like Jamie's, reinforces the depth of commitment required to embody the caregiver role. To demonstrate their support, these students were constantly on-call for their friends, ready to come to the rescue should they have roommate conflicts, need help in class, or a ride to the store. When performed successfully, students occupying this role were also described by their peers as "caring," "thoughtful," and "kind" – they were the sorts of people who were perceived as putting others' needs ahead of their own.

Unlike associates, who in occupying their role only needed to follow the basic rules of the group and respond to the directives of its leader(s), caregivers were expected to be more proactive. Rather than waiting for a friend to ask for help, caregivers had to be constantly vigilant, recognizing and even anticipating the needs of others. Providing support and knowing the "right things" to say at the "right time" were important elements of this form of self-presentation. An Asian student named Kent talked about his relationship with an informal group of friends on his residence hall floor:

> I'm empathetic in the sense that I can understand what's bugging a person… When I'm helping other people, I sort of know what to say and when to say it… One of my friends on my floor named Annie was going through some issues just with family and just dealing with people at college… She'll go through times where she just wants to talk to somebody and you know... Most people, in my experience with helping people out and dealing with people that are going through a rough time, most people just want to be heard… I try to be the most helpful person I can. I get a kick out of helping people. I like volunteering and I like being there for people, so I just want to help out I guess.

While proactive in their efforts to be nurturing, caregivers were cautious not to be perceived as controlling. For instance, Jenna was clear in pointing out that Jamie, "wants to parent me, but in

a nice way. She's not one of those, ‘Oh you shouldn't be doing that.’ She's like, ‘Are you okay?’” Notably, Jenna’s quote illuminates a key feature of the caregiver role. While students who self-presented in this way were expected to be nurturing, it was important that they not be perceived as “bossy,” or judgmental. Rather than telling others what they “should” do, caregivers were supposed to offer care without control. Another White student named Janice likewise described her friends from her Bible study group who took on the caregiver role saying: “They're really good about being like, ‘What do you need?’ And not trying to act like they know what to do, but just being like, ‘How can I help you? What do you need from me?’”

Further, the quotes presented above also demonstrate the ways that being a caregiver did not only mean providing physical care – in the form of band aids, shoes, medication, or rides from one place to another – but also emotional care. Throughout the year, I witnessed multiple instances in the Learning Community, the Volunteer Collective, and the Cardio Club where caregivers would comfort another student who was upset, using a soothing tone to console or just providing a listening ear as a student shared their troubles. This sometimes took the form of helping to relieve stress, as Carol noted above when describing Alexis. Jamie pointed to a similar phenomenon when she mentioned, “I'm just pretty emotional too. I latch on. If they're nervous, I feel it.” In short, it was not enough just to offer a bandaid. A caregiver also had to act as a source of empathy, feeling the emotions of her peers.

In other instances, students talked about paying attention to emotional needs and offering a listening ear. A multiracial female student named Becky was characterized by herself and her peers in the Learning Community as a caregiver. One of Becky’s friends told me a story about a time when she was sick and Becky brought her food and a heating pad; as Becky described the

role she occupied in the group however, she also moved beyond talking about the provision of physical care:

> I'm very empathetic… I take loyalty very seriously and I'm very protective of people that I know… With everybody on the floor, I will go out of my way to help them if I can… I try to watch out for people. I try to help them with their work of ir they need food or something to drink, I'll have that stuff. Just being aware of what's going on and heling with any stuff emotionally and talking to people.

As Becky points out, having empathy and listening to her peers was an important emotional component of her contribution to the group.

Other examples of the way caregivers supported their peers emotionally included helping to boost their friends' confidence or egos. For instance, an Asian female student named Cara occupied a caregiver role in Cardio Club. Often adopting a supportive, maternal style of self-presentation, Cara embodied an ethic of caring. In addition to providing support to the newer and less experienced team members, who Cara would run with so that they were not left behind, Cara also frequently offered encouragement to the faster runners on the team. Before races she worked to build them up emotionally, saying encouraging things to support their confidence. Students could rely on an ego boost from Cara as she often verbally emphasized how "fast" or "strong" the others were. Additionally, Cara was the only member of the group who ever seemed to notice or comment on the absence of others. When one of the students was out with the flu for several weeks, it was Cara who eventually inquired about her whereabouts.

Given the well-established findings of studies on caregiving and gender (e.g. Gerstel 2000; Pavalko and Woodbury 2000; Wharton 2009; Zimmerman, Litt, and Bose 2006), it is perhaps unsurprising that caregivers were primarily female students. The caregiver role was clearly gendered, with references to "group moms" being explicitly coded as female. Additionally, the self-presentation expected from students who would be attentive to others'

needs, offering empathy and support without making demands, also relied on traditionally feminine styles of gender performance. While Kent, described above, provided an example of a male student who occupied the caregiver role, he was certainly the exception rather than the rule; of 27 students in the caregiver role, 26 were female. Additionally, in terms of the racial distribution of caregivers, 17 were REM students and 10 were White students. While there were more REM caregivers, this is in part attributable to female REM students being the largest gender/race group in the sample. Overall, female students occupied the caregiver role at comparable rates (approximately 30% for White female students and approximately 40% for REM female students).

Mattering through Care

Although they gave a great deal to others, caregivers also received something in return. Adopting the caregiver role typically conferred a sense of mattering on the students who acted as caregivers, reinforcing and magnifying their sense of belonging. While being a caregiver required more work than being an associate, it also served a function that was valued by other students in the group. For instance, Janice, quoted above, described the appreciation she had for several of the students in her Bible study group who occupied the caregiver role, noting that they were:

> So supportive and so encouraging. I was like, “Whoa. I've never had that before.” That was really cool. They're really good listeners. [The caregivers are] always really quick to be like, “Here, I have tissues. Do you need a hug?” Really good about asking, “What do you need? What can I do?” These girls would be like, "What can I do? What do you need me to do?” They're really good about being like, “What do you need?” And not trying to act like they know what to do, but just being like, “How can I help you? What do you need from me?” Which is priceless.

Janice not only appreciated the contributions of caregivers in her group, but she went as far as to describe them as “priceless.”

Caregivers received signals of appreciation in words of thanks, a smile, or sometimes a tangible expression of gratitude. For instance, Jamie told me a story about a time when she was recognized by her friends for the care she provided:

> There was one night and it's happened a couple times but this time I remember in particular, where they went out and they were doing drugs. They were drinking. People were throwing up. No one wanted to take care of them. But, I went and I sat everyone down in Bernie's room. They all had their water and we made sure they had some crackers… I remember that Bernie's roommate was having a really hard time and I'm actually really close with him because I'm there a lot obviously. But, he cried and was like, "You're my Momma, I love you. Thank you for taking care of me." And it just made me ... I felt very sad but I felt very happy at the same time that he appreciated what I was doing and it wasn't for nothing. Then people on the floor actually wrote me a letter. A little thank you card, like "thank you for not letting us die." I was like, "I got you, anytime."

In this instance, Jamie received both verbal expressions of love and appreciation from the students she cared for, as well as a thank you card.

Rather than just being a member of the group, caregivers perceived themselves to be *needed*. The support they provided was often intimate, conferring feelings of closeness with others (see also, Clark 1997), and it was when others were in a time of need that caregivers really shone. After I asked Beverly if she could recall a time when she felt valued or appreciated, she described an experience caring for her roommate, who was part of her informal residence hall friend group, during an injury:

> My roommate is a dance major for the school. She's a ballerina and she's from Massachusetts. She fell down a flight of stairs and tore three ligaments in her foot. She was a mess to say the least because she's here to dance and they're telling her she's not going to be able to dance for six months, probably will need surgery. I feel like I felt really useful at that time to be a supportive friend to her, just as supportive as I could be because it wasn't good news… Because she's from Massachusetts, she's from so far that her family can't be here for her as much as they want to be… So there's just some things that she can't really -- we live on the third floor. There's no elevators, so she has to climb those stairs and sometimes she gets up the stairs and she's exhausted. It's a lot on her foot and then her foot hurts. I try to do a lot more of the labor stuff. If we have to do anything or if she needs anything I'll go get it for her because once she's in the room I know she's exhausted. Plus, physical therapy, I went through that in high school. That's exhausting.

As Beverly noted, this sort of experience made her feel useful. Having empathy for her roommate also gave her a sense that the two of them were connected. Their shared experiences in physical therapy offered a way for them to bond as Beverly provided care.

Caregivers were recognized by their peers as full members of the group and were frequently rewarded with expressions of their worth to the group. Sometimes these expressions took the form of kind words or a note of appreciation. Jenna shared one such example with me. After she helped Charlotte, a student who was struggling to fit in, Nina recognized her value as a caregiver:

> Nina texted me and it was the nicest thing anyone's ever said to me I feel like. She was like, oh my gosh, I'll find it, because actually I wanted to quote her [Jenna pulls her phone out of her bag]. Okay, she literally sent me a text out of nowhere on Wednesday, last week at 9:12, I was on a bus. She's like, "You're such a thoughtful person… I've never met someone that cares as much as you. I just want to tell you that." I was like, "Well thanks. That's really nice." She's like, "Charlotte told me how you talked about her to the [sorority members to help her make friends]. Not many people care enough about their friends to talk about them like that, and help them out. It's just a really admirable quality."

By recognizing Jenna's value as a caring friend, Nina had amplified Jenna's sense of belonging in the Learning Community. While she had several difficult experiences fitting in with her peers in the community, at the time of our interview, Jenna told me about her interactions with Nina as well as some of the other student members, which made her feel belonging more frequently with the group. She elaborated, "That makes me feel good too -- makes me feel like I'm being noticed and stuff."

Similarly, Patricia described feeling valued for her contributions to a religious group where she helped by preparing food and setting up for the meetings, and Becky from the Learning Community recalled the community's fall retreat. At the event, the group took part in an activity where students would close their eyes as their instructor read descriptors or qualities

of individuals, and other students would tap the shoulder of those to whom they believed the descriptor applied. When the instructor said "Touch somebody on their arm if you think that they're kind," several students walked up and patted Becky's shoulders. Several months later, Becky told me that this moment stood out in her mind as a time when she felt that people were grateful for her presence in the group.

However, Becky's experience also illustrated the ways that drawing a sense of worth from the provision of care could have downsides as well. While the caregiver role often evoked external validation from others that served to amplify students' sense of belonging, there was a significant amount of complexity here. For instance, Becky noted that sometimes offering care without recognition was difficult:

> I feel occasionally like I'm being taken advantage of. I feel like people take advantage – even some of my close friends. Sometimes that's just a little frustrating. They'll be like, "Do you have any snacks? Do you have anything? Can I get some of this or some medicine?" I'm always like, "Yeah, sure. Don't worry about it." [They ask] "Can you do this for me? Can you do that for me?" I don't like saying no.

In these instances, caregivers like Becky started to wonder if they were truly valued members of their groups or if they were simply being taken advantage of for their kindness.

Additionally, occupying the caregiver role in a group frequently meant that less time was available for attending to one's own needs, and when fellow students needed help, caregivers were expected to drop what they were doing to prioritize the wellbeing of others. In my interview with Jenna, she told me about a time when she was called out of class to offer care:

> Tyler Kavalier, this man got so sick. He got the stomach flu for three days, he's a junior. He's a junior and he's the biggest bitch ever when he's sick. I remember he called me… Tyler called me out of my three o'clock econ class and was like, "I need you to come home." He was that sick. I went to [the dining hall], I brought him bananas and bread, and apple juice. I was literally babying him.

While being called out of class to provide care is a more extreme example, the time-sensitive demands caregivers experienced often required them to put the good of others above their own wellbeing. Caregivers frequently described losing valuable hours of study time and sleep as they were called on to offer care for sick, stressed, or intoxicated peers.[18]

Entertainers

Nick, a Latino male student in the Cardio Club, illustrated the mix of amusing physicality and jokes that were often employed by students who occupied the entertainer role. During the third week of the semester, one of his performances during a training run stood out. After the first portion of our run around campus, we turned down a side road with less traffic. The path we were following dropped us in the center of the road, shaded by a canopy of trees, lined on either side by rows of eclectic, older homes. The group had been fairly quiet on the first segment of the run, but now Nick took a few opportunities to evoke laughs from the other runners. First he began jumping to grab tree branches along the edge of the road. He got an impressed "woah!" from James and the rest of the group laughed.

As a car approached the group from behind Joey called for us to move over. Nick began running faster, but stayed in the middle of the road in front of the car, causing it to slow down and blocking it from passing by. Again a few of the other students laughed. As we ran Nick continued to make jokes and entertain the group with stories of his adventures training and

[18] These students often described offering what Vander Ven (2011) calls "drunk support," protecting and nurturing inebriated friends at parties or upon their return to residence halls. This is a burden that comes to be expected by students as research demonstrates that "people getting sick," is reported by most students as a likely outcome of college parties (Jakeman, Silver, and Molasso 2014; Jakeman, McClure, and Silver 2015). As students return to their residence halls inebriated, caregivers are the default providers of drunk support.

racing cross country in high school. Notably, Nick's performance was a mixture of oral storytelling and jokes coupled with physical feats to offer diversion to his peers.

Students who self-presented in this way were described by others as being "fun" or "funny." A subtle range existed within their performances, where entertainers could sometimes be "witty" (when their efforts manifested in clever jokes or elaborate pranks) or alternatively "goofy" (as students who used self-deprecating humor often were described). Sometimes both traits were combined in the same entertainer's style of self-presentation. For example, an Asian female student named Lynn described herself as having a dry sense of humor that created situations that were simultaneously awkward and humorous. Lynn added that her roommate concurred with her description of this entertaining style of self-presentation, recalling, "I remember my roommate she told me that, in the beginning, she told me that I'm awkward, but I'm like a funny kind of awkward." While she acknowledged her own humorous brand of awkwardness, Lynn's efforts to entertain were also sometimes elaborately planned. Recreating a prank she had seen on a TV show, Lynn spent hours molding a coffee mug that belonged to one of the students in her informal friend group into a block of Jello, before returning it to the student inside the Jello.

Like caregivers, entertainers often expended significant amounts of both mental and physical effort on behalf of their peers. Victor, a White male student who occupied the entertainer role, provided similar sorts of diversion for students in the Learning Community. A gymnast, he often performed acrobatics for the enjoyment of his classmates, and would jokingly draw attention to his own musculature, including his self-described "gym booty," often provoking giggles from his peers. He also frequently used a theatrical interactional style to evoke laughter from other students. During an in-class role-play activity one morning in the middle of

the spring semester, Victor played the part of a television newscaster, delivering “breaking news” from behind an elevated “news desk” with an exaggerated booming voice, to the delight of others present.

In the Learning Community, two other students’ names often came up simultaneously when reminiscing on jokes and pranks: Alec and Paulo. The other student members, the community graduate assistants, and even the professor would smile and roll their eyes upon virtually any mention of these two. Alec, a Black male student, and Paulo, a Latino male student, provided comic relief for the community. I observed one such instance during a class skit that had been prepared by the Learning Community’s course instructor. After welcoming the students and succeeding in quieting the group down a bit, the instructor presented a PowerPoint slide with the text of a short story on it. She asked for two volunteers and selected Alec and Jerry. The two of them came to the center of the room and stood in front of the projector, and the instructor began to read the story while Alec and Jerry acted it out. The story was about two men who see a baby in the river and go to rescue it. They pulled the baby out of the water only to see another one floating by. They rescued that baby as well but noticed more coming down stream. As she was reading the story, the instructor threw stuffed animals into the center of the room for Jerry and Alec to retrieve. Eventually, she began throwing the stuffed animals faster, and Alec frantically grabbed at the toys, spastically scooping them up and launching them out toward “the shore.” The class broke into raucous laughter.

Finally the instructor announced, “One of the men stops picking up the babies and begins to head up-stream.” She directed Alec to walk up the center aisle between the tables; he mimicked wading through water. “Up-stream,” Alec’s character found a “baby factory” that was dumping babies in the river. His pantomimed shock elicited more laughter from the group. The

instructor had apparently hoped that this activity would illustrate the difference between tackling social issues through charity vs. systemic change. However, it seemed that most students missed the meaning underlying the anecdote as they were absorbed in the entertainment provided by Alec's performance.

These kinds of performances were common occurrences both in and out of the classroom. During a Jeopardy-style program hosted by Sean, Paulo snuck up to a table behind Sean, taking a pair of green sunglasses – meant to be one of the prizes for the winners – and wearing them on his head as he walked back and forth across the room. His ability to do this without Sean noticing drew giggles from around the room. Another evening as an event in the dormitory common room was wrapping up, Alec roamed the hallway with balloons that he contorted to resemble genitals, drawing awkward laughter from those who passed by.

Alec and Paulo also frequently posted humorous pictures to the community's electronic messenger account. Alec would post unflattering close-up photos of his peers, and Paulo would frequently respond to requests to borrow items by sending pictures of those items. One afternoon, Karina messaged the group asking, "Does anyone have a [phone] charger I can borrow?" and Paulo replied, "Here's mine, it's new," posting a photo of a phone charger. Later that same week Terrie posted, "Hi, would anybody be able to take me to the airport today at 6 [o'clock]? I'll buy you something on the way or gas money!" only to receive a reply from Paulo (who did not have a car on-campus) with a picture of a new *Dodge Charger* saying, "Use mine." With these jokes and humorous performances, Alec and Paulo displayed a style of self-presentation characteristic of entertainers. While they were not to be relied on for phone chargers or rides to the airport (as caregivers might be), they were ready to offer a good laugh.

In my interview with him, an Asian student named Turner described his style of self-presentation among his informal friend group, saying “They describe me as a fun-loving guy and just out going. I do things that people don't do usually. I don't follow the rules, so I’m that kinda guy.” As Turner notes, not “following the rules” was an important component of being an entertainer. Being unpredictable and breaking with conventions allowed entertainers to catch their peers off-guard with an edgy joke or a surprising prank. While caregivers worked to offer consistent and predictable support to other members of a group, students who adopted the role of entertainer worked to provide surprise diversion and humor, even when that required bending legal or institutional rules or social norms.

In their focus on others emotions (specifically cultivating laughter or surprise), the behaviors of entertainers sometimes appeared similar to those of the caregivers; however, the self-presentation characterizing the two roles was in fact distinct. While the caregivers were read as compassionate and thoughtful, entertainers worked to give off an air of lightheartedness and fun. A caregiver would look out for the wellbeing of others, but an entertainer offered diversion, even if it was occasionally dangerous (like performing acrobatics in the middle of a road) or might hurt someone’s feelings (as could be the byproduct of a teasing joke). When there was a lull in the conversation or a boring stretch in a meeting, entertainers would crack a joke, tell a story, or do something amusing to pass the time. Their efforts were focused on ensuring that others in the group had a good time.

The entertainer role was both gendered and raced. Although there were a few female entertainers and one White male, this role was predominately occupied by male REM students. Specifically, 68% of entertainers were male REM students, despite only comprising 22% of the study participants. Previous research has documented the efforts made by Black male students in

particular to rebuff the stereotype of the "angry Black man," by presenting as easygoing, while simultaneously adhering to expectations of "coolness" associated with being Black and male (Wilkins 2012; 2014). In particular, this is often overlaid with expectations that Black men will be "fun" and "unconcerned with goals" (Wilkins 2014, p. 12). It is possible that similar pressures were at work in situating male REM students within the entertainer role.

Transient Attention and a Lack of Mattering

As the above examples illustrate, unlike students in the associate role, those who successfully took on the entertainer role sometimes received attention from their peers when they were making jokes, performing, or doing physical feats. However, in many ways they were similar to associates in receiving less value or acknowledgement for their contributions to the group. Many students in the entertainer role were unable to think of times when they had felt valued or appreciated in their social groups. For instance, when I asked Lynn, the student who had pranked one of her friends by putting her coffee mug in Jello, if she could recall a time when she had felt valued or appreciated in any of the social groups she joined, she responded, "Not like any that come up into my mind." Similarly, Turner reframed my question about feeling valued or appreciated by his peers to focus on his own academic and career preparation in college. He noted that "I found my value in where I stand academically and where I stand in job market," concluding "that was the point where I valued *myself*."

Kelly from the Volunteer Collective and Max from the Learning Community, reported feeling valuable for being part of community service projects within those groups. For example, Kelly noted, "Particularly with the Volunteer Collective, whenever I help out with events, I feel like I'm actually valued. I feel like I'm actually doing something worthwhile." Likewise, Max said, "Just being able to do some things, volunteering – that's something we all have to do on the

floor, part of the requirement to live there. So being able to volunteer and know I'm doing something to better a community is very nice." As these responses demonstrate, some entertainers were able to feel valued because of the contributions they perceived themselves to be making outside of the confines of their roles in social groups, or in Turner's case because of the academic and career preparation he was acquiring in college. In other words, when entertainers perceived themselves to be valued, these feelings typically had nothing to do with their role, offering a direct contrast with caregivers, leaders, and educators, who felt a sense of mattering for role-specific contributions they made to their peers in social groups.

Perhaps due to the way their jokes and pranks functioned as a distancing mechanism (e.g., Goffman 1961; Coser 1966), entertainers contrasted with caregivers whose efforts to look out for the wellbeing of others cultivated intimacy with their peers (see for instance, Clark 1997). When students recounted lists of friends or members of groups, "the funny guy" (or girl) was often mentioned last alongside associates, sometimes even as an afterthought. For instance, despite having some of the best attendance at meetings, events, and practices, James from the Cardio Club, Colin from the Learning Community, and Kelly from the Volunteer Collective were rarely mentioned by their peers as members of the group. While attention might shift to them as they were telling a joke, the majority of the time entertainers existed near the periphery of social groups, occupying physical locations comparable to associates.

There were a few exceptions to this general pattern, observed when some students' descriptions of their peers seemed to indicate a sense of appreciation for entertainers. For instance, Carol, quoted above described her friend Amira saying: "There's one girl, Amira, she is the most out there person I have ever met; it's so fun to be around her. She's just always saying things that are just funny. She's just really quirky and stuff, and it's just like a really fun person to

be around." In expressing appreciation for her friend's role as an entertainer, Carol was the exception here rather than the rule – and perhaps the same could be said of Amira. While Carol claimed Amira was "always saying things that are funny," most entertainers could not *always* provide diversion. Jokes, tricks, or pranks required thought and effort, and keeping up a steady stream of such entertainment would have required a great deal of skill. More frequently entertainers' humor was momentarily enjoyed by other students, who responded with laughter or amusement; however, it was also apparent that provoking laughs was not usually valued to the same degree as other roles, including caregivers who offered support. Notably, even Carol only mentioned Amira briefly after talking about her friend Alexis, a caregiver, in great detail.

In addition to not conferring value or appreciation, being an entertainer could sometimes place one's sense of belonging at risk. While having a sense of humor is often viewed as a positive trait, jokes are also open to a broad range of interpretations. For instance, a Latino male student named Ruben described how he liked to send funny memes (electronic text or images typically meant to be humorous) to his friends, an informal group of students on his floor and another group from his anthropology class. His expression was gleeful as he told me about a series of memes about Charles Darwin jokes that he sent to his friends in anthropology. However, with the group of students on his dormitory floor he had stopped sending memes because as he observed, "sometimes we don't all understand the memes." Having offended some of his friends with a meme they did not find humorous, Ruben was hesitant to make a similar mistake again.

A student named Peter, who occupied the entertainer role recalled a similar experience where he went too far in making jokes about a friend:

BRS: Have you had any experiences where you felt unappreciated or undervalued?

Peter: Yeah, there was this one time. My friends were just hanging around and I have one friend who's kind of heavy. I made a fat joke. It was really late at night. He texts me personally. He was like, “Cut that shit out. These jokes are starting to get on my nerves.” And I was like, “I never meant to offend.”… It was just one too much.

BRS: How did you feel when you got the text? What were you thinking at the time?

Peter: I read it and flinched… I was like I didn't have the intention to offend, just get people to laugh.

Other students acknowledged the risk in jokes that could “cross the line” when humor was directed at others in the group in the form of teasing jokes. For instance, in reflecting on the behavior of some of the entertainers in her informal friend group, a student named Holly noted, “With the making fun of people, at first I was like, ‘Whoa. That's a little too much.’” As Peter and Holly highlight, attempts to elicit laughter could easily be misread as mean-spirited and backfire. For this reason, entertainers often occupied a tentative space in their social groups, where it was easy for laughter to turn into anger.

Leaders

A White male student named Ollie described the role he played among his friends in structuring and executing group activities – or in his words, “getting things done:”

> I do the planning… [I] get things done and happening. I’ll be like, "Oh, let's all go to [the dining hall]."… Everyone turns, "Let's go." I just do it -- Just like, "Oh, hey, why don't we ..." For example, there was one time, it was around Thanksgiving – it was around midterms also, so it was the time in between the two. Everyone was like, I could just sense that everyone was feeling a little glum and sluggish and I was like, "Oh, this isn't cool. We got to do something," I was like, "Hey, let's get Chinese takeout and like watch Friends or something." I don't know why but that just seemed like the appropriate thing to do not like, "Oh, let's go to DC and have fun or ..." just something really simple, and that was exactly what was needed.

Most groups had at least one member like Ollie, who occupied the leader role, using an authoritative style of self-presentation and employing directives that structured the activities of

their groups. Not only did Ollie typically organize the group's activities, but he was also confident in his ability to lead others, noting in this instance that his plan was "exactly what was needed." Leaders often had confidence in the activity or action they facilitated as well as in their perspective on the process by which things should be done. With this confidence, leaders frequently gave directives about what "should" happen, and the leader role was characterized by self-presentation and behaviors that served to direct the actions of the groups in which they took part.

Leaders would typically offer plans, directives, and assertions that structured the group's activities. In fact, several students referred to leaders as "the planner(s)." For example, when I asked a Latino male student named Ruben to tell me about his friend group, he began by stating, "We have one person who is the planner. He is also the friend I told you about who served in the [student] senate… He's very well disciplined. He usually puts some consideration in before he suggests a time or how a plan will be followed through." In addition to developing plans, leaders took charge of their adoption and implementation, providing specific instructions regarding what should be done. While Ollie led his friends using phrases like "let's go to…" or "let's get…," others described giving more firm directives. For instance, when I interviewed a White male student named Aaron, he described planning an activity with his informal friend group where there was some debate about what should be done. He recounted: "I just said, 'everyone shut up and do it,' and so we did and it was fantastic." Leaders' unique role was highlighted in part by the ability to use this sort of firm rhetoric without incurring the disapproval of their peers. While they were not always so blunt in their declarations, the acquiescence of other students when they were often surprised me.

Leaders took pride in their ability to have their voices heard and shape the action of the groups they were part of – including both formal and informal groups. For instance, Annette, quoted at the beginning of the chapter, described her self-presentation on the equestrian team as "definitely outspoken," noting that she was often involved in making decisions for the group. When the team recently had a budget surplus, Annette was successful in persuading her peers to spend it on long-sleeve t-shirts and duffle bags. Similarly, among her group of five close friends, Annette described herself as one of "the planners," adding that she and her friend Jeremy (the other "planner") often "butt[ed] heads" when they wanted "to plan two different things." She elaborated:

> We like to go to the hookah bar. That's like a way that we go hang out… Tonight we were thinking of two different places to go. One cost more money versus this one, so that was something where we were like, "Wait, not everybody should have to pay that," and this and that. I wanted to go to the more affordable one. I think we're both kind of competitive.

Annette was clearly proud as she informed me that in the end the group had followed her choice – the more affordable bar. Their authoritative styles of self-presentation, responded to with compliance from their peers, meant that the whims of a leader often played a significant role in shaping the day-to-day activities of a group. In addition to being described as "planners," other common words their peers used to describe leaders included "dominant," "independent," "assertive," "intense," and "bold." Students often noted how they "took charge" or were "in charge." The momentary absence of a leader in smaller groups meant that things might not get done (as when a sub-group of friends sat in motionless silence when group leaders were occupied with other tasks, or when a team practice was paralyzed with inaction when leaders were running late). In essence, leaders had authority to make decisions, and they planned, organized, and administered the activities of their respective groups.

Notably, the leader role was not strictly about organizational structure or formal leadership positions like president, treasurer, resident advisor, or team captain.[19] In fact, students who held structural, elected or appointed leadership positions within their respective student groups did not always occupy a leader role in that group. Instead, some were educators, some caregivers, some entertainers, and there were even a few who could best be described as associates in spite of the authority they technically had access to within the group. To distinguish between the leader role and structural leadership, I attempt to be as specific as possible regarding the positions held by students within the groups I studied. For example, rather than calling individuals "student leaders," a common term in the higher education literature,[20] I refer to them in more specific ways such as "resident advisor," "team captain," "president," "treasurer," etc. When referring to groups of students in formal leadership positions I use a term commonly employed by the students themselves: "officers."

Students who occupied the leader role in the group often did not have a formal leadership position. The Cardio Club was a place where the leader role was less prominent in rhetoric and more easily observable through its physical embodiment. Taking charge of the group meant running at the front of the pack during cardio training, determining the pace and direction the group would take. Leaders in the Cardio Club would employ their speed and physical heft to carve out space for themselves when leading a long-run or intervals on the track. Others would

[19] While these formal positions were not a proxy for leader roles, they were occasionally a field in which roles were sometimes negotiated. An illustrative example is offered in the case of Cardio Club, explored in the next chapter.

[20] Within the field of student affairs there is a well-developed literature on "student leaders" and the developmental impact of occupying "positional leadership roles" within student organizations (Renn 2007, p. 315; see also Harper and Quaye 2007; Posner 2004; Renn and Ozaki 2010). For the purposes of this study, I do not focus on formal leadership positions except insofar as they provide arenas for contests over social resources to play out.

fall in line behind, responding to changes in speed, cadence, or direction set by the leader(s). Several White male students took up this role almost immediately upon joining the Cardio Club. In multiple fieldnotes, I remarked on the way Barry, Johnny, and Gabe, three first-year White male students, each took charge of training runs with the group in their first weeks with the team.

Similarly, in my observations of the Volunteer Collective on the first day George, a White male student, joined the group I noted the way he immediately took on the leader role. Notably, all of the students holding formal leadership positions in the Volunteer Collective were women. However, when George entered the group about a month into the semester, he displayed a style of self-presentation that clearly fit the parameters of the leader role. During George's first day with the organization I took note of "a White male student who I hadn't seen at the meetings before." When he arrived at the front of the room near the sign-in table, his presence stood out to me. It struck me that up to that point I was not certain that I had seen a White male student present in the group outside of the very first two interest meetings. George took a seat in the very center of the room, on the edge of the second round table. As we began a group discussion about fundraising opportunities, students were raising their hands one at a time. In response to one student's suggestion that the group try hosting a volleyball game, George – without raising his hand – said to the group "yeah, and that will be better than soccer (the previous student's suggestion) because we can have the tournament indoors since it will be cold out." The Volunteer Collective's president, Beth, who was facilitating the discussion, said that this would be helpful and told the group that the next step would be figuring out how to raise money at the event. As she was indicating that this discussion would happen in smaller groups, George raised his hand. When Beth called on him, he said "you guys should sell water and Gatorade at the event." The other students agreed that this sounded like a good idea.

A few minutes later during a discussion about collaborating with the president of the Salsa Club to host an event, George raised his hand again, and Beth called on him. “Does [the Salsa Club president] plan to charge for admission this time?” he asked, and before Beth could respond he continued, “You need to ask him that.” I noticed that this was the second time George had given an explicit directive to the group. This stood out because it was highly unusual. Typically, the group was very democratic, and directives were rare, even from students beyond their first year of study and those in formal leadership positions, like Beth. Nonetheless, Beth and the other students again seemed pleased to accept George’s directive, listening attentively and then thanking him for his contribution.

Another student brought up the issue of food and beverages for one of the fundraising events, asking if the Volunteer Collective would sell water or snacks. There was some discussion about whether it would be better to charge for water or give it away for free in cups since it was a sporting event. During this discussion George raised his hand, and when Beth called on him he said, “So if we are trying to make money off the event, are we going to have an entry fee for the tournament too? If you’re going to do that, then you need to have the sign-up for teams on the website before you put it up. Otherwise we’ll be handing out flyers and people won’t know how to sign up for the tournament.” Notably, even on his first day with the group George spoke more comfortably than members who had been in the group much longer, giving the sort of directives that might have been expected from someone who had significantly more experience with the Volunteer Collective. Additionally, the way George took his seat at the center of the group was fairly typically for leaders. While associates and entertainers existed on the margins of the groups they were members of, leaders typically took prominent places at the front and/or center

of groups. From these vantage points they were able to communicate directives and signal transitions or changes in group activities in a clear way to the other students present.

Additionally, it was not only in planning that the authoritative self-presentation typical of leaders was noticeable. During an ice-breaker activity at one Volunteer Collective meeting, George took charge of his group as they attempted to solve a riddle about a word that "starts and ends with 'T' and has 'T' in it."[21] While one of the teams began in silence for about 15 to 30 seconds, George quickly began guiding the second team toward a solution. His voice was the easiest to pick up on in the other group as he seemed to be the first to speak as well as the loudest. George told his group that he did not know the answer but that they should create a list of words that start and end with "T." This directive was followed by suggestions from some of the other students who began to offer up words that fit his description: "that" "treat" etc. With each suggestion he would point out that those words did not "have 'T' in them" so they could not be the answer. Rather than being met with annoyance, George's recommendations and directives were factored into the strategy by which his team solved the riddle as well as the plans the group made for fundraising.

When I began my ethnographic observations, the first student in the Learning Community who approached me for a one-on-one conversation was a White male student named Will. Energetic and self-confident, Will seemed to capture the attention of his peers with little effort. In competitions on the floor, Will was frequently one of the most vocal students, taking control of his team and shouting directives. Despite not having a formal leadership position in the Learning Community, Will often took initiative to plan and facilitate events. Near the end of

[21] The answer was "teapot" because it started and ended with the letter "T" and had "T" (tea) inside.

the spring semester, he organized a workshop on public speaking and invited his peers to attend. One day during class, the GTA announced there was an activity that was supposed to be facilitated by Caleb; however, it turned out that he was running late. Without being prompted, Will stood up and walked to the front of the room, announcing "I can fill in for Caleb until he gets here." As this moment illustrated, leaders were comfortable taking charge – even in larger groups or in the classroom space – and an invitation was seen as unnecessary. Leaders could be assured that their direction was welcome virtually anytime.

In addition to Will, three other White male students in the Learning Community also frequently took charge of group activities. Caleb, Jerry, and Aldo invited their peers to events on- and off-campus that they helped to organize. During the first weeks of the fall semester, Caleb assembled a group of students to volunteer at voter registration events on-campus, and it was often Caleb who selected where members of the group would eat for dinner. Aldo, who frequently showed up to class wearing a button-up shirt, tie, and blazer, was also known for the motivational speeches he gave to the group. During the second week of the semester, as the students were preparing to select service projects to contribute their time to, Aldo raised his hand and asked if he could say something. The instructor agreed and he began what seemed like a rehearsed speech, "I just want to say that you can get involved in any of these groups. If you get involved with [the low-income housing organization] you'll make a great impact; if you work with [staff name] at [a local middle school] you'll get a lot out of it; if you volunteer with Sean and Alec at the pop up pantry, or Caleb registering voters, you'll have a great experience. It really doesn't matter which one you do. The important thing is that you're making a difference." A few students clapped as he concluded, and Aldo smiled, clearly pleased with how his speech had been received. The instructor added, "That's why I always love Aldo's motivational

speeches!" Through these "motivational speeches" Aldo persuaded other students to take action in specific ways, in this case by getting involved in community service. Early in the spring semester Aldo took a similar approach when he organized a group of students to attend and present at a local social justice conference.

Leaders were also vocal in shaping the rules of their communities. For instance, early in the fall semester, I took note of Jerry's role as one of the only students to give input during a discussion on the Learning Community's residence hall floor guidelines. "Let's talk about these; are there any guidelines that you want to highlight or modify? Is there anything you want to add?" asked the GTA. Jerry spoke up quickly. "Let's highlight 'be clear, don't beat around the bush'" he said. There were noises of agreement around the room. With Matthew's assistance, Jerry explained why the group would need to be direct with one another so that conflicts did not bubble over. "Does everyone agree?" asked the GTA. After a few more nods and affirmative responses, the GTA used the highlighter function in the electronic document to mark that guideline in yellow. In this way, in addition to giving directives, leaders took a prominent seat at the table when the rules by which groups would function were developed or clarified.

The role of leader was both gendered and raced. With a few exceptions, leaders were predominately White and male, with 18 of 22 leaders fitting this description. In addition, a few White female students and one Asian male student occupied the leader role. The overrepresentation of male students taking on this style of self-presentation mirrors the findings of other research documenting gender-biased understandings of leadership, especially in terms of associations between masculinity and authority, competence, and assertiveness (Ridgeway 2001; Rudman and Glick 2001). Additionally, prior research has documented the racial associations of Whiteness with leadership (Rosette, Leonardelli, and Phillips 2008; Sanchez-Hucles and Davis

2010). These raced and gendered associations with leadership, which emphasize White masculinity, lead to the unsurprising observation that the vast majority of students who took on the leadership role (frequently without formal or positional authority) where White males.

Mattering through Direction

Because of their contributions to shaping the activities of their groups, leaders were often valued by their peers. When George adopted the self-presentation of a leader in the Volunteer Collective, the response of the other students surprised me. As a new member who seemed to be taking on a great deal of authority in his first days with the group, I had expected that there might be some resistance from his peers. In fact, far from being unwelcome, the leadership George offered proved to be valued by the group, and they often thanked him for his instructions on how to plan and host fundraisers, social gatherings, and other events. Other students often focused their attention on George, listening when he would speak, and including him in their friendly banter before and after meetings. It was apparent that immediately upon entry into the group, space was created for him as a central member both physically and metaphorically.

The valuing of leaders played out in other groups as well. This could be observed when Aldo's classmates in the Learning Community clapped after his motivational speech as well as in Cardio Club where students occupying the leader role frequently received expressions of appreciation from their peers. For example, I observed multiple instances where students thanked Drew for organizing and executing group activities. This extended outside of officially club-sanctioned activities, as when students praised Drew for putting together "a rager," as students colloquially referred to parties involving alcohol consumption, held off-campus at the Cardio Club house. Similarly, I heard students congratulate Kenny and Carter for taking charge of a

Cardio Club competition at ESU in the spring semester. Drew, Cara, James, and other students thanked them on multiple occasions, calling it "the best meet" the club had ever hosted.

Leaders also reported feeling valued when their peers complied with their directives. For instance, when I asked Ollie if he could describe a time when he felt valued or appreciated, he responded, "The times that I brought my friends together and we've done things because I set it up, that makes me feel valued." Similarly, Joel described how he occupied the leader role for his intramural soccer team, where he described himself as like an informal "coach" for the team, telling the other members what to do or how to play during games and practices. In recalling a time he felt appreciated, Joel noted, "I would probably have to go with the soccer [team], the whole soccer group… to have people look up to you."

After having adopted a leader role in his social groups, Carter, reported feeling valued when "[his] opinions are listened to." For instance, after taking on the leader role in Cardio Club during the latter part of the fall semester, other students would actively seek out Carter's guidance for the team, asking him which workouts to do, and looking to him to lead team runs.[22] Other leaders recalled times feeling valued when they "played a key role" in their groups or times when they felt their contributions to shaping the actions of a group were seen as "important." In short, leaders felt valued and appreciated by the groups they were part of when their peers complied with the directives or guidance they provided. Being able to shape the activities of their peers made leaders feel like central and important parts of social groups.

In contrast to associates, leaders often enjoyed the attention of their peers. For example, at Cardio Club and in the Learning Community, when leaders arrived or walked into a room,

[22] I describe Carter's experience coming to occupy the leader role in greater detail in the next chapter.

students often shouted their names as a welcome. Upon arrival, eyes would turn toward them as they were often the genesis of action in their respective groups. Leaders were in many ways the center of student groups, with collective actions radiating outward from them. Further, at times their control over the behavior and direction of their peers meant that leaders became synonymous with the groups they were part of (i.e. when students referred to “Drew’s club,” “George’s team,” or “Caleb’s volunteers”).

Educators

As a student named Charlie described his role among the informal group of friends he lived with in the residence halls, our dialogue captured several of the key characteristics of the educator role:

> Charlie: I think I'm more of a ... I guess on some level I'm a second opinion on various things. So, like personal things [his friends ask] like “what do you think, Charlie?” because I'll actually give an opinion…. And then there'll be people who will be like, "Well, I know what John will say, but, what do you say for this?" And, now I have to actually sit down and think about it.
>
> BRS: Because they know if they come to you, you're going to give them a straight answer, or you're going to have an opinion?
>
> Charlie: Not just so much a straight answer. I'd be like well ... I'll give them several answers from different perspectives. Like, well if your goal is for *this* then it might be for that; if your goal is for *this* it might be for that; and, if *I* would do it I would get the hell out of dodge.
>
> BRS: Gotcha. So, it's sort of like multiple options. Kind of laying out what the options are, what the perspectives are?
>
> Charlie: I like to think I never have an opinion so it's easy to think about things from other people's opinions.

As Charlie’s descriptions of his interactions with peers make clear, self-presenting as an educator meant that one typically avoided telling others what to do in the way that leaders typically did. Instead, educators were appreciated for the range of perspectives or ideas they could provide.

Fred, a White male student in the Learning Community settled into the educator role almost immediately. One of my first notes remarked on a soliloquy he gave on a day when the class was discussing the topic of leadership. When Jerry, another White male student, claimed that a leader should have charisma, Fred launched into an impassioned critique of this claim. He argued that charisma was "just something made up" by people who sought to give preference to behaviors that were "typically male." As he spoke, others in the group listened attentively. A few weeks later, during a conversation about what sort of topics the Learning Community course should cover in the spring, Fred made a similar contribution. In response to the Professor's question about topics of interest, Fred responded saying:

> It would be interesting to have a class on how language is used in negative ways to oppress people like based on gender for example and for African Americans. Like language gets used a lot in ways we don't even realize to put other people down, even like when we say 'you guys' because we're saying 'guys,' which has a gender.

His comment here was clearly not just a suggestion, but also a chance for him to educate the other students about this issue. In occupying the educator role, students like Fred took advantage of opportunities to expose others to new or useful information from their own intellectual repertoires. Educators worked to provide information to others in their social groups as a way of offering insight or knowledge. Because of their style of self-presentation, students who occupied this role were sometimes described as "intellectuals" or "teachers."

Fred was one of four students in the Learning Community who occupied the educator role. Another example came from a White male student named Tyler. Given his style of self-presentation, Tyler was the sort of person other students would go to for an intellectually stimulating conversation. Tyler's classmates viewed him as a source of insight on topics ranging from music to politics to religion, and many of them looked to Tyler to help them make sense of their own lives. During such occasions, Tyler would often make extensive use of the whiteboard

he kept in his room. Jenna described a conversation the two of them had one evening about her struggles to make friends on campus.

> Tyler taught me a lot about [making friends]. He was like, “You don't have to be friends with everyone.” He's like, “There's nothing wrong with not talking to people.” I was like, “What do you mean?”… He'll take out his white board, I remember this distinctly. He has this huge whiteboard in his room, he was drawing circles and he's like, “This is your circle. This circle is everyone else.” He was like, “You could pick where these two collide.” I was like, “Tyler, thanks for this diagram.”… It's so lit. I'll watch him be doing something, I'm like, “Yeah you make so much sense Tyler.”

In this example, with his whiteboard and dry erase markers in hand, Tyler occupied the educator role in its most literal sense. In conveying their knowledge to others, educators frequently adopted the posture and demeanor of a lecturer or teacher.

As the examples of Charlie, Fred, and Tyler show, educators offered perspective to their social groups in a variety of ways; however, this perspective served a different function than the directives offered by leaders. Rather than telling the group what to do, educators might suggest things that could be done or ways a situation could be viewed, offering options, history, or possibilities rather than plans. Like impartial arbiters, they sought to offer insight into multiple perspectives rather than demanding a certain action or behavior. By offering insight, educators sought to be perceived as unbiased intellectuals, of the sort often venerated within academic institutions like colleges and universities. While leaders often needed to prioritize or select a single viewpoint – in order to direct their peers toward one activity or away from another – educators presented themselves as fountains of unsullied knowledge, open to a variety of interesting viewpoints.

The Cardio Club had just two occupants of the educator role, both White male students. While at first glance, as a group focused on athletic competition, the Cardio Club might have appeared not to value intellect, these students’ own brand of the educator style of self-

presentation offered them a central place in the group. For instance, Derek, one of the Cardio Club educators, possessed an extensive mental catalogue of possible options for group runs and workouts that he would offer to the team – although he always took care to avoid telling the group where to run or which workout to do, instead presenting an array of choices to other members. Derek also had an archive of knowledge about the club and university athletics bureaucracy at ESU that he frequently shared with new members. I benefitted from his knowledge myself on one of my early runs with the team one evening in September when Derek took the time to recount the history of the Cardio Club for me. During this same conversation, Derek also offered theories about the club's growth, a topic he knew I would be interested in, given the focus of my research. As we crossed the highway to the other side of campus, our conversation shifted to the team's efforts to recruit new members. Derek explained:

> I don't know if this would be useful for your study, but one thing we realized last year about recruiting [new members] was that when we advertised it as a group for beginners, even those who didn't want to compete, we had no luck retaining new people. The only ones who stuck around were the athletes who were serious about it and wanted to compete. So now we've got a lot of new races that we do and we advertise it as a way to keep being a competitive athlete in college.[23]

It was clear that Derek understood – at least in a basic way – that my purpose with the group was to understand social inclusion, and he sought to offer valuable information in support of that endeavor. We continued to discuss his observations about how the group had grown over the years, as he offered a few more hypotheses about the causes of this growth. Few of the student participants expressed much interest in my study, and Derek was the only person to ever suggest specific material as potentially relevant to my findings. Notably, in this exchange, he did so

[23] This is not a verbatim quote, but my best recollection of his comments from the fieldnote I wrote after practice. While I was sometimes able to capture verbatim quotes in my jottings on paper or in my phone, long runs like this one were not conducive to note taking in the moment.

completely unprompted. While he did not tell me what to write, Derek did his best to offer several possible factors of interest.

As with the leader role, it was apparent that not all students could access the educator role. Self-presenting as an educator required that other students recognize the value of the knowledge possessed by the student in question. As social science research has demonstrated, knowledge, intelligence, and wisdom are often coded as both White and male (Aronson, Fried, and Good 2002; Harding 1998; 2016). These associations are also prominent within higher education in particular, where research on stereotype threat has documented the ways race- and gender-biased associations with intelligence shape the experiences of female and REM students (Fischer 2010; Massey and Fischer 2005; Quinn and Spencer 2001; Spencer, Steele, and Quinn 1999; Steele 1997). While there was one notable exception (a White female student named Holly, whose experiences are discussed in the next chapter), all other students occupying the educator role over the course of the academic year were White male students.

Mattering through Wisdom

As with leaders and caregivers, educators were valued members of their social groups. Educators were appreciated for their wisdom and knowledge, and were often touted by others for their impressive intellects. At the end of the academic year, during a culminating activity with the Learning Community, the students each wrote their names on top of a blank sheet of paper and passed them around the room. As the paper passed each person's desk, the students were tasked with writing something nice about the person whose name was on the paper. Glancing at the sheets as they made their way around the room, I saw descriptors written on the educators' papers including "smart" and "wise." Someone wrote a short note thanking an educator for "always sharing your opinion."

Because the insight they could provide to their peers was seen as being very useful, educators often occupied central positions within their groups, with other students coming to them frequently for information or intellectual stimulation. The times educators pointed to most frequently as instances where they felt valued or appreciated by their peers were moments when their intellectual contributions to a group were highlighted by others within their communities. During our interview, Fred described a moment where Jamie read a chapter of the book he was writing, and "couldn't stop talking about," her positive response to it. Another day Maura, Becky, Zara, and Max had shown up with a sign to support him at a public presentation he had given the week before. For his final project in the Learning Community course Fred read two poems he had written. After he concluded the group broke into robust applause and several students praised his writing. These moments where his intellect was appreciated enhanced Fred's sense of himself as a valued member of the community. He described the subsequent feeling associated with these experiences as "moments where I feel little bursts of inclusion that I really appreciate." In short, his sense of mattering in the group served to amplify his feeling of inclusion or belonging in the Learning Community.

The value of educators to their peers was often on display most clearly in larger group environments when educators would speak. Becky noted, "You have people who it's very clear that everybody on the floor respects them, or at least, they're willing to shup up for awhile while they talk -- they'll listen to what they have to say." Becky gave the example of Matthew, of whom she noted, "Everybody respects [him]. They're just more willing to listen." My own observations confirmed Becky's claim. Matthew, who was also a White male student, received a great deal of attention and admiration from his peers who viewed him as wise and intellectual. It was not uncommon to hear someone talk about the "wisdom" Matthew had shared with them.

Students described him as “deep” and “woke” (a slang term used to describe someone who is socially aware, especially of societal injustice and social problems). In the fall semester, Matthew began hosting a show on the campus radio station. The topics he covered ranged from prescription drug abuse to music to media addictions.

In one of the Learning Community classes, Matthew and Kyle, another White male student who occupied the educator role, engaged in a debate about whether violence was a necessary part of social movements. In a large group of 40 students, it was rare to be granted a moment of silent attentiveness from the group; however, as they spoke, others listened quietly. During our interview, Kyle described the value he felt in occupying the educator role when his friends in the Learning Community listened with interest to what he was saying: “Most people, I think they want to think more; they want to hear more. They want to hear different sides, and things like that… They're interested in hearing it.” In reading other students as being attentive to and interested in his efforts to convey knowledge and information, Kyle was secure in his sense of mattering to the community. He felt the role he occupied was appreciated by his peers who “want[ed] to hear more.”

However, expressions of attention and interest in what they had to say were frequently extended to educators like Matthew, Fred, and Kyle in direct contrast to the treatment of others, especially associates and caregivers. Around the time of our interview, I had noted a disparity in the treatment of Becky and Fred. It was a Saturday evening and I had joined the Learning Community in their floor common room for an Earth Day activity Sean put on for the group. He had found an online program where the students could enter details about their lifestyles to get information about their total carbon footprint. While the activity was less interactive than most, given that it directed students’ attention to their laptops, the group focused their collective

attention in a few moments, such as when Fred raised a point to the group. As the carbon footprint activity was winding up, Fred interjected to bring up another tool used to measure environmental impact. As he explained the tool and related concepts the students stopped talking and looking at their computers to listen to him. When he finished speaking, Becky tried to add a related point, but others began talking over her almost immediately. It was only a few minutes later when Fred began to speak again and the group again stopped what they were doing to turn and listen. For educators, their peers' recognition and attention proved to be a marker of their value, and in cases like this, the attention they received clearly contrasted with other students who seemed invisible in the same settings.

In times when they were able to teach others a new skill or convey new information, educators were recognized for their value to the group. In such moments, groups often proudly claimed educators as their own. For example, when I asked Grant about a time when he had felt valued or appreciated, he responded enthusiastically:

> Yeah, definitely! Last semester Campus Ministry actually had a poker night, and my goal was just to go there and hang out, to help teach people who didn't know how to play Texas Hold 'Em figure it out… The Campus Ministry president was talking to [one of the other officers] and the president's just like, "Yeah, even though [Grant is a new inductee] we still count him as part of our [senior members], even though he's not." When I heard him say that, it just blew my mind.

It was in this moment, when he was sharing his knowledge with other members – teaching them how to play poker – that Grant recalled feeling like a valued part of Campus Ministry. The president's recognition of Grant as being like one of the senior members, even though he was technically a new inductee, who would not yet be eligible for the core group of senior members until next year. Similarly, Charlie recalled feeling valued in his informal friend group when at the end of an intellectual discussion one of his peers smiled and said, "I'm really glad I met you." Charlie believed she said this because she was amused by, "the way I present my ideas."

CONCLUSION

After students solved the problem of finding connections, entering social groups where they identified commonality with others, their search for belonging remained incomplete. Once within diverse social groups, students adopted one of five simplistic, commonly recognized styles of self-presentation, which could serve as a short-cut to fitting in within a new environment. Notably, students' sense of mattering within the groups they were part of – manifested in times they felt valued, appreciated, important, or central to their groups – was shaped by the role they occupied in those groups. Because of the way some styles of self-presentation corresponded with valued contributions to the group, roles corresponded to the acquisition (or lack) of external validation. A sense of mattering, cultivated by being an important or central member of their social circles served to amplify students' sense of belonging.

The five roles were not available to students on a menu from which they could freely choose. Instead, access to these roles was related to students' sociodemographic characteristics. In particular, race and gender intersected to shape students' options when taking on a style of self-presentation. As the previous chapter documents, social class was highly influential in shaping strategies as students worked to join groups. However, once students arrived within these groups, the importance of class seemed to diminish as race and gender became more influential. My conversation with Zara, a Black female student who was one of the Resident Advisors for the Learning Community, offers a students' perspective on the relative salience of race, class, and gender at ESU.

As we were having dinner one evening, Zara and I struck up a conversation about the sociodemographic divisions that existed on ESU's campus and at other universities in the state.

Zara contrasted ESU with Elite Flagship U, a highly selective university a few hours away. She was familiar with the state's elite flagship institution, having grown up nearby and was quick to point out that ESU was different. Comparing the two institutions, she noted that social class did not feel like a salient factor for ESU students in their social interactions, as it was in her perception for Elite Flagship students. For instance, she noted that the expensive shoes male students wore at Elite Flagship would not hold much (if any) meaning for students at ESU, and the jewelry female students wore at ESU did not have to be of the same name-brands that were so highly valued at Elite Flagship. Being familiar with both institutions myself, I agreed with her observation. It seemed to me that while ESU still had students from affluent families, these students did not constitute the critical mass necessary to shape an institution's culture around symbols of social class in the way that they did at Elite Flagship. This is not to imply that ESU constituted some sort of class-free utopia, but class did in fact feel less visible there than I would have expected, given the findings of other recent ethnographies of colleges and universities (see for instance Armstrong and Hamilton 2013; Lee 2016; Stuber 2011).

Zara's comment about the limited importance of class in peer groups was also evident in students' distribution within roles in the groups. Students across social class backgrounds were fairly evenly distributed within the five roles (see Appendix C for more detail). The experiences of Jamie and Andre, described above, are also illustrative. Jamie, who was able to find mattering and belonging in the Learning Community, came from a less socioeconomically advantaged background. Meanwhile, Andre, who struggled to feel mattering and belonging, grew up in a more socioeconomically advantaged family.

However, Zara was quick to point out that while social class markers did not seem to play a large role in shaping students' social lives at ESU, race was a much different story. She noted

that although acts of blatant racist behavior or race-motivated meanness – what Bonilla Silva (2013) has called "overt racism" – were rare, the campus still did not feel fully racially integrated. She noted, "ESU is diverse, but not [racially] integrated. [Sean and I] talk about this all the time. It's hard to explain, but there's 'White ESU,' and there's 'Black ESU.'" Despite existing in a socioeconomically diverse institution where the right kind of shoes held little weight, racial divisions were easier for these students to see and make meaning around.

Perceived gender difference was similarly visible for ESU students, and hence, race and gender proved to be the primary markers for cultural meaning and expectations around how students should self-present and what roles they should occupy in social groups. As students socially constructed their styles of self-presentation within the five roles, they seemed to take race and gender into account in subtle but clearly patterned ways, coding certain styles of self-presentation to correspond with gendered and raced meanings. Aligning with the claims of intersectional theorists (e.g. Collins 2000; Crenshaw 1989), these meanings could not be parsed out separately. In short, there was not a singular White role, Latino role, male role, or female role. Rather, raced and gendered associations were woven together, making the performance of various roles more prevalent at certain intersections of race and gender. Table 2 reports the overall distribution of students in the five roles at the intersections of gender and race.

TABLE 2: DISTRIBUTION OF STUDENTS IN ROLES

Role[24]	REM Students (Female)	REM Students (Male)	White Students (Female)	White Students (Male)	Total
Associate	49% (n=19)	47% (n=14)	37% (n=13)	18% (n=6)	38% (n=52)
Caregiver	41% (n=16)	3% (n=1)	29% (n=10)	0% (n=0)	20% (n=27)
Entertainer	5% (n=2)	43% (n=13)	9% (n=3)	3% (n=1)	14% (n=19)
Leader	0% (n=0)	3% (n=1)	9% (n=3)	53% (n=18)	16% (n=22)
Educator	0% (n=0)	0% (n=0)	3% (n=1)	21% (n=7)	6% (n=8)
Other[25]	5% (n=2)	3% (n=1)	14% (n=5)	6% (n=2)	7% (n=10)
Total	39	30	35	34	138

[24] When students came to occupy a different role than the one they began the year in, I have categorized them based on the role they occupied for the majority of the year. All observed instances where change in roles occurred, it was within the first few weeks or months of the semester, meaning that these students spent the majority of the year in the second role.

[25] This category includes students who fell into one of two groups. First, there were six students who adopted unusually complex styles of self-presentation. These students were versatile in the contributions they made to groups, for instance being able to transition fairly seamlessly from humor to directives without the sense of discomfort that Goffman (1967) describes as the byproduct of failing to sustain a "face" or disrupting a "line" within a group. Notably, four of the six students were beyond their first-year of study. It is also worth mentioning that all four of these students occupied formal leadership positions in the groups I observed. It is possible that these formal positions allowed them greater flexibility as other students could come to understand variation in their styles of self-presentation as stemming from variation in the requirements of their positions. Additionally, there were four students who I only met during interviews, whose roles proved difficult to ascertain. While these ten students accounted for only a small portion (just 4%) of the total, I include them here in their own category for clarity. It is worth emphasizing however that the vast majority of students (including 36 of the 41 who I only met during interviews) were not only clear about which role they occupied, but also articulated a consistent use of this style of self-presentation across a range of groups with which they were involved, including both formal and informal student groups.

In addition, presented results illuminate how the patterned distribution of students within different roles could produce an unequal division of labor and social resources (for instance with female students taking on greater shares of emotional and physical care work in the caregiver role and White male students taking greater authority through the leader role). It is also notable that some styles of self-presentation were more rigid than others, and not all of them could be performed with the same amount of effort. While the associate role for example required little more than presence and responsiveness, others required significant amounts of time and effort to sustain.

In addition to having a unique association with various experiences and social resources, each role had a differential relationship to the distribution of value and mattering. As existing research has demonstrated, sustained feelings of belonging require a degree of external validation (Bell 1999; May 2011). The caregiver, leader, and educator roles were highly valued, producing a sense of mattering or group centrality that amplified students' feelings of belonging in social groups. Conversely, the associate and entertainer roles were often undervalued, conferring less attention or appreciation on students in these roles, and often leaving them with a more marginal sense of their place in the group. The experiences of associates and entertainers in relation to their caregiver, educator, and leader peers, demonstrates the veracity of Collins's (2004) claim that the attention that "make[s] some individuals more impressive, more attractive or dominant" also "puts other persons in their shadow" (p. xiii), supporting his notion that inclusion should not be taken to imply equality in social relations. In short, while students in all five roles were included in social groups, some students gained a strong sense of mattering, while others did not. Combining the unequal distribution of value across the roles along with the

unequal distribution of students across roles, produces notable disparities in the allocation of value by race and gender (see Table 3).

TABLE 3: THE ALLOCATION OF VALUE BY RACE AND GENDER

Value	REM students (Female)	REM students (Male)	White Students (Female)	White Students (Male)	Total
Lower Value	54% (n=21)	90% (n=27)	46% (n=16)	21% (n=7)	51% (n=71)
Higher Value	41% (n=16)	7% (n=2)	40% (n=14)	74% (n=25)	42% (n=58)
Other	5% (n=2)	3% (n=1)	14% (n=5)	6% (n=2)	7% (n=9)
Total	39	30	35	34	138

Contrasting the associate and entertainer roles (which conferred less value) with the caregiver, leader, and educator roles (which conferred greater value), reveals stark associations between race, gender, and value. White males occupied the roles that were the most highly valued, with 74% in the leader and educator roles. REM female students and White female students occupied roles conferring greater value at virtually identical rates (41% and 40% respectively), mainly the caregiver role. However, just 7% of male REM students occupied these higher-value roles. In other words, while nearly three out of four White male students occupied the higher-value roles associated with a greater sense of value, less than half of female students and very few male REM students did.

This unequal distribution of value raises a variety of questions about the durability of roles and the external validation they produce. For instance, is it possible for students to alter or change their styles of self-presentation? What happens when students attempt to enter a group

occupying a role that does not correspond with the raced and gendered expectations associated with specific roles? Over the course of this study, the social construction of roles became even clearer when students attempted to occupy styles of self-presentation – momentarily or long-term – that did not match others' expectations. The next chapter examines these processes in greater detail.

CHAPTER 5

THE PHYSICS OF SELF-PRESENTATION:

ROLE INERTIA, CENTRIFUGAL PRESSURE, & CENTRIPETAL CULTIVATION

It was the day after the 2016 presidential election. As I made my way across ESU's campus toward Public Hall for the Learning Community's weekly class meeting, the mood on campus was gloomy. Instead of the usual chatter and laughter in the central plaza there was near silence. The students I passed looked dismayed, and a few appeared to be crying while talking in hushed tones. The rainy weather coupled with a November chill seemed to both reflect and reinforce the somber atmosphere. I entered the classroom to find the space was nearly silent, although several students were already seated around the table in the center of the room. This was highly unusual for the group, which was generally animated and loud. I could tell several students had been crying. Paula and Jenna's eyes were red and puffy, Rhonda had her face covered, with her head down toward the table.

A few minutes later once more students had arrived and found a seat, the instructor began by asking the class if they would like to talk about how they were feeling after the election. "I see lots of us look beat down today and I know I'm feeling it as well. We can talk about it if people would like that." Fred raised his hand. After being acknowledged by the instructor he explained to the class, "I'm feeling so frustrated right now, but I try to remember three things. First, he'll only be president for four years, and presidents can really only get things done in their first two years – the midterm elections are coming up in 2018. Think about all of the trouble Obama has had getting things done. It's going to be the same way for Trump. Second…" Fred proceeded to give the class a mini civics lesson. The group listened intently as he shared these

insights, despite the fact that the instructor had specifically noted that the discussion was meant to focus on how people were feeling.

While Fred was experiencing the attention and deference of his peers, in essence, having his self-presentation within the educator role reinforced, it soon became clear that this same courtesy was not extended to everyone. In particular, his experience speaking as an educator contrasts with Jenna, who just a few minutes later tried to explain to the group why people could be positive about the situation. She said, "When [the election results were announced] people were taking to the streets and protesting – young people who haven't been before -- because people are going to respond to this by getting involved; this is not going to make people stop. It's going to make us fight even harder." As Jenna recounted her observations from news coverage the room seemed to grow agitated. Her message was hopeful but explanatory like Fred's; however, rather than speaking to an attentive audience, Jenna was greeted with eye rolling and agitated whispering from the group. It seemed that while her classmates were willing to listen and learn from Fred, the educator, they were not disposed to do the same with Jenna, who usually performed the role of a caregiver.

After a few additional expressions of concern and dismay, Maura raised her hand. She acknowledged that the group was feeling frustrated, but said, "I just have hope that it's going to be ok and that we can be positive and get through this together. It's really hard but I try my best to be positive." In a way, her comments were similar to Jenna's but instead of explaining to the group why things were going to be ok, Maura expressed care for the community in that moment. She offered emotional support and reassurance, without telling her peers "why" or "how" things were going to get better like Jenna did. Rather than silence or dismissive eye rolls, Maura

received affirmative echoes of "mmm hmm" along with finger snapping, signaling the concurrence of her peers.

In addition to theorizing the connection between self-presentation and perceptions of social worth, as seen in the "line" social actors adopt and the "face" they claim, Goffman (1967) also offers a framework for examining how one's face is maintained. He claimed that having and maintaining "face" occurs "when the line [a social actor] effectively takes presents an image of him [sic] that is internally consistent, that is supported by judgments and evidence conveyed by other participants" (p. 6). In other words, Goffman links the consistency of one's presentation of self with the evaluative judgments of others. When social actors take a line in interaction that differs from what their peers expect, they are said to "be out of face" (Goffman 1967, p. 8). The experience of being out of face often incurs the displeasure of the audience in an interaction, and Goffman shows the ways in which the audience – through its ability to give or withdraw a performer's social face – holds a great deal of power in interactions. Because of this, Goffman suggests that a line – and subsequently one's face – become highly durable. He notes:

> The line taken by each participant is usually allowed to prevail, and each participant is allowed to carry off the role he [sic] appears to have chosen for himself… The mutual acceptance of lines has an important conservative effect upon encounters. Once the person initially presents a line, he and others tend to build their later responses upon it, and in a sense become stuck with it. (Goffman 1967, p. 11-12).

The work of Collins (2004) further suggests that lines and their associated roles could become durable across interactions within groups of individuals who share one another's company on a regular basis.[26] In the context of studying social inclusion in college, such claims direct attention to interactions within the social groups in which students take up sustained involvement.

[26] In his focus on interactions as the unit of analysis, Goffman does not offer much in the way of insight regarding how individual social actor's lines and roles could be durable over time (rather than simply within a single interaction). However, Collins (2004), Durkheim (1915), and others

With the prevalence of narratives about higher education as a catalyst for students' growth and development (e.g., Evans et al. 2009; Hu and Kuh 2003; Magolda and King 2004), it is important to raise questions about the degree to which students' styles of self-presentation could alter, shift, or change over time. How frequently did students take on new or different styles of self-presentation? What happens when students momentarily alter their performance? Do role performances gradually evolve in certain ways over time? And how do students respond when others enter groups with styles of self-presentation that do not conform to gendered or raced expectations? While the answers to these questions are nuanced, the overarching pattern in students' social interactions is one of continuity over time and conformity to expectations.

This chapter examines the ways social groups monitored the self-presentation of their members. I find that many students experienced a phenomenon similar to the one Goffman (1967) documents of social actors becoming "stuck with" interactional roles. With limited options for adding complexity or nuance to their styles of self-presentation, students tended to maintain a single, simplistic form of self-presentation over time. In rarer instances when change over time occurred, it was often in response to social pressure or encouragement connected to the gendered and raced associations with these roles. Below I explore the ways these attempts at change (both successful and failed) and maintenance played out in interaction.

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encourage those studying social life to think about the broader "emotional marketplace" and group solidarity. In Collins's case, thinking about interactions in and across groups over time also facilitates understanding the experiences of individuals as they move through multiple situations.

ROLE INERTIA

As Goffman's (1959; 1967) theories would suggest, self-presentation was rarely a neutral act. Conceiving of students' styles of self-presentation as functioning to do the relational work that Goffman has called "impression management," draws attention to the way that the roles students took on existed in relation to an audience of their peers – an audience with expectations concerning the consistency of the lines or scripts students deployed within these roles. Over the course of the year, the roles students adopted proved to be incredibly durable, a phenomenon I refer to as *role inertia*. Once a student was recognized by their peers as performing within a given role, they often became locked into that style of self-presentation, with little room to add nuance or shift their performance over time. Role inertia was the byproduct of two behaviors that worked in tandem: reinforcement and policing.

Students who adopted roles that were approved of by their peers had their self-presentation reinforced. However, when students deviated from expected styles of self-presentation based on their roles, they were often disciplined by peers through pressures in the form of policing mechanisms that ranged from subtle nudges to more blatant exclusionary practices. When students attempted to introduce some degree of nuance to their styles of self-presentation or "slipped up" in a tense or heated moment, they were quickly reminded that their peers preferred a more clear-cut and simplistic performance of their role within the group.

Reinforcement of Role-Specific Behavior

For students occupying the roles of leaders, caregivers, and educators, performing within the confines of a simplistic style of self-presentation elicited positive attention and benevolent treatment from peers. For instance, Fred, a White first-year student, self-presented within the educator role. As in the example provided in the introduction, Fred frequently explained things to

his peers, offering insight or perspective. In taking on the role of the educator, Fred gained a sense of value in the Learning Community, as other members expressed appreciation for his contributions to the group and reinforced his self-presentation by offering praise and positive attention. While in this particular instance, Fred strayed from the topic at hand – how students were feeling after the election – to offer specific information about governance, he was still listened to with deference. A few moments later, however, others interjected when Max, an Asian male student who occupied the entertainer role, attempted to offer an analysis of the political system.

Like Fred, Maura, a Black student who occupied the caregiver role, received reinforcement for performing within her role. She was read as kind and caring by other students in the Learning Community, and importantly, she was also vulnerable, avoiding telling students what to do while allowing others to provide comfort and care to her as well. In this instance, her expressions of concern were intertwined with positivity and care for the community. Fred and Maura's experiences during this emotionally fraught class meeting were representative of a broader tendency to reinforce the self-presentation of students who performed in ways that were consistent with their roles. When this occurred, students presenting in role-specific ways received indications from their peers that their self-presentation was accepted and even encouraged.

While leaders, caregivers, and educators were the most frequent recipients of these expressions of positive attention, entertainers' styles of self-presentation were also reinforced when performed correctly. Some of these instances were observable in the experiences of entertainers, described in the previous chapter. For instance, when Nick elicited exclamations of "woah!" and laughter from his peers as he jumped to grab tree branches during a run with the

Cardio Club. Similarly, reinforcement of Alec's performance of the entertainer role could be seen when the class broke into uproarious laughter as he took a comedic approach to acting out one of the professor's allegories for the class.

While entertainers did not receive explicit articulations of appreciation as leaders, educators, and caregivers did, their behavior was often reinforced by their peers. In other words, as long as entertainers performed in simplistic, recognizable ways, their self-presentation was reinforced with positive attention – most frequently in the form of laughter – from their peers. As the previous chapter demonstrated however, the one group that hardly ever received attention was associates. Even when they performed their roles smoothly, taking part in group activities and following directives unassumingly, they often remained invisible. In cases when associates' roles were maintained, it was primarily through policing.

Policing

In contrast to the experiences of students like Fred and Maura, whose role performance within the Learning Community was reinforced when they acted within their standard styles of self-presentation (as an educator and caregiver respectively), students who momentarily stepped outside of condoned roles incurred the displeasure of their peers. As Goffman (1959) has noted, when events occur that disrupt a social actor's self-presentation, "the self-conceptions around which his [sic] personality has been built may become discredited" (p. 243). In such instances, students were responded to with disrespect, rebukes, or outright dismissal that served to direct them back into their typical styles of self-presentation. This policing of self-presentation can be seen in the vignette at the beginning of the chapter through the experiences of Jenna.

Jenna was a White female student who typically occupied the caregiver role. However, in this instance, her self-presentation was more similar to Fred's as she momentarily attempted to

convey knowledge to the group. Rather than the attentive listening Fred received, Jenna's claims were met with eye rolling and scorn from her peers. In a separate class discussion about corporations on college campuses, students made fun of Jenna after she claimed that "The [fast food chain] on our campus is in the top three highest profit [restaurants] in the whole company." Again, while her point echoed other claims staked out previously by two students in the educator role, Jenna's own claim was met with derision from multiple students. A few of her classmates snickered, and one quietly mocked her, whispering to those nearby in a caricature, high-pitched voice, "Ooh -- it's the top three highest profit!" Several students around her laughed.

As Jenna's experiences in these two situations illustrate, policing served as a direct contrast to the reinforcement students received when performing in their typical roles. While attempts to convey knowledge to others were recognized positively for students who occupied the educator role, students who typically performed within the caregiver role incurred the displeasure of their peers for the same behaviors. Policing functioned to call students' self-presentation into question, directing negative attention or treatment toward those who stepped outside of the confines of these narrow roles. This sort of negative treatment refused to condone certain behaviors or acknowledge value in contributions to the group when performed outside of the scope of a student's typical role.

Maintaining a specific role consistently was particularly challenging in the Learning Community, a group that lived, socialized, and studied together virtually 24-7. During the tense conversation described in the introduction, Rhonda, who typically performed a role of a caregiver, raised her hand to say that she was tired of people telling her how to think or feel. She elaborated that she did not feel hopeful and was "sick of hearing from people that [she] should be positive and fight harder." She looked back down at the table as she appeared to conclude her

statement. However, it seemed that she thought better of it and looked back up, expanding, "White people just don't understand what it's like to be afraid to go back home, afraid that someone is going to hurt you or kill you just because of the color of your skin." Looking around the room, Rhonda was greeted with silence.

Rhonda's statements during class that day seemed to temporarily reshape the way she was viewed by the rest of the students in the Learning Community. Her momentary "loss of face" – to employ Goffman's (1967) phrase – disrupted students' perceptions of Rhonda. After becoming visibly frustrated and criticizing the other students who "didn't understand," she was temporarily ostracized by the group. This sort of exclusion functioned as a more extreme form of policing that conveyed her peers' disapproval through their unwillingness to communicate or interact with her.

This sort of policing was usually an effective method of enforcing role inertia by pushing students back into the confines of the role they usually occupied. During the next few weeks, Rhonda worked hard to regain her place within the group, trying to prove herself to be caring and kind toward her peers. The next week in class, she attempted to convey this very explicitly during an activity where the students shared stories about experiences in their lives that had shaped who they were. During this activity, Rhonda told a story about what she described as an "unhealthy relationship" she had previously been in with one of her high school boyfriends. She noted that it took her some time to realize that the relationship was unhealthy and was having a negative impact on her. However, Rhonda told the class that once she came to this realization, she became passionate about helping other people develop and maintain healthy relationships. Rhonda elaborated, explaining that this was why she spent so much time with the other students in the Learning Community, asking them about themselves and their relationships. She added

that it was important to her to be able to care for them, saying "I love taking care of people, it just makes me feel good." Over the course of the subsequent days and weeks, Rhonda seemed to recover her image among her peers. Once again, she convincingly occupied the caregiver role, and the events on the day after the election seemed to be forgotten.

While she eventually regained her place within the community, it was clear that Rhonda did not forget this experience. She remained reflexive about the way her actions and words would be perceived in the group. One day a smaller subset of the Learning Community group began talking about the power of stereotypes. Rhonda candidly offered the following description of her concerns about being stereotyped:

> I'm educated but I'm scared to speak up because I'm caring but I know when I talk to people, when I tell them something they see me as an "angry Black woman." I don't want them to see me that way so a lot of the time I try not to say anything. I'm still struggling with that. I struggle with it every day.

Notably, Rhonda was aware of the way both race and gender were related to her style of self-presentation as a caregiver and the way the rigidity of this role led to pressure to conceal her education and avoid speaking up. She was explicit in contrasting "speaking up" or "telling [people] something" with being caring. While the trope of the "angry Black woman" that she describes may have contributed to the policing of female REM caregivers, White female caregivers also had to worry about the way being outspoken, authoritative, or knowledgeable could be misread by their peers.

As it turned out, the caregiver role in particular was especially difficult to maintain, and breaking with it, even momentarily, could garner one the designation of being "fake." The experience of another first-year student in the Learning Community illustrates this phenomenon. Unlike Jenna and Rhonda, the events that led Jamie, a White female student, to be rebuked by her peers were not the product of a momentary change in expression, but a gradual shift in role

performance that led to more active policing from her peers. Jamie began the year occupying the caregiver role. She exuded warmth and compassion. On the first day of class she told the entire group about how much she loved working with kids and wanted to become a teacher. However, as the semester wore on, Jamie began taking on a more authoritative style of self-presentation. Particularly among a smaller sub-group of the community that included her roommates and their close friends, she began to give directives and try to structure the activities of the group. This behavior was received poorly by her peers. I captured the following interaction in my fieldnotes one evening after returning home from a movie night with the Learning Community:

> [Shortly after I arrived at the event] Cecilia, who was sitting two chairs down from me, asked Sherry if Jamie was coming to the movie. "No, I think she's ignoring us now. She's still mad that we called her out" Sherry replied.
>
> Cecilia: "Well I feel kind of bad for getting in the situation, but she shouldn't have been acting that way."
>
> Sherry: "I mean you guys have seen how she's been."
>
> Cecilia: "Yeah"
>
> May: "I mean I haven't seen her lately."
>
> Sherry: "That's because she's staying in her room. She's not even speaking to me. I asked her yesterday if she wanted to go out to Walmart and she didn't even respond. She just gave me the side-eye. I told my mom about it because she's coming to visit this weekend and I said, 'mom, just to give you a heads-up, my roommate might not speak to us.' And she asked me why, because I had told her she was really nice. I mean I used to think she was the nicest person on the floor, but she's just so fake."
>
> "She is really fake," Cecilia agreed.
>
> Sherry concurred, "yeah, but I really thought she was like the sweetest person. I guess that should have been a sign. She's so fake!"

Sherry and Cecilia were not the only students I heard label someone "fake." Similar to the way Pascoe (2007) describes high school students policing masculinity by weaponizing the epithet "f****t," these students disciplined one another with a discourse surrounding inauthenticity or

fakeness. The threat of being marked as “fake” served to police the behavior of female students who stepped outside of the caregiver role. In this particular instance, Jamie was being policed for becoming too authoritative within her group of roommates. As with other caregivers, entertainers, and associates, her efforts to exercise authority or gain respect were met with disapproval.

The very next day in class it seemed that Jamie was already at work trying to repair her image. She appeared despondent during the group discussion, and as far as I could tell her presence went unacknowledged by any of her peers. There was extra time at the end of class, which the group filled with a brief activity. The instructor told the group to form a circle in the courtyard outside of the classroom. One student explained, “As we go around the circle, you say something you’re proud of accomplishing this week and everyone claps.” Matthew went first, saying that he’d gotten a good grade on his Chemistry exam, and many others followed suit – in fact, about half of the students mentioned a grade they’d gotten on an assignment. Some of these were “100%” or high A’s. Other students celebrated B’s, like Andre who announced with pride, “I got an 89 on my communications exam.” Regardless of the grade, everyone clapped for each of their peers’ shared accomplishments.

When the group came to Jamie, she said, “I got to go home for the first time in 10 weeks and I took my little cousin trick or treating.” The comment drew several “aww’s” from the group and Jamie gave a warm smile, looking down after she spoke. It seemed apparent to me with this statement that Jamie was working to repair her image. By highlighting the time she spent taking her “little cousin” trick or treating, she signified to the others in the group that she again intended to perform within the contours of the caregiver role. For several weeks after this incident however her place in the group appeared much more tentative. In the moments when she was

most successful in embodying the caregiver role, Jamie seemed to be granted a tepid sort of acceptance, but it was clear that she had to work harder to present herself as kind and caring.

Other caregivers similarly described worries about being perceived as "fake." For instance, a multiracial female student named Becky, who self-presented as a caregiver, described the importance of avoiding being "fake" through honesty:

> I take integrity very seriously and that's something that I try to hold myself to. Particularly, stuff like honesty… I've been told I'm honest. I try not to be fake to people. I don't really have a whole lot worth hiding so I'm not going to bother to hide it.

As Becky's quote makes clear, avoiding being labeled "fake," meant presenting an honest, authentically caring self. The integrity she describes also related to consistency. Even a momentary faux pas could saddle a student with the "fake" moniker. The irony here was that while fakeness denoted a lack of authenticity, in order to avoid being labeled "fake," students in the caregiver role had to conceal aspects of themselves – knowledge, expertise, preferences, and qualities that signified leadership. In short, to avoid being seen as fake, students had to hide other elements of their feelings or experiences. Being perceived as "real" or authentic required repressing complexity or nuance.

Comparable policing tactics were used to coerce students back into the associate role. One illustrative example comes from a White student named Alice, who joined the Cardio Club. Alice began the year clearly performing within the parameters of the associate role. During the first few weeks, she showed up to practices with the Cardio Club, and rarely said much, often hanging out on the margins of the group. She was one of the few female students who ran with the 8:00-minute mile pace group, which consisted of about eight consistent members. She was not only reserved during workouts with her pace group, but also during warm-ups and cool-downs when the group was more gender balanced. Alice stayed focused on her warm-up/cool-

down stretches or the run, often avoiding conversation by looking at her watch. As the semester progressed however, there were several moments where Alice attempted to take on greater authority within the group. As one of the most consistent members of the Cardio Club, she came to know the structure of workouts and the running routes better than most of the new members. She also frequently read the social media and group messenger feeds before practice, sometimes being the only one to possess the most up-to-date information about what the group's workout would entail for the day or whether one of the captains would be arriving late. However, when she tried to convey instructions to others, seemingly testing out the leader role, she was often rebuffed.

I observed one of the first of these instances during a long run on a wooded trail during the third week of practice. As we crossed over a busy road onto the lake trail the group ran single-file, without anyone talking. Kenny and Danny took turns in front of the pack followed by me, Alice, Ace, and David. Occasionally someone would make a noise as they ran into a branch or lost footing on a rock or tree root. For the most part though, the group settled into a steady silence, and the only talking occasionally came was when Ace, a fourth-year White student who was a stand-in captain for the practice, would shout "left!" or "right!" at places where the trail split so that Kenny and Danny could avoid or correct from wrong turns. After a few miles though David and then Ace dropped off from the main group. Without Ace the four of us who remained occasionally had to stop to get our bearings. The trail had several abrupt turns and more than a few unmarked forks. Although Alice and I had run the trail a few times before, we were both usually a few paces behind the others.

At one point we reached a fork in the trail where Danny and Kenny paused and began jogging in place. Alice continued ahead, bearing onto the trail leading to the right. "Is that the

right way?" Kenny asked. Alice stopped and looked back to the rest of us. No one else spoke so I said, "I think so," even though I was almost certain she was going the right way.[27]

"This is it," Alice stated confidently, turning and picking up the pace again.

I started to follow her, but Kenny seemed hesitant. After a few strides he began to slow down again. "This doesn't look right," he said.

"No, it is," responded Alice.

Kenny repeated himself a few steps later, "I don't remember that house…"

"This is definitely it," Alice confirmed again. By this point the conversation felt awkward and strained. This was Kenny's first day running with the group. I had imagined a new runner would defer to someone like Alice who had run the trail before, but even with her more extensive experience he still raised questions that were implicitly about her ability to lead the group. While her facial expression did not provide much in the way of clues regarding her feelings about being questioned by Kenny, I wondered how Alice felt at this point. She rarely gave directions to the group, and as a first-year student I suspected that leading the group may have been a bit uncomfortable. Whether Kenny intended to or not, his words clearly served to undermine Alice's authority and credibility. Eventually we reached the end of the trail and headed back onto the road again. With this clear signal that we were in fact on the right path, I wondered if Kenny might apologize to Alice for doubting her directions. He did not.

A comparable exchange occurred on another afternoon when James was leading practice. As usual, upon arrival he asked the group where they wanted to run. There was a brief moment of silence before Alice replied: "Not the north loop!" She laughed as she said this, but I could tell

[27] I avoided making definitive statements whenever possible to minimize my own influence on the action of the group.

she was serious, as I had heard her and other students say before that they were tired of running this route. As she made this statement however, Carter turned to her and asked: “Why not? What’s wrong with north loop?” His question could perhaps have been intended to be humorous, but instead it felt a bit pointed, like a rebuke of Alice’s comment. She seemed caught off guard by Carter’s reply and did not respond.

In addition to being policed through the explicit questioning of her authority or knowledge, there were other instances where humor was used in more subtle ways as a policing mechanism. I observed moments when Alice would take a position of authority with the team by running in front and physically leading the group; such actions seemed to provoke efforts by other students to police her self-presentation by making fun of her. For example, during a long run one afternoon in late September, I was running with a group that included Alice and five male students. As we were running out of one of the wooded trails and back onto a side road with minimal traffic, Alice was running at the front, center of the group. Carter kept pace to her left, with Johnny and Drew a few steps behind and to her right. Ace and I trailed the four of them, running a few paces back. In this formation, Johnny looked to his left at the rest of the group until his gaze rested on Alice for a moment. Then he laughed unexpectedly. “It looks like she’s got an escort!” He exclaimed, laughing again.

“What?” Drew asked, apparently not following Johnny’s point.

“It looks like we’re her escorts,” Johnny elaborated, referring to Alice, “like her bodyguards.” This drew laughter from Drew and Ace, but Alice continued running, staring forward without comment. In this moment, it was clear that again, Alice was at the front of the group, and instead of being seen as a leader or being endowed with authority, Johnny framed her as female in need of an escort of male “bodyguards.” The message, while not as explicit as other

forms of policing, was not lost on me, and I imagine it was clear to Alice as well: while others in the group who presented as leaders were apparently welcome – and even expected – to be the frontrunners in the group, she was not. These questions and jokes seemed clearly directed at pressuring Alice to return to her initial style of self-presentation within the associate role. Notably, this was not simply an artifact of gender, as other female students – like Cara, Emily, Victoria, and Sydney –successfully joined the group without having their styles of self-presentation policed in this way. These women took on and consistently embodied the caregiver or associate roles, fitting into a social schema that was reinforced by other members of the Cardio Club. Before the end of the first semester, Alice seemed to have returned firmly to the associate role. She no longer ran in front of the group or directed any of the other students, and as other members of the team appeared to grow closer, having more frequent conversations, Alice again joined the other associates as a quiet, marginal presence on the team.

Efforts to police self-presentation were not only directed at those in the caregiver or associate roles. The behavior of entertainers was tightly controlled as well. For instance, James, a Black male student also in the Cardio Club was a returning member of the team who seemed to have settled into the entertainer role long before I arrived. While most entertainers were able to maintain a feeling of connection with their peers by performing among their peers in humorous ways, James's structural position as the treasurer and a practice captain – responsible for facilitating practices on Mondays and Wednesdays – meant that he sometimes was placed in situations where he was technically in charge of the group's activities. In these instances, James always seemed to take care to avoid giving directives, deferring to the decisions and preferences of others. As a CPR-certified member his presence and formal leadership position were necessary to enable practices to happen. When he was successful – which was most of the time –

James was able to encourage others to make decisions about where to workout, how fast to run, whether there would be weightlifting, how long practice would last, etc. However, there were a few times where James's structural position required him to be more authoritative, such as during one of the practices when a student broke club rules by leaving the group during a run. As we arrived back at the gym, completing the day's run, James turned around to the group and counted each of us. I saw a frown come across his face. "We're missing someone. Where's Johnny?" he asked.

Carter explained James that Johnny had fallen back, but that "he said he was ok… he seemed like he didn't need any help."

James looked frustrated. I couldn't remember seeing him appear even remotely upset before. "Yeah, but that's for me to decide," he responded to Carter, who looked surprised at James' rebuke. He looked away, avoiding a response. The group was silent for a moment until Alice pointed to Johnny, running up toward the group.

As Johnny arrived back at the gym he said, "Sorry, I got hit by some really bad cramps all the sudden."

James looked a bit relieved, but I could tell he was still frustrated. He replied, "I understand man. I know what that's like, but you've got to tell me next time. When you guys are running we're liable for you." He didn't elaborate on what this meant, but I had heard Drew say that the "risk management" and CPR-trained members, which included all practice captains like James, were told by the club sports administrators at the university that they could not leave any runners behind. I was unsure if the others understood the point James was making without this context, or perhaps they remembered Drew's explanation as well. Nonetheless, James seemed frustrated and upset, something that the other students seemed to read uneasily. Instead of trying

to console him or apologize, the group was silent and eventually broke up as the students headed their separate ways. Because of the tension surrounding James' social role as an entertainer and his structural position in the group, his place within the group always seemed to be tentative. Awkward or difficult interactions like this one had power to strip away the acceptance he received in his self-presentation as an entertainer.

It was not only with new members that James had to negotiate his role within the group. Even the other practice captains who had been in the Cardio Club with James for over a year made efforts to police his authority on the team. For instance, it seemed fairly obvious to me that as a third-year student, James would have been a strong candidate to be president of the team the following year when Drew, Alyssa, Adam, and Derek graduated. However, Drew made it clear that this would not be the case. After one of the team's first practices, as Drew, Grant, Joey, Nathan, and I were cooling down in the gym, our discussion turned to who would lead the team next year. At one point Drew mentioned the lack of apparent successors to the students who occupied officer and/or team captain positions in the Cardio Club. Given that there were so many graduating seniors leading the club, Drew said he was not sure who would take charge of the group after they graduated. Nathan, a student who was just visiting the team for the workout, brought up James, who had facilitated the 9:00 minute mile-pace group's workout for the day. This suggestion made sense given that James was the only third-year distance runner who was currently a practice captain for Cardio Club.

Drew however laughed and said, "I don't think that will work with James. I mean I like him a lot and he's cool, but I'm not sure that I trust him to make four correct decisions in a row [he laughed]. I mean we're usually happy if he can get one thing right, and more than that is a stretch." This statement struck me as a bit odd given that James had gotten practice started that

day without Drew's help when he was running late. It was also clear from the statements made earlier in the week by Cara, Drew, and Alyssa that in their eyes James could not be seen as a leader of the group, but only as an entertainer. Alyssa had talked about how funny James was, and Cara had referenced the jokes James made at team dinners.

Over the course of the semester, I heard Drew and some of the other team captains make similar statements about James's inability to access authority. In fact, Drew repeated his line about not being able to "trust James to make decisions" enough times that it was clear that this was not just a one-time observation, but a concerted effort to monitor James's self-presentation. Although these things were never said in such a pointed way in front of James himself (they were often framed through innuendo or more subtle jokes about his irresponsibility), James seemed to understand the confines of his role in the club clearly. This was apparent when I heard Kenny ask James if he would be running for president the next year (a position that Kenny wanted for himself, despite being a new member who had only been in the club for three months prior to the elections). James told Kenny that he planned to serve as treasurer again, minimizing his authority in the group, and adding that Kenny should run for president himself.

As these findings make apparent, students' roles proved to be incredibly durable. Their durability was achieved in part through the work of peers in policing self-presentation. Given the ways that the caregiver, associate, and entertainer roles limited expressions of authority or knowledge, it is perhaps unsurprising that students performing within their parameters sometimes felt the need to momentarily step outside these styles of self-presentation, or perhaps even the temptation to move away from these styles of presentation altogether. However, when change provoked skepticism or teasing and complexity meant being labeled "fake," it was often safer to remain within the confines of the roles.

CENTRIFUGAL PRESSURE

A different, yet related, sets of pressures were applied to students who attempted to occupy roles that did not align with gendered and raced associations connected with those roles, most notably, female students or male REM students in the leader or educator roles. For example, after joining a student organization, Jodie, an Asian female student attempted to occupy the leader role. Jodie told me about how immediately upon joining the group she had been enthusiastic about working to increase the organization's membership. In this effort, she attempted to direct the group toward opportunities to host additional events. However, the other members were dismissive of her recommendations, as she recounted in our dialogue:

Jodie: I feel like our club can be more active. Lots of people have no idea that it's even a thing, and I feel like we've only done one major event. I keep talking to the board members. I'm just like, "Hey, like, do you guys want to like, you know, do some more things? Like, I have a couple ideas." I'm like, "Why don't we have kiosks, and just if we're outside, like book a thing, and like play music," to just get people to know that we're a club and get more people to join… But they would always just sort of be like, "No, it's too much of a hassle, you have to go through so much paperwork and stuff," so I'd be like, "Oh, okay yeah." It was kind of annoying, but I just wish that the club could be a bit more active and stuff.

BRS: Yeah, but when you raised that idea with them, they just said "No"?

Jodie: Yeah, they kind of shut it down. They just kind of like, "No, it's really complicated."

BRS: Yeah, but how did that feel for you at the moment, when they're saying that? What was your reaction or thoughts?

Jodie: Well, to be honest, I was kind of annoyed. I was like, "Man, but you guys ..." I'm like, "Fine, like then if you don't want to be ..." Like, I get it if you're busy. That's fine. But then… they wouldn't really let me and my friends sort of step in… They're just like, "No, it's just for the like E Board members." I'm like, "Oh, okay, well ..." Which, that kind of annoyed me at first… I didn't really argue or anything that much. I was like, "Okay, that's fine." I was a bit annoyed though. I felt like our club can be doing more.

While Jodie attempted to take on the leader role within the organization, others in the group were quick to, in her words, “shut it down.” Dismissing her recommendations, they sent a clear signal that this sort of involvement was not welcome. While the officers initially told Jodie that her plans would be “too complicated,” she noted her suspicion that there was more going on here, given that even when she offered to do the logistical work to get the events up and running they were still unwilling to follow her lead.

Subsequently, Jodie described a shift in her self-presentation with the group. In more recent meetings, rather than attempting to occupy the leader role, she had settled into a style of self-presentation typical of associates. She described the last meeting she had attended where the group was planning how to host a percent fundraiser night at a local restaurant:

> I was just in the meeting, just talking to them, and just there agreeing, like, "Yeah. That's a good idea." I wanted to suggest maybe doing something a bit more creative than just handing out those [restaurant] flyers. I'm like, "You know, I can do something a bit more fun, to like raise money, and I don't know if you still want to educate the kids about different cultures and stuff, you can have, I don't know, certain art events or something outside of the [student union building], to raise money and stuff for music, or food, anything.

Despite having this idea in mind, Jodie noted that she did not express it. She was now an associate who was “just there agreeing.” Instead of proposing her fundraiser ideas Jodie simply told other students that the ideas they had already presented were good.

I refer to the sort of treatment Jodie received as *centrifugal pressure*. This occurred when students entered a group with a style of self-presentation carrying gendered and raced associations that did not align with the intersections of their own race and gender (in Jodie’s case, entering the leader role, which carried associations of White masculinity, as an Asian female student). In such instances, their peers exerted pressure, pushing them into less central,

less valued roles (in Jodie's case from a leader to an associate) by policing the student's style of self-presentation and signaling displeasure with her chosen role.

Centrifugal pressure was targeted most often at students attempting to occupy the leader and educator roles, more specifically, at female or REM students who attempted to take on the leader or educator roles. Because of the way centrifugal pressure monitored the occupation of those roles and because of the way both the leader and educator roles carried associations with White masculinity, this social force functioned in practice to reshape the styles of self-presentation of female and REM students, pushing them into roles at the margins of their groups (namely the associate and entertainer roles).[28]

Carl, a Latino male student, who began attending the Volunteer Collective meetings in September had a similar experience to Jodie in attempting to occupy the leader role. Carl was enthusiastic about being part of the group and seemed focused on demonstrating his value as a member by proposing ways the organization could raise money, taking on a typical presentation of the leader role. The Volunteer Collective meetings frequently included time for input from the students regarding possible activities and fundraisers for the group. In these moments, Carl would put forward plans for events. However, Beth, the other officers, and several of the new members were dismissive of his statements. I observed one such interaction during a fundraising brainstorming session at one of the group's first meetings. During the discussion Carl recommended that the group put on a movie night on campus and sell tickets for a dollar.

[28] Notably, while it seems possible that female students could have been redirected from the socially unacceptable leader or educator roles to the caregiver role, this was not observed in the current study. It is possible that female students who were interested in occupying the leader or educator role were unwilling or unable to self-present within the caregiver role and instead were more apt to relocate into the associate role. Alternatively, it may have been that the policing and disciplinary mechanisms directed at these students served as a signal that they were unwelcome in any role with greater centrality or value, including the caregiver role.

However, Beth seemed unimpressed, pointing out that the venue usually used for movies was closing that semester. She also pointedly remarked that during bake sales the group would be able to ask patrons to "donate whatever you can," which got much more money than pricing items at 50 cents or one dollar. Beth claimed that people would donate five dollars or ten dollars instead. "It's a good trick" she told the group. Others seemed to agree, nodding. Implicit in this comment was a cue for Carl that the plan he contributed was not useful given that a fundraiser securing only one dollar per student would be a waste of the collective's time. They could make more money in other ways.

Carl seemed to take a step back to process this interaction, which it appeared embarrassed him. While he had eagerly leaned forward over the table when describing his idea the first time, he slouched back in his seat with his arms folded and his head tilted downward so that his baseball cap partially obscured his face, as he articulated a half-hearted defense of the plan. "Well we did that in my high school and it worked really well. Lots of people came and you know, you can get your friends you can be like, 'hey man, come to the movie, it's just a dollar.'" The other students seemed uninterested in his defense and moved on with the discussion.

While the Volunteer Collective members were dismissive of Carl's plans, they often took directives from George, a White male student who joined the group shortly after Carl. George, who (successfully) occupied the leader role, was highly opinionated and would offer edicts for the group, often sketching plans that were very similar to Carl's. However, while Carl was typically rebuffed in such instances, the other students commended George on his input and the group frequently followed through in carrying out his plans.

Carl eventually seemed to pick up on these cues from his peers. Their rebuffs functioned to push him toward other styles of self-presentation. To what degree this was an active decision

from Carl or a reflexive response to centrifugal pressure from the group was unclear, but as the semester wore on, he slowly altered his style of self-presentation in the group. During the final meeting of the first semester, the full scale of the change in Carl's performance was evident. After arriving early, he sat down at one of the round tables with Beth, Kelly, George, Linda, and me. Unlike earlier in the semester when their hostility toward him was on full display, the other students occasionally shared a laugh with Carl as he told a joke. Kelly and Linda giggled with amusement as Carl told a story about how he had snuck into a movie theater over the Thanksgiving holiday. Instead of offering directives or plans, Carl became someone who told jokes and made others laugh. While he remained fairly marginal in the group – with other students rarely bringing Carl into their conversations and frequently leaving him out when they set up hangouts outside of the formal meetings – his style of self-presentation no longer elicited displeasure from his peers. The removal of negative sanctions seemed to cement Carl's performance within the entertainer role.

Centrifugal pressure could range from being fairly subtle to highly explicit. On the more subtle end of this continuum, there was the example of Max, an Asian student who was channeled into the entertainer role in a seemingly benign way during the first weeks of the semester. His initial style of self-presentation fit within the leader role; in my early conversations with Max he was confident and authoritative. Additionally, it was very clear that in the first few weeks of class he was uncomfortable with the entertainer role, which often seemed to embarrass him. However, his peers almost immediately seemed to adopt him as a sort of "mascot" for the group, making him the object of friendly jokes, which he went along with.

One example of this could be seen in the first class when students were introducing themselves. When it was Max's turn to speak, as soon as he offered his name, a White male

student named Jerry who was sitting across the room, shouted "that's my roommate!" The two of them pointed at each other and Max responded, "That's *my* roommate!" and chuckled. It seemed like this back-and-forth was something they had practiced before. The whole class laughed, and Paula, who was sitting beside Max gave a loud "aww" before exclaiming, "Max, you're adorable!" and squeezing his shoulders in a partial hug. Max smiled and looked down at the table.

I could tell that the group felt positively about this interaction. There was polite laughter and smiles around the room. However, it was also apparent to me that the power dynamic here was highly imbalanced. Max's roommate's "my" felt very possessive, and being called "adorable" by Paula seemed to situate Max as a form of entertainment for the group. After several students had just introduced themselves and talked about their goals as scholars and leaders (of clubs and groups on campus), the other students' treatment of Max seemed inappropriate. Instead of acknowledging the possibility that he might have similar goals or ambitions, the rest of the class seemed to treat him as a form of amusement – even if it was not in a mean-spirited way.

The group's positioning of Max within the entertainer role was one of the more subtle forms of negotiating self-presentation. Max seemed willing to fulfill the expectations of this role and this recalibrating of his performance would have been easy to miss. However, during my interview with Max later in the spring, it became apparent that my interpretation also aligned with Max's own feelings about the event. In response to a question about what sorts of things he typically did in social groups, Max described how he had learned to adjust his style of self-presentation with other students. He noted that he used to be "more of, 'get-going, let's just get this done with,' sometimes in a crude, abrasive manner, but my intention was to get the job done,

let's just do it now… I guess my approach was a little too abrasive for [other students]… I guess that kind of direct confrontation can be a little intimidating for some people." Although Max got the impression that his initial interactional style was "too abrasive," from my perspective as an observer it was apparent that his initial self-presentation as a leader was very similar to the White male students in the community. Nonetheless, when his peers signaled their displeasure, Max decided to adjust his self-presentation in order to fit in with the group.

Being positioned in the entertainer role also meant that Max was not looked to for insight as the educators were or for directions as the leaders were. Even as Max began occupying this new style of self-presentation, there were moments where it was apparent that this was a difficult balance to achieve. I observed one such instance during an event in the residence halls where the Learning Community watched an inspirational video about procrastination. Shortly after I arrived, Max sat on the couch beside my chair and we said hello. A few moments later Paula took a seat on the floor nearby. Max commented on the video's topic being procrastination. He made a joke about the irony of the fact that he was avoiding doing his school work and in essence "procrastinating" by watching a video about how to avoid procrastination. Paula and another student sitting beside them laughed.

As a few more students slowly gathered in the room Max offered the same point to them, although this time it was framed as an observation rather than a joke. Instead of laughing as he said it, Max smiled and made the comment knowingly as if he was proud to have made this connection. At this point, Paula looked at him with a mixture of incredulity and frustration exclaiming, "You've said that three times!" While she laughed after her comment it was clearly driven in part by annoyance, something that Max clearly read and subsequently became quiet. I had not actually heard him make the comment three times (although perhaps he had said it in her

presence prior to arriving at the event). Nonetheless, this rebuke functioned to police Max's self-presentation in the group. While she and other students were apparently content to laugh along when he framed the comment as a joke, when it was framed as an interesting observation, she publicly embarrassed him by calling out the repetition of his statement. As this vignette illustrated, even a subtle shift from making a joke to offering an observation could set off policing efforts, applying centrifugal pressure.

While Paula was one of the primary culprits in policing Max's style of self-presentation, she was also the recipient of such treatment herself. Whereas the centrifugal pressure applied to Max was often subtle, Paula's self-presentation within the educator role was policed more explicitly. Often outspoken, Paula – like other educators such as Fred, Matthew, and Aldo – seemed excited to share her knowledge and perspective with the group. However, while her White male classmates' behavior was reinforced with encouraging comments and positive attention, Paula was treated differently. When shared with the Learning Community, her ideas were frequently greeted with scorn. For instance, during the first semester Paula shared her knowledge of topics including politics, poverty, veganism, and LGBTQ activism. Given that this was a community focused on social justice, there were many other students in the group who were also passionate about these topics. However, Paula's willingness to convey her knowledge to others often provoked retorts rather than appreciation. When she spoke, other students would frequently interrupt, laugh, or undermine the points she made. Nonetheless, Paula presented within the educator role for almost the entirety of the first three months of the academic year. Beginning around December however, I noticed a gradual shift in her style of self-presentation as she moved from the educator role to the associate role.

One of the last times I heard Paula speak with confidence in front of the group was at a community retreat in January. Midway through the retreat there was a discussion about politics. Fred brought up recent examples of activism and began explaining the social movements behind some of the recent protest that had happened in Washington, DC. Paula attempted to contribute her insight as well, describing the actions of some of the activists she had heard about working within government agencies. In particular, she described the Park Service's use of social media as a form of protest. As she was speaking, the environment in the room changed. Several students who had previously listened attentively to Fred began to talk again. Ellen and Danae pointedly dismissed Paula's contribution to the conversation, as Ellen audibly whispered, "What is she talking about?" and the two of them began to laugh. Paula suddenly became quiet and spent most of the remainder of the retreat silently focused on her cell phone. Less than a week later Paula candidly acknowledged that fears of "being misunderstood" and having other students "talk about me behind my back" led her to avoid speaking in groups. Her new, more reserved style of self-presentation as an associate continued through to the end of the spring semester.

Some students admitted to taking part in the application of centrifugal pressure. For instance, Janice told me about how she and some of her peers responded to female students who took on more vocal, leader or educator roles in their student organization:

Janice: Allie, she's very extroverted and outgoing and sometimes she's a little over the top and sometimes she doesn't realize that that's the way that she's being. She'll be really ... I don't know. It'll come off as kind of passive aggressive, but she won't mean it to be that way. Some people will take it that way. It gets kind of awkward. If we go off track, it bothers her. She has her questions. She wants to stick to her questions. She's like, "No, that's not answering the question." But we want to explore something different. It kind of bothers her… We have a couple of girls that are little bit know-it-alls sometimes.

BRS: How do people respond to that?

> Janice: Most people are just kind of like ... [rolls eyes]. Most of the time with stuff like that, we're just kind of like, "Okay, whatever you say." Then we just move on.

As Janice noted here, Allie's attempts at leadership were read as "passive aggressive," even though Janice realized this was not her intent. Such a description highlights the ways that similar behavior among male and female students was interpreted in very different ways through the lens of roles that had gendered (as well as raced) associations. While White male students frequently took on the leader role and received reinforcement from their peers, Janice described Allie and other more outspoken women as "over the top." She also described female students who attempted to occupy the educator role as "know-it-alls." Janice acknowledged that she and other members of the group would roll their eyes and offer a dismissive, "whatever" in response. Janice's efforts to police female students who attempted to occupy leader and educator roles constituted a clear example of the application of centrifugal pressure.

It is worth noting that not all students responded to centrifugal pressure by altering their styles of self-presentation. In a few rare instances, students persisted in attempting to occupy a role despite the policing and disciplinary efforts of their peers. One example came from Holly. As a female student who self-presented as an educator, Holly's behavior was policed frequently. In her informal friend group, she often felt excluded. The treatment she received from her peers ranged from subtle barbs in one group to being fully ostracized in another. She told me about an experience that had occurred just the previous day with a group of students she worked with on documentary filmmaking. After some of her peers showed a video project they were working on, Holly offered constructive feedback. She described the other students' response as she was speaking:

> Some of them, they were rolling their eyes. They were like, "Mmm" [frowning and shaking head] kind of thing. I was like, "You know I can see you." I don't think they

> meant to do it. They were like, “Umm, no, disagree.” They showed it in their face. It made me upset and angry because it was like, “I can see you physically doing that.” It made me feel shut down, like I didn't want to give them any more feedback.

This experience was deeply hurtful for Holly, and the pain in her voice was fresh as she recounted the events of the previous day. The feeling of being “shut down,” in this manner caused Holly to feel “upset and angry.” Nonetheless, Holly described herself as consistently presenting within the educator role in each of the social groups with which she was involved despite centrifugal pressure from her peers.

Similarly, a member of the Learning Community named Ali consistently presented as a leader. Other students rarely responded positively to her directives, often laughing, rolling their eyes, and occasionally outright ignoring her when she spoke. Even as the year was coming to a close, Ali was still the recipient of centrifugal pressure from her peers. During one of the Learning Community’s final meetings students were directed to write “something nice” about each of their peers on sheets of paper that were passed around the room. Midway through this activity, the instructor, looking flustered and upset, stopped the class to remind the group “these are supposed to be nice things; I see some people are not being nice.” I was confused about what she might be referring to until Ali’s paper arrived at my desk. Along with several lukewarm and even underhanded comments, someone had scrawled “smart ass” across her paper. While other students who received similar treatment almost always revised their self-presentation to conform with expectations, Ali, like Holly, persisted in the leader role throughout the year and across social settings. Notably, Ali was in her third-year at the university, so it is possible that she had not always occupied the leader role but may shifted her self-presentation earlier on in college. Regardless of the reason however, the unresponsiveness to centrifugal pressure that Holly and Ali displayed was the exception, not the rule.

While Ali was the only student I witnessed successfully resisting policing and centrifugal pressure in my ethnographic observations, Holly and two additional female students as well as one male REM student, who I spoke with in interviews, described occupying either the educator or leader roles. Specifically, Holly was the only student who was not a White male to occupy the educator role, and Ali was joined by two other female students and one REM male student as the only non-White male students occupying the leader role. Notably however, all of these students described experiences where their self-presentation was policed by their peers. How or why students like these managed to resist changing roles was unclear in the data I gathered and remains a topic for future exploration. It is worth emphasizing however that they were exceptions to a much more pervasive pattern, accounting for slightly less than 4% of the study participants.

CENTRIPETAL CULTIVATION

Carter's experience offers a noteworthy contrast to the examples in the previous section in which female and REM students attempted to occupy the valued roles of leader or educator. As a first-year student, Carter joined the Cardio Club and initially adopted the associate role. The previous chapter describes his generally reticent and unobtrusive style of self-presentation during the first month of the semester. However, it was not long before I noticed a change in Carter's self-presentation that seemed to be negotiated in his interactions with other members of the club, especially the captains. After Drew talked with Carter about taking part in intercollegiate competitions on his first day at practice, he continued to encourage Carter to compete with the team at the fall events. While Drew and Adam were both opposed to James becoming president of the club, they began actively encouraging Carter and two other new White male students who

began in the associate roles to take on greater authority in the group and run for officer positions in the fall elections.

Carter responded to this encouragement to become more centrally involved in the team and take on the leader role. He began shifting his self-presentation within the Cardio Club. The first signs of this change were evident during a few practices in October and early November where Carter began to take charge of situations both physically and rhetorically. He started exercising this authority at practices that James (due to his structural leadership position) was supposed to lead on Mondays and Wednesdays. It may have been that Carter sensed these practices were a good place for him to test out the leader role; given that James occupied the entertainer role, perhaps Carter sensed a leadership vacuum of sorts where others were not taking authority. Whatever the reason, I made note of two practices in early October where he pushed past James as he was running in front of the group on a long-run. In both instances, Carter pressed forward, ahead of James early on in the run, conspicuously taking the lead. This was not something that other students had done previously. Additionally, Carter began challenging other new student members during practices – sometimes subtly and at other times not so subtly – staking out his space and authority within the team. In a fieldnote written after practice on a Monday evening in October I recounted the following:

> Carter, who started out the semester quieter than most of the other students, now frequently demonstrates authority physically as he runs. He often uses his elbows to carve out space near the front of the group, never quite elbowing anyone, but the possibility is always there. In these moments he feels silently aggressive…
>
> As we neared the end of the run I found myself running between Carter and Joey [another White, male first-year student]. I'd just finished a conversation with Carter about his paper for a class when I heard Joey suddenly pick up the pace from a few yards behind. Carter noticed as well and began to open up his stride. Within seconds they were both sprinting toward the gym. It was clear that this was a moment of competition between the two of them. Carter had been running slightly ahead throughout the run and he seemed

> determined to finish first. I had seen them do the same thing with James in previous practices. (Fieldnote: October 17, 2016).

However, James did not appear to take these displays of dominance personally. He not only accepted Carter's exhibitions of authority; James also seemed to actively contribute to Carter's centrality the group. One day at practice, James, Valerie, and I began talking about attrition from the club. Valerie had recently returned after a hiatus from the Cardio Club and offered an explanation of why she had temporarily left the group. This led into a broader discussion of students who had left or remained with the club, and James made note of some of the students who had stuck with the group. He singled out Carter among a few others. "I mean we've had a decent group [of students] stick with [the club] this year too," James said, "like Kenny and Carter… so it's a pretty good group of new people along with the old group [of returning members]. And now everyone is pretty fast too. Just on Wednesday I was telling them, nobody believed they could run this fast at the beginning of the semester, and now look how good everyone is."

I asked James how he felt about the potential of the new runners. He responded: "Pretty good I think. I mean Kenny is good, and Carter is awesome; like the other day when I got to practice he asked if we were going to be doing 'Old Faithful.' I didn't even know what he was saying at first, but then I got it – he calls north loop 'Old Faithful' because we run it so much." James laughed as he said this, and I could tell he appreciated Carter's more active role in the club. It was apparent that Carter, even though he was perhaps not as fast when compared to the other runners on the team, was still conferred a central place in the group.

Additionally, the fact that Carter had come up with a nickname for one of these routes also marked a change in his level of comfort in the group. More generally, he came to speak with greater authority among the other members of the club. One illustrative case came early in

November. After arriving at practice, James announced, “So it’s going to be an easy run today, we’ve got nationals on Saturday.” After a brief pause to see how others would respond, he asked “How about ‘Old Faithful’ today?”

“Yeah let’s do Old Faithful!” Carter replied smiling; he was clearly enjoying being in the know at this moment. I realized that James meant he wanted to run the North Loop but the fact that he referred to it in this new way functioned as an insider’s reference that offered Carter a moment to both feel he had an impact on the group culture and demonstrate his centrality within the club by making use of this shared reference.

“What’s Old Faithful?” Kenny asked, clearly a bit confused as he did not typically attend the Monday and Wednesday practices for which James was responsible. “What’s Old Faithful? Come on!” Carter exclaimed, feigning surprise and shock that Kenny would be unfamiliar with the reference. His smile became even more expansive. James was not the only one to facilitate these encouraging moments for Carter. Many other officers and returning members did the same. Later in the year Carter specifically singled out Drew and Alyssa when he was telling me about “mentors” who had a positive impact on his first year at ESU.

In addition to receiving this sort of encouragement from others in Cardio Club, Carter had begun to speak up when he wanted a say in the format of practices. In early November I began to note moments when he suggested a route for the group to run or insisted on a longer or shorter workout for the day, despite the fact that these decisions were usually made by the club captains. One of these conversations occurred on a Wednesday afternoon in November when the club was struggling to decide where to run for the day. When I arrived at the gym I saw James, Ace, Carter, and Joey were already there. We talked for a few moments, until James asked the group where they wanted to run. The others seemed to think this was a rhetorical question and

neglected to respond. As usual however, James was careful not to appear too authoritarian, instead seeking a democratic consensus: “Should we do north loop up to the hill?” he asked, “How is everybody feeling today?”

Carter responded at this point saying, “maybe a shorter run today…” James and Ace looked at one another, and Ace said “we could go back onto the trail [for a longer run].” James was clearly uncertain about what to say next, although I got the sense that his uncertainty was more about how to convey his preference to the group. It seemed clear to me that he wanted to do the shorter run up to the north loop hill, but was trying to avoid telling the group what to do. Finally he said “Okay, pick a number: one or two.”

Joey was the first to respond, guessing two. “Oh shoot,” James said, “I didn’t decide which one was which yet… Okay, Blake, pick one or two.”

Not wanting to make a decision for the group I said, “I don’t know... That’s a big decision.” I laughed to try to make clear that I was joking, but I also successfully avoided having to choose.

Ace then interjected, selecting number two. “Two is the trail,” James said, sounding a bit disappointed, “we’re going to run the [park name] trail. But I don’t know for sure if I know the way…” Ace began explaining the path for the trail, but James remained hesitant, repeating that he still wasn’t sure about the route. “I mean, should we do the trail, or just to the hill?” he asked again.

“Okay, we’re doing the hill!” Carter interjected firmly. With that the group was decided, we would run the shorter north loop route up to the hill. James seemed pleased that someone had made the decision, and Carter, in a notable change from the start of the semester, seemed surprisingly comfortable giving this directive to the group. This interaction served as another

example of Carter's increased authority as he transitioned into occupying the leader role within the Cardio Club. Eventually, his authority became formalized. On one of my last runs of the fall semester with Drew and Adam, we began talking about the results of their recent election for 2017 officers, which they described as "not so much elections as we sort of appointed people" although they noted that "We almost had one position contested for president, but when Kenny said he wanted to do it Jack said he would take VP." One of these "appointments" was Carter, who they had selected for the position of Secretary. Along with Kenny and Hunter, Carter would join a board of officers who were all male, and with the exception of James (who was staying on as treasurer), all White.

The social forces acting on Carter's style of self-presentation offer a stark alternative to centrifugal pressure. White male students who initially took on the associate role were frequently encouraged into adopting roles that conferred a greater sense of value, namely the leader and educator roles. I refer to this pattern of encouragement toward more central roles as *centripetal cultivation*. This phenomenon could be observed when White male students' peers encouraged movement toward a more central and more highly valued role that had associations with White masculinity (e.g., from associate to leader or educator) by facilitating the student's movement into a new style of self-presentation.

Other White male students had experiences that were similar to Carter's. For instance, Kyle, a first-year student in the Learning Community began the academic year clearly occupying the associate role. Like Carter, during the first few weeks of the semester his presence would have been easy to miss. In fact, the first one-on-one conversation I had with Kyle was not until nearly the end of September, well after I had gotten to know most of the other students. However, although Kyle seemed to go with the general flow of the group during the first few

weeks, acting within the confines of the associate role, toward the middle of the fourth week I noticed him speaking a bit more frequently. Sometimes this was to make a small point or raise a question. Nonetheless, when Kyle spoke, regardless of how minor the contribution, the perpetually energetic and noisy Learning Community fell silent to listen. For instance, one day during a workshop on socially just leadership, Kyle pointed out that one could think of leadership as being different from management, noting that management was "a task for leaders, but not all that they do." The other students in the group listened attentively as he made this statement, seeming to read it as a profound insight, which they signaled with light snaps of approval after he spoke.

In other moments, Kyle came to fill an educator role through the deference of his peers. For instance, one afternoon the Learning Community course instructor introduced a new activity to the group. She displayed a PowerPoint slide on the board with 10 statements listed, reading each aloud, and asking the group to write down whether they (1) strongly agreed, (2) agreed, (3) disagreed, or (4) strongly disagreed with each statement. As the students were writing, she posted four signs in each corner of the room with the four choices of agreement and disagreement. Explaining the subsequent steps, the instructor informed the students that they would stand in the corner that matched how they felt about each statement and discuss it with others who selected the same answer. Afterward, the groups would have a spokesperson report out to the class regarding why they took the position they did.

The instructor then flipped to the next slide, which included only the first statement from the list: "It's ok to take drinks from [the campus cafeteria] or [fast food chain] on campus without paying for them." The students set out to place themselves into a corner of the room based on their feelings of agreement/disagreement. I found a space standing near the largest

group of students who had selected “disagree.” Once settled in their respective corners, the “disagree” group discussed their position, with a few students discussing morality and their family upbringing. The majority however said they were not quite sure why they felt the way they did, that it was just a “gut feeling” they had.

Once we concluded our discussion, the instructor reminded the groups that they needed to select a spokesperson. I glanced around the group. Several of the female students placed their index fingers on the tip of their noses, indicating their preference not to be the group spokesperson. There was a bit of laughter as no one volunteered. From this vacuum it was eventually Kyle who spoke up. He casually volunteered, and it was settled, that he would be the spokesperson. It was in part through these sort of moments, where other students deferred opportunities to offer their perspectives or looked to others for insight, that White male students like Kyle experienced centripetal cultivation – in his case being encouraged into the educator role.

Kyle’s transformation from a reserved associate to an outspoken educator happened fairly quickly. Just a few weeks later while watching TV with some of the students on the Learning Community residence hall floor, as more students were entering the room I observed additional evidence of Kyle’s evolving self-presentation. As he sat down in a chair across the room, three other students seated themselves on the floor around Kyle, talking with him and quietly listening as he spoke. The students seemed genuinely interested in hearing whatever he had to say – even in their physical positioning around him, gazing up from the floor as he spoke, they seemed to look to Kyle as a teacher.

As the year progressed, the attentiveness and interest of his peers cultivated Kyle’s style of self-presentation as he seemed to grow progressively more comfortable in the educator role.

During a class on social movements in the beginning of the second semester Kyle shared his ideas with the group. As the Professor raised the topic of violence in social movements, Kyle explained the difference between social movements that "needed to break the law" and those that did not. Using the example of the American Revolution he explained, "If the change you are trying to make means that you have to change the whole system, then sometimes violence is okay. I mean like with the American Revolution, they had to have violence. They wanted to get out from under British control and the only way they could do that was by fighting." He contrasted this with more recent social movements that sought to change specific laws or attitudes, saying that those could use nonviolent tactics. As he explained all of this the room listened silently.

As it turned out, Kyle himself recognized this shift in his role within the group. During our one-on-one interview later in the year, Kyle told me that during the beginning of his first semester, "I was present, I was just observing." However, over time he described coming to feel that it was important for him to offer additional perspectives for the group. In particular, he believed that the objective, fact-based knowledge he possessed was valuable to the group:

> A bunch of people have the same mindset that are looking at a problem, and coming up with the same solution, and no one's really questioning it, so I try to throw curve balls in there sometimes. I'll raise my hand, and be like, "Hey, what about this?" And it's not always because necessarily this is the way I feel… I think a lot of times, [other students] all interpret a problem the same, and people just jump on that bandwagon, but I try to look at a problem objectively and differently… My worldview is more of a factual standpoint, like a ... I try to look at it from a more emotionless standpoint. Most people, I think they want to think more; they want to hear more. They want to hear different sides, and things like that… They're interested in hearing it.

As Kyle's quote illustrates, in addition to feeling that it was valuable to offer multiple, objective perspectives on an issue, Kyle also felt that others were interested in what he had to say. Even in occasionally disagreeing with other students, Kyle perceived his role as an educator was

appreciated by the community, and as he took on this new role, he simultaneously came to occupy a central place among his peers.

Not all White male students who experienced centripetal cultivation were enthusiastic about their change in roles. At the first Volunteer Collective meeting in September a White student named Jacob was mostly silent. However, when I spoke with him again later in the spring semester his self-presentation was quite different. More authoritative and confident, Jacob described how he was training to be an orientation leader and had taken more active roles among his peers. One informal friend group that he was particularly close with seemed to have cultivated Jacob's style of self-presentation into the leader role despite his resistance. He described this change:

> Jacob: I hate planning things. The problem is we're a group of indecisive people that never makes decisions, resulting in me getting infuriated. I'm like, "Lets just go to [the dining hall]." And we all finally decide to go to [the dining hall]… I can make decisions, but I would rather not do it all the time.
>
> BRS: So when they are indecisive, they look to you because they know you will solve it for them?
>
> Jacob: Yeah. They definitely, after a whole semester of it, they got to the point like, "Where are we going to eat, Jacob?" I don't care for it, but I'm getting more used to it now. So it's growing on me I guess a little bit.
>
> BRS: You sort of adapt over time?
>
> Jacob: It's at the point if I don't decide, then nothing – everyone goes all by themselves. Which has happened before.

Notably, while Jacob claimed not to be thrilled with taking on this new role, he also noted, "it's growing on me a bit." In the void of effective leadership or authoritative decision making, Jacob was cultivated to take on the leader role. Through this process, Jacob began to take a more central place among this group of friends and accrued the authority that comes with the leader role.

CONCLUSION

The story of students' self-presentation within social groups is predominately one of stability coupled with rare but patterned change. In this chapter I have drawn on the work of Goffman (1959; 1967) and Collins (2004) to examine the interactional mechanisms that animate social life for college students. Moving beyond consideration of approaches to social involvement (e.g., Stuber 2009; 2011) or more static conceptions of social networks in the college environment (e.g., McCabe 2016), I shed light on the internal dynamics of social groups. Such an approach illuminates the production of recognition gaps (Lamont 2017) that have been documented in the college environment (Ancis, Sedlacek, and Mohr 2000; Rankin 2005; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, and Solórzano 2009). I find that recognition gaps at the intersections of race and gender, manifested in disparities in the distribution of belonging and value, are produced and maintained in social interaction. Specifically, I have documented the ways students' efforts to achieve social inclusion interacted with the raced and gendered associations with certain styles of self-presentation that corresponded to the five roles, resulting in interactional styles that constrained their social performance.

As Goffman (1967) has pointed out, the adoption of a line and its associated role carries a risk of becoming "stuck with" a particular social performance. Within social groups, students tended to maintain a single, relatively simplistic style of self-presentation, a phenomenon I refer to as role inertia. Role inertial was supported through the reinforcement of behaviors that aligned with the expected self-presentation of various roles and allowing others (namely associates) to maintain membership through the absence of negative sanctions. Policing on the other hand signaled the displeasure of one's peers by focusing negative attention on behaviors that did not correspond with the self-presentation expected in a given role.

Although role inertia was prevalent, there were instances where change over time was observed as students modified their self-presentations due in large part to the influence of peers. I have referred to the forces producing this change as centrifugal pressure and centripetal cultivation. Notably, these social forces did not act at random. The experiences of White male students as they entered diverse social groups contrasted sharply with the experiences of female and REM students. Centripetal cultivation drew White male students who began in the marginal associate role into the central roles of educator and leader. Meanwhile, students who were not White and male faced mistreatment from their peers when attempting to occupy the educator or leader roles. As described in the previous chapter, in many cases female and REM students entered groups occupying roles that conferred less value (as in the case of associates and entertainers) or required significant effort and sacrifices (as in the case of caregivers). The phenomenon of role inertia worked in tandem with centrifugal pressure to restrict access to more central roles due to the way their associated styles of self-presentation were linked to White masculinity.

In essence, female and REM students' experiences of the social landscape in college diverged notably from White males. Most of the female and REM students occupied roles that limited the perceived value of their contributions (such as associate or entertainer) or required significant physical and emotional labor (such as caregiver). Moreover, when they attempted to move toward the more highly valued educator and leadership roles, they were often blocked from such opportunities. These social forces served to exacerbate disparities in student experiences in social groups, especially in generating inequality in their sense of value and associated feelings of belonging.

CHAPTER 6

THE COST OF INCLUSION

Sociologists have theorized culture as a key mechanism in reproducing social inequality in education (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Willis 1977; MacLeod 1987). Efforts to explore the relationship between culture and inequality in schools have shed light on the ways class-based cultural resources impact educational access (e.g., Dumais and Ward 2010; McDonough 1997; Stevens 2009), grades and academic performance (e.g., Dimaggio 1982; Dumais 2002), and gaining favorable treatment from institutions and their representatives (e.g., Calarco 2011; Domina 2005; Lareau and Horvat 1999; Nelson 2010). However, comparatively little attention has been paid to the role of culture in gaining inclusion in educational settings.

When students arrive on a college campus, their social worlds are altered in meaningful ways. Among new people and new opportunities to socialize outside of their home communities (Chambliss and Takacs 2014; Nathan 2005), the pursuit of social inclusion – in students' words, finding a sense of "belonging" or "connection" – takes center stage. A discourse, promulgated by postsecondary institutions, about college being a time to have "fun," "meet new friends," and get involved in extracurricular activities encourages students to prioritize socializing (Hartley and Morphew 2008; Saichaie and Morphew 2014). Evidence suggests that students themselves are on the same page, with most college students perceiving that their social lives are at least as important – or perhaps even more important – for their development as academic experiences (Grigsby 2009; Kuh 1995). This context makes the college setting an ideal place to examine the use of culture to seek out social inclusion.

The findings presented in this dissertation highlight the ways culture is used in college – not to exclude – but to find inclusion amongst peers. Students draw on culture to locate opportunities for connection in social groups organized around shared interests and evidence of commonality as well as to manage social interaction within those groups. However, while culture can be used to find inclusion, fitting in for many students comes at a cost. Efforts to find inclusion generate inequality by relying on styles of self-presentation that carry raced and gendered associations. The roles students adopt in social interaction allow them to become part of groups where they can feel connection, while simultaneously stratifying group membership.

These findings illuminate the complexity of inclusion in diverse educational settings. While students from a variety of social locations enter groups, maintaining a sense of connection within these groups often requires a tradeoff. To avoid negative social sanctions and behavioral policing, conformity to simplistic, stereotypical roles is expected. Inequality is generated alongside inclusion as students become stuck with styles of self-presentation that facilitate different types of contributions to groups. These contributions in turn are linked with different levels of value from peers. The end result is that students from groups that have traditionally been advantaged in higher education (i.e. White male students) frequently come to experience a sense of being valued that amplifies their feelings of belonging. Conversely, the contributions of students from groups that have been historically disadvantaged in higher education (i.e. female and racial/ethnic minority students) more commonly go unacknowledged, leaving them in marginal positions within social groups.

This final chapter draws together the findings of the dissertation, presenting them in the context of their contribution to existing scholarship in the sociology of culture and the sociology of education. In particular, I discuss the way this research contributes to an understanding of how

students from a variety of social locations navigate the broader social landscape of college and how they draw on culture to develop a sense of belonging within social groups. Next, I assess the limitations of the current study and related possibilities for further research. Finally, I conclude with implications for practice, suggesting ways that faculty and staff in postsecondary institutions can use these findings to inform their work in supporting college students from diverse backgrounds.

Contributions to Understanding Inequality in Social Interaction

Drawing on the theories and conceptual tools of Goffman (1959; 1967), this project offers an examination of the interactional dynamics of social groups and expands the sociological understanding of individuals' use of culture to pursue inclusion. In particular, this project develops an understanding of how culture can be used to gain inclusion while simultaneously unevenly distributing social resources – especially social value and a sense of belonging – within groups. In diverse social groups, students took on one of five simplistic styles of self-presentation. The sense of being valued that students accrued within these groups was shaped by the constraints of the role they occupied, and the manner in which roles were linked to contributions to the group meant that roles corresponded to feelings of being valued (or not) by one's peers. Further, for students who occupied more valued social roles, appreciation from their peers functioned to amplify their sense of belonging.

Such findings provide empirical evidence for Collins's (2004) assertion that the attention that "make[s] some individuals more impressive, more attractive or dominant" also "puts other persons in their shadow" (p. xiii). In other words, the findings I have presented here affirm that inclusion does not necessarily mean equal social relations. In fact, students' experiences demonstrate that the quest to be included often requires sacrifice in other domains. Caregivers

sacrifice their time, sleep, and sometimes their own wellbeing in order to accrue the sense of being valued that comes from caring for others. Associates and Entertainers maintain a marginal sort of involvement in order to sustain their membership within social groups. While these students gave up attention and authority, other students – who in nearly all cases were both White and male – came to occupy central places as valued members of their social groups in the educator and leader roles.

Collins has moved interaction ritual theory forward with recognition that inequality exists even in spaces where all members are included, and the findings of the current project contribute an understanding of the mechanisms at work in producing and maintaining patterned inequality in social groups. Each of the five roles had a unique relationship with social resources, and these characteristics were most pronounced in patterned inequalities relating to the unequal distribution of value. Notably, while culture informed the way students interacted with one another in various roles, culture was important in another way as well. Each of the roles carried gendered and raced associations, meaning that access to the roles depended on cultural understandings of the meanings of various styles of self-presentation. Given the way that sustained feelings of belonging rely on external validation (Bell 1999; May 2011), coupled with the way students were distributed in roles with varying degrees of value by race and gender, it follows that the association of roles with race and gender corresponded to patterned disparities in value and belonging. While a large majority of White male students occupied highly valued roles, less than half of female students and very few male REM students did.

Students' experiences with what I have termed "role inertia," align with the risk Goffman (1967) identified of becoming "stuck with" a particular social performance after adopting a line. Given the prevalence of narratives about higher education facilitating students' growth and

identity development (e.g., Astin 1984; Evans et al. 2009; Binder and Wood 2013; Reyes 2015), it is not surprising that students occasionally attempted to add complexity or modify their social performances. However, change was counteracted by two highly effective mechanisms, namely reinforcement of behaviors aligning with a student's existing role and policing through the focus of negative attention on behaviors that did not match the expected self-presentation of a student's usual role.

In the rarer instances where more significant change in self-presentation did occur, it was observed in students who were blocked from entering a role and in movement from one role to another, both of which occurred in response to the encouragement of peers. Two main social forces could provoke such change. The first of these, centrifugal pressure, often served to prevent female and REM students from successfully entering central roles associated with White masculinity, pushing them into more marginal roles. Conversely, centripetal cultivation encouraged White male students who began in the marginal associate role to adopt more central roles. Overall, this meant that the unequal distribution of value became further patterned by race and gender as some students were reallocated into roles based on the raced and gendered associations attached to their styles of self-presentation.

Overall, these findings are situated within an ongoing effort to comprehend the ways social interaction produces inclusion, while simultaneously stratifying group membership. Where Goffman wrote very little about patterned inequality, Collins (2000) directed sociologists to be aware of the differential treatment of various individuals within the same groups. The findings presented here extend Collins' work by illuminating the ways race and gender intersect to shape the production and maintenance of inequality in group interaction. Mechanisms like role inertia, centrifugal pressure, and centripetal cultivation function because of the confluence of (1)

interactional approaches informed by culture, and (2) cultural associations of race and gender with certain styles of self-presentation. Bringing together these two elements of culture – namely interaction along with raced and gendered meanings – clarifies the process through which social resources become unequally distributed in social groups in ways that correspond to traditional structures of race and gender inequality.

Contributions to Understanding Social Involvement in College

The findings of this project offer additional contributions to understanding the role of culture in shaping inequality within educational settings and within higher education in particular. In their review of theoretical progress in the sociology of higher education, Stevens, Armstrong, and Arum (2008) drew attention to the limited engagement of sociologists with students' experiences within college. A decade later a few scholars have begun to fill this gap by showing how social class inequality is reproduced in the college setting and highlighting cultural capital as a key mechanism facilitating reproduction (e.g. Armstrong & Hamilton 2013; Lee 2016; Mullen 2010; Stuber 2011). While this recent research has shown how disparities in cultural resources shape students' ability to find social involvement opportunities and successfully progress through college, the findings presented here illuminate an additional path through which culture has an impact on college students. Looking beyond class-based cultural resources, cultural meanings linked to self-presentation and interactional styles at certain intersections of race and gender function to generate unequal experiences within social groups.

These unequal experiences become evident in group interaction and in the meaning students make and the emotions they experience surrounding these interactions. Moving beyond static conceptions of social networks or social involvement in college (e.g., McCabe 2016; Stuber 2009; 2011), these findings develop an understanding of the inequalities in students'

experiences in educational settings. Some recent research (both within and outside sociology) has shown that female and REM students encounter unwelcoming social environments – or what has been referred to as a "chilly campus climate" – in higher education (e.g., Armstrong, Hamilton, and Sweeney 2006; Hamilton and Armstrong 2009; Rankin 2005; Torres and Charles 2004; Wilkins 2014; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, and Solórzano 2009). Examining interactions within college students' social groups illuminates the processes through which students' styles of self-presentation are maintained, often without their full consent.

While it has been apparent for some time that female and REM students encounter mistreatment and challenging social experiences in the college setting that their White male peers do not encounter, the findings presented here break new ground in demonstrating that within student groups, the impact of race and gender is much greater than social class. In this study, social class background played a central role in shaping students' approaches to navigating the college social scene as they sought out social groups. However, the subsequent contours of students' social involvement, their self-presentation with peers, their sense of being valued, and feelings of belonging varied by race and gender. In particular, a broader trend emerged where the experiences of students who were both White and male diverged from female and REM students. In fact, even less socioeconomically advantaged White male students had smoother transitions into social groups, despite encountering difficulties locating groups that fit their interests. This occurred because of the advantages that accrue to White male students upon entry into social circles as they are encouraged to take on and/or remain in central roles that convey a sense of being valued and feelings of belonging. Meanwhile, female and REM students' styles of self-presentation were constrained within less central and less valued roles. As the raced and gendered associations of certain forms of self-presentations restricted access to

central places within social groups, female and REM students had fewer desirable options for achieving social inclusion.

I suggest the use of three terms for understanding the mechanisms that maintain and exacerbate this inequality. First, what I call *role inertia* was observed, whereby students' styles of self-presentation were reinforced and policed in order to keep students within the roles they initially entered, counteracting attempts to add complexity or nuance to self-presentation. Second, female and REM students were denied access to more highly valued social roles with styles of self-presentation that carried associations with White masculinity. Rather than allowing these students to become educators or leaders, their peers applied *centrifugal pressure*, pushing female and REM students into less central roles. Conversely, White male students were sometimes encouraged to take on styles of self-presentation that were associated with greater feelings of value and belonging through the application of what I call *centripetal cultivation*.

Overall, this dissertation serves to shed light on what has been described as the "black box" of higher education (Stevens, Armstrong, and Arum 2008; Stuber 2011), clarifying the ways in which the educational core of college can generate inequality even while colleges themselves may serve as sites for social mobility and the contestation of prejudicial attitudes and intolerance (Bolzendahl and Myers 2004; Campbell and Horowitz 2016; Kingston et al. 2003). Using an intersectional lens (Collins 2000), this research adds novel insights to understanding the production and experience of inequality in college through an understanding of the ways students interactional styles come with cultural meanings intertwined with race and gender. Because the resulting race and gender disparities in access to styles of self-presentation cannot be explained with the predominate theories of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1977a; 1986), it was valuable to

apply the insights of interaction ritual theory (Goffman 1959; 1967; Collins 2004). In doing so a great deal of complexity is observed in students' social worlds that was not previously apparent.

Most prominently, it becomes evident that being able to present oneself to others as a valued member of a social group and develop feelings of belonging requires various forms of racial and gender privilege. Further, without such privilege, female and REM students' options are constrained. They might be able to feel valued and develop a sense of belonging at the cost of providing significant levels of care to others. Alternatively, students might be able to maintain group membership and avoid negative treatment by fitting into simplistic, stereotypical roles as the "funny one" or a "quiet follower," but only if they are willing to give up their pursuit of authority or centrality in a group. These findings demonstrate the benefit of being attentive to the use of culture in higher education not only in reproducing social class location, but also in maintaining traditional forms of racial and gender inequality. Examining only access to groups or only a singular social location (i.e. race, *or* gender, *or* class background) would render much of this complexity invisible.

DIRECTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The research presented here advances the literature in several directions, and the findings point to additional areas in which to expand knowledge regarding the ways culture is used to pursue inclusion in educational settings. Additionally, the scope of the current study produces some limitations, leaving certain questions open for further exploration. In addressing these new possibilities and limitations, I would like to suggest a few areas for future research.

First, given that these findings focus on social interaction in diverse student groups, future studies could examine whether they apply to more homogeneous identity-based groups.

As noted above, many REM students eventually opted to join an identity-based group, and prior research indicates that such groups are an important outlet for the development of cultural and/or racial identities, offering respite from difficult campus climates at some institutions (Guiffrida 2003; Harper, Byars, and Jelke 2005; Harper and Quaye 2007; Sutton and Kimbrough 2001). Although such findings are insightful, they offer little insight regarding how students interact with one another within these groups, or what their strategies for finding inclusion in these settings might look like. It is possible that within more homogeneous groups the associations of roles with race and gender become less meaningful, allowing for greater flexibility in styles of self-presentation. Alternatively, it may be that expectations for gendered or raced social performances are heightened among peers in groups that are focused on certain kinds of gendered and/or raced identities. Comparative research that examines identity-based groups in comparison to more diverse student groups could adjudicate between these different possibilities.

Second, building on the insights produced in this research with the use of an intersectional lens (Collins 2000), further studies could consider the impact of other types of social locations as they intersect with race, class, and gender. Existing research has indicated that other student populations encounter additional challenges in finding social inclusion in college. For instance, Fine (2016) finds that lesbian, gay, and bisexual students report challenges integrating on college campuses when confronted by heterosexism and homophobia. Further, the experiences of Turner (described in Chapter 3) in trying to navigate the social landscape of college seemed to be impacted in significant ways by his status as an international student, who grew up in India. Future studies could examine the intersection between race, class, gender, and other categories of experience like sexual orientation, nationality, and language.

Third, as the presented findings illustrate, a small number of students were able to self-present in complex ways that fell outside of the boundaries of the five roles. Future research would benefit from honing in on the experiences of these students in order to understand the factors influencing their self-presentation. I have suggested in Chapter 4 that one possible explanation has to do with the formal leadership positions some of these students occupied. It may be that the structure of a leadership position has potential to give students greater flexibility in their interactional styles. Alternatively, such findings may be related to how far along students were in their educational career, and it is possible that they adopted more complex styles of self-presentation over time. Regardless of the explanation, further investigation of the ways in which the experiences of students who took on complex styles of self-presentation might be translated to broader swaths of students could prove valuable. Given the work done by practitioners in higher education to support the personal development of college students (e.g., Evans et al. 2009; Hu and Kuh 2003; Magolda and King 2004), understanding how to help them move beyond simplistic and often stereotypical social performances could be highly generative.

Finally, based on the tendency of sociologists studying higher education to focus on elite institutions that enroll students who are predominately White and highly affluent, research is needed that builds an understanding of students' experiences in a more diverse range of colleges and universities. Nearly all existing sociological research on student experiences in residential colleges and universities focuses on institutions with highly affluent and predominately White student bodies. For instance, Lee (2016) conducted her research at a predominately White, private liberal arts college, and Armstrong and Hamilton's (2013) study was conducted at an elite flagship university, with a group of participants that were all White and only 13% working class. Stuber (2011) builds her study as a comparison of a liberal arts college and a "big state

university;" however, both institutions had student populations where less than 20% were Pell-eligible and 89% and 88% of students (respectively) were White. Additionally, it should be noted that a fair amount of this research focuses only on the experiences of female students (e.g., Armstrong and Hamilton 2013; Lee 2016).

With participant samples that are stratified by class and often include few or no male or racial and ethnic minority students, is it perhaps unsurprising that scholars know so little about the impact of race and gender in the college social scene. In contrast, the research for this dissertation took place in an institution where 40% or more of students were low-income and/or the first in their families to attend college, where gender was fairly evenly split, and where REM students made up 60% of the student body. This much more diverse setting and participant sample may in part explain the prominence of gender and race in my findings. In the future, as colleges and universities continue to diversify, more research is needed that examines similarly diverse institutions of higher education. In particular, given the findings of this study, it could be productive to examine differences in the social interactions of students in a variety of institutional contexts (for instance, in more socioeconomically diverse, but racially homogeneous institutions and in more racially diverse institutions with socioeconomically homogeneous student bodies). Multi-institutional studies could be particularly generative in pushing forward collective knowledge in the sociology of higher education and better understanding how the composition of student bodies impacts the social lives of students within various types of institutions.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Presented findings may also be used to inform the work of college and university personnel. These findings offer insights that faculty, administrators, and student affairs practitioners can apply to their work with college students through (1) a reconsideration of the complexity of belonging and how students come to feel belonging, (2) an understanding of the way students' configure their social involvement, and (3) suggestions related to the need to structure experiences and support students as they integrate within diverse peer groups.

Reconsidering Belonging

The findings of this project have a variety of implications for the way faculty, administrators, and student affairs practitioners understand the nature of belonging and students' quest to find connections on campus. Through the course of conducting ethnographic observations and interviews, it became clear that belonging was incredibly meaningful for students. Prior research has quantitatively documented the importance of belonging for retention and completion in higher education (Hurtado and Carter 1997; Strayhorn 2012). However, historically scholars and practitioners studying higher education have tended to frame belonging as something that students develop in the process of achieving social inclusion – or in their words "social integration" – during their transition to college, often in a linear way, coming to feel greater social connection as time passes (e.g. Johnson et al. 2007; Ostrove and Long 2007; Tinto 1987).

In fact, Tinto's (1988) research, which suggested that the first six weeks of college is a crucial time for students to integrate within the social fabric of their institutions, sparked the creation of a variety of programs and interventions on college campuses designed to develop students' sense of belonging during this six-week period (Upcraft, Gardner, and Barefoot 2004).

However, such efforts may cause faculty and staff to overlook the complexity in how students come to feel belonging. As the findings presented here demonstrate, students' quest for belonging does not end in the first six weeks of college; nor do all students develop belonging in a linear way.

Students can feel like they "fit in" or belong in one moment or group, while feeling "out-of-place" in other contexts or in the same group at a different time. These sorts of experiences shaped the contours of students' social involvement, as illustrated in Chapter 3. White male students' social experiences were more in line with traditional models of the linear development of belonging. In the first several weeks of college, they often tested out or honed in on one or two groups where they found a sense of connection and subsequently continued to feel value and belonging. Conversely, female and REM students experienced feelings of belonging more intermittently. This could be observed in their experiences within groups where they were sometimes policed and even ostracized. The partitioned involvement of more socioeconomically advantaged female and REM students functioned in part to allow them to feel belonging in different groups at different times. Meanwhile, the trial and error approach of less socioeconomically advantaged students meant that feelings of connection could come and go as they tried out and left various groups.

In short, practitioners need to remain open to the likelihood that for many students – especially those who have been historically underrepresented in higher education – models that imagine a sense of belonging is developed in a linear way will prove to be limited. Instead, faculty and staff would benefit from understanding the complex ways in which students come to feel belonging and sometimes lose those feelings over the course of their educational experiences. Rather than assuming that students who show signs of having socially integrated in

the first six weeks of college are well-adjusted, these findings suggest practitioners remain alert to changes in students' social wellbeing throughout college.

Understanding Student Involvement

Presented findings also have implications for the ways students' social involvement is understood by student affairs practitioners. Existing research in higher education and student affairs encourages university personnel to promote "student involvement" or "student engagement," encouraging students to become involved in social and extracurricular groups (Astin 1984; 1993; Wolf-Wendel, Ward, and Kinzie 2009). Notably, much of this literature either implicitly or explicitly encourages a "more is more" approach, whereby positive student outcomes – such as leadership development, feeling a sense of belonging, and retention – are linked to being involved in a greater number of student groups and/or spending more hours per week with student groups (Astin 1993; Foreman and Retallick 2013; Strayhorn 2012). The findings presented here suggest caution in interpreting extensive extracurricular involvement as a positive sign of social integration.

A simplistic snapshot of the numbers of groups students participate in or the amount of time they spend in social groups hides the complex underlying processes that lead students from different social locations toward a particular configuration of social involvement. While existing research and theories may direct practitioners to view being more involved as a sign that a student is having more positive social experiences in college and is well-integrated (e.g., Astin 1984; 1993; Tinto 1987; 1993), the experiences of students in honing, partitioning, and haphazardly repeating "trials" with multiple groups complicate this understanding. Although some students involved in only one or two formal or informal groups were struggling with a trial and error approach to finding connections, others (namely White male students) were honing in

on the groups they found most enjoyable for sustained involvement. Conversely, some students involved in many groups (typically more socioeconomically advantaged female and REM students) dealt with frequent social challenges that manifested in a variety of forms of mistreatment.

While McCabe (2016) has highlighted the way a "compartmentalized" social network configuration is useful for providing different types of friendships, my findings show that partitioning involvement in this way is also a protective strategy for students who encounter frequent negative social experiences in various groups. Therefore, rather than seeing involvement in a multitude of groups as a sign of students' success in achieving social integration, university personnel working with students should be alert to the possibility that such involvement may in fact be a sign that students have experienced mistreatment and/or been ostracized in some groups. With these findings in mind, practitioners should be encouraged to take a more fine-grained, qualitative approach to understanding students' social inclusion in college.

Supporting Encounters with Diversity

Finally, this dissertation offers empirical support for the need to be intentional in helping students approach interaction with diverse peer groups as they seek to socially integrate in college. Scholars have explored the outcomes of interaction across diverse backgrounds in a literature on the impact of "diversity experiences." These studies have documented the positive outcomes of such experiences in supporting cultural understanding, wellbeing, civic engagement, as well as social, leadership, and cognitive development (see for instance Antonio 2001; Chang, Astin, and Kim 2004; Bowman 2010; 2013; Bowman, Brandenberger, Hill, and Lapsley 2011). However, more recently scholars have begun documenting challenges that some students

encounter in diverse settings. For instance, research on campus climate documents the experiences of racial and ethnic minority students as they encounter discriminatory behavior on campus (Cabrera et al. 1999; Harper and Hurtado 2007; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, and Solórzano 2009). Other studies show that interactions and experiences with peers of different races and ethnicities may provoke anxiety and deplete cognitive focus (Richeson and Trawalter 2005; Richeson, Trawalter, and Shelton 2005; Trawalter and Richeson 2008). Additionally, Roksa and colleagues (2017) find that disparities in cognitive development in college are explained by the greater likelihood of African American students encountering negative experiences with diversity on-campus.

Presented findings contribute to this scholarship by demonstrating that encountering diversity in a group setting comes with its share of challenges. Notably, being a member of a diverse club, team, organization, or informal friend group does not mean that all students involved receive equal shares of social resources like attention, value, authority, and belonging. Rather, groups that include students from a range of races, ethnicities, genders, and social class backgrounds may promote interaction with diverse peers while simultaneously maintaining traditional patterns of inequality.

The findings presented in this dissertation can be understood in the context of this expanding body of literature to encourage postsecondary institutions to do more in promoting educational settings – inside and outside of the classroom – that facilitate experiences with diversity (Harper and Hurtado 2007; Hurtado et al. 1998; Museus 2014; Museus and Jayakumar 2012). Rather than taking a "do-it-yourself" approach, leaving students to navigate and structure their college experiences on their own (Roksa and Silver forthcoming), these findings suggest that faculty and staff within colleges and universities need to do more to structure and support

positive diversity experiences. For instance, Trawalter and Richeson (2006) show that the potential negative effects of interracial interactions on cognitive focus can be mitigated by encouraging students to intentionally pursue more positive interactions across difference instead of simply trying to avoid prejudice. Other scholars claim that when faculty are active in facilitating diversity experiences, student outcomes are more positive (Dee and Daly 2012; Saenz, Ngai, and Hurtado 2007). In other words, it is when students are given the tools to engage with diversity in productive ways that diversity experiences have their greatest positive impact. Faculty, administrators, and student affairs personnel need to take a similarly intentional and proactive approach to supporting students in socializing with diverse peers outside of the classroom.

CONCLUSION

In closing, I want to acknowledge that the findings presented here do not at all add up to the happy picture of inclusion one might expect. While I have critiqued sociologists for focusing on exclusion, it is not because I imagine a focus on inclusion offers a more optimistic alternative, or a more pleasant subject for consideration. While exclusion is painful and difficult to experience, even the process of finding inclusion is fraught, as the findings of this study clearly demonstrate. Some students' socioeconomic disadvantages make finding opportunities for inclusion very difficult. Others who are able to find possibilities for inclusion in social groups subsequently discover that their styles of self-presentation are unwelcome amongst their newfound peers. In the end, being included for many students means reproducing traditional patterns of inequality. College students strive to feel connection and belonging nonetheless.

It is easy to read these findings as yet another sign of the intractability of inequality. Such an interpretation is certainly fair. As sociologists well know, inequality is highly durable and difficult to interrupt (Bonilla-Silva 2009; Gerson 2010; Massey 2007; Tilly 1998; Willis 1977). The challenges faced by female, racial and ethnic minority, and less socioeconomically advantaged students, mirror the structures of inequality that exist in broader society. It is disheartening that these same inequalities pervade the very college campuses that draw students with the possibility of engaging with diversity (Chase 2010; Hartley and Morphew 2008; Warikoo 2016).

However, this research should not be taken solely as a sign of defeat for those who seek to make college and university campuses into welcoming places for students from a diverse range of backgrounds. Rather, I am hopeful that with a clearer understanding of students' social lives, those who study college students and work with them in day-to-day practice will be able to mitigate some of the social difficulties students encounter in higher education. While it would be naïve to imagine it is possible to fully remove students from the challenges of broader society when they step onto campus, postsecondary faculty and staff can nonetheless seek to help students navigate and understand their surroundings in more productive ways. When successful, it may be possible to equip students with the tools to interact across vectors of difference and find belonging without resorting to a reliance on stereotypes and simplistic versions of themselves. However, as research demonstrates, such work requires clearer understandings of interactions among diverse groups in order to facilitate greater structure and intentionality in supporting students. I hope this dissertation is a step in that direction.

Appendix A: Interview Guide

Introduction:

1. First, I'd like you to think back to when you were applying to college. Can you describe the process to me?
    a. How did you go about considering different schools? How did you get to consider Mason in particular?
    b. Did you come to visit? What was your impression of Mason like?

Extracurricular Groups:

2. Are you involved in any extracurricular or co-curricular groups on campus?

If so [if not skip to question 6 and 7]:

3. Using the top half of this sheet of paper (give paper to student) could you sketch a diagram or map of the groups you've been involved in at Mason? It doesn't have to be artistic, I'm just trying to get a sense of which groups you have been involved with during your time at Mason so far.
    a. [I'll be asking some of these probing questions as they draw]:
        i. Is there any overlap between those groups?
        ii. Do the groups ever do any events or meetings together?
        iii. Are any of the members you know in multiple groups?
        iv. [if several groups are mapped] Which group or groups do you spend the most time with? Which do you just spend time with only occasionally?

4. [Select one of the groups that seems most central or important to them; then follow up with a group that is less central to them]. With all of the students I like to talk about two different groups to hear more about what your experiences have been like. I was wondering if you could tell me a bit more about [group name]?
    a. How did you decide to join [the group]? How did you first find out about it?
    b. Could you tell me about the most recent meeting or event [or practice/competition if it is an athletic group, debate, forensics, Model UN, etc.] you were at for that group?
        i. What happened at that meeting/event? What kinds of things were going on? What were the people there doing or saying?
        ii. What did you do at the meeting/event?
        iii. Did you have a role in that meeting?
        iv. If so, what was it? If not, did you want to have a role in the meeting?
    c. Could you tell me about a meeting or event with [the group] that you really enjoyed or one that you considered to be a good meeting?
        i. What happened? What kinds of things did people say or do?
        ii. What did you do? Did you have a role in that meeting?
        iii. If so, what was it? If not, did you want to have a role in the meeting?
        iv. How were you feeling? How did you react?
    d. Could you tell me about a meeting or event with [the group] that was contentious or one that wasn't a very good meeting for some reason?
        i. What happened? What kinds of things did people say or do?
        ii. What did you do? Did you have a role in that meeting?

iii. If so, what was it? If not, did you want to have a role in the meeting?

iv. How were you feeling? How did you react?

e. [If they haven't brought up leaders/leadership yet]:

i. Who are the leaders for [group name]?

ii. How did they [of you if it is the student] become leaders?

iii. [if it is not the student] Have you ever considered being a leader in the group? Could you tell me about why or why not?

5. [Ask this question if they haven't already brought up a group they left]. Students often try things out and decide they don't have time or the group is not the right fit for them. Are there any groups you've attended or jointed and eventually left?

a. How did you decide to join [the group]? How did you first find out about it?

b. Could you tell me about one of the meetings or events [or practice/competition if it is an athletic group, debate, forensics, Model UN, etc.] that you remember going to with that group?

i. What happened at that meeting/event? What kinds of things were going on? What were the people there doing or saying?

ii. What did you do at the meeting/event?

iii. Did you have a role in that meeting?

iv. If so, what was it? If not, did you want to have a role in the meeting?

c. [If they haven't mentioned this already, use the probing questions below]

i. Could you tell me a bit about how you decided to leave the group?

ii. How did you feel about leaving?

For students who said they weren't involved in any groups:

6. Did you ever consider joining any groups?
7. Could you tell me about what your decision process was like?

Friend Groups:

8. Now, using the bottom half of the sheet, could you sketch a diagram or map of the friendships or friend groups you've made at Mason so far?
    a. [I'll be asking probing questions as they draw]:
        i. Is there any overlap between those groups of friends?
        ii. Do the groups ever hang out together?
        iii. Are there any friends you have who are in more than one of the friendship groups?
        iv. [if several groups are mapped] Which friend or group of friends do you spend the most time with?
        v. Which friends or group of friends do you just spend time with only occasionally?
        vi. Do you live with any of those friends? Are there any who you study with? Which friends are you most likely to party with or hang out with socially?
        vii. Do you have somebody you would consider your best friend?
9. [Select one of the friends/friendship groups that seems most central or important to them – if they mention a best friend or closest friend group start with that one; follow the same questions for a group that seems less central to them]. With all of the students I like to talk about two different friends or friendship groups to hear more about what your

friendships on campus have been like. I was wondering if you could tell me a bit more about [friend/friendship group name]?

a. How did you become friends with [person/group]? Could you tell me about how you first met her/him/them?
b. Could you tell me about the most recent time you hung out with [person/group]?
    i. What did you do while you were hanging out? What kinds of things happened while you were together?
c. Could you tell me about a time you hung out with [person/group] that you really enjoyed?
    i. What happened? What kinds of things did you do?
    ii. What sorts of things did you talk about?
    iii. How were you feeling? How did you react?
d. Could you tell me about a time you hung out with [person/group] where there was tension or where you disagreed about something?
    i. What happened? What kinds of things did you do?
    ii. What sorts of things did you talk about?
    iii. What caused the tension or disagreement?
    iv. How did you respond? What happened next?
    v. How were you feeling?
e. [If they haven't brought up friendship dynamics yet]:
    i. Who usually initiates when you will hang out? Who decides what to do?
    ii. [if it is the student who usually initiates] Could you tell me about a hang out or activity that you recently initiated? How did it go?

iii. [if it is not the student] Have you ever tried to initiate or plan something with [that friend/friend group]? If so, could you tell me about how that went?

10. [Ask this question if they haven't already brought up someone they are no longer friends with]. During freshman year students often meet lots of new people, becoming friends with some of them but not others. Were there any friends or acquaintances who you used to spend time with who you no longer hang out with?
    a. How did you become friends with [person/group]? Could you tell me about how you first met her/him/them?
    b. Could you tell me about a time you hung out with [person/group]?
        i. What did you do while you were hanging out? What kinds of things happened while you were together?
    c. [If they haven't brought up friendship dynamics yet]:
        i. Who usually initiated when you would hang out? Who decided what to do?
        ii. [if it is the student who usually initiates] Was there ever a hang out or activity that you initiated? If so, could you tell me about it? How did it go?
    d. [If they haven't mentioned this already, use the probing questions below]
        i. Could you tell me a bit about how you decided to stop hanging out with [person/group]?
        ii. How did you feel about not hanging out with her/him/them anymore?
11. [Note, if they have not already mentioned it, return to the diagram and ask] Okay, we are about to switch to another part of the interview, but I just want to return briefly to this

diagram, and ask a few questions regarding the groups we discussed. Out of the friends we've discussed, are any of them in any of the extracurricular groups on your diagram?

12. [Ask the questions below in reference to each group discussed]
    a. Are the individuals in [group name/person/friendship group] similar or different from you in terms of your family background – for instance in terms of your parents' education and income?
    b. Are the individuals in [group name/person/friendship group] similar or different from you in terms of race or ethnicity?
    c. Overall, how would you describe the gender mix of the individuals in [group name/person/friendship group]?

Belonging:

13. I'd like you to think of an experience that made you feel valued or appreciated during your time at Mason.
    a. Could you tell me about that experience?
    b. Is this something that happens frequently or not very often?
    c. (If the example is academic, probe for a social example.)
14. Could you think of an experience that made you feel undervalued or unappreciated during your time at Mason?
    a. Could you tell me about that experience?
    b. Is this something that happens frequently or not very often?
    c. (If the example is academic, probe for a social example.)

15. Now I'd like you to think of an experience at Mason that made you feel like you belonged or fit in.
    a. Could you tell me about that experience?
    b. Is this something that happens frequently or not very often?
    c. (If the example is academic, probe for a social example.)
16. Could you think of an experience at Mason that made you feel like you didn't belong or fit in?
    - Could you tell me about that experience?
    - Is this something that happens frequently or not very often?
    - (If the example is academic, probe for a social example.)
17. Is there any place on campus where you feel like you really belong or fit in?
    a. Why? What is it about that place? Do you go there often?
    b. Is there any place on campus where you feel like you don't belong or fit in?
    c. Why? What is it about that place? Do you go there often?
18. Is there any group of students on campus you don't feel like you fit in?
    a. Why? What is it about that group? Do you spend time with that group often?
19. Can you think of a time when you felt like you wanted to leave Mason?
    a. Could you tell me about that experience?
    b. Is this something that you feel frequently or not very often?
    c. Is there anybody you talk to about those feelings/experiences?
20. What has been the most challenging part of freshman year?
21. What has been the best part?

Appendix B: Questionnaire

Pre-interview questionnaire:

1. What is your intended major? _____

2. What group(s) on-campus are you involved in (extracurricular/co-curricular):

_____

3. What is your gender: _____ 4. What is your age: _____

5. What is your race/ethnicity (please choose one or more of the following):
   a. Black or African American
   b. Asian or Pacific Islander
   c. Latino or Hispanic
   d. White or Caucasian
   e. Biracial or Multiracial
   f. Other: _____

6. What is the highest level of education completed by your parents or guardians?

First parent: _____	Second parent: _____
a. High school or less	a. High school of less
b. Some college and/or an associate degree	b. Some college and/or an associate's degree
c. Bachelor's degree	c. Bachelor's degree
d. Master's degree	d. Master's degree
e. Doctorate or professional degree	e. Doctoral or professional degree

7. What is/are your parent(s)' or guardian(s)' occupation(s)?

First parent: _____ Second parent: _____

Appendix C: Distribution of Students in Roles by Social Class

Table 1 depicts the distribution of students from the more and less socioeconomically advantaged groups within the five roles. While there are minor differences in some roles, both of the percentages are within at most six points of one another for each role.

TABLE 1: DISTRIBUTION OF STUDENTS IN ROLES BY CLASS

Role	Less Socioeconomically Advantaged Students	More Socioeconomically Advantaged Students	Total
Associate	37% (n=18)	31% (n=16)	34% (n=34)
Caregiver	20% (n=10)	19% (n=10)	20% (n=20)
Entertainer	8% (n=4)	12% (n=6)	10% (n=10)
Leader	20% (n=10)	21% (n=11)	21% (n=21)
Educator	4% (n=2)	8% (n=4)	6% (n=6)
Other	10% (n=5)	10% (n=5)	10% (n=10)
Total[29]	49	52	101

[29] Note, not all students are included in this table due to the fact that I was unable to determine the social class background of 37 of students in the three groups observed for the ethnographic observation portion of the study.

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