INSIDE THE COLLEGE GATES

HOW CLASS AND CULTURE MATTER IN HIGHER EDUCATION

JENNY M. STUBER

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Chapter One

Inside the College Gates

Education as a Social and Cultural Process

On a sunny, early fall day I arrived at Benton College, a highly selective liberal arts college, to begin a study of "how social class plays out within higher education." I had not yet interviewed a single college student, nor had I questioned any administrator about admissions or financial aid policies, neither had I observed classroom dynamics or any of the formal or informal academic or social activities taking place on campus. As such, I had little idea of what I meant by "how social class plays out within higher education." As I climbed the stairs of Willard Hall to my office in the Sociology Department, I began to form an impression of life at Benton College. The wide stairwells of this sturdy, late-nineteenth-century building were covered with fliers informing passersby of a diverse array of activities on and off campus. Colorful posters alerted students to an upcoming talk by a *New York Times* best-selling author, the screening of a documentary film that had been nominated the year before for an Academy Award, and an upcoming internship fair at the student union. For students already thinking about how they might spend the following summer, posters invited them to apply to be a counselor at a woodsy camp in Wisconsin; to attend a study-abroad program in Salamanca, Spain; or do community-action work for a national nonprofit organization. As I neared the top of the stairwell, I was struck by how few of the posters related directly to academic activities, in the traditional sense of the word. Largely absent were posters that informed students about tutoring options, academic deadlines like "drop/add," or how they might go about selecting a major course of study.

Later that afternoon, when I went to grab lunch in the student union, I was further struck by the emphasis on extracurricular life. At a table near the entrance of the food court several students sat selling tickets to a dance sponsored by the Hispanic student association; next to them, another group informed students about volunteer opportunities in the local community. Meanwhile, brightly painted banners made from bed sheets hung from the mezzanine above, reminding students that the deadline to sign up for fraternity and sorority "rush" was fast approaching. Walking back to Willard Hall, the call to "Go Greek" echoed in my mind, as young men threw Frisbees and played what I later learned was called "campus golf" on a leafy quad ringed by stately fraternity and sorority houses.

When I arrived on Benton's campus that fall, it had been nearly 15 years since I had been a college freshman. Although memories fade over time and recollections become selective, it seemed that my main preoccupations as a new college student were worrying about whether I would make friends and do well academically. During my college career I never considered studying abroad; I was not successful in my two forays into sorority rush; and the most I could add to my list of extracurricular involvements was that I attended a handful of meetings of the "Women's Coalition." During my junior year I caught wind of the importance of having a summer internship, but as a lower-income college student, I had little sense of how to get an internship and little confidence that I could forego my summer earnings for what would likely be unpaid work.

The student culture at Benton College, which seemed to focus as much on extracurricular involvement as it did on academics, was not completely foreign to me: I finished college during a time in which having a summer internship was becoming *de rigueur* and I had spent the majority of the intervening years as either graduate student or college instructor. Although I witnessed the growing emphasis on "resume-building" within higher education, I was still struck by how pervasive this culture now seemed, with virtually every physical space at Benton devoted to informing students of the many activities in which they might become involved. And while Benton College's official mission is to grant degrees in higher education, my initial impression was that its students were at least as invested in the social side of college life as they were in the academic side.

During the period in which I began my research, journalists and scholars were also looking into the culture of intensive extracurricular participation that seemed to pervade childhood and adolescence within the United States. Within the popular press, accounts centered primarily on affluent teens and their relentless pursuit of admissions at elite colleges and universities (Robbins 2006; Steinberg 2002). With increasing numbers of applications to such schools, and little change in the number of spots available, the competition for elite college admissions has intensified (Sacks 2007). Most applicants know that they cannot improve their chances of acceptance simply by enrolling in Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses or improving their SAT scores; they know that they must also out-compete their peers through the breadth and depth of their extracurricular involvement. These "overachievers"—as Alexandra Robbins calls them in her book of the same name—labor over homework until 2:30AM, after spending their afternoons and early evenings participating in a roster of activities that may include membership in both varsity and select (club, traveling) athletic teams, the math league and/or debate team, the newspaper and/or yearbook staffs, and community service commitments. Research shows that these students and their parents are not misguided in their headlong leap into extracurricular involvement: while they may not carry the weight of a student's academic accomplishments, participation in such activities is, in fact, associated with increased chances of enrolling in an elite college (Espenshade and Radford 2009; Kaufman and Gabler 2004).

Although researchers have examined extracurricular participation and the role of peer cultures among elementary, middle, and high school students (Adler and Adler 1998, Bettis and Adams 2003; Eckert 1989; Eder and Parker 1987, Eder 1995), to date there has been little scholarly research examining the social and extracurricular lives of college students, and how they may be related to how social class is processed within higher education. What happens to Alexandra Robbins's "overachievers" once they enter college? Do they discontinue their high levels of involvement now that they have reached their college destinations or does their involvement and sociability persist, reflecting what French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1977) would call their * *habitus*—the system of durable, transposable dispositions that form the basis of perception and appreciation of one's social experience? Further, while working-class students comprise a smaller portion of college students—especially those attending four-year colleges and universities—they are, nonetheless, present on all college campuses. Researchers show that their paths to a selective college or university similarly include involvement in extracurricular activities (Espenshade and Radford 2009); yet, compared to their more affluent peers, they appear to be less involved within the college social and extracurricular scene (Pascarella et al 2004; Terenzini et al 1996). So far, researchers have not addressed this apparent disconnect.

As I drove the winding rural roads back to my apartment that evening, I thought about the impressionistic images I had gathered that day at Benton College. These thoughts, then, began to inform the research strategy I pursued during that academic year. My goal, ultimately, was to explore how social class influences the ways in which students navigate the college environment—especially the environment outside the classroom. I wanted to understand, first, how social class shapes the way that students from different class backgrounds integrate into the college environment, especially in terms of their thoughts about and strategies for making friends and becoming involved in their college's extracurricular realm. Second, I wanted to explore how students' experiences in college shaped their social class worldviews, especially in terms of how they think about their own and others' social class identities. Third, I wanted to know about whether social class matters differently on different college campuses. To that end, I decided to conduct my research at two structurally distinct institutions of higher education.

Although researchers have amassed an incredible amount of information about the relationship between social class and higher education, many questions remain. The questions that inform this research, and the answers I provide, are intended to advance sociological understandings of both social class and higher education. In this book, I argue that the experiential core of college life—the social and extracurricular worlds of higher education—operates as a setting in which social class inequalities manifest and get reproduced. As college students form friendships and get involved in activities like Greek life, study abroad, and student government, they acquire the social and cultural capital that allows them to gain access to valuable social and occupational opportunities beyond the college gates. Yet social class shapes students' experiences within the experiential core of college life, structuring their abilities to navigate their campus's social and extracurricular worlds. Indeed, privileged students typically arrive on campus with sophisticated maps and navigational devices to guide their journeys—while less-privileged students are often less equipped for the journey. Yet students' social interactions also shape—and are shaped by—their social class worldviews; that is, the ideas they have about their own and others' class identities and their beliefs about where they and others fit within the class system. Further, students' social class worldviews provide insight into how identities and consciousness are shaped within educational settings. Ultimately, my examination of the experiential core of college life demonstrates the ways in which higher education serves as an avenue for social reproduction, while also providing opportunities for the contestation of class inequalities.

My research contributes to a broader body of sociological research, one that takes seriously the multiple hierarchies that sustain social stratification—in this case, a cultural hierarchy of preferences and dispositions and the social hierarchies, opportunities, and personal connections that allow social actors to put their dispositions into action. Further, I hope to show that social class and education are not merely positions or possessions; they are also social processes that play out within in concrete social settings. In order to make these arguments, however, it is necessary to situate my work within the broader research traditions.

EDUCATION AND CLASS INEQUALITY

Schools within the United States have long been hailed as the "great equalizers." Regarded as institutions that function according to meritocratic principles, our nation's schools are envisioned as the setting in which the American Dream can be realized; a place where students are given the opportunity to overcome the circumstances of their birth through individual effort and competition. Time and again, school reforms have been enacted in order to more perfectly realize this goal by enhancing access and equity for students regardless of their race, class, and gender identities (Ravitch 2001; Tyack and Cuban 1995). Scholars credit, moreover, the expansion of higher education—first through the Morrill Act of 1862 and later following World War II through the G.I. Bill—as the force that gave birth to a strong American middle class (Kerbo 2009). Classic and contemporary sociological research confirms these perceptions, showing that schooling does, indeed, function as a corrective to racial inequalities (Condron 2009; Downey et al 2004) and that social mobility is strongly predicted by how much education a person completes (Blau and Duncan 1967; Sewell and Hauser 1975).

A more critical strain of scholarship challenges this optimistic view. Scholars within this tradition assert that educational institutions play a "sifting and sorting" role (Collins 1971, 1979; Spring 1976), whereby they contribute to—rather than ameliorate—social inequalities. With respect to higher education, one source of stratification is the initial decision to attend college. Researchers find a decades-long pattern whereby high school students from the highest SES quartile are nearly twice as likely to enroll in some type of post-secondary education compared to students in the lowest quartile (Roksa et al 2007). A second source of stratification is the decision of where to enroll. This research shows that students from the first and second SES quartiles are greatly over-represented at highly selective colleges and universities (Bowen and Bok 2000; Carnevale and Rose 2004). The fact that lower-income students are more likely to enroll in community colleges and less-selective institutions has powerful consequences for social stratification, given their association with lower graduation rates and lower earnings over time (Brint and Karabel 1989; Carnevale and Rose 2004; Gerber and Cheung 2008). Finally, researchers have focused on retention as a third source of class-based stratification in higher education. While 88 percent of second-generation students return for a second year, only 73 percent of first-generation students do so (Warburton, Burgarin and Nunez 2001). In general, first-generation students—a common proxy for class status—are "less likely to stay enrolled or attain a bachelor's degree after five years" (Pascarella et al 2004: 250) compared to their second-generation peers.

Carried to its logical conclusion, this research leads to the assertion that if lower-income students were given greater access to higher education and more tools to complete their degrees, our nation's colleges and universities would become the "great equalizers" many imagine them to be. While such inequalities are serious and deserving of attention, my contention is that the dramatic increase in college enrollments, coupled with the diversification of the higher education landscape, has fundamentally altered the relationship between higher education and class inequality. With nearly 70 percent of high school students going on to some form of higher education (National Center for Education Statistics 2009), the relevant questions are no longer simply whether students go to college, where they go, or even whether they complete their degree. Given the ongoing expansion of higher education, it is increasingly important that researchers examine the stratifying processes that take place on college campuses.

In their 2008 review of sociological research on higher education, Mitchell Stevens, Elizabeth A. Armstrong, and Richard Arum called for greater attention to the ways in which stratification occurs outside of the classroom. Although students gain important skills and human capital within the classroom, they acquire other valuable social and cultural resources within their friendship networks and through their extracurricular involvements. While all students acquire social and cultural capital while in college, some students gain more than others. Consequently, students' social and extracurricular experiences offer different—and unequal—opportunities for gaining valuable social and cultural capital and, in doing so, operate as a site for social stratification within higher education.

The foregoing sociological debate over the source of inequality within higher education is rooted in two distinct theoretical approaches to education. Moreover, these theoretical approaches are grounded in two distinct perspectives on the meaning of social class and the dynamics of class reproduction. As I elaborate below, one of these perspectives conceives of education as a possession; this perspective leads to questions about who attends and who graduates. The other perspective conceives of education as a process; this perspective leads to questions about what happens to students while they are enrolled. As I show in my concluding chapter, these theoretical orientations—to the extent that they are supported empirically—provide different recommendations for how to make institutions of higher education more egalitarian in terms of social class.

Education as a Possession

When theorizing the relationship between education and social inequality, some scholars approach education as a possession, as a discrete, measurable trait that defines a person. Frequently operationalized as "years of schooling completed" or "highest degree attained," these studies treat education as a variable that predicts and is predicted by other sociologically relevant characteristics (occupational status, earnings, parental education, mate selection, life expectancy, and more). According to Mitchell Stevens and his coauthors (2008), this research portrays higher education as a "sieve," where educational institutions are conceptualized as gradually filtering out students from lower social class backgrounds (Sorokin ([1927] 1959).

This framework has been used profitably to understand processes of social mobility. These researchers find that those who attain the highest degrees from the most prestigious institutions originate from the most privileged social classes; yet they also show that "educational attainment" is the primary basis upon which privileged occupational positions are allocated. Researchers working within this tradition have developed increasingly complex statistical models whose goal is to predict the extent to which family background, cognitive ability, peer influence, and educational attainments predict subsequent occupational attainments and earnings (Blau and Duncan 1967; Featherman and Hauser 1978; Roksa et al 2007; Sewell et al 1969). Since the late 1960s—assisted by emerging computer technologies—this research tradition has been incredibly fertile. Indeed, a recent edited volume showcases efforts to apply these models to educational access and attainment across nations (Shavit et al 2007).

Yet as higher education has expanded and diversified, this research tradition has encountered new challenges. Because the U.S. higher education landscape now contains approximately 4200 degree-granting institutions, there is incredible variability in the quality and reputation associated with the degrees they grant. This diversification makes it more difficult to conceive of education as a possession that has a uniform, quantifiable meaning. While quantitative models may treat a bachelor's degree from a highly selective university and one from a nonselective university as equivalents, the consequences of these two degrees may be quite different when measured as occupational outcomes or other life experiences. The expansion of higher education, in essence, has reduced "vertical" differentiation in educational attainment; meaning, there is less variability among adults in terms of the amount of education they have received. Because of this, there is greater need to explore "horizontal" differentiation in higher education; that is, to examine differences among people with the same level of education (Gerber and Cheung 2008). For example, researchers could examine how occupational and economic outcomes are impacted by differences among graduates in terms of the selectivity of institution attended, major course of study, and academic performance.

Although the expansion of higher education has prompted scholars to ask more nuanced questions about the meaning of a college degree, there are still limitations to this perspective. In focusing on educational attainment as a possession, many of these studies end up treating education as a "black box." Rather than looking at what happens to an individual who is in the process of attaining a particular level of education, these studies treat educational attainment as an input or output; a window into some other relevant phenomena—occupational attainment or earnings, for example—but rarely worthy of attention it its own right. As such, the underlying mechanisms that produce particular outcomes remain unexplored. There are exceptions, of course. Developers of the Wisconsin Model of Educational Attainment made a major contribution by incorporating "social psychological" variables into their models, namely in terms of identifying aspirations and peer networks (Sewell and Hauser 1975) as mechanisms underlying educational attainment. Similarly, other scholars theorize that educational attainment plays a "signaling" function, whereby it acts as a proxy for valued social and cultural attributes, such as perseverance and knowledge of high culture (Collins 1979).

Critical of this tradition, Mitchell Stevens (2007: 102) argues that "sociologists' enduring penchant for quantification"—wherein measures of educational attainment have been treated as not only necessary, but sufficient, representations of the educational process—"have tended to obscure the essentially cultural character" of the educational experience. By conceptualizing education as "a static quantity akin to money," research that treats education as a possession offers only partial insight into the ways in which education is linked to social class inequality.

Education as a Process

In theorizing the relationship between education and social inequality, a more recent strand of research conceptualizes education as a process. Where the seminal tradition uses quantitative models to predict discrete educational and economic outcomes, the newer tradition uses quantitative and qualitative methods to explore social processes, peer cultures, and symbolic "outcomes." Those working within this tradition argue that researchers must examine what happens to students while they are in school—rather than summarizing their time spent there as a discrete number—to better understand the connection between education and social inequality.

To examine education as a process is to conceptualize schools as incubators (Stevens et al 2008). Those who view schools as incubators seek to open the "black box" that characterizes much of the variable-based, outcomeoriented research; the image of the incubator, after all, calls to mind a transparent environment in which the growth of a living creature can be monitored. Applied to educational research, colleges and universities are conceptualized as sites for "incubating" valued social and cultural competencies. Indeed, it is this notion that I intend to invoke in the title to this book. The image of the college gates—a common symbol emblazoned upon college websites and postcards—suggests a significant entry point into a sheltered, developmentally unique world. The social and cultural competencies that are honed while in college are partially cultivated in the classroom, but because students spend only about fifteen hours each week within formal academic environments, most of this cultivation takes place outside of the classroom. By focusing on the social and extracurricular domain of higher education, researchers seek to extend the rich tradition within the sociology of education that has produced insight into the social worlds of primary and secondary students (Adler and Adler 1998; Bettis 2003; Eckert 1989; Eder 1987, 1995; Pascoe 2007; Thorne 1993; Willis 1977). Together, these works make the essential point that schools are intensely social places, second only to the family of origin as a setting in which socialization and identity formation takes place.

Research that views education as a process mirrors a broader shift in sociological studies of stratification. During the 1970s, feminist scholars argued that studies that define social class location as synonymous with occupational position—the prevailing sociological approaches at the time—provide limited insight into class inequality and social reproduction. These researchers drew attention to women's roles in the class structure, showing that privileged women's participation in cultural institutions and philanthropic organizations allows them to wield power and reproduce their class interests by establishing social and cultural standards (Beisel 1996; Domhoff 1970; McCarthy 1991; Ostrander 1984; Ostrower 2002). Other scholars contributed to this tradition by examining women's roles in class reproduction as part of their parenting roles (Brantlinger 2003; Lareau 1989, 2003; Reay 1998). As privileged women socialize their children in class-specific ways and actively promote their children's interests and protect advantages within schools (and other institutional settings), they simultaneously engage in social reproduction. On the domestic front, women construct class identities and engage in social class projects by maintaining homes that are meticulously clean (Collins 1992) and yards that are attractively landscaped (Kefalas 2003)—efforts that help them gain class respectability when their husbands' occupational efforts do not. Together, this research made an important contribution by showing that social class is not derived solely from a person's occupational identity and experiences, and that social class processes and the reproduction of class inequality take place in multiple social locations.

In addition to feminist scholars, cultural scholars of the 1970s made similarly important contributions to the study of class inequality. The "cultural turn" in sociology refers to an intellectual movement in which scholars brought renewed attention to the role of meaning and symbols in structuring our lived experiences. In studies of social stratification, the cultural turn resulted in understandings of "social class" that moved beyond measures of income, wealth, or occupation. Instead, they conceived stratification as a complex process that generates and is generated by multiple, conceptually distinct hierarchies. That is, social stratification reflects not simply the fact that some people have greater access to economic resources than others, but also the fact that some people have greater access to valued cultural/symbolic resources than others.

As a major proponent of this perspective, French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu wrote: "It is . . . impossible to account for the structure and functioning of the social world unless one reintroduces capital in all its forms and not solely in the one form recognized by economic theory" (1986: 97). Two forms of "capital" that Bourdieu emphasized were social and cultural capital. Researchers define social capital as a resource for social action that inheres in social relations (Bourdieu 1986; Coleman 1988; Portes 1998). In processes of social stratification it is valuable because it provides access to information about and meaningful pathways into desired social experiences and positions. Cultural capital—which exists in embodied, objectified, and institutionalized forms (Bourdieu 1986)—includes a person's educational qualifications, know-how, comportment, and tastes. Within social interaction, it operates as a system of symbolic cues that social actors use to regulate access to places and positions; a yardstick for determining who is "one of us" (Lamont 1992). These forms of capital play a role in class reproduction—the perpetuation of class inequality and the class structure—because they are typically acquired through socialization within the family of origin (Bourdieu and Passeron [1977] 1990).

In terms of how these forms of capital matter within educational settings, an important assumption is that educational settings and other dominant social institutions are not neutral settings; rather, these scholars argue, they operate according to the cultural rules, norms, and expectations of the dominant classes (Lareau 1989; Bourdieu and Passeron [1977] 1990). Students who enter school already equipped with these cultural resources have a "leg up" on those who are only just becoming familiar with the culture of schools and the dominant classes. Cultural capital, then, in the form of cultural attitudes, preferences, and behaviors functions as an invisible, interactional resource that selects and conditions some students for success while identifying others as unworthy of academic or social distinction (Bourdieu and Passeron [1977] 1990).

Despite the fact that social stratification reflects multiple, conceptually distinct hierarchies, the material hierarchies and the symbolic/cultural hierarchies that structure class inequalities are ultimately inseparable. Thus, in order to understand the relationship between class inequalities and higher education, researchers must pay attention to the social and cultural processes that play out on college and university campuses. Through their peer cultures, college students sort themselves into friendship groups and social networks that are stratified and segregated; further, these peer groups often overlap with or provide entrée into extracurricular involvements. Both of these settings, moreover, provide different and unequal opportunities for acquiring social and cultural capital. Thus, as college students move through the social and extracurricular domains of their campuses, they hone their social and cultural competencies, while acquiring additional social and cultural resources. Beyond the campus walls, these resources again come into play as individuals use them to navigate social, marital, and job markets (Armstrong 2007; DiPrete and Buchmann 2006; Schwartz and Mare 2005; Stevens 2007). While college students' degrees surely represent different and unequal attainments of human capital, education is also the process that incubates within students different and unequal attainments of social and cultural capital.

SOCIAL CLASS AND THE EXPERIENTAL CORE OF COLLEGE LIFE

The Perspective from Higher Education Researchers

While sociologists have begun turning their attention to the study of higher education, scholars housed within schools of education have a longer tradition of looking at the experiential core of college life. These scholars understand that what happens outside of the classroom has important consequences for collegiate outcomes. Writing from the perspective of and with the interests of higher education administrators in mind, these researchers typically are concerned with how the social and extracurricular side of college life is related to learning and personal development (Astin 1985), as well as retention (Pascarella and Terenzini 2005; Tinto 1987).

From this perspective, the underlying mechanism that positively predicts learning, personal development, and persistence is what Vincent Tinto (1987) calls "integration" and George Kuh calls "engagement" (Kuh et al 1991, 2010). Vincent Tinto, trained as a sociologist, views integration as a process whereby the student socially and psychologically separates from his or her life prior to college and comes to identify—socially and academically—with college life. By forming friendships, becoming involved in campus activities, and developing relationships with faculty, the student becomes a "competent member in the social and intellectual communities of college" (Tinto 1987: 126), thereby increasing his or her chances of persistence. For George Kuh, "engagement"—similarly captured by the extent to which the student has ongoing interaction with other students and faculty inside and outside of the classroom—increases learning productivity and personal development (Kuh et al 1991, 2010).

Although this line of research has generated important and useful insights for higher education administrators, it has been criticized by anthropologists, sociologists, and others. The thrust of these criticisms is that concepts like integration and engagement are conceptualized as largely neutral processes, wherein social class, race, ethnicity, and other socially relevant traits do not systematically matter (Stuber 2010; Tierney 1992). This characterization remains true, despite the fact that these researchers have found that first-generation students—who are more likely to come from lower-income backgrounds—are more likely to live off campus and maintain ties to people who are not involved in higher education; are less likely to participate in extracurricular activities, athletics, and volunteer work; and have fewer interactions with peers outside of the classroom (Pascarella et al 2004; Terenzini et al 1996). If a student fails to become integrated into the college environment, the implication often seems to be that the problem is with the student—maybe that he or she selected the wrong college or was insufficiently committed to attending college at that time—rather than with the culture or organization of higher education. Colleges and universities, from this perspective, are conceived of as a level playing field; although players (i.e., students) may be excluded at the outset if they do not have the right skills or talents, the implication seems to be that those who are allowed to play the game do so according to a set of rules that treat all students fairly.

While research in higher education—especially that originating from scholars in schools of education—has not fully explored how social class impacts students' engagement with their campus's social and extracurricular worlds, the sociological perspective provides some general suppositions. Where the sociological perspective differs from that generated by and for higher education administrators is in terms of both what is assumed to be gained from participation in the experiential core of college life and how social class structures students' involvement. Rather than focus on student learning and personal development as an end in itself, sociologists like myself argue that extracurricular participation is important because it allows students the opportunity to cultivate valuable social and cultural resources. While participation in activities like Greek life, intramural and varsity athletics, internships, community service, and campus clubs and organizations surely helps students develop their leadership capacities and human capital—skills like managing a budget, an itinerary, or other people—participants also acquire social capital by becoming more connected to a diverse array of students, community leaders, college faculty, and alumni. Social and extracurricular involvement also allows students to cultivate cultural resources. As an experience where students gain foreign language skills and an appreciation for the art, architecture, food, and customs of another culture, off-campus study exposes participants to forms of cultural capital that are valued by the privileged classes (Bourdieu [1979] 1984). And while internships allow participants to gain social capital as they develop connections with a boss, other workers on the job, and associates from other organizations, they also help students develop cultural know-how by exposing them to the subtle cultural and interactional codes of people in particular occupations. Indeed, classic studies of corporate culture show that having the "right" social and cultural traits—a sense of sociability, team spiritedness, articulateness, affability, and presence—plays an important role in hiring decisions (Granovetter 1995; Jackall 1988; Kanter 1977; Useem 1984). In fact, some research suggests that employers and corporate recruiters give considerable weight—sometimes more than that given to academic performance—to an applicant's extracurricular involvement (Albrecht et al 1994; Astin 1993; Kingston and Clawson 1990; Reardon et al 1998). These findings underscore the importance of looking at the experiential core of college life, where students have the opportunity to hone these socially valued traits.

The Perspective of Sociological Researchers

While some higher education researchers seem to presume a class-neutral playing field, sociological theory provides insight into the ways in which social class structures participation in the social and extracurriculum. The model of the highly involved, sociable college student is not class neutral. An elaborate social life and extensive participation in campus activities requires financial resources, as many activities cost money or take time away from paid employment. Students who lack economic capital are likely to be excluded from off-campus study trips—which can easily cost thousands of dollars—and even from more mundane trips to the mall, movies, or a local fast food restaurant or dive bar. Yet money is not the only class-related barrier to participation: social and cultural capital also influence how students navigate the social and extracurriculum. Social capital, embodied in students' social networks, can provide encouragement to participate, knowledge of opportunities, as well as pathways or connections that solidify involvement. Cultural capital, on the other hand, resides in students' beliefs about the desirability, usefulness, or feasibility of cultivating an extensive social life or becoming involved particular activities.

Like economic capital, neither social nor cultural capital is evenly distributed across class lines. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that children from different class backgrounds would be differently involved in their campus's social and extracurricular domains. Sociologist Annette Lareau applied Bourdieu's cultural capital theory to the U.S. context in her analyses of childrearing practices across class lines. In her detailed ethnographic analysis of working- and middle-class families, *Unequal Childhoods*, Lareau (2003) argues that families from different class backgrounds use different *cultural repertoires* to evaluate the desirability and feasibility of involvement in organized activities. By cultural repertoire, Lareau refers to the set of discrete skills, habits, and orientations that shape how people act. Middle-class parents, she shows, use a method of childrearing called *concerted cultivation*, where they actively develop their child's social, intellectual, and physical capacities. Its hallmarks are intensive verbal interactions between adults and children and a daily routine in which children's organized activities set the rhythm for family life. Working-class parents, by contrast, approach childrearing as the *accomplishment of natural growth*, where children are not regarded as "projects" that require a full roster of structured activities in order to hone their talents. Rather, children are given greater freedom to create their own games, mediate their own disputes, and act "like kids."

Ultimately, Lareau argues, these childrearing practices play a role in the reproduction of class inequalities. The accomplishment of natural growth leads to an "emerging sense of constraint," whereby working-class individuals become less likely to explore unfamiliar social and cultural worlds and more likely to accept the actions and dictates of persons in positions of authority. Meanwhile, concerted cultivation yields a "robust sense of entitlement" (p. 2), where children raised in privileged families feel comfortable within new settings, meeting new people—especially those in positions of authority—and have grown accustomed to having their needs attended to as they navigate society's dominant social institutions. Extending the argument of Annette Lareau, one can speculate that exposure to these different styles of socialization will differentially prepare students to interact with peers, professors, and the broader social and institutional apparatus they confront in college life.

A rich body of autobiographical research largely confirms this supposition and brings these theories to life. Writing as upwardly mobile journalists and academics, authors from lower- and working-class backgrounds have commented that while they felt intellectually prepared for their experiences within higher education, they often felt socially and culturally incompetent

(Dews and Law 1995; Grimes and Morris 1997; Lubrano 2004; Ryan and Sackrey 1984; Tokarczyk and Fay 1993). With respect to their language, self-presentation, and styles of social interaction, students and academics from less-privileged backgrounds describe themselves as feeling alienated due to their lack of familiarity with the cultural codes and competencies of the privileged classes. In response, they found ways to opt out and exclude themselves from social networks, organizations, and interactions that prompted feelings of alienation.

The core insight from the social reproduction perspective—as articulated by Pierre Bourdieu and Annette Lareau and reinforced by those writing from an autobiographical perspective—is that those with higher levels of "legitimate" social and cultural capital at the outset are better-positioned to acquire additional stocks of these valued symbolic resources as they navigate society's dominant social institutions. College students, then, will be advantaged to the extent that the social and cultural world of their campus resembles the social and cultural world they were socialized to inhabit while growing up. For children raised in middle-class families, like the ones documented by Lareau, the transition to college may be relatively seamless; although students from privileged backgrounds are not immune to the academic challenges of college life and may experience feelings of homesickness, they have been socialized to be outgoing, confident "joiners" who enjoy and are adept at meeting new people and becoming involved in new activities. Working-class students, by contrast, are less likely to have been socialized to enjoy or be adept at meeting new people and getting involved in organized activities. Yet it is reasonable to presume that working-class students who enroll in higher education do so because they possess some of the social and cultural capital that is useful within dominant social institutions. My research is designed to explore these propositions by looking at how social class shapes the ways in which privileged and less-privileged students navigate their campus's social and extracurricular realms and how their understandings of their own and others' social class identities shapes and is shaped by these experiences.

whole research?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Setting and Methods

In order to explore how social class shapes students' experiences within the social and extracurricular realms of college life, I conducted research at two institutions of higher education during the 2003–2004 academic year (see table 1.1). I selected these institutions for both practical and theoretical rea-

Table 1.1. Big State University and Benton College At-a-Glance

Characteristic	*Big State University*	*Benton College*
Type of Institution	Public flagship university	Private liberal arts college
Setting	Small urban area: 65,000 permanent residents	Small town: 10,000 permanent residents
Undergraduate Population	30,000	2,300
Costs of Attendance	In-state: $11,000 Out-of-state: $16,000	$32,000
Financial Aid Recipients	36%	54%
Average Financial Aid Award	$5,500	$20,000
Acceptance Rate	84% ("selective")	50% ("more selective")
SAT Scores (Middle 50% of Matriculants)	980 to 1210	1100 to 1290
White	88%	89%
Sex/Gender	Female: 55% Male: 45%	Female: 53% Male: 47%
First-Generation	20–25%	20–22%
Pell Recipients	15%	9%
In-State	72%	55%
Live on Campus	37%	95%
Greek Affiliated	16–20%	70–75%

Notes:

Big State covers the demonstrated need of 13% of its financial aid recipients; Benton College, by contrast, covers the demonstrated need of 100% of its financial aid recipients.

Admissions practices are designated "selective" and "more selective" by the *U.S. News and World Report* (2003).

The percentage of students receiving a Pell Grant is often used as an indicator of the percentage of students who fit the federal definition of "low income."

sons. Practically, I selected these research sites because I had ties at each school and they were in located near one another, allowing me to conduct my research efficiently. Theoretically, I selected these schools because they represent "ideal types" of two traditional models of higher education and because they possess important similarities and differences. While both are respected four-year schools, Benton College represents an ideal type of a selective liberal arts college and Big State represents the ideal type of a public flagship university. These campuses differ in terms of size, selectivity, cost and availability of financial aid, and prominence of Greek life; they are similar in that they are located within the same Midwestern state and have student bodies that are racially and geographically similar.

Benton College

Located in the rural Midwestern town of "Farmington," Benton College has a reputation as one of the best liberal arts colleges in the region. During my time on campus, it was listed as one of the forty best national liberal arts colleges in *U.S. News and World Report*. Benton's campus is nothing if not orderly. Dotted with examples of both classic architectural styles, dating to the college's founding during the mid-1800s, and more modern buildings, the campus is well-maintained and conjures an image of a classic liberal arts college. Beyond the campus walls, however, there is a disjuncture between the wealth represented by the college and the surrounding community. Because Farmington is home to several stable manufacturing entities—in addition to the college—a sizable number of the town's 10,000 permanent residents can be considered middle-class. Still, the "downtown" is quite desolate and many areas of town are populated by small, severely run-down dwellings. On the blocks surrounding the town square businesses come and go with great frequency. It amazed me that in a college town, the funky local coffee shop was continually rumored to be on the verge of being shuttered. Like other small towns in the era of deindustrialization, most of the viable local businesses and chain stores have moved to the outskirts of town near the Wal-Mart. Town-gown relations were often strained, with local residents feeling as if the relatively privileged college students treat Farmington as a temporary country club, and Benton students feeling harassed by the local young men who periodically drive their pick-up trucks through campus and yell obscenities at students.

Benton College has long had the reputation as a college destination of choice for regional elites and students with a more conservative outlook. While there is a visible population of "alternative" students on campus—including those who find respite in a "theme house" that serves as a residence and social center for GLBT (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender) students and their allies and those opting to live in a substance-free residence hall—the campus seems most welcoming to students who identify with campus Republican groups, Christian groups, and the sizable Greek community (that is, fraternities and sororities). Benton students often refer to their campus as a "bubble," referring to the feeling that student life is disconnected from the "real world" and the surrounding community. Although quite a few students spend a few hours each month volunteering in local schools or retirement homes, very few hold jobs off campus and the vast majority of their time and energy is devoted to campus life.

Like most four-year colleges and universities in the Midwest, the majority—88 percent, to be exact—of Benton College's 2,300 students are white. Each year the college actively recruits students of color, but diversity programs and self-selection among applicants ultimately attract only a small percentage of nonwhite students. African Americans constitute 6 percent of the student body, while students of Asian and Latino descent each represent 2 percent of the population (the remaining 1 to 2 percent are international students). Socioeconomically, it is harder to quantify where Benton students fall. Where institutions of higher education routinely make publicly available data related to their students' racial and gender characteristics, they either do not systematically gather or do not widely disseminate data on the social class or income characteristics of their student bodies. Although this information is required for students filling out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), not all students apply for financial aid and institutions are reticent to release information for the students who do fill out the forms. One measure that is often used to estimate the percentage of low-income students on campus is the percent who are "Pell eligible." At Benton, the director of financial aid estimated that about 9 percent of its students receive a Pell Grant. Admissions officers estimate that 20 percent of students are first-generation college enrollees, using the definition of a student with neither parent holding a four-year college degree. Historically, the College has operated a number of programs to actively recruit first-generation students and provide them with financial, academic, and social assistance once enrolled.

Ultimately, Benton is an expensive college that attracts a relatively affluent, high-achieving student body. *U.S. News and World Report* categorizes Benton's admissions as "highly selective." Concretely, that translates to a student body where 50 percent of the enrolled students ranked within the top 10 percent of their high school classes and scored an average of 1200 on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT).[1] With annual costs of attendance estimated at nearly $32,000, a Benton education comes with a high price tag. Moreover, because nearly 75 percent of the student body is involved in Greek life, most students incur another several thousand dollars each year in college costs (Greek organizations typically do not offer need-based assistance, though most do employ merit-based scholarship programs). Benton is, however, somewhat less expensive than many of the schools at the top of national raking systems, where annual costs hovered just above $40,000 during the same period.

For those granted admission, the college's substantial endowment may ease the financial burden. The college is able to meet 100 percent of its students' demonstrated need, which at the time of student resulted in an average annual award of approximately $20,000. This means that for those lower-income students who apply and are admitted, Benton is able to ameliorate their financial pressures. Like many of its competitors, Benton has increased merit-based aid in recent years, so that slightly more than 50 percent of the student body receives some financial aid. Still, need-based aid comprises the majority of the financial aid budget.

Big State University

On the rural drive from Benton College to Big State University, the topography changes. An hour away, the flat orderly quadrangle of Benton College gives way to a Big State campus with rolling hills, majestic trees, and a diminutive stream that locals quaintly call a "river." Although Collegeville is home to a large professional class—many of whom are affiliated with the university—there is also considerable poverty and substantial social class segregation in this town of approximately 65,000 permanent residents. There are, for example, areas of town where the 2000 U.S. Census reported a family poverty rate of 28 percent and other areas that are home to rolling suburban subdivisions and extravagant homes. Social class segregation and differentiation is also evident among the undergraduate population: although many students occupy older, affordable rental housing close to campus, there are numerous upscale apartments downtown that cater to a more affluent crowd, with luxury SUVs and sports cars, like Audis, Mercedes, and BMWs lining the streets.

With 30,000 undergraduates, it is difficult to make generalizations about the student culture of Big State University. Because it is located in a small city, the campus still occupies a fairly strong focal point in its students' lives. Although most sophomores, juniors, and seniors live and work off campus, there is sense of unity surrounding the campus, its sports teams, its traditions, and the academic and social life it offers. While the Greek community is relatively large and influential (during a given year, between 16 and 20 percent of the undergraduates may be affiliated), students find numerous alternate "scenes" to accommodate their religious, political, social, and cultural interests. Although Big State was named one of the nation's top party schools during the period in which I conducted my research, many students spend their weekends not at the bars or large Greek parties, but with smaller groups of friends or visiting friends and families in their hometowns.

Demographically, there is a great deal of regional and racial homogeneity on campus. About 72 percent of the student body comes from in-state; of the remaining 28 percent, a substantial number hail from coastal states like California, New Jersey, and New York, with another significant portion coming from affluent suburbs of the Midwest. With a student population that is about 88 percent white, Big State is, like Benton College, a predominantly white institution. Four percent of the undergraduates are African American, with

Asian and Latino Americans accounting for 3 and 2 percent of the student body, respectively (the remaining 4 percent are Native American and international students).

Academically, *U.S. News and World Report* classifies Big State as a "second tier" national doctoral institution with "selective" admissions policies. Statistically, that equates to a student body where 22 percent of the student body ranked within the top 10 percent of their high school classes and scored just below an 1100 on the SAT.[1] While administrators privately describe the University as having an open-admissions policy, "enrollment managers" were actively developing strategies to increase both the quality of admitted students and tuition revenues—principally by admitting more wealthy and out-of-state students. If Big State proceeds with such plans, it will likely admit fewer students with modest high school records and modest socioeconomic backgrounds.

Because Big State is a flagship university with costs of attendance that are substantially lower than Benton College, it is likely that its population is more socioeconomically diverse and less affluent, on average. Nonetheless, there is a significant minority of extremely wealthy students on campus—such as the out-of-state students who have spurred the luxury apartment-boom in downtown Collegeville. Financial aid representatives estimate that approximately 15 percent of the student body receives a federal Pell Grant, meaning that at least 15 percent of the undergraduate population can be defined as "low-income." Perhaps 20–25 percent qualifies as first-generation students. In an era of rising college tuitions, Big State's costs are comparable to other four-year flagship universities in the region. At the time I conducted my research, tuition and mandatory fees for in-state students were approximately $5,300, with total annual costs (tuition plus room and board) estimated at $11,000. Tuition for out-of-state students was approximately $16,000, with total annual costs of nearly $22,000.

Although Big State comes with a lower sticker price than schools like Benton, the irony is that a larger student body, smaller endowment, and greater reliance on public funding makes it less able to offer generous financial aid packages. Thirty-six percent of the undergraduate population has demonstrated financial need, and among those receiving aid, the average award is about $5,500. Only about 13 percent of those receiving aid, however, have their need fully met. Lower-income students who attend Big State are often under considerable pressure to work for pay or take out loans. An irony, then, is that while economically disadvantaged students are more likely to apply to and be admitted to schools like Big State (as compared to Benton), they often face greater financial pressures when they do enroll.

Sample and Recruitment

The 61 students whose lives are documented in this study came from distinct social class locations (see Appendix A for complete information on respondents; see table 2 for abbreviated information). Like other cultural sociologists, I approach class in categorical terms. From this perspective, class is determined by an individual's (or family's) structural location and the unique life experiences, life chances, and cultural orientations that correspond to that structural location (Bourdieu 1977, [1979] 1984; Kohn 1977; Lareau 2003; Williams 1977; Willis 1977). One class location that I was interested in was the working-class. The students I spoke to in my interviews did not commonly use this term to label themselves; instead, they variously referred to their family backgrounds as difficult, poverty stricken, and dirt poor. I defined students as coming from working-class families if their parents or guardians held occupational positions that required lower levels of skill—usually within the manual labor or service sectors of the economy, offered lower levels of pay, and typically provided them with limited autonomy at work (what some researchers call "supervisory capacity"). Some of the jobs held by these students' parents or guardians were factory worker, laborer, apartment manager, security guard, cashier, church secretary, waitress, bus driver, and in-home childcare provider.

I was also interested in the experiences of students who grew up in upper-middle-class families. I defined these as families where the parents held jobs that required higher levels of skill—usually in the professional or upper-level managerial sectors, offered higher pay, and typically provided them with considerable autonomy at work. Some of the occupations held by these mothers and fathers included lawyer, doctor, professor, management consultant, engineer, business owner, and financial analyst. In many of these families, fathers were the primary wage earners, while mothers were employed in supporting economic roles, sometimes as school teachers or office assistants. Despite the common conception that a majority of American's consider themselves middle-class, these students were rather frank about their socioeconomic privilege. When given a concrete set of labels to apply to themselves, 26

Table 1.2. Sample/Comparison Groups

	Benton College	*Big State University*	*Total*
Upper Middle Class	16	17	33
Working Class	14	14	28
Total	30	31	61

identified as upper-middle class, with three and four identifying as upper and middle class, respectively.

Because researchers know that a parent's level of education strongly impacts their child's school experiences, I also selected students based their parents' educational attainment. Each of the upper-middle-class students grew up in a family where both parents had earned at least a four-year college degree—typically from a public school in the Midwest. Only a handful of these parents graduated from a nationally ranked college or university, including one parent with a PhD from Yale; another with a an MBA from Vanderbilt University; and one with a BA from Lehigh University and an MBA from the Wharton School of Business. Among the 66 parents represented by privileged students, 18 percent of mothers and 30 percent of fathers held an advanced degree (MBA, JD, MD, PhD). Among the 28 working-class students, none grew up in a household where any of the adults (parents or guardians) had completed a four-year degree. The majority had parents whose highest level of education was a high school diploma and nearly a quarter had even less than that. A few of these parents had completed a two-year vocational degree and a few others were slowly acquiring credits toward completing a bachelor's degree.

critical review?

The students that I interviewed also seemed to differ in terms of their day-to-day family lives. Upper-middle-class students seem to have been raised in stable family situations, largely within safe, suburban communities. Among these thirty-three students, only three had divorced parents, and only one gave any indication of a less-than idyllic family life. In moments of candor and frustration, Big State's Chad Bush spoke of adolescent sexual assault by a peer and ongoing struggles with what he described as a controlling mother. It is possible that upper-middle-class students had more such experiences than they let on, but that they did not feel comfortable revealing this information to a stranger. Working-class students, by contrast, described growing up in rural areas or the inner city, where they attended schools with students from similar socioeconomic backgrounds, and were exposed to fewer high-quality educational resources. Family disruption was also a common theme. Fully half came from divorced families and more than 20 percent were raised either exclusively or partially by a grandparent. Working-class students were also more forthcoming about problems within their families, with numerous sharing stories of the criminality and imprisonment, mental illness, alcoholism, and physical and emotional abuse they experienced or witnessed at home.

Although the students whose stories I tell contain diverse social class backgrounds and represent equally the two traditional genders, I spoke almost exclusively to white college students.[2] My decision to focus on white students was motivated by practical and theoretical concerns. Much of the existing literature on first-generation, underrepresented, and disadvantaged college students has drawn on samples of students who face *multiple barriers* to higher education (Bergerson 2007; Casey 2005; Goodwin 2006; London 1989; Richardson and Skinner 1992; Tierney 1992; York-Anderson and Bowman 1991). Their findings document the experiences of students who are on the margins not just in terms of social class and parental education, but also in terms of race and ethnicity, age, and enrollment status (full- or part-time). Little effort has been made to disentangle the ways in which these various and multiple factors differently impact students' adjustment to college. By using a sampling strategy in which I held constant race, age (all are "traditional age" students), and enrollment status (all are full-time students), I am able to maximize my empirical and theoretical focus on social class. For that reason, my findings speak specifically to the ways in which *white* students from working- and upper-middle-class backgrounds, navigate and experience higher education.

In some qualitative research on education, gaining access to "informants" appears to be a rather unproblematic process. Although school ethnographers often document the fits and starts they experienced in the early phases of their research, the cumulative impression is one where the researcher selects a site and, after sitting on the playground or in the lunchroom for a few days, students come out of the woodwork and begin to share the details of their lives. It is somewhat sheepishly, then, that I admit that I encountered some challenges in finding students who wanted to spend three hours talking to a stranger. Because I wanted to speak with students who had diverse experiences on campus I began by randomly identifying students from an exhaustive list of undergraduates provided by each university. After initially e-mailing students and inviting them to participate in the study (wherein I sweetened the deal by telling them that they would receive a modest payment for their time), an extended chain of e-mail communication ensued, through which I tried to determine whether the student fit my conceptual definition of either a working- or upper-middle-class student. Students were excluded if they had one, but not two, college educated parents, or if they were unable to provide enough detail about their parents' occupations to allow me to identify their class position. After many e-mails back and forth, I eventually located thirty-five participants using this method of recruitment.

Because random sampling failed to efficiently produce a sufficiently large sample, I also used snowball sampling and targeted recruitment to locate additional respondents. On both campuses I had a hard time finding males who wanted to tell their life stories, so I asked some of my female students to share the names of male students who they thought might be willing to help me out. Because I encountered some difficulty finding working-class students, I contacted the offices of various scholarship programs on each campus and asked them to help me identify additional respondents. Using these procedures, I located the remaining 26 students.

In total, I spent nearly three hours talking to each of these 61 students, 33 of whom came from upper-middle-class families and 28 of whom came from working-class families. All of these students were full-time, traditional-age (19–22) college students, and about half were male and half were female (28 and 33, respectively). They were drawn equally from the Big State and Benton campuses (31 and 30, respectively). Our conversations—which typically took place in my office—used a chronological approach and covered a wide array of topics related to the collegiate experience. I inquired, for example, into each student's family background and high school experiences; the process by which they applied to and enrolled at either Big State or Benton College; their adjustment to college and their perceptions of the college environment; and their experiences within the social, academic, and extracurricular domains of college life. Although my conversations with each student covered all of these topics, depending on the idiosyncrasies of the student's life, our conversation took various twists and turns, and ended up focusing on some topics more so than others.

In talking to these students, I wanted to understand, in the first instance, the basic facts about their college experiences: did they like their dorm when they first moved in; had they made many friends; what major had they chosen, what kinds of grades were they getting; what did they do on the weekend; had they become involved in any campus activities; were they planning on doing study abroad or an internship at any point in the near future? In the second instance I was interested in the cultural lens through which they viewed their experiences: were they *satisfied* with the number and kinds of friends they had made; how *important* did they consider the social aspects of college; how did they evaluate the *appropriateness*, *attractiveness*, and *feasibility* of activities like study abroad or internships? Finally, I was interested in nuances of their language; moments when they used language to express emotion, humor, and pain, as well as discursive patterns and word choices, especially when talking about social class.

In order to situate these students' experiences into a broader context of life at Big State University and Benton College, I gathered additional quantitative and qualitative data. In addition to interviews with nearly fifteen campus administrators—namely those working in offices dealing directly with student life, such as admissions, student affairs, multicultural affairs, residential life, Greek life, study abroad and off-campus study, and first-generation programming—I also collected some archival, documentary, and demographic data. For example, because I was interested in the process by which students become involved in various activities on campus, I interviewed directors of off-campus study, Greek life, and the like. Whenever possible, I also gathered demographic information about participation in programs like off-campus study, internships, and leadership development. It is worth noting that I generally received greater cooperation, and hence much more comprehensive data, from administrators at Benton College. Consequently, I am able to offer only partial insight into the quantitative dimensions of student extracurricular participation on these two campuses.

The Researcher and the Researched

My initial interest in this topic sprang from my own experiences in college. As a first-generation student from a lower-income background, I found many aspects of college life bewildering. While I had only minor difficulties adjusting to the heightened competition and rigorous academic demands of college life, I faced greater challenges when it came to finding my footing within the social and extracurricular realms. A great deal of this stemmed, I think, from the fact that I had chosen to attend Northwestern University, in Evanston, Illinois—an elite, highly-selective institution. The fall of my freshman year, my mother and I pulled up to the Bobb-McCulloch residence hall in our rusty, ocher-colored Chevy Caprice. As we unloaded my possessions, including the new floral comforter set she had given me as a graduation gift, I knew instantly that I was different from my college peers. Although many of my high school friends came from middle-class families with college-educated parents, the level of privilege I perceived among the students in my dorm seemed quantitatively and qualitatively different. Admittedly, there were other young women on my floor who were scholarship students and had been raised by single mothers in urban environments. I was amazed, however, by the proportion that came from affluent areas of Manhattan, Beverly Hills, and Washington, D.C.—including the suburb that was later profiled by Alexandra Robbins in her book *The Overachievers*. I compared my own mother—an attractive, but overweight smoker—to the other mothers who were dutifully arranging plastic storage bins and decorative pillows in their daughters' rooms. They seemed so polished; their hair expertly bobbed, and their trim figures neatly outfitted in pantsuits or shiny silk shantung capris and crisp linen blouses. My mom's body was different; her demeanor was different. Although I did not know it at the time, the difference reflected what Pierre Bourdieu called *habitus*—the way that a person's social class location is inscribed in one's body, in terms of its size, shape, posture, and demeanor (1977).

Even as I was forming friendships with my dorm mates during the first weeks and months of the school year, I felt increasingly different from them.

I was amazed by their stories of summer trips to Europe, winter vacations to the Caribbean, and the trials and tribulations of learning how to do laundry—now that they could no longer rely on help from their cleaning ladies at home. I played along, and blended in, for the most part. Although I struggled to pay for Sunday dinners out, when the dining halls were closed, and was unable to participate in some of the cultural activities that attracted my friends, I was able to regale the kids on my hall with stories of my "brushes with fame" in the posh resort town of Aspen, Colorado, where my father lived and worked as a carpenter.

Throughout my college career at Northwestern, I continued to live in a state of limbo. Socially, I attended weekly fraternity parties, and my best friends were members of some of the most prestigious Greek organizations on campus. I had what might appear to be a lively, successful social life. Yet internally, I felt as if I existed only on the margins. While virtually all of my female friends were members of sororities, I was an utter failure in the sorority rush process—where neither elite nor mid-tier houses expressed any interest in having me as a member. And while I attended many parties alongside my friends, I was never able to accompany them on their spring break vacations to the Bahamas. Meanwhile, my educational and social experiences were distancing me from my mother and my "working-class roots." I could not easily determine where my loyalties or my identity fell, which class I aspired to be a member of or which strategies I should use to shore up my membership in either group.

More than a decade after graduating from college, this social-class duality continues to define who I am. After graduating from Northwestern University I attended Ivy League Brown University, where I obtained a master's degree. This experience, too, exposed me to the culture of the privileged classes. As I spent more time in these worlds, and these worlds became my worlds, I continued to feel the pull of my class origins. After many years of informal reflection, it was these experiences that inspired me to embark upon a research project that allowed me to ask systematic questions about the ways in which social class impacts students' college experiences. It is also this biographical context that shaped my interactions with these 61 working- and upper-middle-class college students.

I define myself as having a "mixed-class" identity, such that I am able to use my own life experiences to communicate comfortably with people from a variety of class locations. I believe this aspect of my identity served as an asset throughout the research process. Because social class is a subtle—yet often charged—topic of conversation, a sense of rapport is essential. When talking to working-class students, I often spoke of my own social class origins as a way to build connection. When a student expressed a sense of sorrow or frustration as they recounted their experiences in college, or the ways in which their relationships with family members or friends from home had change since moving away, I was able to affirm their feelings and provide them with a parallel experience from my own life. When Benton College's Tiffany Morrison and Suzanne Sorensen explained their lack of success during sorority rush as a reflection of their class standing (did not have the right clothes; their father did not have "the right job"), we laughed as I told them about my own sorority rush failures. Sometimes, however, this sense of connection remained elusive. About fifteen minutes into my conversation with Big State's Cassie Harmon, as we were talking about her family's financial circumstances, she became tearful and too upset to continue. At that moment, I shared with her the fact that my mother also turned to welfare after she and my father divorced, and how difficult this had been for me. Although we were able to resume our conversation, Cassie's answers were abbreviated and superficial. It seemed as if her pain was preventing her from truly sharing her life history. Outside of this example, I believe that my own working-class background helped set students at ease and encouraged them to share aspects of their life experiences they might not otherwise.

Because I had the privilege of graduating from two elite institutions of higher education, I was able to use these experiences to create a sense of connection with the upper-middle-class students. Often, it seemed as if these upper-middle-class students saw me as one of them. When I first met Big State's Emily Chase she immediately bonded with me over the fact that we were wearing the same pair of simple, silver stud earnings from the posh jewelry store, Tiffany. Especially during my conversations with students who had grown up in the Chicago area, I was able to build rapport by explaining that I had attended college nearby. The fact that I had graduated from Northwestern University granted me a degree of credibility with some of these students--as illustrated by the surprise and approval in Abbie Kohn's voice when she responded: "Oh, that's a really good school!" Similarly, because my own college experiences had equipped me with some insight into Greek life, I was able to deploy this knowledge during our conversations—especially among Benton College students, where the majority was affiliated with Greek organizations.

In general, I found these students to be incredibly frank and forthcoming. I typically prefaced our conversations by stating that while I would ask about a wide range of college experiences I would not ask explicitly about drinking, drugs, or sexual activity. When I mentioned this to Big State's Mark Mason, however, he quickly replied, "You can ask me about anything." Indeed, within twenty minutes he was telling me about how on his first night on campus he immediately found a group with whom he could "party." Students on both campuses were quite open about their own and their peers' underage drinking, yet the "hardest substance" anyone spoke of using was marijuana. Elsewhere, some working-class students openly discussed alcoholism or physical abuse within their families, topics that are typically considered taboo.

If there was any issue that caused the students to be somewhat "tight-lipped" it was the specifics of Greek life—a topic that concerned nearly 80 percent of the Benton students and 40 percent of the Big State students I spoke to. Students would become a bit vague when asked about fraternity or sorority rush procedures—especially how they evaluated the desirability of a potential new member—or behaviors (illegal parties, serving alcohol to minors, and so forth) for which their chapter could be sanctioned. Greek letter organizations are, after all, secret societies, and it appeared that these students were serious about respecting these codes of silence. More than anything else, what seemed to make students uncomfortable was their concern over whether I found what they were telling me useful. Some asked at the end of the interview, for example, whether they had been helpful, or, as with Big State's Allison Smith, they prefaced or concluded their answers with statements like, "I'm not sure if this is what you want to know."

In evaluating my data, I have fewer concerns about rapport and disclosure than I do about natural variations in students' energy levels, sociability, and verbal facility. Indeed, some students were easier to talk to than others. Some were so articulate and free-flowing that they would answer many of my questions before I even had a chance to ask them. Conversations with others were more labored, characterized by truncated responses. Some students quickly showed a high degree of verbal facility and abstract thinking; others were more limited in their language skills and seemed more concrete and less introspective in their thinking. Finally, while some students were upbeat, others were mellow. During each conversation I worked hard to mirror the student with whom I was speaking. I found myself constantly moderating my own energy level, word choice, and use of probes in an effort to have the most productive conversation possible.

As Ruth Frankenberg (1993) wrote in her groundbreaking book *White Women, Race Matters*, "An interview is not, in any simple sense, the telling of a life so much as it is an incomplete story angled toward my questions and each woman's ever-changing sense of self and how the world works" (41). Indeed, qualitative researchers increasingly highlight the partial, situated nature of their analyses. Had these data been gathered by a different researcher, in a different setting, a very different life—and a very analytic different story line—may have been told. Were I male, were I an older female, were I African American, the stories reported herein surely would be different. During our conversations I defined myself as a graduate student conducting research on how students' college experiences are shaped by their "backgrounds"--without making explicit reference to social class. In terms of self-presentation, I did not dress differently depending on the class background of my respondent. For the most part, I presented myself either as a young professional (especially if I were meeting with students on days when I also taught) or as a relatively preppy—but not especially flashy or trendy—young adult. As I note above, I did at times present a different social class self to the students with whom I spoke. Yet both of the social class selves I presented are real. I am, in fact, a person who has had a wide variety of social class experiences, hence an array of cultural tools that I can deploy in interaction. Although I used these tools strategically, I did not use them inauthentically. Hopefully the reader will find that I have faithfully and convincingly documented the lives of these students, as they told them to me in the production of this research.

Organization of the Book

In an era where nearly 70 percent of high school graduates go on to some form of post-secondary education (NCES 2009), a study of how social class impacts college students' involvement in the "experiential core" of higher education is increasingly valuable. In chapter 2 I examine the processes by which these working- and upper-middle-class students came to attend Big State or Benton College and their subsequent adjustment to college life. Here, I show that social class matters for students' earliest experiences on campus, in the sense that the social and cultural resources they have at their disposal can facilitate or hinder their integration into the college environment. As these students acclimated to the college environment, many turned their attention toward the extracurricular options available on their campuses. In chapter 3 I explore the ways in which students navigated their campus's extracurricular realm, paying particular attention to the ways in which their social and cultural resources influenced their beliefs about the desirability, utility, and feasibility of becoming involved. I continue to show that social class matters in that the types of resources that upper-middle-class students brought with them to college were well suited for getting involved and engaging in the types of activities that allow them to acquire the kinds of social and cultural resources that are valued by the privileged classes; the converse appeared to be true for working-class students, who had lower levels of involvement within the extracurricular realm.

While working-class students did not typically arrive on campus with the kinds of social and cultural resources that encouraged their participation in their campus's extracurriculum, I show in chapter 4 that whether these students ultimately became involved in activities like internships, study abroad, and Greek life was partially shaped by the campus context. Working-class students at Benton College—where the vast majority of students live on campus for all four years and where they spend their days in a setting where the ethos of intense involvement is virtually inescapable—were more involved in campus activities compared to their Big State peers. I show that certain features of the college environment tend to either pull in or push out working-class students from the collegiate extracurriculum. These processes made it more or less difficult for them to acquire valuable forms of social and cultural capital, thereby illustrating one set of mechanisms that alternately reproduce and contest class inequalities. Yet because some working-class students at Big State were extensively involved in the experiential core of their campus, I also explore the processes by which they, too, were pulled into their campus's extracurricular domain—despite the broader pattern of students like them being pushed out.

In chapters 5 and 6 I turn my attention to how social class influenced these students' sense of class identity and their social class worldviews, first by looking at the worldviews of upper-middle-class students and then by looking at those of working-class students. I examine, in particular, how students situated themselves in relation to their peers and the kinds of *symbolic boundaries* (Lamont 1992, 2000; Lamont and Molnar 2002) they drew when talking about social class. For both working- and upper-middle-class students, social class worldviews were characterized by clams to moral superiority and troubling class "blind spots." Ultimately, I argue that the discourses they use to talk about social class may have enduring social consequences for class inequality, in that these discourses function as a schema that motivates social action.

Finally, in chapter 7, I conclude my discussion by reconsidering the role of institutions of higher education in the reproduction of social inequality. From a practical perspective, I point toward numerous initiatives that colleges and universities might take to ameliorate class inequalities on campus. Yet I also highlight the ways in which these analyses illustrate the limits and the possibilities of higher education by showing how institutions of higher education valorize the cultural and social resources of privileged students while also providing avenues for less-privileged students to acquire valuable college credentials—which have value in their own right—and some familiarity with the social and cultural norms that govern middle- and upper-middle-class life.

NOTES

1. *U.S. News and World Report* gives SAT information by listing the range of scores between the 25th and 75th percentile of admitted students. For the period in which I conducted my research, these scores in this range went from 1100 to 1290.

2. Before adding a racial identification question to the screening protocol, I recruited and interviewed two bi-racial students at Big State: Mark Mason, an upper-middle-class African American and white male, and Nicole Martinez, a working-class Hispanic and white female. Both of these students were involved in a scholarship program for high-achieving minority students, had social networks that were predominantly white, and made little reference to race during their interviews.