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I am just like my students: Working Class Academics at a Community College

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“I AM JUST LIKE MY STUDENTS:”

WORKING CLASS ACADEMICS

AT A COMMUNITY COLLEGE

by

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Abstract

This research project investigated the experiences of working-class professionals at a community college to discover whether a working-class background could be an asset in academia. Scholarly literature mainly portrayed the difficulty professors encountered due to their working-class identity. The results of a survey of 984 faculty and staff members, including adjuncts, and four in-depth interviews yielded a multiplicity of viewpoints on how social class manifests on campus. Interpreted through Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, cultural capital, and field, the study revealed that strong working-class and first generation characteristics of the professional staff influenced institutional culture and academic practices. The evidence suggested community college provides working-class professionals a welcome academic home. Community college staff disrupted the status quo of social reproduction by ascending into the middle class and by becoming allies with students to do the same. Enhancement of the study might include additional interviews or a survey at a second college.

Chapter 1

Introduction

This research project investigated the professional experiences of academics from working-class backgrounds employed at a community college. Much of the existing literature discussed in Chapter 2 suggested that working-class social origins prevent academics from having fully satisfying careers within the professoriate (Muzzatti & Samarco 2006; Ryan & Sackrey, 1984). Research also showed differences between male and female academics. Women in higher education reported being disadvantaged relative to their male colleagues (Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988; Bernard, 1964; Glazer-Raymo, 1999; Simeone, 1987). More recent studies started to provide a more nuanced view of working-class academics (Brodersen, 2008; Dole, 2010; Vander Putten, 1998). My own observations as a professional staff member at a community college ran counter to the prevailing conclusions offered by research on the topic, and those observations were the genesis for this research project.

The purpose of this research project was to explore the educational and professional experiences of community college academics from working-class backgrounds. Two overarching themes framed the research. First and foremost was the question of whether a working-class background can be an asset in academia. The second point concerned the social mobility of working-class academics and whether community colleges might act as gateways to middle-class lives for those that work there, in ways similar to the community college student population.

These two themes informed the main argument. I argue that community colleges offer working-class academics a satisfying middle-class, professional environment because these colleges diverge in important aspects from other institutions of higher education. The research questions that structured the research methodology were:

- Do working-class academics view their social class background as significant to their approach to their professional roles?
- In what ways does class background shape the academic practices of professionals at the community college?
- Are there differences in the experiences and approaches used by individuals related to their gender identity?

I detailed in Chapter 3 how I used my home institution as the research site by devising a survey distributed to the entire professional staff of 984 colleagues. I solicited interview participants from the survey respondents and conducted four in-depth interviews with colleagues from working-class families. Throughout this research the definition of *academics* equated to all professional staff. While most prior studies concentrated on the professoriate, I chose to be more inclusive and surveyed all full-time and part-time faculty members, and all full-time and part-time non-teaching staff members, including administrators, counselors and librarians. This study added to the literature by combining survey data with interview data to enlarge the number of participants. I wrestled with how to define the term "working class," and finally decided to ask respondents to self-identify the class that best described the family that they grew up in. I also determined the proportion of respondents who could be defined as "first

generation" college students because neither parent attained an educational credential beyond the high school diploma.

In Chapter 4, I evaluated the extensive data collected by employing a conceptual framework influenced by Pierre Bourdieu, looking for evidence of the working-class habitus, elements of cultural capital, and features that would distinguish community college as a sub-field of higher education. The survey data and four case studies constructed from the interviews revealed specific examples of social-class conflict, which I conceptualize as a mismatch of cultural capital, sometime between staff and students, sometimes among colleagues.

The conclusions, presented in Chapter 5, revealed that the community college was a complex social institution, or field, that exhibited both working-class and middle-class characteristics. While class conflict was visible on campus, academics related the many ways that a working-class background enabled them to connect and relate to students. The community college setting provided working-class colleagues a welcome academic home. This story of working-class academics was set against the backdrop of social class inequality and an elucidation of how educational institutions generally contribute to social class immobility. That is to say, most Americans do not transcend the social class of their childhood. The implications of the research suggested that working-class academics at community colleges have the potential to leverage their habitus to positively affect social change and social class standing for themselves and their students.

Chapter 2

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

Sometimes feeling like I have to prove, given my working-class roots, that I am a 'real intellectual.'

The essence of this research study crystallized with the revelation from a community college professor in this study, about his own status within academia. This powerful statement concisely expressed the conflicted situation working-class academics often experience within their professional environment. Highly credentialed, academics from the working class routinely confront barriers to achieving career fulfillment.

This research project explored the experiences of academics from working-class family backgrounds within the context of one community college. The community college sector provided an interesting research site to investigate the significance of social class background in shaping the role of working-class academics. One of the primary assumptions made at the outset of this study was that the community college offered an environment in which working-class academics could achieve gratifying careers. This assumption was informed by my fourteen years of experience as an instructor and administrator at a community college and provided the genesis of the process of inquiry, not the endpoint. Rather than aiming to present a clear counterpoint to the academic literature which showed the difficulties working-class academics faced in building meaningful careers, I sought to open the subject of social class and academia for further examination and discussion.

A study of academics, those perennial inhabitants of college campuses, resided within the larger context of scholarly literature on the sociology of higher education in the United States. Throughout this study the seemingly straightforward mission of educational institutions was questioned critically. The issue of social mobility, particularly research that challenged the notion that education provides Americans a true ladder to upper social classes, was part of the broader context for this study.

The story of working-class academics at a community college was interwoven with a critique of this institutional type within the landscape of higher education. Thomas Bailey (2012), noted researcher in the field of community colleges, articulated both the problem and the potential opportunities:

> Access to high-quality education is unequal from earliest schooling, and over time, those inequalities build on themselves. Community colleges have contributed to this problem, but they are also essential to the solution.

The review of the research literature investigated my argument that community colleges offer working-class academics a satisfying middle-class, professional environment because these colleges diverge in important aspects from other institutions of higher education. The approach to constructing the methodology for this research projected relied upon a theoretical framework based on concepts developed by Pierre Bourdieu, a prolific, French social theorist. Specifically, the analytical concepts of cultural capital, habitus, and field formed the structure to this inquiry into working-class academics at community colleges.

The scope of the literature review started with the broad topic of social class inequalities as revealed in educational institutions, specifically higher education. Within the discussion of class inequality, one of the key themes addressed was social mobility.

From there the review of scholarly work focused on prior studies of working-class academics, with particular attention to women in academia. The latter part of this chapter elaborates how Bourdieu's concepts were applied to the research topic.

Education and Social Mobility

Schools are important *social* institutions, and it is through the discipline of sociology that researchers can connect educational institutions to their societal context. Research in the field of sociology of education is robust, inquiring into many aspects of the American educational system. The issue of inequality is an important one to those studying education from the sociological perspective. One major, consistent research finding was that schools and post-secondary institutions reinforce the inequalities that students bring to school by virtue of their social class background. This finding contradicts the ubiquitous belief that educational institutions are the conduit for all to achieve upward economic and occupational mobility (Bourdieu, 1974; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Bowles & Gintis, 1976, 2002). The advantages that students from privileged family backgrounds bring to the school setting are construed as "natural" characteristics such as talent, ability or skill. While the benefits of economic privilege go unacknowledged, the disadvantages that poor youth bring to school are viewed as deficits and impediments to success (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Fine, 1991; Johnson, 2006; Khan, 2011; Lareau, 2011).

In the world of higher education, as colleges and universities moved toward more diversity in their student populations and the faculties that teach them, fears about declining standards became obstacles to institutional change. A departure from long-standing patterns of the dominance of White, male, privileged students and professors

was masked in terms of apprehension about threats to excellence and institutional status (Mahrer & Thompson Tetreault, 2011). Despite efforts to create more diversity on college campuses, as Mullen (2010) stated, "*who* goes *where*" to college is still largely dependent upon the students' class background (Stevens, 2007). College students from working-class families encountered financial and emotional strains because of their enrollment in college, and developed various strategies to cope with the burdens of feeling like an outsider, and the potential estrangement from family as they moved into a new social world (Hurst, 2010). Eventually though, some of those same students entered graduate school and made their way into the professoriate and other roles at institutions of higher education.

Academics from the Working Class

Professors with working-class origins have attracted the attention of researchers and the first literature included three works collecting the stories of working-class academics. The earliest volume addressing this line of inquiry was titled *Strangers in Paradise: Academics from the Working Class* by Ryan and Sackrey (1984). The authors solicited autobiographical statements from one-hundred fifty colleagues, all at four-year institutions. The call for contributions went to a pool of individuals the authors knew had been raised in working-class families; the pool was then enlarged by referrals to other professors. Most of the twenty-four professors included in the volume fit the definition of working class which was characterized as having parents without college educations and employed in blue collar occupations. The autobiographies chronicled the move from working class to middle class, and brought to light "feelings of not belonging, not fitting

in, not wanting to fit in or belong, and feeling [distanced] from one's class of origin (Ryan & Sackrey, 1984, p. 311).

Another volume edited by Dews and Law (1995) titled *This Fine Place So Far From Home,* took a similar approach. The authors posted a national call for essays. The result produced twenty-five autobiographical accounts that raised issues of estrangement from family, concealment of class identify, and feelings that the transformation from working-class background to professional academic is never complete. The authors chose to define working class as those who self-identified as growing up in a working-class family.

A similar, more recent volume by Muzzatti and Samarco (2006) also collected auto-ethnographies of professors from the working class; titled *Reflections from the Wrong Side of the Tracks*, the editors concluded that the narratives showed the persistent, pervasive nature of class discrimination in the United States. Stated succinctly, "class matters" (p. xiii). Muzzatti and Samarco viewed their own working-class backgrounds as a liability to their positions in academia.

Vander Putten (1998) offered a different approach to the topic. In his dissertation, he used interviews to explore faculty members' perceptions of their working-class backgrounds along with the factors that influenced them to leave their institutions. Vander Putten interviewed ten faculty members at five types of institutions from community colleges through research universities and medical schools. Clear differences emerged. Community college faculty members expressed nothing about the role of social class in their interactions with colleagues, while faculty members at other types of institutions described situations where class manifested itself in the course of daily

interactions. Seven of the ten faculty members expected to change positions or leave higher education within three years, though only one spoke about issues of status incongruity between herself and colleagues as a reason for considering departure. Counter to the trend, community college faculty members in this study did not intend to leave their positions. Vander Putten concluded that feeling like an imposter and not fitting into a middle-class role were some of the reasons professors contemplated leaving their academic posts.

All of these authors provided an entrée into the research topic with a clear focus on class issues. At this juncture, the discussion of the relevant literature moves to the experiences of female academics to introduce the dimension of gender.

Gender and Academia

One of the significant changes in the demographic characteristics of college campuses over the past century was the admittance of women. Women moved from the margins to the mainstream of higher education and also charted new patterns of labor force participation (Jones, 2009). Research delving into the status of women in academia began with a landmark study titled *Academic Women* by Bernard (1964), which Simeone (1987) followed up on with *Academic Women: Working towards Equality* over twenty years later. Simeone augmented the inquiry of gender equality among the professoriate with twenty interviews of female professors at a prestigious research university. The illusive nature of gender equality included such topics as salary, rank, tenure, old-boy's networks and women's networks, and work-life balance issues related to motherhood. Additional studies have found that female academics reported being disadvantaged relative to their male colleagues (Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988). The traditional role of

women with regard to childrearing and spousal obligations restrict women's choices in the types of academic careers they pursued (Finkelstein, 1984). Furthermore, institutions themselves presented challenges to female academics due to prevailing American norms pertaining to work expectations, and institutional policies such as tenure requirements and provisions for maternity leaves (Curtis, 2005; Glazer-Raymo, 1999).

Another edited volume titled *Working-Class Women in the Academy* by Tokarczyk and Fay (1993), brought together issues of social class and gender. This book included twenty-one auto-ethnographies of women defined as working class by their parents' blue collar occupation and lack of a college credential. Their stories illustrated some of the issues that affect academic women from working-class origins. The work offered a feminist perspective and an analysis of class within higher education.

Picking up on the theme of "first generation" college professors, Jones (2003, 2004) interviewed women faculty members who were the first in their family to go to college in order to study how class informed their academic practice. Although Jones' main focus was social class, she interviewed only women to compensate for the meager research on women's experiences of class. The research finding most important to note within the context of my research project was that women faculty members found value in their working-class heritage and consequently looked for ways to mentor students from working-class backgrounds. Jones observed female professors teaching about class within their disciplines. Participants self-reported how they supported their working-class students by helping them navigate through the waters they had already forded. An assertion Jones made structured my conceptualization of this research project; she said educational institutions primarily reproduce class stratification; however; they also can be

sites for "disrupting dominant ideologies and practice" (2003, p. 806). I propose that community colleges are an excellent site to explore that assertion.

Community Colleges

The scholarly literature about community colleges is growing. Community colleges are institutions of higher education that provide the first two years of college at an affordable price compared to other institutional types, and espouse an "open access" mission. Women, students from low-income families and minority backgrounds, recent immigrants, adult, and part-time students have all embraced community colleges. The growth of the community college movement dates to the 1947 President's Commission on Higher Education. Commonly known as the Truman Commission, the six volume report advocated establishing more community colleges. Community colleges, wide-spread by the 1970s, facilitated the democratization of higher education. Today, forty-six percent of the nation's undergraduate student population attends community colleges, half of whose collective student body comes from historically underrepresented family backgrounds (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2013; Witt, Wattenbarger, Gollattscheck, & Suppiger, 1994).

The community college sector seems to gain more attention daily, and with increased exposure comes more scrutiny, particularly related to whether low-income and minority students graduate in sufficient proportions. While the research on student outcomes and assessment of instructional formats and innovations is burgeoning, there is less scholarly attention to professionals working at community colleges (Townsend & Twombly, 2007b).

Data collected in the National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF) 2003 survey of faculty members illustrated some of the differences in the profile of the professoriate in various higher education sectors. Table 1 displays key distinctions among public community colleges as compared to all public and private institutions, public master's granting colleges and public doctoral universities (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2005).

Table 1

Characteristics of Institutions of Higher Education National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF) Faculty Survey 2003

Institutional Profile Factors	Community College	All Institutions	Public Masters	Public Doctoral
Highest Credential Doctorate or 1st professional degree	19%	68%	76%	86%
Salary from Institution	$52,600	$66,800	$58,200	$76,400
Percent Full-Time Faculty, Female	49%	38%	41%	32%
Percent Full-Time Faculty, Black	7%	6%	8%	4%
Percent Full-Time Faculty, Asian	4%	8%	7%	11%
Percent Full-Time Faculty, Hispanic	6%	4%	4%	3%
Percent Time Spent Teaching	85%	68%	82%	52%
Percent with Tenure Systems	74%	91%	99%	99%
Percent Adjunct Faculty	64%	43%	37%	22%
Percent Adjunct Faculty, Female	48%	47%	49%	50%

One of the primary differences among institutional types was the highest credentials held by professors. At community colleges, 19 percent of faculty members had attained a doctorate or first professional degree. This statistic clearly showed that the currency to be hired into a faculty position at a community college was the master's degree. In some vocational areas at community colleges, a bachelor's degree is often sufficient. Compensation was another apparent difference between community college faculty members and professors at all other institutional types.

Another notable divergence was the higher percentage of women on community college faculties, nearly 50 percent, as compared to other sectors of higher education. Not surprisingly, the percentage of adjunct faculty members was higher at community colleges than any other sector.

Most community college professors and those at public master's colleges spent the majority of their time teaching, much more so than professors at public doctoral institutions. Finally, nearly all public doctoral and public masters' granting institutions had tenure systems; only 74 percent of community colleges offered the security that tenure provides.

There were two areas that institutions shared similarities. First, women comprised almost half of the population of adjunct instructors across all institutions. Second, the racial and ethnic diversity of the professoriate at all institutions was equally sparse. The National Study of Postsecondary Faculty conducted in 2003 is the most comprehensive survey of college faculty. The statistics began to identify some of the characteristics of the community college professorate that differ from other college faculties. One factor absent from the national data provided was the class background of

American academics. The literature reviewed thus far asserted that social class was an important element of the identity of those who teach. Prior research that addressed the issue offers rich insights from qualitative data from small numbers of interview participants or narratives from working-class academics. My research project augmented the scholarly literature by combining survey data and interviews of working-class academics with a clear focus on those in the community college sector.

When community colleges were still in their adolescence, Cohen and Brawer (1972) argued that professors at community colleges needed to understand and integrate their own person or personality with their role as instructors and potential scholars in the area of teaching and learning. Without one reference in the index to either women or minorities, this study still offered a tantalizing perspective on the unique role community college instructors and other professionals might carve out for themselves. Particularly relevant to this research project was the idea that personal background characteristics, social class and gender, were key elements that community colleges professors and staff brought to their professional roles.

Several scholarly works raised points critical to an exploration of class and gender among community college professionals. Lester (2008) drew upon interviews and observations of women faculty members at an urban community college in an examination of the dominant discourses' function in maintaining gender roles. Her ethnographic case study illustrated how gender roles were reproduced and how "these inequalities are perpetuated by the very people who experience the discrimination" (p. 300). Lester's research pointed to conflicts experienced by female professors within the context of the academic culture of their workplace in higher education.

In her dissertation, Dole (2010) approached the question of working-class academics with regard to career path, and interactions with students and colleagues in her study of fifteen faculty members at community colleges. Dole limited her participants to those with doctoral degrees teaching in liberal arts disciplines. Using Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and capital, and with the idea of border crossing in mind, Dole found that working-class academics approached their career with the working-class values of meritocracy and hard work. Those interviewed lacked important knowledge such as the crucial role that a mentor could play in the academic setting. Faculty members found solidarity with their students, and expressed the goal of promoting the social mobility of their students.

In a study of nine women faculty and administrators at a multi-campus community college in the Midwest, Brodersen (2008) found that seven of nine informants expressed "comfort and solace in working with their students and their colleagues at the community college" (p. 142). Individual and group interviews of full-time and part-time faculty and administrators surfaced issues of feeling like academic imposters, feeling isolated from colleagues, and the idea that higher education was dominated by "white, male, elitist attitudes." In making the case for her dissertation research, Brodersen (2008) noted "Not a single study has examined the specific experiences of working-class women who are community college faculty or administrators" (p. 1).

My research project followed in the paths forged by Dole and Brodersen in continuing the focus on working-class academics at a community college, with an emphasis on women, and using Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, cultural capital, and field to analyze the results of the data collected.

Conceptual Framework: Habitus, Cultural Capital, and Field

Three of Bourdieu's concepts provided the theoretical and analytical tools for this research project: habitus, cultural capital and field. The first concept, habitus, connotes the array of habits, attitudes, values, and tastes held by an individual. The word that best captures the meaning of the term habitus is *disposition.* According to Bourdieu, a person's world view is mediated by the habitus and is related to both the large social forces and structures, and a person's individual situation within the social realm. Individuals absorb their habitus so completely that they are oblivious to it (Bourdieu, 1985; Lizardo, 2004).

People raised in upper-class families in America have different experiences of childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood than those raised in middle-class, working-class, or low-income families. Some differences are very visible. The neighborhoods, houses, cars, colleges attended, and vacations taken differ widely between the various social classes. Other class markers include vocabulary, attitudes, tastes, and preferences for cultural or leisure time activities. A person brings their habitus, their dispositions, with them as they move about public social spaces. One of the first places a person may encounter a culture, or habitus, other than that of their own family is in childhood, at the schoolhouse door.

Education, Schools, and the Habitus

One of the subjects that Bourdieu is well-known for writing about is formal schooling, particularly the French education system. Bourdieu argued that schools are one of the primary institutional mechanisms that reinforce the social hierarchy and power relationships between the social classes. The term for this social process is social

reproduction (Bourdieu, 1974; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). The way schools accomplish this is by embodying the habitus of the dominant group in society, and expecting all students to exhibit the qualities of a middle- or upper-class habitus. Therefore, students from poor and working-class families, hence from poor and working-class habituses, do not come to school with the requisite social or cultural capital to succeed. Explaining Bourdieu's argument, Harker (1990) writes, "The schools, he argues, take the habitus of the dominant group as the natural and only proper sort of habitus and treat all children as if they had equal access to it" (p. 87).

One of the major points to consider when discussing the habitus in relation to schools is how achievement and success of students is determined by seemingly objective means such as examinations, grades, and obtaining credentials. Bourdieu cautioned that schools value the traits that are associated with a certain habitus, that of middle- and upper-class people, and further, make those traits seem *natural* rather than acknowledge them as privileges only given to certain children. The fact that *some* poor and working-class children succeed in school does not disrupt the overall hierarchy of the class structure. Further, Bourdieu argued that mass education and the ability for more working-class people to obtain certificates and degrees has, in fact, not opened the door to advancement through education. As more people become credentialed, the criteria for social and career advancement privilege, other factors such as presentation of self and "fit" with an organization. These qualities, Bourdieu stressed, are learned in the habitus of the family, not the habitus of school. Even with the same academic credentials working-class individuals remain at a disadvantage (Harker, 1990).

One of the critiques of Bourdieu's social reproduction theory is that it is too deterministic, allowing no conditions under which children or adults in the non-dominant social groups can alter their life trajectory. Harker's reading of Bourdieu reminds readers that Bourdieu wrote about France and an education system that was extremely hierarchical; however, Harker also encouraged sociologists in other countries to use Bourdieu's theory and method to look at their own societal context. Bourdieu's model allows for social change. The habitus is in constant flux, the result of the interplay between social forces (structure) and individual decisions (agency).

Forms of Capital and Their Relationship to the Working Class

Bourdieu grounded his theory and view of the social world in the material conditions of life, the theoretical stance espoused by Karl Marx. Social reality starts with material life, both the historical situation in which people live and their position relative to others in the social world. Bourdieu acknowledged the importance of the role and influence of economic accumulation, the monetary wealth and capital that individuals can amass. *Economic capital* is but one form of capital that Bourdieu describes. Bourdieu refers to economic capital, wealth, as the material form of capital. It is perhaps the one most easily recognizable; people with more money can afford more things.

Bourdieu also delineated a form of capital that is embodied, that is, identifiable on the body of a person. Individuals possessing non-financial assets such as an elite education, a command of verbal and written language, and a stylish wardrobe own *cultural capital* that better positions them in the social world. The elements of culture, that is to say cultural capital, are mainly transmitted to a child through the family, acquired unconsciously, becoming part of the person's habitus.

The notion of *social capital* captured the networks of social relationships individuals develop, including their membership in various social groups. Finally, years of formal schooling was termed *academic capital*. This expanded view of the concept of capital is vital in understanding Bourdieu's model of the social world. The habitus is comprised of and reflects all of these forms of capital and the social position an individual holds is as a result of ownership of more or less capital, as broadly defined (Bourdieu, 1984, 1986; Eddy, 2006; Harker, Mahar & Wilkes, 1990).

All of these forms of capital comprise a person's or a group's social identity. Bourdieu used the concept of habitus to provide a means to think about the complexity of social identity in a way that also bridges the theoretical extremes of the macro-level and micro-level approaches to the social world. Bourdieu (1985) called the perception of the social world "the product of a double social structuration" (p. 727). Bourdieu used the two main approaches in sociology, structural-functionalist and symbolic interactionism, by incorporating them into an explanation of how people perceive and act within the social world. The "objective" macro-social structures play a role by sending messages to individuals through the traditional avenues such as culture, family, religion, education, and mass media, to name but a few. Individuals absorb these messages and develop tastes for certain goods (e.g., clothing, food) and cultural artifacts (e.g., art, entertainment). At the same time, at the "subjective" micro-social level, individuals can attach variations of meaning to objects in the social world. Bourdieu (1985) further explained the relationship between the larger society and the individual.

> The social world is, to a large extent, what the agents make of it, at each moment; but they have no chance of un-making and re-making it except on the basis of

> realistic knowledge of what it is and what they can do with it from the position they occupy within it. (p. 734)

In other words, individuals exercise agency by assisting in constructing the social world; however, they act to a large degree in ways constrained by the social structure. Bourdieu's words are very reminiscent of the position about social change forwarded by Karl Marx (2007) over one-hundred years earlier.

> Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. (p.112)

The final of Bourdieu's concepts used to explore the world of the working-class academic in this study is field. I conceptualized the community college as a sub-field of higher education to formulate the research methodology.

Community College as a Sub-field of Higher Education

As institutions of higher education, community colleges comprise a specific sector. Community colleges serve freshman and sophomore students in a variety of associate degree, certificate and diploma areas of study. Most community colleges offer liberal arts programs intended to be a pathway for transfer to a baccalaureate college or university, and career preparation to place students into such diverse fields as culinary arts, automotive technology, nursing, dental hygiene, and welding.

Despite the disparities in the type of workload, salaries and security of teaching positions, researchers have previously argued that within the realm of institutions of higher education, two-year community colleges are in many ways the most gender equitable. On such measures as the percentage of faculty appointments, pay equity, promotion through the ranks, and the percentage of females in leadership positions,

community colleges treat women well. Looking more closely, one may question why the academic site where women are so successful is at the lowest prestige colleges on the hierarchical ladder of postsecondary institutions (Townsend, 2008, 2009; Townsend and Twombly, 2007b). A desire to go beyond the statistics and more fully examine the experience of working-class academics at the community college led to thinking of the college campus as, in Bourdieuian terms, a field.

The term *field* is one that Bourdieu developed to conceptualize and name areas of the social world or social space. Examples of such areas or fields are: art, religion, education, science, medicine, the economy, and social class. Fields are social spaces that have their own particular rules, expectations for behavior, and associated values. People within each field are often "natives," having absorbed the rules and values of the field because they have been exposed to them from a very early age. One helpful example Bourdieu gave to elaborate the concept of field is that of learning a language. The way that children learn their native tongue is by observation, absorption, and mimicking adults. Toddlers learn to speak and communicate almost without a conscious effort to learn the language. In contrast older children and adults acquiring a second language learn it mechanically, often in school by studying grammar and literature, and by practicing the skills of listening, speaking and writing. The toddler is initiated into the field of language in a way that gives facility with the language without thinking about it. Someone learning a new language usually struggles, makes mistakes, and feels uncomfortable. The same applies to other fields, when one is born into a field, the lived experience is different than if one "learns" a new field. Bourdieu states that learning a new field is a slow initiation, like a second birth (Bourdieu, 1990).

Higher education can be thought of as a field, and community colleges constitute a sub-field within higher education. Community colleges exhibit similarities with all other formal types of educational institutions. They educate students, issue credentials, transmit knowledge and cultural values, and employ faculty. In important ways, as elaborated above, community colleges diverge from other institutions of higher education. The community college presents a different institutional context which faculty members and other education professionals inhabit. Thinking of a community college as a field helps to frame it for analytical purposes as a specific type of institution where working-class academics function.

Bourdieu's theory provides a way to understand how educational institutions preserve and reinforce the stratification of society into social classes, but it also allows for the opportunity for change. While many aspects of human life are constrained, there also remains the possibility for an individual to make decisions, select from options, and take action. Therefore, the habitus can both reproduce social reality and help transform it (Lizardo, 2004).

This research project investigated social class among the entire professional staff at a community college in order to discover how working-class academics negotiate their middle-class, professional environment in light of the potential conflicts arising from their class background. The data collected was evaluated with a conceptual framework in mind, looking for evidence of the working-class habitus, elements of cultural capital, and features that would distinguish community colleges as a sub-field in higher education. The following chapter details the methodology employed to facilitate this inquiry.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The purpose of this research project was to explore the educational and professional experiences of community college academics from working-class backgrounds. I argue that community colleges offer working-class academics a satisfying middle-class, professional environment because these colleges diverge in important aspects from other institutions of higher education.

A mid-sized, multi-campus community college in the Northeast provided the research site to explore the intersection between social class and academia. The entire professional staff, of which I am a member, was surveyed for this project. I conducted one-on-one interviews with four colleagues drawn from the survey respondents.

The term *academic*, for the purpose of this project, was inclusive of the entire professional staff of full-time and part-time faculty members and full-time and part-time administrators. The study excluded several groups that work at the community college, specifically staff members in the unionized clerical unit and the unionized maintenance unit, and part-time hourly staff members whose positions were not administrative.

Methodology and Data Collection Plan Overview

This study utilized a mixed methods research approach employing a short survey and individual interviews with four participants currently working at a community college. The entire professional staff of one community college received a fifteen item survey with thirteen closed-ended questions and two open-ended questions. The commercial survey software SurveyMonkey was used to distribute the survey. At the

conclusion of the survey a note from the researcher solicited volunteers for interviews and specified the desire to find participants who had grown up in working-class families.

The methodology for identification of candidates for interviews relied on purposive sampling, which is a nonprobability sampling technique. Using this approach, the researcher identifies participants with the purpose of the research in mind, in this case, to gather data from faculty and professional staff members who had a working-class background, and who were employed at this community college at the time of the study. Purposive sampling is appropriate for exploratory research, such as this study, and in cases where the researcher seeks participants with unique experiences to interview at length to gain a deeper understanding of a specific phenomenon. Snowball sampling could be later employed to enlarge the list of possible respondents (Neuman, 2006). The technique of soliciting volunteers at the end of the survey yielded forty-eight volunteers for individual interviews.

Data Collection Procedure

In October 2014, the Institutional Review Board at Lehigh University approved the Human Subjects Application, shown as Appendix A. The anonymous survey constructed in SurveyMonkey was distributed in October 2014 to 984 members of the professional staff. The survey had thirteen closed-ended questions and two open-ended questions. Respondents had the option for each question to check "prefer not to respond."

The first page of the survey contained the informed consent statement that asked respondents to certify they were age 18 or older, to agree that they had read and understood the informed consent information, and to give their consent. There were two

response options: Consenting to the survey and continuing to the next page, and withdrawing from the survey. Those that withdrew were redirected to a page that thanked them for their time. The survey appears as Appendix B.

The respondents who completed the survey ended on a page that thanked them for their participation and solicited volunteers for a one-on-one interview. The brief note stated the researcher's desire to find volunteers who grew up in working-class families and provided contact information. The means to attract volunteers was structured in a way that allowed the survey respondents to remain anonymous.

The welcome response of interview candidates allowed me to select four participants to represent the major categories of employees at the College. I selected four volunteers for interviews, one for each position type, and the first four participants asked readily agreed to be interviewed: a female full-time professor, a female part-time professor, a female full-time administrator, a male full-time professor. I knew many of those who volunteered for interviews. I purposefully selected more female than male colleagues to interview, allowing the focus of the inquiry to be on women, and I included one male for a comparative perspective. I explained to the participants the research was my thesis project. The interviewees received a ten question pre-interview survey and an informed consent document in advance. The participants brought the pre-interview survey to the meeting. This brief survey contained the same demographic questions as the anonymous survey with one additional question about the participant's age. The pre-interview questions can be viewed as Appendix C. I reviewed the informed consent document, Appendix D, with participants and had them sign two copies, one they retained and the other was for me.

The interviews began with a description of the purpose of the research. I explained to the participants the project was to inquire into the intersection between their social background and working at a community college. I reminded the interviewees that they could decline to answer any questions, or end the interview at any time. Finally, I indicated the interview would be audio taped. I followed an interview guide, presented as Appendix E. Individual interviews lasted between 53 minutes and one and a half hours, and I transcribed the audio files.

I conducted the first interview as a pilot and added several questions to the interview guide because the participant spoke about some areas of interest that were not covered by other questions. I asked participants the same questions in the same order, occasionally skipping a question when the participant had already answered the question in a previous response. When the interviewee said something unclear or offered an entrée into an area related to the research topic, I probed for more information. I assigned pseudonyms to the interviewees and presented their case studies, or stories, in a way that provided relevant details about them while withholding some information so that they remained anonymous. The results of the survey and the interviews comprise Chapter 4.

Considerations in Qualitative Research

I used the term mixed methods to describe the research methodology for this project because I employed both survey and interview methods. The survey contained thirteen questions that provided the descriptive statistics needed to build a profile of the survey respondents including basic demographic information, elements of their family background and education. The remainder of the survey data was qualitative. The two open-ended questions yielded a large amount of text and the features of the

SurveyMonkey software aided the analysis. The interviews supplied additional qualitative data and gave me the ability to amplify themes that emerged from the open-ended survey responses.

In order to keep the survey questions to a reasonable number, I elected to determine respondents' social class by asking them to self-identify their own class. Other options might have included asking for a self-reporting of their current salary. I took the approach of self-identification for the social class item for two reasons. First, I also wanted to know the social class of the family that respondents grew up in, and asking respondents to accurately report family incomes from a time period when they were children did not seem to be a sensible approach. Second, the Gallup Poll provided a model for a question about social class that relied on self-report. I reworded the question and used the same five response categories that the Gallup Poll employed: lower class, working class, middle class, upper-middle class, and upper class (Gallup, 2012). Thus the two questions, one about the social class of the family a respondent grew up in and the other about their current, adult social class, mirrored each other. Prior researchers faced the issue of defining working class. The edited volumes contained narratives from self-identified working-class academics (Dews & Law, 1995; Muzzatti & Samarco, 2006; Ryan & Sackrey, 1984). Tokarczyk and Fay (1993) discussed the difficulty of pinning down an exact meaning and settled on a definition of working-class academics as those who were themselves the first in their family to go to college and whose parents had jobs that lacked professional autonomy. I also collected data on the education level of the respondents' parents in order to identify first generation staff members.

The survey included questions about the occupations of respondents' parents. I reviewed the Hollingshead Four Factor Index of Socioeconomic Status, as well as the work of Will Barratt who created the Barratt Simplified Measure of Social Status (BSMSS) to update Hollingshead's concept of occupational prestige. I simplified the number of occupational categories from nine to five (Adams & Weakliem, 2011; Barratt, 2012).

Errors or inaccuracies that may occur by allowing respondents to self-report their social class illustrates just one of the issues with reliability and validity that crop up in all social science research. The act of quantifying the experience of social class, or recording answers to interview questions and deriving meaning from them, are fraught with uncertainties and potential inaccuracies, which is one criticism of qualitative research.

I position this research study within the genre of qualitative, field research where I acted in the role of participant observer. This research methodology raised particular considerations. One important element of the research process was the fact that I am an administrator at the community college in this study. I have worked at the College for fourteen years; first as an adjunct instructor, then as an assistant dean, supervising adjunct instructors; and for over ten years as an academic dean. My complete immersion in the academic culture I sought to study provided the genesis of this research project. It also occasioned the need to acknowledge some of the factors related to participant observer research (Bourke, 2014).

The years spent working at the community college constituted a type of informal field work. I observed the institutional culture and my colleagues' actions and behaviors,

and through those observations began to understand the rules of the organization I had joined and become a part of. I began thinking and writing about the community college in a new way as a part of the graduate work in sociology I undertook. The "mental notes" I had taken about the community college environment turned into lines of sociological inquiry that were formalized into research questions that became the foundation of this study.

In terms of my own personal, family, and professional background, I share some of the traits of the target group for this study, but in other characteristics I differ. I am a white, female academic, working at a community college; however, I grew up in a middle-class family and both of my parents finished college and held professional jobs. That said, my parents grew up in working-class families and some elements of family culture discussed by those I interviewed also resonated with me. All of those interviewed were white. I did not purposefully exclude individuals from other cultural backgrounds. The interview participants hinged upon who volunteered. The small number of interviews conducted coupled with the fact that race and ethnicity were not stated foci of the research project made the racial composition of the group interviewed acceptable to me as an exploratory research project, which could later be extended to include participants from other groups.

As a member of the college community professional staff, I was an insider. As an insider and active member of the group in the study I responded to the survey. I answered the objective questions in order for my demographic information to be part of the profile of members of the professional staff, but I did not respond to the two open-ended questions. I purposefully selected three of the four interview participants using

knowledge I had about them because they were my colleagues. I knew two of the participants quite well, including aspects of their family background, and selected them because I thought the interviews would be fruitful. I knew one of the participants less well, and that person fulfilled one of the categories of employees I sought to interview. Finally, I had never met the fourth interviewee, and again, her employee classification was one that I wished to include.

Staying in the role of researcher as the person conducting the interview was, for the most part, easy. During two of the interviews, I restrained myself from moving into the role of dean when participants revealed particularly difficult situations they had faced as a member of the faculty. After the tape recorder was turned off, I explained to the participants that I had refrained from commenting on those specific issues while we were in "interview mode," but shifted to the role of dean to provide an empathetic ear for them to again voice their experiences and for me to appropriately respond as an administrator at this College.

I am mindful that my position as both colleague and academic dean influenced the research process. It was easier for me to identify the benefits of being an insider than the detriments. Being a fellow member of the College staff facilitated the survey and interview process, from the good response rate on the survey to the overwhelming response to my request for interview volunteers. As an interviewer, I had a prior relationship with three participants and quickly established a rapport with the fourth.

The subjective nature of this type of qualitative research has limitations. The story of this community college is not the story of every community college. It is place-bound and specific to the colleagues who became respondents and participants in this

study. It is possible that those I interviewed opened up because I was a colleague, or perhaps they were more reticent to disclose information for the same reason. This is something we cannot know. A researcher with no ties to the College or experience working at a community college would no doubt have produced a different study. My extensive, first-hand knowledge of the community college environment, and this College in particular, afforded me ways of thinking and interpreting the qualitative data which, combined with insider insights allowed for a nuanced research product.

Chapter 4

Results and Analysis

All members of the professional staff of a mid-sized, community college with one suburban campus, one rural campus, and one urban campus were surveyed in October 2014. The professional staff includes full-time and part-time faculty members, full-time non-teaching faculty members, and full-time and part-time administrators. The non-teaching faculty members are primarily librarians and counselors. The administrative classification includes staff in all departments of the College including academic affairs, student affairs, and all support functions such as finance, human resources, the non-credit community education department, and a small number of administrative assistants. Respondents could opt out of each question, which some did by checking "prefer not to respond," while other respondents simply skipped some questions. Missing data for each question ran at about five percent. The question with the most missing data, 12 percent, asked for respondent's race. The total professional staff of 984 received the survey. Of the 483 who opened the survey, 11 withdrew and 472 continued providing a response rate of 48 percent.

Table 2 displays the number and percentage response rate of respondents by each of the College's position type. The response rate by position type varied, with a small number of non-teaching faculty members responding at 74 percent, the highest rate.

Table 2

Professional Staff Number and Percentage of Survey Respondents by Position Type

Position Type	Total Number of Professional Staff Members	Number & Percentage of Respondents
Full-time Teaching Faculty	120	(78) 65%
Full-time Non-teaching Faculty	23	(17) 74%
Part-time Faculty	602	(235) 39%
Full-time Administrator	195	(120) 62%
Part-time Administrator	44	(21) 48%
Prefer not to Respond	0	(1) 0.21%
Total	984	(472) 48%

The results of the survey and interviews follow. First, from the survey results, I drew a profile of the demographic characteristics of the professional staff, and then presented in detail the qualitative data to the open-ended questions. Each interview participant's story was written as a case study. The chapter concludes by considering how the survey and interview fit together to inform the story of academics at this community college.

A Profile of the Professional Staff at a Community College

The profile of the professional staff at this College reflected those that responded to the survey. There is a slight over-representation of full-time staff members; however, the largest segment of the professional staff, part-time instructors, was well represented. Part-time instructors comprised half of the survey respondents. The composition of those in the survey data was: 50 percent part-time instructor, 25 percent full-time administrator, 17 percent full-time professor, four percent full-time non-teaching faculty member, and four percent part-time administrator. Institutional data from the Human Resources Department was used to compare the self-selected sample to the characteristics of the entire staff when possible.

Demographic information collected by the survey provided important detail about the personal, educational, and family characteristics of the professional staff. In this study females were over-represented. The College statistics for fall 2014 reported that 58 percent of the entire professional staff was women, while 65 percent of the survey respondents were women. Women comprised 59 percent of all full-time professors and 55 percent of the adjunct professors at this community college; higher proportions than the national trends for this sector of higher education. Within the group that responded to the survey 68 percent of the full-time faculty members were women, and 58 percent of the adjunct faculty members were women. Women from the full-time administrative ranks were also well represented at 66 percent, on par with the proportion of females in the administration at the College.

A comparison of the statistics provided by the College's Human Resource Department showed survey respondents very closely mirrored the race and ethnic

identities of the total professional staff (K. Siegfried, personal communication, October 14, 2014). Eighty-eight percent of respondents identified as Caucasian, five percent as Hispanic, four percent as Black/African-American, two percent as Asian, and one percent as American Indian.

In fall 2014 most respondents, 62 percent, worked at the main suburban campus of the College, while another 16 percent worked at a large rural campus, and six percent at a small urban campus. Twelve percent of respondents primarily taught online courses. Four percent indicated "other," many of whom wrote in that they worked at more than one campus or taught a mixture of online and traditional campus-based courses.

As typical within the community college sector where the master's degree is the requisite credential for most professional positions, 66 percent of the respondents indicated holding a master's degree, while 19 percent held a doctorate, M.D. or J.D. degree. A focus on teaching staff showed that 76 percent of adjunct instructors held a master's credential and 18 percent completed a doctorate or professional degree. Twenty-nine percent of tenure-line professors at this College hold a doctorate or professional degree, ten percent higher than the national average at community colleges (NCES, 2005).

Two surprising results from the survey highlighted additional educational patterns. Fifty-one percent of respondents were the first in their families to attend college—defined as neither father nor mother attaining higher than a high school diploma. Based on a survey in spring 2014, the proportion of first generation staff members is 17 percent higher than the estimated percentage of students that fit the same definition (R. Stumpp, personal communication, March 17, 2015). Interestingly 18

percent of professional staff members attended or graduated from this community college prior to their professional employment at the College. This was true for almost half of the non-teaching faculty members, a third of the part-time administrators, 18 percent of full-time administrators, 17 percent of full-time teaching faculty, and 14 percent of adjunct faculty members. First generation staff members mirror a large segment of the student body at the College. Of course, those that attended the College before joining the staff were, at other moments in time, part of the student body.

As noted in the previous discussion of how I chose to operationalize the concept of social class, respondents indicated the social class that best described the family they grew up in and the social class that best described them currently. Many, 43 percent, grew up in middle-class households which Table 3 displays. Thirty-seven percent came from working-class households. Thirteen percent had an upper-middle-class upbringing. Relatively few, four percent, grew up in lower-class families. Only one percent came from upper-class families. The results varied for first generation staff members. Sixty-four percent of first generation staff identified themselves as coming from lower-class and working-class families.

Asked about their current social class, the majority of respondents, 55 percent, fell squarely in the middle class. Thirty percent lived in upper-middle-class households and 11 percent in working-class families. Two percent lived in upper-class households while less than one percent lived in lower-class households.

The data allowed for an exploration of social mobility. Eighty-one percent of respondents raised in lower- and working-class families reported moving to middle, upper-middle, and upper class status as adults. Among first generation staff members, 88

percent had moved to the middle-class status and above. Staff reported very little downward mobility. Ninety-four percent of staff members who grew up in middle-class, upper-middle-class, and upper-class families remained in those social class brackets.

Table 3

Professional Staff—Class Identification of Family of Origin and Current Family

Class Identification	**Social Class Family of Origin**		**Social Class of Current Family**	
Lower Class	(20)	4%	(3)	1%
Working Class	(175)	37%	(49)	10%
Middle Class	(202)	43%	(257)	55%
Upper-Middle Class	(61)	13%	(141)	30%
Upper Class	(5)	1%	(9)	2%
Missing Data	(6)	1%	(8)	2%
Total	(469)	99%	(467)	100%

Another important demographic characteristic of the professional staff at the College was their parents' education. The highest level of education completed by most staff members' parents, by a large margin, was high school. Fifty-four percent of mothers and 43 percent of fathers of staff members had completed high school. Fourteen percent of mothers and 16 percent of fathers had not completed high school. Twenty-five percent of mothers and fathers of staff members held a two-year or four-year college degree. Seven percent of mothers and 16 percent of fathers had completed a master's degree or higher.

When asked about their parents' primary occupation, respondents replied that 39 percent of mothers and 37 percent of fathers worked in skilled occupations. Examples of skilled occupations listed with the survey question were: secretary, plumber, electrician, and bookkeeper. Professional occupations were held by 31 percent of mothers and 32 percent of fathers. Examples listed with the survey question were: teacher, nurse, enlisted military, administrator, engineer, computer programmer, and accountant. Only a small percentage of parents encountered job instability or periods of unemployment as their primary work experience. Executive jobs such as physician, lawyer and business executive were held by two percent of mothers and 15 percent of fathers.

The profile of the professional staff at this College largely follows national patterns with regard to gender and ethnicity. A higher percentage of full-time faculty members hold terminal degrees than other community colleges. Comparative statistics on academics were not available for other characteristics such as the social class backgrounds or first generation status, which is, in part, why I characterize this research as exploratory.

The next section of this chapter relates to the qualitative data supplied by the two open-ended survey questions. All respondents' answers were read and coded into themes rather than limiting analysis to only those staff members who self-identified as working class or lower class, in order to fully investigate the data. The themes that emerged began to illustrate the variety of experiences related to social class within the context of the community college.

Social Class at Work

One of two open-ended questions on the survey soliciting a narrative reply asked the respondent, "Describe a situation at the College that made you aware of your social class background." Responses were coded using nine categories to reflect the themes that emerged from the answers. An individual response was often assigned to two or more categories, thus the percentages reported below do not tally to one-hundred percent. Throughout this section, the percentages referenced were based on the 323 answers to the question. Along with the percentages, I included the number of respondents whose answers reflected each theme to provide a better sense of the magnitude of the response.

Twenty-nine percent (95) of the responses represented the view that social class did not matter in their work life. Typical responses were: the question did not apply, the respondent could not think of an instance to describe, or that the respondent was aware of social class before coming to work at the College. Responses mainly fall into two camps: a few people indicated being well aware of their social class before working at the College, having interpreted the question as asking whether working at the College made them become aware that they belonged to a social class; the majority replied that they could not think of a situation to describe. I interpreted these responses as a reflection of the invisibility of social class in America.

The majority of respondents, 71 percent (228), provided answers that demonstrate the visible nature of social class within the context of being employed at a community college. A large number of respondents, 44 percent (142), wrote about a variety of ways in which their work with students made them aware of their own social class:

> Discussing travel abroad with program participants and seeing their reaction to the concept of traveling outside of the US.
>
> Discussions with students that showed minor financial difficulties that become major roadblocks because of a lack of resources and insights to solving daily life problems.
>
> When a student explained to me that she missed an exam because she did not have enough money for the bus.
>
> Realizing that we have students who may not have a stable place to live and may be homeless.

A small number of respondents, six percent (20), gave examples of how they identified with the college student population.

> The similarities found in the lives/struggles of my students rings a bell in my memory. Struggles from living paycheck to paycheck, suffering from bigotry and ignorance of others, etc. A desire from some of my students to reach for the stars and do something with their life that brings them joy is a constant reminder of my own personal journey to stretch beyond the world in which I was born. I cannot recall any particular situation.
>
> Having grown up in poverty and been placed in the lowest track for the first 8 years simply because of my socio-economic class, I am always cognizant of recognizing when a student needs financial help and offering the help in a discreet manner.

A larger number of professional staff members, 15 percent (50) wrote about differences between themselves and the college body.

> One situation that periodically reminds me of my social class background is the fairly common inability of some students to buy their textbooks during the first week of classes because they don't have their financial aid yet or didn't account for the costs of some expensive textbooks. I never had to worry about finding money for my academic needs.
>
> Primarily in interactions with my students, I realize the ways in which their precarious socio-economic reality is different from my own.

Most germane to the topic of this study 15 percent (49) of respondents identified colleagues in their description of situations at the College that made them aware of their

social class. Comments included elements of comfort and discomfort with colleagues in relation to the topic of social class awareness. Some short responses are tantalizing tastes of experiences that employees have had. One respondent simply wrote "conversations with colleagues in the cafeteria," while another said, "collaborating in meetings and having feelings of invisibility." Other responses were more concrete.

Some professional staff members noted specific topics that brought them an awareness of class within the context of working at the College:

> Informal gathering among staff and discussions that surround personal life experiences.
>
> Where I live—How I live—Car I drive—Annual income as compared to my colleagues.
>
> Talk about how we spent our summers or how much travel around the world we had done.
>
> Interestingly, there have been comments about my clothing made by a couple of colleagues. These comments didn't necessarily make me aware of my social class background, but they made me aware that the perception of these colleagues was that I belonged to a class higher than theirs.
>
> More often then not, it is evident when those of upper-middle-class and upper-class status flaunt their status. Then it is obvious.

A number of staff members linked social class to the administrative hierarchy within the College:

> Relationships with superiors is cordial but never offered as a friend would.
>
> The dress of the administration. I have never been around business attire before on such a constant basis.
>
> Hearing about the vacations that upper management go on.
>
> Self perception of lesser administrative status in relation to those in upper positions.

Another type of situation that led to awareness of class was within the context of institutional advancement events and interaction with donors, members of the Foundation Board, and the Board of Trustees:

> Outside College events that may cost more than I am able to afford.
>
> Working at college functions—serving donors.
>
> Interactions with other constituents involved with the college (i.e., Foundation, Board of Trustees) who clearly came from a different background than I did.

Two concepts elaborated in the theoretical framework for this study surfaced from survey respondents. The first was academic capital defined by Bourdieu as the duration of years of schooling. Several respondents indicated becoming cognizant of the importance of the attainment of a graduate degree through their interactions with colleagues.

> A discussion of job descriptions for our department's current staff members and the recommended educational requirements for those positions.
>
> Others' respect for education. I have two Master's Degrees, one of which required more than enough hours for a Doctorate.
>
> Until I started working at the college, I did not realize how important having a higher degree was in the mix of things.
>
> At the college a lot of emphasis is placed on educational attainment rather than work experience. I was passed over for a job position a little over 5 years ago because I had only earned my bachelor degree, even though I was told I was the most experienced candidate. Once I finished my graduate degree opportunities have opened for me.
>
> Sometimes it is easy to pick out people that don't have experience with working with their hands or have little life experience of real struggle and sacrifice through conversations and actions. I also notice that Academia recognizes education achievements, which is logical but does less to recognize experience achievements.

One female part-time instructor, from a working-class family background, sounded frustrated by the attitudes of colleagues regarding the completion of a degree:

> Colleague's recommendations that I just take on more debt to finish my degree. Assumptions that I have family $$ to catch me financially if I need it. I don't.

Survey respondents also articulated elements of a second theoretical concept important to this study, cultural capital. Cultural capital is defined as non-financial assets or traits such as an elite education and exposure to varied experiences through international travel. Individuals acquire the elements of cultural capital mainly through influences and experiences available to them during their upbringing. Several respondents' replies mentioned aspects of cultural capital in response to being asked to "Describe a situation at the College that made you aware of your social class background."

> Public education, travel, values, interpersonal relationships, professional relationships, work ethic. Nothing specific.

> Occasional discussion about growing up, food preferences, child rearing, previous education, or politics.

One full-time female administrator, holding a doctoral degree, who grew up in a lower-class family wrote eloquently about individual differences in the embodiment of cultural capital.

> I thought about the distinction of my social class background from a colleague, particularly when he used a high number of idioms and cultural phrases that I was not exposed to as a child, but that seemed so readily accessible to my colleague that I believed that he grew up hearing the language and internalizing to such a degree that it became a natural part of his communication. I am aware that some of this may be cultural background, but I also believe that social class background is at work in this situation.

Likewise a male adjunct instructor, who holds a master's degree and came from a working-class family, linked facets of cultural capital, again language, to social class background.

> In my first year or so as a professor when I heard other professors using words and concepts in everyday conversations that I had never learned about or heard before. Language usage and vocabulary knowledge in general often seem to be an indicator of social class/background when I hear people talking.

One of the female full-time, non-teaching faculty members who holds a doctorate and came from a working-class family wrote about an important piece of professional knowledge, cultural capital, that she had not gained from her graduate experience.

> When I started I didn't know about professional organizations or conferences. I had to be told about them.

In contrast, a comment made by a female part-time administrator who grew up in a middle-class household illustrated the cultural capital typical of individuals from middle-class backgrounds.

> I work near some individuals who have told me that they never attended any college and have never moved out of the Lehigh Valley. When we speak about world news or trips that colleagues have taken abroad, there are sometimes misunderstandings about locations of regions or languages that are spoken in those regions. Because I have been able to travel extensively, have exposure to many places and people, and most of my circles of acquaintances have similar exposure, I am sometimes surprised by my co-workers lack of knowledge.

Overall, the majority of respondents to this question expressed views about social class awareness within the context of working at a community college. Possession of aspects of academic and cultural capital typical of middle-class and working-class families corresponded to the respondents' comfort or discomfort within the academic arena.

Employing Social Class

A second open-ended question on the survey soliciting a narrative response asked: "In your work at the College, how do you use your social class background?" Responses were coded using nine categories to reflect the themes that emerged from the answers.

An individual response was often assigned two or more categories, thus the percentages reported below do not tally to one-hundred percent. The percentages reported in this section were based on the 351 answers to the question and again show the number of respondents.

Twenty-one percent (75) of respondents wrote to indicate being uncertain about their answer. Typical responses were: "I do not use social class at work," "I am unsure if I do," and "I do not know if I do.' Conversely 79 percent (276) of respondents provided insights about how they bring their class background to their daily occupation.

Forty percent (141) of respondents shared ways they used their social class to connect with students; the phrase most often used was "to relate" to the student population. Those surveyed used social class "to understand," "to identify with," and "to connect with" students. Some specifically mentioned either the ability to relate to first generation college students or the help of a shared social class identity in finding common ground with students. Nineteen percent (66) of respondents tapped into their sensitivity and awareness of class issues when offering advice to students.

Twenty-two percent (78) of those surveyed offered ways that they used social class in the context of teaching. Many cited relating their own class background to students, and creating materials students connected with through examples and illustrations chosen for that purpose.

> The way I engage students in extracurricular activities is to design the presentations that will resonate with the working class. Unless you are from the working class you probably will not understand what I mean. Presentations for the working class need to be edgy and site real life examples. Students of privilege are less likely to be engaged by those types of presentations.

> I am more explicit about course and graduation expectations, don't assume students know how to navigate college language and materials. I share my own experiences and challenges when relevant.

In contrast, one full-time female professor with a master's degree, who describes her upbringing as upper-middle class, noted the importance of awareness of class and the possible bias that can occur:

> I try to work through it, understand it and not let it cloud my perception of students because our class background does cloud us and realizing that is the only way we can overcome that bias!

Similarly, a part-time female administrator with a bachelor's degree who grew up in a middle-class family wrote about the danger of relying on the presumption that one's own experience is the same as everyone else's.

> My social class background comes into play in interactions with students and staff/faculty, but the important aspect I've learned is to not assume. While it's easy to make assumptions that my college experience will be similar to our current students' experiences, I need to actively listen to students to get a clearer picture of their experience.

A full-time, male professor from a middle-class family wrote about his goal of offering to community college students the same quality of intellectual experiences he received from an elite institution.

> My own class background was comparatively disadvantaged during my undergraduate years at a "backdoor ivy," but my interaction with professors and students of higher social class expanded both my opportunities and my understanding of the operation of American society. Because of this I have probably had a significantly more satisfying life (career and marriage) than I would otherwise have had. All I can say is that I feel the obligation at (this College) to extend to my students something like the benefits I received when I was a student, both in the classroom and outside of it. Ambitious (community college) students are no less deserving that I was…… in my typical classes I try to offer my students the kind of original insightful thinking that my best professors modeled for me. The trick is doing this without flunking half my students, but I have spent decades developing tricks of the trade in pursuit of that elusive goal. I don't believe I have achieved it, but I think my approach has been

> successful enough to benefit hundreds of students over the years in truly meaningful ways.

Another quarter of survey respondents (89) expressed observations related to social class that spoke about social mobility. Of those, a third of respondents (29) wrote about ways they used their own experience as an example to let students know how to move up in the world. Interestingly several noted using their own personal stories to demystify the professoriate.

One full-time male faculty member, possessing a master's degree and from a working-class family shares his story with students.

> One thing I do is tell my students how I started out, not even expected to graduate from high school, and how I worked shitty jobs before I enrolled in college (and during college) to get where I am now. Students think college instructors were predestined to teach at a college. I pull back the curtain on that myth and let them know how I got where I'm at.

Likewise a female adjunct instructor, with a master's degree hailing from a working-class family discloses her background to students.

> I let my students know the kind of things I experienced as a student, and that I can relate to many of the things they're experiencing. They think all teachers come from an upper class background.

A full-time female professor, holding a master's degree, and grew up in a working-class family described herself as "a working class kid" to her students.

> I think it's helped me relate to students. I'm often surprised by their interest in hearing about my personal experiences, or "how I got here." Maybe it's comforting (or normalizing or empowering) to know that their professor was a working class kid who worked a couple of jobs each semester to get through school and is still paying off college loans.

Twenty-four percent (21) of staff members whose response invoked social mobility linked movement toward a better life with "education," while 15 percent (13)

credited "hard work" with advancement. Some generalized about the relationship between getting ahead in life to education and hard work, while other respondents gave detailed accounts and opinions about how social class played out at this community college.

> I try and show students that working hard and earning a college education will help them improve their social class.
>
> To show students that—with work and determination—they can move up.
>
> I encourage students to continue their education to attain at least the next social class up from where they stand.
>
> I do talk about my days at a community college on financial aid when I was in school. I guess I'm trying to keep students from believing that MY successes are merely the result of my advantages and not hard work.
>
> I remind students that I attended community college and that education is the key.
>
> My almost poverty impoverished background—even though I'm white—relates to a lot of my students…I tell them stories of sleeping in my car, working two full-time jobs while going to school, sleeping in people's basements...you know…doing what you need to do to survive…with the idea that hard work and sacrifice pays off…I tell them that hard work and dedication through opportunity taken, not entitlement, will get them where they want to go. I'm living proof of it.

Twelve percent (11) of respondents writing about social mobility referenced elements of cultural capital in their response about employing their social class at the community college. One respondent specifically cited modeling academic behavior.

> In a way, I do use my background to model traditional academic behavior for my students, and to teach them the proper ways they should behave in an academic environment. I cannot relate to many of the struggles my students face, so instead I try to be supportive, listen, and provide any advice that is needed.

Others situated their use of social class within the context of socializing students into middle-class behaviors and expectations.

> As an opportunity to draw conscious attention to middle class values and expectations, as a role model for students wishing to gain employment in a middle class environment.
>
> In comportment so as to give the majority population a different understanding/perspective from what they may equate as cultural negative norm/stereotype.
>
> I try to use examples of middle-class or professional living (without stating this outright) to give poorer students examples of how to live in a more accomplished and organized/orderly manner. Also give students, most of whom are young, instructions on how to interact with police in a cooperative way that won't result in confrontations.

By comparison several respondents revealed leveraging knowledge of working-class norms to appeal to their community college students. A male adjunct instructor with a master's degree and raised in a working-class family, wrote extensively about how he explicitly addresses working-class culture within his classroom:

> I have used examples of communication situations that occurred in blue collar working conditions to illustrate concepts such as inadequate listening, handling difficult people (especially overbearing bosses), prejudice and discrimination, etc. Also I've used experiences attending schools populated by middle class and working families to help students relate to concepts such as peer pressure, low academic expectations, bullying, etc. Also, in coaching, counseling and mentoring students, I am sensitive to issues they have as first generation to attend college, such as adjusting to higher expectations for academic performance and pressure not to fail (which is not quite the same as pressure to succeed).

Many respondents created a bond with students by using their own social class experiences; others used social class awareness to attune themselves to differences with their students. Professional staff members sought to guide students along the pathway to attaining a college credential with the sometimes implicit, sometimes explicit goal of assisting students in acquiring middle-class dispositions, attitudes, and professional skills. Respondents pointed to a combination of education and hard work as the constituent parts social mobility and the relative financial stability that entry to the middle class offers.

Case Studies—Four Stories

Interviews with four volunteers offered the opportunity to further explore the research issues in depth and from a variety of perspectives. The prompt for volunteers that appeared at the end of the survey generated forty-eight responses. I chose four, purposefully selecting three women and one male. Interviewing three women allowed a focus on females working at a community college while also gaining a male perspective for comparison. I also selected participants in a manner that provided one full-time senior faculty member and one full-time junior faculty member. Finally, I selected two participants whose background I knew well, one participant I knew less well, and one participant I had never met.

Each participant contacted readily agreed to be interviewed and they are as follows: a female full-time professor, a female part-time professor, a female full-time administrator, a male full-time professor. Using a pseudonym to protect their identities, the stories of each participant includes family influence, significant college experiences, and how their social class and gender shape their professional role and approach to their work in the community college setting. Extensive quotes from those interviewed help to narrate each story. Quotation marks around phrases and words signal those spoken by participants.

Amy's Story. Amy is a full-time, tenured member of the faculty. Her highest educational credential is a master's degree. Amy is a white woman in her thirties who described herself as coming from a working-class family. Her father has a college degree and works in a small family business. Amy's mother finished high school and worked

jobs as a waitress and in retail stores before becoming a paraprofessional in the health field. Amy now identifies herself as falling within the middle class.

Amy spoke about growing up in a working-class family where financial instability forced her parents to "live smaller than they could have." Amy described the significance of being a member of the working class.

> To me that means a family who's financially vulnerable. A family who teeters maybe between something a little more solid and something a little less solid.

Despite financial instability in the household, Amy believed that her parents "afforded us somehow—luck—middle-class opportunities." One of those opportunities was to go to college. Amy portrayed her parents as sacrificing a lot to enable her to attend college. Her father did all of the financial aid paperwork and took out a second mortgage on their house. Amy planned on attending a public state university, but applied to a selective liberal arts college in her home state because a friend did. Amy attributed being able to attend the liberal arts college to luck. The institution seemed to have more scholarship funds in the year she applied, making enrollment there less expensive than a public college.

Once at college, Amy felt like the "odd-ball out." She described classmates "dressed to the nines" and a "country club" atmosphere. Amy confessed to not knowing certain designer clothing brands. She worked two or three jobs during the semester and went home to work over spring break while peers came back to campus tan from their trips. Attending college was "culture shock" for Amy. Networking with fellow students did not come easy. Amy explained that she had a "stubborn streak" and a "working-class chip on my shoulder" which prevented her from networking. She reflected that the chip

on her shoulder may have been "ideological," but may have also been for "self-preservation."

Amy continued on to graduate school and started her teaching career at a comparatively young age and expressed challenges related to gender.

> In other words, my role as a woman, my physical presence being emphasized more than it should have been. Attractiveness or what I am wearing. I've had students comment on clothes a lot on my student evaluations. I should wear this, I shouldn't wear that. I've had disgusting pictures drawn. I was 26 and I probably looked even younger. Not that that's an excuse. That was hard, that was definitely hard. And I didn't know who to go to. I had (supervisor's name) when I started and he was always supportive about these types of things, but he is still a guy so that took some—it was weird.

In a lighthearted manner Amy joked that a male colleague should come to her classes for the first weeks of the semester to "scare" the students.

> There are rules and structure in the classroom but he has a different presence and gender one of the things that influences my presence for sure—less as I get older so I am finding it is a little bit easier. I've colleagues that have said things before that were inappropriate.

Amy draws on her womanhood, her working-class upbringing, and her own educational experiences to apply to her daily work as a professor at this community college. In the past Amy used her youth to relate to students while more recently she sees herself as a "nurturer" and sometimes needing to employ "tough love" with students.

Students call Amy by her first name and she views the ideal relationship with students as that of a "coach, a mentor" without the "emotional dumping" from students she experienced at the beginning of her career. Now that Amy is older, her relationship with students is not "as fraught with complications as it used to be."

Thinking of her role as an academician at a community college, Amy expressed one of her professional responsibilities as teaching students "life skills" as well as

teaching content. She uses her own background, going to a school where she didn't "necessarily fit in," to build a bridge to her students.

> I am always surprised by this, that students want to hear my story. I disclose in the classroom when it is relevant because we are trying to connect (her discipline) to our lives. I am always surprised by how it gets really quiet and everybody leans forward and wants to know, wants to hear.

Among other things, community college students relate to working several jobs while going to college, and telling her own story "validates their experiences." Amy feels comfortable disclosing personal information to students if it "makes sense" and tells stories about her parents as a point of reference. She depicts her parents as people who worked hard their entire lives to put their kid through college despite substantial financial hardship. Amy believes examples drawn from her story "humanizes" content and builds "empathy."

Amy said students give her the greatest sense of belonging at her institution stating, "It doesn't always happen, but when you try to connect with students they generally get it; and I think that's what helps me to know that I am in the right place." Conversely, Amy expressed not having an answer to the question as to whether anything gave her the sense of not belonging at this community college, though after a pause she responded, "I think when I was younger I would have said I felt like a poser—like do they know that they hired me for this job?"

> It felt, I don't know if you could call it metaphysical or whatever, I knew this was a job that I wanted, and I knew this is where I wanted to be. And I was too young and naive to really even worry about tenure like so many of my colleagues were—I was like oh guys we'll be fine, don't worry about it, just keep doing your thing—and they were nervous and I just don't think I—and maybe part of that was my family background, what I was exposed to, I didn't know there was the underbelly of professional worlds where things didn't work out or where it was a

> little bit tougher or cutthroat—I just didn't know—it helped me avoid some of the pitfalls that people fall into.

Amy described her story as "the perfect storm of luck and opportunity." Her parents supported her going to college and helped her financially to go. Her parents "think it is the coolest thing ever" that Amy is a college professor. Now Amy lives in a two-income household that she characterized as middle class, and does not experience the type of financial instability her parents still do. Amy commented that she and her husband talk about that a lot because he is from a "much more solidly middle class household" and recognizes that her "parents found a way" to encourage and enable her to go to college.

One of the philosophical approaches Amy uses with her students she terms "resourcefulness." It is a concept that started at "proactive," but that she developed over the years to "resourceful." Amy believes she was not resourceful as a college student and works to cultivate that trait in her students. In the liberal arts college setting Amy was exposed to people who "pushed her forward" in a way that her family could not, such as proposing opportunities that working class and first generation in college families are not aware of. Therefore, Amy uses small moments in the classroom to promote resourcefulness by instructing students to look for answers and consult their notes, before giving up on an assignment.

Amy finds her role as a professor at a community college rewarding and does not aspire to another position. She has found career success, which she defined as "fulfillment," and seeks to "be a better teacher" and to try "new projects" to grow more in her current role of professor.

Donna's Story. Donna is a part-time member of the faculty. Her highest educational credential is a master's degree. Donna is a white woman in her fifties who identifies herself as being brought up in a working-class family. Both of her parents completed high school. Her father was a plumber and her mother was a homemaker. Donna now identifies herself as falling within the middle class.

Donna spoke about the financial instability of growing up in a working-class household.

> Well, the rug can be pulled out from under you at any point, that's what it means. There is not much of a cushion there—an economic cushion.

Narrating an episode from her childhood, Donna remembered her father being hurt on the job and home for six months recuperating from third degree burns. While the family survived on workman's compensation, they lost the income that would have come from overtime pay. "I didn't have any new clothes that year, I don't know if the property taxes got paid that year." Still planning for college was also a part of Donna's working-class upbringing. The obstacle she faced in obtaining a college degree boiled down to "money."

Describing her parents as "paranoid about debt" because of living through the Great Depression, Donna knew from an early age that she would have to contribute to her college fund. Her parents did not allow her to take out student loans. The deal struck was that her parents would save half of the money needed and she would contribute the other half. She started working at age sixteen and ninety percent of her paychecks went into a bank account. In college she worked every semester except the last one and finished her degree in three and a half years.

Donna attended a public in-state, land-grant institution and lived on campus. She did not partake in many of the social aspects of a residential college. She mentioned not "trying out for a sorority" because it was not on her radar.

> The social stuff—I just didn't get into it in college. I didn't have time and it didn't seem like that would have been set up for someone like me. People talk about college being this wonderful experience—it wasn't that for me. I was there to get my diploma, and that's all I was there for, it never occurred to me to do anything else.

By the end of her undergraduate degree she felt "burned out." After college Donna started her professional career and got married, pursuing a master's degree afterward. Donna had not considered going directly to graduate school after completing an undergraduate degree.

> I think I also had a mental block for a while that upper graduate degrees were something that middle-class kids went and got and maybe it was a middle-class girl who had more financial support behind her. But I was just really focused on my bachelor's at the time. I thought that was all I would ever get. It never occurred to me to think about anything else.

Part of her college experience included female faculty members who were role models, but they were the exception to the rule. Donna mused, "Maybe I could have gone to graduate school earlier and gotten a Ph.D. in research, if I had been a guy—maybe I'd let myself think like that. I'm not sure. I'm not sure."

Donna began teaching at this community college part-time, ten years ago, and brings her working-class background with her into the classroom stating, "You bring your class background everywhere, because its working class, so it never leaves you. You recognize yourself in some of your students, and you recognize the struggles of some of the students." Her own upbringing and social class background helps her to understand

her current students. "They tell me they are struggling, and I … believe that they are struggling."

Donna relates to students through family stories, particularly about her father. She wants to see students display a good "work ethic" and equates "worker students" with "best students" and believes they will turn out to be the "best workers, too."

> I'll take someone of average intelligence who's hard working over someone who is super smart and lazy. You are going to get a better worker out of them and you are going to be able to trust them, they are going to be willing to follow the rules.

A strong feature of Donna's view of her professional role as an instructor is to model the professional behaviors expected in the world of work.

> My professional role is to show you a professional. A professional comes in prepared, knows what it is they are supposed to be doing, makes the goals and objectives very clear for you, makes it clear that they are there to support you but also that they expect you to be pulling your own weight.

The focus on grooming future professionals flows through the way Donna teaches her courses. She establishes a structured relationship with students early in the semester. Students call her by the title "Misses." "I am the teacher, I am in charge, you all will be following me. I like to get the dynamic in place pretty quickly it avoids problems, it avoids power plays, quite frankly." Donna admitted that "teaching is exhausting," and that students "gang up to push" her on class policies and other instructional issues. She seeks to strike a balance between being "approachable" but not "too friendly."

Another way that Donna relates to her students is by recognizing that students, particularly adults managing jobs, children, and rent payments "get overwhelmed." She offers them advice, often to manage better by slowing down the pace at which they are trying to get through college.

> It wasn't a good way to go through and when I get students like that, especially in summer courses, I tell them they need a break and time off…smart kids, but mentally exhausted, and I know what that looks like because I used to experience it.

A perfect day in the classroom happens when students see how the content ties to their lives. One of the daily challenges is the very diverse student population at a community college; however, Donna spoke emphatically about how important it is that institutions of higher learning strive to have a diversity of students. She spoke about a graduate course taken at an elite private institution in which several classmates disclosed having come from families that received welfare. Donna used this example to illustrate the desirability of having a "mix" in every classroom.

Donna's lifestyle is much different now as a self-described member of the middle class. She has more money, more freedom, and more opportunity. Working-class families, Donna reflected, have to make decisions based on money, all the time, and it can wear on people.

> It's a lot nicer up here, it's a lot more relaxed, it is not as on the edge all the time. It does help to hopefully show that the payoff is worth it for getting the education. You get into a place where you don't have to struggle all of the time, and you are not at risk of a layoff or maybe—I don't know, I could be at risk (as an adjunct instructor).

Donna's ability to work part-time suits her now, but she does not consider part-time teaching to be career success. She felt more successful when she worked in industry doing research and publishing. Donna aspires to either a full-time teaching position or returning to a research position.

Vince's Story. Vince is a full-time, tenured member of the faculty. His highest educational credential is a master's degree. Vince is a white male in his seventies who

identifies himself as coming from a working-class family. His mother completed eleventh grade and did not work outside of the home. His father completed high school and was a welder. Vince now identifies himself as falling within the upper-middle class.

Vince referred to a working-class family environment where "there was considerable suspicion about highly educated people." Vince's father imparted a view that people should be judged by your experiences with them, not by whether they have a title that makes them a doctor or a lawyer. Vince's father scoffed at the type of "pretentiousness" exhibited by people with an elite education and those attitudes gave Vince "a healthy disrespect for superficialities" and a "healthy respect for people that worked for a living."

Vince remembers teachers in his small high school placing "immense pressure" on the few students in the college preparatory curriculum to apply to college. He was accepted to some "good" colleges, in part due to athletic skill, but upon realizing the cost associated with an elite college education, he enrolled in an out-of-state, land-grant university. His parents supported his decision to go to college, and perhaps took some pride in him going to graduate school, but did not see the practicality of an advanced degree. Vince's parents "didn't spend a lot of time patting you on the back telling you how special you were."

Once at college, Vince faced obstacles because of his background. As a junior when he began thinking about graduate school, he consulted a professor for his opinion.

> "You have a lot of work to do boy." I was resentful of that in a way because I thought maybe it should just be about my mind, not language, or where I'm from, or my dress.

Vince continued on to graduate school enrolling in a doctoral program, but did not finish his dissertation.

> There were a lot of positives and there were a lot of negatives, and I have never not been able to not say "screw you" either with my eyes, my body language, or my actual mouth, so it occasioned some difficulty—that's why I never finished my Ph.D. because the man that was in charge of my thesis was for me the poster child of what was wrong with ivory tower education, so it was a real clash and I wouldn't make the effort.

Vince recounted feeling different from other students due to his clothing and long hair and summed it up "as Newton postulated for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction, and so I am sure I was quite hostile."

Vince could not recall any educational experiences related to his gender and mentioned that he uses the topic of gender in his classes to "to disabuse people of any notions of male superiority in any way except short-term anaerobic strength."

In his teaching, Vince uses his working-class roots. "All the time. Every class, somehow. Sometimes pointedly, sometimes not so pointedly, and it's comforting to them."

> You know you can't separate yourself from your yesterday; if you are, you are artificial. You become something other than what you—so my yesterdays are part and parcel of what I do in the classroom.

Vince sees his professional role at the community college as "multi-layered:" to expose students to a broad education, to convey content, to mentor, and to influence. An important element of the philosophy that Vince employs is to connect personally with students. Students call him by his first name. He keeps abreast of the popular culture of students who are several generations younger than himself, and Vince sees this as a very important part of his role as a professor. He uses cultural references as "hooks" to get

students to pay attention. If students perceive the "hooks" to be dated Vince risks losing the "street cred" that he works hard to establish.

> I can talk about that experience and lend a certain amount of street cred to what I am telling them—so I am not pulling it out of my ass, I'm not just regurgitating what's in a book. I think I am here because of my social class background, because these kids are from—most of them are from the same social class I came from. A lot of them are first generation college students. A lot of them live lives that the people sitting next to them in class can't even envision what's going on…I mean and I think I am here because I am comfortable with them. I would be far more uncomfortable at a president's tea than standing with a bunch of 18 year olds in (names perceived "dangerous" part of a local town).

Another aspect of Vince's approach to his teaching is a respect for manual labor. Vince talked about a number of people that made an impression on him, many of whom do not have a formal education, but instead have the ability to work with their hands stating, "I have real respect for those people." Vince worked in high school and throughout college as a manual laborer among other blue collar non-skilled jobs. Even after obtaining a tenure-track teaching position at the community college, he also worked a second job for the first couple of years to supplement his income.

One element that flows from his father's influence is the importance of "respect." His father garnered respect "even from people that hated him…people that didn't share his views…I always thought that was pretty neat."

> That kinda means something to me too, and that's not something you can kinda campaign for, it kinda just happens. I know it's not true of everybody, not everybody respects me. Having being respected has always been important and that's also from the working class—judge people by what they are, not what they say, or what they seem to be.

Early in his teaching career Vince had the very real opportunity to move out-of-state to a four-year institution and turned it down because "I didn't think I would fit in."

After a long career at one institution, Vince will eventually retire from the community college.

Patti's Story. Patti is a full-time administrator. Her highest educational credential is a master's degree. Patti is a white woman in her forties, who was brought up in poverty. Both of her parents completed high school, and had skilled blue-collar occupations. Patti's parents divorced when she was one year of age, and she resided with her mother and four siblings. Patti now identifies herself as a member of the upper-middle class.

Patti is very open about her family background which includes living in a public housing project and her family's dependence on welfare and food stamps.

> My family growing up I—would not classify us as working class because of the poverty. To me working class was above us.

Her mother went back to work when Patti was in third grade and was the "definition of working poor, she could never earn enough on a high school diploma to make ends meet." During middle school they moved to a half of a double home, evicted from the projects because her mother would not give up their dog. "Like I said, there is no lower than low being evicted from the projects, but I thank that dog who is no longer alive because that's what it took to get us out." After moving, Patti started to leave behind the moniker "project kid" which had made her feel like she "didn't measure up." Despite the circumstances, Patti remembers her mother's expectation that her children go to college. Four of them earned college degrees. Patti supported herself through college. "I got the maximum PELL, I got the maximum PHEAA (state aid) and the balance was made up by the maximum student loan." She worked at a department store from the age

of sixteen and continued to do so on semester breaks and in the summer during her college years. Patti attended an in-state, land-grant institution. The money she "banked" from her job covered her living expenses. Patti carried around a roll of quarters to print in the library and to very occasionally afford the little treats of fast food or frozen yogurt.

Patti described herself as "good at academics," but she struggled because her family was unable to contribute to her college expenses. Knowing this her mother struck a deal.

> My then boyfriend, now husband, would come see me every weekend, he would either come up to stay or come get me to take me home, because he was my transportation. We set up a system of sending laundry back and forth every weekend because my mom said this is the only thing I can do for you, I can do your laundry, and I want to do your laundry, because I can't help you in any other way.

Patti recounts taking her education serious, never attending any parties, and foregoing most of the social scene. Patti spoke fervently about education.

> In retrospect, I realized how very, very passionate I was about education because I still credit education with enabling me to go from one class to the other. Not even just about class—just making me that person that doesn't look like I come from the projects. Most people wouldn't know that about me unless I tell them that because I just don't fit a lot of the stereotypes about the projects and being poor, and I want it to be that way because that's not anything I relate to anymore or want to go back to and without education that wouldn't have been possible, would not have been possible.

As ardent as she is about education, she expressed being even more passionate about gender.

> As strongly as I feel about my message and communicating my class background that pales in comparison to how I feel about my gender. My gender, my identity as a female means much more to me than anything related to my class, because, I grew up watching my mother, as I said, pay the price for her father not allowing her to continue her education the impact of my father cheating on her, and my mother divorcing him and having no means to support her family, damn did that determine my path—the message came directly from my mother: 'You be a

> strong, independent-minded female, you do not follow, and you stand on your own two feet, always.'

Patti's position at the College is in an administrative office that does not have direct student contact, yet, she connects with the institution's student-centered mission in very powerful ways. She is "emotionally invested in the success of these students" because she identifies so completely with the student population at the community college. She cannot see herself working in the four-year sector of higher education because "the mission here speaks too much to who I am." About more elite colleges she says, "They're not my people." Patti attended a private college to obtain a master's degree using the educational assistance plan provided in the benefits to employees of the community college. She spoke about being in class with students from families with financial means.

> I am very sensitive to being in a group of people who are entitled. I am almost too sensitive to it. I can't stand to be around people who carry that air around them, it really bothers me because it takes me right back to—you know—that whole phrase you can take the kid out of the ghetto but you can't take the ghetto out of the kid. Growing up in the projects has a very lasting mental impact on me if you peel away all my layers it is at my core.

Patti recounted arguments with colleagues who are publicly judgmental about people on welfare or using food stamps, and questions why they would work at a community college whose mission is to provide access to education to those without financial means to attend other colleges.

> Those are the stories of so many of the families that live in the projects, and you want them to succeed in school? When daily life is such a struggle, and I just want them to know you can, you can, and I will sing it from any rooftop, treetop, anywhere that I can, you can, you can, you have to want it bad enough. And you have to want to make a difference, and you have to want to escape that bad enough.

Paradoxically Patti hopes that colleagues and others see a hardworking professional with no "evidence of my prior social class" while at the same time tells "the whole world my story" because she feels safe to disclose it because "I am no longer there anymore." She is comfortable at the community college because in her words, "they're my people" and believes that colleagues who have not had the same lived experience cannot understand the situation many of the College's students find themselves in. "The mission, the people, the students, our purpose" give her the greatest sense of belonging at the community college.

Patti is in the position that she aspired to but does not rule out the possibility of moving to the vice-president level, although she does not want to "participate in the hierarchy" which is one aspect of the community college she finds the least appealing. Currently, she is uncertain what the next five years hold for her professionally.

Four Stories—Common Themes

Each of the four people interviewed recounted their unique story. Conspicuous similarities included self-identification as having come from the working class, and in one case, impoverished families who struggled to make going to college a reality for them. All four participants helped to fund their own education, in varying degrees. Among participants, three were first-generation college students. Amy's father had a college degree but did not use it in his job. All the parents who worked outside of the home were employed in blue-collar jobs. All but one participant grew up in a two-parent household and in a family that owned their home.

Another strong area of commonality was the connectedness participants expressed to the mission of the community college and to the student population. The three

teaching faculty members employed their working-class background to relate to students, and the administrator related to the mission of the college because of the population of students served. Amy, Donna and Vince spoke about their fathers' strong influence, while Patti's clear point of reference for family influence was her mother.

Amy and Donna both spoke about gender in relation to their teaching role. Amy acknowledged that her youth and gender play a part in classroom interactions. She joked about a male professor's presence and how he might "scare" her students in the first weeks of the semester if he ran her classes. Amy also reported difficulties with students and colleagues in the form of inappropriate comments. She used her gender to nurture students or to employ tough love tactics with a view to helping students in the long run. Donna pondered whether she would have gone to graduate school earlier or pursued a doctoral degree if she had been male. Donna, who teaches courses considered gatekeepers to several selective and sought after majors, articulated how students "gang up to push" her as "power plays," but did not refer to it as a gender issue. While Donna and Amy related to the College's working-class students, they also both mentioned having comparatively stable families and easier lives than their students.

The interviews also revealed areas of individual emphasis. A major theme in Amy's story was "luck." She cited luck many times, attributing her enrollment at a selective private college and landing a full-time tenure-track position right out of graduate school to luck. Donna referred to the value she placed on seeing students with a work ethic and relating to students in whom she saw the signs of the type of "burn out" that she experienced in college. Vince's story emphasized the value he places on being respected and the "respect" he had for people who work with their hands. Patti repeated

again and again the credit that she placed on obtaining a college degree in providing her with the means to transcend her impoverished background. "Education" combined with "hard work" gave Patti the ingredients necessary for social mobility.

Summary: Themes from the Case Studies and Survey Results

Commonalities emerged between the responses from professional staff members to the two open-ended survey questions and the four participants interviewed. When asked about social class awareness within the community college context, both survey respondents and interviewees talked about using their own social class to relate to students and to shape their teaching practices. Identification with the struggles of community college students to hold part-time jobs to pay for school and juggle college and family responsibilities resonated with respondents. All four staff members interviewed also elaborated on specific characteristics and experiences they had in common with the students they serve.

Another important area where interviews reinforced the survey data was through discussions of family background characteristics and knowledge that sociologists term cultural capital, habitus, and field. Two survey respondents vividly explained "the distinction of my social class background from a colleague" as the type of language the co-worker employed, which is embodied cultural capital. Similarly, Donna spoke about such social class markers as "trying out for a sorority" as an aspect of residential college life that did not "seem like that would have been set up for someone like me." Vince had a professor tell him "he had a lot of work to do," not on his academic abilities but on his presentation of self, before contemplating graduate school. Vince lacked embodied cultural capital. Patti remained "very sensitive to being in a group of people who are

entitled." Amy experienced "culture shock" in college and to some degree when she accepted her teaching position. Amy said she "felt like a poser" as a new faculty member but in some ways avoided the anxiety of a tenure-track appointment. She described her naivety about the requirements for earning tenure at an institution of higher education. Amy "didn't know there was the underbelly of professional worlds where things didn't work out or where it was a little bit tougher or cutthroat."

In an explicit way, one of the survey respondents echoed Amy's uncertainty about her position in the academic world. A male full-time faculty member, who holds a doctoral degree and grew up in a working-class household, candidly expressed thoughts about needing to substantiate his standing as an academic.

> Sometimes feeling like I have to prove, given my working class roots, that I am a "real intellectual."

This comment surfaced the insecurity felt by an academic from a working-class background, who despite having the requisite credentials, feels like a fraud, or in Amy's words, a poser.

The interviews also supported the survey data to the open-ended question asking about ways in which professional staff members used their social class background in their work. Many, including all four staff members interviewed described "connecting" and "relating" to students by virtue of their shared family background, or habitus.

The belief in the power to move up from one social class to another featured strongly in the survey data with the credit for social mobility going to "education" and "hard work." Patti asserted with certainty that education enables individuals to achieve financial security. Donna attributed success to a strong "work ethic." Amy consciously

cultivated “resourcefulness” in students, relating in the interview to her own lack of resourcefulness as an obstacle.

Several survey respondents reported purposefully disclosing their own social class backgrounds to students with an expressed intent of making it clear that college professors are not all from privileged family backgrounds. Amy spoke about how surprised she was that students want to know “my story.” Meanwhile, Vince’s strong identification with “respect” led him to be upset by colleagues who “disrespect their students and where they come from and what this place is theoretically supposed to be doing.”

The use of two research methods, the survey which reached hundreds of colleagues and the four in-depth interviews, yielded a multiplicity of voices and viewpoints on how social class becomes visible and tangible within the community college context. The themes that emerged demonstrated that individuals can be presented with both challenges and opportunities as a result of their own social class standing and the professional environment they operate in. The discussion in Chapter 5 brings the qualitative data gathered for this study back to the research questions and the theoretical framework outlined in the literature review, after which I draw conclusions and offer some implications of the research.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Conclusion

The themes and specific examples that emerged from both the survey respondents and the interview participants support my assertion that working-class academics can have satisfying and rewarding careers at community colleges. The survey and interviews also reveal the everydayness of how social class manifests itself on campus. A brief return to the results of this study, as discussed in Chapter 4, turns first to a summary of the main points and explicit links to the research questions, and then to an extensive discussion of the implications of the research project.

Three Research Questions

Colleagues at the College shared experiences that uncover elements of cultural capital in response to the question on the survey that asked, "Describe a situation at the College that made you aware of your social class background." This question links to the research question "Do working-class academics view their social class background as significant to their approach to their professional roles?" Daily interactions with students in the context of teaching and advising exposes staff members to their commonalities and differences compared to the student population. Likewise, within the work environment respondents note various ways in which social class becomes visible to them through interactions with colleagues.

Professional staff members convey the many ways in which their social class background is significant and shapes their academic practices. The survey question that asked, "In your work at the College, how do you use your social class?" supplies the

evidence to answer the research question, "In what ways does class background shape the academic practices of professionals at the community college?" Staff members use their own social class background to connect, to understand, and to identify with the students at the College. Professors, cognizant of the relevance of social class in their teaching, construct learning experiences and assignments with class issues in mind. The three professors interviewed elaborate the importance of social class in their philosophy and approach to teaching.

The results of the research focused less on gender than expected. A third research question asks, "Are there differences in the experiences and approaches used by individuals related to their gender identity?" The main discoveries about gender came in the interviews. All three women interviewed recounted educational and professional experiences very much related to their womanhood, while the male interviewed had very little to say on the topic of gender as related to his education experiences and professional practices.

Key Concepts: Cultural Capital, Habitus, and Field

The research questions were operationalized as questions posed to survey respondents and interviewees, and their responses start to bring to life the theoretical concepts that form the framework for this study: cultural capital, habitus, and field. Many professional staff members draw upon their working-class upbringings and their own educational experiences to relate and connect themselves with the student population found at community colleges. As academics inhabit the social space of the community college environment, a space that Bourdieu conceptualized as the field, their class dispositions, or habitus, serve to unite individuals to the College mission and its students.

The cultural capital embodied by working-class academics mirrors the cultural capital of a large proportion of community college students. Specific elements of cultural capital, those non-financial traits and assets transmitted through one's childhood upbringing, are part of what working-class academics share with community college students. Academics from the working class have often "moved up" in social class rank to the middle class, but maintain the ability to identify with and feel comfortable in the presence of working-class colleagues and students.

Conversely, some members of the staff express times when they are at odds with the working-class habitus and cultural capital of the community college, as demonstrated by thoughts from a female adjunct instructor with an upper-middle class upbringing.

> It happens often in my conversations with students. They are honestly struggling to pay the rent, food, gas, electricity... and they often have difficulty paying for textbooks and school supplies. I want so much to offer them money or free textbooks, at which it is apparent that I am in a much different financial place than they are. I do my best to support them by directing them to resources that can assist them in meeting their own needs and goals. It kills me to see such strong and dedicated students struggle so much.

Another professor's comment illustrates common, but inaccurate assumptions often made about college students' cultural capital.

> Some of my students had never traveled to NYC, Philadelphia, or NJ beach before. I assumed most college students would have traveled beyond the Lehigh Valley with their families or with friends for vacation.

A professor from a middle-class background said he became aware of social class through "homeless students. Hearing students talk of 'respect' and 'street cred' and 'rules of the street.'"

The incongruous nature of the cultural capital embodied by working-class and middle-class individuals can result in feelings of comfort or discomfort when interacting

with others, students and colleagues, from a habitus that is not the same as one's own. Amy, for example, talked about feeling like the "odd-ball out" when she attended a college filled with students from middle and upper-middle class families. Patti remains sensitive to being around people who are "entitled." Vince describes how class differences can manifest in ways that are potentially harmful to students.

> Maybe that old working-class bias against, you know, I've never understood some faculty here who disrespect their students and where they come from and what this place is theoretically supposed to be doing…they don't keep their office hours…they stare at the back wall of their lecture rooms…in private conversations they talk about how dumb they are and there is a difference between being uneducated and being dumb. They don't make that distinction a lot of times.

The disparity in social class backgrounds and the associated values and traits is not limited to those between staff members and students. Within the professional staff differences related to social class backgrounds surface. Several survey respondents mention their surprise at the knowledge some co-workers lack, knowledge typically gained by traveling abroad or following international events.

The community college field appears to be neither purely working class, nor purely middle class, instead as a complex social and educational institution it has an institutional culture that exhibits characteristics of both social classes. Members of the professional staff offer valuable insights that substantiate my argument that a working-class background can be an asset, not a disadvantage, to a career in the community college sector. Community colleges differ in important ways from other types of colleges, and another of Bourdieu's theoretical concepts helps to explain these differences. The distinctive environment at a community college, thought of as a field, reflects the social class habitus of many of its students and its professional staff members.

This social space, or field, has rules and norms that establish and guide the behavior of those within the space. Working-class professionals help to create the rules of the playing field that becomes the institutional culture. Working-class academics can be likened to indigenous inhabitants of the community college, because they feel comfortable there and express a sense of belonging on campus. The match between the working-class values and experiences of academics from the working class and students from the same social class link them in powerful ways.

While there is a good fit for working-class academics in the community college sector, disclosures from the professional staff also show that there are tensions. The community college is sometimes a site where class conflict is visible. The conflict can be thought of as a mismatch of cultural capital and habitus. Working-class and middle-class colleagues and students all interact but without a complete understanding of each other because they do not share the same personal histories, or stories. It is difficult for working-class people to acquire the sort of cultural capital needed to feel comfortable in a middle-class environment. Reintroducing the concept of academic capital is helpful to add to the discussion of this point. Anyone hired into a professional position in higher education holds the appropriate credentials; however, years of schooling, their academic capital, is often not enough to make up for the cultural capital not accumulated in childhood. Stated another way, middle-class and upper-class families inculcate their children with the language, values, and experiences that allow them to move easily within middle-class social environments. These environments, or fields, are a reflection of their habitus and cultural capital. According to Bourdieu (1984), no amount of formal schooling can acculturate an individual as powerfully as their own childhood upbringing

can. Thus, despite winning a tenure-track position Amy felt like a "poser" and one adjunct professor feels like, "I have to prove, given my working-class roots, that I am a 'real intellectual.'" These statements echo sentiments expressed by many other working-class academics who feel like imposters within academia (Brodersen, 2008; Dews & Law, 1995). Donna, the adjunct instructor interviewed, stated the seemingly inescapable nature of habitus beautifully saying "You bring your class background everywhere, because it's working class, so it never leaves you."

The research findings support the position that working-class academics are a good fit for community colleges and that such careers facilitate movement into the middle class. Eighty-one percent of survey participants who identified as growing up in lower and working-class families experienced social mobility, and reported moving to the middle, upper-middle, or upper class as adults.

Even though Donna carries her childhood habitus with her, she now exhibits elements of middle-class cultural capital. She established a strong professional network partly because she and her husband are in similar academic disciplines. She informed me they "just know a lot of educated people; you tend to find each other." Donna professes an ease at forming a collegial network, something reflective of her shift in social class status and adoption of some characteristics of a middle-class habitus.

There was a small amount of downward mobility among those in the survey at the community college in the study. Six percent of respondents raised in middle, upper-middle and upper class families reported moving to the lower class or working-class status as adults. The data also hints that the landscape is more varied for the large

number of adjunct instructors. One male adjunct instructor credentialed with a doctoral degree, responds about awareness of social class by conveying a sense of uncertainty.

> Low adjunct salary. Since I am a retired, full-time professor economically disadvantaged by Wall Street and mortgage lenders, I don't know where I fit now.

Another comment by an adjunct instructor further illuminates the variations within the teaching ranks.

> It's interesting with adjuncts: we are very educated and thus seem to be middle class or higher, but we have a lot of student debt and little pay, so we are barely making it. I notice the higher class status often when interacting with my students. I notice the lower class status, when I see the abyss between how well off the students think I am and how well off I really am.

A few other survey respondents mention their current circumstances include working multiple jobs and being unable to incur debt to go back to graduate school.

The titles "academic" and "professor" can be a veneer covering a more complicated reality. Donna's story serves to highlight the fluid nature of social class. She describes many situations during her college days when she felt like a fish out of water, uncomfortable vis-à-vis her peers and the overall institutional culture. All four interviewees offer similar reflections on their college experiences. Those interviewed also characterize their professional existence at this community college as feeling at home, at ease with colleagues and students, and passionate about the mission of the College. As Patti, the administrator interviewed, emphatically states when asked what makes her comfortable at this College, "They're my people. This place speaks to me, this place speaks to me, they're my people."

Implications: Social Class and Higher Education

The strong correlation between higher education credentials, or academic capital, and increased earnings make for a compelling reason for Americans to go to college. Americans that complete a bachelor's degree will almost double their life-time income compared to those that only complete high school (Julian, 2012). Still, upward social mobility defined as the movement to a higher income bracket remains low (Pew, 2012).

In the face of evidence to the contrary, Americans continue to strongly believe in meritocracy; the idea that one can rise to the top through hard work and education. The respondents to the survey mirror those beliefs when attributing their own advancement to hard work and education. Few Americans, like Amy, acknowledge that upward mobility may involve a bit of luck, rather than rational steps such as working toward a college degree.

One of the professors surveyed declared. "I am just like my students, but education transformed my world." I routinely hear such proclamations made on my campus. "We transform lives." I can attest that it is true; the community college experience does transform students' lives. But how can this be, if it is also true that the odds of getting out of the working class remain slim?

Counter to the prevailing trend, one of the findings of this project is that survey respondents and all four interviewees offer examples of the ways that higher education altered their lives and moved them into the middle class. Eighty-one percent of survey respondents self-identified as having grown up in working-class and lower-class families reported moving to the middle class and above. I am not claiming that community college caused upward social mobility for professional staff members, but rather that the

community college staff includes a preponderance of individuals that defy the dominant storyline in which working-class children become working-class adults (Bowles & Gintis, 2002; Willis, 1979). Community college at least partly reflects the working-class habitus of its inhabitants and provides a more welcome academic home.

Community college changes the lives of working-class students and working-class academics, within an American culture and a higher education context that privilege the habitus of those at the middle class and above. Educational institutions are primarily middle-class institutions that reflect and instill the culture and knowledge valued by their main constituents. Elite private schools and universities are upper-class institutions that operate the same way. Community colleges serve working-class, minority, and non-traditional students who are often the first in their families to go to college. As institutions serving the least privileged college-going population, the community college sector has been criticized recently for restricting future opportunities rather than praised for providing access to higher education for those that have few if any other options. Carnevale (Bailey, 2012) wrote, "College education is becoming a passive participant in the reproduction of economic privilege. Taken one at a time, postsecondary institutions are fountains of opportunity; taken together, they are a highly stratified bastion of privilege."

Each institutional type mainly caters to the audience of students they were founded to attract. The fact that some working-class students attend elite institutions does not disturb the overall pattern in which students from each type of social class attend an institution designed for them, and that upon graduation funnel them back to their place within the ranks of their social class of origin. Bourdieu (1977) explains that educational

institutions profess to offer opportunity, but are in actuality one of the chief social mechanisms that help to maintain the status quo.

> Indeed, among all the solutions put forward throughout history to the problem of the transmission of power and privileges, there surely does not exist one that is better concealed, and therefore better adapted to societies which tend to refuse the most patent forms of the hereditary transmission of power and privileges, than the solution which the educational system provides by contributing to the reproduction of the structure of class relations and by concealing, by an apparently neutral attitude, the fact that it fills this function. (p. 487-488)

Yet, there *is* room for transformation. The findings of this project concur with Jones' (2003) statement that educational institutions can be sites for "disrupting dominant ideologies and practice." I conceptualize this potential space as the "wiggle room" community colleges offer. Rather than channeling working-class students to working-class jobs, professional staff members move students toward the middle class by purposefully connecting with them through their shared social class experiences, and then acculturating them to middle-class knowledge and expectations. The most surprising finding from the survey results was the revelation that 51 percent of the survey respondents were the first in their family to go to college. The first generation population of the professional staff exceeds that of the student body by 17 percent. The strong working-class and first generation identity of the professional staff influences the institutional culture and academic practices. Thus, the community college is a field in which individuals can act to disrupt the status quo, and facilitate social mobility for working-class students.

One further way to purposefully change the status quo is to diversify the professoriate at all types of college campuses. Recent scholarship builds the case for the importance of having working-class individuals within the academic ranks (Brook &

Mitchell, 2012). Oldfield (2007) lays out how to include social class background as an explicit part of the academic search and hiring process with a goal of identifying working-class origins as a desirable diversity trait.

This project allowed the voices of those at one community college to be heard. The purpose of this research was to explore the educational and professional experiences of community college academics from working-class backgrounds. I argue that community colleges offer working-class academics a satisfying middle-class, professional environment because these colleges diverge in important aspects from other institutions of higher education.

The research exposes many manifestations of social class on campus. The survey responses and the interviewees' stories witness to and make visible the specific ways class conflict occurs in the workaday life at the College. Yet, as a sub-field of higher education, the community college provides some wiggle room for working-class academics to be at ease in their professional role and to become allies for working-class students. In this way working-class academics at community colleges counter some aspects of social reproduction.

This project, with its focus on community colleges, contributes to the research literature on working-class academics. The limitation of this project was that only one college was studied. One way to enlarge the scale of the project would be to interview additional participants. Purposefully recruiting participants from diverse cultural backgrounds would also enrich the project. Another possibility would be to incorporate a second institution in the research for comparative purposes. In particular it would be of

interest to discover whether the percentage of first generation professional staff is of similar proportions at other community colleges.

One critique outside the scope of the data gathered relates to the position of community colleges within the sector of higher education. Community colleges are the lowest institutional type within the hierarchy. The evidence found to suggest that community colleges provide working-class academics with a satisfying academic home base, and working-class students with allies who show them the pathway to upward social mobility, happens at a college campus with the lowest intuitional prestige. As Bailey (2012) remarked about social class inequality, "Community colleges have contributed to this problem, but they are also essential to the solution." This study suggests the unique environment of the community college, where working-class academics help to set the rules of the game or field, positions them to leverage their habitus better at community colleges than at other types of institutions of higher education.

A critical perspective on education means acknowledging the processes by which schools funnel students into appropriate higher education institutions and occupational destinations based on their family class background (Freire, 1994; Giroux, 2010). While educational institutions do serve multiple purposes, the proposition relevant here is that colleges have the *potential* to positively affect social change, specifically by enabling social mobility as demonstrated by the professors and other staff members from the working class who now professionally reside in community colleges.

Social change, against the monumental social structures that affect individual lives, can seem a completely daunting and impossible goal, even within the microcosm of

one school or one college. In discussing social change, Hoffman (2009) paraphrases Mica Pollack who asserts, "educators can make a difference by paying close attention to the routine moments of schooling and capitalizing on every opportunity during everyday acts to counter inequality" (p. 409). It is by asking community college professors and professionals whether they value and leverage their working-class origins to inform their academic practice, and perform those small daily acts of human agency with working-class students that we establish *how* they may counter the status quo, disrupting the inequality existing and reproducing in educational institutions. If they do, in doing so, community college professionals positively influence their students, their institutions, and the greater society.

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Appendix A

Lehigh University IRB Letter

LEHIGH UNIVERSITY

Office of Research and
Sponsored Programs
526 Brodhead Avenue
Bethlehem, PA 18015-3046
(610) 758-3021 Fax (610) 758-5994
http://www.lehigh.edu/~inors

DATE:	October 1, 2014
TO:	Elizabeth Bugaighis / Heather Johnson
FROM:	Lehigh University IRB
STUDY TITLE:	[640950-2] Bugaighis Thesis
IRB REFERENCE #:	15/033
SUBMISSION TYPE:	New Project
ACTION:	APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE:	September 30, 2014
PROJECT EXPIRATION DATE:	September 29, 2015
INITIAL APPROVAL DATE:	September 30, 2014
REVIEW TYPE:	Expedited Review

Thank you for your submission of materials for this research study. The Lehigh University IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a study design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission. This approval is valid for one year.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on the Lehigh University Policy on the Protection of Human Subjects in Research.

Reapproval and Progress Report: The current approval will expire on September 29, 2015. If you wish to continue beyond that time, you must submit a renewal request and progress report on the Continuing Review form via IRBNet. This protocol will be due for continuing IRB review ***60 days*** before the expiration date of September 29, 2015.

Informed Consent: Please remember that INFORMED CONSENT is a process beginning with a description of the study and insurance of subject understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the study via a dialogue between the researcher and the research subject. The Lehigh University policy requires each subject receive a copy of the signed consent document.

Changes or Amendments: If during the year you propose significant changes in your approved protocol, please submit these changes for review using the amendment/modification form through IRBNet. The proposed changes may not be initiated without IRB approval (except when necessary to eliminate immediate hazards to subjects).

Adverse Events: All SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported to this office. Please use the appropriate adverse event forms through IRBNet for this procedure. All sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed. Any injuries or other unanticipated problems involving risks to research subjects and others resulting from this study must be reported promptly to the Lehigh University IRB. If the problem is serious, approval may be withdrawn pending further review by the committee.

Non-compliance or Complaints: Please report all NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this study to this office.

Completion of Study and Record Retention: Please notify the Lehigh University IRB as soon as the research has been completed. Study records, including full protocols and signed consent forms (originals) for each subject, must be kept in a secured location by the investigator for 3 years following the study's completion.

If you have any questions, please contact Susan E. Disidore at 610-758-3020 (E-mail:sus5@lehigh.edu). Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.

Appendix B

Survey of Professional Staff

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

This form is to request your agreement to participate as a survey respondent in a research project on professionals working at a community college, conducted by Elizabeth Bugaighis under the supervision of Dr. Heather Johnson. This research project is part of Elizabeth Bugaighis's thesis project for a master's degree in sociology from Lehigh University.

The purpose of the study is to explore how community college academics, faculty members and administrators, use their social class experiences within their professional roles.

You are asked to respond to the questions in this survey. Your responses will remain anonymous. At the end of the survey you will be asked if you wish to volunteer for a one-on-one interview. Should you volunteer for an interview, your survey responses will still remain anonymous.

Your decision whether or not to participate is voluntary. There are no risks associated with responding to this anonymous survey. You may skip any question you do not wish to answer by clicking "Prefer not to respond."

You will not receive any direct benefits from participating in this study, but participation may help to increase knowledge that may benefit others in the future.

If you have any questions about this study you may contact:

Elizabeth Bugaighis at xxx-xxx-xxxx, researcher@comcollege.edu. You may also contact the researcher's advisor at Lehigh University: xxx-xxx-xxxx, advisor@lehigh.edu

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you are encouraged to contact the University's Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at xxx-xxx-xxxx or by e-mail at ORSP@lehigh.edu.

All reports or correspondence will be kept confidential.

The next page will ask for your informed consent, or allow you to exit should you wish to withdraw from the survey.

1) Statement of Consent

   By clicking below to enter the survey I:

   --Certify that I am 18 years of age or older
   --Agree that I have read and understand the informed consent information
   --Give my informed consent

   a) I consent to participate in the study. Continue to the next page.
   b) I withdraw from participating in this study.

[Respondents answering "I withdraw" are redirected to a page that says: You have withdrawn from this survey. Thank you for your time. Elizabeth Bugaighis]

2) My primary role is:
   a. Full-time teaching faculty member
   b. Full-time non-teaching faculty member
   c. Adjunct faculty member
   d. Full-time administrator
   e. Part-time administrator
   f. Prefer not to respond

3) For the College I work primarily at:
   a. XX Campus
   b. XX Campus
   c. XX Center
   d. Teaching online courses for XX College
   e. Prefer not to respond
   f. Other (write in)

4) What is your gender?
   a. Female
   b. Male
   c. Prefer not to respond

5) Are you Hispanic/Latino?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Prefer not to respond

[Respondents answering "Yes" will branch to question 7, skipping the question about race. I chose to collect the data in this way to mirror the way that the College collects data in the hiring process. This will allow me to compare my respondent results to the entire population of employees.]

6) Choose one or more to describe you.
    a. Caucasian
    b. Asian
    c. Black/African American
    d. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
    e. American Indian
    f. Prefer not to respond

[I chose to collect the data using these categories to mirror the way that the College collects data in the hiring process. This will allow me to compare my respondent results to the entire population of employee.]

7) What is the highest level of education you have completed?
    a. High School Diploma
    b. 2 year college degree
    c. 4 year college degree
    d. Master's degree
    e. Doctoral, M.D., or J.D. degree
    f. Prefer not to respond

8) What is the highest level education that your mother completed?
    a. Unknown
    b. Less than High School diploma
    c. High School diploma
    d. 2 year college degree
    e. 4 year college degree
    f. Master's degree
    g. Doctoral, M.D., or J.D. degree
    h. Prefer not to respond

9) What is the highest level education that your father completed?
    a. Unknown
    b. Less than High School diploma
    c. High School diploma
    d. 2 year college degree
    e. 4 year college degree
    f. Master's degree
    g. Doctoral, M.D., or J.D. degree
    h. Prefer not to respond

10) What is/was your mother's primary occupation?
    a. Job Instability (examples: periods of unemployment)
    b. Unskilled Job (examples: retail sales, food service, construction)
    c. Skilled Job (examples: secretary, plumber, electrician, book-keeper)

d. Professional Job (examples: teacher, nurse, enlisted military, administrator, engineer, computer programmer, accountant)
e. Executive Job (examples: physician, lawyer, business executive)
f. Unknown
g. Prefer not to respond
h. Other (write in)

11) What is/was your father's primary occupation?
a. Job Instability (examples: periods of unemployment)
b. Unskilled Job (examples: retail sales, food service, construction)
c. Skilled Job (examples: secretary, plumber, electrician, book-keeper)
d. Professional Job (examples: teacher, nurse, enlisted military, administrator, engineer, computer programmer, accountant)
e. Executive Job (examples: physician, lawyer, business executive)
f. Unknown
g. Prefer not to respond
h. Other (write in)

[I chose to ask this question to add to the information and indicators of respondents' family social class background. I have reviewed the Hollingshead Four Factor Index of Socioeconomic Status work, as well as the work of Dr. Will Barratt who created the Barratt Simplified Measure of Social Status (BSMSS) to update Hollingshead's concept of occupational prestige. I simplified the number of categories from 9 to 5, and added "job instability," "other," "unknown," and "prefer not to respond" as additional categories.]

12) Which social class best describes *the family you grew up in?*
a. Lower Class
b. Working Class
c. Middle Class
d. Upper-Middle Class
e. Upper Class
f. Prefer not to respond

[I asked respondents to self-identify the social class background of the family that they grew up in. The five response categories are the same used by the Gallup Poll from 2000-2012: "If you were asked to use one of these five names for your social class, which would you say you belong in?"]

13) Which social class best describes *you currently?*
a. Lower Class
b. Working Class
c. Middle Class
d. Upper-Middle Class
e. Upper Class

f. Prefer not to respond

14) Describe a situation at the College that made you aware of your social class background. (TEXT BOX for written response)

15) In your work at the College, how do you use your social class background? (TEXT BOX for written response)

Thank you for completing this survey and contributing to my research.

I am looking for volunteers for follow-up one-on-one interviews. I am seeking volunteers who grew up in working class families. If you wish to volunteer for an interview reach me at:

Elizabeth Bugaighis
researcher@comcollege.edu
xxx-xxx-xxxx,

If you contact me about an interview, your survey responses remain anonymous - I cannot identify survey respondents.

Thank you again,

Elizabeth Bugaighis

Appendix C

Pre-Interview Survey

After respondents take a survey, they may contact the researcher to volunteer for a one-on-one interview. A list of volunteers will be compiled. The researcher will know some but not all of the volunteers. The researcher will identify potential interview participants by selecting 4-6 that have different roles and responsibilities at the College. The common element sought in interview participants is that they grew up in working-class families.

In order to screen potential participants the researcher will screen by asking volunteers the questions below. Before the conversation begins the researcher will let volunteers know that they may end the conversation at any time.

1. My primary role is:
    a. Full-time teaching faculty member
    b. Full-time non-teaching faculty member
    c. Adjunct faculty member
    d. Full-time administrator
    e. Part-time administrator
    f. Prefer not to respond

2. For this College I work primarily at:
    a. XX Campus
    b. XX Campus
    c. XX Center
    d. Teaching online courses for XX College
    e. Prefer not to respond
    f. Other (write in)

3. What is the highest level of education <u>you have completed</u>?
    a. High School diploma
    b. 2 year college degree
    c. 4 year college degree
    d. Master's degree
    e. Doctoral, M.D., or J.D. degree
    f. Prefer not to respond

4. What is the highest level education that <u>your mother</u> completed?
    a. Unknown
    b. Less than high school diploma
    c. High School diploma

d. 2 year college degree
e. 4 year college degree
f. Master's degree
g. Doctoral, M.D., or J.D. degree
h. Prefer not to respond

5. What is the highest level education that your father completed?
    a. Unknown
    b. Less than high school diploma
    c. High School diploma
    d. 2 year college degree
    e. 4 year college degree
    f. Master's degree
    g. Doctoral, M.D., or J.D. degree
    h. Prefer not to respond

6. What is/was your mother's primary occupation?
    a. Job Instability (examples: periods of unemployment)
    b. Unskilled Job (examples: retail sales, food service, construction)
    c. Skilled Job (examples: secretary, plumber, electrician, book-keeper)
    d. Professional Job (examples: teacher, nurse, enlisted military, administrator, engineer, computer programmer, accountant)
    e. Executive Job (examples: physician, lawyer, business executive)
    f. Unknown
    g. Prefer not to respond
    h. Other (write in)

7. What is/was your father's primary occupation?
    a. Job Instability (examples: periods of unemployment)
    b. Unskilled Job (examples: retail sales, food service, construction)
    c. Skilled Job (examples: secretary, plumber, electrician, book-keeper)
    d. Professional Job (examples: teacher, nurse, enlisted military, administrator, engineer, computer programmer, accountant)
    e. Executive Job (examples: physician, lawyer, business executive)
    f. Unknown
    g. Prefer not to respond
    h. Other (write in)

8. Which social class best describes *the family you grew up in?*
    a. Lower Class
    b. Working Class
    c. Middle Class
    d. Upper-Middle Class
    e. Upper Class
    f. Prefer not to respond

9. Which social class best describes *you currently?*
    a. Lower Class
    b. Working Class
    c. Middle Class
    d. Upper-Middle Class
    e. Upper Class
    f. Prefer not to respond

10. Which age bracket do you belong in?
    a. 20-29
    b. 30-39
    c. 40-49
    d. 50-59
    e. 60-69
    f. 70-79
    g. Prefer not to respond

Appendix D

LEHIGH UNIVERSITY

CONSENT FORM

Working Class Academics at a Community College

You are invited to be in a research study of academics at a community college. You were selected as a possible participant because you identified your availability for an interview on the survey instrument for this study.

I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Elizabeth Bugaighis, a student in the MA in Sociology program at Lehigh University, under the direction of Advisor, Associate Professor of Sociology, Lehigh University.

Background Information

The purpose of this study is:

This is a research study which will be the basis of a master's thesis in sociology. The purpose of the research is to explore how community college academics, faculty members, and administrators from working class backgrounds use their experiences within their professional roles. The research questions include:

- In what ways does class background shape the academic practices of professionals at the community college?
- Do working class academics view their social class background as significant to their approach to their professional roles?
- Are there differences in the experiences and approaches used by individuals related to their gender identity?
- Can community colleges be a site for social mobility and the gateway to the middle class for working-class academics?
- Can a working-class background be an asset in academia, specifically at the community college?

Procedures

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:
Consent to an individual interview. Questions will cover family background, college and graduate school experiences, and professional experiences. Notes may be taken during the interview. The interview will be audio taped and last about one hour.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study

The study has several risks:
You will most likely find the interview process interesting and introspective. The risks involved with participating in an individual interview are minimal.

The benefits to participation are:
As a member of the profession of higher education, the benefit to you is knowing that you contributed to the knowledge base and academic literature on community colleges.

Compensation

There is no compensation for your involvement in this study.

Confidentiality

The records of this study will be kept confidential and any information collected through this research project that personally identifies you will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without your separate consent, except as specifically required by law. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records. The same procedures apply to audiotapes. In the event that using an audiotape of a participant would make the presentation of this study's results more compelling, you would be asked to give separate consent to use your audio taped responses in this manner.

Participation in this study is voluntary:
If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question, to end the interview, or withdraw at any time.

Contacts and Questions

The researcher conducting this study is:
Elizabeth Bugaighis. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact me at xxx-xxx-xxxx, researcher@comcollege.edu. You may also contact the researcher's advisor at Lehigh University, xxx-xxx-xxxx, advisor@lehigh.edu

Questions or Concerns:
If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), **you are encouraged** to contact the University's Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at xxx-xxx-xxxx (e-mail: ORSP@lehigh.edu). All reports or correspondence will be kept confidential.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent

I have read the above information. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have my questions answered. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature:_____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator:_____ Date: _____

Appendix E

Interview Guide

Before the Interview

- Review Informed Consent Form with participants.
- Provide signed copy of Informed Consent Form to participants.
- Fill in 10 question survey as background information.

Introduction and Instructions

The purpose of the research is to inquire into the intersection between the social background and individuals working at a community college. Again, as noted in the Informed Consent Form you may decline to answer any questions during the interview, or to end the interview at any time. The interview will be audio taped. Are you ready to begin?

Professional Experiences

- Which institutions of higher education have you worked at full-time and part-time?

For teaching faculty:

- What tone do you set for your classroom?
- What do students call you?
- Describe a perfect day in your classroom.
- How would you describe the relationship between you and your students?
- How do you approach dealing with disengaged students?

For non-teaching faculty and administrators:

- What tone do you set for your work with students?
- What do students call you?
- How would you describe the relationship between you and students you work with?
- How do you approach dealing with disengaged students?

Family Influences:

- You say that you came from a working class family—what does that mean to you?
- Did your parents support your decision to go to college and then on to graduate school?
- What does your family think about you becoming a college professor, college administrator?

- On the pre-interview survey of 10 questions, you indicated you moved from working class to middle or upper-middle class…can you talk about that?
- Who are your close friends?

College and Graduate School Experiences

- Where did you go to college, graduate school?
- Did you face any obstacles on the road to obtaining your college degree? Your graduate degree/s?
- Did you work to pay for college?
- Describe any educational experiences you feel are related to your social class background.
- Do you use a professional network—how?

For all participants – views of professional role:

- How do you view your professional role at the community college?
- Describe any professional experiences you feel are related to your social class background.
- Do you apply a particular philosophy or set of values to your work with students?
- Do you use your own class background in any way, in your role as a professor/professional? How?
- What did you bring with you from your working class family background?
- What challenges you most about your role at this community college?
- What makes you feel most comfortable at this community college?
- What makes you feel most uncomfortable at this community college?
- What gives you the greatest sense of belonging at this community college?
- What gives you the sense that you do not belong at this community college?
- What would you change about this community college?
- How do you define career success for yourself, and have you achieved it?
- What position do you aspire to?

Gender

- Describe any educational experiences you feel are related to your gender.
- Describe any professional experiences you feel are related to your gender.
- Do you use your gender in any way, in your role as a professor/professional? How?

Closing questions

- Before I turn off the recorder, what should I know about your experiences of class within the context of this community college?
- Just to remind you that this is what I am interested in—we've been talking a lot about class and education—what else can you tell me that you have not already?

Elizabeth Tyler Bugaighis, Ph.D.

Education

Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Theory and Policy—December 2000
The Pennsylvania State University

Master of Sociology—Expected May 2015
Lehigh University

Master of Public Administration—December 1990
Kutztown University

Bachelor of Arts, History & Political Science—May 1987
Moravian College

Senior Year of High School—1983-1984
Ocean County College

Professional Experience

Administrative

Dean of Education & Academic Success—July 2009
Northampton Community College

Dean of Humanities & Social Sciences—2005-2009
Northampton Community College

Acting Dean of Humanities & Social Sciences—2004-2005
Northampton Community College

Assistant Dean of Humanities & Social Sciences—2002-2004
Northampton Community College

Coordinator of Scheduling and Special Projects—1987-1990
Cedar Crest College

Instructional

EDUC 101 Foundations of Education—2001-2003
Northampton Community College

ED 150 Education in American Culture—2001-2002
Moravian College

EDTHP115 Education in American Society, teaching assistant—1995-1998
The Pennsylvania State University

Instructor of English as a Foreign Language—1992-1994
Brussels, Belgium