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Oasis from Learn-to-Earn: Adult, Working-Class, Liberal Arts Graduates Make Meaning of their Learning Careers at Harvard

Suzanne C. Spreadbury
Lesley University

An Oasis from Learn-to-Earn: Adult, Working-Class, Liberal Arts Graduates Make Meaning of their Learning Careers at Harvard

A DISSERTATION

submitted by

Suzanne Caryl Spreadbury

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to learn from 18 adult students, all of whom grew-up working class and many of whom were living working-class lives as adults, the meaning of returning to school and earning a liberal arts degree from an open-enrollment program, Harvard Extension School (HES), which is part of a selective, elite institution: Harvard University. The educational research in the US is sparse on adult, working-class, liberal arts, students. Indeed, these students' experiences go mostly undocumented due to the agreed upon conclusion that adult students, in general, and working-class students, in particular, are more interested in job training than liberal arts learning.

From this qualitative, narrative inquiry, I learned that institutional adult education is often about validation and attempting to silence mounting feelings of "marginality and deprivation" (Hooper & Osborn, 1975) much more than about job training. It is about "becoming somebody" (Luttrell, 1997; Wexler, 1999) in one's own eyes and in the eyes of others. As Maxine Greene (1990) would conclude, it is also about looking like Melville's "water-gazers," for something more out of life. But instead of turning to the sea and nature, these working-class adult students turned to books and culture— humanistic education— to break from the everyday routine and to reassure themselves, through the more difficult pleasures of the mind, that there is more to life than just work. Finally, it is about a liberal arts education exerting its academic influence by helping working-class adults claim intellectual identities and "warm up" (Deil, 2001) their academic expectations. But for some participants, it was about finding themselves, using Bourdieu's (1999) language, "outcasts on the inside," holders of a somewhat elite liberal arts degree, but due to the open-enrollment, second-chance nature of the education, not truly benefiting from higher education's standard economic, social, or cultural capital.

This study is about the intellectual joys as well as the emotional hurts of liberal arts education for working-class adults.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Research has always been a collective experience, for academics are in constant conversation with the scholars who have gone before them. Our ideas are informed, affirmed, and, in a few rare instances, transformed completely by the work of previous researchers. We pay homage to these scholars through in-text citations, footnotes, and references. But there are other shoulders on which the success of academic work rest; those of our friends, family, colleagues, and research participants. Many times, however, their contributions go unrecognized. So, it is with sincere gratitude that I share their names with the world and claim my work as a co-construction with them.

From admission to thesis completion, doubt was my constant companion. My husband Mark Smith, however, never questioned my ability to see this project through to the end. Without his love, respect, patience, and support, both emotional and physical (for he did more than his fair share of chores and childcare), this work would be unfinished. I don't know how I will ever repay him expect by declaring my enduring love. While my son Maxwell Robert Spreadbury Smith always came first, he had to understand more than he should have that Mom had to write, rather than play pirates. Now, there is more time for sword fighting and treasure hunting, and I happily accept the role of second-mate. I also want to thank my mother-in-law Irene Smith, who generously gave up her attic to me, so I could have a "room of my own" to write. I want to thank my own mother, for tirelessly pursuing education as a working-class adult, and giving me the inspiration to do the same.

Next to my family, there is no one who I'm more indebted to than Dr. Caroline Heller, my senior advisor. Caroline *got* me and I her. Her sincere respect for me and faith in my work made me aim higher to reach my academic potential. From her, I learned how to do qualitative research that is theoretically rigorous, yet caring and humane. But her affect on me is much broader than academic work, for I learned from her how to be a better person. She cares deeply about the world and her fellow human beings, particularly those who everyday must live with injustice. I learned how to care much more deeply too. I also learned the following life lesson: to help someone grow, you shower them with love and support. Thank you, Caroline.

I want to thank my other committee members Judith Beth Cohen, Bill Dandridge, and Anita Landa, who took me on when others left and pushed me when I was stuck and in need of forward movement. I especially want to thank Wendy Luttrell. Prof. Luttrell's inspirational, thoughtful, and ethical qualitative research was, along with Caroline's, the primary model on which I measured my own work. Her concise comments were marked with intellectual precision and perfect timing.

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Finally and perhaps most important, I want to thank my participants who gave me and the fields of higher education, sociology of education, working-class studies, and adult education a great gift: their life stories. I have learned so much from their lives and I know that anyone who reads this work will be informed, affirmed, and transformed in some way.

Lesley University
Ph.D. Program in Educational Studies

DISSERTATION APPROVAL FORM

Student's Name: Suzanne Caryl Spreadbury

Dissertation Title: ~~Water Gazers:~~ *An Oasis from Learn-to-EARN:* Adult, working-class, liberal arts graduates ●~~meaning making~~ *Make meaning* of their learning careers at Harvard

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Approvals

In the judgment of the following signatories, this Dissertation meets the academic standards that have been established for the Doctor of Philosophy degree.

Dissertation Committee Chair _____*Caroline Heller*_____ *12/1/2004*
(signature)   (date)

Dissertation Committee Member _____*William L. Dandridge*_____ *Nov. 3, 2004*
(signature)   (date)

Dissertation Committee Member _____*Wendy Luttrell*_____ *Nov. 18, 2004*
(signature)   (date)

Director of the Ph.D. Program_____
(signature)   (date)

Dean, School of Education_____
(signature)   (date)

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PROLOGUE: Louis's Story

"Do you know if that economics of labor course will be offered again?" Louis, a Bachelor of Liberal Arts (ALB) candidate at the Harvard University Extension School (HES), has asked me this question before. I tell him I don't know. Maybe he could email the instructor and ask him directly. He says he has done that already, but received no response. As his academic advisor and, now, Director of the HES/ALB program, I consider how much I should involve myself in this request. I could email the instructor or go straight to the power source: the Assistant Dean. If she considers the course worthy, she could convince the instructor to offer it again. I wonder about the enrollment. I need to check on that first, for if the enrollment was low the course would surely not be offered again and there is no reason to go to the Assistant Dean. My involvement should begin (or end) once the enrollment question is answered. Or should it? I wonder how high the profit margin must be for HES to offer a course like the one that Louis wants, one relevant to working class experience. What are the risks to the institution if it offers a course low in enrollment numbers but high in class-consciousness? What are the risks to me in requesting that we offer such a course again? A few seconds have passed and I turn my full attention back to Louis.

I am enjoying speaking to Louis. Indeed, every time he drops by the office for academic advising, I light up. Louis has been pursuing his bachelor of liberal arts degree at the HES for the same amount of time that I have worked my way up to director from staff assistant— seventeen years. The time we spend together is brief, usually no longer than fifteen minutes, but we have formed a tangible bond that comes from a consistent long-term relationship. I imagine that Louis and I share the similar comfortable feeling that comes

from going to the same barber year after year. You open the door, the little bell rings to announce your entrance, you look in, and there he is, the same barber who has cut your hair for the past seventeen years. You smile, take your seat, open the newspaper, and settle in to wait for him, even if another barber with an open chair can take you right away.

Louis waits for me. I have been there for Louis, whenever he has encountered big or tiny bumps in the road. Like the time he almost didn't graduate with his Associate's Degree because he was failing math. Or the other day when his ID card didn't arrive and he needed to get into the library. I light up because I know I've helped Louis and he's grateful. More important, I light up because I treasure every moment with Louis, for he is from where I'm from— the working class. With Louis, I shed my imposter skin that immediately grows in the company of my Ivy-League-educated colleagues. My imposter skin is so tight that it constricts my movements. It is particularly tight around my upper and lower lips, but not so tight around my hands. Consequently, around them, I work a lot, but speak little.

With Louis, the tight skin is gone. I am chatty. I try to assure him through my body language, word choice, and laughter that I'm not a stuffy Harvard administrator; that I am *like him.* After seventeen years of fifteen-minute meetings, Louis is as relaxed as he will ever be with me. Louis usually teases me ever so respectfully with his dry sense of humor. But mostly, Louis speaks the way that I speak with authority figures: brief and to the point. He uses few extra words and refers to a small notebook on which he has carefully written three or four prepared questions. Louis does not want to over extend his welcome. He probably assumes that I have other "real work" things to do and perhaps he himself has more important "real work" things to do, too. His behavior reminds me of mine in the few meetings with teachers or advisors that I've pushed myself to attend. When you come from a

world where most people are too busy or tired to talk to you, chitchat has little value and is a waste of precious work time.

The problem in our relationship is that all I want to do is chitchat with Louis. I want to know his life story. Louis looks more Irish than Italian. He has the same red hair color and pale, freckled skin as all six of my brother and sisters. Over the seventeen years, he has dropped by only once in his work clothes: an industrial, one-piece, caramel-brown jumpsuit, splattered with large grease spots, well-worn work boots, and a plastic, white hard-hat. Usually Louis is cleaned up in "professional casual" clothes for our meetings. How does a working class, Italian, pipe fitter make meaning of his Harvard liberal arts education? That is the question on my mind whenever I see Louis. I want to know what motivates him to keep taking one course a semester, or sometimes one course a year, in fine arts, history, philosophy, Italian language, for nearly two decades. I asked him once, well, actually twice.

The first time he stated that he didn't know what motivated him. Then he suggested half-jokingly that going to school at night keeps him out of the bars. The second time when I asked him with high hopes of getting more information, he stated: "You've asked me that before, why are you curious?" I don't ask any more personal questions of Louis. I quickly assumed that he felt exposed by my curiosity because I communicated, ever so subconsciously, that it was his class background that made his motivation so intriguing. I didn't want to "probe" further, for, after all, Louis is my advisee, not a volunteer in my research.

My own working-class background and the books and articles I've read about adult education relay to me that Louis's choice to study liberal arts *is* worthy of further research. How does a working-class man with no prior college experience decide to spend his precious time and money on liberal arts courses for the past seventeen years at one of the most elite

schools in the country? The more I thought about Louis's story the more I thought about the stories of all the other working-class students around me.

Chapter I. Introduction: The Personal and Professional "Bones" that Brought Me to My Doctoral Research

> Why do you never find anything written about that idiosyncratic though you advert to, about your fascination with something no one else understands? Because it is up to you. There is something you find of interest, for a reason hard to explain. It is hard to explain because you have never read it on any page; there you begin. You were made and set here to give voice to this, your own astonishment. "The most demanding part of living a lifetime as an artist is the strict discipline of forcing oneself to work steadfastly along the nerve of one's own most intimate sensitivity." Anne Truitt, the sculptor, said this. Thoreau said it another way: know your own bone. "Pursue, keep up with, circle round and round your life. Know your own bone: gnaw at it, bury it, unearth it, and gnaw at it still."
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> Annie Dillard (1989), *The Writing Life*

A. My Idiosyncratic Fascination: *The space where adult education, liberal arts learning, and working concerns intersect*
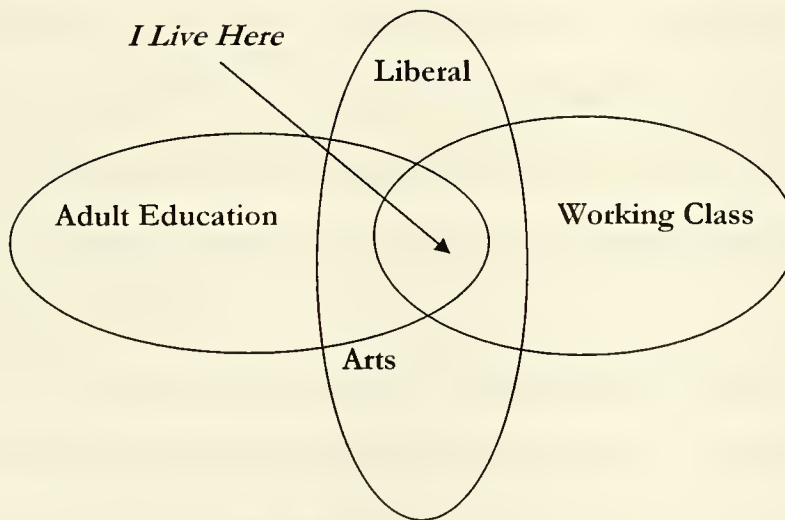
I live in the space where adult education, liberal arts learning, and working class

concerns intersect. I grew up working class. My own vocational, then liberal arts higher

education was formed by working-class values and then *trans*formed by class-consciousness.

For the majority of my adult life—seventeen years—I have worked in the field of adult

education, helping hundreds of working-class adults earn their Bachelor of Liberal Arts

degrees through the Harvard Extension School, the Division of Continuing Education

school at Harvard University. To make the intersection even more contested, I am a PhD candidate in educational studies and my academic passion is the adult, liberal arts, and working-class student experience. While spending many of my formative years looking for escape routes from this intersection, particularly, my working-class background, today it informs all I do. It is the "nerve of [my] most intimate sensitivity"; it is my "bone" (Dillard, 1989). Consequently, I "gnaw and circle around" the class-inspired concerns that informed my own as well as my adult students' liberal arts educational journeys.

My mother was the sole breadwinner of our large, hungry (in every sense of the word) family. As a consequence, I was more concerned with earning a paycheck than a degree, so I went to work after high school. The weekly paychecks were great for two years. But a few months into my third year of full-time work, $120 a week no longer seemed liked a lot of money. As a medical secretary, each day was filled with too many mind-numbing and class-defined tasks, such as deciphering doctors' cryptically handwritten orders, while tip-toeing around their egos. I concluded that a two-year vocational degree was my exit off the time-card-punching highway.

Once in community college, I enjoyed the elective writing, English, history, and philosophy classes much more than the required business courses. I was intellectually "warmed up" (Deil, 2001). I wanted a traditional liberal arts education. I waved good-bye to my dream of being an executive secretary and transferred to a four-year liberal arts college. At that moment, I also waved a tentative and nervous goodbye to my working-class definitions of education, and simultaneously broke my mother's heart. She thought for sure I would never find a job, and maybe her hard-earned money would have been better spent if she had insisted on sending me to Katherine Gibbs secretarial school. While the fear that I

was making the biggest mistake of my life never left me during those undergraduate years, it did subside.

As the youngest of seven and the first to go to college, I inherited this fear. But the more I learned about the world around me through the liberal arts curriculum, the more my working-class past did not define my future. I no longer saw life limited to the two career paths presented to me as a teenager: nurse or secretary. I began to see an expanding set of future roles for me to explore. Moreover, I began to view education as more than job preparation. I allowed myself, albeit fearfully, to spend time honing my thinker-*self*, in addition to, my worker-*self*. Indeed, I began to question my role as passive worker[1]. I started to see myself as a challenging thinker, someone who could put her head up, question, and possibly change her relationship to the world of school and the world of work. I credit this critical and class-conscious paradigm shift to the transformational power of my liberal arts education. By transformation I mean the profound change in thinking that allows one to see one's life and future in a new light. The new light illuminated the assumptions about the world— particularly the world of work and school— that I had been making since childhood.

But even more important, as director of undergraduate degree programs, I "gnaw and circle around" the class-inspired concerns that inform Harvard Extension School students' adult education and liberal arts journeys. Truly, it is their stories that I came to "unearth" in my doctoral research. I have the privilege of working with adult women and men who are pursuing their bachelor's degrees during a full-time work schedule and amidst full-time family responsibilities. What is most compelling to me about this sacrifice for higher education is that these students are choosing to earn bachelor of liberal arts degrees

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[1] I grew up with the life lesson to find a job for life and not make waves. To this day my mother worries that my doctoral pursuit sends a message to my employers (all PhD's themselves) that I am distracted from the tasks at hand. In her world, distraction from employers' immediate needs is ground for dismissal.

rather than professional degrees that have as their signature a more immediate return on students' investments of time and money. I see how profoundly affected the students are by the liberal arts curriculum and when they say to me that this program has changed their lives, there is a discernibly truthful ring to their words. Their words, often echoing similar transformations as my own, inspired me to come in close and learn more about this noteworthy educational experience from the students I serve.

I came to doctoral study believing that the Harvard Extension School working-class[2] students have something critical to share about adult liberal arts education[3]. I came to doctoral study because of their stories, my own, and the space among our stories[4]— the space where adult education, liberal arts learning, and working-class concerns intersect. This space is my "astonishment." I was made— indeed born— to tell this story.

B. A Neglected Research Experience: *My desire to understand the atypical choice to pursue liberal arts education as a working-class adult student*

I also came to doctoral study because, as an adult liberal arts educator, I found little research about the adult liberal arts student. The prevailing conviction in the field of adult

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[2] Working class has traditionally been defined through level of education (i.e., little to no college education), job title and income (as well as parents' level of education and job title) (Linkon, 1999). While I don't know students' income, I am referring to first-generation college students working in white-collar service or blue-collar union jobs. I also understand that class cannot be completely separated from other attributes (e.g., race and gender [for a discussion of this difficulty, see Weis, 1988]). But I agree with class researcher, Ostrove (1996), who concludes that a focus on class can "illuminate the need for understanding the meaning of class, even if it can never be completely separated from other structural variables" (p. 2).

[3] There are many middle-class and upper-class students who attend the Extension School, but the working-class students stand out for me because I view their liberal arts choice as courageous given their limited time and money and our materialist culture that drives many of us toward job advancement education. I am sure that my own working-class background helped me to see this contrast as noteworthy.

[4] My status as a person who grew up working class is relevant and possibly a necessary part of this study. Working-class researcher Plummer (1999) comments that most working-class research has been done by those from the middle class and that working-class researchers are needed to question and disrupt the middle-class lens that clouds much class research. "Those doing the theorizing traditionally stand outside working class experience and fail adequately to involve working class people. Working-class history has been a middle-class terrain, located as it is in paradigms saturated with the meanings of those who have observed rather than lived working-class life" (p. 157). While I may be, in the words of class and education researchers, Lynch and O'Neill (1994), "contaminated" through my advanced education and current middle class income, I have not abandoned my class identity and have lived, and been formed by, working-class life.

education[5], supported by streams of quantitative data (Johstone & Rivera, 1965; Kim, Collins, Stowe, & Chandler, 1995; Valentine, 1997, as cited in Merriam & Caffarella, 1999), is that adults return to school for job-related[6] education. Additionally, Courtney (1992), who completed an exhaustive examination of survey data of 20th century participation in adult education, laments that it is "sobering to realize that though the field [of adult education] has grown in statistical sophistication and conceptual complexity" what was reported in 1920s is true today: the majority of adults participate in adult education for job-related ends (p. 40). But this is not my experience working with the goals and hopes of adult students at the Harvard Extension School, who literally check off the personal-enrichment box in far greater numbers than the job-related box. While a liberal arts[7] program is an uncommon choice for returning adult students, that it *is* a choice for some deserves attentive exploration.

The adult education research is just as clear about the typical socioeconomic background of adult students: middle class. The evidence from forty-plus years of quantitative data collection is so overwhelming that Merriam and Caffarella (1999) surmise: "Regardless of the study, the profile of the typical adult learner remains remarkably consistent: white, middle class, employed, younger, and better educated than the

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[5] Much has been written about the difficulty of defining adult education. Rose (1995) concludes: "One of the problems endemic to the field is precisely the *definition* of adult education" (p. 228). Baptiste and Heaney (1996) concur: "The net for gathering adult educator has been cast ever more widely, excluding less and less until almost everything is adult education" (p. 4). Typically, and in this context, adult education refers to formal learning activities that happen outside mandated secondary school and full-time, day college and university degree programs. Lifelong learning, extension studies, continuing education, and adult basic education are just some terms that fall under the umbrella of "adult education."

[6] Job-related is the term I use to describe professional, pre-professional, vocational education, i.e., all education designed to promote job advancement or job change.

[7] There is much debate over the definition of liberal arts education as well, and adult liberal arts education in particular. McNair (1999) reports: "Liberal adult education is not (and perhaps never has been) a single coherent concept" (p. 2). For the purposes of this introduction, liberal arts education is non-job-related education. I am using Winter, McClelland, and Stewart's (1981) definition of liberal arts students, who "spend several years studying broad abstractions rather than learning specific facts. While their counterparts at professional, performance, technical, or vocational college are learning particular action skills, liberal arts student are supposed to develop their powers of reflection upon the broad vistas of human knowledge in order to become 'liberally' (rather than 'vocationally') educated" (p. 1).

nonparticipant" (p. 71). Applied to any division of education the findings would be disturbing, but the findings are particularly duplicitous given adult education's public persona of open access. Courtney (1992) comments on the paradox of adult education's open-door policy, yet closed-door reality:

> Adult education is not the open supermarket into which all, by virtue of their purchasing power, can enter and buy at will. At times it appears more to resemble a club, of moderate to high exclusivity whose doors revolve for anyone to enter, but whose rules confront everyone once inside, beckoning some to advance, while rejecting many more as unworthy. (p. 5-6)

But again, that adult students are largely middle class does not fit the setting where I work. Every day I meet with men and women from the working class (i.e., first-generation college students whose parent(s) worked in and who themselves work in white-collar service or blue-collar union jobs) who are returning to school. I've come to doctoral study because I am interested in exploring the life stories of these atypical students returning to school for atypical reasons: the working-class adult student who makes the decision to immerse herself in liberal arts education. By "adult" I mean an individual past the typical age of going to college.[8] While the "typical" liberal arts college student is eighteen to twenty-four, the students whose stories I want to understand better are a good deal older, some in their forties and fifties. Their stories, while uncommon, are still a part of the adult student landscape and, therefore, need to be shared in order to expand our collective knowledge about adult students' lives.

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[8] By typical, I mean historically typical and stereotypical, for in 2003 the National Center for Education Statistics (NCSE) announced that the nontraditional working adult student with family responsibilities describes the majority of higher education students today (Sandeen, 2004).

C. A Neglected Interest in Adult Liberal Arts Learning: *My desire to (1) disrupt the learn-to-earn climate of adult education, (2) question the elitist assumptions behind liberal arts learning, and (3) acknowledge the systematic tracking of many working-class students away from four-year liberal arts institutions*

1. Disrupting the learn-to-earn climate of adult education

I came to my doctoral research because the learn-to-earn climate that dominates the field of adult education and continuing education in particular[9] troubles me. Cunningham (1993), in her scathing article, "Let's Get Real: A Critical Look at the Practice of Adult Education," attempts to jolt adult educators away from the myth that adult education is about helping students become enlightened individuals who are equipped to question the political and economic *status quo*. She wants to dowse adult educators with the cold water reality that professional education is the field's primary goal. "Most adult education has little to do with self-actualization or with building a better society. Our discourse is framed instead by the work place: learning for earning is the goal" (Cunningham, 1993, p. 3). Cunningham had the entire field of adult education in mind when she wrote those words, but continuing education is my direct concern.

Continuing education in the US is a self-supporting, and more likely, income generating arm of universities. To survive, continuing education works under the assumption that it must privilege bottom-line, capitalistic concerns over nonprofessional educational goals. As a result of its predetermined profit-making mission, it has been characterized, particularly by more traditional academics, as a business enterprise devoid of redeeming educational value. Simpson (2001), a continuing educator, sums up this characterization: "As a field of practice, continuing education, more than any other sector of

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[9] Continuing education is the more specific term under the adult education umbrella that refers to open-enrollment, credit-bearing, degree-granting divisions of fully accredited college and universities that offer

American higher education, has been associated with the culture of business" (p. 50). He

continues in a more sarcastic fashion: "We [in continuing education] have been accused of

selling out as long as many of us can remember [and are] accused of doing a deal, often with

questionable educational value, simply to turn a buck" (p. 50).

Simpson's sarcasm is a reflection of his claim that the dichotomy that continuing

education operates on the business principle and traditional higher education does not is

now false[10]. He reports that large numbers of traditional colleges and universities (i.e., full-

time, day programs) are partnering with business to recover dwindling federal funding and to

profit from the distance education boom. He concludes that asking the question, Are we

selling out?, is no longer the sole purview of continuing educators. All higher education

professionals must continually ask themselves this question. Simpson's position is a relevant

reminder that sharp distinctions (i.e., continuing education is business driven, while

traditional education is not) are usually hollow stereotypes and that continuums make for

more accurate descriptions. However, continuing education's narrowing vision on corporate

training interests has prioritized professional learning over all other curriculum goals

(Cunningham, 1989; Einsiedel, 1998; Foley, 1998; Haughey, 1998; Heaney, 1996; Lauzon,

2000; Thompson, 1993; Welton, 1993). Adult education scholar and critic Jane Thompson

(1993) comments frankly on this corporate tunnel vision:

> Adult educators now talk about strategic plans and targeting techniques, about
> franchising and credit transfers, about twilight shifts and accelerated degrees and they

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evening and weekend courses to accommodate working adult students. Harvard Extension School is part of the Division of Continuing Education at Harvard University.

[10] Indeed, the dichotomy that traditional higher education is the bastion of liberal arts learning and continuing education is dominated by professional education is also false. Liberal arts undergraduate degrees have been loosing ground in traditional higher education institutions for nearly three decades. As education scholar Baldwin (2000) reports: "Thirty years ago, half of all baccalaureate degrees were granted in a liberal arts discipline including science. By contrast, a profile of today's college students reveals that nearly sixty percent of degrees granted are in a pre-professional or technical field, and the largest number of baccalaureate degrees granted in 1990s were in business, with business majors alone representing fifteen percent of the total" (p. 18). Learning to earn is a tension in traditional higher education as well.

speak with a kind of tenacity devoid of passion that characterizes automatons released from business training schemes. (p. 244)

Thompson (1993) and other adult education critics drew me to further study of adult liberal arts education, for their words mirrored my pre-occupations. Briton (1996) wrote in *The Modern Practice of Adult Education: A Post-Modern Critique*:

> This instrumental understanding of adult education, however, contrasted starkly with the understanding that I brought to the field, an understanding tempered by my own experience as an adult learner. Unable to accommodate my direct experience with the field's vocation-centered, instrumental vision, I subsequently found myself driven to question its integrity. (p. 2)

The integrity questions that Briton (1996) is alluding to surround mainstream adult educator's politically neutral position that they are just providing what adult students want, that is, instrumental, professional education. Adult education critics, like Briton and Thompson, assert that adult education can never be politically neutral and, indeed, its instrumental vision is evidence of its political desire to maintain the capitalist *status quo*. I agree, but, I also believe there are broader historical and socioeconomic forces that contribute to why members of the working-class may decide not to demand more liberal arts learning options from adult educators and return to school for a vocation or professional, as opposed to, a liberal arts education.

2. Questioning the elitist assumptions behind liberal art learning

Liberal arts adult education in the US has an elitist history nicely summed up by adult educators, Usher, Bryan, and Johnson (1997). "Historically, the apparently non-instrumental nature of the liberal tradition in adult education has its basis in the aristocratic values and patriarchal position of the cultured 'gentleman of leisure' " (p. 11). The following quote from literary critic Harold Bloom's (1994) best selling and highly acclaimed book, *The Western Canon*, was my jarring introduction to this aristocratic and patriarchal view:

> Very few working-class readers ever matter in determining the survival of texts, and left-wing critics cannot do the working class's reading for it. Aesthetic value rises out of memory, and so (as Nietzsche saw) out of pain, the pain of surrendering easier pleasures in favor of much more difficult ones. Workers have anxieties enough and turn to religion as one mode of relief. Their sure sense that the aesthetic is, for them, only another anxiety helps to teach us that successful literary works are achieved anxieties, not releases from anxiety. (p. 36)

Bloom is defending his belief that the Western canon is solely for the elite because members of the working class had no part in creating or maintaining the canon[11]. In addition, Bloom is claiming that members of the working class have no ability to judge the Great Books because their heads are filled with mundane concerns for daily survival. Workers, filled with anxieties about daily life, are looking for escape through "easier pleasures" and reading classic literary texts is not a leisure time pursuit. The Great Books would only add to the anxieties of the laboring class, consequently, they should avoid them at all costs. I was particularly shocked by Bloom's statement that members of the working class were not up to the task. In Bloom's mind the working class may know much about hard manual labor, but they know little about the more difficult work of the mind.

Bloom is among the leaders on the conservative side of the modern-day controversy about the value of liberal arts or Great Books education in traditional higher education. Others are the late Alan Bloom (1987), author of *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Improvised the Souls of Today's Students,* and E.D. Hirsch

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[11] This is not just Bloom's stance. Liberal arts education is premised on belief that only those who are "liberal," free from labor, can engage in true and good learning: the liberal arts. The aristocracy in Ancient Greece, freed from the toil of labor performed by slaves and women, had the leisure time to pursue learning for learning sake. But as far back as Hutchins and Adler in the early 20th century, liberal arts educators have made the point that just because liberal education was formed under an oppressive political and cultural system doesn't mean that the entire ideology of "liberal" learning is oppressive. Defenders of liberal arts learning believe that today all "men and women in the US have political power because of democracy" (Stubblefield, 1988, p. 92) and therefore, need access to the foundational philosophic, literary, and historical principles on which Western democracy rests. We cannot, however, dismiss the historical fact that liberal arts education was born on the backs of slaves and women, particularly when current-day scholars, like Bloom, want to shore up this privileged, leisure birthright.

(1987), author of, *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know.* The controversy that swarms around these authors' work has been aptly named the "culture wars," for one of the principle tensions is the value of multicultural texts versus the traditional Western canon: Whose culture has more value? Another tension is access. Harold Bloom and Alan Bloom differ from E.D. Hirsch in their stance on who should have access to their chosen culture, the Great Books of Western civilization. The Blooms want to maintain an elite philosopher-king concept of a liberal arts student, while Hirsch takes the approach that all college students need the Great Books to know their "common" culture and to converse in the business world. Scholes (1988) sums up their divergent views:

> Together, they [Bloom and Hirsch] set the conservative agenda for American education. Hirsch will make sure that everyone knows what the classics are and respects them, while Bloom will see to it that an elite can be defined by actually knowing these classics. In this way, the masses will be sufficiently educated to respect the superior knowledge of their betters, who have studied in a few major universities. (p. 323-324)

Both Harold and Alan Bloom advocate reserving liberal arts learning for a highly selected few. Who are these selected few? Harold Bloom has made it clear that it cannot be those from the working class. Literary critic Mary Louise Pratt (1992), a leader of the liberal-side of the culture wars debate[12], comments on the selected-few aspect of the curriculum debate: "Few doubt that behind this Bloom program is a desire to close not the American mind, but the American University, to all but a narrow and highly uniform elite with no commitment to either multiculturalism or educational democracy" (1992, p. 15). Pratt goes on to argue that this modern day battle over the curriculum is fueled in part by

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[12] I, too, am a member of the liberal camp. As a women's studies student, I view multicultural texts and thinking as much needed compliments to the Western canon and applaud their politically transformative potential to imbue the liberal arts curriculum with students', rather than academics' learning concerns. I agree with critical theorists Aronowitz and Giroux (1991) who so eloquently and succinctly state: "The traditional curriculum must meet the test of relevance to the student-centered learning regime where 'relevance' is not coded as the rejection of tradition but is a criterion for determining inclusion" (p. 15).

conservatives' growing awareness of the "cultural and demographic diversification underway in this country" (p. 15). The rising tide of a socioeconomically diverse and multicultural population in general, and of college students in particular, has motivated educational conservatives to hold on with an increasingly firm grip to their elite knowledge of Western civilization, hence their cultural privilege[13]. Critical theorist Henry Giroux (1992) confirms my concerns about the message to working-class students that is a byproduct of the conservative agenda:

> Of course, what Bloom means by reform is nothing less than an effort to make explicit what women, minorities, and working-class students have always known: the precincts of higher learning are not for them, and the educational system is meant to train a new mandarin class... Their fate is tied to technical knowledge. (p. 124)

This "explicit" message is not just communicated to working-class students, it is internalized. I have met many potential students who initially considered, then rejected, the liberal art program offered at the Harvard Extension School because of these historical elitist connections, as well as their own more present day concerns, such as immediate financial needs and family backgrounds that often value practical, job-related education. I don't trivialize these pressing needs grounded in real-world, economic fears. As critical theorist Ira Shor (1988) succinctly concludes: "Critical study, liberal arts, humanities, have been luxuries in our society, allowed generously to an elite, far less to main stream students" (p. 102).

3. Acknowledging the systematic tracking of many working-class students away from four-year liberal arts institutions

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[13] In fact, many from the conservative camp have blamed the demise of liberal arts learning and the rise of the learn-to-earn climate in higher education on working class, minority, and, specifically, adult students gaining access to higher education since the GI Bill. Winter, McClelland, and Stewart (1981) report in the introduction of their book, *A New Case for the Liberal Arts*, that one of the "attacks on liberal education" came from the "growing number of 'new' or 'nontraditional' students' " (p. 7) demanding more accountability from educators for learning relevant to future careers.

In addition to liberal arts' ancient and modern elitist history, the evidence from higher education research data suggests that long before they are of college age many working-class students are tracked away from four-year liberal arts learning toward two-year vocational education at community colleges. Higher education in the US is divided into three hierarchical tiers: (1) elite colleges and universities, (2) less prestigious private colleges and state universities, and (3) community colleges (Levine & Nidiffer, 1996). But most members of the working class, however, have access to only one tier (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Brint & Karabel, 1989; Hassan & Reynolds, 1987; Karen, 1991; Lavin & Hyllegard, 1996; Lemann, 1999; Levine & Nidiffer, 1996; Shaw & London, 1995; Soliday, 1999). In the past thirty years, even after the unparalleled success of the GI Bill (Ford & Miller, 1995), the working class as a group has made very few inroads toward participation in the two upper tiers and remain highly concentrated in the third (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Karen, 1991; Levine & Nidiffer, 1996).

Higher education researcher Karen (1991) completed a review of access to higher education from 1960 to 1986. He concludes that while the sheer number of working-class students entering college has increased, they are actually losing ground in their representation in the first two tiers: "The relationship between being from a lower socioeconomic background and being located lower in the higher education hierarchy has become stronger; students of working-class origins have become increasingly likely to attend community colleges" (p. 218). Levine and Nidiffler (1996), researchers on disadvantaged students' access to higher education, agree. If there is an academic home for the working class it is the community college. Additionally, Soliday (1999) reports:

> The numbers of middle- and upper-income college students have increased dramatically since the 1970s, but the number of low income-income students is actually decreasing in the 1990s. [Moreover,] astoundingly sharp income gaps now appear to distinguish students attending public two-year colleges, public four-year

colleges and universities, private liberal arts colleges, and elite private universities. (p. 732)

One might ask, what harm comes from the fact that our higher education system channels many working-class students into community colleges. The transfer rate from two-year to four-year schools is dismal. Community college researchers Shaw and London (1995) report that eight-nine percent of community college students in urban settings do not transfer and Yankelovich (1998) reports that only six percent of students who entered community colleges in 1986 had earned BA degrees five years later[14]. The poor transfer rate leaves community college students with little hope of finding jobs with salaries, benefits, and advancement potential when compared with BA degree holders, even if community college students earn AA degrees. Lavin and Hyllegard (1996) completed outcome research on the effects of the open enrollment (1970s to 1980s) and then restrictive (1990s to present) admission policy at CUNY (City Universities of New York). They conclude that the current restrictive admission policy tracks most working-class students away from CUNY and toward open-enrollment community colleges where they earn AA degrees, which has a devastating affect on their economic potential. They claim that the AA degree is no better than the high school diploma in facilitating students' upward economic mobility:

> In terms of socioeconomic gains, then, the AA provided no more of a boost than a high school diploma or even college exposure with no degree. These results seem consistent with a view of two-year schools as leading to jobs with limited potential, located in the lower reaches of the white-collar world. (p. 134)

Conversely, comparison studies, such as those of Levine and Nidiffler (1996), have found that working-class students who attend four-year liberal arts colleges make clear and

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[14] The predominance of vocational course offerings, rather than courses in liberal arts subjects, is one reason for the poor transfer rate. The majority of four-year colleges don't accept vocational courses toward bachelor degrees. As a result, working-class students with limited time and money must make up these credits, which essentially discourages them from pursuing higher degrees (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Dougherty, 1994).

significant gains that can end the cycle of vocational education that leads to economically dead end jobs.

What can account for this third-tier tracking? First, unlike women and ethnic minorities, working-class students are not considered an official recruitment category by elite colleges (Karen, 1991). Second, as evidenced by the cuts in federal and state grant money, there is a growing political backlash against helping working-class students achieve higher education. "Since Ronald Reagan assumed office," write Hassan and Reynolds (1987), "his administration has shifted the student financial aid emphasis from outright grants to subsidized loans. Federal aid for [less-advantaged applicants] is drying up" (p. 7). This policy has continued through successive administrations. The Council for Aid to Education (1995) reports: "The United States must overhaul its system of funding higher education or face growing stratification along class lines" (Dembner, p. 4.) Newman (1999), a political scientist who looks at the effects of social class in US culture, comments on this backlash in her book, *No Shame in My Game: The Working Poor in The Inner City:*

> The kinds of social supports [e.g., the GI Bill, CUNY open admission/free tuition and federal grant money] have been deemed luxuries we can no longer afford or worse, policies that created unwarranted subsidies or lower-quality graduates. Hence the opportunity ladders extended in the past [to the working class], as recently as a few years ago, are being rolled up. (p. 59)

In addition to "opportunity ladders being rolled up," higher education's reliance on standardized tests as the one-size-fits-all-method to sort students significantly decreases many working-class students' admission chances to first- and second-tier schools. Above all other factors, income has the highest correlation with SAT scores— the lower the income, the lower the score (Mantsios, 1998). A politically naïve assumption would be that lower income equates to lower academic ability. In her 1998 essay, "Imagine a Country," education scholar Sklar provides short vignettes that highlight examples of class oppression

in the US. Her vignettes draw sharp contrasts between the class-stratified reality of US

culture and the mythology of the US's classless meritocracy. I found her vignette on

education particularly poignant in its illumination of the pertinent political and economic

forces that create the SAT/income correlation:

> Imagine a country whose school system is rigged in favor of the already privileged
> with lower cast children tracked by race and income into the most deficient and
> demoralizing schools and classrooms. Public school systems are heavily determined
> by private property taxes, allowing the higher incomes districts to spend much more
> than poor ones, rich schools look often look like country clubs, poor schools often
> look more like jails. College prep courses are often considered necessities for the
> affluent, luxuries for the poor. Wealthier citizens argue that the lack of money isn't
> the problem in poor schools— family values are— until proposals are made to make
> school spending more equitable. Then money matters greatly for those who already
> have more. (Sklar, 1998, p. 195-196)

Lemann (1999), writing about the history of the SAT,[15] states in his book, *The Big Test*, that

the most unfair system of higher education selection would be one that did not allow for *any*

competition. But a close second is one that relies on a standardized test taken in the teen

years when the effects of the circumstances that Sklar (1998) details are at their highest:

> The second most unfair system [was competitive], but insisted that [the competition]
> take place as early in life as possible and with school as the arena. The influences of
> parentage, of background culture, and class are at the highest and most explicit
> during a person's student years. (Lemann, 1999, p. 345)

The barriers for many working-class students to the top tiers of the US higher

education system— no official recruiting category for the working class, decreases in financial

aid grant money, and reliance on SAT scores that are skewed by the politics of class-

stratification— are huge obstacles to access four-year liberal arts learning. But a far more

insidiously systematic barrier is the tracking of working-class students toward two-year

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[15] The newest factor in the competitive college admission process is prospective students' increased reliance on
SAT test preparation courses (Hassan & Reyonlds, 1987). Only those families with higher disposable incomes
can afford the high price tag of SAT prep courses, which have become a modern mainstay in the middle-class
college application process.

vocational colleges as a means of supporting a capitalist system where there is limited room

at the top. The duplicitous nature of this class reproduction is highlighted by the fact that

life at the bottom tier is viewed as the student's own fault. Shor (1987) recounts the

numerous "linguistic motifs" offered by educational researchers over the years that name the

phenomenon of the systematic lowering of many working-class students' academic

aspirations, for example, "cooling out" by Clark (1960) and "social stratification" by Karabel

(1972). Shor (1987) goes on to state that regardless of the label, "what is at issue is the

artificial lowering of expectations built into the mass experience of schooling [that] transfers

the responsibility of failure from the institution to the individual" (p. 43)[16].

To keep the wheels of power safe and nicely oiled, this needs to be accomplished in

such a way that students internalize this lack of success as their own fault. Karabel (1972), a

harsh critic of the systematic tracking and one of higher education's premier researchers on

its detrimental effects on poor and working-class people, explains the political importance of

this internalization:

> The crux of the dilemma is how to gently convince s student that a transfer [to a
> four-year college] program is inappropriate for him without seeming to deny him the
> equal education opportunity that Americans value so highly. It seems fair to assume
> that many of them are working class. A great deal is thus at stake; failure to give
> these students a "fair shake" would undermine Americans confidence in the
> democratic character of the education system and, very possible, of the larger society.
> (p. 537)

The gentle convincing is achieved through required placement tests, required remedial

courses, gateway courses, and nontransferable vocational credits that impair many working-

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[16] Shor (1988) points out that the vocational domination of the community college curriculum is a modern
phenomenon. From the 50s to 70s, community college students "refused low aspirations by seeking non-career
programs" (p. 104), with two-thirds taking liberal arts courses and one-third vocational courses. This ratio
reversed "when the Nixon Administration pumped millions of dollars into career education to enforce from
the top down the current one-third liberal arts and two-third vocational" (p. 104). Shor claims that "depressing
economic aspirations was important to containing political challenges after the insurgent 1960s" (p. 104).

class students' progress. Impairing progress for students who have limited time and money is a surefire way to *end* their progress. The students drop out and internalize the institution's message that their failure was their own fault. Their collective and individual self-esteem is crushed, while America's myth of a classless meritocracy is bolstered.

Lavin and Hyllegard's (1996) outcomes research on open and then restrictive access to higher education in New York City is an example of how institutions' academic policies can either support or hinder working-class students' academic progress (and hence future economic success). They found that during CUNY's open-enrollment period (1970s to 1980s), many working-class students earned bachelor degrees, and even graduate degrees, at much higher rates than the national average, and certainly at much higher rates than under the restrictive-admission policy. Their research raises questions about the taken-for-granted assumption that working-class students "choose" or "need" to attend third-tier schools (community college) because of academic ability. If given the opportunity to be judged on their performance in open-enrollment college courses rather than on their high school grades, standardized test scores, and their success in university remedial courses, many working-class students succeed in four-year higher education— they prevail if the system lets them.

I experienced the "gentle convincing" or "cooling out" (Clark, 1960), not at community college, but at my local state university. Failing a mandatory and poorly taught finite math course for my business administration concentration led me to drop out before the conclusion of my first semester. I was convinced that this was concrete and unbiased evidence that I, a working-class girl was unworthy of a college education. I worked for a few years and returned to community college at what Shor (1987) calls a more "mature moment." There, I experienced what Deil (2001), a researcher on the community college

experience, describes as "warming up," that is, my confidence in my academic abilities were warmed up rather than "cooled out."

Deil's (2001) research reminds us that "despite their many shortcomings, community colleges do mange to produce success stories of students who are encouraged to go on to pursue and attain bachelor's degrees despite their own initial low expectations" (p. 5). She surmises that working-class students, who initially find it difficult to commit to school because of lack of familiar support, begin to experience a transformational shift. They start to identify closely with the role of academic student. This shift, she adds, is supported by a strong liberal arts (as opposed to vocational) curriculum, as well as a caring student-centered faculty and institutional support in the form of transfer advice and information.

Over the years many educational scholars have pointed out— as Deil does through her research— that liberal arts courses are central to working-class students' academic and economic progress. Nearly thirty years ago, Bowles and Gintis (1976) suggested that offering liberal arts courses to members of the working class would increase these students' aspirations. Seventeen years ago, Shor (1987) commented (cynically) that in order to ensure their status as a college and not a post-high school experience, community colleges were compelled to offer liberal art courses. He saw this as a "concession" that had to be made against the "true" capitalist-inspired desire to solely offer vocational education to the working class. Shor believed that the working class should exploit this concession and take liberal arts courses that will help them question the dominant discourse and the oppressive forces on their lives. "These rather non-utilitarian, unvocational subjects are to be offered to worker-students at their most adult moment of growth, the transcendent possibilities are promising" (p. 27).

In the final analysis, we have created a segregated society marked by a higher education system that sorts many working-class students into lower-tier vocational education programs. For a few, like myself, community college can be a "warm-up" to transfer to a four-year college and further liberal arts education. A few students are not enough. Class matters in this society and no matter how much we want to believe in meritocracy, we have glaring evidence that for a vast majority it doesn't exist. Van Galen (2000), in her article, "Education and Class" sums up the lack of economic mobility in the US:

> Most working class children become working class adults; most middle class children retain the advantages of middle-class life into adulthood; many poor children 'rise' no higher than the working class (Marshall, Swift, & Robert, 1997; Mayer, 1997; Miller & Kastberg, 1995; Zimmerman, 1992). Mobility for males in the United States is among the least fluid of all the democractic capitalist countries (Marshal, Swift, & Robert, 1997). (Van Galen, 2000, p. 2)

Van Galen went on to report that when academic ability is identical (i.e., same high school GPA), those from the middle class are far more likely— fifty percent more likely in some comparative studies— than those from the poor and working class to graduate from four-year colleges [17]. Also, Paulsen and St. John (2002) found in their study on college costs and college choice "that poor and working-class students were more likely to earn A grades [in high school], but aspired to substantially lower levels of postsecondary education attainment" (p. 202). There are systemic barriers that can prevent working class upward mobility, including political, economic, and class factors that prevent many working-class students from choosing liberal arts learning. My own experience taught me that a liberal arts education has the power to inspire individuals to question the social conditions that create

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[17] Van Galen (2000) reports upon a review of the National Center of Educational Statistics that "only twenty-five percent of high-achieving high school students from the lowest SES quartile had completed a college degree within eight years of graduation," compared with seventy-four percent of their high-achieving peers from the highest SES quartile (p. 4). See also Sewall and Shah (1969).

such dictums (i.e., liberal arts is for the elite and vocational education is for the rest of us) that are squarely the outcomes of a class-stratified society. Adult education scholar Peter Jarvis (1993) concurs:

> Once non-vocational adult education is crudely viewed as an interest-based leisure time pursuit it becomes more difficult for individuals, especially those who are at the lower end of the social spectrum, to use education as a vehicle for self-achievement. (p. 120-121)

The degree candidates with who I work are challenging the notion of liberal arts as the exclusionary turf of the wealthy and middle class. Every day I work with working-class men and woman, who, after a full day's work and family responsibilities, still look for what Harold Blooms calls "more difficult" pleasures. I came to my doctoral research to "unearth" the stories of Harvard Extension School students' educational journeys and challenge the much agreed upon belief that liberal arts learning is (1) not an adult education concern and (2) is solely an elitist, leisure time pursuit. Third, I came to learn about the possible uplifting consequences of an affordable, open-enrollment, top-tier institution not tracking working-class students away, but toward a four-year liberal arts education as well as the possible limitations. Indeed, there may be hidden injures that await working-class adult students after they enter an open-enrollment, four-year liberal arts degree programs at an elite university.

D. A Neglected Research Site: *My desire to understand the Harvard Extension School student experience*

I cannot deny that as the Director of Undergraduate Degree Programs, I have developed a passionate curiosity about the students with whom I work each day and that is why I chose to do research in my own "backyard" (Creswell, 1998)[18]. Bolstering my choice is the fact that there are few studies on adult students who attend elite (top-tier) continuing

education programs. The low number of research studies is not surprising given the fact that there are so few programs of this kind in the US. I contend that the uniqueness of the program is precisely why we should want to know more about this adult education experience. I believe that Harvard Extension School illuminates multiple issues that take place and reveal themselves at the intersections of class and adult liberal arts education that can't be found at most other institutions. Harvard is one of the most elite institutions of higher education in the country. Harvard Extension School, however, is similar to a community college because it offers an open-enrollment program that asks reasonable tuition ($500 per undergraduate course).[19] Students are not admitted to the degree program based on past academic performance, SAT scores, or letters of recommendation. At Harvard Extension School, students are admitted on their demonstrated ability to do well in three Harvard Extension School courses[20]. It is *non-*elite Harvard.

As already noted, much has been written about how the standard academic hurdles (high tuition with limited financial aid, necessity of a high GPA, a high SAT score, and exemplary [of a certain genre] letters of recommendation) are used by more traditional higher educational institutions to track many working-class students away from four-year bachelor of liberal arts programs and toward two-year vocational community colleges (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Hassan & Reynolds, 1987; Brint & Karabel, 1989; Karen, 1991; Shaw & London, 1995; Lavin & Hyllegard, 1996; Levine & Nidiffer, 1996; Lemann, 1999; Soliday, 1999). Critical theorist Ira Shor (1987), a leading investigator of the tracking system,

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[18] A discussion on my insider/outsider researcher status is in the methods section.
[19] The Harvard Extension School offers the lowest tuition of the private, adult continuing education programs in the Boston-area and is competitively priced with state institutions.
[20] The Harvard Extension School is an open enrollment program, so anyone can pay the fee and take courses. Students interested in the undergraduate degree program must take one required expository writing course and two other liberal arts courses in any area they wish (e.g., history, government, psychology, or English). To be admitted students must earn three grades of B- or higher and their overall GPA can't go below 2.50.

places hope in adult liberal arts education, for he believes that it presents an alternative route

for adult working-class students:

> Many working adults who could not afford the time or money for full-time
> attendance will now find themselves able to add academic study space to their lives.
> This can lead to unpredictable critical and creative growth on an even larger scale
> than facilitated through full-time matriculation on a two-year campus. Because
> schooling through adult education makes smaller demands on your time and money,
> and because it is a form of study less ruled by careerism, you can get into the work
> with less anxiety, less vocational interference of thought, and more voluntary
> enthusiasm. [Adult education] provides more opportunities for intellectual growth.
> (Shor, 1987, p. 39-40)

Harvard Extension School is a part-time, four-year, liberal arts degree with "less vocational

interference." It is not tracking students away, but toward, a four-year, elite, liberal arts

education. Within it, the potential for "unpredictable critical and creative growth" that Shor

imagines reveals itself. However, we simply do not know enough about this program's (or

other similar programs') reported effects on adult students' lives. My research is an attempt

to fill this research gap.

What we do know is that no matter how open adult education reports to be,

historically adult education, as Courtney (1992) reminds us, is more like a "club, of moderate

to high exclusivity" (p. 5-6) where the typical socioeconomic background is middle class.

Equal-opportunity adult education has the potential to offer "unpredictable critical and

creative growth" (Shor, 1987) but, as statistics confirm, adult educators need to do more

than simply open the doors to students not accustomed to walking in. We have to

interrogate critically the middle-class culture, practices, and politics that prevent higher

working-class student participation in adult education and higher rates of graduation from

adult education programs, particularly four-year liberal arts programs. Mariana (1997), a

higher education scholar, warns that the majority of working-class students, even if they walk

in through open doors, will have difficulty penetrating the ironclad walls of academe. They

will be asked to change (conform), while the university and its predominately middle-class

values about learning, writing, and absorbing canonical knowledge stay the same.

> The university doesn't change; the knowledge and work that is most valued by the
> university doesn't change because there is no equally valued place for working class
> experience within the public domain of the academy. (Mariana, 1997, p. 4)

Adult educators need to learn about the subjective meaning working-class students

make of their liberal arts education experience, making available to scholars, teachers,

policymakers the experiences of those working-class students who have negotiated their

class background through the open, middle-class door, made a place for themselves, and

successfully earned their undergraduate degrees. We need to know about the changes that

had to take place during their transitions from non-participants to degree earners, for they

likely run a wide and illuminating gamut. We need to understand their experiences in order

to do more to ensure that larger numbers of less-privileged students enter, stay, and succeed.

E. A Neglected Interest in Stories: *My desire to understand the meaning behind the experience of
earning a liberal arts degree as a working-class, adult student*

Much of what we know about adult students has been gleaned through surveys.

While survey data provides broad indications of adult students' motivations or adult

education outcomes, the field needs to learn more about the meanings behind the decisions

to participate in adult education and the meanings of entire educational journeys. The desire

to understand meaning is what distinguishes the qualitative researcher from her quantitative

sister. When we learn the meaning behind choices— not just the choices themselves— we

learn about the beliefs, values, and life circumstances that come into play when adults make

the choice to pursue higher education and earn their undergraduate degrees. A focus on

meaning leads to complex understandings of human behavior. Adult education researcher

Tobias (1998) points to the lack of qualitative research on working class adult students:

> Very little sociologically informed research has been done to investigate the historical
> and biographical processes through which class, gender, race, and other forces serve
> to structure the post-compulsory learning and educational patterns, experience,
> interest, views and perspectives of adults from working class backgrounds. (p. 121)

While the qualitative research is not vast, it is rich (two prominent examples are Luttrell,

1997 and West, 1996), for it replaces wide-angel camera shots on adult students' experience

with close-ups. By focusing on the personal stories behind students' decisions to pursue

higher education and also the meanings they give to their journeys toward degrees, we can

expand or even call into question conclusions drawn from quantitative data.[21] As adult

educator and qualitative researcher West (1995) states:

> Without the level of detail provided, crucial parts of the story, and therefore
> potential theoretical understanding, would be lost. The concern for mass
> generalization, and use of large numbers for statistical manipulation, produces
> knowledge about human motives and actions, which fails to address the complexity
> of individual lives either in their uniqueness or their commonality. (p. 152)

I chose a qualitative research approach because I wanted to hear, understand, and share the

complicated life stories that go into working-class, adult students' decisions to return to

school and earn liberal arts degrees.

In addition the majority of adult education research has focused on participation

(Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Indeed, the survey research in this area is so immense that one

adult educator has termed it a "preoccupation" (Harré Hindermarsh & Davies, 1995). While

I, too, am interested in the transition from non-participant to adult education participant, I

am also interested in the meaning of the undergraduate journey from non-participant to

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[21] In fact, West (1995) notes that the decision to check off job advancement on surveys could be motivated by
a need to confirm to society's expectation of learners, "mirroring, in their responses, the rationalization for

adult education participant to *degree earner.* I want to know more about adult, working-class students' liberal arts entire learning careers. Finally, I want to understand their learning careers within the fuller, social context of adult students' personal and professional lives, including their meanings of education learned in childhood. Very few adult education researchers have taken this more sociological[22], less psychological approach, even though for the past twenty years there have been calls from adult education scholars for more qualitative, sociological, life-story research. For example, in 1982, adult educator and scholar, Rockhill attempted to galvanize adult educators to do more qualitative research that includes a life-story approach "where educational participation is considered within the broader context of learning, and learning viewed as embedded in the life-world" (p. 3).

F. Conclusion to the Introduction: *Learning and sharing "something"*

I came to do research on the space where adult education, liberal art learning, and working class concerns intersect for it has the potential to offer many working-class students like Louis (see Prologue) the opportunity to share their stories, for I felt— in my bones— that they would teach us much about the value of learning-for-learning's-sake, particularly in our learn-to-earn climate. This feeling was confirmed during my first interview with my first research participant. Wendy is a forty-one year old former executive secretary and Katherine Gibbs graduate, who is now a Harvard *alumna* and a Master's Degree candidate at New York University. She shared: "Harvard Extension School is such an oasis from the learn-to-earn climate of adult education. That's one of reasons why I came and stayed to earn my degree."

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educational participation most dominant in the wider culture" (p. 135). The more evidence that adults return to school for job-advancement the more adults will choose job-advancement as their reported motivation.
[22] Merriam and Caffarella (1991) define a sociological perspective as one that views adult education decisions and experiences as having "less to do with needs and motives than with position in society and the social experience that have shaped [adults'] lives" (p. 95). They call for more research of this type to balance the preponderance of psychological based research (Merriam and Caffarella, 1999).

Educational philosopher Maxine Greene (1988, 1990) considers working-class adults like Wendy to be like Melville's "water-gazers"; adults who are "imagining something better and more liberating for themselves" (1988, p. 9). Greene believes that working-class adults who choose to return to school, particularly for a liberal arts education, are in Walker Percy's words "onto something" (Percy, as cited in Green, 1990, p. 40). I came to doctoral study to learn and share with readers what that something is.

Chapter II. Literature Review: A Historical, Philosophical, and Qualitative "Epistemological Dispatch" on the Adult, Liberal Arts, Working-Class Student Experience

> When you write, you lay out a line of words. The line of words is a minor's pick, a wood carver's gouge, a surgeon's probe. You wield it, and it digs a path you follow. Soon you find yourself deep in new territory. Is it a dead end, or have you located the real subject? You will know tomorrow or this time next year. You make the path bodily and follow if fearfully. You go where the path leads. At the end of the path, you find a box canyon. You hammer out reports, dispatch bulletins. The writing has changed, in your hands, and in a twinkling, from an expression of notions to an epistemological tool.
>
> Annie Dillard (1989), *The Writing Life*

A. A Brief History of Adult Education in the US: *A movement from liberal arts education for the masses to professional education for the middle class*

1. Finding my intellectual soulmates across the pond

Readied with my personal and professional "bones" that brought me to doctoral study, I began a literature search on the adult, liberal arts, working-class student experience in the US; more specifically I was interested in reviewing qualitative studies on the meaning of liberal arts education from adult educators' perspectives and adult students' perspectives, particularly those from the working class. I found very few sources. Now, an under-researched topic is usually a doctoral student's dream, but I was worried. Was my research interest just an idiosyncratic concern devoid of broader appeal, value, or consequence? I considered changing directions, but I couldn't turn away from Louis's story or my own.

So, I expanded my literature search to include non-US sources in hopes of finding a few related research studies. To my surprise I found numerous research studies on the adult, liberal arts, working-class student experience, as well as theoretical material written by adult educators on the meaning of adult liberal arts education, all of which originated from the UK. In fact, I stumbled upon an ideological debate about the value of adult liberal arts

learning for working-class students in the UK (see Jarvis, 1985; Lawson, 1982, 1998;

Thompson, 1982) that was similar in intensity (but not content[23]) to the culture wars debate

in the US (see Introduction). I found my intellectual soulmates across the pond. My

surprise and excitement was quickly replaced with puzzlement. While my research interests

no longer felt idiosyncratic, they did feel un-American. I needed to find out why there was a

scholarly interest in the adult, liberal arts, working-class student experience in the UK, yet so

little interest in the US. The answer, I soon realized, lay buried in adult education history.

Adult education in the US and the UK developed along different trajectories. Kett

(1994) was the first of many adult education historians who confirmed the existence of the

distinct historical paths. He discovered that prior to 1900 adult education in the US and the

UK began on similar roads, but due to deeply ingrained cultural assumptions about

intellectualism, egalitarianism, and classism the fields developed in contrary ways:

> British and American adult education fertilized each other. Then in the mid-1890s
> began to move in opposite directions. In the early 1900s the contours of adult
> education in Britain were shaped by two forces alien to the United States: a tradition
> of restrictive access to higher education, and the allegiance of intellectuals to the
> working class. American educators preferred to address the public rather than the
> working class, and they assumed that higher education in the United States was
> inherently if not always actually democratic. (p. 444)

Wanting to learn more about the historical forces that created the fork in the road, I turned

to the history of adult education in the US in order to understand its preference for classless

"public" education and to grasp more fully the modern-day consequence of the distinct

paths: that is, one country's ongoing commitment to adult, liberal arts education for the

working class and one country's modern-day commitment to lifelong professional adult

education for the middle class. The following is the result of my investigation constructed

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[23] The debate is between "conservatives" who believe a liberal arts education is a great benefit to working-class
students and "radicals" who believe that a liberal arts education stifles political action. The debate is discussed

from the work of adult education historians. It isn't a full-fledged, comparative historical investigation of adult education in the US and the UK, for that is beyond the scope of my research and would leave little room to explore the life stories of current day adult, liberal arts, working-class students— my primary concern. However, I paint a historical frame that adds shape and depth to my research in critical ways. I wanted to become familiar with early 20th century debates about the meaning of adult liberal arts education to broaden and deepen my understanding of 21st century Harvard Extension School graduates' meanings of their liberal arts education.

2. The birth of adult education in the US: *Privileging liberal arts learning*

Adults coming together to share knowledge has always been a part of the American landscape, but the late-18th and early 19th centuries witnessed a more organized adult education movement that took the form of debating clubs (e.g., Benjamin Franklin's Junto Club), mutual improvement societies (e.g., mechanics institutes), public lectures (e.g., lyceums), and summer retreats (e.g., Chautauquas) (House, 1991; Kett, 1994; Knowles, 1994; Stubblefield & Kean, 1994). But it wasn't until the 20th century that adult education became a commonly used term and field of study (Stubblefield & Kean, 1994). It is during the period between 1915 and 1926 that professional organizations were founded, conferences were held, research studies were funded, and books were published on this newly emerging field of study.

Specifically, in 1915 the National University Extension Association (NUEA) was founded (Knowles, 1962). NUEA represented the growing practice (imported from the UK) of US universities "extending" their resources to the local community. The Harvard Extension School, founded in 1909, is a product of this early 20th century initiative. The

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in detail in the next section, Philosophical *Investigation of Adult Liberal Arts Learning*.

Extension School was established primarily to provide continuing education of

schoolteachers. Kett (1994) points out that high school enrollment increased from "less

than a quarter of a million in 1890 to nearly 4,000,000 in 1926" (p. 285). The marriage

between teachers needing liberal arts training and universities needing to justify their public

services to taxpayers without sacrificing their "academic integrity" was a perfect match. The

following is an excerpt from the first annual report of the Harvard Extension School that

articulates the teacher-education motivations, as well as concerns for an "adequately guarded

degree":

> The opportunity and need of providing instruction for the community outside the
> walls of the University, and especially for the body of school-teachers in and near
> Boston, has occupied the Faculty of Arts and Sciences for several years, partly in
> consequence of the earnest efforts of a committee of Boston public school teachers.
> The outcome of this is that there is now in operation in Boston a kind of extension
> college, giving courses which lead to an adequately guarded degree. (1910)

Soon after the establishment of the Harvard Extension School and the National

University Extension Association, the American Association of Adult Education (AAAE)—

the premier adult education association— was founded. Supported by grants from the

Carnegie Corporation, AAAE was established in 1926 as a clearinghouse of adult education

literature and research (Stubblefield, 1988). AAAE published the *Journal of Adult Education* as

well as "a score of important studies on topics ranging from university extension to libraries

and correspondence schools, the use of leisure and the habits of readers, community drama,

and parent education" (Kett, 1994, p. 334). Also in 1926 the first book on adult education

in the US appeared: Eduard Lindeman's, *The Meaning of Adult Education*, which is still widely

read by adult educators and considered one of the most influential books on adult education

theory.

In the early 20th century, when theories of adult education were germinating, all major theorists privileged liberal arts and nonvocational learning goals. Adult education historian Kett (1994) concludes that AAAE governors "shared an aversion to vocationalism" (p. 336), while Day (1992) concludes: "The liberal arts education of adults was a primary concern of the AAAE leadership [many of whom], viewed liberal adult education as a vehicle for both changing society and developing more mature minds" (p. 18). Adult education historian Stubblefield (1988) categorized the work of the pioneering 20th century adult educators into three ideological rubrics, all three representing nonvocational learning goals: (1) adult education as diffusion of knowledge (public access to scientific knowledge), (2) adult education as liberal arts learning (critical thinking, individual enlightenment, and social change through the canon), and (3) adult education as social education (group situated learning versus individual education). I was particularly interested in learning more about the work of the adult educators who fell into Stubblefield's liberal arts rubric.

Main supporters of early to mid-20th century adult liberal arts education were Everett Dean Martin (critical thinking, anti-propaganda advocate), Robert Hutchins and Mortimer Adler (Great Books advocates), and Alexander Meiklejohn and John Walker Powell (social change through Great Books advocates). Day (1992) adds Morse Cartwright, Mary Ely, and Dorothy Canfield Fisher to the list of forgotten pioneering 20th century adult education theorists who privileged the liberal arts. All these thinkers and writers came of age during the birth decade of adult education and cut their adult-education teeth on early to mid-20th century beliefs about the value of education.

It appears, like today, there were problems defining adult liberal arts learning. Martin, Hutchins and Adler, Meiklejohn, and Powell all had distinct beliefs about the value of liberal arts learning. In brief, Martin, whose book *The Meaning of Liberal Education* was

published in 1926 the same year as Lindeman's *The Meaning of Adult Education* (mentioned above), believed that true liberal arts learning was lifelong and had no instrumental end. Earning degrees or even acquiring knowledge of Western civilization could not be the goals of liberal arts learning. Rather, liberal arts learning through the Western canon trained the mind to make reasoned judgments, to shun propaganda, and to elevate tastes:

> Education may be said to be achieving its purposes in a nation to the extent that quiet reflection supplants superficial cleverness, and that minds with patience and grace and breadth of outlook, with indifference to fads and catchwords, and with respect for excellence, supplant the "go-getter", "the movie-fan", the sensation monger and the narrow sectarian. (Martin, 1926, p. 310)

Hutchins and Adler were committed to making available the best that had been thought and said— the Western canon— to the common man. They anticipated that workers with increased leisure time would want to (and should) occupy their time with "higher" tastes than "sleeping, watching movies, and driving on the highway" (Stubblefield, 1988, p. 87). Moreover, the "common man" should have access to and participate in the "Great Conversation" of Western civilization (Stubblefield, 1988).

Meiklejohn and Powell used the Great Books in the adult education discussion groups, not because of their abstract greatness or to grant the masses access to the Western culture, but because the books would help adults understand current civic problems and encourage them to take political action. They considered these books great because they had this quality. "Using books as instruments of intelligence emphasized the mind at work: books were used as a person solving a problem" (Stubblefield, 1988, p. 105). While the meanings of adult liberal arts education varied, the purpose did not. Liberal arts adult education in the early 20th century was education for democracy.

3. Ensuring democracy's survival: *Egalitarianism*

Meikeljohn, an experimental adult educator and outspoken critic of American capitalism, believed that liberal arts education should have a political agenda (Stubblefied, 1988).   Here, he sums up adult education's role in promoting democracy: "In so far as we can educate the people, in so far as we can bring people to an understanding of themselves and of their world, we can have a democracy. In so far as we cannot do that, we have control by a few" (Meikeljohn, 1924, as cited in Taylor, Rockhill & Fieldhouse, 1985, p. 130). Meikeljohn was not alone. Indeed, the majority of 20th century adult educators supported nonvocational learning centered on the belief that adult education's primary mission should be helping citizens to think critically and thus, to ensure democracy's survival. The tone was decidedly egalitarian. Adult education was not conceived as a vehicle to train a talented subset for positions of leadership; all were considered potential leaders[24]. Adult education was needed to ensure the successful transition of power from the elite to the masses, particularly in the post-WWI era where democracy was being tested throughout the world.

For example, Schied (1995) praises Kett (1994) for the historical accuracy of concluding in his book, *The Pursuit of Knowledge Under Difficulty*, that the establishment of the New School of Social Research (a socially aware experiment in adult education) in 1919 was in one respect a response by "liberal intellectuals (Everett Dean Martin, Eduard Lindeman, James Harvey Robinson, Charles Beard, and Will Durant) to popularize adult liberal education as a way to combat the growing threat to democracy posed by society during the inter-war years" (p. 233). Taylor, Rockhill, and Fieldhouse (1985) make a slightly more colorful assessment: "Messianic in its fervor, the liberal education for adults was eagerly turned to as an alternative to guns in making the world safe for democracy" (p. 13).

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[24] While the adult education literature points to an ideology of "all," we have to view this belief through the lens of institutionalized sexism and racism that was a shaping force of early 20th century culture.

While admittedly eager to praise the early 20th century adult educators for such enlightened thinking by connecting liberal arts learning to democratic ends, I now step back and consider the broader historical context that informed the educational theories of my adult-education colleagues from the past.

The early 20th century was a period of widespread interest in learning, particularly adult learning. In prior decades educational reformers were consumed with establishing and then reforming public education for children (Taylor, Rockhill, & Fieldhouse, 1985). In the 1920s adults' "desire for knowledge was so intense and widespread that it could be compared to the mass hunger for learning in the thirteenth century" (Stubblefield, 1988, p. 73-74). The desire for knowledge was fueled by unparalleled availability of learning opportunities. Between the late-19th and early 20th century adult learning opportunities were a growth industry. The number of college and universities, graduate schools (including PhD programs), evening schools, correspondent schools, public lectures, summer schools, workers' colleges, libraries, and museums grew exponentially, as did published books (hard cover and paperback), newspapers, and magazines (Knowles, 1994).

Amidst the expanding opportunities for individual learning were opportunities for collective action. The suffrage movement spurred women's rights debates. African-Americans, inspired by the Harlem Renaissance and national associations such as the NAACP, were focused on racial pride, social justice, and equal rights (Knowles, 1994). Increased industrialization, immigration, strikes, and great income disparities between owners and workers spurred workers' rights debates that included discussions of communism and socialism (Kornbluh, 1987). The Settlement House and social work movements spurred debates about the rights of the poor (Knowles, 1994). While all of these movements were critical pieces of the liberal arts adult education puzzle, the Progressive

Movement championed by John Dewey played a leading role. While Dewey's work centered on childhood education, he was no stranger to the adult education movement. He was one the founders of the New School for Research and his book, *Democracy and Education* (1916), was a powerful influence on early 20th century adult education thinkers (Stubblefield, 1988).

A hallmark of Dewey's work and of the Progressive Movement in general was the goal of turning schools into participatory democratic institutions in order to close the gap between the practice of education and the practice of democracy (Wirth, 1988). While Dewey was interested in reforming schools to include vocational curricula as a way to engage learners about the meaning of work, he was against the early 20th century vocational-education campaign called the "social efficiency" movement (Sherman, 1988). Social efficiency advocates, influenced by the devastating effects of the 1893 depression, wanted to test and sort students according to "natural" abilities for specialized vocational education to ensure the successful and smooth functioning of the industrial economy (Wirth, 1988). Stereotypical and classist notions about the working class would hover over the testing procedure to create two sorting tracks: vocational education solely for the (poor and) working classes and liberal education for the (middle and) upper classes.

The following quote represents Dewey's (1915) sentiments about the meaning of vocational education. He believed that vocational education should not be used as a sifter to create two educational tracks. He believed that education should be open to all and not specialized for distinct populations. Most important, vocational education ought not be training for the current market place, but an opportunity to reflect on the meaning of work and possibly empower students to redefine the organization of work in the US:

> The kind of vocational education which I am interested in is not one which will "adapt" workers to the existing industrial regime; I am not sufficiently in love with the regime for that. It seems to me that the business of all who would not be educational time-savers is to strive for a kind of vocational education which will first

alter the existing industrial system, and ultimately transform it. (Dewey, 1915, as cited in Wirth, 1988, p. 60)

Adult education for democracy was an outgrowth, then, of the Progressive Movement and its "open to all" philosophy. Moreover, increased learning opportunities and a climate of collective action propelled by oppressed groups voicing their rights for full participation in US society and its political process fueled the egalitarian ideology of adult education. Taylor, Rockhill, and Fieldhouse's (1985) characterization of the connection between adult education and democracy as "messianic," however, alludes to a less progressive side of early 20th century adult education philosophy.

4. Ensuring democracy's survival: *Elitism and anti-worker sentiment*

The climate from the turn of the 19th to the 20th century was a hotbed of progressive political debates and filled with unprecedented opportunities for individual learning. It was also the combination of these factors that led to conservative concerns about (1) what the masses were choosing to learn and (2) how they would choose to vote (Kornbluh, 1987; Stubblefield, 1988;Taylor, Rockhill, & Fieldhouse, 1985). Twentieth century adult educators' ideology cannot be viewed through a lens of apolitical egalitarianism, but rather against a historical backdrop that contained both progressive and powerful conservative tenets.

My investigation uncovered a conservative adult liberal arts education philosophy that was driven, at least in part, by fear: fear about post-WWI socialist and communist expansion, fear about growing immigration from communist and socialist sympathetic countries, and fear about downtrodden and working class use of leisure time (Kornbluh, 1987; Stubblefield, 1988;Taylor, Rockhill, & Fieldhouse, 1985). These manifest fears themselves in concerns about the future of democracy at the hand of "extremists" (read: socialist) and the survival of "American" culture against the tidal wave of immigration. There

is no better example of this conservative fear than the imprisonment of Socialist Party leader Eugene Debs and "the many others who were imprisoned or forced to leave the country under [the unprecedented usage of] the Espionage Act" (Taylor, Rockhill, & Fieldhouse, 1985, p. 182). The Red Scare and xenophobia were clear and present in early 20th century life. Simultaneously, this was a time when politically conscious workers' education was marked by the founding of hundreds of workers' schools or labor colleges around the country.

The mission of workers' schools, at least initially (1900-1930)[25], was to raise the consciousness of the working class and prepare its members to assist in bringing about a change in the social order through active union membership (Dwyer, 1977). This was accomplished, interestingly enough, through liberal arts social science subjects like economics, history, and political science (Kornbluh, 1987)[26]. The workers' schools ran the political spectrum from the far left to center. For example, the Workers' School of the Communist Party was steeped in leftist politics, while Wisconsin State Summer School for Women Workers viewed social change as a possible by-product, but not central to the program's mission (Dwyer, 1977). A few of the early 20th century pioneering adult education theorists (e.g., Lindeman, Overstreet, Beard, Robinson) worked as lecturers and consultants at workers' colleges (Kornbluh, 1987). But workers' education and mainstream adult education never fully meshed.

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[25] The period following (1930s-1950s) is marked by the movement away from the politically electric social change goals that were the heart of workers' education and the soul of the adult education for social change movement. During this time workers' education became labor education and it moved away from education in the social sciences for social change and toward instrumentalist, union specific "tool" (Dwyer, 1977) training. Capitalists' interest and workers' interest became one and the same, so there was very little room for the political potency of anti-capitalistic, socialist, or social change thinking. Taylor, Rockhill, and Fieldhouse (1985) agree: "A critical turning point in workers' education came in the Depression years: not in terms of posing an economic alternative to capitalism, but in the acceptance of the argument that the well-being of the workers is dependent upon the well-being of the capitalism" (p. 175).

[26] This harks back to Chapter One, *Introduction* when late 20th-century critical theorists Bowles and Gintis (1976) and Shor (1987) claim that the liberal arts has political as well as academic "transcendent possibilities" (Shor, 1987, p. 27).

The majority of adult educators where unreceptive to workers' education because they viewed it as having a specialized, rather than general public, audience. Additionally, mainstream adult educators viewed workers' education as propaganda designed to bring about a specific political action, and hence incompatible with adult education's general and non-utilitarian goals. For example, liberal arts adult education advocate Everett Dean Martin believed vehemently that adult education specifically for workers, no matter what the curriculum, was not education at all. First, he believed that education could not have any ulterior motive, such as the political consciousness raising of the working class. Second, like many adult education theorists of his time, Martin believed that the "working class did not have a culture apart from the rest of America" (Stubblefield, 1988, p. 78). The majority of adult educators at this time were steeped in the mythology of a classless America. Workers' educators were equally unreceptive to mainstream adult education's mission because it lacked class consciousness. Schied (1993) uses the following quote from a leader in the 20th century workers' education movement to attest to the tension: "There can be nothing but war between the Adult Education movement, with its 'civic' aims, and the Workers' Education Movement, with its class mission" (Schied, 1993, p. 155).

The claim here is that adult education was education open to all and not specialized for any particular group, especially a group defined by the "anti-American" concept of class identity. Taylor, Rockhill, and Fieldhouse (1985) claim that because of this atmosphere there was little egalitarian or progressive thinking behind early 20th century liberal arts adult educators' concern for democracy. They viewed the ideology solely as means of social control: "The premise is that the masses will be less unruly if they know how to exercise their vote responsibility, and understand American democracy and culture, as well as the perils of authoritarian, socialism, or communism" (p. 128). They use the following quote

from Harry Overstreet, an early 20th century adult educator, to underscore their point. In

their estimation, Overstreet was the only adult education theorist in the US who saw the

ideology of education for democracy in its true, social-control light:

> We virtuous adult educators mean to save the civic souls of these rapscallion
> neighbors of ours. Adult education has too much of this soul-saving citizenry. Come
> therefore, ye of little education, and we shall make you into the hope of democracy.
> (Overstreet, 1938 as cited in Taylor, Rockhill, & Fieldhouse, 1985, p. 159)

Indeed, many other adult education historians agree that interest in liberal arts adult

education for the masses was at least partially rooted in fear about propaganda's power to

corrupt the minds of the working class who may decide to pursue socialist-inspired political

means to achieve their fair-share-of-the-pie ends (Kett, 1994; Kornbluh, 1987; Stubblefield,

1985).

It appears that many early 20th century adult educators were more interested in

educating the general public than workers specifically because of their commitment to the

mythology of a classless society in the US (Stubblefield, 1988; Taylor, Rockhill, &

Fieldhouse, 1985). But, paradoxically, they were centrally concerned with the working

class— adult educators wanted to uplift their minds and, possibly, tame their politics. The

history of adult education in the early 20th century is truly a history of adult, working-class

education. In fact, adult education historian Schied (1993) advocates pushing the definitional

boundaries of workers' education in the US beyond labor colleges and union membership

training. Schied (1993) wants historians to take a wider look at the history of adult education

in the US and suggests that the education of the working class (versus workers' education)

should live at the center of the any historical analysis of adult education:

> The roots of the adult education movement are to be found in the beginnings of
> industrialization. Adult education is but one cultural response to the new industrial
> society. Workers' education as a means to control laboring people as well as a means
> to liberate them, becomes the focus. (Schied, 1993, p. 163)

One can conclude that 20th century adult educators were preoccupied with the effects of industrialization on working-class life (e.g., increased leisure time and propaganda facilitating a working-class political consciousness). Taylor, Rockhill, and Fieldhouse's (1985) warning about the elitist and anti-worker side to adult education for democracy illuminates the multiple and contradictory social forces behind this goal. But their claim that the early 20th century adult education theorists were *solely* interested in social control is simplistic. Early 20th century adult education liberal arts theorists embodied a continuum of sentiments that include messianic social control leanings, but also progressive, egalitarian, and even social change thinking that embraced socialist ideology. Joseph Hart, Harry Overstreet, and Eduard Lindeman, as well as Alexander Meiklejohn and John Walker Power are examples of adult educators who were not interested in social control; they fall squarely in the social change camp (Stubblefield, 1985).

Whether they were diffusion of knowledge, liberal arts, or social education theorists, early 20th century adult educators all agreed that nonvocational education was the only true form of adult education. They did not consider job-related education to be adult education at all:

> The first generation theorists, for all their differences, identified nonvocational adult roles as the core problem of adult education to address. The vocational training and educational needs were, they believed, adequately served through existing programs. (Stubblefied, 1988, p. 3)

Stubblefield (1988) goes on to state that "the reverse is true today. How to equip adults for their place in the economic sector now engages the greatest interest" (p. 4). Even Taylor, Rockhill, and Fieldhouse (1985), critics of adult liberal arts education in the US, lament that at the very least the early 20th century was a time "when content and method were seriously debated" as opposed to today where "marketing values" dominate adult education debates (1985, p. 168-69).

5. Adult education priorities today: *Professional training for the middle class*

Early 20th century adult educators in the US were responding to the needs of a growing immigrant population, industrialization, and fears about democracy's stability in the post-WWI world. In addition they were informed by progressive thinking, unprecedented learning opportunities (e.g., libraries, museums, and correspondence schools), and debates about women's, workers', and African-American's rights as well as rights for the poor. Against this intense transformation of sociopolitical roles of the US populace and questions regarding government responsibilities, adult educators wanted an educated citizenry to ensure democracy's (and also *capitalism's*) survival. This created a paradoxical mix of egalitarian and elitist concerns that centered not on the working lives of the industrial masses, but their personal and political lives.

Today, post-WWII and post-Soviet collapse, socialism as a viable political threat (or alternative) to American capitalism has all but been stamped out, adult educators are far less worried about anti-capitalistic concerns and far more interested in adults' professional lives, particularly efficiently training the adult work force to buttress the US economy against growing global competition. Sherman (1988), a vocational education historian, referring back to the early 20th century debate between Progressive Movement and social efficiency advocates, states: "For all practical purposes, the debate was won by the social efficiency advocates. Practical needs won out over [progressive] theory" (p. 65). Adult educators now respond to competitive global markets and the constant vocational retooling that global competition has as its signature. Heaney (1993), an adult education historian and theorist,

agrees with Sherman, and claims that adult education today is rooted in a post-WWII "cult of efficiency"[27]:

> Industrialization, the growth of the military in two World Wars, and the expansion of government bureaucracy demanded a new role for adult education. Americans needed the knowledge and skills to operate competitively and efficiently the machinery of state. In this new economy of adult learning, content was no longer at issue. The content was reduced to social or workplace environment to which the adult learner was to be adapted. (p. 2)

Collins (1991), an adult education scholar articulates the cult of efficiency as, " a growing, and seductive, tendency to make more and more areas of human endeavor (the practical, moral, and political projects of everyday life) amenable to measurement and techno-bureaucratic control according to what is invoked as a scientific approach" (p. 2). Adult education did not escape the "cult." Heaney (1996) and others, like Brookfield (1989), Collins (1991), Day (1992) and Grace (2000), document how adult educators, craving scholarly legitimacy, fueled a philosophical shift away from thinking about what adults *should* learn and toward thinking about *how* adults learn. Adult education devised its own andragogical (adult-centered, as different from child-centered) pedagogy in order to differentiate, specialize, document, teach, and then certify individuals in the distinct process of adult learning. There is no better example of this shift than the replacement of the father of adult education, Eduard Lindeman, who advocated social change and authored the first book on adult education, *The Meaning of Adult Education (1926)*, with the modern day father of adult education, Malcolm Knowles, whose major work is the *Modern Practice of Adult Education (1970)*.

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[27] Heaney was quick to point to Myles Horton's Highlander School as a shining example of an adult educational project that was not affected by the cult of efficiency and remains a true testament to adult education for social change.

In addition to the cult of efficiency and global competition, scholars point to the GI Bill as a turning point away from adult liberal arts education and toward adult vocational education, for it brought millions of adult students (mostly male) into higher education. At its peak in 1947 fifty percent of all higher education enrollments were veterans (Kett, 1994). Some historians claim that these nontraditional adult learners were far more interested in vocational education than liberal arts education (Winter, McClelland & Stewart, 1981[28]; Whipple, 1967). Adult education historian Whipple (1967) characterizes veterans as "hard-headed and practical about those educational objectives that led toward immediate advantages. Their most pressing objective was vocational, and in overwhelming numbers they worked toward a business school degree" (p. 1). Adult education responded to this market demand. This slant toward vocational education became a concern for some adult education leaders, but not enough to stem the tide[29]. Another factor in the move away from nonvocational, liberal arts education for the working class is that the industrial working class is no longer adult education's main focus. Halsey, Lauder, Brown and Wells (1997) report: "If the industrial working class was the driving force behind social change in the nineteenth and early decades of the twentieth century, it is the middle class who are now seen to

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[28] These authors document a turn away from liberal arts education and toward more vocational and pragmatic goals for *all* of higher education (not just adult education) during the 60s and 70s. They point to the Vietnam War, for many antiwar critics made the connection between "liberal arts education and imperialism" (p. 5), the student protest movement of the 60s, which "heightened distrust and rejection of all forms of elitism, status, and power [particularly Western power]" (p. 6), the 1960s de-schooling movement championed by Ivan Illich that claimed an instrumental conservative agenda behind all higher education, the 1970s recession which "shrank the job market for liberal arts graduates" (p. 7), as well as the influx of nontraditional students into traditional higher education spurred on by the GI Bill (1940s) and other government programs such as Lyndon Johnson's Great Society (1960s).

[29] A byproduct of this concern was the establishment the Center for the Study of Liberal Education for Adults (CSLEA). CSLEA was founded by a group of adult education deans to help combat the growing vocationalism that dominated adult university education course offerings. A former director of CSLEA, James Schwertman (1953), characterized adult education during this period as "pragmatic [and] utilitarian [and] while not anti-liberal largely non-liberal in nature" and in need of outside assistance to stem the tide of professional education (Schwertman, 1953, as cited in Whipple, 1967, p. 2). From 1951 to the late 1960s CSLEA was a "think-tank" for adult liberal arts education (Stubblefield & Keane, 1994), but it lasted only seventeen years, closing its doors in 1968 due to lack of funding. CSLEA's impact on adult education was minimal; a blip on the adult education screen dominated by vocational concerns.

determine the destiny of post-industrial society" (p. 14). They conclude that since the 1970s

the middle class has been experiencing unstable work environments similar to the working

class in previous eras and this has led to increased investment in education for further

credentials to ensure their class position. To support their claim, they point to Bourdieu's

cultural capital theory, which concludes that "academic credentials are essential to the

reproduction of middle-class privilege" (p. 15). In addition they point to Illich and Verne's

political stance that we have become a society of institutionalized lifelong learning founded

on the fear that without constant retooling, job security is impossible to attain. This fear

benefits no one more than adult education providers:

> Professional educators, through the institution of permanent education [adult
> lifelong education], succeed in convincing men [and women] of their permanent
> incompetence. The ultimate success of the schooling instrument is the extension of
> its monopoly, first to all youth, then to every age, and finally to all areas. (Illich &
> Verne, 1976, as cited in Halsey, Lauder, Brown, & Wells, 1997, p. 12)

Adult education in the US, which is dependent on student tuition for survival, is taking

advantage of middle-class post-industrial workplace insecurity by expanding graduate-level

professional education course offerings[30].

I have not offered a complete review of the history of adult education in the US, for,

as I stated earlier, an investigation of that kind is beyond the scope of my research. For my

work it was important for me to understand the larger ideological evolution of adult

education— a movement that began by privileging nonvocational education for the masses

to one that now privileges professional education for the middle class. Also, it was necessary

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[30] The Harvard Extension School with all its liberal arts educational opportunities is also a working example of
this expansion. The Extension School offers one Bachelor of Liberal Arts degree and one Masters of Liberal
Arts degree. However, the Extension School offers nine graduate-level professional education options: seven
certificate programs and two professional masters degree programs. These programs are designed to attract the
middle-class professional with surplus funds and a desire to secure her class position.

for me to grasp the early 20th century debates about the meaning and value of liberal arts adult education, which lived at the crossroads of egalitarian and elitist concerns. Adult educators at this time were committed to democratic participation and against the tracking of the working class solely toward vocational education. Adult liberal arts education was open to all, but often hiding behind this egalitarian philosophy were elitist aims toward social control and a lack of interest in working-class consciousness (Haughey, 1998; Heaney, 1993; Kett, 1994; Lauzon, 2000; Stubblefield, 1988; Taylor, Rockhill, & Fieldhouse, 1985). One result of the turn away from workers' specific education is that today in the US, workers' education is but a small subset of the adult education field (Dwyer, 1977; Kornbluh; Schield, 1993). The same shift did not occur in the UK. In the UK, workers' education and adult education, particularly adult liberal arts education continued as intertwined and complementary learning goals.

6. Adult education in the UK: *A different trajectory*

In the UK the tie between adult education and workers' education remains so strong that the terms are still used interchangeably (Schied, 1989). Moreover, UK workers' education has a deep tradition of liberal arts learning. Kriegel (1990) writes: "The liberal arts [workers'] pedagogical model owes considerably more to English intellectuals and trade unionists than it does to their US counterparts" (p. 242). One of the hallmarks of workers' liberal arts education in the UK was the use of the tutorial system or student-centered discussion format, a particularly respectful pedagogy for adults, for they bring a wealth of life, work, and academic experience into the classroom. Arthur Mansbridge, one of the leaders of the adult liberal arts movement in the UK (and a member of the working class), sums up the discussion format, the student-centeredness, the voluntary nature, and the rigor of the adult liberal arts program in the UK:

> The University Tutorial Class consists of thirty adult men and women, pledged to study for three years, and not to miss a single attendance other than from unavoidable causes, and to write twelve essays in connection with each of the three sessions of twenty-four lessons each; together with one tutor, who must be a fine scholar, and whose main business in life is the development of the subjects with which he deals. The students control the class, the justification for which is that they have devised for themselves regulations which are of greater severity than any which a university would have dreamed of asking them to frame. (Mansbridge, 1912, as cited in Bureau of Current Affairs Discussion Method, Introduction, ¶ 3)

In addition to the tutorial classroom, adult liberal arts education in the UK was concerned with workers' intellectual and political lives. The connection between British university adult education and labor unions during the early 20th century was built of solid material; it was not the tattered thread that represented the connection between adult education and labor unions in the US[31]. Adult educators in Britain ("the Dons") were, in general, eager to prepare workers for their roles in the political intelligentsia and specifically, Britain's Labor Party. In fact, the Workers Education Association (WEA) was established in 1903 to support the ongoing "cooperation between British universities and trade unions" (Kett, 1994, p. 190). While in the US, the majority of adult education leadership lacked interest in workers' education because of their belief in America as a classless society, no such classless mythology exists in the UK. In fact, the reason that workers' education has flourished for so long in the UK is because leaders in adult education acknowledged class stratification. As

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[31] During the first period of workers' education (1900-1930) in the US, mainstream adult educators where unreceptive to workers' education because they viewed it as having a specialized, rather than general public audience. Also they viewed workers' education as propaganda designed to bring about a specific, political action, and hence, incompatible with adult education's general and non-utilitarian goals. Workers' educators were equally unreceptive to mainstream adult education's mission for it lacked class-consciousness. However, social change adult educators (e.g., Lindeman and Overstreet) shared similar views as workers' educators and worked closely with the workers' education movement by teaching at labor colleges and shaping the curriculum. During the first period a thread still connected workers' education to adult education. This thread was cut when labor colleges closed and union leadership became the primary source for workers' education. Union leaders were not interested in liberal arts education, they wanted to provide instrumental education that focused solely on labor laws and regulations. Schied (1989) states that the transition from the first to the second period marks the end of adult education's connection to workers' education as well as its "drift away from social transformation [in the early part of the century] and towards the more functionalist and technocratic purpose [of today]" (p. 329).

Kett (1994) concludes: "The British [education] extension movement would prove far more persistent in courting workers because its leaders knew it had to be" (p. 202). Class as an impediment to upward mobility was openly acknowledged. Moreover, UK union leaders had a less pragmatic view of education than the US leadership (Dwyer, 1977 and Kett, 1994), and hence demanded that their constituents have access to knowledge (e.g., liberal arts subjects) that would make them more effective political leaders for the working class.

But upon closer reflection of adult liberal arts education in the UK, there is an interesting class-stratified twist. Workers did not earn degrees or even college credit after three years of adult liberal arts education; it was a strictly noncredit academic endeavor[32]. As British adult educator, Benn (1992), explains: "Traditionally liberal adult education in Britain has been premised on non-accreditation [and] a British liberal tradition which equates liberal with the freedom from tyranny of examination" (p. 71-72). Yes, enlightenment was in excess, but actual changes in social positions (better jobs through higher education credentials) were still rare opportunities for the working class in the UK.

It appears that the UK's richer and longer tradition of adult liberal education for working-class students is connected to the two cultural differences that adult education historian, Kett (1994), identified (quoted earlier): First, "the allegiance of intellectuals to the working class [i.e., grooming working class adults for political positions in the Labor Party]", and second "a tradition of restrictive access to higher education" (p. 444). The US, with its public school system and Land Grant Universities, provided many more opportunities for access to education for the working class (Goldman, 1995); no such opportunities existed in the UK. As a consequence, adult liberal arts education in the US (which was essentially "extension" education) was always in competition with more pragmatic and less expensive

educational opportunities for workers, so it turned toward more vocational and public service enterprises, for example teacher-education (Kett, 1994). Extension education in UK made no such pragmatic turn. It "retained its orientation toward academic subjects, especially history, literature, and economics" (Kett, 1994, p. 189). The reason for the UK's longer commitment to liberal arts is that, unlike the US, with its numerous adult education opportunities, adult liberal arts education was the only open access opportunity for workers. There was no competition (until the 1960s) and as adult education historian, Goldman (1995), points out in his book, *Dons and Workers: Oxford and Adult Education Since 1850*, the university was free to "foist [a liberal arts dominated] Oxford curriculum onto the working class" (p. 315).

Also, keeping adult liberal arts education for workers in the UK as a noncredit enterprise meant freedom from accountability to university-controlled, degree-granting policies, which permitted adult educators greater academic freedom in curriculum (class-conscious) and pedagogy (student-centered). The unfortunate flip side to this policy is that, as adult education historian, Goldman (1995), points out, UK's noncredit policy leaves the traditional, elite, degree-granting system unchanged:

> Oxford curriculum [was offered to workers] but without degrees at the end: three years of university-standard work in a tutorial class is wonderful for the soul, but it gave no equivalent qualifications. It also allowed British universities to pay scant regard to adult students because structurally, extramural education in association with the WEA, and aimed as a specific group of male workers, did not necessitate any changes in the organization of the university. (p. 315)

Adult education in the US, due to its pragmatic push (see Veblen, 1918), is primarily a credit-bearing and degree- or certificate-earning enterprise. As a result, it must closely adhere to university-controlled policies regarding curriculum (non-class-conscious) and pedagogy (less

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[32] The Open University program in Britain, which leads to degrees, was established in the 1960s and was modeled on the University of Chicago's extension division (Goldman, 1995).

student-centered, more top-down teaching). But unlike the UK system, the traditional, elite, degree-granting higher education system in the US, by having non-traditional students admitted to its degree-granting programs, is transformed. But transformed in what ways, to what extent, and for whose benefit? These are my research concerns.

7. Conclusion: *A Reiteration of the Importance of this Historical Trip*

History made clear to me the progressive as well as duplicitous possibilities of liberal arts adult education. I no longer held naïve assumptions about the essential "goodness" of liberal arts education, but rather understood that liberal arts education that focused on open access, individual enlightenment, and democratic participation, while admirable goals (particularly from a 21st century view of adult education) were deemed incompatible to education for collective class-consciousness. Adult liberal arts education open to all sent an egalitarian, democratic participation, anti-vocational tracking message I applaud, but an anti-worker educational message I question.

Investigation into the history of adult liberal arts education helped me understand why there is much scholarship in the UK about working-class, liberal arts education and little in the US. While adult education in the US began with a liberal arts focus, America's pragmatic push for professional, job-related education soon dominated. Modern-day adult liberal arts educators find a shrinking space amidst human-capital formation and cult-of-efficiency priorities. Additionally, it is difficult for adult educators interested in the socioeconomic context of students to find space for working-class concerns because we are part of a tradition that values the less-politically contentious concept of open to all "general public" education.

My research provided me with more questions about modern-day students' experiences with adult, liberal arts education. Would current students make connections to

the field's ability to encourage their democratic participation and stem the tide of

professional education that lives all around them? Or, and perhaps simultaneously, would

they view the adult, liberal arts education open-to-all philosophy as lacking a working-class

political consciousness? I would have these thoughts in mind when I listened to the life

stories of Harvard Extension School working-class, adult, liberal arts graduates.

B. A Philosophical Investigation of Adult Education Learning Goals: *The tension between social change and liberal arts adult education*

> 1. A modern day political pickle: *Liberal arts adult education disrespected from the Right and Left*

Early 20th century, pioneering adult educators privileged liberal arts learning goals,

but the opposite is true today. Due to political and economic changes (as outlined in the

previous section), 21st century adult educators are far more interested in professional

education. The ideological progression from nonvocational to vocational adult education is

not, however, the sole reason for the lack of scholarly interest in adult working-class liberal

arts students. While it is true that adult education today is narrowly focused on professional

education, it is not solely focused on this end. Many 21st century adult educators, scholars,

and critics choose to focus not on professional education, but on social change education

(Baptiste, 1998; Briton, 1996; Brookfield, 1984, 1987b; Cunningham, 1993; Freire, 1970;

Lovett, 1988; Mayo, 1997; Newman, 1994; Quinnan, 1997; Thompson, 1980). These adult

educators want to empower adult students to bring about economic and political change that

would create a more just and equitable society. Adult educator, Kerka (1996), confirms the

existence of these two distinct modern educational paths, one focused on professional

education and one on social change:

> Adult education at the end of this century is represented by both streams: market driven, professionalized institutions that help individuals acquire the knowledge and skills needed to maintain the status quo, and those who envision a different order and consider the purpose of their educative work to bring it about. (p. 3)

Liberal arts education, which is focused on nonvocational learning, does not mesh with "market-driven" professional learning goals. Additionally, liberal arts education does not mesh with the learning goals expressed by those educators who "envision a different order." Social change education, also commonly referred to as radical, emancipatory, and liberatory education, has as its ideological center critical theory (Quinnan, 1997). Critical theorist and adult educator, Quinnan, states: "Critical theory seeks to reveal the contradictory and hegemonic elements underlying our social and cultural arrangements" (1997, p. 14). By hegemonic elements, Quinnan is referring to the agreed upon (as opposed to physically forced upon) acquiescence of those with less privilege to those with more privilege. The hegemonic element with which critical theorists concern themselves most is the accepted dominance of capitalism. Social change educators want to reveal to adult students the gross inequalities and injustices of the capitalist system. Many want to empower students to work toward the ultimate goal: disabling capitalism and replacing it with some form of socialism (Thompson, 1980). Given that this is not the primary goal of liberal arts education, social change educators see adult liberal arts educators as living on the conservative side of center and as such view adult liberal arts learning as education that is centrally concerned with maintaining the *status quo*.

A consequence is that liberal arts adult educators in the US lack an intellectual community and tend to be disrespected by both streams. Professional educators disrespect liberal arts educators for being out of touch with student demand for job-related education and social change educators disrespect liberal arts educators for not viewing social change as the only legitimate outcome of adult education (Thompson, 1980). Adult liberal arts education advocates, Taylor, Rockhill and Fieldhouse (1985), sum up the current

predicament of adult liberal arts educators as a modern day "political pickle: under attack

from both the Left [social change theorists] and from the Right [professional educators]" (p.

28). The lack of intellectual respect for liberal arts learning goals leads Day (1992), one of

the few proponents of adult liberal arts education in the US, to lament (in his most

"highfalutin" liberal arts manner) that:

> Adult liberal arts education has become the Rodney Dangerfield of adult education
> in the US. Like the American comedian who always complains of getting no respect,
> it has become fashionable to ignore or dismiss the literature and proponents of
> liberal arts adult education. (p. 19)

Why is liberal arts education the Rodney Dangerfield of adult education and under attack

from the Right and the Left? It is readily apparent to me why professional educators

dismiss liberal arts learning goals as irrelevant to students' demands for job training[33]. But it

is not as clear to me why social change educators so easily dismiss the liberal arts tradition.

Couldn't liberal arts education illuminate the hegemonic forces at work in our everyday lives

and lead students toward social change goals? I believe the answer lies in modern-day

understandings of the value and meaning of liberal arts education in our lives.

My engagement with the ideological difference between adult liberal arts educators

and social change educators, like my historical investigation, is a broad-brush approach

rather than an in-depth analysis. A full discussion, including all the philosophical nuances, is

beyond the scope of this study. I do feel, however, that my engagement illuminates the

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[33] Many liberal arts educators started in the 1990s to promote explicit connections between liberal arts learning
and professional training. Daly's 1992 article, "The Academy, the Economy, and the Liberal Arts" is an
example of the literature that addresses this new phenomenon. He states: "Many of the same characteristics
that devotees of liberal arts education have traditionally sought to develop in students in pursuit of
enlightenment [basic quantitative and verbal literacy, intellectual breadth, cultural breadth, and sensitivity to the
needs of others] are now ardently sought by business and political leaders in pursuit of an internationally
competitive workforce. (p. 10). He advocates that these 21st century workplace needs are higher education's
chance to partner with big business for the financial rewards while not having to compromise on its "virtuous"
mission. See Hersh (1997) and House (1991) for other examples as well as Hart (1992) for a critique of this
literature.

central arguments residing at the core of the ideological dispute. My aim is to become familiar with current philosophical debates about the meaning and value of adult liberal arts education in order to broaden and deepen my understanding of Harvard Extension School graduates' meanings of their liberal arts education. When I sit and listen to the stories of their learning careers I want to be informed philosophically as well as historically.

2. Liberal arts and social change education: *Defining the terms of the debate*

I've noted elsewhere that adult liberal arts education does not have one universally accepted definition. Up til now, I have defined adult liberal arts education as education in the broad disciplines of natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities. Liberal arts education focuses on breadth versus depth, and, primarily, education for education's sake rather than for job training (Winter, McClelland, & Stewart, 1981). Defining liberal arts education as interdisciplinary, nonvocational education is only part of the definition and it leaves out potential political elements that focus on individual enlightenment, as opposed to system-wide change. I need a different definition of liberal arts education in order to engage in a debate about its political value, and have determined that the definition put forth by historians Taylor, Rockhill, and Fieldhouse (1985) is the most comprehensive. They conclude that modern-day, adult, liberal arts learning includes five components: (1) a focus on individual versus group advancement, (2) broad exposure to ideas in order to understand conflicting points of view, (3) critical analysis, (4) an open debate philosophy that accepts all points of view into the critical analysis process, and (5) a non-utilitarian focus in the job training or job advancement sense, in favor of a focus on intellectual growth and democratic participation as valid educational ends (Taylor, Rockhill, & Fieldhouse, 1985). The only component missing in their definition is a clear nod toward curriculum. Except for the

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nonvocational nature of the content, their components stress the pedagogical process of

liberal arts education over content. As adult educator and scholar Mechthild Hart (1992)

states:

> When the selection of content becomes an essentially arbitrary matter because
> conceivably many different kinds of content could serve the same purpose, the
> communicative or consensual structure of the content becomes frozen into a means-
> end relationship. (p. 66)

In order to specify what a nonvocational curriculum looks like, I add a sixth

component to their definition, one borrowed from Hirst (1965): a list of liberal arts subjects.

Hirst is a liberal arts scholar who believes that liberal arts is "about a comprehensive

development of the mind [therefore] it is necessary to study mathematics, physical sciences,

human sciences, history, religion, literature and the fine arts, and philosophy" (Hirst, 1965, as

cited in Jarvis, 1985, p. 34). Liberal arts education is about discipline-learning with a specific

emphasis on humanistic education, which includes, philosophy, art, literature, and history.

Other than the fact that adult education should not be job training, social change

theorists find little of value in the components of liberal arts learning and much to criticize.

The central ideological difference is that social change theorists do not believe that

individuals are free. Therefore to them, an education premised on liberal man, i.e., "free men

versus slaves" (Jarvis, 1985, p. 35) is doomed from the beginning. Social change theorists

contend that the political and economic systems under capitalism places restrictions on the

movement and thinking of individuals, particularly those at the bottom of the class structure,

for the system that is inherently concerned with the well being of a privileged few. "If liberal

adult education is about a theory of adult education which presupposed the freedom of the

individual, radical adult education starts from the presupposition that the individual is

constrained by social structures" (Jarvis, 1985, p. 38).

In addition, social change theorists would argue against the open debate and broad perspective of liberal arts education, for it does not make central their view that capitalism is the source of social injustice and inequalities (Thompson, 1980). A critique of capitalism could not be accepted as one of many valid opinions, it must be the fundamental agreed upon belief of all adult educators. Social change adult educator, Baptiste (2001), names the open debate component of liberal arts education a theory of "niceness." Baptiste believes all adult educators (and educators in general) want to be nice and neutral. For example, they want to show students all sides of a political argument and then let students decide what is right for them. Baptiste (2001) believes that this is duplicitous and wants educators to come out of hiding about their political agendas and claim coercion as a legitimate tool to help students fight their oppressive enemies. Social change educators like Baptiste require that social change be the sole outcome of education. Intellectual enrichment and personal enlightenment are not, in their view, valid learning outcomes. "Adult education [should be] judged by its capacity to promote major change" (Thompson, 1980, p. 27).

In sum, social change theorists have difficulty with the liberal arts curriculum because of its (1) irrelevance to a critique of capitalism, (2) lack of social change goals, (3) top-down pedagogy, (4) aristocratic legacy, (5) veil of inherent goodness, and (6) lack of focus on student experience, particularly working-class experience (Baptiste, 2001; Brookfield, 1989; Jarvis, 1985; Quinnan, 1997; Taylor, Rockhill, & Fieldhouse, 1985; Thompson, 1980).

3. Is adult liberal arts education irrelevant to the working class?: *I began to wonder*

Social change theorists' critiques are compelling. They want to educate the working class to bring about a political and economic social revolution. Their goal is commendable: they want to make the world a more equitable place for those living at the bottom of our

class hierarchy. I felt a close allegiance to these thinkers and began to wonder if liberal arts education should be dismissed as irrelevant to the working class. I was most persuaded by one of the two primary ideological leaders of the social change debate, Paulo Freire (the other is Antonio Gramsci). Freire (1921-1997) was a Brazilian adult educator whose work centered on literacy education for the rural poor. Freire positioned his educational work, aiming to help adults come to a greater understanding of the oppressive forces at work in their lives, as an act of love and resistance[34]. Freire published dozens of books throughout his fifty-year career, but his most widely read text (throughout the Western world) is *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). It is in this text that he outlines his philosophy of adult education. At the time he wrote this book his literacy work was centrally concerned with facilitating class-consciousness among Brazil's rural poor in order to inspire them toward political participation, upheaval, and social change. For Freire there is no other goal for education except social change. What distinguishes Freire's philosophy of literacy education from so much that had gone on before is his focus on students' lived experience instead of on the use of outside texts to teach reading and writing. Freire used "texts" created from spending time living and working in the students' communities and through conversations with students about their everyday lives and political frustrations. Much of social change education is built on Freire's pedagogy that puts the adult student's political and economic experience, rather than a disciplinary subject matter, front and center.

Freire's work is about organic, continuous, group social change. Freire was solely concerned with a whole class of people— the underclass— receiving education for social

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[34] Freire's initial literacy work was so politically contentious that in the early 1960s he was jailed, and then exiled, from his Brazilian home (Mayo, 1999). During his exile, Freire continued to participate in literacy work in Latin American and came to the US to teach at Harvard University. He returned to Brazil in the 1970s and continued to write and work in education. In 1988, he was appointed Minister of Education for the City of San Paolo, a position from which he retired in the late 1990s (Coben, 1998).

transformation that leads to political action and liberation. The two central tenets of his adult education theory are conscientization and praxis. According to Freire (1970), the only authentic goal of education not individual enlightenment, but rather conscientization, which he defines as:

> the process in which men [notice the plural], not as recipients, but as knowing subjects, achieve a deepening of the awareness both of the sociocultural reality which shapes their lives and their capacity to transform that reality. (p. 27)

He does not want adults just to understand the political and social forces at work against their freedom as a class, but to act on this and transform their worlds. For Freire (1970) education's mission is praxis, "the action and reflection of men upon their world in order to transform it" (p. 66).

While there is much to say about Freire's work, what was and remains so meaningful to me is that individual self-improvement or individual development has no place in his critical pedagogy. Freire's work is "collective empowerment" (Baptiste, 1998). Because of this shift in thinking inspired by Freire, I no longer viewed the individual and, more specifically, individual enlightenment through liberal arts education, as an unproblematic learning goal. I began to see the working class as a community of people that needed to "reflect on their [collective] world in order to transform it" (Freire, 1970, p. 66).

I thought back to the early 20th century adult education theorists who turned away from workers' education. It was during this time of increased collective action by workers that adult education leadership had an historically significant opportunity to support radical political change for workers, but the majority, like Everett Dean Martin, turned toward liberal humanist ideology of open access and individual enlightenment and away from social change. I questioned that choice, wondering , too, whether I am making the same one? Social change theory gave me a taste of a more political view of adult education that grew

into a strong appetite, pushing me to question my culpability in the oppressive forces at

work in working-class students' lives. The following quote from adult education scholar and

social change theorist, Heaney (1996), hit close to home:

> Social change is not what happens when the offspring of a working-class family joins
> the newly emerging professional classes. It is what occurs when workers, women, or
> other oppressed groups organize to overcome hegemony of professional educators
> or bureaucrats and reclaim control over their lives. (p. 21)

Had I become one of those hegemonic professional educators that working-class

students needed to overcome to reclaim control over their lives? Was my personal

experience a blinder to seeing systemic critical issues of class oppression and social change?

I was in the sort of ideological depression that social change, adult educator, and scholar

Brookfield (1994) might call "lost innocence" (p. 202):

> Adult educators in critical process see their learning critical reflection as a journey
> into ambiguity and uncertainty. Their descriptions of their journeys as learners are
> quite often infuse with a tone of sadness. (p. 203)

In my mind, I returned to Louis's story, my story, and the space in between our stories. My

experience with liberal arts education was one that those from the social change camp might

applaud: a questioning of taken for granted assumptions of the world that included

constructions of race, gender, class, and sexuality. But regardless of my experience, I still

couldn't help but feel great value in Louis's adult education choice. Is there no room for

learning about art, philosophy, and literature in adult education? Is there no room for Louis

to engage in learning that doesn't have his role as worker front and center?

4. Forming my own conclusions: *Liberal arts education should not be dismissed as a middle-
class concern*

I did not believe that "the liberal arts tradition at best an irrelevance, and at worst a

part of the cultural false consciousness which plays such a large part in maintaining the

hegemony of capitalism" (summing up the social change position, Taylor, Rockhill, &

Fieldhouse, 1985, p. 227). Nor did I believe, as social change educator Peter Jarvis (1985)

concluded, that liberal arts education was just a middle-class concern irrelevant to members

of the working-class. He wrote that liberal arts education and learning-for-learning's sake

"are statements of middle-class values and if the middle classes seek to impose their values

on the working classes in adult education then the working classes do not participate" (p.

205). Jarvis's (1985) conclusion is based in part on low participation rates of working-class

students in adult liberal arts education. So, in this instance, a social change theorist makes the

claim that members of the working class are acting out of "free will" and are not reacting to

hegemonic forces in their lives. This is a contradiction to social change theorists'

fundamental belief. Adult educators Jackson and Ashcroft (1972) concur that to exclude

working-class students from liberal arts education based on their lack of participation is

giving in to hegemonic forces:

> To limit access to this heritage on the grounds that its relevance to working-class
> men and women is not immediately apparent is, in effect, to perpetuate the system,
> which creates this irrelevancy. It is to concede defeat without even attempting to
> win. (Jackson & Ashcroft, 1972, as cited in Thompson, 1980, p. 101)

In addition to the inconsistency of social change theorists' fundamental position that

hegemonic forces are always at play, another complicating factor is that the majority, if not

all, of the intellectuals who are declaring that liberal arts education is a middle-class value

have been educated in the liberal arts tradition themselves. Their interdisciplinary,

nonvocational education helped social change theorists to see the "big picture" and to claim

that what working-class students really need is not what they experienced, but education

with one narrowly defined goal: to affect economic and political social change. It is hard for

me to imagine that social change adult educators don't enjoy art, literature, or philosophy for

the pleasure it gives them in their intellectual, social, and emotional lives— lives that are lived

apart from and are informed by their social change agenda. Was there ever a poem, a play, a

piece of fiction, or work of art that enriched their political goals as well as their souls? Aren't

working-class students entitled to the same pleasure or should they simply be trained as

freedom fighting foot soldiers? The contradiction between those educated in the liberal arts

tradition concluding that members of the working class should not be educated in this

tradition is glaringly apparent to Lawson (1982), a proponent of adult liberal arts education

in the UK, and a former member of the working class. He states:

> The whole radical case for restructuring education to the interests of the working
> class, rather than helping members of the working class to take advantage of the
> liberal tradition [originates] from outside the working class itself. It is from people
> educated in the liberal tradition that the impetus comes and their analysis of working
> class needs, and the interest is that of outsiders who can perceive the whole because
> they are outside. (p. 15)

Liberal arts education has been thwarted as an option for working-class students

because hegemonic forces want to keep the working class focused on job training. This

injustice is compounded by the fact that social change theorists want liberal arts education to

be ruled out for the working class. Each side is ruling out liberal arts education because each

believes that it is irrelevant to working-class lives.

I am reassured by the work of Mike Rose (1989), Ira Shor (1987, 1992, 1996), and

Earl Shorris (2000a), politically conscious academics who have committed their lives to

teaching liberal arts courses to the poor and working class to facilitate social change. Astute

witnesses to working-class students' struggles in schools and colleges, they would disagree

with the assertion that liberal arts education is irrelevant to working-class experience. After

years of work navigating the space between working-class culture and academia, Ira Shor

(1987) writes: "It is hard to find examples in educational history of people being kept in their

place with liberal arts" (p. 50). Rose (1989), a writer and researcher, as well as a teacher of

working-class students, concludes: "Too many people are kept from the books of the canon,

the Great Books, because of misjudgments about their potential" (p. 234). Finally, Shorris, founder of the *Clemente Course in the Humanities*, a college-level course in humanities for the poor, and author of *Riches for the Poor* (2000a), a book that chronicles his experiences bringing classical Western education to the poor and working class, offers his reasons why the liberal arts are critical to these students' lives:

> The poor should not be relegated to training. They are less cynical and bored than middle-class students at expensive schools. They bring the experience of living "close to the bone" in the classroom [which] permits them to understand great works at a deep level. The Greek experience that led to the invention of democracy can be reproduced through the teaching of humanities, and the problems of the poor [and working class] lie not in the [students' themselves] but in the way the society has cheated them. (Shorris, 2000b, p. 2)

Shorris is a witness to transformations that take place every day in his classrooms.

Lawson (1982) believes that the determination that liberal arts is irrelevant to working class concerns can lead to only one, paternalistic conclusion: working-class students who choose to participate in adult liberal arts education are under a "false consciousness' and [are] subverted members of the working-class" (p. 16). Those that attempt to enjoy the liberal arts are not doing so out of their own free will, but because of middle-class dominance over them. I agree with Lawson, and believe that social change theorists' understanding of liberal arts education is one-dimensional and not grounded in working-class students' educational experience.

I don't see Louis's choice to study the liberal arts as one entered into under a "false consciousness." Nor do I see my own family as "subverted members of the working class." As I wrote earlier, I am the youngest of seven and while I'm the more formally educated one, I'm not the smart one. All of my brothers and sisters sought opportunities to learn-for-learning's sake on their own or in informal educational settings. Their breadth of knowledge of history, literature, science, and art is breathtaking. While there are many reasons

(particularly financial) why they never pursued a formal liberal arts education, a belief that learning-for-learning's sake is solely for the middle class is not one of them. There is no doubting the fact that liberal arts education is part of an elitist tradition and is marked by that history, but couldn't affordable, part-time, open-enrollment, adult liberal arts education for working adults change this tradition? Adult educator Yarnit (1980) writes: "Traditional knowledge is not 'of itself' repressive; it is made to be repressive through control used by ruling groups in society, seeking to maintain their cultural hegemony over others" (Yarnit, 1980, as cited in Thompson, 1980, p. 101).

a. Liberal arts education should be transformed by social change critiques

Adult liberal arts education should be revitalized by social change critiques, not dismissed as irrelevant to the working class or to social change goals. For example, adult liberal arts education in the US is devoid of critical theory and class-consciousness; this must change. Brookfield (2001) locates the reason for a lack of critical Marxist analysis in adult liberal arts education (and I assert higher education in general) in a post-McCarthyism fear:

> It seem that American adult education suffers from the "knee-jerk-Marxophobia" (McLaren, 1997, p. 172) that prevents practitioners and theorists from drawing, however, critically or circumspectly, on his work. Marxophobia holds that even to mention Marx is to engage in un-American behavior and, by implication, to support the genocide and repression exhibited by totalitarian communist regimes throughout history. (p. 9)

A more diverse canon (that includes Marx and other critical theorist) is essential to liberal arts education's future survival. There is no doubt that adult liberal arts curricula need to include courses relevant to working-class and multicultural lives. Adult students need to see their experiences reflected in their curricula.

While the critiques about the curricula are critical to the survival of adult liberal arts education, I believe that social change theorists must also accept critique of their position

regarding liberal arts learning. Social change theorists must realize the consequences of adult

liberal arts education's dismissal. If adult liberal arts education were dismissed, adult

education in the US (which is becoming more and more continuing professional education

for the middle class) would become completely devoid of any nonvocational education goals.

Adult liberal arts education stems the tide of professional training and certification that is the

modern day practice of adult education. As adult educators Taylor, Rockhill, and Fieldhouse

(1985) state: "The drift away from education and towards training must be resisted; and the

reassertion of the centrality of liberal approach is crucial in this process" (p. 229).

Also, social change theorists who wish to temper open debate by predetermining for

students that an anti-capitalist stance is the only conclusion that they can draw are hiding

their authoritarian role in students' lives. A closer look at the practice of social change

education is needed to exam this authoritarian, "we-know-best" stance. Social change

pedagogy starts with student experience, not an academic discipline. Then the social change

adult educator pushes the boundaries of that experience in order to incorporate broad

political, economics, and hegemonic forces at play in students' lives. Social change educator

and theorist Jane Thompson (1980) outlines the process:

> In education the dialogue should begin with the issues chosen by the student and not
> the teacher. Since "education for is own sake" is rarely a luxury that working-class
> men and women can afford, these issues will be largely instrumental— concerned
> with welfare rights, employment, housing, etc. The responsibility of the teacher is to
> try to develop the discussion beyond the boundaries of the already known, and into
> the areas of the unknown, which still has to be discovered, understood, mastered,
> and controlled by the students. (p. 106)

The "unknown" is the social change theorists' perspective that capitalism needs to be

replaced with, in their view, a truly egalitarian system. It appears that social change educators

want to give control of the curriculum to students, but in fact maintain the power of its

larger political meaning. Avis, in his 1995 article, "The Validation of the Learner Experience:

A Conservative Practice?" points out the duplicitous nature of valuing learner experience to achieve a prescribed pedagogical end. He suggests that using student experience as a means to "uncover the 'true' meaning of knowledge and experience" is simply giving students the "illusion of control" (p. 174), for the adult educators are is some ways masterminding the experience behind the scenes:

> A slight of hand is involved for whilst learner experience and knowledge appears to have value it is used instrumentally and selectivity. It only has meaning if it leads to the appropriate form of knowledge [valued by social change educators], if not, it is discounted. (Avis, 1995, p. 175)

Liberal arts education is about providing a range of opinions to empower individual students to answer crucial social questions for themselves. It is not about replacing one voice of authority with another. Within an ideal liberal arts format, all well-reasoned opinions are welcomed. Indeed, the student's informed interpretation is viewed just as valid as the teacher's, while a student's interpretation of inequalities of life cannot deviate too far from the social change theorists' agreed upon tenets. Liberal arts advocate Geoffrey Partington (1984) sums up the distinction: "Whereas, however, the indoctrinator will seek to develop individuals whose judgements are his own, the liberal educator will seek to enable them to make decisions which are other than his own" (p. 403).

Additionally, disciplinary, subject matter learning is a critical part of affecting social change. Freire put students' lived experience— as opposed to literature, art, and philosophy— at the educational center of his work. But Freire was teaching illiterate rural peasants language skills in order for them to vote and effect social change. If students already have those skills, might engaging them in debate about the dominant culture (e.g., art, literature, philosophy) be the next step toward social change? I don't believe it is such a big leap from language-skills learning to cultural learning, if that learning is not framed by the

"banking" (Freire, 1970) method of education (i.e., teacher depositing facts and meanings). Indeed, adult educator and scholar Mechthild Hart's (1992) position is that one cannot critique the dominant culture unless one *knows* the dominant culture. "In fact, the very meaning of 'critique' or 'critical' refers to the process of questioning the reality and validity of a social consensus concerning beliefs, values, and assumptions" (p. 66). She believe that to be a participating member of society and a critical citizen one must know the "shared heritage" (Hart, 1992, p. 67), so that one can question the "implications" of that heritage.

Moreover, we don't need our own experience to be the sole well from which to draw our education material. Humanistic education that takes us out of our own lived experience can, I believe, promote social change thinking; some members within the social change camp concur. Indeed, it appears that learning-for-learning's sake was valued highly by Gramsci, a primary ideological leader in the social change education camp. Additionally, modern-day critical theorist Herbert Marcuse and social change educational philosopher Maxine Greene believe similarly that humanistic education, particularly art education, helps students to "break" away from their everyday experience, and hence bring about the potential for social change.

5. Gramsci, Marcuse, and Greene: *Three social change theorists who value the tenets of liberal arts learning*

Similar to Freire, Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) is a widely hailed 20th century social change theorist. But while Freire's work centered on the rural poor in Brazil, Gramsci was concerned with the industrial working class in Italy (Mayo, 1999). He was a political activist and writer working toward social change through the raising of working-class consciousness

and political upheaval[35]. Gramsci is responsible for bringing to the fore the notion of

hegemony, the critical idea that political power is not just effected through force, but

through voluntary acquiescence of those less privileged to the dominant discourse of the

privileged. Succinctly put by adult educator and Gramsci scholar, Coben (1998), hegemony is

the "articulating of dominant class interests as if they were universal" (p. 15).

Gramsci was educated in the liberal arts tradition. At university he studied "Greek,

Latin, geography, philosophy, modern history, and Italian literature for a humanities degree,

specializing in historical linguistics" (Coben, 1998, p. 10). Coben (1998) points out that in

the early part of his public life his writings focused on "wide- ranging interests, spanning the

theater, language, literature, education, and folklore" (p. 10). Gramsci's writings on education

outline his dislike of the tracking of industrial classes toward vocational education, for in his

view it prevents the working class from receiving education for leadership. In fact, his

observation of how the 1920s Italian education system evolved to educate workers and

rulers separately and its consequences for the erosion of democratic possibility could have

been written about the 21st century, higher education system in the US. Moreover, his

thoughts are reminiscent of early 20th century adult educators' beliefs about the democratic

participatory value of a liberal arts education:

> The multiplication of types of vocational schools thus tends to perpetuate traditional
> social differences; but since, within these differences, it tends to encourage internal
> diversification, it gives the impression of a benign democratic tendency. The laborer
> can become a skilled worker, for instance, the peasant a surveyor or petty
> agronomist. But democracy, by definition, cannot mean merely that an unskilled
> worker can become skilled. It must mean that every "citizen" can "govern" and that
> society places him, even if only abstractly, in a general condition of the rulers and the
> ruled. (Gramsci, 1999, p. 40)

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[35] Like Freire, Gramsci's work was politically contentious. He was a leader in labor party politics and founding
member of The Communist Party of Italy (Mayo, 1999). When Mussolini and the fascist government came to
power, Gramsci, after a period of exile, was arrested and sentenced to twenty-two years (Coben, 1998).

Through a review of Gramsci's university experience and his theoretical writing, adult education and Gramsci scholar, Mayo (1999) concludes that he valued putting disciplines— not just experience— at the center of learning and that his experience with the canon informed his political and social change thinking[36]. Mayo (1999) points to specific manifestations of Gramsci's humanistic education informing his politics. For example, Gramsci used Ibsen's Nora Helmer, the protagonist in *The Doll House*, to discuss feminist issues (Mayo, 1999). Mayo (1999) goes on to state that: "Several elements of the "canon" were considered by Gramsci to be relevant to the needs of the working class." (p. 51)

Furthermore, Gramsci wrote[37] that it was critical for the working class to have the experience of learning for no particular end, before embarking on education for job or even political goals. Speaking fondly of his old school that was centered on Latin and Greek grammar, Gramsci (1999) stated:

> Individual facts were not learnt for an immediate practical or professional end. The end seemed disinterested, because the real interest was the development of personality, the formation of character by means of the absorption, and assimilation of the whole cultural past of modern European civilization. Pupils did not learn Latin and Greek in order to speak them, to become waiters, interpreters or commercial letter-writers. They learnt them in order to know at first hand the civilization of Greece and of Rome, in other words they learnt them in order to be themselves and know themselves consciously. (p. 37)

Gramsci knew that Latin and Greek are impractical in the modern world and must be replaced, but he lamented the difficulty of finding equivalents that give students the sense of learning-for-learning's sake:

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[36] Mayo's conclusion is upheld, but also contested by many in the field of adult education. I came to a conclusion similar to Mayo's when I was introduced to Gramsci's work in a course taught by adult education scholar and social change educator Stephen Brookfield. Brookfield then introduced me to Mayo's work and to Diana Coben's work, which offers a different interpretation. (See her book *Radical Heroes*, 1998.)
[37] Gramsci's writings were not published until long after his death and were in the form of letters written from prison to significant others, and from his prison notebooks.

It will be necessary to replace Latin and Greek in the fulcrum of the formative school, and they will be replaced. But it will not be easy to deploy the new subject or subjects in a didactic form, which gives equivalent results in terms of education and general personality-formation, from early childhood to the threshold of the adult choice of career. For in this period what is learnt, or the greater part of it, must be— or appear to the pupils to be— disinterested, i.e., not having immediate or too immediate practical purposes. (Gramsci, 1999, p. 40)

Mayo (1999) believes that Gramsci was constantly searching for middle ground between cultural education and political education. "Gramsci's focus on both aspects of the 'high' and 'low' cultural divide occurs as part of a constant search for synthesis of the potentially emancipatory elements found in both spheres" (p. 50). His attempt to find the middle ground between "high" liberal arts learning and "low" labor education is most evident in his widely hailed statement: "All men are intellectuals. Each man carries on some form of intellectual activity, that is, he is a philosopher, an artist, a man of taste" (1999, p. 9). Gramsci believed that all men (and women) make meaning of their lived experience and, thus, there should be no— or at least only a minimal— divide between intellectual life and manual labor.

I do not want to give the impression that Gramsci was anything but a social change educator. He was interested in learning-for-learning's sake, as part of process that would naturally lead to learning that focused on challenging hegemony in order to create a more just society for workers. Literature, art, and philosophy were not inimical to these goals.

Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979) was a critical theorist who published numerous books and articles in the US from 1940 to the 1970s and was hailed as the "guru of the New Left" (Kellner, 1984). He was born in Germany, but fled the Nazis in the 1930s, taking up residence in the US. The majority of Marcuse's published writings are on Marxist theory and the corruption of capitalist thinking, which he claims all but silenced radical, social change ideology. His most widely read text, *One-Dimensional Man* (1964), concerned itself with this

corrupted silence. Unlike contemporary social change theorists, Marcuse was interested in

individual as well as "collective empowerment." As Kellner (2002) surmises, Marcuse

"believed that Marxism neglected the problem of the individual and throughout his life was

concerned with the individual liberation and well being, in addition to social transformation

and the possibilities of a transition from capitalism to socialism" (Kellner, 2002, ¶ 3). In his

final book, *The Aesthetic Dimension* (1978), Marcuse theorizes that the arts, and more

inclusively, the humanities, are a way out of alienation and the critical components of

political change. Marcuse believed that art creates an "estranged" break with the everyday, a

break that could be used to critique oppressive social relations and question capitalism's

corruption of everyday living and thinking:

> The individual steps out of the network of exchange relationships and exchange
> values, withdraws from the reality of bourgeois society, and enters another
> dimension of existence. Indeed this escape from reality leads to an experience which
> could become a powerful force in invalidating the actually prevailing bourgeois
> values, namely, by shifting the locus on the individual's realization from the domain
> of the performance principles and the profit motive to that of the inner resources of
> the human being: passion, imagination, conscience. (Marcuse, 1978, p. 4)

For Marcuse it was the "high art" of the bourgeois that created this escape from

reality. It could not be, for example, political art grounded in working-class experience.

Marcuse, unlike other social change theorists, does not view personal experience as a vehicle

for social change. He believed that personal experience is too tainted by the dominant

capitalist discourse to be of any value. Brookfield (2001) explains: "Just as Marcuse believes

that rebellious subjectivity could only develop at a distance from everyday experience, so he

argued that true critical thinking is necessarily distanced from the false concreteness of

everyday reasoning" (p. 269). Marcuse (1978) claims that the break with everyday experience

through art, not personal experience, creates the foundation for social change. This escape

and break from the everyday "becomes a political value as a counterforce against aggressive

and exploitative socialization" (p. 270). Marcuse's "break" from the everyday through art and the move away from the "inward personal sphere" implies more than the two-hour-a-week course entitled "History of Art I" given every Thursday night that an adult might fit in among her competing roles as worker, mother, wife, and community member. Brookfield (2002) states:

> The key point, though, is that for aesthetic adult education to instigate a rupture with everyday experience, its programs would have to focus on fostering the isolation and privacy Marcuse urged as necessary for an authentic immersion in aesthetic. Music or art appreciation would not be taught as a group process in which people were introduced to the canon over a period of several weeks. Instead the learner would receive minimal initiation into the criteria for judging artistic power, and maximal immersion in an extended private engagement with art. (p. 286)

I can't help but think about the importance of context. Is one person's two-hour art appreciation class on Thursday night another person's solitary six-month study spent staring at a Kadinsky? If two hours is all one person can manage, and if that person truly views those two hours as her break from the everydayness of her life, could it not also produce emancipatory effects? Maxine Greene (1990, 1995) concludes, yes.

Maxine Greene's work holds all the disputes surrounding social change and liberal arts learning in a tightly woven web of light and hope. Known for her penetrating intellect and ethic of care for those living at the bottom of our capitalist socioeconomic ladder, she believes in the power of humanistic education, for example, literature, philosophy, history, and art, that transforms individuals to work for social change. Greene was educated in the liberal arts tradition and draws much of her philosophical thinking from the Western canon. Dewey inspires her life's work, as do existential thinkers like Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, social change, critical theorist Marcuse, as well as all forms of art: painting, sculpture, literature, dance, and music.

Greene, however, is not a proponent of the liberal arts education in the manner of conservative culture war advocates Bloom and Bloom. She does not want the Canon to be a closed-off site of archaic works that are not enlivened by new emerging artists, especially those artists representing historically marginalized groups. "Today, we must allow the voices we realize were long silenced to sound: the voices of women, of ethnic minorities, of poets, and musicians recognized outside the Western work, and we must make way for the untried and the unexpected" (1988, p. 136). That is what keeps the arts alive. And we need as many contested voices as possible.

Greene (1995) believes we must imagine before we can make meaning and puts "imagination at the core of understanding" (p. 140). Art lends itself to imaginary thinking that can open up new and creative possibilities for action that wouldn't be available to us if we stayed saturated in our every day ways of being in the world. "It struck me early in my life that the language of imaginative literature disclosed alternative ways of being in and thinking about the world" (Greene, 1995, p. 90). Greene believes that stepping out of our experience and having an "as if" experience— "as if" this were our life— is education for personal and social change transformation. By leaving behind our set of concerns about life and imagining life through the eyes of another we can "see over the course of time what [we] might never have seen in [our] own lived world" (1995, p. 128). Greene believes that humanistic education helps us practice "as if" thinking, and "as if" thinking is what sparks social change. Only when we can imagine the world "as if" oppression did not exist can we work toward living in such a world. This, I believe, is Greene's social change philosophy.

Greene, like Marcuse, wants us to use art to break away from our everyday experience and inspire our imaginations and thus our minds to think in new ways. She believes that Marcuse is right about the power of art to change our everyday thinking, but

she doesn't agree that one needs long, extended periods of time away from the lived world

to experience this change. She has felt examples of Marcuse's theory in her own everyday

life. "We can all recall experiences that validate Marcuse's claim. I remember, for example,

the subversion of traditional order of reality accomplished by Braque and Picasso when they

enable so many to realize the significance of looking through multiple perspectives at the

lived world" (Greene, 1995, p. 139).

Moreover, Green believes that art makes people feel the injustices of life in

meaningful ways that political rhetoric can't come close to replicating:

> To see sketch after sketch of women holding dead babies in their arms, as Picasso
> provoked us to do, is to become aware of a tragic deficiency in the fabric of life. If
> we know enough to make those paintings objects of our experience, to encounter
> them against the background of our lives, we are likely to strain toward the
> conceptions of better order of things in which there will be no more wars that make
> women weep like that, no bombs to murder innocent children. (Greene, 1995, p.
> 123)

Greene's written work represents her philosophy, for she moves through art, literature,

dance, and music references in order to inform her political thinking and make her words

matter to the reader. Indeed, Greene's writings embody imaginative thinking. Her texts are

filled with perceptive examples of how art has sparked her imagination to envision

"alternative ways of being." I was drawn to her ruminations on Melville's *Moby Dick*, for I

immediately made connections to the working-class students with whom I work everyday

and their choice to study the more difficult pleasures (Bloom, 1994):

> "I find myself growing grim about the mouth," says Melville's Ishmael, "whenever it
> is a damp, drizzly November in my soul; whenever I find myself involuntarily
> pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral, I meet.
> Then, I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can." Melville wrote about the
> landsmen "pent-up in lath and plaster all week, tied to counters, nailed to benches,
> clinched to desks." On Sundays they come to sit on pier-heads, to become "water-
> gazers" peering out to sea. He was concerned with a confinement suffered by

ordinary working people with their hunger for an "openness," looking outwards, imagining something better and more liberating for themselves. (Greene, 1988, p. 9)

Greene views an adult student's decision to return to school as the choice to climb over a wall that is preventing the desired change. "The wall stands in the way of something he desires or needs. Acknowledging it, measuring it, the person is breaking with immersion; because, when 'sunk in everydayness' there is only habit or recurrence or routine" (Greene, 1990, p. 40). These students are breaking with the "everydayness" and living life "as if"— as if this wall "preventing change" were not there. This, she commends, is a courageous and noteworthy choice. I agree.

With Gramsci, Marcuse, and Greene's help, I have grappled with some of the basic conflicts between liberal arts educators and social change theorists. I've concluded that liberal arts education should be transformed by social change critiques. It needs to be transformed by critical thinking. Liberal arts education must include Marxist ideology in order to challenge capitalism. Moreover, the liberal arts curriculum cannot be solely Western education. It must include multicultural voices and working-class experience. Adult liberal arts education must educate students not from a top-down "banking" pedagogy (Freire, 1970), but through a student-centered pedagogy. Then, and only then, can it disrupt the hegemonic conception of liberal arts learning.

However, liberal arts education cannot be dismissed as irrelevant to the working class. First, social change educators must realize that without liberal arts education, adult education in the US would focus solely on professional training goals. Second, they must realize that free and open debate is central, for adult, working-class students must form their own opinions about the sources of inequality in their lives. Third, learning-for-learning's sake can be a way for members of the working class to feel less alienated and to reconnect more

fully to their thinking-selves and, most important, that discipline-driven humanistic education can be another avenue to promote social change.

6. Conclusion: *Writing My Way Through Social Change Theory*

The theoretical investigation of the tension between social change and liberal arts adult education has made my research choice all the more conscious and informed. I could not stand behind a liberal arts education that was politically naive and not transformed by social change critiques. Is adult liberal arts education a middle-class concern devoid of political consciousness or is it an opportunity to experience learning-for-learning's sake, and hence a fight against the alienated character of modern man? Is it mouthpiece for hegemonic power or is it a chance to "break" from the everyday and promote "as if" thinking? These are some of the questions driving my research on the intersection of adult education, liberal arts education, and working-class concerns that I've explored in this section.

As with my historical investigation, it was important— indeed critical— to my research to have these ideological debates in my mind when I listened to the life stories of adult, working-class, liberal arts graduates of the Harvard Extension School.

C. Qualitative Research on Adult, Working Class, Liberal Arts Students: *"Digging my own path to a new territory"*

A sizable amount of qualitative research has been done on working-class students in the US: secondary school (Fine, 1991; McRobbie, 1978; Weis, 1990; Wexler, 1992), traditional-aged college (London, 1978; MacLeod, 1987; Ochberg & Comeau, 2001; Roberts & Rosenwald, 2001), and adult basic education (Fingeret, 1983; Luttrell, 1997; Rockhill, 1987). Also, there are published narratives from working-class academics, on their (mostly painful) experiences in academia (Law & Dews, 1995; Ryan & Sackrey, 1996; Tokarczyk &

Fay, 1993) and life-story interviews with working-class parents on their discomfort with the subject of education (Rubin, 1976; Sennett & Cobb, 1972).

As stated earlier, however, there were no paved roads in the US that led directly to the adult, working-class, liberal arts student experience. I decided to "lay out a line of words and dig a path to a new territory" (Dillard, 1989) through the existing research from (1) traditional higher education; (2) adult basic education; and (3) adult higher education in the US and in the UK. I chose these three research areas to understand the issues that traditional-aged, working-class college students face in academia, and possibly glean from this literature information that would help me understand the adult working-class student experience. While the adult student experience is usually considered separate from and unlike the traditional-student experience, this is not always the case (Tett, 2000). In this section I share in detail the few qualitative studies on adult, working-class students in the US and the UK in order to form a dialogue between my findings and related research.

2. The traditional-age, working-class student experience: *The "cultural deficit" model*

The agreed upon conclusion from the research literature is that higher education and working-class culture don't mix— at least not easily. Researchers on the intersection of class and education, Lynch and O'Neill (1994), summarily conclude: "No other group's culture is structurally defined in its totality as being structurally inferior and inadmissible in education" (p. 314). For example, Hsiao (1992) completed a review of the recently published research (1990s) on working-class college students. He found that often working-class students' academic progress is shaped, detoured, and, sometimes, ended for three class-related reasons. First, many tend to come from families that don't support their decisions to attend college. As a result, attending college creates strained family relationships and identity

conflicts that can interfere with academic success. Second, working-class students are more likely to come from families that throughout their secondary school experience didn't reinforce the development of essential academic skills (e.g., time-management and study skills) and they generally enter college from less competitive high school backgrounds. The combination of these factors makes them less academically and socially prepared for the academic environment (Hsiao, 1992). Third, significant work responsibilities can affect working-class students' academic standing and assimilation in to the college culture (Hsiao, 1992).

Inman and Mayes (1999) conclude similarly from their review of research that many working-class students are "academically and psychologically unprepared for college" (p. 3). They report that the lack of academic preparedness is related to poor high school and SAT performance. The lack of psychological preparedness is attributed to coming from families that have less knowledge about college; families either don't support attending college, or even if they do cannot offer valuable guidance. Inman and Mayes (1999) add that studies have shown that often working-class students have a "lower sense of self-efficacy" (Hellman, 1996) and "lower self-esteem" (McGregor, Mayleben, Buzzanga, Davis, & Becker, 1992) (p. 4). Finally, in her literature review Van Galen (2000) reports that some working-class students experience "alienation, loss and exhaustion" (p. 3). She shares one working-class college student's experience of having started college, but leaving because of feelings of alienation:

> In the end, it all came down to a question of belonging. In the end, it all came down to certain events that had happened many years previous that emerged now in one pithy phrase to conquer myself: I don't belong here. The belief system, the few words that sum up in a neat phrase the wisdom of my conquered self. No fighting, no resistance. Just an overwhelming feeling of having a huge array of forces stacked against me, of knowing I did not belong. (p. 3)

In our "classless" society there is still a feeling among the working class that they don't belong in college.

Much of the research literature on working-class college students is framed in a "cultural deficit" model. The ideological foundations of this model conclude that many working-class students have to overcome "deviant" family backgrounds to succeed in academia (Weiss, 1988[38]). Many working-class families don't imbue their children with the "right stuff," that is, academic skills, psychological readiness, and emotional support to succeed in academia. Moreover, their families may thwart their attempts at college or at the very least offer limited active support. The following are two examples of studies that support the "cultural deficit" conclusion and highlight "deviant" family values that can adversely affect liberal arts learning goals. Carnahan and Cancro (1982) and Gos (1995) conclude that when compared to middle-class students, many working-class students tend to be more authoritarian and lack the critical thinking and questioning skills to succeed in traditional academic environments.

Carnahan and Cancro (1982) explain that the authoritarian characteristic affects students' ability to negotiate the terrain of academia. Specifically, they conclude that many of the working-class students that they studied didn't see the value of learning in a student-centered, as opposed to instructor-centered, classroom. They find tolerating the perspective of others difficult, and question taking courses that do not specifically relate to their careers: "Study for study's sake [one of the hallmarks of a liberal arts education] is not a viable, valid motivation for most of these students" (p. 16). Gos's (1995) research concludes that many working-class students' authoritarian home environments make it difficult for them to engage in "questioning, critical thinking, and the art of persuasive and expository writing" (p.

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[38] Lois Weiss is an ardent opponent of the cultural deficit model.

32), another hallmark of a liberal arts education. They have difficulty integrating their experiences or assuming the voice of a true *knower* separate from the voice of authority because the behavior of questioning and using evidence to support ideas was not modeled in the home. Gos (1995) claims that many working-class students have been taught to consider arguing one's point as "rude, a waste of time, and a personal attack" (p. 32)[39].

In addition to pointing to working-class college students' low self-esteem, low self-efficacy, authoritarian attitude, and academically weak backgrounds, the educational research reports that many of these students experience emotionally painful family conflicts. Family tensions can arise when a working-class student earns a college degree because her class status changes. She is now different from her family— she is *other*— in a significant way. Many working-class students report that their families express a range of emotions that not only includes pride, but also anger, envy, and, bewilderment, and the students themselves report a combination of emotions that includes pride, but also shame, guilt and, a significant sense of loss (Billson & Terry, 1982; London, 1989; Piorkowski, 1983; Roberts & Rosenwald, 2001). Moreover, because the working-class student may never feel completely at home in the middle-class college setting, she is adrift, left with feelings of metaphorical homelessness, not feeling at home with either her family of origin or with college-educated friends and colleagues[40]. Social mobility researchers Roberts and Rosenwald (2001) and

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[39]All college students struggle with distinguishing and developing their personal and academic voices, the problem is far more complicated for working-class students if we agree with "deficit culture" theorists' depiction of working-class culture as more authoritarian. Kegan (1996), an adult development psychologist, is one of the few who surmises what a developmentally difficult task we're asking of ALL students who reside in the most authoritarian stage of meaning-making and how painful their achievement of claiming an academic voice can be. "They [educators] are asking many of them [students] to put at risk the loyalties and devotions that have made up the very foundation of their lives. We acquire personal authority after all, only by fundamentally altering our relationship to public authority. This is a long, often painful voyage, and one that, for much of the time, may feel more like mutiny than merely exhilarating expedition to discover new lands" (p. 275).

[40] Powerful examples of the bordering-two-worlds existence can been found in the narratives of working class academics: See Law & Dews, 1995; Ryan & Sackrey, 1996; Tokarczyk & Fay, 1993.

Ochberg and Comeau (2001) concur. I highlight their work because their qualitative, life-story approach and attention to liberal arts learning mirrors my own research design.

Robert and Rosenwald (2001) interviewed fifteen traditional-aged, working-class college students and graduates. The majority of the participants reported "value clashes and communication difficulties" (p. 102) with parents that were a result of their parents having "no clue" about college or no interest in their college experiences, even if their parents wanted them to attend college. The range of parental reactions was "approval without substantive comprehension to outright sometime cruel disparagement" (p. 102). Participants reported that parents were particularly "dismissive of impractical studies" (p. 100) such as liberal arts. For example:

> Lisa worried that her father was even more thoroughly dismissive of her "impractical" studies. He has often forgotten Lisa's major and has reportedly questioned the wisdom of her course selection, with his "big question" being, "Are you learning anything that's going to help you in the real world?" (p. 100)

Also, the participants shared that their parents were unimpressed with the their academic success. Many parents downplayed the worth of "book smarts" and played up the need for knowledge about the "real world." In general, the participants reported that their parents were far more interested in their current or future job prospects than their academic performance or learning. As one participant shared: "I'm like, 'Dad, I got straight A's'. He'd reply, 'You need a job' " (p. 100). Moreover the participants reported that they had trouble communicating with their parents, for they felt that they were "educating themselves past them" (p. 101). They shared that when at home they needed to consciously remove "big words" from their speech and cover up their knowledge, so they wouldn't appear "arrogant" or "putting on airs" (p. 102). In all cases, the parental relationship became strained with both parties feeling hurt and misunderstood. As one participant shared: "There's like this vast gulf between us now" (p. 102).

In addition to strained relationships with parents, participants at elite universities reported strained relationships with their college peers, particularly around issues of money and family background. The participants felt a sense of injustice that some students don't have to worry about money and could attend college without the burden of work. "It is really irritating. It seems like they've been given things their whole lives, everything they've needed. I have so much more of my time every week taken up by things like work. It's frustrating, it's aggravating" (p. 107). Also, many of the participants felt that they were far more independent from their parents than their college friends; they were "on their own" both financially and emotionally. This came across most acutely when they saw their friends getting a leg up on their future careers through parental connections. "My parents don't have connections. You become aware of that when you are at some place like [Private U]. Everybody's parents seem to able to get everybody else jobs" (p. 109).

In the end, Robert and Rosenwald (2001) conclude that the psychological costs of a change in class status through higher education are substantial for working-class college students:

> Respondents found their personal and academic progress undermined in various ways: through the pains involved in leaving family and friends behind, the uncertainty of entering a foreign educational world, and the confusion of pursuing a career without obvious role models or wealth of financial and cultural capital. (p. 117)

It is important to add— and refreshingly noted by the researchers— that the psychological costs were felt most deeply because of the working-class students' closeness and respect for their parents. "In fact, it was their closeness before college that made negative developments in family relations especially unnerving for some; these changes were not experienced as trivial, predictable annoyances but as deeper and alarming losses" (p. 115).

Ochberg and Comeau (2001) surveyed one hundred and sixty college seniors and completed fifty-six interviews in order to compare working-class students' responses to middle- and upper-class students' responses concerning parental support and attitudes toward higher education. They found that parental support fell into three categories: "shared enthusiasm, benevolent misunderstanding, and estrangement" (p. 134). The students from the more privileged backgrounds made up the "shared enthusiasm" camp. They reported active parental support and interest in their college experience.

The working-class students made up the other two camps, with most falling into the "benevolent misunderstanding" camp. Their families valued education, but their parents didn't actively participate because they didn't understand academic life. These participants communicated sadness. They wanted to share their college experiences with their parents, but their parents couldn't help, support, or guide them. As one participant shared:

> Like if I bring up a thought about the type of [graduate] school I am interested in, they won't go into it much, or talk much about it. And so I'll just sort of back off, and realize that it's up to me. I might be looking for an answer from then that they don't really have. (Ochberg & Comeau, 2001, p. 135)

In addition, a sizable portion of the working-class students categorized their relationships with their families completely "estranged." These participants reported anger at and from their parents. Their families derided their higher education choice and refuse to help them, even if they could:

> My car broke down my last semester of school and I couldn't get to work, I couldn't get to finals and I needed my father to wire me some money to get the car out of the shop. And I begged my father and he said, "If you had a job you wouldn't be where you are right now." (Ochberg & Comeau, 2001, p. 136)

Again, the issue of liberal arts education became a central bone of contention. Parents particularly refused to offer support or help when the students were pursuing academic

subjects that they deemed a waste of time and money because the learning had little

connection to job training. As one participant noted:

> If I said, "Dad, I want to get a master's in philosophy," he'd be like, "Why, that's
> silly. Why are you going to waste your money doing that; you're not going to be able
> to find a job; didn't you learn anything from getting a BA in English, and not having
> a minor in business or marketing?" When I couldn't find a job he used to throw it up
> in my face. "Well, what did you expect, what were you doing being an English major
> anyway? I told you so." (p. 137)

Oddly enough, the working-class students who fell into the "estrangement" camp

reported the highest academic ambitions, including plans to attend graduate school for

master's degrees and PhDs. These students did not want to follow in their parents'

footsteps; they wanted a different life for themselves.

Through the narrative interviews that complemented the survey data, the researchers

were able to offer their understanding of the anger on both sides of the "estranged"

relationship. They conclude that strong feelings are a result of holding different meanings of

the world and moral questions about character. They appear to stem from the central issue

of wanting a different life. Parents perceive their upwardly mobile children as having

unrealistic views of the world and taking costly and irresponsible risks with their futures. In

their eyes, the world is a difficult place where one should be responsible with time and

money and not waste it on a misguided sense of academic elitism. Students perceived their

estranged parents' refusal to view higher education as a critical investment in their future

material, psychological, and intellectual happiness as another example of a lifelong parental

tendency to "humbly and gullibly settle for less" (p. 138). Both parents and students ask the

emotionally charged questions: "Who do you think you are? And who do you think I am, if I

have chosen differently?" (p. 140):

> I am just in a different world from what they are in. In the working-class world, you
> know, you are to be humble and thankful for what you have, and by criticizing what

you have you are basically criticizing everyone around you. They don't mean to be mean or hurtful but there is an unspoken accusation that I think I am better than they are. I can't state opinion without being accused. (Ochberg & Comeau, 2001, p. 138)

Ochberg and Comeau (2001) conclude that many working-class students have a difficult, perhaps an impossible, problem to overcome. If they want to resolve the tension in their relationships with their parents, "they must explain why the world into which they were born— that seems world enough to their parents and siblings— seems to them inadequate" (p. 140).

These two qualitative studies demonstrate in complex and intimate terms the implications of working-class families' tensions regarding going to college. Community college scholar London (1992) observes that social mobility conflicts "inevitably call into question the meaning of allegiance and love" (p. 6). More qualitative research studies that can highlight the complex feelings that live behind "deficit culture" models are needed to deepen our understanding of working-class experience. In addition, we need research that takes into consideration the broader socioeconomic and political contexts that imbue one class's family culture (middle class) with essential abundance, while imbuing another (working class) with what some have viewed and labeled "deficit."

2. The deficits in deficit culture research

a. Shifting the spotlight away from families and on to schools: *Cultural and social capital theory*

Those who believe in supporting the idea of "deficit culture" ask what is wrong with the individual's family background that makes success in school difficult? French sociologist Bourdieu (1977, 1986) asks what is wrong with the culture of schools that prevent working-class student success? Bourdieu's (1977, 1986) theoretical work brought to the forefront that money is not the only element that separates the classes, but rather that three forms of

capital— financial, cultural, and social— work together to create our class-stratified society. Because his theories of "cultural capital," "social capital," and "symbolic violence" (the injuries that are the result of a lack of cultural and social capital) force us to view class experience through a wide-angle lens, we begin to comprehend the issue systemically, rather than individually. With an expanded view, we can shift the spotlight away from individuals and their families and onto the school's role in reproducing, rather than diminishing, class inequalities.

Bourdieu (1977, 1986) asserts that the knowledge valued in schools is squarely middle class, therefore, one needs the "cultural capital" of the middle class to succeed. Cultural capital is centrally concerned with the inherited qualities (e.g., a certain type of linguistic ability and sense of entitlement) that can account for the unfair advantage that makes middle-class success in schools more likely. Cultural capital's power resides in its duplicitous existence. Cultural capital is viewed as an achievement, when in reality it is more of an inheritance:

> Cultural capital confers on the privileged the supreme privilege of not seeing themselves as privileged and manages more easily to convince the disinherited that they owe their scholastic and social destiny to the lack of gifts or merits, because in matters of culture, absolute dispossession excludes awareness of being dispossessed. (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, as cited in Jones, 1984, p. 26)

Those who have the "cultural capital" of the dominant group (i.e., middle class) more easily benefit from social systems (e.g., schools) controlled by the dominant group. Those who have cultural capital from a less dominant group cannot equally compete. If I dress well, express my ideas in a particular fashion[41], do my homework neatly, have a sunny disposition, respect my teachers, ask questions in a curious but subtly deferential fashion, I

will be rewarded. If I don't, I won't. To succeed, working-class students must adopt the

language and value system of the dominant culture. Adult education researcher, Cohen

(1998) describes Bourdieau's "cultural capital" theory in a college setting:

> A working class student arriving in an elite college environment would tend to be
> less knowledgeable about, and aggressive in, her pursuit of the rewards available in
> such schools. Teachers, too, tend to favor students whose sense of cultural capital
> most closely matches their own and who understand the subtle vocabulary of
> cultural and social transactions that take place in the classroom. (p. 356)

While educational credentials fall under the cultural capital rubric, social capital is our

network of friends, family, and colleagues, as well as the larger social network of our class.

The value of our social capital is the resources we have at our disposal when we tap into the

network: for example, access to information, better jobs, money, or to help with institutional

rule bending. Dika and Singh (2002), who completed a review of educational research on the

effects of social capital, conclude: "Social capital is the investment of the dominant class to

maintain and reproduce group solidarity and preserve the group's dominant position" (p.

32). Their review of educational research supports Bourdieu's supposition that those with

more social capital have an easier time in the middle-class world of school; specifically, they

tend to have higher educational aspirations and perform better in school. But as these

researchers point out, few of the studies take a more systemic view of these outcomes and

treat social capital "as norms rather than access to institutional resources" (Dika & Singh,

2002, p. 55).

Robert and Rosenwald's (2001) research (mentioned previously) reveal social capital

at play. They found that working-class students in college were acutely aware of their lack of

social capital, and hence their inability to compete on equal terms in the marketplace even

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[41] For a detailed description of how children from a mainstream community versus children from a poor
and/or minority community "grew into" a home language and were differently "rewarded" for language use at
school, see Shirley Brice Heath's, *Ways with Words*, Cambridge, Press, 1983.

though they had the same, or even better, education credentials. As one of their participants observed: "Everybody's parents seem to able to get everybody else jobs" (Robert & Rosenwald, 2001, p. 109). Zweigenhaft's (1993) research on Harvard graduates in the 1960s reveals another example. He found that graduates from the middle class invested more time in the academic side of college and put their energy toward the accumulation of cultural capital through earning high grades and honor society memberships. Those from the upper class invested more time in the social side of college life, and put energy into social capital accumulation through participation in elite social clubs. He concludes that these choices are motivated by the upper class's advantage in understanding that who you know is more important than what you know when you leave the university and attempt to compete for the limited number of prestigious positions. This was especially apparent to them because they were already earning one of most valued cultural capital investments— a Harvard degree— so it was time to invest more in the social capital side of Bourdieu's money, culture and social triangle.

Bourdieau and Passeron's (1977) "symbolic violence" identifies the concrete injures that are a result of lack of cultural and/or social capital. Instead of being able to name these injuries as unfair consequences of living in a class stratified society (as a few of Robert and Rosenwald's participants did), many working-class individuals blame themselves for these injures and accept the consequences. "Symbolic violence" is a direct result of members of the working class feeling that they deserve less because of their lack of cultural and/or social capital, and members of the middle class denying that their rewards are the result of living in a society where their class status has more privilege. Cohen (1998) gives an example of "symbolic violence" in a four-year college setting:

> Students enter the university setting keenly aware of their own disadvantage and
> become increasingly conscious of their social limitation. Students ultimately expect

less of themselves and aspire to less— to lower paying and less prestigious jobs. (p. 369)

"Cooling out," (Clark, 1960), discussed in the introduction, is a form of "symbolic violence." Working-class students may drop out of community college due to institutional policies designed to lower their academic aspirations. They leave school feeling that the rules of the game are fair; they just don't have the skills to compete. Additionally, while many academics are invested in the notion of uplifting the working class through higher education, there can be a darker side to this enterprise. In fact, it can send the message to working class students that they need saving, not from the institutional education system, but from their families. Most research on class and education doesn't fully grasp the emotional strain caused by self- and family hatred that some working-class students must negotiate to succeed in school. The following narrative from a high-achieving working-class student highlights the dilemma:

> When I slammed the door to my house shut to go out into the world, I had to leave behind my parents' values to enter the middle-class institutions of school and church, which had been designed in all their parts, sometimes intentionally and sometimes not, to foster in a me a hatred of those values, a hatred of my own self. In order to succeed in the world I would have to deny my deep root system and to become something different, a social construct of an upwardly-mobile person who would succeed or fail depending on how much of myself I could remove, forget, leave behind. (Courtott, 1991, as cited in Van Galen, 2000, p. 5)

The lack of financial, cultural, and social capital, plus the internalized oppression that is a result of not having the "right stuff," are the obstacles that working-class students must contend with when they interact with institutions like college and universities owned and operated by the dominant middle class.

b. A more balanced Account: *We need a discussion of unequal power relations, money, and the value of working-class values*

Ostrove (1996), who researches the psychological consequences of class, concludes that the "deficit culture" literature, does a wonderful job of detailing examples of how working-class beliefs are different from middle-class beliefs about education and "social relationships, work, leisure, speech, intelligence, sex, crime, religion, health, and well being" (p. 13). However, in her mind, the literature does a poor job explaining why these differences exist. The literature lacks any critical analysis of the unequal power relations and oppression that are the root causes of the differing beliefs. She states that there is much psychological research that claims that members of the working class have low self-esteem, as well as feeling that they have little individual control over their lives, and the outside world has much control over their lives. Yet, there is no attempt to understand these research conclusions from a political or socioeconomic viewpoint[42]:

> The absence of any discussion of power and oppression is striking. There is no
> discussion of the possibility that believing that one has littler power in those domains
> (sociopolitical, personal, and work-related) is because one actually *has* little power.
> This fact might contribute to scoring in the external direction on measures of locus
> of control. (p. 14)

In addition to the absence of a debate regarding the role of power and oppression in working-class students' lives, money is, for the most part, never mentioned in studies about working-class students' college experiences except when it is attached to students needing to work while attending college. Working and going to school is no trivial matter. Soliday (1999) reports: "The one factor that is consistently linked with college students' retention

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[42] Gos's (1995) research that was shared at the beginning of this section concludes that in working-class families children can't question parents without the parents' position of power also being questioned. And questioning parental authority, according to Gos, is severely discouraged in working-class households. This was certainly true in my family. No one questioned my father's commands. We lived by silent reverence for his version of the truth, no matter how illogical it seemed. To do so would call into question his parental authority. However, I viewed my father's need to protect his role as unquestionable authority figure in the home as a direct result of his chronic unemployment. His lack of power in the public sphere translated into a totalitarian expression of power in the private sphere. The connection between public oppression and private domination is not, however, highlighted by Gos. This is Ostrove's point.

rates— across ethnic, race, and gender lines— is the number of hours worked at an outside job while attending school" (p. 733). As a result, most working-class students experience college not as a consistent four-year process, but through short bursts of participation over many years (Soliday, 1999). Not surprisingly, a lack of money also affects parents' abilities to support their children's academic aspirations. While feelings of true political and socioeconomic powerlessness contribute to low self-efficacy, lack of money contributes to ambivalent feelings from parents about college attendance. How can they push what they can't afford? Moreover, having little money and needing to work at low paying, off-hours, stressful jobs can interfere with parents' ability to help their children develop the academic skills necessary to ensure success in high school and beyond. As Lynch and O'Neill (1994) conclude: "What alienates working-class children from the system [of higher education] most of all is not necessarily the middle-class character of the curriculum or even the hidden curriculum per se, but the absence of the financial resources to make the system work for themselves" (p. 317).

Finally, there is little acknowledgement of the "good" in working-class culture. In my review of the literature, I found Roberts and Rosenwald (2001) to be the only researchers who made a point to share narratives of students expressing gratitude for their working-class values:

> Respondents made the point that their relative lack of financial and emotional support in college had bred independence and responsibility that they are thankful to possess. They noted that straddling the professional and working class has allowed them to find common ground with an impressive diversity of people. They said that they have developed uncommon work ethics and that they have an appreciation of achievements and possessions for which they have worked harder than most peers. (p. 114)

As someone who might have responded to Roberts and Rosenwald's questions, I might add that while plenty of items in my "cultural capital" backpack needed to be discarded, perhaps

unfairly, for me to succeed in college[43], there were also items that led to my success. My family primed me for the hard work of college. In addition, my working-class life prepared me to be honest, not take short cuts, and get along with people. There is much about working-class life that can be celebrated— not romanticized— if we would look with an eye toward the "good" of working-class lives as well as an eye toward the injustice that prevents many working-class families from obtaining the cultural capital that our society tends to equate with easier passage through higher education.

c. The working-class experience: *Can it be known?*

Terepocki (2000), a researcher on the working-class in higher education, questions the whole notion of "good" and "bad" working-class values, as well as "deficit culture" theory. Her view is that working-class characteristics are a construction of middle-class privilege and classist views of the world. In her research on the representation of the working class in academia, Terepocki (2000) reports that throughout the sociology of education literature the "working-class subject is either eulogized or despised" (p. 48). Specifically, the working class has been characterized by this literature as: "Having restricted linguistics codes, as non-verbal, conformist, reactive, macho, hyper-feminine, submissive, lazy, hard-working, salt-of-the-earth, and street-smart" (p. 48-49).

Terepocki (2000) warns that much of the educational research on the working class is so contradictory that the differences between working-class and middle-class beliefs about education are simply inconclusive. She wants all researchers to distrust positive or negative representation of the working-class, for she claims that the working class cannot be accurately portrayed. Their actions are always viewed through the bourgeois gaze, that is,

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[43] Critical educator, Giroux (1988) writes that growing up working class made him value collective learning, but that when he arrived at school and attempted to engage in-group learning it was considered cheating. "The

"middle-class theories, discourses, and practices" (Terepocki, 2000, p. 18). Like Ostrove, Terepocki (2000) concludes that the majority of public claims about the differences between working-class and middle-class culture are de-politicized and, more important, that the middle class has a vested interested in "seeing" that which they dislike in other cultures so they can reify their privileged position. "Dominant groups through their control over representation demonized those characteristics which they revile and displace onto others [and which they may unconsciously fear in themselves]" (Terepocki, 2000, p. 47).

Thomas Gorman's (1998) work contradicts dominant beliefs about the working class's interest in higher education. Gorman interviewed working-class and middle-class parents. Many of Gorman's working-class participants gave "typical," previously documented responses. For example, the majority of working-class parents reported that "commonsense" was more important than a college education and community college was valued equally or more so than a four-year college. In addition, working-class parents' believed that learning was better if it was pertinent to their children's lives.

But, surprisingly, he found that working-class respondents were more than twice as likely than middle-class respondents to report that they wanted their children to be happy in their work. Middle-class respondents were less concerned with happiness, and more concerned with their children obtaining high status and high-paying jobs. Also, contrary to most research that concludes parents from the working class want their children's higher education to be job related, Gorman (1998) found that working-class parents' who had some college spoke more often about the value of learning-for-learning's sake than middle-class parents who had earned four-year degrees. The middle-class parents were much more concerned with their students' higher education preparing them to enter high-paying jobs

curriculum sent the clear message to me that learning was a highly individualistic, almost secretive, endeavor.

and/or law, business, and medical school. This supports Bourdieu's (1977, 1986) claim that the middle class invests in academic credentials— cultural capital— to reproduce their class privilege.

Terepocki (2000) is right that the research on working class's beliefs regarding higher education is contradictory (Cave, 1970; Komarovsky, 1962; Lindsay, 1969; O'Brien, 1987; O'Neill, 1992, for additional research that supports the working class's keen interest in higher education). However, the conclusion stated at the beginning of this section remains the same: until schools, colleges, and universities value the working-class experience, working-class culture and higher education won't mix— at least not easily. But with Bourdieu's (1977, 1986), Ostrove's (1996), and Terepocki's (2000) warnings about the deficits in the "deficit culture" model, I'll shift the spotlight away from individual and family deficit and shine the light on the school's role in reproducing class inequality. I will focus on the strengths and challenges of working-class culture, as well as difficulties. Finally, I will attempt to question the bourgeois lens that tints our view of all of it.

Howard B. London's (1978) community-college ethnography is an appropriate bridge between research on the traditional-aged working-class student experience and the adult, working-class student experience because both sets of students are included. Moreover, London's ethnography emphasizes how liberal arts learning and the institution's culture facilitate or inhibit working-class students' academic success. Finally, London's study is pertinent because the Harvard Extension School is in some sense similar to a community college in that it operates on an affordable, open-enrollment, part-time study model, and hence invites working-class participation.

My working class experience didn't count [and] was disparaged" (p. 96).

London's (1978) research was considered a breakthrough study, for it uncovered the class-inspired daily tensions that are inherent in community-college culture. He spent an entire year observing and interviewing faculty, staff, and students at a Boston-area community college that just opened its doors. His research goal was to understand the "working definitions of community college life," that is, knowledge about the institutional culture that students and faculty held (London, 1978, p. xiii). While London shares students' and faculty's experiences in his book, here I focus solely on the students' experiences.

As London (1978) suspected, the majority of the students at the community college were working class and of traditional college age. The majority worked, lived at home, and commuted from the surrounding working-class neighborhoods. Most had poor high-school records and characterized their high school experience and the few years just after as "a disquieting period in their lives in which they wandered without a clear goal or purpose" (p. 18). As a direct result of their poor academic records most students were unsure of their ability to perform well in community college and, in London's words, considered themselves "comparative failures, for when measure against a vaguely defined middle-class reference group, they found themselves wanting" (p. 15).

They began school with the high-stakes feelings that community college was either going to change the direction of their lives and provide social mobility or confirm their internalized fears about their inability to succeed in school, and hence cement their working-class fates. "Nothing but disappointment has been my past experience so City Community College; it is my last hope" (London, 1978, p. 23). Paradoxically, the sense of high stakes did not translate into students' efforts to perform well. London (1978) observed: "They did not 'seize the hour.' In class after class it was painfully obvious that reading and writing assignments were often undone, that students were unwilling to engage in class discussions,

and that attendance was poor" (p. 25). London explains that the paradox is rooted in working-class students' tenuous position regarding intellectual work. To commit fully and fail would be a damaging blow to the ego, but when one commits half-heartily and fails the ego is preserved by the comforting knowledge that one didn't try very hard. A further complicating tension is the "fear of success," for to commit oneself fully and succeed would mean a class-status leap that, for many of the students, was viewed with intense apprehension. The fear of success or failure was not just psychologically, but socially rooted, for either road had "long-range consequences in terms of identity and life chances" (p. 90). London surmises:

> The central point is that for students academic activity was a problematic feature of community college life as it was bound with issues of one's fate, of one's niche in the social world, and hence of what membership in a status group implied about oneself and one's social honor. (p. 61)

Decisions about one's social-world niche played out differently in vocational and liberal arts classrooms.

In general, the students expected less academic rigor in the vocational classrooms and this expectation was one of the reasons they enrolled, for it matched their self-doubt about intellectual work. "Enrolled in training programs, they did not expect school to be a 'fount of wisdom' and, importantly, this awareness led them to compare what was wanting in their programs with what they believed to be wanting in themselves" (p. 64). Overall, the working-class students were far more comfortable with the less challenging and rote memorization style of the vocational classrooms. But academic victories in these courses were only hollow rewards and did little to elevate their sense of self-worth or change their doubts about their academic abilities. The pedagogical style only served to highlight their low academic abilities. Two secretarial students articulated the diminishing self-worth that came

as a result of meeting low academic expectations: "Shirley said, 'You'd have to be a moron to flunk a secretarial course'. Dianne replies, 'Are you proud of that?' and explains that since you'd have to be moron to flunk it doesn't take 'much brains' to pass" (p. 65).

However, in courses where academic expectations were high, the students acted out and disrupted classroom learning far more often that in the vocational courses. Unsure about their abstract thinking skills and feeling inferior to their liberal arts teachers, the students needed to reconfigure the power structure in the classroom and subvert the teacher's authority. London concludes that the acting out in the liberal arts courses was a resistance strategy. It was a result of working-class students being asked to "meet the demands, expectations, and values of those who made them feel inferior; and so as a matter of honor it became necessary for students to resist" (p. 93). The students had the strongest resistant reactions to those faculty members, particularly liberal arts faculty, who touted their academic accomplishments and knowledge. The faculty member who had the most success with the students was himself from the working class, and often shared his childhood and young adult experiences with the students. He provided the inspiration that they, too, could be like him someday; they could be an owner of knowledge and work with ideas. While the middle-class teachers, possibly in an unconscious effort to shore up their own academic identities as community-college teachers, sent the message to the working-class students that they would never be like them.

For those students who were unsure about their abilities as well as their desire to move up the socioeconomic ladder, there were few safe havens. London's research revealed that both vocational and liberal arts classrooms created identity conflicts and confirmed the working-class students' sense that they were not "enough" to succeed in higher education.

London's ethnography adds a complicating dimension to the cultural capital debate[44]. Cultural capital theory doesn't account for the fact that members of the working class may actively resist the accumulation of cultural capital in an effort to protect themselves against shame and humiliation from the middle class. To protect themselves, some will "actively" participate in their own downward mobility.

The working-class students who did succeed in community college had fully committed to upward mobility. Students who fell into this category were more often traditional-aged female students and nontraditional-aged students. London (1978) reports that the female students "were less anxious about doing well because they were less anxious about upward mobility. Their allegiance to or sense of honor in their present lifestyles was not as strong [as the working-class males, whose masculinity was at stake] and they more readily implied they were after something better" (London, 1978, p. 105). The nontraditional-aged students had more experience in the workforce and therefore, were clear about their desire to move up and find more satisfying and less demeaning work. The high-stakes feeling that community college was the last opportunity to change their lives was felt more deeply by them, so it translated into intensive effort to perform well. Moreover, they were less conflicted about the implications of intellectual work, so they were more invested in personal growth and the upward mobility opportunities it offers:

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[44] While cultural capital is a highly lauded theory to explain working-class students' poor performance in school, it does have its critics who claim that cultural capital theory makes no room for human agency. In fact, much of the ethnographic work on working-class culture (Anyon, 1981; Luttrell, 1997; MacLeod, 1987; Mclaren, 1982; McRobbie, 1978; Weis, 1990; Willis, 1977) concludes that the working class attempts to conform to middle-class expectations, but they also actively *resist* middle-class demands. The research illustrates that some working-class students could be performing poorly in school because they have made a conscious choice to reject (as opposed to being victims of) middle-class values of behavior and performance. Willis (1977), the most well-known researcher on working-class resistance, concludes after interviewing working-class teenagers in Britain: "In a strange, unspecified way mental labor always carries with it the threat of a demand for obedience and conformism. Resistance to mental work becomes resistance to authority as learnt in school. Class resistance [is] educational refusal" (1977, p. 103).

The unabashed desires of this group of students to escape the festering powerlessness, frustration, and undistinctiveness of their working lives allowed them, even prompted them, to intellectualize. Doing well in school and playing by the teachers rules and values were important not just for the economic value of a better job but for cultivating their personal qualities; in this way the idea of personal worth enhanced the worth of working with ideas. (London, 1978, p. 112)

The nontraditional students on the whole found the traditional-aged students "lazy, irresponsible, or dull" (p. 112). They believed that the younger students were ungrateful for the opportunity that the community college offered to redirect their lives upward. They were also confident that the traditional-aged students would regret wasting their chance for a better life once they found themselves in the jobs that these nontraditional-aged students were attempting to flee. The following words written by an adult student came from a school newspaper editorial. The quote emphasizes the warning tone of the nontraditional-students' anger: "Jesus Christ kids, wake up! If you flunk out of this school you're up shit's creek without a paddle" (London, 1978, p. 113).

Student-to-student tension was not just felt between the nontraditional and traditional-aged students, it was felt between those working-class students who committed themselves to performing well in college and those who did not. Working-class students were the clear majority at the community college, so there were no privileged students to direct anger toward for having more money, time, and social capital as noted in Roberts and Rosenwald's (2001) study. However, there was plenty of anger to direct at those who were "too quickly shifting from a working-class to a middle-class orientation" (London, 1978, p. 102), whose school and intellectual values were changing. These students were viewed as "brown-nosers" who were too easily capitulating to teacher and institutional authority. This anger left the high-achieving students ambivalent about their success in school. Their ambivalence is a reminder of Bourdieu's (1999) conclusion that upwardly mobile adults face

"feelings of being torn that come from experiencing success as failure, or better still, as transgression" (p. 510).

London (1978) concludes that in community college "the worth of ideas and the idea of worth are inseparable issues" (p. 62). Community college students must choose to validate their self-worth either through capitulation to middle-class values of academic success or resist through behaving in ways that ensure failure. The tension between self-worth and worth of ideas is heightened by the two learning tracks so much apart of community college culture: vocational courses, i.e., practical learning, and liberal arts courses, i.e., abstract learning. Traditional-aged community college students needed to evaluate the self-worth costs and benefits of more closely aligning themselves with one track over the other. They needed to evaluate which track would inflict the less shame. In the end, London's (1978) work adds a narrative to adult education scholar Reay's (2002) conclusion that higher education for working-class students is always about being different people in different places, about who they might be and what they must give up" (p. 412).

3. The adult, working-class student experience

Each year millions of adults participate in adult education. In 1999 just about half (forty-six percent) of all adults participated in some form of adult education (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2001). Nearly seven million adults (twenty-five years old or older) return to college for undergraduate and graduate degrees each year (College Board, 2000) and, in 2003, the nontraditional, working, adult student with family responsibilities describes the majority (73%) of higher education students (Sandeen, 2004).

What do we know about these millions of adult students? As already noted, we know that "the typical adult learner is white, middle class, employed, young, and better educated than the nonparticipant" (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 71). We know that

previous education is the single best predictor of adult education participation. Courtney (1992), who completed the most exhaustive review of 20th century adult education participation literature, confirms that adults return to school not to "make up for earlier deficiencies" (p. 50), but to continue their successful relationship with education. Additionally, adults who participate in education are younger (late twenties and early thirties) with higher incomes than the nonparticipant and are looking to move up the professional ladder. As Courtney reports: "Formal adult education results from, rather than leads to economic mobility" (p. 39), confirming the much-touted and ironic conclusion that those who need adult education most participate in it least.

We also know from a nearly a century of research that adults return to school primarily for job-related education (Johnstone & Rivera, 1965; Kim, Collins, Stowe, & Chandler, 1995; Valentine, 1997, as cited in Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). This conclusion was drawn from national survey data. More in-depth studies on adult student participation have tended to focus on the psychological aspects that inform the decision to return to school. For example, life cycle theories attribute adult student participation to developmental stages (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980; Harvighurst & Orr, 1960). Personality theories suggest that adults participate in education to satisfy different needs based on their personality types, such as the need for social interaction with other people or the need to strive for and obtain goals (Clayton & Smith, 1987; Houle, 1961). Finally, decision-making theories place the choice to return to school within a web of cost-benefit analysis and the fragile interaction of personal, institutional, and situational barriers or opportunities (Cross, 1981; Drakenwald & Merriam, 1982).

However, I am more interested in the sociological forces that inform decisions to return to school, particularly studies that take into consideration systemic forces and class

issues. I was introduced to two such studies (Hooper & Osborn; London, Wenker, & Hagstrom) through Courtney's (1992) review of 20th century participation research. In his book, *Toward a Theory of Participation in Adult Education*, Courtney advocates for a return to the sociological research of the early 60s and 70s, claiming that adult education has gone too far afield from a systemic analysis in preference of a one-dimensional understanding that focuses on the psychology of the individual.

Hopper and Osborn (1975) completed research on adult students in the UK who returned to higher education to earn degrees. They take the position that one of the aims of education is social selection and the reproduction of a class stratified society:

> In no industrial society are the aims of formal education primarily the development of intellectual and emotional potentials and the fostering of curiosity and creativity. In each society the central aims of education are, first, to continue the process of socialization, and, then, to try to solve the fundamental problem of social selection of their populations. (p. 19)

Hooper and Osborn contend that social selection happens in secondary education when students are tracked to enter the workforce directly (or perhaps community college first) to find employment in blue-collar, lower-level or semi-skilled white-collar and pre-professional positions or are tracked toward four-year colleges to then find employment in higher-level professional fields. Adult students, Hopper and Osborn conclude, are social "selection errors" (p. 24), meaning they were tracked for lower-level jobs, but found themselves unsatisfied with their working lives and in need of further training and credentials. West (1996) characterizes the students that Hopper and Osborn term "selection errors" as living on the margins, "not really belonging anywhere, unsure and uncertain of who and what they were" (p. 8). Adult students who are inappropriately "selected" return to education to re-align their education with their identities and sense of authenticity, that is, to match their educational credentials with their professional responsibilities.

London, Wenker, and Hagstrom (1963) completed research on adult education participation patterns by social class. They surveyed thousands and interviewed hundreds of male adults living in Oakland, California, to identify the factors and characteristics that led to adult participation, as well as the barriers that blocked participation. The researchers learned a few things that we already knew: that education is the single best predictor of adult education, that most adults participate in adult education for job-related reasons, and that most adults who participate in adult education are younger, between twenty-five and thirty-five years of age.

What London, Wenker, and Hagstrom (1963) found— that other researchers hadn't up until this point— was that when age and education are controlled, a third determinant to adult education participation was identified: "style of life." Adults who have an "active orientation toward life" participate in adult education at higher rates than those who have a "passive orientation toward life" (p. 144). Active-oriented adults are members of organizations, active in community groups or politics, and attend cultural events. Passive oriented adults spend more time at home with family and their leisure time activities include watching TV and working around the house. This is how the researchers explain participation in adult education of members of the working class— the "active-oriented" working-class man is much more likely to participate in adult education than the "passive-oriented" working-class man. The "style of life" finding led London, Wenker, and Hagstrom (1963) to conclude: "A general participation syndrome is at work. Being too busy is not a deterrent to being involved in adult education, contrary to popular impression" (p. 144). Courtney (1992), a proponent of London, Wenker, and Hagstrom's (1963) research, shares that the general participation syndrome is about a way of looking at the world that involves risk-taking behavior rather than risk-avoiding behavior. General participation syndrome

suggests "that the learner is someone who is more involved with life, more likely to try

something new, more open to life's possibilities and challenges" (Courtney, 1992, p. 154).

Moreover, London, Wenker, and Hagstrom (1963) conclude that unlike in traditional

higher education, participation in adult education is not correlated with parents' occupation

and level of education: "What appears to be important for [adult participation] is a man's

own life situation, rather than the background out of which he came" (p. 146). From their

research they conclude that commonly held beliefs about working-class life are simply

myths. Workers are interested in the "larger society," "sustained intellectual effort," and they

"value higher education" (p. 149), but what working-class adults are skeptical about is *school*:

> It was our observation that workers value education highly, but often expressed a
> negative attitude toward schools. This negative attitude emerges out of the failure of
> schools to deal effectively with the style of thinking, background, and values of
> workers and their children. (London, Wenker, & Hagstrom, 1963, p. 149)

This conclusion echoes Bourdieu's theory that working-class culture is not valued in school;

their cultural capital is seen as being of little or no worth.

Knowing more about how adults decide to participate in adult education, who

participates and why, leads into a need to have a general understanding of their experiences

in higher education. Once in higher education, much of the educational research on adult

students highlights their different characteristics from traditional-aged students. Adult

education researchers, Benshoff and Lewis (1992), conclude from their review of the

research literature that when compared to traditional-aged students, adult students tend to be

more academically motivated and independent. They also found that adult students have the

following four characteristics: "(1) stronger consumer orientation, (2) multiple, non-school-

related commitments and responsibilities, (3) they lack an age cohort, and (4) have limited

social acceptability and support for their student status" (p.1). Benshoff and Lewis identified

from the literature that the primary retention issues that adult students face are related to

limited time and identity conflicts among their competing roles as full-time employees, partners, parents, and students, as well as "fear of failure and self-doubt" about their academic ability (p. 3). I found Benshoff and Lewis's (1992) review of the literature the most complete, particularly for their inclusion of the idea that adult students face limited social acceptability because they are engaged in undergraduate education past the "typical" age range (eighteen-twenty-five) for undergraduate learning. This obstacle is rarely mentioned in other research. In fact, I could find no other adult education study that makes this link. But, as I will discuss in my own research findings in chapter four, this was a salient experience for many Harvard Extension School graduates and it affected their ability to construct a positive, adult-student identity.

Most of the information presented so far has been gathered through surveys or structured interview studies. As noted earlier, qualitative research in adult education is not vast, but it is rich. I chose to review the following life story studies because they build on some of the aspects that Benshoff and Lewis (1992) identified, as well as the sociological issues that Hopper and Osborn (1975) and London, Wenker, and Hagstrom (1963) brought to the fore. Moreover, I chose studies that relate to my research interest in terms of working-class participants, attention to the tensions that surround the value of academic knowledge over vocational knowledge, and life-story methodology. I begin with US studies. But, as stated earlier there is much more research on the intersection of adult education, liberal arts learning, and working-class concerns in the UK, so I then turn to my intellectual soulmates across the pond.

a. The adult, working-class student experience in the US: *A qualitative glimpse*

L. Steven Zwerling (1992) completed qualitative research on working-class adult students in community college. He noted that while many traditional-aged, working-class

students must negotiate the strains of family relationships that are a result of conflicts surrounding upward mobility, often adult students "are able to function in two worlds more effectively than younger students" (p. 53). Zwerling provides two case studies of working-class women who returned to community college as adult students: Cynthia Brown and Selma Rodriguez. From his life-story interviews with the women he concludes: "There is evidence that rather than experiencing a pull back toward the world of the old neighborhood, adult students are frequently encouraged to pursue a higher education by their new friends at work, by their supervisors, and by their own children and spouses" (p. 48).

Both Cynthia and Selma returned to school because their children were growing up and forming independent lives of their own. As a result, they began to think about their own futures and were propelled to enter higher education because they saw their lives, as well as their college-educated colleagues, passing them by. As Cynthia states: "I began to think that I wanted to make something else of my life. Frankly, I wanted to be in a position to get promoted, to make more money, maybe get a better job" (p. 49). Both Cynthia and Selma received positive encouragement from supervisors to return to school. Selma's husband had just earned his college degree, so there was a supportive role model right in her home. Cynthia was single mother and was initially apprehensive about sharing with her family her desire to return to school. She was, however, pleasantly surprised by their supportive encouragement, even though they never encouraged her when she was younger. Indeed, "For the first time in her life her father told her he was proud of her" (p. 50).

With family support firmly in hand, these women entered college with a desire to make better lives for themselves and be role models for their children. As Cynthia states: "I was trying to set an example by going to college, by doing all the reading I was required to

do. In the past, all I ever read were magazines. I was hoping that some of it would rub off on [my son]" (p. 50). Selma adds that there were often times when the whole family would sit at the dinner table doing homework together, reinforcing the importance of education.

Both women, however, experienced loss and alienation of relationships, not with family members, but with friends. They felt that they were being educated past their old friends. In addition, many of their childhood friends were not supportive of their choice to pursue higher education. Selma reported that her best friend from high school always asked: "Aren't you tired? Are you sure you want to do this?" (p. 52). Selma also has not internalized her ability as a learner. She was only ten credits away from earning her BA degree, but shared that every time she entered the classroom she was "petrified" (p. 52), and she believed that any honors grade she received must be the result of the "instructor taking pity on her or the course being too easy" (p. 52).

Zwerling's research highlights that for these two women to even consider going college, they needed to live lives apart from their families. They needed to obtain competence in the world of work, and be around other adults, who had invested in higher education, succeeded, and been rewarded. "From these safe havens [away from home, the women] were able to consider new possibilities for themselves and allow themselves to come under the influence of adults who had created lives for themselves that were different from any they had witnessed at home or in the neighborhood" (p. 52). But his research also points out that the "safe havens" couldn't protect them completely from the feelings of shame and loss that seem to be a hallmark of the working-class student experience in higher education. The women could not shed completely their self-doubt about their place in academia, nor could they avoid completely the loss of once-meaningful and long-term friendships.

Rosetta Marantz Cohen's (1998) research on working-class adult students at an elite college, in some ways, matches my own. Cohen interviewed women in Smith College Ada Comstock Program, a program that encourages academically talented (evidenced by high GPAs from community colleges), working-class adult women to join Smith College's elite, traditional, on-campus, full-time BA program. In her 1998 article, "Class Consciousness and Its Consequences: The Impact of Elite Education on Mature, Working-Class Women," Cohen concludes that women went through a development process during their learning careers at Smith that was directly related to their class status. The final stage (upon earning their liberal arts degrees) was a complete rejection of middle-class notions of upward mobility. Instead of choosing to enter prestigious positions in business, law, or medicine, like their middle- and upper-class, traditional-aged, Smith counterparts, the women chose to return to their working-class communities to work as social workers or teachers. Cohen's research ponders the "perceived class bias" that surrounds these public service aspirations.

Cohen interviewed five students twice a year for the two years that they were at Smith. She also read hundreds of application essays. On their applications to Smith, the "Adas" reported that money was the major obstacle to earning their degrees at more traditional ages. Additionally, Cohen (1998) reports that the Adas "were waylaid by early, unsuccessful marriages; by drug or alcohol addiction, or by overwhelming personal problems." (p. 358). While reports of "career change" or "career advancement" as the reasons for returning to school have increased over the past five years, personal enrichment "remains the primary 'goal of study' cited by the applicants" (Cohen, 1998, p. 359).

Cohen (1998) concludes that the Adas went through three developmental stages during their learning careers at Smith: (1) Self-Deprecation and Role Confusion, (2) Class Consciousness, Reacting to Smith's Elite Environment, and (3) The Power of Service.

During the first stage, the women were shocked to have been chosen for the Ada program

and were sure that a mistake had made. In this stage, the women were most concern with

fitting in: "When I first got here, I didn't know anything and I started to feel that these

young women were not just economically better off but also they were prepared

academically much better than me" (p. 361). Cohen concludes that these feelings are an

example of Bourdieus's theory of "symbolic violence."

During the second stage, the Adas moved away from the idea of fitting in and

became aware of the University's and their fellow students' lack of sensitivity to class issues:

> We have these discussions in class, about welfare and other kinds of social programs.
> And what is amazing to me is the hostility— I mean real hostility— that the students
> express about the welfare recipients. Like they know anything at all about what it is
> like with their fathers writing checks out for them every month. I sit there and I just
> fume (p. 363).

It was during this stage that the Adas decided to maintain their outsider status. They became

"increasingly isolated from the traditional-aged students" (p. 370). It is also during this stage

that the students moved from feeling "less-than" everyone else, to feeling in some ways

superior to everyone else. As one student shared: "My compassion [for those less fortunate]

makes me better than them" (p. 365). Cohen concludes that this transition was critical to the

Adas success, for it kept them afloat during turbulent times of class-inspired, disparaging

remarks and ignorance that can be part and parcel of elite university life.

Near graduation, in the third phase, The Power of Service, Cohen found the majority

of Adas decided to choose careers in social service. They felt they were given a "gift" by

being accepted to this program and they wanted "to give back" to other men and women

from similar economic situations. They mentioned specific liberal arts courses in sociology

and women's studies that "opened their eyes" to the political inequities of the social

construction of sex, race, and class (p. 367-368):

> You know, it's incomprehensible to me that I wouldn't use my talents and intellect in the service of those who need me most. I feel as if I have been given a gift— this wonderful education that not the tiniest fraction of the people on the planet could begin to approach. And it's incumbent on me; it's absolutely imperative that I give something back to the world. (p. 368)

Cohen's research concludes that the Adas were empowered by the class differences they felt on this elite campus and they decided to channel this newly found class consciousness toward a life helping those less fortunate. Cohen, however, promblemitzes the Adas' decisions to pursue careers in social service and wonders if this could be viewed as an expression of internalized class oppression. The decisions to turn away from more high-powered and higher-salaried occupations could be an expression of "symbolic violence," which happens when those from the lower class "internalize their social limitations and aspire to less— to lower paying and less prestigious jobs" (p. 369). Cohen further complicates matter by questioning the ideological foundation on which the notion of "aspiring for less" rests. She claims that it excludes other, non-middle-class definitions of success: "It is predicated on the assumption that all students, regardless of age, gender, or social class, will define success in generic economic terms; that is, given ideal conditions, all students would seek rewards that afford class mobility and status" (p. 369). To add support to this critique Cohen notes that the Adas felt confident in their ability to transition to corporate America, but freely chose not to go in that career direction.

Cohen's position is evidence that firm conclusions are hard to make using narrative studies. Are the women choosing freely because they have redefined success in terms of giving back, or is their choice driven by fear that they could never fairly compete with middle-class Smith graduates for high-powered jobs? We cannot know for sure. But, in the end, for Cohen it is the outcome that matters, and the outcome is one that she applauds.

Perhaps working-class communities need the Adas more than the investment banking community.

Cohen credits the institution for its part in helping the Adas gain a stronger class-consciousness. First, she credits the liberal arts curriculum, specifically sociology and women's studies courses, for putting theory behind the students' personal experience and for facilitating particularly "eye-opening and revelatory" (p. 369) academic moments. Second, she credits the liberal humanist notion of open debate for, as she states, while "the women in this study may have complained about the insensitivity of their professors to certain class-based issues, they never felt ignored silence or dismissed" (p. 370). Finally, and most interesting, she credits the class privilege that is simply a part of elite college campus for empowering these women to work in public service:

> While academic institutions like Smith should obviously work against classism and bias, the more benign forms of entitlement that essentially define such institutions have an unexpected pay-off— for the school itself, for the Ada, and for the world into which she graduates. The subtle abrasion of class conflict and class consciousness had the potential to produce a political sensitive, savvy, and deeply compassionate product. (p. 371)

Cohen concludes that the primary implication of her study is that, though liberal arts programs for adults are on the decline, they should not be; they should be increased. For participation in the liberal arts programs, particularly at elite college campuses, can inspire class-consciousness in working-class adults, and the outcome is an increase desire to work in public service, where this type of intellectual capital is desperately needed. The investment in cultural capital of a few can translate to helping many.

While Cohen interviewed working-class women at an elite campus, Wendy Luttrell (1989, 1997) interviewed two hundred women in noncredit, community run adult basic education courses, gathering thirty life stories, fifteen from northeastern, white, working-class women and fifteen from southern, black, working-class women (the women preferred

the term black). Luttrell wanted to learn about the decision to return to school by women who left school before earning their high school degrees. Statistically, these women are the least likely to participate in adult education because of their previous unsuccessful relationship with school. Luttrell's research resides at the intersection of education, race, gender, and class. From this dynamic position we learn again what was posited in prior research, but in far greater detail and from many different angles: that schools can be unkind places— sometimes, one might assume intentionally— to working-class girls of both races. The women entered the school system lacking the middle-class cultural capital necessary to garner the respect and attention they needed to feel accepted and valued in school. The neglect from authority figures, and racist practices (e.g., valuing of lighter-skinned black girls), as well as their class practices (e.g., valuing the youthful often passive, middle-class girls) had long-term consequences for the women's upward mobility, their ongoing relationship to education, and most important, their self-esteem. Luttrell (1997) concludes: "Schools impeded the women's sense of social value and self worth" (p. 3).

There is much to learn from Luttrell's discoveries about the culture of secondary schools and the emotional pain it can inflict on working-class girls, and, interestingly enough, on working-class mothers. Indeed, mothers, Luttrell (1997) discovered, were scapegoats for a system that "takes for granted middle-class family life, knowledge, time, and resources" (p. 10) and uses middle-class life style as the model, short-changing the working class. Mothers are viewed by both the school system and their own children as "ineffective, inadequate, bad mothers" (p. 10). Here we see once again how the spotlight on individual failure blinds us to systemic injustice.

Through Luttrell's research we also learn that a large majority of white, working-class women who attended urban high schools were tracked toward vocational education. In this

track only obedience to authority was valued, which left the women feeling devalued. To

regain some sense of self-worth the women "split off their abilities and desires for

intellectual or academic mastery" (p. 66) in favor of caretaking roles. They rejected school

and claimed a sense of self-worth through affirming abilities that lived apart from school, for

example working, taking care of siblings, and motherhood:

> Such splitting was assisted by specific institutional arrangements [vocational tracking]
> that divided labor, knowledge and people into opposite types and conferred the
> dominance of one group over another, the class-based divisions of manual versus
> mental labor. These institutional splits fragmented the women's self understanding
> and conferred dominance of side over other sides of themselves impeding their
> development. (p. 116)

This split between "commonsense" and "schoolsmarts" and its consequences for adult

education is particularly pertinent to my study.

Luttrell (1989, 1997) discovered that both the black and white working-class women

split off knowledge into these two distinct spheres: "commonsense" and "schoolsmarts."

Both embraced the term, "commonsense," considering it the compass by which to navigate

their complex lives. Moreover, both sets of women considered schoolsmarts to be a threat

to common sense. In fact, the women felt that schoolsmarts could impair one's ability to

deal with life: "I know a lot of people who are very intelligent but they are fruity; I wouldn't

want to be one" (1987, p. 38), and:

> I used to beg my mother to let me go to school. She would say, "Girl, you have no
> common sense." Or when I would want to read instead of doing my chores she
> would say, "You're never going to learn anything like that— you've got to have
> common sense in this world." (p. 25)

Even though the white women viewed schoolsmarts with trepidation, they did, albeit

reluctantly, believe that education could led them toward upward mobility: "People really

need education to get out of their ruts" (p. 38). The black women believed education held

little promise for upward mobility. They knew that racism would overshadow any educational credential. The black women knew "plenty of black people with educations that have jobs that are not better than the ones we got here" (1997, p. 2).

Another difference between the white and the black women's understanding of knowledge came through when they were asked to name people in their lives with "real intelligence." The white women only named men and their verdict was contingent on the men's mechanical ability: "The most intelligent person I know is my brother— he can fix anything. And when you get right down to it, what's more important than being able to make things work?" (Luttrell, 1987, p. 39). The black women gave examples of both men and women as having "real intelligence." For them, "real intelligence" was directly related to one's survival skills and one's ability to cope with the daily struggles of racism:

> I got a sister. I think she is smart, real intelligent. She can hold onto money better than anyone. Anytime she or her childrens need something, she can go and get it [and] I'll tell you what takes real intelligence— dealing with people's ignorance. (Luttrell, 1987, p. 41)

How do we understand this split between commonsense and schoolsmart? Luttrell (1997) concludes that in an attempt to fight back against feelings of worthlessness the women "arrived at split and conflicted self-images, self understandings, and social identities" (p. 3). The women split knowledge into two categories: there is commonsense, which they have and value highly, and there is schoolsmarts, which they don't have and disparage. Even though they performed poorly in school and dropped out, they had commonsense, which is a far more important form of knowledge in their world. Luttrell believes that valuing commonsense over schoolsmarts was also an expression of "class-consciousness" (p. 27). Commonsense is what "ordinary" and "average" (p. 27) working-class people have, schoolsmarts is what middle-class, college-educated people have. Luttrell (1997) notes that the split makes the return-to-school experience all that more tension filled:

> While the split view of knowledge may enable the women to defend themselves
> socially to ward against the hidden injuries of class, race, and gender these same splits
> put them in a bind vis-à-vis education. (p. 35)

When returning to school, the working-class women felt they had to give up that which they

most valued and had in abundance, their commonsense in exchange for the far more risky

and perhaps, in their minds, almost unattainable schoolsmarts.

The women, however, took the risk and came back to school because commonsense

was no longer enough. They wanted to feel better about themselves and their self-worth

with the socially sanctioned schoolsmarts that a high school diploma represented. Luttrell

reports that the women returned to school not to get better jobs, but to better themselves.

They wanted to be educational role models for their children. They wanted to be "good"

mothers. The focus on bettering themselves led Luttrell to conclude that: "Adult education

is about establishing a credible, worthy self and public identity as much as it about gaining a

diploma" (p. 113). Luttrell cautions against viewing the decision to return to school as

evidence that these women "uncritically embrace the myth of meritocracy" (p. 116):

> Having been encouraged to stifle the development of some aspects of themselves for
> the sake of others, the women returned to school to regain the visibility, voices, and
> autonomy denied them. (p. 117)

Because school was viewed as a risky endeavor, the women chose neighborhood

community centers and participated in work-based programs. Comfort was highly prized. As

Luttrell states: "The women preferred to stay close to home mostly because they didn't want

to feel 'uncomfortable' in places they didn't 'belong' " (p. 14). Luttrell also noticed that the

women stayed clear of certain GED instructors who made them feel uncomfortable, even

shameful for their lack of academic credentials or perceived ability. The fear of shame was

constant and, like their commonsense, it was a compass by which they navigated safe

passage through institutionalized education. If the women were in a position to be judged

harshly by others, they would change course toward comfort and safety. Luttrell adds: "Seeking comfort among those like themselves exposes as it masks how they learned their social limits" (p. 48).

Once in the classroom, all the women lacked academic confidence. They were haunted by their poor high school experiences and, if they had achieved some success in school, it was quickly discounted as having to do with a good or caring teacher, not their ability. Also in the classroom, Luttrell noticed a distinct difference in the women's approach to learning. The white women struggled with getting things right, the way the teacher wanted them to, while the black women completely underestimated their academic abilities. Luttrell notes: "In the classroom setting I observed that the [white] women expressed discernible fears of making mistakes, while the [black women] held mistaken fears about their intellectual capabilities" (p. 56).

In the end a few women earned their GED and moved on the college. A few more were able to "learn new things about themselves oftentimes making for better stories, [to] revisit and reinterpret past feelings of powerlessness and inadequacy in the face of teacher authority" (p. 120). But the majority struggled with their self-doubt as well as their desire to put others' needs before their own. Luttrell observes: "To put one's self on a shelf like a book that perhaps one day one will have the time permission, or even the obligation, to read is a fitting metaphor for these working-class women's relationship to school" (p. 112).

Luttrell offers adult educators a critical dilemma to ponder. She found that school, and particularly for these women, a high school diploma, represents a "badge of honor" (1997, p. 126), a testimony to the fact that they are somebodies and they are "better" people. Adult education is in the business of awarding such badges, but should it be? Indeed, the

women came to adult education to better themselves. But should adult education continue to perpetuate the belief that self-worth is so tightly bound to academic credentials?

  b. The adult, working-class student experience in the UK: *A qualitative glimpse*

Adult educators and scholars Gallacher, Crossan, Field, and Merrill (2002) interviewed one hundred and forty-nine working-class, adult students in Scotland about their decisions to return to school. Through focus groups and life-story interviews, identified two sets of factors that influence the decision to return to school (the researchers use the term "re-engagement with a learning career"): (1) personal and social factors and (2) institutional factors. They also report how the adult education experience, supported by these factors, resulted in participants replacing a fragile, self-doubting learner identity with a more confident learner identity that no longer resided at the margin but at the center of their life-world. All the adults in their study were participating in "further education" (which is a cross between centers for adult education and community college in the US).

The personal factors that facilitated the participants' re-engagement in a learning career were "critical incidents" or trigger events, such as "divorce, bereavement or redundancy" (p. 501). This finding supports research done in the US. Aslanian and Brickell (1980) were the first to introduce the notion of "trigger events." As recently as 2000, The College Board (2000) confirmed trigger events' influence on participation: "There is always a trigger, a life event, that sets the time for returning to school— like divorce, loss of job, upgrading of job, changing technologies, and moving into a new community" (p. 1). Gallacher, Crossan, Field, and Merrill (2002) also noted that previous exposure to informal learning opportunities, such community associations, parent groups, or labor unions facilitated a re-engagement with a learning career. This finding supports London, Wenker, and Hagstrom's (1963) notion of a "general participation syndrome." The general

participation factor has been overlooked by adult educators in the US who give far more attention to the importance of a trigger event (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980). But in Gallacher, Crossan, Field and Merrill's (2002) study, we see both contributing equally to the return-to-school decision.

In addition to the personal factors of trigger events and previous exposure to informal learning opportunities, social factors played a role in adults' decisions to re-engage in a learning career. Supportive partners, family members, and friends were critical to the decision, but also a sense a community and support from fellow students supported adults' ability to stay in school. Finding supportive adults at the institution was particularly relevant to those students who started back to school with little personal motivation; these adults were motivated by their own feeling that they should go back to school. Gallacher, Crossan, Field, Merrill (2002) conclude that personal factors and social relationships, or in their words "status passages" (p. 502), were the necessary foundation on which the adult students could begin to build more confident, self-affirming identities. As one woman remembered:

> Well you feel that when you come here you are starting to find yourself. That might sound a bit stupid. You are not a clone or somebody else— you are starting to find you own identity although it has taken me— I won't say how many years. (p. 502)

Along with personal and social factors, Gallacher, Crossan, Field, and Merrill identified institutional factors. The first institutional factor that influenced students' re-engagement with learning careers was knowing someone like them who attended the institution and had a positive experience. Gallacher, Crossan, Field, and Merrill surmise: "This helps reduce the risk associated with a decision that may mean a movement away from a familiar milieu into an unfamilar one" (p. 503). Second, and similar to Luttrell's findings, the participants wanted to attend a neighborhood institution and learn from teachers who respected them. The researchers claim that tutors' respectful attitude was essential to

students' ongoing commitment to their learning careers. This respect helped adult students

to feel "culturally at ease as a learner" (p. 505). Most adults in the study shared the opinion:

"They [the tutors] didn't look down on you" and they never made the adults feel "stupid" or

"incapable." (p. 505):

> The mere fact that the tutors are approachable. If you have a problem you can
> actually turn around and say to him I have a problem. If you are left to feel that the
> tutor is above you, you are not going to approach him. (p. 505)

In sum, many of the personal, social, and institutional factors can be culled under two basic

questions that adults have before they consider re-engaging in a learning career: Will there be

people like me there? Will I be comfortable there?

> The fact that this was here [in the community], and I knew that there were going to
> be people like myself. What I am trying to say is that I would never have entered a
> beginners' course in a college because I would feel stupid. (p. 504)

Gallacher, Crossan, Field and Merrill, like others in the field researching working-

class students and adult education, conclude that engagement in a learning career for

working-class adults is a risky proposition. Many working-class adult students have had

unsuccessful relationships with formal schooling. In order for working-class students to

return to school, they must feel that the benefits of a college education outweigh the

potential risk of feeling shame. Gallacher, Crossan, Field and Merrill conclude that potential

risks decrease when the students' personal, social, and institutional needs that relate to

feelings of comfort are met. Most important to the students was being around people like

them and experiencing respectful relationships with tutors, who were the key element in

developing "an identity that was favorably disposed to learning" (p. 505). Once adults

attended further education, momentum began to build and the majority of the students

gained greater self-confidence. Indeed, many of the students began to imagine careers and

academic possibilities they never thought possible. Gallacher, Crossan, Field and Merrill believe that the increase in academic aspirations resulted from the students moving their learner identities from the margin to the center of their life-worlds. Not all the adult students experienced upward and linear learning careers. The researchers also identified students with "fragile learning identities." For these adult students, personal, social, and institutional needs were not met and they had to discontinue their learning. The personal and social factors of money and time, lack of family support, and self-doubt related to poor performance in previous academic settings, were most often the reported obstacles to continued learning.

Gallacher, Crossan, Field and Merrill (2002) conclude that re-engaging with a learning career is a complex process of identity construction, where personal, social, and institutional factors play equal and critical roles. Based on their analysis of students' narratives, they believe that if the working-class adult student can embrace the learner identity without overwhelming conflicts from the personal, social, or institutional realms, then, and only then, will higher education be a successful and rewarding experience that can lead to heightened academic aspirations.

Adult educators and scholars Reay, Ball, and David (2002) interviewed adult students in Britain who were involved in further education about their decisions to return to school, asking them to discuss their adult education experiences. Like Gallacher, Crossan, Field, and Merrill (2002), they conclude that adult student participation is based on a fragile interplay of "individual, familial, and institutional factors" (p. 16) that creates access to higher education for some, while blocking access to others.

Reay, Ball, and David gathered life stories from nineteen working-class and four middle-class adult students. They drew comparisons from a similar study they completed with traditional-aged students. Given the preponderance of statistical evidence that adults

return to school for job-related reasons, Reay, Ball, and David were shocked to find that all of the adult students stated that learning-for-learning's sake was the reason they returned to school. As one participant shared: "It's basically the education in itself, not just about getting the qualifications" (p. 7). The traditional-aged students they interviewed were interested in employment opportunities. Another distinction between the adult students and the traditional-aged students is that the adults were more likely to identify public service as the reason they returned to school. "It was important to a majority of mature students that they might be able to make a difference to the lives of other people by drawing on their own, sometimes painful, life experiences and knowledge" (p. 8). Both of these findings— learning-for-learning's sake and public service— are reminiscent of Cohen's findings on working-class adult students at Smith College.

As in Gallacher, Crossan, Field, and Merrill's (2002) study, location of university was also a primary factor in the adult students' higher education choice. For the mostly working-class, adult students their choice of institution was "finding out what they cannot have" (Reay, Ball, and David, 2002 p. 9). For these participants location was connected to limited money, work commitments, and childcare responsibilities. "Wherever I go needs to be a bus ride away" (p. 9). But similar to other research presented, the adults were also looking for a sense of community at the institution and a feeling of comfort. They wanted to be with liked-minded students. In fact, many of the adult students referred to themselves as "we," where the traditional-aged students most often used "I": "We have ended up all supporting each other, quite often we talk about our fears and anxieties to one another and that's been really helpful" (p. 13).

Reay, Ball, and David found that most adults experience school as a physically taxing and emotionally draining experience, particularly if they have childcare responsibilities. An

interesting paradox is that many women returned to school out of a desire to be role models

for their children. However, it was childcare responsibilities that most often interfered with

their completing courses and ultimately led to withdrawal. It is not surprising that single

mothers had the highest attrition rates:

> The whole family thing was taking over, taking up so much of my time and I was
> desperate to finish this assignment and I just couldn't find enough time to do it and I
> was crying because I was so upset, so desperate about it all. (p. 12)

Reay, Ball, and David surmised from the stories of exhaustion: "Being an adult student is a

constant balancing act between wanting to study, meeting domestic responsibilities, and

needing to earn money" (p. 10). While all the working-class students had financial

limitations, the most difficult problem to overcome was finding free time. The researchers

conclude that working-class adult students with families were "time poor" (p. 15). Time for

self and friends were the first to go when an adult added the responsibility of school to her

already demanding schedule: "They were eschewing various aspects of a 'normal

biography'— social life, financial security, and family relationship" (p. 11). Being too "time

poor" led to disengagement with the learning career. The second factor that led to school

withdrawal was self-doubt, which we see time and time again with working-class students in

higher education: "I'd got nearly all my credits so it wasn't that I just lost all my nerve. I

started to feel I wasn't good enough. I panicked that I was virtually illiterate, how could I

possibly be a teacher" (p. 15). These self-doubts were the result of wounds from poor

academic performance in secondary schools that never healed. In the end, seven of the

twenty-three adult students withdrew at the time of the study because of "time-poor" issues

or self-doubt about their abilities— all seven blamed themselves rather than structural

inequalities, hence likely continuing the cycle of past injuries interfering with future success.

Reay, Ball, and David conclude that while adults who return to school demonstrate considerable courage, there are many obstacles to maintaining a sustained engagement with a learning career. Money, time, and the "symbolic violence" that is the result of past academic injuries surface to pull the further-education rug right out from underneath working-class students' feet, leaving the researchers to include that "access [to higher education] remains one of grand design and inadequate realizations" (p. 17).

Adult educator and researcher Diane Reay (2002) published a second article from the study on the twenty-three mature students attending a further education program in London. Her article, "Class, Authenticity and the Transition to Higher Education for Mature Students," focuses on the students whose academic aspirations have been "warmed up" (a phrase from Deli, 2001) through their further education experience and are now opting to transfer to university to earn their four-year degree. Reay found that the majority of working-class students chose universities for their comfort levels, while middle-class students chose universities based on their prestige. In addition to comparing findings to middle-class adult students, Reay also compares the working-class adult students' responses to the traditional-aged students' findings that were part of her previous study. She is quick to highlight that among all the talk of professional education, adult students, far more than the traditional-aged students, are "invested in a vision of education as a means of self-fulfillment" (p. 402). Moreover, the adult students shared a "magical" excitement and an "amazement" at being in education and sense of finally "becoming somebody" (p. 402). "I had a constant sense of going nowhere, being no one. But when I finally made it to college, I found it had left completely. [It's] amazing" (p. 402). The traditional students shared a more subdued approach. They considered attending college as just the next step in the "normal life course" and something to be "got through rather than relished" (p. 402). Reay concludes: "The

responses of the mature students represent the total conversion of the excluded permitted access to what has previously been denied" (p. 402).

Reay found that when choosing their transfer universities the middle-class students were far more interested in "prestige" and "reputation," while "a majority of these working-class students were prioritizing the safe and the familiar, attempting to find somewhere they might have a sense of belonging" (p. 405). The working-class students wanted to "find themselves" in academia, but they didn't want to get lost. They wanted to be able to stay connected to their "authentic" working-class identities. As one participant observed:

> I don't see the point of spending my time with people who are not going to be able to relate to me and I'm not going to be able to relate to them. We are from different worlds, so I think I've had enough of that in my life. I don't want to feel as if I have to pretend to be someone I'm not. (p. 404)

In addition to maintaining connections to their working-class roots, the adult working-class students prioritized a feeling of comfort over competitiveness, for they were unsure about their academic abilities due to painful memories of past academic failures. Many had "troubled" academic histories. While some were able to create "spaces for recovery" (p. 409) from these past failures, most remained haunted by shame, and hence, felt vulnerable to peer evaluation, which played into their choice of schools. "I don't want to compete with anybody. I don't want to be in any of this competitiveness" (p. 404).

However, Reay reports that not all the working-class students made decisions about their next step in higher education based on comfort and belonging. Three working class adults shared a less "solidarist" and more "individualistic" approach (p. 410). These students were not trying to "hold on to their working-class identities," but were looking to leave them behind (p. 410): "I don't want to be a member of any club that will have me" (p. 410). Reay concludes that these students had a stronger sense of academic aspiration and more confidently claimed an academic identity. But this did not mean that any elite university was

open to them. While they had higher academic aspirations than the other working-class students, they didn't want to choose a university too far afield. One student discounted the London School of Economics because it was "very, very ambitious, ruthless even" (p. 411). While a second student chose an elite university, but the school she wanted to attend within the university welcomed adult, nontraditional students. These students were able to move out from their comfort zones, but not too far.

Reay concludes that all the working-class adult students in the study were struggling with issues of authenticity, tensions that were foreign to the middle-class students. Their institutional choices were centered around questions about comfort and belonging. At which institution would they feel more like themselves, either as a self still connected to their working-class roots or a self that was moving toward a more— but not too much so— middle-class academic world? Reay concludes that the working-class students lived at the intersection of two shames when making decisions about higher education institutions. "First, was the shame of overreaching and failing" (p. 413) and second, was the shame of attending a university lacking in prestige and cultural capital, for which they were now longing:

> At the end of the day you want to say you've been to university and be proud of it, when people put their little university in brackets it's like that's where I did it. Not do it in really messy joined up writing so they can't understand it because you're ashamed of where you went to. (p. 413)

From Reay's research, we can conclude that for these working-class, adults the "academic self" is always in some sense a threat to authenticity.

Adult educator Linden West (1995, 1996) interviewed thirty adult students attending the School of Continuing Education at the University of Kent from 1992-1995 about their motivation for returning school. All were studying liberal arts subjects in natural sciences, social sciences, or humanities. West (1995) chose a qualitative, longitudinal approach because

he wanted to give adult students time to reflect on their adult education motivations and understand their choices within the fuller context of their lives. West found that the adult students that he interviewed would initially state that they had decided to return to school for job-related reasons. For example, Karen, one of the participants, shared that she wanted to return to school to become a solicitor. We learn that unlike many working-class adult students, Karen was a successful secondary school student, but her family didn't support her dream of attending university. She found herself in boring, dead-end jobs and in an unhappy marriage. She wanted more out life. She wanted to reconnect to feelings of success in school.

Karen is an example of Hopper and Osborn's (1975) "selection error" theory. As West (1996) concludes: "She was educationally marginalized, having tasted some success but dropping out of the system for non-educational reasons. She looked to education in her present discontent because historically schooling represents time of relative success and some recognition" (p. 39). But returning to school to achieve a new occupation was never the full story. As time went on West found that the decision was part of a much bigger psychological and sociological life project:

> As the students reflected on these statements in subsequent sessions, their objectives were gradually subsumed within more complex narratives of frustration, fragmentation, and marginalization in existing lifestyles and of patterns of low self-esteem, disrupted education, and family and personal unhappiness over a lifetime. (p. 34)

Through life-story interviews that include childhood experiences, West learns that, for example, Karen's reasons for returning to school "became entangled in a story of powerlessness and inner vulnerability across her entire life" (p. 138). West believes that for Karen:

> Wanting to be a solicitor expressed a wish, however ill-judged the ambition, to be a
> more socially confident, assertive, and respected person. [This wish] continued into
> the present, not the least in relation to her husband and his friends. As in her family
> of origin and early experiences, she continued to feel worthless and empty in her
> relationships with others: patterns repeated across time. (p. 138)

West (1995, 1996) believes that for all the thirty participants, returning to school was about rebuilding a stronger, more confident, and authentic self during turbulent times. Adult education "provides space and frameworks to understand better, and revise, the story of one's life" (1995, p. 133). West (1995) also shares the story of Brenda, who returned to school at a time when her children were grown and her marriage was in trouble. She reported to West that she didn't feel needed or wanted anymore and that she decided to return to school to fulfill her childhood dream of becoming a teacher. West notes that in the early interviews with Brenda she was "self demeaning" and "dismissed" her own experience (p. 150). But by the end of the three years, Brenda's voice was stronger and she had access to her own feelings of anger as well to her inner strength and creativity. West concluded that Brenda was "constructing more of an independent identity" (p. 147). Brenda reported that reading Victorian literature in her comparative literature class helped put her own life into social and historical perspective. She saw parallels to her own life as an undesired wife and unneeded mother on the written page of these novels. Indeed, her sense of being used by others was so strong that she identified most with a prostitute in one the novels: "I just could draw alongside with her in that she is trying to hold back the tears and hurt and frustration and anger at being cheated when she really has been open and honest" (p. 148). Through education, West concludes that Brenda is constructing "a strong self which enables her to scream and shout as well as begin to celebrate her self and potential in more vibrant ways" (p. 149).

West cautions that education is not a linear progression to self-actualization, but that it is a "fragmentary, even fragmenting, processes" (p. 133). Brenda, after having a difficult experience in school, regressed slightly to her doubting, less confident self, but she never "plummets to previous depths" (p. 148). She was becoming, even though the process is fragile and at times regressive, "an active agent in constructing her own life" (p. 148). West (1995, 1996) concludes that the motivation to return to school for his participants was part of a psychological and sociological endeavor, having less to do job preparation than with rebuilding identities and telling different life stories. The adults in his study:

> Looked to education, to universities, to help them in a struggle to rebuild and move beyond the fragments of a life; a university may represent a space to understand the self and others somewhat better and revise a personal narrative as part of the process of rebuilding and constantly reshaping a life. (p. 154)

4. Conclusion: *The adult, working-class student experience*

West's (1995, 1996) research is an appropriate end for his work gives narrative evidence to the conclusion held by me and all the researchers presented: there is much more motivating the adult student's return to school than job preparation. In fact, it appears that working-class adult students, far more often than traditional-aged students, are interested in learning-for-learning's sake and want to learn to give back to those less fortunate. It appears that a liberal arts education can promote "as if" (Greene, 1995) learning experiences which support these students efforts to work toward social change or at least toward careers in public service. Also, and perhaps, most important, if we give adult students space, beyond the survey check-off box, to share the meaning of higher education in their lives we learn much about the psychological and sociological implications of education for adult students.

The qualitative life story research on working-class students' experience in higher education shared in this section brought to the fore just how much many working-class students, unlike many middle-class students, must live with family and social network

tensions that surround their decisions to go to college. When some working-class students enter higher education there are always questions: Do I belong here? Who am I leaving behind? Many must also defend learning as a valuable investment of time and money to those close to them who have little time and money. Also, over and over again, evidence was offered about the role of adult education in certifying students' self-worth. Confidence and identity formation— "becoming somebody"— through comfortable and safe learning environments appear to be what adult education can be for many working-class students. Moreover, it is an opportunity to overcome scars of shame about their academic ability formed in childhood. For many students who live at the margins of society, adult education is a chance to feel better about past academic failures, to feel like somebody, to feel they belong, and perhaps to find confidence to pursue even more demanding academic opportunities.

However, the dilemma remains: Is this what adult education should be about? Is adult education a willing participant in the cultural capital accumulation that will always excluded more people than it can certify? What can adult education offer to those students whose past academic scars don't heal, who don't have the time, money, or the self-confidence to remained engaged in their learning careers, and who, upon returning to education, feel shame or the fear of shame. The important lesson of my review of research is that I must keep these questions alive while I share the findings of success stories. My own research is not an uncritical celebration of meritocracy in America. It is my hope the through the study of successes we can learn, at least in part, a few answers to the haunting questions about those left behind.

D. Conclusion to the Literature Review: *The meaning of this "epistemological dispatch" on the adult, liberal arts and working-class student experience*

My "epistemological dispatch" formed a three-legged stool that now supports my own research. The three legs— history, theory, and qualitative research— support my own thinking about the intersection of adult education, liberal arts learning, and working-class concerns. Moreover, they support my understanding of Harvard Extension School graduates' learning careers. Indeed, I would have felt off balance if I began my research without an understanding of the meaning of adult liberal arts education at the turn of the century, that is, education for democratic participation. Or if I began without understanding liberal arts education's potential to stifle rather than promote social change. Or finally, if I didn't have an understanding of how much fear, shame, need of comfort, and identity construction play into some working-class adult students' decisions to return to school and ultimately play into their experiences once in higher education.

The literature review deepened my interest and propelled it from an "idiosyncratic fascination" (Dillard, 1989) to a topic worthy of scholarly attention. The lived experiences of adult, working-class, liberal arts students is the "bone" that I have "pursued," "kept up with," "circled round and round," and "gnawed" through this journey (see Dillard, 1989). This continues to be my "bone"; upon completion of this epistemological dispatch, I wanted to know more than ever why working-class adult students choose to study liberal arts, at Harvard in particular. I wanted to listen to stories about how these students ended up in a liberal arts education at Harvard University and what they made of their experiences. Through thinking deeply about their stories I wanted to return to this now semi-plowed

historical, philosophical, and theoretical field to grow my own meanings of their experience from this soil.

But first, I must share how I went about gathering and listening to Harvard Extension School working-class graduates' stories.

Chapter III. Methods: Process is Everything

> Process is nothing; erase your tracks. The path is
> not the work. I hope your tracks have grown over; I hope
> birds ate the crumbs; I hope you will toss it all and not
> look back.
> Annie Dillard (1989), *A Writing Life*

The distinction between an author of novels and an author of qualitative research is, for me, blurred. Both authors choose to write about their "idiosyncratic concerns" and "close to the nerve of their most intimate sensitivity" (Dillard, 1989). Both authors think through big ideas by "laying down a path of words" out of a canyon and straight toward new epistemological territory (Dillard, 1989). Both authors write their versions of lived experience, albeit, one real, one imaginary. Both authors care about the people in their stories and want readers to care, too. Both help readers to care by sharing the details of lived experience, for it is in the details of life that personal connections are made and larger meanings are gleaned. But, the success of creative writing rests with the invisibility of the writer's process; while the success of research rests with a full disclosure of the researcher's methods.

As readers of fiction, we don't want to know how the author constructed the story, for knowing the painstaking, story-building process can ruin the reading experience. As readers of research, we must know how the story was constructed. Without a blueprint, our reading experience is ruined by doubts and questions: How did she do that? How does she know that? Once these questions are answered to our satisfaction, then, and only then, can we sit back, relax, and appreciate the story.

Fiction writer Annie Dillard (1989) has been my writing guide, but now we must go our separate ways because when writing research, process is everything. My tracks need to be clearly delineated, for getting lost in research is not an aesthetic, but an unethical experience.

A. The Research Topic

   1. The question

How do adult[45], working-class graduates of the Harvard Extension School make meaning of their learning careers, that is, their experience of starting, continuing, and earning their liberal arts[46] undergraduate degrees?

   2. Definitions: *Working class, Harvard Extension School, meaning making, and learning career*

In educational research, working class has been typically defined by education level and job title (Linkon, 1999). Those who hold undergraduate degrees and managerial positions are more firmly entrenched in the middle class and those without are more closely associated with the working class. When I use the term **working class**, I am referring to first-generation college students whose parents worked in, and who themselves work in, white-collar service or blue-collar union jobs— jobs with little to no power.[47] The majority of my participants were working class; however, I did include two participants whose fathers earned their undergraduate degrees as adult students and four participants who were working in middle-class jobs at the time they were pursuing their undergraduate degrees. (See "The Participants" section for the rational behind their inclusion).

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[45] By "adult" I mean an individual past the "typical" age of going to college. While the "typical" liberal arts college student is eighteen to twenty-four years old, the students whose stories I want to better understand are a good deal older, some in their forties and fifties.

[46] There is debate over the definition of liberal arts education, and adult liberal arts education in particular. McNair (1999) reports: "Liberal adult education is not (and perhaps never has been) a single coherent concept" (p. 2). For the purposes of my research, liberal arts education is non-job related education. I am using Winter, McClelland, and Stewart's (1981) definition of liberal arts students, who "spend several years studying broad abstractions rather than learning specific facts. While their counterparts at professional, performance, technical, or vocational colleges are learning particular action skills, liberal arts students are supposed to develop their powers of reflection upon the broad vistas of human knowledge in order to become 'liberally' (rather than 'vocationally') educated" (p. 1).

[47] Michael Zweig (2002), researcher on working-class experience in the US, states that income and taste have been ways that popular culture has defined class, but he firmly believes that power not income informs class status and therefore he asserts that we should define class through job description: "Sixty-two percent of the labor force in the United States are working-class people, by which I mean people who do not have much control or authority over the pace or the content of the work and they're not a supervisor and they're not the boss. We're talking about white-collar workers, like bank clerks or cashiers; we're talking about blue-collar workers in construction and manufacturing" (Zweig, 2002, p. B9).

Harvard Extension School is part of the Division of Continuing Education at Harvard University. It is an open-enrollment program designed for working adults to earn degrees and graduate certificates or to enroll in continuing education courses on a part-time basis in the evening. In fact, only fifteen percent of Extension School students are degree or certificate candidates; the rest are non-degree students enrolled in one or two courses for their own personal enrichment or professional training. As stated in the Literature Review, previous education is the single best indicator of participation in adult education (Courtney, 1992), leading to the ironic conclusion that those who may need adult education least simply because they've already experience a lot, participate in it most. This holds true for the Harvard Extension School, which attracts a highly educated population: seventy-five percent of the students have undergraduate degrees, twenty-five percent have master's degrees, and five percent have doctorates.

The Extension School is separate and distinct from Harvard College. The Extension School awards its own degrees, which for undergraduate degree candidates is a Bachelor of Liberal Arts (ALB) in Extension Studies. Harvard College awards the Bachelor of Arts (AB). The ALB is the only bachelor degree that the Extension School offers; like Harvard College, there are no professional undergraduate degrees offered (for example, in business management or information technology). Moreover, Extension School students cannot choose a major. It is strictly a liberal arts degree covering the broad areas of natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities. At the Extension School, faculty members are drawn primarily from Harvard, but also from surrounding colleges and universities (e.g., Boston College, Boston University, Lesley University, and University of Massachusetts).

The Extension School is a school within the university, similar to the Harvard Law School or the Harvard Business School, but in daily practice, due to its open-enrollment

admission policy, the Extension School lives on the margins of the university. In the words of one of my research participants: "We're the poor step-children of the university." While that participant's comment may live near the extreme end of the sense-of-belonging continuum, it's not an atypical observation. Over my seventeen-year tenure at Harvard, many Extension School students (and even staff) have shared with me that on this campus they feel like "second-class citizens." There is a divide between those who paid the extraordinarily high tuition and jumped through the standard academic hoops to attend Harvard (e.g., high SAT or GRE/GMAT/LSAT scores, outstanding high school or college GPAs, extensive extracurricular lives, and noteworthy letters of recommendations) and those who pay reasonable tuition, bypass those obstacles, and are allowed to attend Harvard.

Indeed, the Harvard Extension School undergraduates and the "regular" Harvard College students ("regular" is a common qualifier on campus) rarely interact, except in the early evening when they pass by each other on the narrow, paved paths that connect the twenty or so brick and ivy-clad buildings that constitute Harvard Yard. Regular students stroll from classes to dorms, while Extension School students run from work to classes. The tension between regular students and Extension School students on campus is storied along class lines, with many students using the language of "front" and "back door" to describe the divide. Regular Harvard students walk in to Harvard through the front door, while Extension School students got in through a back door (i.e., the service entrance). I take up the class-inspired tension again in my findings, for it was a formative issue that shaped participants' learning careers.

Meaning making is about expressing personal experience. It is the distinctly human process of understanding our experience through language and acting upon those understandings. As narrative scholar, Polkinghorne (1988), asserts, the cognitive process of

meaning making "is not an 'object' available for direct observation" (p. 1). We can only understand meaning making through the stories human beings share about their experience. Polkinghorne does not stand alone, for scholars from a range of disciplines such as anthropology (Bauman, 1986), psychology (Bruner, 1986 & Mishler, 1999), and literary criticism (Ricoeur, 1984), agree that we come to understand the meaning of our lives "through the stories we hear and the stories we tell" (Witherell & Nodding, 1991, p. 1).

Learning career is the term I use to name research participants' educational journeys: that is, their experience starting, continuing, and earning their Harvard Extension School liberal arts degrees. I have borrowed this term from UK adult education researchers, Gallagher, Crossan, Field, and Merrill (2002). Sociologists from the Chicago School first introduced a broader definition of the word "career" in the late 1960s. They defined career as "any social strand of any person's course through life" (Goffman, 1968, as cited in Gallagher, Crossan, Field, & Merrill, 2002, p. 498). The term career as used by these early sociologists has both objective and subjective facets, but for the purposes of Gallagher, Crossan, Field, and Merrill's, and now my own, research it is the subjective facets that take center stage. "A career points to the individual's subjective experience, the meaning which they attribute to their experience, and their sense of becoming a certain person" (Gallagher, Crossan, Field, & Merrill, 2002, p. 498). The term learning career is important because of its emphasis on "subjective meanings." My research is centrally concerned with participants' subjective meaning making of "becoming a certain person" who didn't hold an undergraduate degree to becoming a person that does.

B. Research Methodology

1. Narrative case studies

Because of my interest in meaning making I constructed a qualitative research design. A focus on meaning is what distinguishes the qualitative researcher from her quantitative sister. My qualitative research methodology is a narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry, which is part of what many qualitative researchers name the "narrative turn," grew out of postmodern and feminist philosophical thinking about knowledge construction (Auerbach, 2002). The influence of this thinking offers an alternative focus for qualitative research by replacing attempts at understanding "the truth" of an experience with attempts at understanding individuals' "situated meaning" of an experience, particularly those individuals with limited political, economic, and social power. Narrative inquiry privileges the spoken word, that is, first-person accounts of experience, over other ways of understanding meaning, for example, observation, statistical correlation, or grand theoretical constructs.

Moreover, narrative inquiry focuses on context-specific meaning making— the inner worlds— of the participants through the "stories" they share about their experience. There is much debate surrounding the definition of the word "story" in the qualitative research context, with many narrative researchers noting the interchangeable use of the terms "narrative" and "story" (Mishler, 1995; Polkinghorne, 1995; Reissman, 1993). I am using narrative scholar Reissman's (1993) definition of narrative that includes told stories, but does not include short "question-and-answer exchanges, arguments, or other forms of discourse" (p. 3):

> The precise definition of narrative is a subject of debate. For now it refers to talk organized around consequential events. A teller in a conversation takes a listener into a past time or "world" and recapitulates what happened then to make a point, often a moral one. (p. 3)

The Harvard Extension School graduates took me back in time to the "world" of their adult education journeys from non-participants in higher education to degree holders. In addition to a past time orientation, the graduates shared the "consequential events" of their learning careers.

While I include grounded theory analysis of all participants' stories, the heart of the study are three narrative case studies. By case studies, I mean an in-depth look at three individual's learning careers at the Harvard Extension School. My case studies are constructed in the spirit of Freud's Dora, rather than case studies of particular places or programs; here the "bounded system" (Stake, 1995) is the individual learning career at Harvard. The focus is not psychoanalytic. The emphasis is on understanding the meaning of a participant's learning career within the context of his or her larger world. As working-class writer Carolyn Steedman (1986) states about narrative case studies inspired by Freud: "Case-study presents the ebb and flow of memory, the structure of dreams, the stories that people tell to explain themselves to others" (p. 21). I took a look at three individual learning careers and came to know them well, and attempted, to the best of my ability, to understand what the Harvard Extension School educational journey meant to the individuals, what it asked of them, and what it gave them.

2. Identity construction

Many narrative scholars from the fields of psychology and sociology believe that it is through narrative accounts of lives that our identities are formed. Narrative researchers Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998) sum up these scholars' theoretical positions:

> In the forefront of psychology and sociology today, Bruner (1991, 1996), Fisher-Rosenthal (1995), Gergen (1994b), Gegen and Gergen (1986), Hermans, Rikjs, Harry, and Kempen (1993), McAdams (1993), Polkinghorne (1991), and Rosenthal (1997), among others, advocate that personal narratives, in both facets of content and form, *are* people's identities. (p. 7)

They conclude that "we know or discover ourselves, and reveal ourselves to others, by the stories we tell" (p. 7). I agree with this thinking, but I knew that I would not understand these graduates' identities through my open-ended interviews about their learning careers. However, I did come to understand, at least partially, their time-bound and context-specific learning identities. The precedent for connecting identity formation to time-bound, context-specific social strands comes from social psychologist and narrative scholar, Eliot Mishler. Mishler (1999), when researching craft-artists' life histories, found that their work identities were just one among many self-definitions. "Metaphorically, we speak— or sing— our selves as a chorus of voices, not just as the tenor or soprano soloist. I propose that identity be defined as a collective term referring to the dynamic organization of sub-identities that might conflict with or align with each other" (p. 8).

For Mishler (1999), one sub-identity was craft-artist or worker identity; for my research, the sub-identity is adult student, or learner identity. I use this term tentatively, for I know one narrative of a life experience is just one of many meaning-making accounts. However, a focus on identity is integral to my study. From the literature review, we learned that for many working-class adults, higher education is a formative experience by which, as students, they construct their identities. In my study, issues around identity, particularly becoming "confident," "legitimate" adults, were much more salient educational outcomes for the participants than content learning or job training. As Luttrell (1997) concludes from her research on working-class, adult, basic education students: "Adult education is about establishing a credible, worthy self and public identity as much as it about gaining a diploma" (p. 113).

   3. Taking into account things said about us: *Class, liberal arts, and Harvard*

Educational decisions or transitions (e.g., to start, to stay, to finish an undergraduate degree) can be broken down into three sensible and dynamic processes: "What one can do, of what one wants to do, [given] the conditions that shape one's preference, and intention" (Gambetta, 1987, as cited in Lynch & O'Riordan, 1998, p. 449). I want to understand the "can" and "want" of Harvard Extension School graduates' learning careers, but I also want to understand the meaning of their learning careers given three "conditions that shape [their] preferences and intentions." Their class status, the liberal arts curriculum, and Harvard (i.e., the institution). These are not the only conditions that shape their experience; however, through the Literature Review I have demonstrated that these three conditions more than likely play leading roles. Moreover, it is critical to this inquiry that meaning making not be seen as only personal and micro, but political and macro; that is, the stories that we tell about our lives are informed by the stories we hear— mostly from those in power— in our common culture. As Wittgenstein (1922) states: "Who we are and who we become is determined by the things both said to us and, importantly, said about us. One cannot view meanings as something generated primarily by the private, solipsistic self" (p. 13).

a. Class

Many adult education researchers before me, all from the UK[48] (Gallacher, Crossan, Field & Merrill, 2002; Lynch & O'Neill, 1994; Lynch & O'Riordan, 1998; Marks, 2003; Reay, 2002; Reay, Ball, & David, 2002), have concluded that class must be centrally attended to in order to understand the meaning of the formal adult education experience. UK adult education researcher, Reay (2002), sums up this point: "Class, although mediated by gender

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[48] This fact highlights the plethora of adult educators in UK that explore issue of class and the lack of adult educators in US who tackle this issue. My research is an attempt to fill in this gap, but for now I must call upon my British colleagues to stress the importance of class-based analysis in adult education. Moreover, the same can be said for liberal arts learning, with a number of adult educators in the UK exploring the intersection of liberal arts and adult education and with very few adult educators in the US exploring this issue.

and ethnicity, always counts in the transition [into the higher education] process" (p. 400). It "always counts" because members of the working class can have a contested relationship with higher education. As demonstrated in the Literature Review, often working-class culture and higher education don't mix easily. For example, many working-class students, unlike many middle-class students, are more likely to live with family and social tensions surrounding their decisions to go to college. When working-class students enter higher education there can be questions: Do I belong here? Who (and what) am I leaving behind? What am I risking? Will I be shamed?

Moreover, class counts because higher education credentials are markers of class distinction. Through earning their undergraduate degrees, the research participants are transitioning to, or are becoming more firmly part of, the middle class, at least in terms of education and at least in terms of outsiders' perspectives and stories "said about them" (Wittgenstein, 1922) in the world. How they subjectively perceive this transition and the ways in which their own meanings of higher education (at any time in their pasts) conformed to or were in opposition to these "don't mix" theories are central questions of my study.

b. Liberal arts

As noted previously, the prevailing conclusion in the field of adult education[49], supported by quantitative data (Johstone & Rivera, 1965; Kim, Collins, Stowe, & Chandler, 1995; Valentine, 1997, as cited in Merriam & Caffarell, 1999), is that adults return to school

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[49] Much has been written about the difficulty of defining adult education. Rose (1995) concludes:"One of the problems endemic to the field is precisely the definition of adult education"(p. 228). Baptiste and Heaney (1996) concur: "The net for gathering adult education has been cast ever more widely, excluding less and less until almost everything is adult education" (p. 4). Typically, and in this context, adult education refers to formal learning activities that happen outside mandated secondary school and full-time, day college and university degree programs. Lifelong learning, extension studies, continuing education, and adult basic education are just some terms that fall under the umbrella of "adult education."

for job-related[50] education. Additionally, liberal arts education in the US has an elitist history (Usher, Bryan, & Johnson, 1997). Due to this elitist history in large or small part, and to the systematic tracking of many working-class students toward two-year vocational degrees (see Introduction), the liberal arts choice is atypical, given what we know about many working-class parents' and students' rejection of liberal arts education in favor of vocational, job-related education (Clark, Heist, McConnell, Trow, & Young, 1972; Ochberg & Comeau, 2001; Roberts & Rosenwald, 2001; Rubin, 1976; Shor, 1987, 1988).

Adult, working-class students' preference for job-related education is the story that lives in our world or "said about them" (Wittgenstein, 1922). As a result, the against-the-grain liberal arts curriculum choice has the potential to shape the decisions and meaning of these graduates' learning careers in substantial ways. Again, these are outsiders' perspectives. Discovering whether these graduates' subjective experience is that liberal arts education is elite, unrelated to career goals, or an atypical choice given their own working-class background is another central aim of the study.

c. Harvard

Finally, Harvard, as an institution of higher education, is steeped in social and cultural history. For centuries it has offered liberal arts education to the best and brightest, not to mention some of the richest. Many political and economic leaders from the US and around the world are educated at Harvard, a cultural icon of prestige, power, and elitism. Given Harvard's name recognition and history, it is not surprising that it is a character in the participants' stories, whether they chose to play up or play down its meaning. Moreover, the juxtaposition between highly selective, expensive (elite) Harvard and open-enrollment,

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[50] Job related is the term I use to describe professional, pre-professional, and vocational education, i.e., all education designed to promote job advancement or job change.

affordable (non-elite) Harvard Extension was destined to be an impressionable part of the participants' learning careers.

In sum, in order to understand these graduates' experiences, I cannot separate out the contexts in which they had the experiences. As narrative researchers, Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998) state: "People are meaning-generating organisms; they construct their identities and self-narratives from building blocks available in their common culture, above and beyond their individual experience" (p. 9). The "building blocks" of place (Harvard), curriculum (liberal arts), and class (first-generation, working class) are attended as "conditions," or stories that live in our world (as Wittgenstein's premise of stories told about us) that informed and shaped the graduates' learning careers.

C. Data Collection

1. The invitation

On April 15, 2002, I sent an invitation to participate in one ninety-minute, tape-recorded interview to 1999-2000 and 2000-01 Harvard Extension School graduates (see Appendix A). I made the decision to send the letter to graduates one or two years post-graduation because I believed that it would give potential participants enough time to have achieved a reflective distance from their degree-earning experience, yet the emotional, subjective details would still be fresh in their minds. I sent the invitation to all 260 graduates rather than devising a creative plan to solicit just working-class participants. The reason for the blanket invitation was that I was initially interested in doing a comparison study between working-class and middle-class graduates. I soon abandoned that as part of my research design.

Thirty-two students responded to my invitation letter by phone or email and I interviewed twenty-three graduates (just about ten percent of the graduate population). Of

the nine that I didn't interview, four were out of state and five did not return my follow-up inquiry. I decided to make in-person interviews a criterion and I chose not to make second follow-up calls to avoid the appearance of pressuring participants.

In the invitation I stated that an examination of socioeconomic class is part of the study. Because class is a "touchy subject" (Fussell, 1992) in the US, I felt ethically compelled to be sure that the graduates who chose to participate were comfortable with this aspect of the research. As a result, I may have excluded those who were not comfortable discussing class. In addition, participation in the study is most likely biased toward those graduates who were satisfied with their experience at Harvard Extension School and a few who appreciated my personal interaction. I received a number of responses from graduates stating that they would be happy to participate because it was the least they could do to give back to a program that gave them so much and that I, in particular, through my academic advice had helped them.

There was little that I could do to prevent these conditions, except choose a different research site. I did steer clear of questions related to academic advising or any student service aspect of their adult education experience (which is my domain), as well as evaluative questions that would require them giving their personal opinion or sharing their satisfaction (good or bad) with the program. I focused solely on their individual life stories. Of course, the shared good feelings that brought the participants to the research and my role as the interviewer ultimately shape the story I tell of their experience. That is why I share these details with the reader. But while in the beginning of the interviews there was a slant toward an overall feeling of satisfaction, about mid-way through many participants gave accounts of a contested, tension-filled relationship with their Harvard Extension School experience, and others communicated outright negative feelings. I believe that by focusing on life stories and

steering clear of educational experiences that directly related to my work, as well as evaluative questions, I was able to get past the careful "public voice" (Seidman, 1991) and elicit their personal voice; the voice of individual experience.

2. Application essays

In order to prepare for the interviews, I read all 260 applications essays from the two graduation classes (1999-2000 and 2000-2001). While applicants to the program usually had a choice of three essay questions, the majority answered the question: "In a brief essay detail, why you are pursuing a degree through the Harvard Extension School." The application essays are pertinent sources of information about why adults didn't attend college after high school or why they dropped out of college, and why they are returning to school at a more nontraditional age. First I noticed that most applicants had some college experience. Second, the application essays of those students who dropped-out of college for monetary reasons had a distinctly different tone than the applications essays of those who dropped-out for non-monetary reasons.

The non-monetary reasons why the adult students dropped-out of college ran the gamut from the death of a parent, to their own mental or physical illness, to a wonderful career or artistic opportunity, to finally, a lack of maturity, which led to excessive socializing, drinking, and drug use. "I lacked focus," was the most prevalent phrase used throughout the college-drop-out essays. The students left college the first time because they had little focus or personal drive to be there, little idea of what they wanted to learn or wanted to be when they grew up. There were many stories of attending college because they "were supposed to," not because they wanted to. As adult students at the Harvard Extension School, they shared in their essays that the reverse was true: they were "focused" and they were here

because "they wanted to be here." They also attribute their newly found academic success to their focus.

These non-monetary prevalent story lines are in stark contrast to the story lines in the essays of my 23 participants who, for the most part, fell into the monetary-reasons-for-dropping-out-of-college-the-first-time camp. Indeed, only one participant mentioned the "party" atmosphere as a reason for leaving college and one other mentioned the "lack of focus." The dominant theme in my participants' essays was the need to be self-sufficient after high school and go to work. When they did attend college it was, for the most part, on a part-time basis while working. The participants in my study were not your typical "undergraduates." At the time of their application to Harvard Extension School, the participants wanted to return to school to "finally" finish their undergraduate degree because they felt "incomplete," "lacking," "deficient," as well as "a nagging sense of emptiness." They also wanted to "feed" the hunger of their intellect through the liberal arts curriculum. The language of hunger and thirst was noteworthy: "I am very eager to commit time and energy within a structured environment where I can satisfy my thirst for new ideas." The participants also shared in their applications essays that the first few courses at the Extension School firmed up their decision to return to school, for they found intellectually stimulating faculty and fellow students— they found "people like me" at the Extension School. This was the narrative backdrop on which I listened to participants' life stories in the individual interviews.

In addition to being another source of information about these graduates' learning careers, the essays served as a possible method of data triangulation. The applications essays were written five, six, and sometimes ten years ago, all closely match the narratives shared in the interviews. I had assumed that as time went on the decision to return to school would be

viewed in a different light. It could be that the decision to return to school is a profound

turning point in an adult's life committed— in detail— to long-term memory. Or it could

mean that once we commit an event to text, we also commit it to memory[51].

3. The questionnaire

When the participants came into my office for the interview, they first signed a

consent form (see Appendix B) and filled out a brief pre-interview questionnaire (see

Appendix C). On the questionnaire they identified past and current class backgrounds

(through check-off boxes) and answered questions related to family background (parents'

job titles, education levels, and class status, as well as family messages regarding higher

education). In addition, they answered questions related to family and friends' support for

their liberal arts education choice and questions related to their personal roles during their

Harvard Extension School learning careers, for example, marital, parental, and employment.

Finally, they answered a few financial questions regarding tuition funding. I wanted to know

if the Extension School tuition was an out-of-pocket expense for participants or if they were

receiving help, either through employer tuition-reimbursement programs or scholarships.

Over the years, students have often made the comment to me that when they were spending

their own money, it made a difference in terms of their academic motivation (i.e., more

committed) and curriculum choices (i.e., employer subsidies made for more job-related

choices).

While all the information collected on the questionnaire became grist for the data-

analysis mill, the questionnaire's main role was to help me determine class backgrounds and

to initiate a conversation around class definitions. I spent the first minutes of each interview

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[51] Indeed, Annie Dillard (1987) warns memoir writers that once you have written about a certain moment in time "you can no longer remember anything but the writing" (p. 71).

discussing the questionnaire in order to invite the participants to explain further their thinking behind choosing on the questionnaire one class over another. For example, I asked: "How did you decide to choose middle class over working class as your class background?" The answer to my "probing" question was a window into the participants' subjective meanings of class. Moreover, this question became an essential part of my class identification process, particularly when participants self-identified their backgrounds as middle class, when the standard criteria of job title and level of education would place them in a working-class background. (See "The Participants" section for more information.)

4. The interviews

While the questionnaire played a useful role in the data analysis, the study is not about demographics or short-answers to survey questions; it's about life stories that adult students shared with me about their learning careers. The interviews were just as much about the participants' childhoods and learning careers prior to Harvard Extension School as they were about their experiences at Harvard Extension School. I chose this approach because I know that my own educational choices and meanings are constructed in relationship to past experiences and my family of origin's messages about the value of education. Also, like social mobility researchers, Bertaux and Thompson (1997), I believe that my field, adult education, has neglected family background completely or, "has typically treated families as black boxes, whose input are a handful of variables such as father's occupation" (p. 19). In this study I wanted "to open those black boxes" (p. 19) and hear the stories that are told inside about the meanings of a college education.

Finally, I chose to focus on the participants' childhood and learning experiences prior to Harvard Extension School because the education literature has stressed that many working-class parents don't prepare their children "academically and psychologically"

(Inman & Mayes, 1999) for college. In fact, they may discourage or just not support going to college, particularly four-year liberal arts institutions (Ochberg & Comeau, 2001; Roberts & Rosenwald, 2001). I wanted to find out if this lack of family support story that lives in the world of educational research held true for these adult students. I wanted to learn their thoughts about how growing up in working-class homes affected their educational choices and experiences. Finally, I wanted to learn about the participants' previous experiences in high school and/or college, for as I wrote in the Literature Review past research has supported the notion that, many working-class adults have "troubled" (Reay, 2002) academic histories. Adult education can be an opportunity to re-story the past and create a new academically secure self, or, sadly, to re-live this experience and the accompanying shame.

The interview questions about family and academic background focus on certain *etic* aspects (i.e., aspects generated from the educational research on working-class students). I do not believe that my *etic*-inspired questions are in contradiction to the narrative research design, that is, a design focused on individual life stories. I didn't interrupt or guide the participants in any way after asking questions. As narrative scholar, Mishler (1986), states: "Respondents may also tell stories in response to direct, specific questions if they are not interrupted by the interviewer trying to keep them to the point" (p. 69). Indeed, the open-ended interview questions (see Appendix D) were designed to encourage the participants' active construction of their own views. The first and primary interview question was: "Tell me the story of how you came to the Harvard Extension School." I chose this open-ended question to ensure that I spent a large portion of time in the interview listening to participants share their thoughts about their decisions to return to school. Polkinghorne (1995) states: "If the interviewer will not suppress the interviewee's responses by limiting the answers to what is relevant to narrowly specified questions, a storied answer will be

provided" (p. 13). This was my experience. After asking this opening question, the majority of the participants spent the first twenty minutes of the interview sharing the situated life world context around the Harvard Extension School choice with little to no prompting by me. As West (1995) found in his research on adult students' return-to-school narratives, the stories just "poured out" (p. 153).

As a result, the greater part of the interview data comprises graduates taking extended storytelling "turns" (Linde, 1993), meaning, long, uninterrupted periods of speaking time. During these turns they brought me back to the world where they first decided to return to school. They shared details of their daily lives as adult students, their thoughts on the liberal arts curriculum, and on being at Harvard. They also shared their experiences after graduation. With some initial prodding from me, they also took me back to their young adulthood. During these stories they shared their learning lives in high school, and if applicable, in college. They also took me back to their childhood to share their families' meaning making of education, that is, the stories that were told to them by their parent(s) about higher education.

Most interviews were an organic process. The questions were not asked in one particular order (except for the first question), but when the moment felt right. Additionally, we moved back and forth between the past and present when it seemed like a natural transition to do so. At the end of each interview, I felt compelled to share my background with the participants. I wanted them to know that I, too, grew up working class and in great part that is why I was interested in their stories. I didn't want them to feel that I was "studying down," but studying alongside. Cultural awareness, as well as the felt experience in the interview that class is a "touchy" (Fussell, 1992) subject was very much a part of the discomfort that inspired my eagerness to share my own class background. After I opened

up in this way, the participants would ask questions of me, regarding my family and educational background. This helped alleviate another discomfort I had with life story interviewing. The participants were revealing personal details of their lives to me, while I remained silent. They were vulnerable, and I was not. By sharing personal details of my life, even at just the tail-end of the interview, helped me to feel that we were engaged in a more— at least slightly— egalitarian relationship. However, like West (1995), who also shared his personal experience with his participants, I worried that I shared too much personal experience:

> Had I used my own experience and position of power and authority to take the tale in particular directions? If so, did this matter? Was it a strength or weakness? Should I celebrate the fact of common experience making it possible to talk in more open and explicit ways, or not? (p. 152)

After some investigation, I concluded that sharing my personal experience at the end of interview helped more than hindered participants' own storytelling. The participants tended to use my story as a way to clarify their own backgrounds by using phrases such as: "Oh, in my family it was a little different" or, to gain confidence about their own experience: "I never knew anyone else felt that way," "I feel so much better," and "I thought I was alone."

In the end, I was pleased with the data that were generated from one ninety-minute or two-hour interview with each participant. Together the participants and I covered a lot of ground and I felt I learned enough to engage in an in-depth analysis about their adult education journeys within the context of their life worlds. Ethically, I felt good about sharing my experience at the end of the interviews. I felt that the participants appreciated my personal disclosures. Also understanding the personal story behind my research took the "scientific sting" out of the encounter. For me, and I believe for the participants as well, personalizing the interview made the event much more human, and humane.

5. Follow-up interviews

Two follow-up interviews were done with three participants who are the subject of the case study portion of the research. These participants were chosen because their stories exemplified and took up the features and themes of the discourse of others not chosen. Indeed, each of the stories, in the words of social anthropologist, Carol Stack, "held the all of it" (personal communication, October 2003). Specifically, each case exemplified the three reasons I found for why these 18 adults returned to school. Beatrice (like two other participants) felt morally compelled to return to school, because she felt like a cheat in her upper-level professional job. Carl (like seven other participants) returned to school because he felt uneducated or felt others viewed him as uneducated. Wendy (like six other participants) felt marginalized and deprived about her station in life and wanted to return to school to get a better paying job. In addition, each case study exemplified different working-class reactions to higher education that London (1992) has found in his research. Some members of the working-class "cherished upward mobility, others are wary of it, and still others see it as incidental to other goals" (p. 7). The participants in my study were nearly evenly divided among these three categories, and the case studies themselves represent the divide. Beatrice "viewed it as incidental to other goals," for she was far more interested in achieving professional success. Carl was "wary" of upward mobility and found a way to combine his academic ambitions with his working-class identity. Wendy, perhaps more than any other participant, "cherished" it. Moreover, these three participants' life stories represented one of three dominant identity struggles represented across all the stories: adult student identity (Beatrice), working-class intellectual identity (Carl), and Harvard graduate identity (Wendy).

During the first follow-up interview, I used the transcription of the first interview as my data source, and shared verbally with the participants my reconstruction of their learning careers and asked for comments and corrections. In addition, I invited participants to comment further on themes in the first interview that related to class, liberal arts, and Harvard, as well as previous academic experience, impressions of family/friends, and childhood stories of higher education. I phrased the follow-up questions: "Tell me more about ... ." This invited participants to share further details and meaning-making schemes about specific "conditions that shape [their] preferences and intentions" (Gambetta, 1987, as cited in Lynch & O'Riordan, 1998, p. 449) in their leaning careers, which is the central aim of the study. One participant shared contradictory information in the second interview. In the first interview, Wendy shared that upon graduation from the Harvard Extension School she expected little from the degree, and assumed that she would just return to her "same life and job." But in the second interview, she told me that she expected her life to change dramatically: "I expected the trumpets to blare, the red carpet to be unrolled, and the corner office to be vacated." When this didn't happen, she was initially quite disappointed. Her turnabout was a critical turning point in my data analysis, and helped me see other participants' post-graduation responses in a new light. If for this reason only, it was certainly worth doing a second interview.

The second follow-up interview happened about a year later. I met with each of the three case-study participants over lunch to share with them the progress of my study and, most important, to check in with them about their current educational and employment pursuits. During these sessions, I learned where their liberal arts degrees that they earned at mid-life from the Harvard Extension School had taken them professionally and

academically. I also learned about their level of satisfaction with their post-graduation

pursuits and plans.

D. The Participants

I interviewed twenty-three graduates, but I did not to include five interview

participants' stories in the data analysis stage because their class backgrounds were squarely

middle or upper class, therefore, my data population was narrowed to eighteen women and

men— Silvia, Kevin, Sue, Jane, Sara, Jeff, Beatrice, Tom, Wendy, Beth, Lisa, Brenda,

Maureen, Gale, Jean, Carl, Cheryl, and Barbara— to whom I'm eternally grateful. I do like

knowing that (without my recruiting them) eighteen out of the twenty-three participants

grew up working class and are first-generation college students. It is an interesting bit of

information that perhaps hints at the type of adult student we are attempting to serve

through the undergraduate degree program at the Harvard Extension School.

1. Gender and age

My research is an exploratory study of the working-class undergraduate experience at

the Harvard Extension School. There was no effort on my part to recruit an equal

percentage of women or men, or participants from various ethnic and racial backgrounds.

The working-class graduates that chose to participate in the study, became my research

participants. Of the eighteen participants, fourteen are women and four are men.

Historically the Harvard Extension School educates more women than men. The larger

population of graduates which these participants were part was sixty percent women and

forty percent men. My research population has a slightly higher percentage of women,

seventy-seven percent. The gender breakdown of the participants is as follows:

14	Women
4	Men

The age range of the eighteen participants at graduation was from twenty-seven to eighty. The average, mode, and median were respectively, forty-two, thirty-seven and forty-six, and forty-one. The participants' ages are older than the average age of a 1999-2001 graduate, which was thirty-five, with thirty-three the median. The participants in the study do, however, represent the typical gender and age of the adult student in the US: forty years old and female (College Board, 2000). The age breakdown of the participants is as follows:

4	Twenties
4	Thirties
7	Forties
1	Fifties
1	Sixties
1	Eighties

Average Age	42
Mode	37, 46
Median	41

2 Race and socioeconomic status

Of the participants, fifteen are white (one permanent resident from the Netherlands), two are black (one is African-American and one Haitian-American), and one is Hispanic (both parents born in Central America). Minority students made up eighteen-percent of the larger graduate population in 1999-2001, while minority students represented sixteen-percent of my research population. The race breakdown of the participants is as follows:

2	Black
1	Hispanic
15	White

The participants self-identified their class status growing up through the following check-off boxes: poor, working class, middle class, or upper class. The socioeconomic class backgrounds of the participants are as follows:

5	Poor
9	Working Class
4	Middle Class

I chose to include the four students in the study who checked off the middle-class status box because it is not uncommon for white, working-class Americans to define their class status as middle class (Farley, 1984; Floyd & Shinew, 1994; Linkon, 1999). More important, their parents' educational background and job titles were squarely working class. Of the four, the fathers worked as police officer, low-level government employee, factory worker, phone technician, and accounts receivable office worker. Only one mother worked; she was a medical technician.

When asked about their middle-class designation the majority of participants stated that their parents were working class and worked at working-class jobs, but that the difference in their minds was that they owned a home and/or their parents participated in cultural and intellectual events. While I agree that owning a home is a significant source of financial security, I felt it didn't change the central criteria of the study, which is parents' educational backgrounds. Moreover, there were too many participants who identified their backgrounds as poor and working class whose parents also participated in cultural and intellectual events to consider this a class distinction. I believe the idea that working-class people do not actively participate in cultural or intellectual activities is a stereotype in our world. It does not, however, belong in this study.

Two of the participants are not first-generation college students. I included these two participants in the study because both fathers (the mothers did not hold degrees) went back to school as adult students to earn their degrees and I felt that this was much more of a working-class experience of college than attending college right from high school. One father went to school on the GI bill and subsequently worked as a government employee and the other was already a police officer, but returned to school to achieve a higher pay scale and to satisfy his love of learning.

I asked participants to self-identify their occupations during their degree-earning periods. The majority, fourteen, worked in standard working-class jobs. Six were secretaries or had related office assistant jobs, and the others were truck driver, waitress, carpenter, bill collector, computer technician, nurse, house assessor, and retail salesperson. I also included four participants who worked in middle-class jobs during the degree-earning period. Of the four, one was a broker, one a computer software engineer, one a retired Foreign Service and high-level government employee, and one a vice-president of at a sales and marketing firm. The breakdown of working class and middle class jobs is as follows:

14	Held Working Class Jobs
4	Held Middle Class Jobs

I included the participants who held middle-class jobs for three reasons. First, I wanted to critique Hopper and Osborn's (1975) theory of "selection error," that is, their notion that adults return to school to re-align their education credentials to *improve* their job satisfaction. Second, I didn't assume that the participants' working-class backgrounds were promoted "out" of them (Terepocki, 2000) when their job status changed. I assumed that their working-class upbringings still shaped their "habitus" (Bourdieu's 1977, 1986), that is, the meaning making frames they use to understand the world. If we ignore the subjective

experience of class formed early on, we come to view job title and education like place cards. Once a working-class woman's job title and education changes, she gets up and moves to her proper middle-class seat, and, so the theory goes, leaves behind ways of making meaning of the world that began in childhood. Moreover, this understanding of upward mobility views class as an external category bestowed upon members of the working class, rather than a category that is actively constructed by members of the working class.

Terepocki, researcher on the working class in academia, rejects the place-card understanding class. Terepocki (2000) believes that when job status or education changes: "Class-based identity is not lost. But there is a broadened frame of reference, and a sharpened experience of social difference" (p. 45). Terepocki's critique does not relegate class to a fixed category inherited from childhood, but invites a broader understanding of class that includes subjective, as well as historical and political contexts, rather than defining class solely through standard (and narrow) criteria of job title and level of education[52].

Third, I contend that while the participants held middle-class jobs, not having a college education kept them away from a comfortable, no-questions-asked seat at the middle-class table. Paul Fussell (1992) concludes that in America, higher education in the form of an undergraduate degree, more than any other class criterion (job title or income), defines one's class. He adds: "The number of hopes blasted and hearts broken for class reasons is probably greater in the world of colleges and universities than anywhere else" (p. 141). Additionally, Luttrell (1997) concludes from her research on working-class adult students that "talking about school is a code word for talking about class" (p. 6)

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[52] To the outside world, I am no longer working class. I am a manager. I make a decent wage. For the first time in my life, I live in home, not an apartment. I have a master's degree and, soon, will have a doctorate degree. But, how I make meaning of this doctorate degree is clearly informed by my working-class background. Moreover, I still make many life decisions, for example staying at the same job for the past seventeen years, based upon my working-class ways of thinking about the world. While I claim fully my personal comforts and power over others, I do not claim a middle-class view of the world— at least not completely.

E. Data Analysis

There is not just one way to do narrative inquiry. Indeed, Reissman (1993) states: "There is no standard set of procedures compared to some forms of qualitative analysis" (p. 54), but there are scholarly guides, that is, narrative researchers who have written down their research methods. My principal guide is narrative scholar Donald Polkinghorne (1988, 1995). I interpreted the data in the ways that he proposes: paradigmatic analysis of narrative data and narrative analysis of eventful data. Polkinghorne (1995) asserts that these are the two primary ways to analyze narrative data, which are inspired by cognitive psychologist Jerome Bruner's (1986) definition of two kinds of cognition: paradigmatic and narrative. The idea is that paradigmatic analysis, like paradigmatic thinking, is about classification of items into like categories, while narrative thinking and narrative analysis is about the particular and "special characteristics of each action" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 11). Moreover, with the paradigmatic, the emphasis is on what is said and with the narrative the more emphasis is placed on how it is said. Narrative researchers and scholars, Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zibler (1998) also explain the differences between these two procedures. They use two different terms: content analysis and holistic approach:

> In traditional content analysis, the original story is dissected, and sections or single words belonging to a defined category are collected from the entire story or from several texts belonging to a number of narrators. In contrast, in the holistic approach the life story of a person is taken as a whole, and sections of the text are interpreted in the context of other parts of the narrative. (p. 12)

I chose to do both, paradigmatic analysis of narrative data and narrative analysis of eventful data, because I wanted to understand the common elements of the learning career across all participants' stories and I wanted to share the nuances and the richness of a few individual stories.

While both data analysis processes are central to the research, the individual stories or case studies are the heart of the study. The case studies are my re-constructions of entire learning careers of three participants. I share as a unified whole the set of complex situations and beliefs systems that characterized three participants' journeys from adult education non-participant to degree earner. As stated previously, the three case studies were chosen because they represented emerging story lines found across all participants' stories, specifically: (1) tension around the adult student identity, (2) the working-class intellectual identity, and (3) the Harvard graduate identity.

Additionally, they were chosen for their fitness for particularization, that is, unique experiences that would be lost if classified as items into like categories. As case study researcher, Robert Stake (1995) concludes: "The real business of case study is particularization, not generalization. We take a particular case and come to know it well, what it is, what it does" (p. 8). While the focus is on particularization, this does not mean that the case studies have no relevance beyond their boundaries. The bounded system of the case can (and should) push the perimeters of our everyday thinking about phenomena, or, as case study researcher and scholar, Anne Dyson (1995), states, case study should push our thinking "out of bounds," to places where we don't normally let our thoughts wander. For Dyson, case study researchers must "deal with the dangling threads that cannot be understood [e.g., through thematic analysis alone], that suggest the need to refocus, to clarify, and sometimes to redefine our assumed theoretical perspectives" (1995, p. 7).

I share my paradigmatic analysis of narrative data first, and then the three case studies. My narrative analysis of individual case studies (narrative analysis of eventful data) and my thematic analysis of all participants' stories (paradigmatic analysis of narrative data) support the existing literature on adult, working-class students' experiences, but it also offers

alternative perspectives about commonly accepted assumptions about a place (in this case,

Harvard University) and a population (in this case, working-class, adult students).

1. Paradigmatic analysis of narrative data

For my paradigmatic analysis of narrative data I borrowed data analysis methods

from grounded theorists, Strauss and Corbin (1998). The purpose is to understand the

common elements of all the participants' experiences by deriving concepts inductively from

the data rather than deductively from established theories. To accomplish this goal, I used

Strauss and Corbin's (1998) three data analysis techniques: open coding, axial coding, and

selective coding.

During open coding I fractured the data into discrete units and words, sentences,

and whole paragraphs and then moved the units under larger categories of meaning, for

example, "reasons returned to school." During axial coding I identified relationships

between phenomena through questions of conditions, contexts, and consequences (Strauss

& Corbin, 1998), which realigned my open coding categories. For example, by asking

context specific questions of the data unit, "children are now grown," I decided that it is a

condition that made the returning to school decision easier, but not a reason to return to

school. During selective coding I collapsed many of the sub-categories created through

open and axial coding into a few meta-categories of meaning in order to share my

"theoretical" understanding of these graduates' learning careers.

Through using these three data analysis processes (open coding, axial coding, and

selective coding), I brought about a thematic understanding of the common meaning-

making elements of these adult working class students' learning careers. Moreover, these

processes helped me understand the conditions of class, liberal arts curriculum, and

institution (Harvard), as well as past academic experiences and childhood stories about higher education that give shape and form to these graduates' learning careers.

2. Narrative analysis of eventful data

While paradigmatic analysis of narrative data begins with a narrative (or story) and fractures the data into themes, narrative analysis of eventful data creates a narrative (or story) from the data. Polkinghorne (1995) suggests that the goal during narrative analysis is to identify a consistent plot-line (or lines) that run through a participant's story, in this case, about her learning career and background in order to construct a meaningful account of her journey from non-participant to degree holder. Rather than looking for common themes across all participants' stories, the process is to look for common themes within one individual story in order to "configure them as contributors to the advancement of a plot" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 16).

The process of doing narrative analysis of eventful data is "recursive," that is, the researcher moves from data to plot construction and then from plot construction to data. When data do not fit the developing plot, then, of course, the plot line needs to be re-configured until the researcher can account for all meaningful data. The end result is an "an explanation that is retrospective, having linked past events together to account for how a final outcome might have come about" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 16). Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zibler (1998) have broken down the "recursive" movement into five data analysis steps:

1. Read the material several times until a pattern emerges, usually in the form of foci of the entire story.
2. Put your initial and global impressions of the case into writing. Note exceptions to the general impressions, as well as unusual features of the story such as contradictions or unfinished descriptions.
3. Decide on special foci of content or themes that you want to follow in the story as it evolves from beginning to end.

4. Using colored markers, mark the various themes in the story, reading separately and repeatedly for each one.
5. Keep track of your results, follow each theme throughout the story and note your conclusions, paying special attention to episodes that seem to contradict the theme. (p. 63)

I followed these steps to construct my narrative analysis of eventful data, i.e., my case studies.

While my primary analytic focus is the content of the life story, I attend to the story's form as well. I believe that language is not simply a transmitter of meaning, but "its very structure imposes some order on events that thereby influences meaning" (Rossiter, 1999, p. 5). This level of attention helps, in Riessman's (1992) words, "to see how a narrator actually constructs her account— the linguistics choices she makes, the structural function of specific clauses, the role of listener" (p. 233). I attended to word choices such as intensifiers (e.g., "really" and "very"), deintensifiers (e.g., "maybe" and "like"), and mental verbs (e.g., "I thought", "I understood", and "I noticed"). In addition, I took note of grammatical construction switches, such as passive and active construction and first-person to second-person to third-person transitions (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zibler, 1998) in order to understand the participant's active construction of, or agency within, an experience.

Moreover, narrative analysis must attend to the role of stories in our lives. Narrative researcher Hunter McEwan (1997) reminds that as far back as Cicero, we've learned that speakers speak with an intentional purpose: "Thus, Cicero speaks of the three ends of discourse: to prove, to please, and to persuade" (p. 85). Modern day philosopher and literary critic, Paul Ricoeur (1984), concludes that narrative is an "art hidden in the depths of the human soul" (1984, p. 287). He believes that one shares stories about personal experiences in ways that point to becoming a person whom one was always meant to be. That is, living out life according to a deeply ingrained notion of coherence between identity and destiny.

Moreover, through current research from the field of linguistics, we have learned that human beings tell stories in predictable ways that tend to shore up egos, confirm self-agency, and leave out the potential randomness of life. For example, sociolinguist, Charlotte Linde (1993) found that when adults communicate their life stories to another, they want to share "adequate" reasons for their life choices. Moreover, listeners expect "adequate" reasons and will interrupt and ask for clarification until "adequate" responses are given. Linde (1993) terms this aspect of social storytelling the "creation of coherence."

Linde (1993) interviewed white, middle-class adults about their chosen professions. From her life story interviews, she concluded that personal characteristics are most often given as an "adequate account" for career choices. Explanations "rooted outside the self," that is, reasons for career choices that could be "attributed to either accident or determinism" (p. 131) are rarely given:

> The most powerful adequate causality for a choice of profession is character. Speakers and addressees appear to take character traits at primitives, referring to them as obvious and sufficient cause for career decisions. Thus, if a speaker claims "I like that sort of thing" or "I'm good at it," the accounts can be taken as offering an adequate and final reason for the choice of profession. (1993, p. 221)

Linde (1993) also found that creation of coherent life stories was not simply a personal and social act between speaker and listener, but that larger cultural (e.g., American) "social systems" were at play. Speakers and listeners make "assumptions about the world to make events and evaluations coherent" (p. 221). For example, Linde (1993) found that race or class status was never mentioned as a factor that influenced career choice, leading her to conclude: "This view of the world without politics and without social class appears to be particularly American" (p. 166).

Similarly, from her research on white and black working-class women's life stories, Luttrell (1997) surmised: "People tell stories in ways that explain and justify social

inequalities related to privilege, power, or respect as we, each in our way, search for personal recognition and esteem in a society where some people count more than others" (p. xv). She found that the white, working-class women in her study were far more likely to attribute their lack of social mobility to family (i.e., mothers) and personal failures, rather than to class oppression. However, she found that the black working-class women in her study were able to name race as a legitimate explanation for their lack of upward mobility. This is an example of the point that Hunter McEwan (1997) makes about the paradoxical power of stories to be emancipatory or coercive. "On one account, the narrative is to be valued because it is proper vehicle for expressing truth about human thought and action [e.g., race is a "adequate account"]. On the other, narrative is a suspect form that tends to obscure the truth in order to bind the individual to group norms [e.g., class is not an "adequate account]" (p. 89). McEwan goes on to claim that research participants (like all of us) are "presented with a finite number of story schemas, and they tend to sort out their perceptions and experience into those that they recognize as comfortable and familiar structures or plots" (p. 88).

As all of this research suggests, stories are rarely what they appear to be. As a result, McEwan advises all narrative researchers to develop their interpretive skills and attend to the "hidden features" (p. 91) or "narrative secrets" (Kermode, 1980) of participants' stories. Understanding that the stories the participants told me were, in some ways, (1) predetermined by "story schemas" (McEwan, 1997), (2) attempts at finding "personal recognition and esteem" (Luttrell, 1997, p. xv), and (3) possibly influenced by the notion of character traits and larger "social systems" (Linde, 1993) were essential considerations that informed my data analysis.

In addition to recursive plot line construction, linguistic narrative analysis, and understanding the potentially predictable role of stories in our identity formation, all discussed above, I constructed my case studies by taking into consideration Polkinghorne's (1995) seven criteria for judging a life story:

> (1) cultural context of the events and the graduate's meaning making, (2) the physical details of the graduate (e.g., height and physique), (3) the role of family and friends in the meaning making story, (4) the graduate's choices and actions, that is, the narrative must be centrally concerned with the graduate's meanings and understandings of her learning career, (5) previous experiences that play major roles in the graduate's story, (6) the graduate's unique character traits, and, finally, (7) the story that I create from that data must "provide a story line or plot that serves to configure or compose the disparate data elements into a meaningful explanation of the [graduate's] responses and actions. (p. 18)

It is interesting to note that Polkinghorne's criteria of understanding a life include many of the criteria that I personally felt were conditions that had the potential to shape the graduates' learning careers in meaningful ways. Indeed, before reading Polkinghorne, I crafted many of the interview questions in order to take into consideration the cultural context of class, the role of family and friends, and previous academic experiences. This match between the way I collected the data and the way Polkinghorne recommends analyzing the data was a major factor in choosing his narrative research methodology as my model.

In the end, I share my construction of three individual learning careers that take into account the context of the graduates' broader adult lives, and the theories about adult students, liberal arts learning, and the working class that already live in the world. Moreover, I take into account theories about the role of narrative in our lives and the potential "hidden features" of stories that are at play when all of us attempt to make our life stories understood.

F. Validity

How will the reader know if the case studies and vignettes I share about the participants' learning careers at the Harvard Extension School are "true"? Bosk (1979) states: "All fieldwork done by a single field worker invites the question, 'Why should we believe it?' " (as cited in Maxwell, 1996, p. 87). As a narrative researcher the "Why should we believe it question?" will not be asked just because I am a single field worker, but because narrative inquiry is tentative, interpretive, and subjective. As Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998) state:

> Narrative research differs significantly from its positivistic counterpart in its underlying assumptions that there is neither a single, absolute truth in human reality nor one correct reading or interpretation of a text. The narrative approach advocates pluralism, relativism, and subjectivity. (p. 2)

For this project, I am not claiming that I am locating a "truth" beyond the first-person accounts of the participants. I was not interested in following the participants home or into the classroom to confirm their reports about family and professors. I am centrally concerned with their meaning-making through their narrative expressions of their experiences. Indeed, there are many in the field of narrative studies who believe that there is no experience that is not storied in some way, that is, we cannot separate out what happened from what is told about what happened (Bruner, 1990; Doyle, 1997; Linde, 1993; McEwan, 1997; Mishler, 1999). As Bruner (1990) declares in his narrative research study of four life stories:

> If you should ask how we propose to test whether these four lives "imitated" the narratives each person told, your questions would be proper enough, though a bit impatient. The position I have avowed, indeed, leaves entirely moot what could be meant by "lives" altogether, beyond what is contained in the narrative. (p. 30)

The value of narrative research rests in uncovering participants' intentions and beliefs. However, a focus on intentions and beliefs does not mean we can ignore issues of

validity. What it does mean is that validity needs to be framed in ways that are in line with

the interpretive nature of narrative work (Mishler, 2000; Polkinghorne, 1988; Riessman,

1993). Narrative scholar, Riessman (1993), concludes that narrative inquiry validity claims

should center on issues of "trustworthiness" rather than "truth": "The latter assumes an

objective reality, whereas the former moves the process into the social world" (p. 65).

My analysis of adult, working-class students' learning careers at the Harvard

Extension School aims to be trustworthy, for (1) I used "thick" descriptions, (2) shared my

analytic construction by using participants' words, (3) made public the tension between

accepting and deconstructing participants' stories, and (4) made available to the reader my

own life history that was a condition that shaped the presented story.

1. Thick descriptions

First, I shared "thick descriptions" of the site and contextualize issues raised by

participants using my own professional and personal experience in the field. I am what Gold

(1958) names a "complete participant" (Gold, as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 84),

that is, a participating member of my research setting as the director of the undergraduate

degree program. I was also an Extension School student for many years, although I am not a

graduate of the Harvard Extension School. I tried to use my experience as an advantage, but

I was also conscious of its potential dangers. As education researchers, Anderson and Jones

(2000), warn:

> The tacit knowledge that an administrator acquires over the months and years is an
> advantage in that it would have to be reproduced from scratch through
> enthnographic observation at a new site, however, it tends to be impressionistic—
> full of bias, prejudice, and unexamined impressions and assumptions that need to
> brought to the surface and examined. (p. 443)

To tread carefully around these dangers, I attempted to write with "verisimilitude," which

Denzin and Lincoln (1998) define as an observational writing style that "draws the reader so

closely into subjects' worlds that these can be palpably felt" (p. 88). I always made a point to name my observations as my own and most important, my observations were only used to illuminate participants' own understandings.

For example, my observation at the beginning of this chapter that Harvard Extension School undergraduate degree candidates and "regular" Harvard College students rarely interact except to pass each other by on the narrow, paved paths that make up Harvard Yard, is my observation, something I witnessed during my seventeen years at Harvard. This observation is not directly informed by participants' words; however, it adds narrative details to participants' sense of invisibility and isolation on the campus that is storied in their own words as they describe the front and back door divide. While my observations will be used to add narrative details, they will not be used to contradict or judge the "truthfulness" of students' meaning making, for the "truth" is their own subjective experience of their learning careers. As Mishler (2000) states: "How individuals interpret events and experiences [is the key problem in narrative research], not assessing whether or not their interpretations correspond to or mirror 'objective' reality" (p. 130).

In the end, what matters in narrative, case study research is the level of descriptive details that can be shared, for as West (1995) reports: "Without the level of detail provided, crucial parts of the story, and therefore, potential theoretical understanding, would be lost" (p. 152). Moreover, as Stake (1995) points out about case study: "Researchers are encouraged to include their own personal perspectives in the interpretation. The way the case and the researcher interact is presumed unique and not necessarily reproducible for other cases and researchers" (p. 135). The value of my research is not the applicability to other cases, but its richly detailed, in-depth rendering of participants' experience.

2. Public trail of evidence

Trustworthiness, vis-à-vis the tenets of narrative analysis, comes from a public trail of evidence that builds the constructed story. Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998) state that while narrative researchers can only offer subjective and tentative interpretations, they "are responsible for providing a systematic and coherent rationale for their choice of methods as well as a clear exposition of the selected processes that have produced their results" (p. 2). Similarly, Mishler (2000) asserts that the public trail evidence is the central way to assess the validity of narrative research:

> The view of validation that I have advanced [comes from] the visibility of the work: of the data in the form of text used in the analysis, with transcripts and tapes that can be made available, of the methods that transformed the texts into findings; and of the direct linkages shown between data, findings, and interpretation. (p. 130)

I use participants' words extensively to construct my interpretation. By sharing the participants' words, I invite the readers to evaluate for themselves the trustworthiness of my interpretations. Throughout my writing I reveal the roots of my constructions and share "direct linkages" between data and findings. Additionally, I include discussions about discrepant evidence and "negative cases" (Maxwell, 1996, p. 93), that is, data that does not fit my agreed upon interpretation. There is something extraordinarily compelling— at least initially— about a conclusion drawn from narrative data that begins with the following three words: "All the participants... ." However, it is highly unlikely that all human beings could share the same meaning-making about any life event. The reader is intimately aware of the individuality of human experience and would be suspect of tidy all-encompassing findings. As a result, negative cases in all of qualitative research, but particularly in narrative research, expand rather than diminish validity.

3. Tension between accepting and critiquing narratives

There is a tension in narrative research between "accepting narratives as they are given and critiquing or deconstructing them" (Fenstermacher, 1997, p. 123). As stated previously, stories hold "narrative secrets" (Kermode, 1980) and we can't always accept stories at their face value. In order to add validity to the participants' narrative explanations about their learning careers, I felt I needed to offer interpretations that were informed by what I felt were the "hidden features" (McEwan, 1997) of stories. I decided to bring the tension between accepting and critiquing narratives into the data analysis. This decision was inspired by Rosetta Cohen's (1998) research on working-class adult students at Smith College (highlighted in the Literature Review).

Cohen concluded that the working-class, adults students (called Adas) were empowered by the class differences they felt on the elite Smith College campus and, hence, channeled this newly found class-consciousness toward career choices in public service. Instead of accepting the participants' narratives as they were given, Cohen promblemitzes the Adas' decisions to pursue careers in social service. She suggests that the Adas' decisions to turn away from more high-powered and high-salaried occupations could be an expression of "symbolic violence," which happens when those from the lower class "internalize their social limitations and aspire to less— to lower paying and less prestigious jobs" (p. 369). She further complicates the matter by questioning the ideological foundations on which the notion of "aspiring for less" rests and claims that it excludes other, non-middle class definitions of success. The back-and-forth of Cohen's position is evidence that firm conclusions are hard to come by in narrative studies, and in the end, all Cohen can offer is her informed opinion. But, by making the tension between accepting and critiquing narratives public, her opinion is made more valid in the eyes of the reader. Moreover, the

reader has access to critical "hidden features" from which to draw her own conclusions. I

modeled the same back-and-forth in my study.

Not accepting narratives as they are, but critiquing them is an example of viewing

truth not as "solid mass," but a "swirl":

> There is order in it all of some sort, but it is the order of a squall or a street market; nothing metrical. It is necessary, then, to be satisfied with swirls, confluxions, and inconstant connections; clouds collecting, clouds dispersing. (Geertz, 1995, as cited in Doyle, 1997, p. 96)

Doyle (1997) finds Geertz's metaphor of "truth" an illuminating and helpful metaphor for

narrative researchers: "Each [narrative research] rendering provides insight, expands

understanding, and pushes credibility, but none settles it once and for all" (p. 96). By not

leaving the narratives offered by the participants as they are, but deconstructing them, I am

avoiding the "solid mass" understanding of truth and adding to the "swirl" understanding

lived experience. Moreover, I see my role as offering "insight," but not "settling" on one

truth of the participants' experience "once and for all."

4. Coming to terms with my closeness

Reflexivity is the process of reflecting on my experience, on others' experiences, and

on the ways in which I reflect on others and my own experience. In qualitative research,

reflexivity shines a spotlight on the experience between the researcher and the participants.

Also, it "forces us to come to terms not only with our choice of research problem, but with

our selves and with the multiple identities that represent the fluid self in the research setting"

(Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 183). I came to this research with many identities and my

choice of research is deeply embedded in all of them. The two primary identities that I've

disclosed are my professional identity as director of the undergraduate degree program and

my personal identity as a former working-class liberal arts student.

I am not alone in choosing a research site and question that reflect my personal concerns and professional affinities. In fact, there is a growing movement to encourage qualitative researchers to publicly own their personal reasons for doing research. The movement is spurred on by many feminist researchers (Carter & Delamont, 1996) who claim that the majority, if not all, of scholarly research interests can be traced back to personal experiences. As qualitative researcher and scholar, Chris Powell (1996) states:

> Positivism purports to be able to effect a split between researchers' professional and personal or emotional life. Motives for scholarly work such as personal and emotional satisfaction are simply (and falsely) disavowed. [Feminists researchers are more likely to claim] that professional and personal roles should be seen as integration rather than confusion. In other words, the personal is accorded positive rather than negative connotations. (p. 4)

While I agree that "professional and personal roles should be seen as integration rather than confusion," I need to "come to terms" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) with my closeness.

Qualitative researcher, Creswell (1998), explicitly warns researchers against studying their own "backyards." While he agrees that "intimate knowledge of a setting may be an asset," (p. 114), he suspects that students of qualitative research are attracted to studying their own backyards because it "provides easy access to informants and information at minimal cost" (p. 114). Other researchers have more crudely defined backyard research as "opportunistic" (Riemer, 1977). My research choice was not one of ease or opportunity, but rather one of difficulty and responsibility. I chose my research questions and site because I simply couldn't turn away from the students' stories that I encounter every day, my own story, and the space in between our stories— the space where adult education, liberal arts learning, and working-class concerns intersect. Living, working, and thinking at the center of the intersection gave me a unique and critical vantage point on this story, so I felt I must pursue these particular research questions at this particular research site. I did so knowing

full well that some qualitative researchers, like Creswell (1998), would devalue my insider status, while others, for example, feminist ethnographer, Reinharz (1992), would value it, for as she claims "closeness enhances understanding" (p. 67).

Indeed, trustworthiness in qualitative research and narrative inquiry does not come from proving the researcher's distance and objectivity of an event or experience, for narrative inquiry assumes that the researcher's own life history and meaning-making shapes the story told. As Polkinghorne (1995) states: "In narrative inquiry, it is expected [that the researcher] will include a recognition of the role [she] had in constructing the presented life story and the effect that [her] views might have had in the shaping of the findings" (p. 19). However, I do not believe that I should elevate my personal and professional experience or "insider knowledge" over "outsider knowledge." I am simply of the mind that each has equally admirable advantages and equally questionable disadvantages. As education researchers, Anderson and Jones (2000), offer: "Practitioners have a wealth of knowledge and are what Geertz (1983) calls 'experience near' to the every day life of schools, but they do not have a privileged access to truth" (p. 444). The most suspect disadvantage that all researchers much face, but particularly insider researchers, is the high probability of overriding the participants' stories with their own.

Tom Cottle (2002) warns that whenever we (insider or outsider) encounter a narrative, a fine line must be walked between our story and the other's story. For while it is true that our own life history will shape this encounter, the goal is to never overshadow the other's experience. "In forming our reactions and making our interpretations we constantly run the risk of pushing our stories against the stories of others and in a sense demanding that others rethink their stories in light of our stories" (Cottle, 2002, p. 535). His words cautioned me against "disaffirming" the other by not putting down my story and thereby,

choosing to "not meet the eyes of the other or attend to the words constituting his or her narrative" (p. 539). Cottle claims that we can't consciously decided to put our story down and attend to the other. "The response to the call of the story is not a willful act" (2002, p. 537). As a result, saying that I don't want to overshadow my participants' experience is not enough. I must begin with the assumption that I will "push my story up against my participants stories," (Cottle, 2002, p. 535) and then, attend to the more appropriate question: To what extent have I pushed?

To lessen my pushing, I attend more to what surprised me in the data than to what I thought I would find (Delamont, 1991). But in the end, I cannot deny the fact that the research story I share will have my personal and professional imprints from my closeness. What's critical to narrative method is that the imprints are rendered (to the best of my ability) visible. As Delamont (1991) concludes: "Preconceptions are not a bad thing the danger lies in the preconceptions that are implicit, unacknowledged, and unexamined" (p. 77).

E. Conclusion to Methods: *The value of a long-term resident's point of view*

Narrative inquiry can offer "no claim to a final, definitive, or easily generalizable 'truth' based on the 'facts' of the interview" (West, 1995, p. 153). Moreover, Tom Cottle (2002) adds: "Who is to say what the 'real' story of any persona may be? We only imagine that others' lives are constituted of the one telling tale" (p. 538). While narrative inquiry's subjectivity and lack of "truth" frustrate some, I am inspired by it. To me, Martin Packer (1985) states the reason why I am inspired by it best when he compares interpretive inquiry with positivistic, truth-seeking inquiry. The first, he states, is akin to an account of a city by a long-time resident. The second is akin to an accurate street map that highlights the well-known thoroughfares and historical landmarks. "The account one would give of living in a

city on a daily basis is likely to be personal, incomplete, and prejudiced. Therein lies its usefulness to a newcomer who has come to stay or to someone who already lives in the city but now wishes to get to know it better and to live it more fully" (Packer, 1985, p. 1092). I "already live" in the intersection of adult education, liberal education, and working class concerns. I wanted to learn from adult, working-class graduates of the Harvard Extension School, from their experiences of living in this intersection in order to know "it better" and "more fully." I wanted to learn about their experiences in order to give back to the world better and fuller stories of its significance and meaning.

Chapter IV. Findings: Paradigmatic Analysis of all Eighteen Participants' Stories

> Stories of the past are part of managing the present... Secret and impossible intimacies have been neglected in stories of working-class life, including why they may wish to learn and re-enter education. The challenge of life-history researchers is to find the appropriate means for people to create their stories in supportive contexts since without them the understanding of motive, learning, and education, as well as biographies and culture more generally, is impoverished; and the neglect of those on the margins is compounded.
> Linden West (1996), *Beyond Fragments: Adults, Motivation, and Higher Education*

As stated in the previous chapter, this study is just as much about the participants' childhoods and adult lives prior to attending Harvard Extension School (HES) as it is about their learning careers at HES. I chose the retrospective breadth of this focus because I know that my own educational choices and meanings are constructed in relationship to past experiences and my family of origin's messages about the value of education. Also, like social mobility researchers Bertaux and Thompson (1997), I believe that my field, adult education, has "typically treated families as black [survey check-off] boxes, whose input are a handful of variables such as father's occupation" (p. 19). In this study I wanted "to open those black boxes" (p. 19) and hear the family narratives told inside about the meaning of going to college. It is also about the participants' learning careers at HES and the meaning they made of this experience. Finally, it is about the participants' post-graduation lives, i.e., how earning their undergraduate degrees at HES shaped their future plans and aspirations.

The findings are presented as a two-tiered analysis: (1) paradigmatic analysis of all eighteen participants' stories and (2) narrative analysis of three case studies. In this chapter, I discuss the major themes of the participants' lives prior to HES that created the "conditions

that shaped their preferences and intentions" (Gambetta, 1987, as cited in Lynch &

O'Riordan, 1998, p. 449) to return to school. Then I examine their reasons for choosing

HES. Finally, I discuss a significant theme of their HES experience: finding an intellectual

identity. In Chapter V, I share three case studies through which I offer a close-up view of

the participants' life stories and the meaning they made of their HES learning careers. In the

case studies I include voices of other participants whose narratives contained similar

consistent plot lines and attended to three conditions that significantly shaped the degree-

earning experience: their class status, the liberal arts curriculum, and the institution.

    As a result of my two-tiered analysis— paradigmatic analysis of all eighteen

participants' stories and narrative analysis of three case studies— I know *my* answer to what I

anticipate is the reader's overarching questions: "Who are these eighteen adults, how did

they come to Harvard University Extension School (HES) to earn their Bachelor of Liberal

Arts (ALB) degrees, and what meaning did they make of their experience?"

A. Understanding Participants' Lives Prior to Harvard Extension School

    The participants shared the salient themes of (1) independent childhoods that

developed into independent, "active" (London, Wenker, & Hagstrom, 1963) adulthoods, (2)

innate feelings of brightness, and (3) growing feelings of "marginality and deprivation"

(Hopper & Osborn, 1975) regarding their station in life that inspired their decisions to return

to school.

1. Independent, self-sufficient childhoods developed into independent, active
   adulthoods

    a. Independent childhoods

Of the eighteen participants, seven were raised by a single parent and most

participants reported explicit tales of independent upbringings that ran the gamut from

stories of borderline neglect, necessary early self-sufficiency, to independent natures. Carl started working at age eight, and spent much of his time "out of the house" because of his father's drinking. Beth worked since she was 12 years old and stayed clear of her parents to prevent both emotional and physical injury. Cheryl, due to her parents' explicitly communicated feelings that her sister was her parents' favorite, lived a "separate existence in the same house." Tom, like many other participants, was "expected to take care of the house, prepare dinner, clean up the dishes" and was working outside his home by age 12. Lisa started running away at age 14 and was on her own at 17. Gale too started work at age 14 and was out of the house by 17. Kevin got his own house key in first grade and was "on my own at 17." Sue simply reported: "I've always considered myself an independent gal." Brenda communicated the most literal narrative of independence. Starting at age 11, she and her twin brother were left alone for weeks at time, while their single parent father traveled for work:

> My parents were pretty much hands off anyway and that was partly due to what was going on in their lives. Our family was very much, you kids are on your own to take care of yourselves and make your own decisions, and I would say at inappropriate ages, too.

Brenda's use of the term "inappropriate ages" was a familiar comment by the participants. As adults looking back, they considered the level of independence as something to question. However, they often understood the necessity of an independent childhood due to a single parent's time limitations and/or the value their parent(s) held for instilling in their children early self-sufficiency. Hence, it was common for them to counterbalance this criticism with a complement, crediting their independent childhoods for their successful independent adulthoods. For example, Tom shared that his mother, a single parent, imparted the "ability to think independently and make our own decisions" regarding

completing homework and attending college. He stated: "The wisdom of that philosophy could be argued." But in the next sentence he reports: "The way in which we were raised and the home life that we had, being responsible, being self-sufficient, being able to have a good solid work ethic... prepared us to really do something with our lives. Each of us (i.e., he and his siblings) has done that."

The call to work early in life (on average, at age 14), and independent, self-sufficient childhoods that required the participants to make their own decisions about school and work were striking themes throughout the majority of the narratives, but common in research reports from the field of working-class studies. Scholars such as Sennett and Cobb (1972), Rubin (1976), and Willis (1977) have all documented the theme of early independence in working-class families. In his working-class ethnography, *Learning to Labor*, Paul Willis (1977) found that more often than not, middle-class parents viewed their role as "responsibility to a dependent instead of the working-class notion of indifference to an independent" (p. 76). My own participants seem to concur, and I share this theme of independence not just because it was prevalent in my study and documented by other scholars, but because independence and early self-sufficiency, and, sometimes what Willis refers to as "indifference" from parents, were likely among the conditions that shaped the participants' decisions about going to college.

Like other researchers looking at the aspirations of working class students (Hsiao, 1993; Inman & Mayes, 1999; Ochberg & Comeau, 2001; Roberts & Rosenwald, 2001), I found that the majority of my participants received discouraging or ambivalent messages about going to college. However, unlike these researchers, I also discovered that a few participants had parents who were actively involved in preparing them for college. The five participants who received encouraging messages stated that their parent(s) believed that

college was their next step after high school; they offered advice about the importance of being on the college-track in secondary school; and they encouraged them to earn good grades. Given the preponderance of contrary evidence, I was surprised by this finding. It appears that writer of the working-class experience, Carolyn Steedman (1986), is right: too much has been written about the working class that assumes their "homogeneity." Even Willis (1977) reminds us:

> Not all parents act in the same way or share the same values. Parents have their own complex and creative relations to class themes, and in no sense press their children into a simple standard working-class mold. There is a degree of relative independence between parents and kid. (p. 73)

An example of a parent who had her "own complex and creative relations to class themes" (Willis, cited above) was Silvia's mother. Silvia, age 27, was one of the younger participants in my study. She identified her socioeconomic background as working class and her race as Hispanic. She grew up minutes from the university and her mother worked for Harvard as a cook in dining services. While many other parents in the study with limited funds shied away from pushing college, Silvia's mother was a tireless promoter:

> She would always say that you don't have to go to college, but if you want to go, it's there for you. I will be there to support you, and other people in the family will be there to support you, if you need it. Friends of hers were always, like, "Okay, you know, college is the next step." She would always put me in contact with [Harvard] students. She is constantly networking with people. Professor Smith [a Harvard professor] calls her my biggest PR rep. She is always networking with people, even him. "Silvia is doing this and this and this and if she needs a recommendation, can she call you?"

Silvia's mother knew that she couldn't do it alone, so she accessed the "social capital" (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986) of her elite work environment. She surrounded Silvia with a network of knowledgeable mentors so that a chorus of voices was communicating to her that she was college material and that regardless of financial circumstances, college was an option. An

important anchor to Silvia's story is her mother's unfulfilled desire to go to college earlier in her own life. Indeed, the common feature in all the encouraging messages was having a parent (usually a mother) who always dreamed of going to college, but missed out. For these parents, college wasn't a foreign world into which they would lose their children; it was their own childhood wish that they wanted to see lived out through their children. Sennett and Cobb (1972) point out that many working-class parents don't let their children "be indifferent about school, for it was their own failure to develop in school that has made them run of the mill" (p. 123).

All the participants whose parents encouraged them to go to college and monitored their high school performances, or in the words of education researchers Inman and Mayes (1999), prepared them "psychologically and academically for college" (p. 3), attended college right away. However, the majority of those who received discouraging or ambivalent messages from their parents, and received no support or monitoring during secondary school, also attended college either right away or shortly after high school. Barbara, who grew up poor, in the middle of the economic depression of the 1930s, with no family support found a way to work and go to college— music school, no less. Brenda, whose parents were "hands off," figured everything out on her own through peers and guidance counselors, and was accepted to a private four-year university and stayed for nearly two years. Beth, whose parents sent the most explicitly discouraging message about going to college, "you will only end up working in a grocery store," left home at age 18, never to return. Yet, while working as a live-in domestic, attended art school for a few years. Kevin, whose mother told him life is all about "work, work, work," knew in the eighth grade that he was "going to college, period," and attended right away for a semester. Finally, Lisa, who

grew up on welfare and was told that she and her family were "street smart," not "book smart," declared as a child that she was going to "attend Harvard some day."

The participants' rejection of the family message that they were just "regular people," "working people," or "street smart people" who shouldn't ask for more out of life than what they already had, is an important reminder that children are not passive recipients of parental communication; they actively construct their own meanings from their parents' words and actions. Perhaps this is particularly true for children who grew up in independent, self-sufficient households, where the message was: you're on your own. Working-class parents, needing and wanting their children to be independent from them so that they (their children) could make their own way in world, may also be giving their children permission to disagree with their world views. Bertaux and Thompson's (1997) qualitative research work on upwardly mobile British families suggests that "close family ties are more likely to inhibit than to encourage occupational mobility" (p. 23) and the adults who made greater gains toward upward mobility were from indifferent or estranged families. Moreover, we learned from Ochberg and Comeau's (2001) research that those college students who had the highest academic ambitions felt most independent or estranged from their parents. Upward mobility researchers Bertaux and Thompson (1997) conclude that the varied nature of how families communicate love and support "helps explain why at extremes some adults struggle forward as ego-centered semi-isolates, while others immerse themselves in an altruistic commitment to the intergenerational family network" (p. 21). The majority of the participants lived near the "semi-isolates" point on the family connection scale, with most characterizing their relationship with their families as "separate," "indifferent," "distant," or "estranged." Indeed, the theme of independence continued far into adulthood where the

majority (13) of the participants were unmarried/un-partnered and still making their own ways in the world.

b. Independent Adulthoods

While most participants disregarded ambivalent or discouraging family messages about going to college, and began an undergraduate degree-seeking journey at age 18, the initial journey usually ended at age 19 or 20 because of limited funds. Their degree earning processes were ones in which work and school alternately took front and back seats, with work more often than not winning a much longer stay— in one case, sixty years— in the driver's seat. Their need to earn money to support themselves had to override their desire to attend school, particularly when many left home right after high school to be independent or, more accurately, to *continue* their independence outside the family home. The fact that working-class students need to interrupt college attendance because of limited funds and the need to work has been well documented by others (Astin, 1993; Sternglass, 1997; Soliday, 1999). Soliday concludes: "The few working-class students who do attend four-year schools don't graduate in four years because they experience higher education intermittently" (p. 733). In my study the average time to complete an undergraduate degree from first college attendance to Harvard Extension School graduation day was 23 years, with a median of 21 years.

It took this long because the need to work, for the most part, was stated by these participants in concrete terms: they needed to work to earn money for food and rent. There is no doubt in my mind that these concrete needs were real, compelling, and at times, difficult to meet. But my interpretation of my data leads me to believe that it took this long because the participants *chose* work over school. Early in their adult lives they simply valued work and independence more than school. Carl, who dropped out of college after two years

of full time school and full time work, stated: "I worked more than I needed to when I was going to school, but I wanted the independence that a full time job offers." Maureen reported: "I should have moved back home and commuted to school, but I wanted to be on my own." Gale, who left home and went to work right after high school, told me: "For me it was independence. I felt bad for my friends who were going to college. They had to stay home and didn't even have money for gas. I had my own apartment and car." Working and earning money were valuable skills in working-class households, so, many participants replaced academic aspirations with wage-earning positions. It seems that the participants, in part, rejected school and claimed a sense of self-worth through affirming (not caretaking roles as Luttrell, 1997, found), but wage earning roles that allowed them to be independent from their families.

Most were successful workers, and shared statements similar to Sue's: "I never had any problem finding jobs, keeping jobs, or being good at my job." Also, perhaps by gaining confidence through early self-sufficiency the participants weren't afraid to take calculated risks with their work-lives or to turn to adult education opportunities for job-training. Many moved out of state or even out of the country for job opportunities and learning experiences. For example, Carl moved out at age 17, worked for a few years, pursued adult education courses, and then joined the Peace Corps. Tom moved across the country for work, and told me that he applied for jobs for which he was under-qualified to just "see what would happen." He started out as a salesman, worked his way up to a vice-president position, and along the way took adult education courses in a variety of topics related to his work. Lisa wanted more out of life and wasn't going to settle for any minimum-wage job:

> I've worked since I was 12 years old. After high school, I didn't want to be flipping burgers at Burger King. I wanted something better for myself. I wanted to be a successful person. I did quite well without my degree. I got into sales and you can make good money in sales. I bought a small house, went into bankruptcy, but I

found a way to keep my house. Without a degree and being a kid coming off welfare, you've got to be motivated. Sometimes I would have liked to kick back and do nothing, but you can't. You just get more by putting in more.

In the effort to "get more by putting in more" most of my participants were avid readers who shared an aversion to watching television. Beth stated: "Libraries are free, so I don't watch TV. It is quite odd because television is so prevalent. Everyone you know has a set of friends that you don't know. They talk about this person on TV, but I don't know these people." Jeff, who reads two to three books a week, shared: "Instead of wasting time watching TV, I am doing what I would be watching on TV." Some participants developed their love of reading as adults. For others it was part of their working-class family's culture, even though school learning and academic performance were not emphasized. Maureen grew up "in poverty," and stated that while her mother was never interested in her school performance, she loved opera and instilled in Maureen a love of the arts and reading fiction. They always went on "free vacations" to museums, had engaging conversations at the dinner table, "different than at my friends' homes," and "we all had our noses in books, still do." Beatrice is African-American and grew up in a working-class home where college was viewed as too much of a financial risk. Yet, self-education through reading history was offered as the path to critical race consciousness: "It was important to read about historical events from many different angles, so we could form our own opinions." Brenda, whose parents were indifferent to her school performance and future college plans, modeled reading: "My parents never had formal secondary education, but they both are absolutely avid readers, so that was part of my bath water, you read everything."[53]

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[53] These findings highlight the fact that working class can split education into to parts: self-education and institutional learning. As London, Wenker, and Hagstrom (1963) found in their survey research that workers are interested in the "larger society," "sustained intellectual effort," and they "value higher education" (p. 149), but what working-class adults are skeptical about is school and institutional learning.

The participants' risk-taking in their working lives, their engagement with continuing education, and their interest in self-education through the love of reading led me to conclude that the majority had an "active orientation toward life" (London, Wenker, and Hagstrom, 1963, p. 144). Actively-oriented adults are engaged in the public sphere, while passive oriented adults spend more time in the private sphere, at home with family, and their leisure time activities include watching TV and working around the house. Courtney (1992) states that an active orientation toward life is about a way of looking at the world that involves risk-taking behavior rather than risk-avoidance behavior: "It is someone more involved with life, more likely to try something new, and more open to life's possibilities and challenges" (p. 154). London, Wenker, and Hagstrom found that working-class adults who have an "active orientation toward life" participate in adult education at higher rates than those who have a "passive orientation toward life" (p. 144). Their successful, independent working lives and active orientation toward life created "status passages" (Gallacher, Crossan, Field, & Merrill, 2002), "bridge experiences" (Hopper & Osborn, 1975) or even "safe havens" (Zwerling, 1992) from past poor school performance and family's discouraging messages about going to college, so that they could more easily decide to return to school. My own data indicates that what made the decision even more viable was the feeling that they were always "bright."

2. Innate feelings of brightness

Most participants were not outstanding secondary school students or college students; however, the majority considered themselves bright. Both Wendy and Kevin stated: "I always knew that I was bright." Carl reported: "But yet, somewhere along the line, I've been told that I was bright. And I always had that feeling that I was bright, but couldn't

get it together." Maureen shared: "I wouldn't say naturally bright [I got a sense that this was exactly what she wanted to say]. It's just that I would catch on to things quicker than other people do." "Catching on to things quicker" was the phrase used by most participants to define their brightness. At first, I considered the participants' story of innate brightness since childhood as a narrative strategy to communicate an "adequate" reason (Linde, 1993) for their Harvard choice and Harvard-graduate identity— only bright people end up at Harvard. Also, it could be an attempt, as Paul Ricoeur (1984) might well interpret, to share a story about personal experience in a way that points to becoming the people they were always meant to be that is, their living out life according to deeply ingrained notions of coherence between their bright identities and Harvard-graduate destinies. However, my participants early college attendance despite discouraging messages from parents, their activity oriented and risk-taking adult life style (London, Wenker, and Hagstrom, 1963), and their choice to return to school at Harvard are compelling pieces of evidence that they did indeed feel bright *prior* to earning their HES degrees.

"Bright" is a noteworthy word choice. The participants didn't state they were smart or that they were intelligent, they always chose the word bright. The participants used bright to describe their innate ability and used words such as smart and intelligent to communicate thinking skills related to school performance. The participants' choice to split knowledge into brightness (natural ability) and intelligence (school performance) is similar to Luttrell's (1997) finding that the working-class women in her study split knowledge into common sense and school smarts. Like common sense in Luttrell's study, the data from my study indicates that brightness can be viewed as a "self- and identity forming" (Luttrell, 1977, p. 26) strategy to protect the participants from the assaults on their ability that they experienced in high school or college when they performed poorly. According to Luttrell common sense

and school smarts have an antagonist relationship; one always overrules the other. She writes that common sense "pits experience against schooling and working-class people against middle-class educated people" (p. 35) and that her participants believed that school smart people can't get a long in the real world. In addition, the working-class women in her study were wary about losing their common sense through schooling, for it was their compass by which they navigated their complicated lives.

But the data in my study coaxes me toward the conclusion that brightness and school smarts do not have an antagonist relationship. Indeed, brightness is a step along the path to school smarts. It was a way for these working-class participants to feel that under the right circumstances, they too could be middle-class, educated people. In fact, the only difference between them and middle-class educated people was parental guidance[54]. Sue observed: "When I was in high school nothing was ever that important, as academics went. I was bright, but I was screwing off, partying, playing with my friends. No one in my family ever thought twice to ever say, 'why don't you ever bring home homework?' It never crossed their minds." Maureen was not a bad student, but she didn't have good study habits to carry her through the tougher subjects or classes that she didn't like:

> No. I was never a good student. I wasn't a bad student. I just simply was a very undisciplined student. I got As and Bs without trying; occasional C here and there. I did what I wanted to do. So, it's the same with my sister and brother in high school. Yes, we were all very undisciplined.

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[54] Hence, the participants understood "cultural capital" (Bourdieu, 1990), that is, they were aware that their schools were middle-class institutions that benefit middle-class children. However, the participants' answer to this dilemma was wishing that their parents acted more like middle-class parents. They didn't communicate to me an understanding that perhaps their school-system should have been more responsive to students from all classes.

Maureen told me that her undisciplined nature was a result of growing up in poverty with a single mother who didn't have time to check up on her: "I think without the proper guidance you don't know how to get around that."

The participants' feeling of brightness is a significant finding and is in stark contrast to most research on the working class. For example, Sennett and Cobb (1972) found that insufficient intellectual ability is what the working-class men in their study pointed to when naming the source of their feelings of insecurity and lack of upward mobility: "It was always to notions of the mind and intelligence that they resorted: 'I really didn't have it upstairs to do satisfying work'" (p. 118). Additionally, we learned from educational research literature that many adult students have "troubled" (Reay, 2002) academic histories, and as a result, a sense of shame about their past poor performance in school. Their feelings of shame interfered with their ability to stay in college to complete their degrees (Gallacher, Crossan, Field, Merrill, 2002; Reay, 2002; Reay, Ball, David, 2002). However, some adults were able to create "spaces for recovery" (Reay, 2002, p. 409) from these past failures. The participants in my study fell into this category. They created a space around past poor performance in school by connecting it to their working-class background, not their innate abilities. While many were wary of their ability to live up to middle-class academic standards, their feelings of innate brightness gave them the confidence to begin their undergraduate degrees at HES. Their innate feeling of brightness was not the whole story, however, for it was only when this sense was paired with growing feelings of "marginality and deprivation" (Hopper & Osborn, 1975) that the participants decided to return to school.

3. Growing feelings of marginality and deprivation

Adult education researchers Hopper and Osborn (1975) take the position that one of the aims of education is social selection and the reproduction of a class stratified society:

> In no industrial society are the aims of formal education primarily the development
> of intellectual and emotional potentials and the fostering of curiosity and creativity.
> In each society the central aims of education are, first, to continue the process of
> socialization, and, then, to try to solve the fundamental problem of social selection
> of their populations. (p. 19)

They further contend that social selection happens early in life. Secondary school students

are either tracked to enter the workforce (or perhaps community college first), then to find

employment in lower-level positions, or they are tracked toward four-year colleges to find

employment in higher-level, professional fields. Most adults are content with their station in

life, for their "achievements are commensurate with their levels of normative expectation"

(Hopper & Osborn, 1975, p. 20). Those without a higher education are content with the jobs

that are open to them because they "chose" not to earn higher credentials or have come to

terms with the fact that they weren't smart enough to earn higher credentials. The

education/social selection system is viewed as fair even though it is predicated on proving

one's merit early in the life cycle, "when the influences of parentage, of background culture,

and class are at the highest and most explicit" (Lemann, 1999, p. 345).

Adult students, Hopper and Osborn conclude, are social "selection errors," meaning

they were tracked into lower-level jobs, but found themselves unhappy and dissatisfied, for

their lower-level occupations didn't match their internal abilities or expectations. West (1996)

characterizes the students that Hopper and Osborn term "selection errors" as living on the

margins, "not really belonging anywhere, unsure and uncertain of who and what they were"

(p. 8). Adult students who are inappropriately "selected" experience feelings of "marginality

and deprivation" (Hopper & Osborn, 1975) in relation to their station in life and return to

college to re-align their education with their identities. Seven participants in my study were

"selection errors" in the ways that Hopper and Osborn describe: they were growing

increasingly dissatisfied with their station in life in terms of their occupations. All of the

younger students in the study (those under 30 years old) returned to school because they wanted better jobs than the ones they had without degrees. "I am not going to do this for the rest of my life" was a familiar phrase from these participants. Similarly, two of the older adult students (30 to 40 years old) were growing tired of the lower-level jobs that they held for many years. Both Wendy and Lisa felt "trapped" (a word used by many participants) because they didn't have academic credentials. Lisa stated: "Even though I had twenty years of sales experience it was difficult going somewhere else without a degree and getting a good sales job. I was stuck, trapped. They want that sheepskin. They want that paper."

It is no surprise that seven participants return to school to earn degrees in order to be qualified for better, higher paying jobs. What was surprising were the "marginal and deprived" (Hopper & Osborn, 1975) reasons the other participants gave for returning to school. Three participants, Barbara, Beatrice, and Tom returned to school because they felt morally compelled to earn a degree so that their education would be commensurate with their high-level jobs. While, the other eight participants weren't looking for upward professional mobility at all, they wanted their innate brightness to be institutionally certified. The first group felt like "cheats," and the second group felt "uneducated."

a. Feeling like a cheat

Beatrice, Tom, and Barbara felt they didn't deserve their middle-class or even upper-class high paying jobs without a college degree, so they returned to school to rid themselves of shameful feelings of being cheaters. Tom reported that he felt that he was "faking it" and felt like a "cheat" because he had a successful career at work without a degree: "I was 27 years old having a fair amount of authority without the background, quote, unquote, the educational background. There was a period of time that I honestly felt like a cheat." Beatrice reported similar feelings:

I felt like the biggest schmuck because this part of my life is not together. Living without a degree is kind of like being illiterate. You really don't want to talk to people a whole lot. You really don't want anyone to know about you or your personal business. You feel that you don't deserve a lot.

The sense of not deserving their achievements was no longer a tolerable state of existence, so, Beatrice, Tom, and Barbara decided to return to school. Barbara's pilgrimage to Cambridge at 78 years old to earn her undergraduate degree is testament to the power of the lifelong "cheating" feeling that she felt she needed to be addressed once and for all.

At age 19 Barbara left Topeka, Kansas, all alone, for Washington, DC to work for the federal government. She held many high-level positions in the Department of Defense and was a member of the Foreign Service. While Barbara had what by all accounts was a successful professional life, she felt not having a degree always held her back: "It was a handicap all my life. This is one of the reasons why I was so determined, because it just held me back." Barbara reported that in her professional life: "I happened to always have bosses that would let me do anything that I was capable of, so I was writing surveys along with the Wellesley gals coming in from colleges at that time, but they had the higher classification. So I guess that had a part in why I wanted to finish. I couldn't get the advancement without it." But why now? Barbara was retired; there would be no more lost job-promotions or shameful feelings of standing side-by-side Ivy Leaguers and feeling like (she) didn't deserve to be there." It appears that the injustice of this credential discrimination (i.e., doing the same work for a lesser classification) turned inward and made her feel unworthy, like a cheat, for most of her adult life. In retirement this state was no longer tolerable. At age 78 Barbara left Durum, North Carolina, all alone, for Cambridge, Massachusetts, with the sole purpose of earning her undergraduate degree at HES. She left her lifetime commitment to a retirement community, which meant a considerable loss of money, and said goodbye to her

friends and family. Barbara turned her life upside down because not having a degree was "a sore point, very much so, it was thistle that pricked all the time." Just three months after learning about the HES she was here, and two-years later earned her degree. With the prickly thistle cut away, she "finally felt satisfied."

In Beatrice, Tom, or Barbara's narratives there was limited celebration of the fact that they made it so far in their careers without a degree— that they'd made it solely on their abilities, not because of who they knew or what school they went to. The participants communicated to me an overriding sense of shame for not playing the game by the rules. It appears that higher education in the US is a rigid, tightly controlled credentialing system. Those who attempt to get to the top by alternative means are named cheats, or more accurately, are required to name themselves cheats. Sennett and Cobb (1972) point out that the higher education certification process "creates certain moral symbols around work" (p. 179); as a result, without the "proper" certification one can feel inadequate, and even morally corrupt.

b. Feeling uneducated

While one group felt marginalized and deprived about their station in life and wanted to return to school to get better paying jobs, and the second group felt morally compelled to return to school, a third group returned to school because they felt uneducated or felt others viewed them as uneducated. Nearly half the participants in the study (eight) didn't mention employment reasons at all for coming to the HES even though many of them were in low-level secretarial positions[55]. Their jobs were not the problem,. Their reasons were more related to intellectual ambitions and needs. They were "starved for intellectual stimulation"

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[55] It could be that these participants were not willing to let go of their working-class roots in terms of jobs, but they were willing to let go of their working-class roots in terms of education.

and/or they wanted to learn about a particular subject matter, such as writing, physics, or history of science. Additionally, they believed that they were "bright" individuals, yet those around them didn't treat them as such. They felt that their friends, family, and employers viewed them as "uneducated" people, so they returned to college to rid themselves of a feeling of marginality and deprivation regarding their education. (I share more about the intellectual reasons motivating students to attend HES at the end of the narrative case study, "Composing a Working-Class Intellectual Identity: *Carl's Learning Career*," for it was a notable finding.)

Hopper and Osborn's theory is centrally concerned with feelings of marginality and deprivation that are a result of occupation misalignment, i.e., wanting a better job. The participants in my study who returned to school because they felt morally compelled, or for intellectual reasons (e.g., interested in a particular subject matter, hungry for intellectual stimulation, and/or wanted public validation of their brightness) are "selection errors" of a slightly different type. However, the resulting feelings of marginality and deprivation were the same. In sum, all the participants in the study returned to school for the underlying reasons that Hopper and Osborn found in their work, that is, to find a sense of authenticity by matching external credentials with their internal expectations of themselves. In addition, much of the research on working-class students, particularly traditional-aged college students, details the shame and sense of not belonging that they feel in academic settings (Hsiao, 1992; Inman & Maynes, 1999; Van Galen, 2000). However, my findings, along with Hooper and Osborn's theory, exposes the shameful and "not belonging" feelings *in* the workplace and other parts of adult social worlds that propel their decisions to return to school as working-class adults. It appears that growing feelings of marginality and deprivation can override any long-held fears of not belonging in middle-class institutions of

higher education. Particularly, when adult students have an active orientation to life (London, Wenker, and Hagstrom, 1963), successful work-lives, and innate feelings brightness they feel themselves ready to consider themselves worthy of a middle-class academic credential. In fact, what better place to correct morally compelled or brightness-inspired "selection errors" (Hopper & Osborn, 1975) than Harvard.

B. Understanding Participants' Harvard Extension School Choice

Participants' stories about their initial reactions to the HES followed a predictable and sequential path. First, they expressed disbelief. Then shock. Then they immediately ruled out HES as an option. Finally, they reconsidered. The majority of the participants couldn't believe that HES was an open enrollment program and "someone like them" could go to Harvard. "Someone like them" usually meant working class, average to poor high school grades, uninspired first attempts at college, and no SAT scores. Cheryl was "dumbfounded": "I couldn't believe it. I thought I couldn't do that. I couldn't possibly do that. But, it was like once somebody gave me the idea. I thought maybe I can, so I applied." Their feelings of shock and amazement were similar to Reay's (2002) characterization of adult students in her study: "The responses of the mature students represent the total conversion of the excluded permitted access to what has previously been denied" (p. 402).

Participants also chose HES because of the convenient evening hours that allowed them to continue to work, and the affordable tuition. In fact, Gale stated that the Harvard name didn't play a role in her decision to come to HES; it was the price:

> What brought me was the tuition. Not the name, so people are still shocked today when I tell them what the tuition is. They are shocked, they don't understand why it is so affordable. Let's just say Harvard is giving back to the community. Harvard owns most of Cambridge; they have to give back to the community. Yes, they do, that's the politics in me.

This is an important point, for if the HES had been out of their price range, it is likely that many of the participants wouldn't have come. But after the convenience and affordable tuition, they chose HES because they wanted the "excellence," "quality," and "seriousness" that the name Harvard represents. They had limited time and many had limited money, so they wanted to be challenged, held to high standards, and be around other adults who were "seriously committed to academics." They also wanted a liberal arts curriculum. Hands down this was the most surprising finding. I expected, in fact, I *assumed*, that the participants would recount stories about how they were apprehensive about the value and applicability of a liberal arts degree. My assumption was based on my own experience and the research literature, which tends to portray adult students (Merriam & Caffarell, 1999), working-class students in particular, (Ochberg & Comeau, 2001; Roberts & Rosenwald, 2001; Shor, 1987, 1988), as anti-liberal arts education. This was not the case. Most participants in my study wanted a liberal arts curriculum and had little doubt about its value.

This finding may be due to the fact that nearly half of the participants returned to school for intellectual reasons, most were avid readers, and some came from working-class families that valued self-education. Indeed, many came looking for the liberal arts curriculum in order to learn "everything," that is, academic subjects they missed learning about by not finishing their undergraduate degrees earlier in life. In addition, the participants reported that they weren't put off by the liberal arts curriculum because they either believed that having a degree— any degree— was the important part, or were savvy about the degree's re-sale value recognizing the connection of the liberal arts to Ivy League institutions. Finally, others who were more business minded, assumed that the Harvard name would work in their favor if the liberal arts degree did not. Jeff stated: "The nice thing about Harvard is when you are going to school at Harvard, people hear Harvard they don't hear what else." But the most

frequent phrase used by the participants to communicate their reason for choosing HES was: "I came to Harvard because it was the 'best'."

1. Wanting the best, because they deserved the best

When the participants decided to return to school, not just any local adult education program would do. These active-oriented, risk-taking, and bright adults wanted to go to an institution that has an outstanding reputation. If they were going to spend their precious time and money they wanted it to be on the "best." Jeff said:

> If you are going to be a bear, be a grizzly. If you are going to put the work into it and the time, which is much more precious to you as you get older, you may as well have the best. It is the Lexus rather than the budget car. It's nice to have the Lexus in the yard rather than the old junk.

Specifically, what did the "best" mean? Well, it meant prestige. Participants were not shy about stating that they wanted the prestige. Lisa stated: "It just made sense to come to an institution like Harvard and get the degree here and have it mean something on my resume." When I pushed for more clarification, the participants looked at me as if I were asking a strange question. Their collective feeling was that Harvard is, of course, the best and *everyone* wants the best. I wasn't so sure. I've met too many people who *self-selected* out of HES, even if they felt it was the best assuming that they didn't deserve, shouldn't want or couldn't have the best. As Tom observed: "Harvard has a reputation that proceeds it, as well as a lot of preconceived notions about whether you can or can't participate in this experience."

My sense of the overall meaning of the data would imply that the participants wanted the best because they believed that they deserved the best. But how did these 18 working-class participants many of whom had unremarkable past academic lives and grew up in families that didn't actively promote college attendance come to believe that they deserved

the best college education? Kevin, a Haitian-American who grew up working class, gave the most revealing answer:

> The Harvard name is the incentive. There is nothing wrong with incentives. What's wrong with that? I'm a better person for taking advantage for incentives. At least the university is giving you the opportunity to do it. They are making it affordable and convenient. My mother never wanted to be anything more than a nurse. In our culture, it is important to just get a job. It doesn't matter what you do as long as you work. You know that's not me. I want to be the best. I want the best of everything. People say that's kind of selfish. If I have the opportunity to have the best why can't I have it? Especially in the history of this county, if someone is offering me the best in this country, I am going to take it and run with it. I am going to do well.

Like for Kevin, the decision to come to HES was just one in a series of choices that they went after because they felt they deserved the best. Many pursued college when their parents said, "No, you're not college material"; many considered themselves bright, when the school system said, "No, you're not performing well"; and many pursued professional careers when society said, "No, you need a BA for that job." The participants are compelling— perhaps extreme— examples of London, Wenker, and Hagstrom's (1963) "active" adults. Moreover, the open-enrollment, part-time, affordable, evening program sent a message that this program was designed for people like them— bright, working-class adults who deserve a second chance. The name Harvard satisfied their need to confirm their brightness, and the open-enrollment program calmed their working-class fears of not fitting in or belonging in an upper-class institution.

In choosing Harvard, the participants showed themselves to be examples of Reay's (2002) "individualistic" (p. 410) approach to college selection. She found that when choosing universities middle-class students were far more interested in "prestige" and "reputation," while "a majority of the working-class students were prioritizing the safe and the familiar, attempting to find somewhere they might have a sense of belonging" (p. 405). Reay found a few working-class adults in her study who were interested in prestige, and she concluded that

they shared a less "solidarist" and more "individualistic" approach (p. 410) to university

selection. They weren't trying to "hold on to their working-class identities, they were trying

to leave them behind" (p. 410). It seems that the participants in my study were also looking

to leave behind their working-class identities, hence HES was an ideal university choice in

this regard. Moreover, given their independent relationships with their families there was

little tension surrounding the decision to choose a middle-class or even upper-class school,

for their ties to their working-class families and communities were already estranged.

Affordability, open enrollment, and part-time evening study, as well as being a

"serious" academic program, were the concrete factors that led these participants to choose

the HES. However, independent, self-sufficient childhoods that made room for imagining

different adulthoods, active orientations toward life (London, Wenker, & Hagstrom, 1963)

that allowed for wanting, expecting, and gaining more out of life, and, finally, unshaken

beliefs in their innate brightness are "the conditions that shaped their preference, and

intention" (Gambetta, 1987, as cited in Lynch & O'Riordan, 1998, p. 449) for returning to

school and choosing Harvard. Furthermore, HES may be the perfect "comfort zone" (Reay,

2002) match for the participants. They would have their brightness confirmed at a "serious"

academic institution, yet their class status wouldn't be threatened too much, for the

affordable, open-enrollment, evening program was designed for "people like them."

C. A Significant Theme from the Participants' Learning Careers at the Harvard Extension
School: *Finding an intellectual identity*

The case studies go into much detail about the participants' HES learning careers,

but here I want to report a salient theme that ran across most participants' narratives of their

degree-earning experience: finding an intellectual identity. While the participants felt bright

prior to HES, because of their unsuccessful academic histories they didn't feel "school

smart" (Luttrell, 1997), or educated and were concerned with their academic ability.

However, at HES the majority performed well, most graduating with honors. They were able

to claim an intellectual self. Maureen's statement was not uncommon: "I never quite realized

that I was an intellectual until I came here." How did it happen? How did these men and

women who grew up working class find their intellectual identities at HES and come to

integrate into their identities a "more academic," "more theoretical," and "less practical"

self? The participants shared that the place (Harvard and Cambridge, MA), the people (HES

faculty and fellow students), and the curriculum (liberal arts) are what "warmed-up" (Deli,

2001) their academic aspirations and helped transform their sense of innate brightness into a

new sense of intellectual identity.

1. The place

The place, Harvard University, so steeped in intellectual and social history, was very

much a part of participants' intellectual awakenings. They felt that they were no longer just a

part of the world of truck drivers, the secretarial pool, or credit collectors. They were now

part of an intellectual community where on crisp autumn evenings they strolled past "Nobel

prizewinners" on their way to charming ivy-clad brick buildings. In these buildings, they

walked into the same classrooms and sat in the same seats as "some of the greatest minds"

in modern history. As Barbara shared: "There is just an aura about the place." Lisa

reported: "Going to classes in the Yard had an impact. Looking at the famous writers and

philosophers' quotes that are all over the halls. I think it was inspiring." Jane, stated:

> The buildings were so huge and so, not community college. My community college
> was built in the 1960s, very ugly architecture. It was just utilitarian and ugly. Coming
> here it was like being in a film or a dream, seeing these big buildings with so much
> intellectual energy. I loved the campus and I loved coming here.

Ira Shor (1987) surmises that the architecture of higher institutions sends a signal to the students inside about the university's mission. The message is either you're being trained to be a worker or a thinker: "The stark aesthetic functionalism [of community colleges] was merely the product of the network's stark economic functionalism. The forces of work, job-market, and surplus-absorption were modeling the mass college audaciously" (p. 13).

The romance, the history, the intellectual energy, as well as the architecture of Harvard University, played a vital role in participants' aspirations and reorientation away from the world of occupational work toward the world of academic study. The location of Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts was also a significant factor. Many participants observed that Cambridge, with both Harvard and MIT in close proximity, was an academically dense environment that was intellectually stimulating and inspiring. Brenda shared:

> I came to Boston having come from not a super charged academic background and then I didn't do well at BU. Then suddenly working on this side of the river and being surrounded by all these people that went to Harvard or MIT, sometimes you feel that you are not quite as smart or quite as well equipped. And I think that I decided I was [smart and equipped] by the time I finished the degree. These guys are not that much smarter. Some of them are, some of them are damn brilliant. But I could hold my own. There is something about this place that makes you want to aim higher.

Cambridge (as well as the greater-Boston area, with seventy institutions of higher education) is a place where every bookstore, coffee shop, and pizza joint are filled with undergraduate, graduate, PhD students , and professors of all ages and cultures. As Beatrice stated: "There are smart people everywhere!" and Wendy observed: "You just trip over them."

Time and time again I would hear that there "is something about this place that makes you want to aim higher." The participants are expressing what many in the field of educational research term the effect of the "college atmosphere" on learning satisfaction

(Kuh, 1992; Terenzini, Pascarella, & Blimling, 1996,). In fact, Graham and Long (1998) found that adults prioritized the "academic climate" over all other factors when reporting their satisfaction with their learning. Harvard University is a place where some of the greatest minds in modern history have studied and taught, and where current day experts on every imaginable subject are around every corner. The academic atmosphere of the university, as well as the surrounding city, was academically motivating for the participants and re-enforced the notion that intellectuals and intellectual pursuits were just as much a part of daily life as workers and work. Indeed, it appears that absorbing the dense academic atmosphere night after night created a transformative "as if experience" (Greene, 1990)— *as if* they were already intellectuals.

What was also critical to the participants was that this place Harvard wasn't snobby, or, as Maureen stated: "There was no snootiness here and no one made you feel that you didn't belong." Many participants were surprised by this and were shocked by how comfortable they felt. The word "comfortable" came up often. As Gale, shared: "I always felt comfortable here. It doesn't feel pretentious or like some people may think Harvard would feel. It always felt comfortable to me." Another aspect of their comfort was finding people like them at HES. "People like me" was another familiar phrase. Adult education researchers (Gallacher, Field, & Merrill, 2002; London, 1978; Luttrell, 1997; Reay, 2002) found similarly that when choosing a higher education institution or when pointing out why they persisted at a particular institution working-class adults tend to prize (1) a feeling of comfort and (2) knowledge that there are people like them over all other qualities. "People like me" meant adult students not interested in professional, job-related education, but wanting to learn a variety of academic subjects. It also meant working people who didn't

have the chance to attend college right way, but were bright and interested in learning for

learning's sake.

Gale observed: "HES is great because the purpose is for people like me, who didn't

have much of interest out of high school, but now do. I think it would be a different feeling

at Harvard College. The atmosphere, the setting would just be very different. I would feel

that I wasn't in the right place." Additionally, Jane, who after working for a brief time at a

Harvard College student organization, realized how happy she was to be at HES with people

like her: "The people that I was going to school with at HES were more like myself. They

were more your normal, average, intellectually curious people, but the people at Harvard

College are younger and they are trying to find their identities."[56]

The participants had the gumption to try Harvard, but they needed the open-

enrollment program to feel "comfortable," and now, finding "people like them" was critical

to their ability to stay the course and earn their degrees. The participants couldn't leave their

working-class identities too far behind. However, comfort is a double-edge sword, for as

Luttrell (1997) states: "Seeking comfort among those like themselves exposes as it masks

how they learned their social limits" (p. 48).

2. The people

Without exception faculty were mentioned as "brilliant" and "intellectual." They

were praised for knowing their subject matter through and through, and for being passionate

teachers. But, in addition, participants believed that the instructors didn't need to be

teaching for financial reasons; they "wanted to be there." As Brenda stated: "The teachers

for the most part want to be here, I don't know how much of a financial incentive there is

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[56] I find these class-inspired comments about Harvard College an interesting contrast to the thoughts about the Extension School. There is an assumption that they would not be comfortable at the College because the

for teaching beyond the normal courseload. I think you would have to want to do it to take

that on." Beatrice observed:

> I think most of instructors here were living well. They liked what they were doing
> and that came through. They wanted to be there. That's very important. Because
> that's the unspoken communication between the students and the teacher that
> actually helps the class, helps the energy of the class, helps one to learn more. The
> fact that that instructor loves what he is doing and loves his career, and is happy
> about this moment.

It appears that the mere presence of Harvard faculty among the non-elite, nontraditional,

open-enrollment students gave them a feeling that the instructors were personally interested

in them. Perhaps this "wanting to be there" presumption by the participants speaks to the

low-esteem that is a part of many adult students' lives, for it assumes that there are those

who would choose *not* to be in their company, and that these elite professor viewed teaching

adult students as more of a calling than a job. Viewing faculty members in this way reminds

me of Goffman's (1963) idea that a stigmatized individual finds comfort in the company of a

"wise person": "Wise persons are the men before whom a individual with a fault need feel

no shame nor exert self-control, knowing that in spite of his failing he will be seen as an

ordinary other" (p. 28). This view of faculty is significant, for the notion of adult students as

stigmatized individuals was a dominant theme from the participants' narratives and is

explored in depth through the case studies.

In addition to "wanting to be there," the instructors were praised for not talking

down to the participants and for considering them part of the larger intellectual academic

community. Jean reported that her instructors often gave her suggestions on what to read

next when she communicated an interest in a subject. Maureen also stated that many times

she was introduced to other scholars by faculty members. Because of this, she felt part of an

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students there wouldn't be like them at all; they would be rich, privileged 18 to 21-year-olds. In classless

intellectual community: "I found myself talking to someone at Stanford. It is pretty amazing, I don't think other schools are like that." Gallacher, Crossan, Field, and Merrill (2002) found that the key to students developing an academic identity was supportive faculty who were "personally interested in students' lives" and "didn't talk down" to them (p. 505). As we learned from London's (1978) research, if traditional-aged working-class students sense that a teacher is talking down to them, they will act out, disrupt class, and choose not to learn. Their behavior is a result of being asked to "meet the demands, expectations, and values of those who made them feel inferior, and so as a matter of honor it became necessary for students to resist" (p. 93). Most participants in the study didn't get the sense that they were inferior, and in fact, faculty members helped them believe they were part of intellectual community and thus they became "culturally at ease as learners" (Gallacher, Crossan, Field, and Merrill, 2002, p. 505).

But, surprisingly enough, even more than the faculty, the participants mentioned their fellow students as the people who inspired them to become increasingly focused academically. They found the other students were centrally concerned with their academics. They were "serious students" (frequently used term) who weren't there to bide their time; they were there to learn. Jane observed: "At community college I would be the only who raised my hand and told the teacher 'you forgot to give us the extra-credit homework'; at Harvard Extension School half the class would raise their hand. I knew that this was the program for me." Jeff said:

> It made it more worthwhile to go back to school here. You have better students over here. On the whole you have some great students over here. So, you are in with a better crowd, you're running with tough competition. The reputation of school brings in people who are willing to work.

America there are some circles that one cannot travel in without class-inspired discomfort about belonging.

Barbara reported that her fellow students were: "Very serious, it is a very serious group of students and I can understand why. It's difficult for them to take the time to come and take classes and combine it with a busy life and career."

The seriousness is a result of things that have already been mentioned: the dense academic environment of the university and the city of Cambridge that contributed to a rich "college atmosphere" (Graham & Long, 1998; Kuh, 1992; Terenzini, Pascarella, & Blimling, 1996), the need to "keep up with reputation of the school," and the passionate faculty who put students "culturally at ease" (Gallacher, Crossan, Field, & Merrill, 2002). Researchers in the field of adult education have reported that adult students tend to be more focused on their academics than traditional-aged students (Benshoff & Lewis, 1992). But I couldn't help wonder if there was something else, other than the "aura" of Harvard and the adult-student focus. I turned to Nisan's research to learn more about high academic performance at "second chance" degree programs.

Nisan (1990) found that students involved in "second chance" (i.e., open-enrollment, degree granting) programs felt the university was offering them a "privilege" for which they should be grateful. They were being offered a "second chance to make good" (p. 99), and hence felt obligated to perform at higher levels. In a true sense, all Harvard Extension School students are on campus due to charitable acts of power holders; as a result, every student, to a varying degree, may feel the need to prove him or herself worthy of the benevolently sanctioned right to study on hallowed ground. While the open-enrollment admissions policy sends the message, we have faith that *You can do the work*, perhaps a hidden message of obligation, *Don't let us down*, lives between the lines. A sense of obligation may be an additional condition that, combined with the intensive intellectual atmosphere,

encouraging faculty, and focused adult students, helped produced the "serious" academic climate that inspired high academic performance.

3. The liberal arts curriculum

Confidence was the most frequently used term the participants used to describe what they got out of their HES learning careers. As Wendy said: "Just the confidence level. I speak now with a stronger more assured voice than I did before. It even goes beyond confidence. There is a surety in me now that was not there before." It is commonly known in the field of education that graduates of four-year colleges express greater gains in confidence (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). What is noteworthy from my data is participants' connection between liberal arts education and confidence. The majority felt that because they were pushed to pursue academic subjects outside their comfort zone, for example, natural science, math, and foreign language, and they performed well, they achieved a greater sense of confidence that permeated all aspects of their lives. They also were grateful to the liberal arts curriculum, for it gave them a "well-rounded intellectual knowledge" and helped them find their "intellectual interests." The majority of the participants didn't just choose a major they found an academic passion that they then wanted to meld with their future career plans.

For example, Silvia discovered through the liberal arts curriculum that she loved art history. She initially shied away from this discipline because she thought art history was solely for the rich to study, and she was afraid that she wouldn't be able to earn a living. But after an inspirational comment from an art history instructor that she "had an eye for art," these feelings changed:

> I had the perspective that art history was for the rich— those people who could afford to send their kids to the Sorbonne or Italy. It wasn't for someone whose mom was working tooth and nail to pay for all of this. But I really like this, why would I take that away from myself. Also, I am good at it. Faculty members think I am good

> at it too. I understand what's being said in lectures, what I am reading, and I can formulate my own opinions and arguments. I realized this might be what I want to do.

Silvia made a special effort to impress upon me that her love of art wasn't about being an "elitist snob," but rather about finding her intellectual passion, craving more knowledge, and realizing that in this field she wasn't regurgitating others' thoughts but formulating her own opinions about art. Silvia is currently pursuing a graduate certificate in museum studies, for she "loves sitting in stuffy museums and looking at art for hours to the point where the security guards tell me to back away."

Gale, a 45-year-old medical secretary, never took school "seriously." For her it was always "work, work, work." But at HES she became "more serious" about academics and discovered a love of writing. She is currently working on a collection of short stories, and pursuing her master's degree in literature and creative writing at HES. Jean was excited about earning her degree at Harvard, but initially she was not interested in liberal arts; she wanted to go back to school for computer science. She thought that was more practical. Now she is so grateful that HES only offers a liberal arts program, for she was exposed to a more "intellectual and theoretical way of thinking and it's the theory that you see applied everywhere over and over again and that's what you use." After earning her degree at age 47, Jean decided to go to law school, in order to put her "love of theory to good use." Sara and Lisa discovered a passion for psychology and both are pursuing degrees in that field. For Jane and Wendy it was literature; Jane is pursing her master's degree at HES in English and American literature and language and Wendy is pursuing her master's in publishing at another university. For Barbara it was history of science, and she is now writing a science fiction novel that makes ample use of her new knowledge. For Maureen it was linguistics and ancient languages such as Sanskrit and Gothic; she, too, is pursuing a master's degree in

English and American literature and language, with a focus on Old English at HES. She wants to use her knowledge to teach English-as-a-second-language and make a difference in her local Portuguese community.

London (1978) concludes that because the academic emphasis has been so skewed toward vocational education in community college some students questioned their intellectual ability: "Enrolled in training programs, they didn't expect school to be a 'fount of wisdom' and, importantly, this awareness led them to compare what was wanting in their programs with what they believed to be wanting in themselves" (p. 64). However, at HES, where all that was offered was the liberal arts curriculum, the participants were able— forced even— to put aside the demands of the marketplace and choose instead the demands of their own intellectual passions, and indeed claim an academic, even intellectual self.

The place, the people, and the liberal arts curriculum were the conditions that shaped the participants' learning careers; so much so that most participants stated: "I couldn't go back to what I was doing before." Jean, who decided to start law school at age 47, said: "I have to do something now that *I* want to do. I've done things in the past that have just accommodated my situation. Now I feel like the whole world is open to me." At age 65, Cheryl retired from her 40-year nursing career the day after Commencement to pursue her own business as an inspirational speaker. Barbara, at age 80, offered: "If I were just ten years younger I would go on to do a PhD and trace the development of history, science, and religion. But now I will just work on my novel." The desire, indeed, *need*, to make a change was true across the board. For some it was a new job. But for others who remained at their same jobs, the change took the form of pursuing their academic passions at more advanced, specialized levels in graduate degree programs, with the hopes of one day melding their academic interests with their professional lives. It appears that there is something about this

experience that created a desire for life-change, the need to apply what they learned, and an ongoing engagement with intellectual interests.

D. Conclusion to Paradigmatic Analysis of all Eighteen Participants' Stories: Who are these students, why did they come to HES to earn the liberal arts degree, and what meaning did they make of their experience?

The participants in this study lived self-sufficient childhoods with sink or swim early adulthoods. All of the participants swam. They are survivors who have an "active orientation toward life" (London, Wenker, & Hagstrom, 1963), and who always felt bright. They came back to school because they could no longer tolerate feeling "marginal and deprived" (Hopper & Osborn, 1975) about their occupation or educational level. They chose Harvard not because they felt privileged to go to the best, but because they are risk-takers who, through their successful work experiences and innate brightness, have *earned* the best. Additionally, Harvard Extension School's affordable, open enrollment, evening program communicated that HES was for "people like them."

When they arrived they were unsure of their institutional academic ability, but due in larger part to "finding people like them" and the intellectual atmosphere of this elite university that includes "brilliant" faculty, "serious" students, and a liberal arts, rather than a vocational, curriculum, they "warmed-up" (Deli, 2001) their intellectual identities. They transformed their innate brightness into polished intellectualism. Indeed, Commencement day was the pinnacle of validation and joy. The participants were primed for their next active-oriented lifestyle leap (London, Wenker, & Hagstrom, 1963). For some that meant a new job, for others, graduate school, but for all there was a sense that the "whole world was now open to them" and opportunities that "never in million years" would they have dreamed possible, they now had. As Gallacher, Crossan, Field, and Merrill (2002) found in

their research on adult students, the participants in my study were able to move academic aspirations from the margins to the center of the lives, and "were able to consider learning opportunities that they wouldn't have considered an option in the past" (p. 505).

There is, however, a darker side to this euphoria, for many participants found that as adult students and graduates of an open-enrollment program, particularly at Harvard, they had to withstand "positional suffering" (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 4) similar to that of the musician in Patrick Suskind's play, *The Double Bass*, "whose very deep and very real misery comes from the fact that at the very heart of this highly privileged world to which he belongs, everything is as if designed to remind him that the position he occupies in it is a low one" (p. 424). As a result of occupying a less-than position in a privileged world, many of the participants came to feel like "outcasts on the inside" (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 425). It seems that there are indeed limits to feelings of self-worth, as well as upward mobility in a world that chooses not to congratulate, but to humble those who find alternative roads or "back doors" to an elite education. The next chapters probe these aspects of my research findings.

Chapter V. Findings: Narrative Analysis of Three Participants' Stories

A. Composing an Adult-Student Identity: *Beatrice's Learning Career*

> While the stranger is present before us, evidence can
> arise of his possessing an attribute that makes him different
> from others in the category of persons available for him to
> be, and of a less desirable kind. He is thus reduced in our
> minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted
> one. Such an attribute is a stigma.
> Erving Goffman (1963), *Stigma*

On a raining Thursday evening at around 6:30 pm, Beatrice enters the Harvard

Extension School (HES) building and rides the elevator up the fifth floor. She knocks on the

locked doors that lead into the suite of offices on the eastern-side of the building. I hear the

knock, and not wanting her to wait an extra second, run to the door. As she shakes her

umbrella dry, I welcome her inside. She rails against the lack of on-street parking in Harvard

Square and her need to pay a garage. I immediately feel guilty about her long drive in. I

should have met her somewhere or gone to her home. Why did I decide to have the

participants meet me in my office? I thought it would be convenient for both of us, but now

I wonder about whose convenience, and perhaps whose safety and comfort I prioritized?

This critical reflection is interrupted by the immediate need to lead Beatrice into my office

and get started.

Beatrice is a striking, five foot nine inch, 37-year old woman with flawless skin and

short-cropped hair. She is African-American with a Vogue-like beauty to her face. Her

make-up and clothes have received detailed attention. Her manner is professional, assertive,

and slightly sarcastic. Beatrice fills the room with her confidence, so much so that I have the

passing thought that she should run for office; she is a natural leader. Beatrice cannot seem

to wait to begin. She starts talking before I can unwrap the microphones and put the tape

recorder on. I want to tell her to wait because this is all too good to miss. But Beatrice can't

be stopped. She is singularly interested in sharing her critique that adult students are

"stigmatized" in this society. As she sees it, they work their "asses off" far more than

traditional-aged students, but are disparaged. Adult students are not out partying, trying to

find themselves, or taking hedonistic, and possibly Freudian-inspired, pleasure in wasting

mom and dad's money. They are serious students who pay their own way and are principally

interested in their coursework. But these academic distinctions go unnoticed by a society that

makes adult students feel like "cheats" and "fuck-ups."

Beatrice grew-up working class in the midwest. He father worked in a factory and her

mother was a homemaker. She is eldest of three children. Beatrice went to a middle-class

high school that stressed going to college and at an early age she was placed into an

enrichment program for gifted students:

> I was put into this sort of gifted program— it's an enrichment program— very early
> on. Like second grade you were in this program, so your teachers treated you, they
> really treated you very differently. From the teachers' point of view there was no
> question that you were going to college.

Beatrice's change of personal pronoun from "I" to "you" and her emphasis on "the

teachers' point of view" are clues that for her, college attendance was a question. There was

a discrepancy between the message at home and the message at school. But like many of the

participants in this study, she was independent of mind, so, she ignored the family message

and proceeded with her own plans to attend college. She even had a dream school in mind:

"I wanted to go to Loma Linda University. I wanted to be doctor and that's where I wanted

to go. I mean my whole life I wanted to go there." Low and behold, Beatrice got accepted

to Loma Linda University, but her parents would not talk about it, would not look at the

college catalogue, and most important, would not fill out the financial aid forms. As Beatrice

remembered, her father's comment to her was: "I am not going to lose my house over you screwing up in school." At the time, Beatrice didn't understand what this meant. How were they going to lose their house? Why did they assume that she would screw-up in school? She was a good high school student. She knew her parents loved her, and thinking back on it during the interview, she realized that due to living lives precariously perched on the edge of financial insecurity, her parents were truly afraid of losing what little they had. As Lynch and O'Neill (1994) conclude: "What alienates working-class children from the system [of higher education] most is the absence of the financial resources to make the system work for themselves" (p. 317). However, her parents were also afraid of losing their daughter to a foreign world: "I think it was a lot about my parents' fears. I think it was about them feeling like they wouldn't fit in." They were "regular" people, who perceived the odds of life stacked against them, so why bet the house?

There was no point in pushing harder or asking for clarification. Her dream of attending Loma Linda University was gone. With her own funds, Beatrice made a half-hearted attempt at Cleveland State University. She was not an enthusiastic student. She would sign up for courses, but not attend, and as a result, earned a number of failing grades. She felt that the university was below her academic ability: "I hated every minute. I have to admit to myself now it was just kind of depressing. I just felt like, oh dear, these people aren't too terribly bright and I am not being educated here." Beatrice was bright and felt she deserved better. This could be a narrative strategy to make sense of her academic failure in college by pointing to external, rather than internal, influences (Linde, 1993). It is more likely that she was angry and resentful at having her dream of attending Loma Linda University taken away from her. She turned the injustice inward and didn't work up to her potential. In fact, she "screwed-up," fulfilling her parents' prediction. Then, her father died. Fooling

around at college was no longer an option. She had to get a full-time job to help support the family.

She left home shortly after that and headed to New York City. There she landed an entry-level position in a brokerage firm, but she had to do some "creative" resume writing to get in the door. She worked her way up. Eight years later, she was making $200,000 a year, planning European get-a-ways, and living in a stylish Manhattan apartment. She also sent money home to her mother and put her younger brother through school. Once her brother's education was complete, Beatrice made an attempt to return to school. She never finished the course because she felt it wasn't academically rigorous enough. There were "too many people talking about their experiences at work." But the fraudulent feeling of "faking" a college degree was beginning to haunt her more and more:

> At that time my biggest account was TIAA-CREF. How funny is that? I felt like the biggest hypocrite. Okay, I'm selling to the Teachers' Annuity and I don't quite have my education stuff together. It's funny, here I am making like $200,000 dollars a year and no one knows that I don't have my degree completed. And I just felt like the biggest schmuck because this part of my life was not together.

Beatrice compares her behavior at work to an illiterate person hiding her inability to read. She was working in job that requires an MBA and she didn't even have her BA. As a result, she spent her workdays in hiding: "You really don't want to talk to people a whole lot. You really don't want anyone to really know about you or a lot about your personal business or anything that is intimate about you because they'll find out that you don't have a degree." The intensifier "really" puts emphasis on how much shame she felt, and communicates just how much her life and achievements did not feel real to her. Even Beatrice's boyfriend didn't know that she didn't have a degree, and it wasn't until he popped the question (asking her to marry him) that in a flood of tears Beatrice came clean. The tears were about the deception, but they were also about the fear that her boyfriend would reject her:

He was like, "You don't have a degree? I never knew that." I know you didn't know that. I made sure that you didn't know that. "Why do you think I would like you less or love you less because you don't have a degree?" Because you know what, I know people are like that. Because I have friends that are like that. Oh, she doesn't have a degree. Oh, what's wrong with her? I can't date anyone who doesn't have a degree. I was sobbing uncontrollably, saying I can't do this because I've got to get a degree. I can't marry you until I get a degree.

Here was a "trigger event" (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980, Gallacher, Crossan, Field, & Merrill's, 2002; College Board, 2000). The time had come for Beatrice to deal with the mounting feelings of "deprivation and marginality" (Hopper & Osborn, 1975) that living without a degree in a high-powered financial world created. She also wanted to move on with her life. But she felt she couldn't marry a man with an Ivy League education or become an appropriate role model to her future children without an undergraduate degree: "I can't bring children into this world and tell them education is important and have them turn around and say: 'You don't have a degree, so why should I have one.'"

Beatrice searched for adult educational programs across the country and discovered the Harvard Extension School (HES). She chose HES because it was a "serious" academic program. She could just tell by the course catalogue: "The course descriptions were a little more in depth. It felt more structured; we are not going to tolerate bullshit here." She flew in for a visit, and left feeling assured that this was a rigorous academic program that didn't only stress life and work experience. Because of her mounting feelings of shame in her work life (feeling illiterate), not just any local evening program could dispel the fraudulent feelings; she wanted to go to Harvard. Additionally, her desire to confirm her "brightness" could only be satisfied at a school respected for its rigorous academic standards. She didn't want a repeat performance of either her first or second attempt at college. She wanted to be around people who she was convinced were bright and where she could get a "real" education:

> I think the first thing that drew me here was I really wanted to find an adult program with people that think. That last thing I needed to do was to spend time with a bunch of old-ass people that are going to talk about their days at work. "Well, I realize that the economics of blah, blah." It has no basis, no barring, it means nothing. I was happy to find that I was correct. That really didn't happen here a lot. Or this whole life experience thing. Well that's nice, but you're here to learn. Harvard does not engage in that as much as other schools, which is great. You have a curriculum, you're expected to read books, you're expected to do your assignments, get a grade and move forward. Which I really appreciated because where I found with other adult students or in other adult settings was just time to socialize, talk about their gripes at work, or how they think the world should be.

She studied the HES catalogue and devised a plan. She had just twelve transfer credits from Cleveland State, but she would earn her degree in less than three years by taking course overloads (five courses a semester) and attending summer school. Then she could get married, plan a family, and get right back on her finance career track: "I had all these big plans. Curriculum, okay, this is going to take me three years to get through. I'll find this little part-time job when I'm there, by that time I'll be done, I'll start my CFA (Certified Financial Analysis) license. I'll become an analyst for awhile, and then move on to investment banking or venture capital."

With her three-year curriculum plan in hand, as well as a sense of her future career in the finance industry, she relocated to Boston. She went out to find a full-time job; working part time was not financially feasible in Boston, nor did it match Beatrice's personality. As demonstrated by her move to NYC and her successful climb up the corporate ladder, she has an "active orientation toward life" (London, Wenker, & Hagstrom, 1963). Beatrice is a risk taker, who enjoys having many demands on her time. As London, Wenker, and Hagstrom (1963) concluded: "Being too busy is not a deterrent to being involved in adult education" (p. 144); it is, in fact, highly correlated with adult education participation. While without a degree she was hesitant about going into a financial firm and asking for a job, she did it. She was offered a job making 70% less than what she was making in New York City.

She was shocked: "Are you kidding? I was like, "Have you looked at my resume?' He was like, 'Well you don't have a degree and a degree is very important.' No kidding, it was the only reason I was even in Boston." She took the job.

Her life was work and schoolwork, and nothing else, "truly nothing else." At the financial firm she managed to work her way up to the middle, but throughout her employment she had to suffer the indignities of a boss who treated her "like a child" and took every opportunity to point out that she needed to get her degree:

> It used to drive me to drink. "Now, Beatrice, [stated in a stuffy old-white-man voice] you need to consider completing your degree and get that done because that's important." I would sit there and just bite my lip like, Thank you, it is? I didn't know that, thanks. That's why I am taking five classes and working my ass off because I didn't know that it was important.

While work had its own sets of problems, home was all about schoolwork. Before work, after class, and on the weekends, Beatrice would sit on her one chair at her one table, turn on her one lamp, and type:

> I would just sit in that chair with my laptop and just type and type and type and go to bed. Wake up and type and type and type. Go to bed and wake up. And for the first year and a half he [her fiancé] wasn't really here and then he came at that end and he cooked, he cleaned, he did the laundry. He did everything, while I was just typing [making typing noises] the entire time. I don't recommend it to many people. We went nowhere. There were no weekends. There were no dinners. Over break, winter break, I would have to spend that time studying. I would always have a paper due, something due, something due. We would try to do something in August, and back to the grind. It was so bad. It was very intense.

But Beatrice never considered quitting or easing up on her course load. She shared that she felt like a runner who, after hitting the wall, reaches the runner's high and thinks, "Wow, I could do this forever." She wanted the degree. She wanted the piece of paper (the sheepskin) that represented so much in the form of self-validation. Once obtained she would feel like she deserved that high-powered job, to be married to that well-educated man, and to

be a role model for her future children. It was easy to keep running with these high-stakes

motivations. As Sennett and Cobb (1972) write: "A person can put up with a great deal of

physical privation if he believes that what he is doing is worthwhile" (p. 185). Beatrice also

credits her academic experience at HES: "My experience was great. It was like nirvana. I

could withstand anything." Challenging, intellectual faculty who were "into what they were

doing" and fellow "serious" students who were more academic than she had anticipated: "It

was just very scholastic and very, you know, intellectual, which was great, intellectual

discussions, which were fantastic! The student body was even better than I thought." Her

biggest fear was that the place was going to be filled with Harvard College want-to-be's. In

fact, she only came across one person like that:

> He was that kind of student that was dreadful. He was Mr. Harvard. He wore his
> Harvard gear everywhere. Harvard bag, Harvard gear, Harvard everything. He was
> the kind of the person I expected. But there were so few. But, he was what I feared.
> You know I'm Harvard, I'm Mr. Harvard. Look pal, you did not come here with an
> SAT of like 1800, don't try to steal it.

Here, Beatrice names one of the central tensions of HES student life: Extension School

students have to negotiate the feeling of "stealing" the true Harvard-experience all the time.

However, her strong reaction to this student may be more about her own fraudulent

feelings. She came to Harvard to rid herself of shameful, cheating feelings, so, any hint of

those resurfacing were problematic. Beatrice wanted to be around serious students who were

not impressed by the Harvard name. She wanted this experience to be "real." Also, her

strong reaction to this student may well be further evidence of her feelings of stigmatization.

In the words of Goffman (1963), Beatrice is sharing her "identity ambivalence," for she is

coming face to face with one of her "own kind behaving in a stereotypical way and the sight

repels her because she supports the norm of the wider society" (Goffman, 1963, p. 108).

Yet, she can't deny that she is one them; she is part of the open-enrollment, adult student population who found the "back door" into Harvard.

In addition to serious students and "brilliant faculty," the diversity of courses also kept Beatrice motivated during this grueling work-and-school schedule that excluded all semblance of a "normal biography" that includes a social and family life (Reay, Ball, & David, 2002). While she didn't choose the HES because of the liberal arts program, she was quite grateful that's all HES offered:

> At first I was very into I need an accounting degree; I need something technical. But then after a while I thought I just need a degree and I need it to be in something I like. While I wasn't drawn to a liberal arts degree in the beginning, I now think everyone should have one. It is kind of like, to know what really fits. And my idea was accounting, I need this and I need that, but I found I really liked the more theoretical, philosophical side of economics a great deal, and I really like gender issues a great deal and history of science. I would *never* [emphasized loudly] have gone down that path. I think liberal arts really kind of opens your mind and lets you blossom more so than having a narrow point of view.

Through her use of the mental verb "I think," I believe Beatrice is making meaning of a liberal arts degree and sharing its larger value. Moreover, the intensifiers, "really" and "never," communicate just how much finding academic interests outside of the business world was an unexpected benefit of the liberal arts curriculum. In fact, Beatrice brings up the importance of studying gender issues at three different points in her narrative. She credits these courses with opening up her views on feminism and the feminist movement, which she previously considered a white-women's movement: "I think the [women studies] classes here helped me not only formulate what I really think, but actually made me be able to communicate what I really thought about the feminist movement and how I could change things and become involved."

Overall, Beatrice was surprised by how much she learned. Since young adulthood, she considered herself a "bright, well-read person." Her parents, who felt college was too

much of a financial risk for both Beatrice and themselves, did, however, support self-education in the form of reading, particularly historical texts. Her parents wanted Beatrice to read as much as possible from many different angles in order for her to develop her own opinions about the world. In the beginning, she wasn't sure how much new information she was going to learn in college: "I guess I kind of came in with the attitude, okay, I'll just breeze through this because I have a wealth of experience, and I read a lot. There is not much that they can teach me here, but I can get my grades and move on. And I found myself learning a great deal here."

She did it. At 37, she finally earned her undergraduate degree. Life was supposed to change dramatically, but it didn't, at least not right away. The year after graduation was "hell." She didn't get the promotion at work that she hoped for. She felt it was because the firm's management did not respect her because she earned her degree later in life and that she didn't start there with a degree: "The stigma at *that firm* [stated loudly] because I entered with no degree [slapping her leg], it is like I still don't have a degree." She tried to stay in her current job, but couldn't. She was bored. She had enormous creative energy from taking five classes and working full time and nowhere to put it: "As an adult student you spend a lot of time running around doing things and now you're just back to work, you're kind of like, all right, I've got to move on."

But where to? When Beatrice began the program she had a plan. She was going to continue to work in the financial industry to become a CFA, but after earning her degree, she believed that she has more to offer the world than making money. Then she realized that things had changed— dramatically. She no longer needed to hide behind the "veil" of non-degree status that limited her choices. She could *choose* what to do next, rather than unconsciously jump back on the finance career path. She now saw herself sitting at a

banquet table and comprehending that she could eat "whatever I wanted instead of eating only what someone gave me because I was hungry." She experienced a transformation and again her use of the mental verb "I think" in the following quote seemed to highlight her making meaning of the experience. The following may indeed be the essence of how her experience at HES changed her life:

> We are in this, and I think a lot of us come in this, to help ourselves economically. I need this degree to have a better salary, but I think at some point one kind of changes because there are so many courses you have to take here. And they are very diverse. At some point one will think about am I in this for me and how will I feel about all of this at the end? What does this job mean to you? What did it mean prior, and what does it mean to you now. And I think it is very different. So I think there is a bit of a transformation for every student.

Beatrice came back to school for the academic credentials that her financial profession demanded, but through the eclectic course selection of the liberal arts curriculum she began to reflect on and reconsider her one-dimensional motivation for earning her degree. Maybe she had other interests, talents, and political agendas. Maybe there was more to life than earning money and she should consider giving back, perhaps working in public service on gender issues: "It was really good for me to realize that there is more to life than making money, and although we all say that, we need to mean it. I mean it." She also realized that her academic ambitions had been "warmed up" (Deli, 2001). Her brain was hungry for more learning. It spent the last three years being fed a daily diet of history, literature, and science, and now it was "looking for the next thing to do." She began to contemplate applying to Harvard Business School or the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard, which in "a million years" she never thought she would seriously consider. She stated that her "confidence" and "self-esteem" had grown ten-fold. Like Gallacher, Crossan, Field, and Merrill (2002) found with their participants, she was able to consider learning opportunities that she "would not have considered an option in the past" (p. 505). But with

all these options, and still not feeling quite used to her new degree-earning self, she was not sure what the next step should be. She was at a crossroads.

It was only toward the end of the interview that Beatrice began to reflect on what being at Harvard was truly about for her. She spent her degree-seeking experience denying that the Harvard name was in any way important. She was here to learn, and while the name would look good on her resume, she just wanted to go to an academically rigorous institution. Her thoughts then took an interesting turn and drifted back to her father. She shared that back in New York City she made more money in one year than he had in his lifetime. And while the money brought her a middle-class, or even an upper-class income, her lack of an undergraduate degree kept her "blue collar." She also remembered the "dual consciousness" (Dubois, 1953) of growing-up working class and working in a high-level financial environment where discussions about the economic benefits of takeovers and merges were commonplace, but little mention was made of the people, like Beatrice's father, who would lose their jobs:

> I felt I had one foot here and one foot there; I was straddling fences. To be in a morning meeting and listen to people talking about shutting down plants to boost earning and you realize, okay, that's nice, because you shut down, but now there are lives in a tailspin. I know, because I was on the other side. Rich kids picketing at Harvard about labor issues. If their parents' portfolios didn't go up because of the exact issues that they are picketing against, they wouldn't be here. It is just very interesting to see both sides of the thinking.

She even thought back to the Harvard College want-to-be student and now saw from where he came from. That person, who embodied everything she despised, now represented, at least in part, her feelings about earning a Harvard degree:

> I can see where he was coming from. "I can't believe I'm here, I can't believe I'm here, I cannot believe it, somebody pinch me because I cannot believe I'm here." I can kind of see where he is coming from, as uncomfortable as it made me.

Her feelings of shock and amazement were similar to Reay's (2002) characterization of adult students in her study feeling "magical transformative powers of education" (p. 402). Beatrice was just starting to believe that a working-class girl from the midwest, who had all the potential and none of the money or family support to go to college, now holds a Harvard degree, a degree that is no longer her much-prized ticket to a better, higher paying job in finance, but to an academically rewarding life in a career of her choosing where she will always be learning and making a difference. Prior to coming to Harvard, Beatrice never considered that she had any other capacities beside money-earner. HES helped her to see that she had more than a worker-self. She now, more fully, owned an intellectual-self.

There is one big problem. The feeling of being a "cheat" was not gone, and that was one of the primary motivations to begin her arduous learning career at Harvard. Beatrice wanted desperately to rid herself of fraudulent feelings. In fact, Beatrice explicitly stated that she came back to school for "self-gratification and self-worth." She related these needs to being a woman in a society that is "constantly telling women that they are not worth a whole lot, so, we accomplish one thing after another." While finally earning her degree meant a great deal to her, she was not getting the recognition from the outside world to truly validate her self-worth: "I still do not feel whole. I feel much better than when I started the program, but it's almost as if I feel other people are looking at me as if I cheated, like, 'You have a degree, but its from HES, so it's not a real degree.'" She took on the tone of voice of another person, which emphasized the feeling of an outsider looking in and judging her experience. While earning her degree specifically at Harvard exacerbated the "cheating"

feeling[57], she believed that this feeling emanated much more from simply being an adult student— *anywhere*.

She felt that there is a certain agreed upon age to do things and when you deviate from that norm "people expect a story" in the form of an explanation. The story they expect has the adult student playing the role of a "fuck-up" who wasn't "smart enough" or "rich enough" to go to "regular" college. As a result, adult students are trying to get their acts together late in life. But society tells them: That's all well and good, but it's just too late, as adult students you need to expect the crumbs, not the cake. In addition, Beatrice believed that the outside world thinks adult education is non-academic, it's "easy," it's "night school." It is education-*lite* where instructors take out half the fat from the subject matter because adult students have to work and they perceive that students are just there to buy the degree. She blamed the field of adult education for this perception. She felt strongly that the field put too much emphasis on life experience and not enough on providing a traditional college curriculum. She was adamant that giving credit for life experience was a bad idea that compromises the ability of every adult student to market her degree effectively to future employers: "And I think this whole life service shit, schools giving credit to life service, I think its doing a disservice to adult students. Because, again, employers can point to, 'Oh, you're just getting credit for breathing.'"

The injustice of the outsiders' view that adult students are non-academic was so frustrating to Beatrice that she told me she could just scream. She felt that it went without

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[57] Bithiah shared that it doesn't help to get the degree from HES, where many people communicate to her that it's not the "real" Harvard. The main reason it is not Harvard is because it is open enrollment. It is not exclusive; therefore, the feeling from others is you're not so special. "People say, 'Oh, you went to the Extension School.' Almost like, 'Oh, but you cheated, you didn't really go to Harvard, you went to the Extension School.' Bithiah's philosophy about this reaction: "I think people want to pick on Harvard sometimes because it is exclusive and they can't be apart of it. So any part that they can put down— and Extension School is an easy target— they will try to cast dispersions on."

saying that adult students are far more academically inclined than traditional-aged students, who, she believed, are "drinking their way through school" and are more interested in trying to "find themselves" than studying academic subjects. She reported that her husband, who attended Princeton, stated to her: "Hon, you are getting way more out of college than I ever got out of it." While this maybe the case, she believed that her educational experience was not valued:

> The end result or the end analysis by the outside world is that his degree matters more than mine, because he obtained his degree between the right ages of eighteen and twenty-one. Even though he was partially sober like a lot of kids versus being an adult and actually doing the work and thinking about why you're doing this.

She also believed that for adult students it was their time and money, and therefore they took education far more seriously, even though they had to work and go to school: "I think more time is probably being spent on assignments because it means something. I think it means more to the adult student than the 18-21-year-old with mom and dad paying for it." The mom and dad comment punctuated the class differences between traditional-aged college students and adult students that were inherently assumed by Beatrice and many other participants.

When she finally earned her degree, Beatrice wanted to feel socially validated. She wanted to feel like "somebody" (Luttrell, 1977). Unfortunately, she didn't. At the time of our interview Beatrice was leaving her job and looking into graduate degree programs in business and government where she could focus on gender issues. She decided that a graduate degree could finally be the answer to her self-worth dilemma, another achievement that she could accomplish, and one that wasn't age-dependent: "I'm looking for validation. That I can say, I graduated from this program with a master's degree. No one questions at what age you get a master's."

1. Beatrice's significant plot line: *Scarlet letter A for adult student*

Beatrice's consistent plot line centers on feelings of "marginality and deprivation" (Hopper & Osborn, 1975) that she had assumed would disappear once she earned her degree, but did not. The fraudulent feelings of not deserving what she had in her work life transferred into her academic life. She was a "cheat" at work, and now she was a "cheat" at school. Beatrice attributed the cheating feeling at school to society's lack of respect for adult students. She felt stigmatized by the scarlet letter A: adult student. Goffman (1963) concludes that the central feature of the stigmatized person is a lack of acceptance: "Those who have dealings with him fail to accord him the respect and regard" (p. 9). According to Beatrice, the lack of respect for adult students is in direct proportion to high regard afforded 18- to 21-year-old college students. Beatrice mentioned "18- to 21-year-olds" forty-nine times in the interview. She believed that the stigmatization she felt was due to society viewing her as "less than traditional-aged students," so she needed to be content with less upward mobility, as well as less regard and respect.

Beatrice was not alone in this belief. Other participants felt stigmatized as adult students, and judged their experience against the stereotypical, traditional 18- to 21-year old college student experience. The population of traditional-aged college students has been shrinking dramatically over the past ten years, and as of 2002, there are more nontraditional students than traditional in higher education (Sandeen, 2004). Yet, the traditional students are still the gold standard by which many participants compared their educational experience. For a significant number of the participants, in varying degrees the much-touted phrase used by adult educators, "adult education is a second chance, but not second class," was not true. Even though they held their HES education in the highest regard, they felt, like Beatrice, that their second chance HES education was viewed by *others* as second class. The stigmatized

feelings centered on the converging and overlapping stories that live in the world about (1) age, (2) class, and (3) open-enrollment adult education.

a. Stories about age

Like Beatrice, Sara believed that there is an agreed upon age to do things and when you deviate from that norm, society looks down upon you. Sara (born in The Netherlands) rarely told Americans that she was pursuing an undergraduate degree: "Here in America, it sounds like you somehow screwed it up along the way and now you are trying to patch it up. I wouldn't want to tell a stranger that I was going to school and hear: 'Oh, undergraduate, how come you are doing that? How old are you?'" Benshoff and Lewis (1992) reported that adult students can face limited social acceptability because they are engaged in undergraduate education past the "typical" age range for undergraduate learning. To substantiate their claim they point to social psychologist, Bernice Neugarten's (1975) work on "social clocks." According to Neugarten (1975), Beatrice and Sara are right. There are agreed upon ages for major life events that most adults can name and identify. These "social clocks" or "prescriptive timetables" are used to judge behavior as appropriate or inappropriate. Moreover, they are used to regulate behavior by pushing people toward some actions, while pulling people away from others. Neugarten (1975) wrote:

> Men and women are aware not only of social clocks that operate in areas of their lives, but they are aware also of their own timing and readily describe themselves as early, late, or on time with regard to family and occupational events [and in this case higher education]. (p. 23)

Neugarten (1975) also found that "when a person's own opinions differ from the norms he encounters, he may exaggerate the difference and place the norms even further away from his own opinions that is warranted" (p. 27). Society may indeed be judging adult students unfavorably for being out-of-sync with "ideal norms" (Neugarten, 1975, p. 27)

about the appropriate age to earn an undergraduate degree. Beatrice and Sara seemed keenly aware of this judgment and this led to their feelings of stigmatization. Moreover, they held different views from the "norms they encountered," which, in turn, contributed to the intensity of those feelings. Also, the intensity of the feelings could be attributed to their relationship circles. Beatrice traveled in circles of finance and investment banking. Sara's husband was a PhD candidate, and she traveled in circles of academics and advanced graduate students. It makes sense that these two participants in particular would have intense feelings of adult student stigmatization related to their age, for nearly everyone around them chose the "right" path, and at younger ages their peers were already far ahead of them in terms of upward mobility and educational credentials.

b. Stories about class

Silvia, Lisa, Beth, Jane, and Sue— like Beatrice— viewed traditional-aged college students as iconic representatives of the privileged middle-class. Lisa stated: "I wasn't one of the kids whose parents said, "Go college, go college, or else." No one paid for it but me, and I'm still paying for it. I'll have student loans until retirement." Marie said: "It is wonderful that you feel that you're better than me [speaking to an imaginary traditional college student]. I understand that your parents have money and all that. You think we [adult students] are the lesser, the poor little stepchildren because we have work and go to school." Through their working-class eyes, all 18-to-21-year-olds have unlimited amounts of leisure time and money to pursue their education. They also have their parents' unwavering emotional support that created a psychological safety net around their college-going experience. The participants in my study felt the strains of working without a net. Most also believed that they were "bright" enough to go to college right after high school; they just weren't rich enough or had the right family support. They were excluded from ever being 18-to-21-year-old college students

themselves due to class issues. Other researchers have documented how class-inspired feelings of marginality and deprivation surface when some working-class students study side-by-side middle-class college students, particularly around issues of parental support, leisure time, and money (Ochberg & Comeau, 2001; Roberts & Rosenwald, 2001), and intellectual ability (Cohen, 1998).

One way the stigmatized person deals with the difficult feelings of stigmatization, is to "manage the information about his failing" (Goffman, 1963, p. 42). The participants attempted to "manage" the stigma about adult students that they were working-class "screw ups"— who, in Beatrice's words, weren't "smart enough" or "rich enough" to attend "regular" college, and were now just "buying" the degree— by transferring that same stigma onto traditional-aged students. They deemed them the real "screw ups." In fact, they were *privileged* "screw-ups" who "screwed around" with mom and dad's money, and were more interested in "socializing, drinking, and finding themselves" than learning. Beth summed up the feeling of these participants best when she stated: "I will probably never have enough money to be able to afford to be irresponsible. I will never have enough money and privilege to screw up." From their research, Sennett and Cobb (1972) concluded that what "working people hated to see was students acting as if they didn't care about the freedom that was open to them, as if they were wasting themselves when others so desperately wanted the chance for control over their lives that they had" (p. 234). They go on to claim that "this resentment can exit only when the position itself is idealized, so that the person in that position is like a priest who betrays his office" (p. 234). Many participants idealized traditional-aged students. Through their working-class eyes, traditional-aged students had everything that they didn't have, but wanted: time, money, family support, and, most important, society's respect and regard. But 18-to-21-year-olds were just wasting their

education away while they were "working their asses off" and getting no respect. Their

feelings of injustice and stigmatization about this second class status were palpable.

c. Stories about open-enrollment, adult education

Beatrice, Sara, Silvia, Jane, Maureen, Gale, Sue, and Carl all agreed that adult students

are stigmatized because they returned to school through an open, hence, "back" door. Gale,

Paul, Jane, and Carl often heard: "Oh, anybody can go there, that's just night school." Sara

admits that the discrepancy between what her student life was really like and how the outside

world perceived it, and the resulting feelings of "marginality and deprivation" (Hopper &

Osborn, 1975) were at times just too difficult to bear. She was working so hard, yet others

were quick to surmise that she was taking the easy road. As a result, she spent her

undergraduate years wondering if all the hard work was going to pay off:

> People think the requirements are so low because its open enrollment and at night.
> "Why, don't you try and go and take a class, let's see about that!" I did well, but I
> worked so hard. Especially, when you manage and support a family at the same time.
> You wonder if people [e.g., future employer, graduate school admission's officer, or
> even passing stranger] are going to understand the workload that I have and the odds
> that I am going against, even when I am taking classes in the evening.

Time and again participants shared that others in their life commented that their

HES adult education was not valuable because "anybody can go there." Maureen reported:

"Because it's open enrollment people think that you just show up and get a degree. They

don't realize or think about that you have to go to all the classes, read all the books, do all

the research, write all the papers, take all the tests, for five or six years!" I was aware of the

open-enrollment stigma prior to doing the research, but I was surprised by the fact that

friends, family, and colleagues would be so openly disparaging to adult students working so

hard to earn their degrees. It seemed to me they were trying to right an injustice and put the

participants in their place or, as Sennett and Cobb (1972) concluded: "The humbling of

inferiors is necessary to the maintenance of the social order" (p. 247). Perhaps we are all too deeply invested in Harvard and other like universities remaining selective. We all want to believe that there are exclusive places in the world that we or our children might attend and have the opportunity to be separated from the norm— to be special, elite, not one of the masses. We are also too invested in the notion that selective competition is not only what makes an education valuable, but what makes people valuable as well. Moreover, it seems to be socially acceptable to express disrespect to those who attend open-enrollment programs because selective admission based on academic merit that surfaces early in life is viewed as unbiased and fair. While Granfield (1991) was writing about social class, I believe his words are an apt description of open enrollment programs: "The assignment of stigma to lower socioeconomic groups is not seen as being based on arbitrary evaluation" but based on merit (p. 347).

Not all participants reported feelings of adult student stigmatization. Cheryl, Brenda, Tom, Jean, and Barbara (for snap-shot descriptions of all the participants, that is, their age, occupation, self-identified class background, etc, see Appendix E) shared that the outside world valued their choice to return to school. Moreover, they were showered with praise for returning to school as adults, mostly for their dedication, perseverance, and multi-tasking. Cheryl stated that people were just so impressed that she had the "energy" and "stamina" to work and go to school. People would always say to her: "I don't know how you do it. I could never do that." Brenda, too, felt that people were very impressed with her perseverance to earn her degree over ten years while working: "I have nothing but people going, 'Wow!' I got bragging rights for that." The difference between those participants who believe that adult students are held in high regard and worthy of praise from society, and those participants who believe that adult students are stigmatized, is that the former

participants were getting their degrees for themselves. They were settled in their careers and weren't interested in using their Harvard degree as a way to achieve upward mobility, while the latter were. Goffman (1963) wrote that a stigma is not an attribute, but embedded in relationships: "An attribute that stigmatizes one type of possessor can confirm the usualness of another, and therefore is neither creditable, nor discreditable as a thing in itself" (p. 3). The latter were examples of Reay's (2002) "individualistic" (p. 410) approach to college selection. They chose Harvard because they were not trying to "hold on to their working-class identities," particularly in terms of their careers, "they were looking to leave them behind" (Reay, 2002, p. 410).

Beatrice is a case in point. She wanted to bring her degree to the marketplace and trade it in for a higher-level job, but she encountered norms about age-appropriate behavior and selective admission criteria that diminished her ability in the eyes of employers, in her case a financial firm. Her solution was to change direction, perhaps consider a job in public service and to invest in a further validating credential, a master's degree from a selective admission program to ensure the degree's market, social, and personal value. As in Cohen's (1998) research, the decision to turn away from more high-powered and higher-salaried occupations could be viewed as an expression of "symbolic violence" (Bourdieu (1977, 1986), which happens when those from the lower class "internalize their social limitations and aspire to less— to lower paying and less prestigious jobs" (p. 369). But I question the use of the term "internal" in the definition of "symbolic violence." It seems the members of the working-class who are bold, confident, and gusty enough to ask for more out of life are stigmatized and not rewarded through our economic system. Perhaps this is not internalized oppression, but the economic reality of the capitalist marketplace where there is limited room at the top.

d. Conclusion to Beatrice's learning career

One possible explanation for Beatrice's consistent feelings of stigmatization is that no matter where she traveled, fraudulent feeling would follow her due to issues (possibly rooted in childhood) that live apart from societal sanctions that govern upward mobility or adult education. Another possible explanation is that Beatrice used a narrative strategy that emphasized her feeling of stigmatization in part to manage her discontinuity of profession. She was at the top of her game prior to coming to HES, making $200,000; now she was in the middle of the pack making nowhere near that salary and having less responsibility. She attempted to make sense of her downward mobility by blaming societal rules and norms that govern behavior. Narrative researcher, Linde (1993), concludes that adults tend to offer reasons for unsuccessful choices that are "external— that is, due to circumstances that forced the choice on the speaker" (p. 132). However, if we take her stigmatized feelings at their face value and don't assume they were the result of a narrative strategy or psychoanalytic dilemma, we need to consider her story as compelling evidence that we do not live in a classless society where, by hard work, ambition, and perseverance, we all can get to the top. Beatrice was able to move far up the ranks when it was assumed that she had a degree, but when she didn't have a degree, she was deemed unworthy of a high-level position even though her work experience clearly confirmed her ability. Then, when she finally earned her HES degree it wasn't good enough because she earned it as an adult student at a night school. So, it seems other things control upward mobility: stigmas concerning age, class, and open-enrollment education. Hopper and Osborn (1975) conclude: "If the educational system were not concerned with social control and social selection through the regulation of ambition as much if not more than with the provision of instruction, most people would be apprenticed as soon as they become literate and numerate" (p. 12).

The educational system in the US is a highly stratified class credential system that relies on achievement early in life "when the influences of parentage, of background culture, and class are at the highest and most explicit" (Lemann, 1999, p. 345). An adult, working-class student who earns a Harvard undergraduate degree at night, from a program that is open to all, to anyone who can do the demanding academic work and pay the $500 fee per course while juggling a full-time work schedule and perhaps, family responsibilities is in some way viewed, in the words of Beatrice, Sue, Silvia, Sara, Maureen, Carl, and Jane, as a "cheat." The irony that lives between rugged American pull-yourself-up-from-the-bootstraps individualism, and class inspired, social selection is remarkable.

A year after our initial interviews, Beatrice and I had lunch. I learned that she was working as the chief financial officer of nonprofit firm that is a clearinghouse for volunteer services for adolescent girls in the greater Boston area. She shared with me that she enjoyed working on gender issues and wanted to find a way to become a bigger player on the public service side of this agenda, perhaps working for the governor's office, or even higher up. Beatrice is indeed a born leader. She was still interested in attending graduate school. In fact, I told her about the London School of Economics and its gender studies research center. She was excited by this prospect. She still says she doesn't feel whole; she wants a "legitimate" academic credential in order to eliminate her "outcast" (Bourdieu, 1999) status and become a complete insider. When she repeated her sense of the need for a "legitimate" degree, Beatrice sounded like a "woman looking to cross that magic barrier beyond which she will receive the respect of 'anyone in America' " (Sennett & Cobb, 1972, p. 165).

B. Composing A Working-Class Intellectual Identity: *Carl's Learning Career*

> When one distinguishes between intellectuals and non-intellectuals, one is referring in reality only to the immediate social function of the professional category of the intellectuals, that is, the direction in which their specific professional activity is weighted, whether towards intellectual elaboration or towards muscular-nervous effort. All men are intellectuals. Every man carries on some form of intellectual activity, that is, he is a philosopher, an artist, a man of taste, he participates in a particular conception of the world, has a conscious line of moral conduct, and therefore contributes to sustain a conception of the world or to modify it, that is, to bring into being new modes of thought.
> Antonio Gramsci (1999), *Selection from the Prison Notebooks*

Determined not to get caught off-guard again with an interviewee speaking and no tape running, I start preparing 90 minutes in advance of my meeting with Carl, a 56-year-old truck driver. The questionnaire with clipboard was ready, I had a pad of paper and new pen, and the chair next to my desk was perfectly angled for direct eye contact. I now needed to move on to the dreaded microphones. With nervous fingertips, I started the untangling process. Luckily it didn't take long and I had time to read over Carl's application essay:

> I eased my truck into an interstate highway rest area in western Kansas somewhere near the Colorado state line. I was coming from St. Louis, Missouri, on my way to Los Angeles. I felt tired and pulled in for a refresher nap. As I stepped out of the truck, I was struck by the brilliance of the moonless, cloudless sky. I had seen skies full of stars before, as on the dry high plateau in Iran, where the night didn't even seem that dark. But this time in western Kansas it was one of those "wow" experiences where the enormity of all those little points of light yelled, "Look!" I looked at those stars for a long time on that crisp autumn night. The sense of wonder that I felt dissipated my tiredness and soon I drove on. I remember that sky every time I hear Carl Sagan in his TV program, *Cosmos*, distinctly pronounce "billions and billions" of stars.

After that starry night, Carl began an astronomy self-education project. He read textbooks, and found a weekly column in the *Boston Globe's* "Health and Science" section. He reported that the astronomy articles were "written for beginners." I found the word choice

"beginners" intriguing. Through the articles, he learned about public lecture nights at the Harvard Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics. Carl started attending and became, in his words, a "groupie." Carl wrote in his essay that the main speaker at these lectures "had an enthusiasm for backyard observing." I find "backyard" another interesting word choice. At one of the public lectures he met a Harvard Extension School (HES) astronomy instructor who "invited" (a third notable choice of words) Carl to give his course a try. Carl did. In fact, he completed three astronomy courses at HES with A grades.

Carl wrote that many of his fellow students in the astronomy courses were pursuing their undergraduate degrees at HES and were "like me." Aha! Now all those interesting word choices came together. By choosing the words "beginners" and "backyard," and also emphasizing that he was "invited" to give HES a try, Carl was communicating critical plot-thickening elements to his return-to-school story. The articles and the lectures were for re-gu-lar people, that is, "people like him," not for Harvard astrophysics scholars, so, that made the thought of attending Harvard lectures possible. Then, he found other adult students at HES who were "like him," so, that made joining the degree program possible too. The phrase, "people like me," is a clue to Carl's apprehension about what learning opportunities are available for someone like him at a place like Harvard. As Bourdieu (1990) determined: "Agents shape their aspirations according to concrete indices of the accessible and the inaccessible, of what is and is not 'for us'" (p. 64.) Additionally, as we learned from Gallacher, Crossan, Field, and Merrill (2002), knowing that there were members of their peer group at higher education institutions motivated working-class adults to begin formal learning careers. Finding people like them "helped reduced the risk associated with decisions that may mean movement away from a familiar milieu into an unfamiliar one" (2002, p. 503). As Carl's fears about being out of place cooled down, his academic ambitions "warmed up"

(Deli, 2000). But as Carl appeared in my doorway, I remembered that returning to school is never a tidy, two-page story.

Carl is a six foot, four inch, physically fit, silver-haired, trucker/teamster. (He uses these words interchangeably to identify his occupation.) He reminds me of my brother, Alan, the youngest male in our family: hard working and dependable, the kind of guy you would call without hesitation if you got a flat on the highway. Carl, like my brother, has little in the way of male bravado and much in the way of thoughtfulness. I asked Carl to tell me the story of how he came to HES. He repeated nearly word-for-word the story of pulling into the rest stop and seeing the stars. His essay was written eight years earlier. I was reminded again of Annie Dillard's (1987) advice to memoir writers that once you have written about a certain moment in time "you can no longer remember anything but the writing" (p. 71). But then, Carl added: "That's not the only reason." As we continued to talk, the threads of validation, redemption, and intellectual awakening came together to weave Carl's return-to-school story, as well as the meaning of earning his liberal arts undergraduate degree at HES.

Carl grew up in the country, the western part of Massachusetts. He had what he termed an "unsupportive" childhood. Carl's mother was a "silent" homemaker and his father was an "abusive alcoholic." After returning from World War II, Carl's father didn't go back to the family roofing business. Like many of his generation, he used his GI Bill benefits to earn an undergraduate degree. With his degree in hand, he obtained an office job at the Department of Social Security and soon bought a house for his wife and four young children. Carl was the eldest and only son. He stated that he grew up in a working-class home with "middle-class pretensions":

> I always felt working class. I always worked. My first paying job was when I was eight years old. I worked on a farm picking potatoes. My family perhaps had middle-class pretensions. We had a house, but my father had an alcohol problem, which led him to spend money not in a wise manner. There were always financial problems. So

if we were middle class, we still had working-class problems of, like, utilities being shut off.

During Carl's adolescence, his father's drinking "got out of hand." So while he did well in elementary school, by the time junior high rolled around he was a "C student just skidding along" and he "barely made it out of high school." However, he never took these disappointing secondary school achievements as signs of being unintelligent, but rather felt that his low achievements were due to family circumstances. Specifically, Carl attributed his poor school performance to his father's drinking and his authoritarian message that he would go to the Coast Guard Academy after high school:

> "It is not your choice; you're going to college. You're going to the Coast Guard Academy, because I [his father] worked for the Social Security Administration and did a lot of favors for political officials." He was going to call in the cards and get me an appointment to the Coast Guard Academy, but the condition of the Coast Guard Academy was that you had to serve twelve years altogether. I didn't like being told.

Later, Carl stated that his father never shared this message directly with him, but "said it in front of me to someone else." Carl, an independent and rebellious son, opposed all messages from his father, in particular one that carried years of mandatory military service. As a result he "sabotaged everything in high school." Carl made a direct link from his father's forceful college attendance message to his poor high school grades. This could be the fact, or this could be a narrative strategy to make sense of his academic failure in high school by pointing to external, rather than internal, influences (Linde, 1993). We don't know for sure, but we do know that this is how Carl makes meaning of the story.

Maybe due to early success in elementary school and the feeling that he "just caught on to things quicker than everyone else did," or because his father fancied himself a genius of sorts, and discussed taking the Mensa exam, Carl assumed he, too, must have some intelligent genes. Or maybe in sober moments his father sent an encouraging message or

two. Whatever the reasons, Carl held tight to the belief that he was "bright," for along with

his father's drinking came his constant disparaging comments about Carls's self-worth:

> My father was probably a good-intentioned person, but he had that negative outlook
> that accompanies the disease of alcoholism. He transferred it to me. In later life he
> said that by giving me jabs that would make me strive harder to show him wrong. I
> don't think it did; I think I internalized it. "I am stupid." You know what I mean.
> "Yes, I'm bright, but I'm really stupid." [Growing up] I always felt I have certain
> abilities, but I wasn't able to use them.

With the dichotomous feelings of "bright" and "stupid," Carl left home right after

high school and headed for the big city, Boston. His academic aspirations were stimulated by

the many educational opportunities available there, so, he made a first attempt at taking adult

education courses. Carl enjoyed the course content, but he couldn't follow through with the

homework. He didn't know how to write, and had no study skills, so, he performed poorly

and quickly ended that learning career. Soon thereafter President Kennedy was assassinated,

and this prompted Carl to join the Peace Corps. The decision to join the Peace Corps, along

with working early in life, moving out of his parents' home when he was 17 years old, and

taking adult education courses, are all examples of Carl's active, independent, and risk-taking

orientation toward life (London, Wenker, & Hagstrom, 1963). But more important, the

Peace Corps is where Carl received his first concrete confirmation from the outside world

that he was bright: "When I entered they gave us a battery of tests. They said, 'You're

bright.' I went, 'Yeah, sure.' [But they insisted] 'No, you're bright.' They said I placed in the

94 percentile of college sophomores, which was my age." Now, his secret feeling of

brightness was confirmed by scientific evidence (similar to the Mensa exam). In addition to

the impressive IQ results (which were remembered down to exact percentage detail), his

Peace Corps training was the first time that Carl succeeded in a challenging academic

environment. He credits his success to the Peace Corps' intensive classroom approach to

learning (7 am to 9 pm) with no required homework. He learned to speak Persian, as well as studying topics related to agriculture, including hard sciences such as biology and chemistry.

Carl went with the Peace Corps to Iran for two years. There he experienced another dichotomous sensation. This time it was not feelings of "bright" and "stupid," but "laborer" and "academic." Carl worked on farms during most of his childhood and young adult life. Because of his years of manual labor, he observed: "I enjoyed working with my hands and I identified most strongly with the peasants in Iran who worked with their hands, not the middle class that I was supposedly working with or training with or cultivating relations with." But in the Peace Corps, he was also surrounded by college graduates, and, oddly enough, he didn't feel out of place in their company. They were, in some respects, like him. Should he continue to work with his hands or should he go to college and begin an academic life? While in Iran, he decided to give the latter a try. He was accepted into the university that his father attended back in Boston and he planned to enter the Foreign Service after graduation.

At Boston University his lack of writing and study skills came back to haunt him. He did well the first semester, but once he began taking courses that required papers, he couldn't complete them: "I didn't know how to write. I didn't even know how to start. I collected mimeograph sheets of paper, but didn't know how to put them together. Throw them up in the air and see how the papers land." He was on and off academic probation because of his writing issues. As Inman and Mayes (1999) conclude about many working-class students, Carl was "academically and psychologically unprepared for college" (p. 3). Then the Vietnam War put an end to his future Foreign Service career plans: "I didn't want to be an apologizer for a policy that I didn't believe in." Because of his poor performance and the lack of a specific future career direction, he began to wonder what he was doing in

school. Moreover, he was also working nearly full time, which was getting to be too exhausting. His peers weren't in school, and because of his age (mid-twenties), he was supposed to be "smarter" than those 18-year-old college students; but he felt "dumber." So, Carl "tuned in, turned on, and dropped out."

He became a hippie-biker for a short period and partnered with a woman who had two children. The partnership didn't work out, but the fatherhood role did. Carl became a single father of two children. He needed a good job, so he became a truck driver, which fit his independent, risk-taking nature: "The last of the American cowboys." Indeed, being a trucker/teamster, that is, being working class and having a working-class job was (and is), very much a part of Carl's identity: "I've always felt working class." Rejecting all things related to his father (including middle-class pretensions and a government job), he reached back a generation to his grandparents, who were hard-working day laborers to find a sense of self-worth. Carl rejected school and claimed a sense of self-worth through his day laborer role. His attempts to turn innate brightness into institutionalized certified knowledge were thwarted because he lacked the middle-class writing ability, study skills, and support system, so he "turned away from college" and went back to the fork in the road, choosing the other dichotomous path of working with his hands:

> I kept saying that I had to work with my hands. It was very important. When I was in junior high school I worked summers picking tobacco. I remember telling my father how much money I made in a day and, unfortunately, he was intoxicated. I said something like, "I made seven bucks today, Dad." He said, "That's all you are going to be, a seven-dollar-a-day laborer." Yeah, well, [I thought] I'm going to show you. Yeah, I'm going to be a laborer, but I'm going to get in the teamsters union. I'm going to get in some kind of union job and my labor is going to be more valuable. *I'm* going to be more valuable.

It is somewhat hard to believe that at 13 years old he was thinking about union employment. As Maxine Greene (1990) concludes: "Looking back in time, we always find a

directionality, even a necessity in what we have chosen" (p. 48). This story is most likely a way to communicate that his union labor job was a significant part of his character (Linde, 1993), for, in Carl's mind, it had been a part of him since boyhood. Through this story, we also learn just how much his self-worth was damaged by his father's disparaging remarks. The future tense choice of "I am going to be valuable" reinforced my sense of the enormity of his feeling that he didn't feel valuable as a child. As a result, for Carl, perhaps there was a psychological gratification in working with his hands because it was in direct opposition to his father's office job. Additionally, we learned from Gramsci (1999) that the working class can feel both respect and contempt for the intellectual-class, and because of "envy and impassioned anger" (p. 14) they can idealize manual labor and view working with one's hands as the only "real" work. Carl's choice to work with his hands was, I believe, an expression of his class consciousness, which is central to his character.

In fact, there is also a political, Marxist quality to his occupational choice. There was a period of time where every morning he would arrive at the trucking dispatch office and state: "All power to the working people. Death to the running dogs of capitalism and their lackeys in that dispatch office." He was not a lackey, but a worker, whose labor was valued in terms of salary, but also in terms of a political agenda. Later in the interview Carl offered as a side point: "I always thought that common ownership of capital goods is ideal. Isn't that great? It has shown that it works. And socialism might seem like the second alternative, but that seems like a dead economic philosophy now." For many years, Carl was able to feel content with life, for his occupational choice matched his psychosocial and political identity needs. He was a bright, working-class man, who was working with his hands (the ultimate expression of working-class consciousness), getting paid well for his labor (beyond his

father's expectations), and participating in one of the strongest and most powerful unions in the world.

Twenty years later, with his children grown, Carl was beginning to feel "trapped in trucking." He was looking at his life and feeling unfulfilled. The feelings of being financially compensated for work with his hands and the political consciousness of not being a lackey, but a day laborer, was no longer enough. He started feeling "marginal and deprived" (Hopper & Osborn, 1975): "You know, I was becoming aware that there isn't going to be any more out of life. That this was it. I was really starting to feel the walls closing in." To rid himself of feelings of deprivation, of wanting more out of life, Carl didn't turn to job training or professional education, which many in the field of adult education routinely predict. He began an intellectual quest, for it was intellectual starvation— the turning away from work of the mind that was at heart of his deprivation. He was bright, but he never lived up to his intellectual potential and now, time was running out: "You have potential and you feel guilty because you are not utilizing it." His use of the word "you" instead of "I" in this statement alludes to how difficult it is for Carl to claim publicly the potential that he kept hidden and tucked away inside of him for nearly thirty years. He started listening to National Public Radio, reading the *New York Times Review of Books*, and attending public lectures on a variety of topics. Carl was looking to get a quick introduction to a number of academic subjects. These efforts could be termed "status passages" (Gallacher, Crossan, Field, & Merrill's, 2002), "bridge experiences" (Hopper & Osborn, 1975) or more examples of his "active oriented lifestyle" (London, Wenker, & Hagstrom, 1963) that these researchers believe can lead to adult education participation.

Carl characterizes this time period as an "awakening": "It was like all knowledge is mine, and death to those who would hold me back." Suddenly Carl, who still believed he

was bright, now believed that he had a "right to knowledge." It was around this time that he

pulled into the rest stop, looked up, and saw "billions and billions" of stars. Carl reported

much later in our interview that learning about astronomy was also a quest for greater

meaning: "It became a search for spirituality through cosmology. Where we live, there must

be the outer edges of this. Also, the more you search for meaning in the stars the more it

affects your life, because your life is certainly insignificant compared to the cosmos." When

Carl compared his life against the cosmos and it felt insignificant, that was a comforting

feeling, but when he compared it to people's lives closer to home, and to his own young

adulthood dreams, he felt "trapped." As a result, he desired to search out the "outer edges"

of his own life.

Carl's desire, at 49 years of age, to want more out life is noteworthy, for many others

would neither have the imagination nor the courage to change their lives. Maxine Greene

makes this point in her 1990 essay, "Opening Spaces for Second Chances." She believes

that adult students must do battle with powerful cultural forces in order to believe that they

have a right to a second chance:

> To perceive alternative possibilities is to break with a notion of the taken-for-granted
> that stems from reliance on others' demarcations of the given. Such demarcations are
> often linked with the workings of power: existing arrangements are presented as
> objectively natural, normal, and unchangeable. Efforts to alter them are treated as
> futile, deviant, or subversive. (1990, p. 37)

Greene, paraphrasing philosopher Hannah Arendt's words, punctuates the uncommon event

of imaginings alternative life paths: "Any act interfering with what is statistically likely is so

impossible as to be almost miraculous" (1990, p. 38). A truck driver seeking a Harvard liberal

arts education at age 49 is statistically remarkable.

At HES Carl was a successful student earning high grades in all subjects. By all

accounts he had a "troubled" (Reay, 2002) academic history, and he shared with me that he

was indeed fearful of a repeat poor academic performance at HES. But this didn't happen.

What changed? Why was this experience so much more successful? He first tipped his hat

to the HES policy that requires all students to take an academic writing course before they

begin the program, then he stated:

> Well, personal interest number one. It was a different style of learning. There were
> actually teaching assistants. It's hard to put your finger on it. It was a whole different
> atmosphere. I get misted-eyed about this [his eyes are now wet with tears]. It was
> quite a change coming back. It was quite a positive experience at this school. I don't
> think I ever got a free donut at Boston University. And you have socials, the socials
> especially. But I was older, I was five years older than the rest of students [at Boston
> University], so I didn't really feel like I fit in. I fit in here and was accepted by people
> who cared about me.

Here we see Carl expressing what many in the field of educational research term the effect of

the "college atmosphere" on learning satisfaction (Kuh, 1992; Terenzini, Pascarella, &

Blimling, 1996). In fact, Graham and Long (1998) found that adults prioritized the

"academic climate" over all other factors when reporting their satisfaction with their

learning. It appears that for traditional and nontraditional students, it is the feeling of

concern and respect communicated by faculty, administrators, and fellow students in direct

and indirect ways that can make the substantial difference in their learning. Carl felt

respected and cared for at HES, and he also found people like him.

He found many students his age and with similar backgrounds. He found bright

people who were on their own intellectual quests. Moreover, while he found people like him

at HES, and therefore "fit in," Carl, out of a sense of deprivation, was, perhaps, more

desperate to "fit in" than during his first college experience. At age 49, this was perhaps

Carl's last chance for intellectual redemption in the form of a college degree. Carl was like

London's (1978) adult community college students who were solidly committed to doing

well in school. Their high-stakes feeling that community college was their last opportunity to

change their lives translated into an intensive effort to perform well. Additionally, because

of their advanced age and time away from family and young adulthood peer groups, they

were less conflicted about the class implications of intellectual work, so, they were more

invested in the personal growth and upward mobility opportunities it offered. Carl was

clearly less conflicted about intellectual work than during his first college experience. He was

no longer wondering if he belonged in college and thinking that maybe someone like him

would be better off working with his hands. Carl came to HES with the feeling, "All

knowledge is mine."

As a result, the tears that were shed about his HES experience, I believe, were about

"fitting in," but most important, about healing old "troubled" wounds of academic failure,

and finally achieving scholarly confirmation of his innate brightness. Carl's brightness was

not lost and then found at HES, it was publicly certified, at a prestigious university no less. I

believe it was the public recognition and the bringing together of his inner experience with

the larger world's view of him that brought the tears. Carl observed: "I always had that

feeling that I was bright, but couldn't get it together." It came together at HES because it

was the right academic climate at the right life stage. At HES the stars aligned.

Unlike Beatrice, Carl didn't have a three-year HES curriculum plan that required

course overloads, summer school attendance, and 5:00 am to 12:00 pm weekend typing

marathons. In fact, it took Carl eight years to earn his undergraduate degree. While Beatrice

was anxious to earn the degree and move on with her life, for Carl, returning to school and

attending Harvard was the point to which he was moving on— this act alone brought

meaning to his life. He had no specific career plans after earning the degree. The immediate

plan was to learn and finally complete the education that he started so many years ago. His

learning career at HES was in his words "learning for learning's sake" and a road to

redemption. His motivation was more intrinsic than Beatrice's, that is, relating to the

"curiosity to learn and to know" (Nisan, 1990, p. 95). He was finally "onto something"

(Percy, as cited in Greene, 1990, p. 40), and it was the time of his life when he was just

working and not engaged in a self-education or institutional learning career, that is, "not

being onto something that led to despair" (Percy, as cited in Greene, 1990, p. 40).

The slower pace didn't mean freedom, however, from difficulties balancing work and

school. Carl had the added dilemma of working in an industry that doesn't value college

education. Carl could only take classes at 7:30 pm because of his work schedule. This made

course selection and completion of degree requirements challenging. The only time his work

let him out early to take a 5:30 pm writing class was when Carl agreed to work the graveyard

shift. Also, there were few people in his work life with whom he could share his educational

experience:

> You know in trucking and teamsters, it was like, "Shut up." They don't want to be
> reminded what they don't know or what opportunities they haven't made. And there
> are many people who are in trucking that might be college material, might have
> college ability, but either circumstances or drive, haven't been able to make it
> happen. But as far as discussions about school, no. They just didn't work out. My
> problem was I was perceived as a know-it-all. But how do you shut up about things?
> You have to back up. You know, family, people were encouraging, but no one would
> discuss school.

Yes, how do you back up when you're moving forward, but your life world remains still?

Not only was it difficult to find people with whom to share his experience, but when

he did share his learning career, most people were disparaging. Carl would often hear from

friends and colleagues that he was going to "night school, that's just night school, oh, you're

just going to night school, an-y-bod-y [sounded out long for emphasis] can do that." Here

we see Carl needing to contend with the stigma of the scarlet letter A (adult student) that

Beatrice so forcefully articulated in her narrative. While Carl was shamed and disheartened

by these comments, his feeling of injustice about the remarks wasn't as strong as Beatrice's.

For Beatrice, the "night school" and "anybody can do that" comments were cultural signals

that she wasn't going to get as far professionally as she had hoped. For Carl, the comments

remained in the personal sphere, for he was not invested in upward professional mobility

upon graduation. As a result, he could more easily shrug off the attacks. Carl, however, was

also challenged by others for pursuing a liberal arts subject: astronomy. People in his life

always wanted to know why he was studying that and not business:

> People would say, "What are you gonna to do with that, studying astronomy? What
> the hell are you going to with that? What the hell good is that? Why don't you take
> business?" I would say, "What about business?" They would say, "Just business, I
> don't know." The thing is, they don't even know what business means. I don't want
> to take business.

Here we see the tension between Carl's desire to change, and his relationship circle wanting

him to stay the same.

The tension is similar to what the educational researchers Roberts and Rosenwald

(2001) found between traditional-aged working-class college students and their parents. The

working-class college students felt they couldn't talk to their parents about their education

and when they did, they would get shot down. Many of their parents specifically downplayed

the worth of "book smarts" and played up the need for knowledge about the "real world."

Additionally, London (1978) found plenty of anger directed at traditional-aged, working-class

students who were performing well in college, particularly in liberal arts subjects, because

their working-class peers felt they were "too quickly shifting from a working-class to a

middle-class orientation" (London, 1978, p. 102). These students were viewed as "brown

nosers" who were too easily capitulating to teacher and institutional authority. This anger left

the high-achieving students feeling ambivalent about their success in school. London

concludes: "The worth of ideas and the idea of worth are inseparable issues" (p. 62). The

feeling of ambivalence is a reminder of Bourdieu's (1999) conclusion that upwardly mobile

adults face "feelings of being torn that come from experiencing success as failure, or better

still, as transgression" (p. 510). Robert felt torn and, at times, like a "traitor," but my

interpretation of his narrative is that his independent nature, active-oriented view of life, and

faith in his brightness kept him going.

As Carl progressed toward his degree, he increasingly felt that there was no place for

him in the teamsters union, for it was becoming "anti-democratic and anti-intellectual." His

word choice, "anti-intellectual," is interesting for, I believe, it is evidence of his burgeoning

intellectual identity and how this transformation was creating new tensions in his life world.

He began to wonder if the teamsters union was still a place for someone like him, someone

with an intellectual identity. To test the identity-fitting waters, he would put up astronomy

posters, but they were torn down, and when he tried to speak his mind, he was shot down:

> At union meetings it was like, shut up and sit down, you're working, aren't you? No
> argument. Don't question. My thing in the 60s was question and challenge all
> authority. I was knocking heads. I am still knocking heads with those guys. So, I'm
> on the outs there. I'm still on the outs.

This effort to directly confront his life world with his new intellectual identity was, perhaps,

in London's (1992) words, a "lightning rod display" to "address, however, indirectly, some

of the deepest concerns regarding separation and social mobility" (p. 8). Carl wanted to see

how his new intellectual identity would play in his blue-collar world. Carl talked passionately

about a specific clash of wills that would often erupt at work. Through his coursework at

HES Carl advanced his computer knowledge and began using the computers at work to find

information about his trucking routes as well as other "accessible" work-related information.

Not management, but his fellow teamsters, insisted that he stay away from the computer:

> I had people telling me that I should not be touching the computers at work.
> "You're not supposed to be doing that." I got so angry. It was like they were saying

we workers shouldn't have access to information. I would get angry with the teamsters. Who are they to say that I should not know the computers? I don't care if they like me, this desire to be popular, one of the guys, the hell with them. Once you lock on to the notion that you have a right to all knowledge, forget it, no one can stop you.

When Carl reported this story it was the only time that he ever shared anger and frustration about his job. At first I didn't know what to make of it, but then I realized that this story held the "all of it" (Carol Stack, personal communication, October 2003). Carl spent a lifetime feeling that worker and knowledge-owner were two different identities. He chose a worker identity because his initial attempts to access institutional knowledge were thwarted. But now that this split in his mind was gone— he could be a worker and a knowledge-owner— he wasn't letting anyone, friend or foe, tell him otherwise. Furthermore, he could no longer tolerate being cast as a class-traitor. Learning for him was not a "transgression" (Bourdieu, 1999), but a central part of his working-class character: "We workers should have access to information."

During this time Carl was forming a solid connection with his student life, and he reinforced his relationship with the university by volunteering to help at HES events. He stated: "Participation is the key to harmony. You feel a sense of ownership when you volunteer." Carl didn't just want to have a Harvard experience; he wanted to "own" it. I believe his comfort and strong connection to his student identity at HES was due in part to his ability to combine all his passions: school, work, and class politics at HES. When Carl ran out of astronomy courses, he turned to an environmental management course by "accident" one semester. In this course, he realized the instructor was talking about places from his own lived-experience, businesses and companies he'd visited as a truck driver:

> With my experience as a truck driver, I used to go to that company and ask questions: "What do you guys do here? What do you make? How do you do that?" I was always interested in the processes that they do. So I knew what people did.

> When he [instructor] talked about different processes and problems, [I thought] oh, I know that company. I've been there I know that. I felt a lot of identification with that. I did well in those classes.

Carl's frequent use of "I know" and "I knew" in this passage emphasizes how, in the environmental courses, he felt more like an owner, and not just a receiver of knowledge. This was the key to Carl's excitement, joy, and motivation to learn more about this topic.

Most important, he saw through environmental management a way to combine his intellectual interest with his working-class life. Carl was interested in environmental issues that affect workers' lives. In fact, one of his environmental instructors invited him to work on a study at the Harvard School of Public Health on the effects of exhaust on truckers' respiratory health. Carl also made a point in the interview to mention that environmental issues affect low-wage workers first, but no one cares until it affects middle-class consumers:

> Are you aware of the janitor strike in LA, mostly Hispanic? It was called Justice for Janitors and the living wage long before it came to Harvard. Janitors were exposed to chemical toxicity via cleaning materials for years, but the changes in cleaning chemicals did not come about until people became aware of similar affects on suburban housewives. It was a very low priority. People in janitorial services are about 1,000,000 workers in the US.

Through her research, Reay (2002) identified that one of the central difficulties for working-class adult students is "negotiating the tensions between maintaining a sense of authenticity [regarding their class status] and desire to fit in [to academia]" (p. 404). Through his environmental management studies, Carl was able to construct an "authentic" relationship with the academic institution and his burgeoning intellectual identity that didn't require him to leave his working-class self at the wrought iron gates of Harvard Yard. Carl found a way to be true to his bright and working-class self.

Eight years after he started at HES and 32 years after high school, Carl has earned his bachelor of liberal arts, with a field of study in environmental science. He reflected on

how the degree changed him and observed: "I certainly have formed more opinions. I

cannot sit at union meetings and listen to someone mistake volume for good oratory." He

also shared that he didn't get wrapped up in the prestige of Harvard until he graduated. "At

first it was yeah, I'm going to get a night school degree. It's going to say night school. Then

when you get the degree, it doesn't say anything about nights on there. It felt good [a few

tears again]." I don't quite believe that he wasn't wrapped up in the prestige of Harvard until

the end, for at the beginning of the interview he shared with me that he enjoyed, every now

and then, telling friends that he was "off to a lecture at the Harvard Center for

Astrophysics."

Regardless, as the tears indicate, finally earning his HES undergraduate degree was

validating for Carl, even if it *was* night school. He reconnected with his bright-self, and at

Harvard his bright-self transformed into an intellectual-self that wanted to be more centrally

located in the academic community:

> I want to be a part of the community of learned people, of very educated people. As
> the President of Harvard said: "We welcome you into the community of the
> educated now that you have your BA." I think I need to stay in that community and
> head towards the master's. I mean, it sounds boastful, but really, yeah, in real
> language, I want a master's. I want more credibility. I want to continue in that
> learning.

Carl had a taste of what being certified by the academy feels like, and he wanted

more. What is particularly noteworthy about his story is that Carl had no intentions of

turning his back on his working-class roots. He still claimed the identity of working class,

even after receiving his Harvard degree. Carl continued to work in the trucking industry, but

he was trying to find ways to bring environmental education and policy changes to his

vocation, as well as adult education opportunities. Specifically, he was an enthusiastic

supporter of the HES. He wanted everyone in his relationship circle to "get in on it" and

have what he found, which was not job advancement, but: "A better enjoyment out of life, a more fulfilling life the more you know." Carl approached truckers at work and people he met in his daily life, for example, meter maids, security guards, janitors, and the cashiers at the auto-supply store about going back to school. He went up to them and asked: "You seem like a bright guy, did you ever think about going back to school? Do you know about the HES?" As he shared his sales pitch with me, he suddenly realized that all the people he approached are working class. I asked him the reason why, and he stated: "I am drawn to pulling people up."

Carl had one regret: he wished he had done it sooner. He still felt "trapped," not in trucking, but in years. His ideal job was to use his environmental knowledge to help improve workers' lives, but he felt he first needed a master's degree. He considered the Harvard School of Public Health, but realized that the science prerequisites would just be too time consuming to begin now at his age: "That program is really designed for kids coming out of undergrad at 21." His academic and professional aspirations have been "warmed up" (Deli, 2000), but he wondered if it was too late. As Freeborn (2000) concludes: "Educating yourself out of your own class, but doing it at an age where assimilating into the educated class is not realistic, not even entirely desirable, means that you become for ever, neither flesh nor fowl" (p. 10). This is why he was on a mission to recruit others, like him, to come to HES and to arrive there earlier than he did: "I go back to people at work. Get your ass in gear. Look at what age you will wind up, get going!" His message to younger workers was similar to the adult students' message to traditional-aged college students in London's (1978) community college ethnography. The adult students in London's study were convinced that the traditional-aged students who were performing poorly and not attending classes would regret wasting their chance for a better life once they dropped out of school and found themselves

in the jobs that the adult students were attempting to flee. The quote from London's research emphasizes the warning tone of the adult-student message: "Jesus Christ kids, wake up! If you flunk out of this school you're up shit's creek without a paddle" (London, 1978, p. 113).

At the conclusion of my second interview Carl, like Beatrice, was at a crossroads and waiting to take that next big "active orientation toward life" (London, Wenker, & Hagstrom, 1963, p. 144) leap. He still wanted more out of life. He had no plans to end his intellectual quest; he just needed to find the right "authentic" (Reay, 2002) path that could combine his intellect, politics, and working-class roots that was also commensurate with his life stage.

1. Carl's significant plot line: *Becoming a working-class intellectual*

Carl's consistent plot line centers on feelings of "marginality and deprivation" (Hopper & Osborn, 1975) related to his intellectual identity. His initial attempt to confirm his brightness through formal institutional learning was impeded, so he "turned away from college" and became more firmly entrenched in his working-class consciousness. As he grew older, and when there was time to focus on his own life, not just his children's, feelings of deprivation and marginality (Hopper & Osborn, 1975) began to build. Was this going to be it? Was there no more in life? Indeed, he felt that there should be more in life for someone like him, someone who is naturally bright.

While regretful feelings over not putting his naturally bright talents to better use were initially painful, they also inspired his imagination and gave him the courage to create alternative possibilities (Greene, 1990). Carl began a self-education quest that culminated in returning to school. He wanted to bring together his inner sense brightness with the outer world's view of him as a smart, college graduate: "I always had that feeling that I was bright, but couldn't get it together." Not just any college would do. He waited this long (25 years)

and, like Beatrice, his mounting feeling of "deprivation and marginality" (Hopper & Osborn, 1975) were not going to be silenced by attending any local university. It had to be Harvard, the place that had the reputation for recruiting the best and brightest. But unlike Beatrice, Carl wasn't looking for upward professional mobility. He wanted to "be somebody" (Luttrell, 1997), an intelligent somebody.

a. Returning to school for intellectual reasons

Carl was not alone. Seven other participants, together representing nearly half of the 18 participants in my study, chose to return to school for intellectual reasons, rather than the job-related reasons cited most in the adult education literature (Johstone & Rivera, 1965; Kim, Collins, Stowe, & Chandler, 1995; Valentine, 1997, as cited in Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Cheryl stated (for snap-shot descriptions of all the participants, that is, their age, occupation, self-identified class background, etc, see Appendix E): "I was the opposite of going back to school for professional reasons." Brenda said coming back "never had anything to do about getting a better job." Also, Beth, a legal secretary and painter, noted: "I didn't need the degree to advance my career at all because I don't have a real career." These participants were content with their jobs, even though some of them held low-level secretarial positions[58]. What brought them back to school were growing feelings of deprivation and marginality (Hopper & Osborn, 1975) about their lack of a formal education. They were "selection errors" of a different type not explicitly covered by Hopper and Osborn's theory. These participants came to HES to rid themselves of feelings of shame about their education, not about their occupations.

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[58] It could be that these participants were not willing to let go of their working-class roots in terms of jobs, but they were willing to let go of their working-class roots in terms of education.

The participants shared both internal and external, intellectual reasons for returning to school. The internal motivations were often expressed in terms of work not being enough. They were bored and restless, and, like Carl, wondered if this was all there was to be had from life. Gale stated: "You get good at what you are doing at your job and it just becomes the same old routine. You need more. In school, every semester you are challenged to learn something new and do research, do papers that you have never done before in the past." Philosopher Mary Warnock (1978) believes that one of education's primary roles is satisfying feelings of deprivation: "The main purpose of education is to give people the opportunity of not ever being, in this sense, bored; of not ever succumbing to a sense of futility, or to the belief that they have come to an end of what is worth having" (Warnock, 1978, as cited in Greene, 1990, p. 41). These participants were looking "to get onto something" (Percy, as cited in Greene, 1990, p. 40). The "something" they chose was a liberal arts education because they were "starved" for intellectual stimulation. The language of being hungry and finally being fed ran through many narratives. As Gale stated: "I wanted to satisfy my hunger and thirst for new ideas," and as Cheryl shared: "So, it [going back to school] was like water falling in the dessert. I felt I was beginning to sprout." Also, many participants shared that, like Carl, they attempted to feed this hunger on their own, but now they wanted to learn with others in a structured environment. In her application essay, Beth wrote: "I evolved into a voracious, but undisciplined reader, a fault that the degree program would help remedy. I want structure to my learning."

Interest in a particular subject matter was also mentioned as an internal, intellectual reason to return to school. For example, Cheryl and Beth both came initially just for the writing courses. Beth shared: "I wanted to improve my writing. I wanted to write better, so I could send hostile letters to the newspapers. I wanted to better express my indignation, but I

also wanted to write fiction." Brenda came to learn physics: "I came back, oddly enough, because I wanted to take physics, but before I took that I had to go back and take algebra, trig, and calculus." This was a fun leisure activity to her. For others it wasn't just one subject, it was all the academic subjects that they had missed out on by not earning a degree. As Jean observed: "People who leave school always wonder what they didn't get."

External, intellectual reasons were often expressed in terms of feeling marginal and deprived (Hopper & Osborn, 1975) around people in their relationship circle. Jean shared: "I was defensive about not having a college degree. I felt I had reached some success without it, but reflecting back, I can say that I was a little defensive about it with friends and family." Brenda stated: "Being around friends who had all finished college, I felt that I lacked something and I wanted to catch up with the group. I needed to do this." As Reay (2002) believes: "The uncredentialled are left to feel unfinished and incomplete in some way" (p. 404). Also the participants felt marginal and deprived (Hopper & Osborn, 1975) about their intelligence at work. For example, Maureen worked for a company that suddenly wanted to put everyone's resume on the website. She was the only person in a company of three hundred people who didn't have a degree. They decided not to post her resume. She felt: "Oh, this is not good." This "trigger event" (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980; Gallacher, Crossan, Field, & Merrill's, 2002; College Board, 2000) prompted her to begin her undergraduate studies immediately. It was the first time in her life that she realized that others could view her as not bright, even though she was internally confident that she was:

> I never felt, quote, less educated. I always read whatever. But I didn't have a degree and people need you to have a degree to judge your ability. So I thought if you want to play in the world there are a certain set of rules and instead of bucking those rules, you're better off just conforming and go get a degree and this will never come up again.

While Maureen realized that the lack of a degree made her look uneducated, Gale

and Beth came to realize that people who had degrees weren't that smart. Gale reported that

she was motivated to come to HES because: "I've been working as a secretary, working for

people with degrees. I was smarter than a lot of them, I will tell you." Beth shared similarly:

> I had worked in academic settings with people who had been tracked from birth to
> go to college. Their parents had all gone to excellent schools and you know some of
> them weren't that bright. You don't want to say [I decided to go to Harvard because]
> I saw some really stupid people who had gone to Harvard. But that's the truth. The
> library is free. I don't mean to brag, but my general knowledge is pretty big.

The working class, as Sennett and Cobb (1972) found, are keenly aware that "the badges of

inner ability people wear seem unfairly rewarded" (p. 188). Over time these bright adult

students began to see their lack of a degree in a new light. It wasn't that college-educated

people were smarter than they were. College-educated people just had time, money, parental

support, and played by rules to earn the piece of paper. The reality that more privileged

people had a degree and they didn't was no longer tolerable to these participants. While they

didn't want to change jobs and become professionally equivalent to those others, they did

want to be their intellectual equivalents.

The participants who had intellectual reasons for returning to school embraced the

term "learning for learning's sake" to describe their motives. After interviewing middle-class

and working-class parents about the value of higher education, Gorman (1998) found that

the middle-class respondents were far more interested in higher education as a credential to

ensure upward mobility toward prestigious jobs. However, working-class parents who had

some college were more interested in learning for learning's sake. My participants, like

Gorman's, were similarly interested in learning for learning's sake, but for some, public

validation and self-worth were goals as well. They wanted the credential to feel better about

themselves as educated people in their own eyes and in the eyes of others. Indeed, for a few

of the participants it was a matter of getting the credential in order to prove to the world that they were smart. As Jeff stated: "I came back to school because I should have a college degree. It was something I should have. Something some people should have in life." The feeling here for Jeff, as well as for Beth, was that they were "some people." They were bright enough to be college graduates; therefore, they should have the piece of paper to prove it to themselves and the world. Beth's comment sums up the sentiment: "I'm a smart person and I like having it authenticated by Harvard." But for most of the participants, like Carl, their experience at HES was a more a gradual transformation from initial feelings of innate brightness, to confirmation of academic ability, and then transformation to owning an intellectual self. (The conditions that shape this transformation were discussed in Chapter IV).

   b.   School is for me

Given the preponderance of evidence that most adults return to school for job-related reasons, I was surprised that nearly half of my participants came primarily for intellectual reasons. I wonder about the "conditions that shaped the preferences and intentions" (Gambetta, 1987, as cited, in Lynch & O'Riordan, 1998, p. 449) of this unexpected finding given the stories that live in the world about adult students in general, and working-class students in particular. First, we need to question whether it *is* that unexpected. UK adult education researchers Reay, Ball, and David (2002) and Reay (2002) found that their adult working-class participants returned to school in greater numbers for "an education in itself," and to "give back." It was the traditional-aged, middle-class students whom they studied for comparison who were invested in job-related reasons for attending college. Perhaps this is further evidence of Bourdieu's claim (1977, 1986) that the middle class are far more invested in higher education for the professional upwardly mobility it

offers than the working class. Second, the preponderance of intellectual reasons could be a result of the liberal arts curriculum attracting a higher percentage of adult students interested in learning for learning's sake. Third, it could be the participants' ages. On average, the participants who returned to school for intellectual reasons were in their mid-forties. Perhaps they felt content— not overly marginal or deprived— with their occupations, and if they weren't content, perhaps they understood that the system couldn't or shouldn't accommodate job changes at their life stage. Their "social clock" (Neugarten, 1975) was telling them that it was unrealistic to be looking for more out of their professional lives.

Additionally, returning to school for intellectual, rather than job-change, reasons could be a form of "symbolic violence" (Bourdieu, 1990), meaning the participants had internalized class oppression and considered themselves unworthy of upward professional mobility. The participants who chose more intellectual reasons for returning to school, may have viewed upwardly mobility as something that was not "for people like them," so their "aspirations were adjusted accordingly" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 64). Cohen (1998) offered symbolic violence as a possible theoretical explanation for why adult, working-class students at Smith College didn't apply for prestigious jobs upon graduation, but decided instead to work in the low-paying, public service sector. We can't exclude any of the possible reasons (the working-class more invested in learning than credentialing, the liberal arts curriculum, the participants' age and "social clocks", or "symbolic violence"). However, I agree with Cohen (1998), who complicated the symbolic violence theory in her study, by proposing that it excluded other, non-middle-class definitions of success: "It is predicated on the assumption that all students, regardless of age, gender, or social class, will define success in generic economic terms; that is, given ideal conditions, all students would seek rewards that afford class mobility and status" (p. 369). In my study the participants' questioned the

dominant assumption that upward mobility through job-related education was the preferred

generic outcome of an undergraduate education for everyone regardless of class background.

In fact, the participants who returned for intellectual reasons had alternative views

about how education and job advancement should go together. They wanted to keep their

education separate from their jobs. This was a conscious decision. Returning to school and

studying the liberal arts was something they did for themselves, not for anyone else, and

certainly not for the marketplace. As Maureen said: "Work is what I do for my family and to

make money, school is for me." Gale reported:

> I have always separated the two: education and my job. They never mingled. I always
> felt like education was more of a personal thing and I didn't want it to mingle with
> the job because it takes the fun out of it. If my focus is on a better job or money,
> then, suddenly I don't want to do it. I like to focus on it as being just for me. Just for
> personal learning.

Cheryl observed: "Everybody was saying to me, 'You should go back and get your nursing

degree,' and I really didn't want to. I really wanted the liberal arts, all the things that I hadn't

studied. I wanted to do something that had nothing to do with work." As we learned from

Marx, the way to keep oppressive, alienating feelings at bay is for "man himself to enjoy the

product of his labor" (Marx, as cited in Fromm, 1966, p. 104). In order to keep education

"fun" and personally rewarding, their HES learning careers couldn't be offered to another

for payment in the form of a higher-level job or more money. It could be that so much of

their lives were already about serving other people that they wanted a break away from that

subservient position. As Wendy reported: "A liberal arts education is such an oasis from

learn-to-earn," and I would add, more forcefully, capitalistic alienation. House (1991)

concludes that in the era of learn-to-earn, adult liberal arts education "can make us fully

human" (p. 194). Perhaps adult liberal arts education, by offering an opportunity to

experience learning-for-learning's sake, can help fight against the alienated character of

modern man. Perhaps adult liberal arts education is a chance to experience an "estranged break" (Marcuse, 1978) from the everyday and promote "as if" (Greene, 1990) imaginary thinking— "as if" the demands of the marketplace weren't central to our lives— and "as if" pursuing academic passions are what defined successful upward mobility. For nearly half of my participants, I believe adult liberal arts education was all these things, at least to some significant extent.

c. Working-class and intellectual, dichotomous identities

By choosing to view school as just "for me," the majority of the participants also chose to remain silent about their academic lives. Gale's comment was a common response: "I prefer not tell people that I am going to school or what I am learning. I kept it to myself." Of the participants who offered intellectual reasons for returning school only Carl and Maureen were public about their learning. This finding points to the dark side of compartmentalizing one's life. As Sennett and Cobb (1972) conclude: "Fragmentation and divisions in self are the arrangements consciousness makes in response to an environment where respect is not forthcoming as a matter of course" (p. 214). Carl's astronomy posters were torn down and he was questioned repeatedly about why he wasn't pursuing a business degree. Moreover, he was put down for using the computer and speaking his mind at union meetings.

Maureen is a basic computer skills trainer. At HES she discovered a love of linguistics and studied ancient languages. She stated that she spent most of her working-life hiding her academic interests and the fact that she was going to Harvard. She used the term "closet intellectual" to describe this experience. But as the years went by, she decided that she could no longer keep her intellectual-self and her worker-self separate. She wanted to live a more "authentic" (Reay, 2002) and integrated life. She stated that it was a "big turning

point" to bring in her ancient language manuscripts, e.g., Sanskrit, Old English, Old Norse, and Gothic, into work to share them with her colleagues before she trained them on *Microsoft Office*. She enjoyed educating her trainees about her interests in an attempt to inspire them to find their academic passions. Initially, she was called a "geek," but people began to talk to her about her languages and ask her "intellectual questions": "Oh, go ask Maureen, she'll know, she went to Harvard and studied dead languages."

Carl and Maureen's decisions to bring their working-class and academic lives together is courageous, for other participants were just too unsure about how the world would react. Perhaps one of the reasons for their trepidation is society's assumption (i.e., the story that lives in the world) that members of the working class are not intellectual. Jonathan Rose (2001), author of *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, wrote that in order to maintain their "class superiority" many literary intellectuals have "convinced themselves that the typical clerk was subhuman, bestial, machinelike, dead inside, a consumer of rubbishy newspapers and canned food" (p. 393). While one might assume that this statement to be extreme, there are other examples, such as Harold Bloom's (1994) quote shared in the Introduction. According to Bloom the working class are not fit for the more difficult pleasures of the mind for "the aesthetic is, for them, only another anxiety" (p. 36). It is hard to deny that there is a bias that lives in world against believing that secretaries, truck drivers, or bill collectors can also, after their workday is over, live intellectual lives and pursue more of the difficult pleasures of the mind.

In the end, returning to school for intellectual reasons was not a conflict for these bright working-class adults. They felt they were just living up to their potential. The conflict was claiming publicly an intellectual identity. The majority remained closeted and kept their academic lives to themselves. The need to keep quiet about their love of humanistic

education seems to spotlight a cultural dilemma in the US that "working class" and "intellectual" are incompatible, and, perhaps, dichotomous identities.

d. Conclusion to Carl's learning career

Carl is a working-class, intellectual success story. He refused to remain silent about his newfound intellectual identity, for he wanted both friend and foe to know that workers were entitled to own knowledge. For Carl being a worker and a knowledge owner was a critical part of his identity and his life's mission, as he attempted to be public about his academic interests and "pull others up." Moreover, his newfound intellectual identity wasn't solely a source of self-worth validation; he wanted to give back to his working-class community. He wanted to put his intellectual capital to good use for members of his class. As stated earlier, Reay, Ball, and David (2002) and Reay (2002) found that many working-adults return to college because they want to "give back." Also, in her study Cohen (1998) found that after earning their degrees working-class women wanted to return to their working-class communities in public service roles, as social workers and teachers. Beatrice also chose to give back through public service work, and as Wendy, in the next case study, reported: "You can't eat at the buffet, and not turn around and help feed someone else."

A year after our initial interviews, Carl and I had lunch. I discovered that he has changed jobs. He was working for a government environmental agency, training workers on a variety of health and safety issues, as well as organizing for his union out on the shop floors. He stated that the job description had "me written all over it." He found it! He found the right "authentic" (Reay, 2002) path that combines his intellect, politics, and working-class roots that is commensurate with his life stage. Furthermore he is a teaching assistant at HES for two environmental courses. Carl had not only become an owner of knowledge, he was now also an expert teaching others. Carl's life now had become very

much like the lives of Gramsci's (1999) organic intellectuals; he had a "conscious

responsibility" that was "aided by the absorption of ideas" (p. 4). But he still wished that he

had pursued his education earlier. He felt his open-enrollment HES degree was not enough.

If he were younger, he could have gone on from HES to pursue a master's or even a

doctorate in public health at Harvard. While content with his life change, and feeling more

authentic because his academic credentials and occupation now more closely matched his

internal expectation of his himself, he was also left wanting and feeling "neither flesh or

flow" (Freeborn, 2000, p. 10).

C. Composing a Harvard Alumnus Identity: *Wendy's Learning Career*

> Just as the design of a building or a vase must be rethought when the scale has changed, so must the design of our lives.
> Mary Catherine Bateson (1989), *Composing a Life*

Wendy was scheduled to arrive to my office. I was ready, so I sat at my desk and waited. With nothing but time on my hands, I began to think about Wendy and our seven-year relationship. While I knew Carl and Beatrice when they were students, I wasn't their academic advisor. Wendy was my advisee. I remember that our meetings took place after regular business hours. Wendy had the work ethic, and held the types of jobs (secretarial) where it wasn't easy to take time off for an appointment between the hours of nine and five. I never minded— too much— for I enjoyed her sense of humor, enthusiasm, and pre-meeting planning (an art that I have finally mastered). I have a vivid memory of Wendy's well-worn catalogue with dozens of dog-eared pages. For her, there were always more courses that she was interested in taking than she could take. I can picture her in my office flipping to each highlighted page, and once we found a course that was a perfect combination of day, time, requirement, instructor, and interesting subject matter, she would state something to the effect: "I'll give a try and see where it will take me." Wendy, I always surmised, was at HES for the education not for the piece of paper.

Facing a different kind of meeting with her, I suddenly realized that after seven years I'd learned so few personal details about Wendy and her learning career. I knew that she moved to Massachusetts from New York City, that she was enjoying her overall experience at HES but, at times, it was difficult for her to balance work and school. I felt that she was here because she had a vague notion of wanting a better job, but no specific post-graduation plans. For Wendy, graduation seemed like a vastly distant event, so, an unspoken agreement

formed between us to focus on the smaller semester-by-semester planning. But I knew nothing about how she got to HES and why, and what meaning she made of her experience. I wondered why academic advising was so estranged from students' personal stories. Was it me, was it the profession, or was it the students? My research was supporting and accelerating my belief that as an academic advisor my pervious inclination to isolate the HES journey from advisees past choices and to turn away from the ongoing psychosocial meaning of the experience was disingenuous. Wendy's hello and rap at the door interrupted my thoughts. I welcomed her into my office.

Wendy was 37-years old the. She's petite, about five feet, two inches tall, with fair skin and strikingly short, brown hair. She exudes humor, kindness, and efficiency, and her choice of clothing gave me the impression of a neat and "well-put-together" individual. As I handed her the questionnaire, I thought to myself that Wendy must be the type of friend who would never forget your birthday. In fact, as I noticed her crisp packages and color-coded, to-do stickies sprouting between the pages of her planner, it seems likely that she would have purchased the birthday card weeks in advance while she was buying her back-up tube of toothpaste. Her first comment to me was: "The Harvard Extension School (HES) was the left-hand turn that changed my life." I eagerly awaited the rest of the story.

Wendy grew-up in New Jersey in a working-class home. She was the oldest of three sisters. Her dad worked for the phone company as an "outside technician" and her mother was a homemaker for a while, then went to work as a bookkeeper. Her parents never went to college. Wendy also offered:

> My grandmother was a telephone operator and my grandfather was a carpenter. On my mother's side my grandmother never had a job outside the home. She never knew how to drive. She never wore pants. My grandfather was a barkeeper in Newark in a rather tough neighborhood. He quit school at the age of nine. You know my grandmother was schooled at home for a while because they didn't have enough money to send her to Catholic school.

As Wendy communicated these class-related family details, which I interpreted as attempts at emphasizing that her family roots are about as far from a stereotypical Harvard graduate's as they could be, she became emotional. Tears flowed: "Oh, God this feels like therapy." The teary-release brought forth in my minds eye and image of my own earlier self. I remember my own tears, which were thick with contradictory emotions, for I too grew up working class and graduated from Harvard. For me the tears represented the intense mixture of pride (look at how far I've come), disbelief (I still can't believe that I've come this far), and finally, guilt (I don't deserve to be here because of where I'm from). Through Wendy's tears, which perhaps were formed from similar contradictory emotions, she shared: "Well, you know the fact that I come from a certain strata. My parents are blue-collar, just finished high school. It's just, I mean, nobody's gone, nobody's gone as far as I have. The doors that are open now, I try to explain it to my mother, but she just has no concept." As Wendy's tears continued, I comforted her and thought about the *apparent* randomness of life. Had she been only a right-turn away from not coming this far at all?

During high school, Wendy never considered college an option. She remembered a ninth-grade class trip to Princeton where she saw students with college sweatshirts running track without a care in the world. She thought to herself:

> What a waste for us. Because, you know, we were children of telephone linemen and house painters, people who worked for the town. Why in the world would they be showing us this? This is some other world. It was like F. Scott Fitzgerald. What? Are you kidding me? We went off to be auto mechanics and bookkeepers.

The curiosity about why she was there was infused with anger about being shown a world of which she could never become a part. At age 14, Wendy already knew what most of us know, but rarely say out loud: we live in a class society where everyone pretends there are no

classes. In her family, college was not a place to run track without a care in the world, it was a place to learn a trade or receive business training along the lines of a two-year accounting degree. Or the message was you had to be "really, really, rich, like a Rockefeller" or you had to be "really, really, smart to get a full scholarship." There was no middle ground. Her mother would tell her all the time that: "We're just re-gu-lar people." Not smart, not rich, just regular. When I asked her to define "regular," Wendy said: "I guess regular people just means you have a nine to five job and you never ask more of life than what it offers you."

I am reminded of Ochberg and Comeau's (2001) research. They found that for the working class, attending college can be a tension-filled decision about moral character and holding a different view of the world from the one the parents held. The upwardly-mobile college students viewed their working-class parents as people who saw the world as a risky place and chose (or been required) to "settle for less out of life" (p. 139), and now they wanted their children to do the same. The parents didn't want their children making costly decisions about their future based on unrealistic, academic ambitions. Similarly, in Wendy's family, after high school one was expected to work, maybe get a two-year business or technical degree, or join the service. Wendy went to work. She worked in retail for a year or two, then worked her way up to a mid-level position in a bank. During this period she was surrounded by many college graduates, but she still never considered going herself: "The college experience was so foreign, and I thought I'm just a re-gu-lar person. I'm not going off to Amherst. Please!" Here, once again, we see compelling evidence of Bourdieu's (1990) theory that "agents shape their aspirations according to concrete indices of the accessible and the inaccessible, of what is and is not 'for us' " (p. 64).

After a few years working at a bank, Wendy decided she wanted to change careers, so she went to Katherine Gibbs Secretarial College (while working) to earn her paralegal

certificate. She worked freelance in that field for a while; however, she wasn't getting the plum assignments because she didn't have a four-year degree as well. The "lights started to go on." She needed to go to school to boost her earning potential and find intellectually challenging work. She attempted a few evening courses at a university in New York City, but dropped out after a year: "I thought it should be different. It should be more like Princeton, where students are running track and drinking cocktails at the Tiger Club. I just thought this was not the *college* experience. I need the *college* experience." She wanted access to the world from which she once felt excluded. If she was going to take the time and spend the money, it was going to be for the "real" college experience. However, I find it difficult to believe that Wendy went from believing that college was not for her, to wanting to have drinks at Tiger Club. This seems like a narrative strategy to understand her failure to complete college the first time around by pointing to external, rather than internal, influences (Linde, 1993). Far more likely, re-gu-lar Wendy wasn't "psychologically or academically" (Inman & Mayes, 1999, p. 3) ready for the college experience, so, she rejected the university before the university rejected her.

She tried again a few years later at a more traditional college program for adults, more akin to the "real" college experience. Again, Wendy dropped out after a year or so because money concerns were just too distracting: "I was very focused on the money. How much it cost and how difficult it was going to be to pay for it." Over a five-year period, Wendy had attended two four-year universities and accumulated just a little over a semester's worth of college credits, but she had also incurred debt. Her next move would need to be more fiscally prudent. She was also discouraged: "I thought maybe I just don't have it. I'm bright, but I'm not talented academically." Feelings of being unworthy of a college education can run deep when rooted in a family story that college is only for the "really, really smart"

or the "really, really rich." It is likely that Wendy dropped out of college twice due to "symbolic violence" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977), which, as already noted, is when the working class internalize their class oppression and come to believe that they deserve less, and hence aspire for less.

A year later, Wendy traveled to Boston with a friend for the long fourth of July weekend. They found their way to Harvard Square, and then to the front of the Extension School office building:

> We were just tooling around Cambridge, and we took a left-hand turn onto Garden Street. And there was a table outside 20 Garden Street. I asked what is this all about: "Well it's a part-time degree program and it's affiliated with Harvard." I thought that's interesting. I didn't know you could you that. I thought you had to go in straight after high school as a valedictorian. "Why don't you take the brochure?" and I thought, yeah right, I'll go to Harvard.

On the train ride home, Wendy read the catalogue cover to cover and her friend encouraged her to move to Boston and just do it. When she got home, she tossed the catalogue on her desk, and thought it was just a crazy idea: "Hardly anybody in my family has a college education. It just seemed like, hey, let's go to Mars." She selected herself out because of her class background. For Wendy, being a college student still remained a "cultural difference too far" (Reay, 2002, p. 414) from her own. She didn't realize, however, that Mars was moving closer to her world every day.

Just a few months later, 29-year-old Wendy was having dinner with a group of friends and someone asked the dreaded question: "What will you be doing in ten years?" As each person went around the table, Wendy froze. Wendy couldn't think of anything to say except that she would probably be doing the same thing that she was doing then, working in a bank: "I looked into this big black hole and I thought oh, my God, what is my life going to look like and what do I want it to look like?" After this "trigger event" (Aslanian & Brickell,

1980), or perhaps more appropriately, epiphany, Wendy reacquainted herself with the course

catalogue that night. She decided that HES was her "just right" school. It was the traditional

college experience (i.e., elite, liberal arts school like Princeton) that she was looking for, but

without the high tuition. Also it was open enrollment, which fit her psychosocial belonging

needs:

> I thought that there would be people like me there. The HES doors seemed more
> open. At [the more traditional university] the doors were definitely closed. I had to
> go through an interview, a two-part interview process. I had to take a three-hour
> entrance exam in a lecture hall. I had to write not one, but two essays. It was the
> traditional college experience that I was looking for, but HES had a much more open
> feeling. All I had to do was prove that I could do the work.

Wendy, who so desired the "real" college experience, rejected the college with the

more selective admission and, indeed, it "cooled down" (Clark, 1960) her academic

aspirations. Once Wendy jumped through all those hoops, one would assume that her sense

of belonging at the institution would have risen dramatically, that she might have felt she

deserved to be there because she earned her place just like everyone else. That she had the

opposite reaction reveals just how transparent institutional polices can be to students.

Wendy knew how artificial those hoops were, and the only thing they communicated was

that because of her class background in the form of average high school grades, no SATs,

and no Rockefeller name, she needed to prove herself worthy to get in the door. It appears

that the admission policy didn't feel empowering; it felt intimidating, and perhaps, a little

humiliating. Reay (2002) concludes that educators can choose to believe that working-class

students' feelings of humiliation and shame in higher education institutions are a result of

their being unprepared for college. Or, educators can view their shame and humiliation as

the institution's problem for not "knowing how to deal with difference, especially class

difference" (p. 414). Either way, at that time Wendy considered the selective college not for

"people like her." But with growing feelings of "deprivation and marginality" (Hopper &

Osborn, 1975) about her station in life, Wendy was more desperate to fit in and find her

"just right school," and the open-enrollment admission's policy at HES eased the cultural

divide.

Given her active oriented view toward life (London, Wenker, & Hagstrom, 1963),

Wendy decided that she could handle the risk. She moved to Boston to earn her bachelor of

liberal arts degree at HES.

After arriving, Wendy quickly got an office job. She had no trouble finding work for

a reasonable salary. She reported that as an adult student some employers were worried

about her ability to balance work and school; they questioned if anyone could do both well.

However, she got a good job, began saving money, and was able to start at HES within nine

months. When she first came to campus, Wendy expected to find Harvard-proper filled with

rich WASPs, i.e., Rockefellers, similar to those students who inhabited her Princeton

memory: "I thought to myself everyone will be walking around in cashmere crew necks and

camel hair coats and they will be riding in convertibles drinking champagne in their dorm

rooms. And when I got here, it was such a rude shock to me."

She was surprised by how international and diverse the campus was, and while this

was initially comforting, she remained nervous and intimated for nearly two years. At first,

she was afraid of buying the wrong books or getting lost and having to ask for directions,

hence being exposed as someone who didn't belong: "Every Sunday I would just sit in the

Yard and absorb my surroundings. I would take walks all around the campus just to know

where I was going because I was so intimidated and that feeling didn't leave me for the first

couple of years." As an adult student, Wendy experienced many of the documented

traditional-aged, working-class college students' fears about belonging (Hsiao, 1992; Inman & Mayes, 1999; Van Galen, 2000). She felt like an unworthy trespasser.

With all her nervousness about being in a new city with no friends or family around, and simply being unprepared for how "serious" HES was, Wendy ended up withdrawing from one of her first courses. She began to doubt her academic ability: "I couldn't make it through the mid-term and I thought, 'Oh, damn it, I've come all this way and I'm just not smart enough to do this.' I knew that I was bright, but there was a whole other level of bright here." This time, however, unlike before, it wasn't time to drop out, but "knuckle-down and do this." She was motivated by her age— she was now 30 years old— and by her previous attempts. This was Wendy's third try at college, and it was "do or die time." Hopper and Osborn (1975) found that a personal trait of successful adults students is "achievement motivation," and that their "determination to succeed was matched only by their fear of failure, and it is not clear which constituted their main source of motivation" (p. 113). While she had an internal do-or-die achievement motivation, her fellow classmates also motivated her: "Not only were the professors demanding and expecting something of you, your other classmates kept the level up. And that's what I saw consistently. People were really contributing in keeping the level up." Moreover the student-rich Cambridge/Boston area invigorated her and made committing to an academic life a normal expectation— something she never felt in NYC. She felt that everyone she met in Boston was going to school, getting their master's degrees, working on their PhDs, teaching, and taking exams. She was tripping over intellectuals walking the streets of Cambridge:

> There was so much going on around here that was intellectually and academically focused, so it was just easy to have faith. You're in a community. Even though you're not all doing the same thing, you're in a place where there are liked-minded people all around you. You just meet people everywhere, everywhere. I saw Cornell West at the newsstand. Then you would see one of your classmates having coffee, or you meet Noam Chomsky on the Red Line.

Wendy's use of the word "around" twice and "everywhere" twice, gives the sense of being completely surrounded, almost claustrophobic, as if there was no escape— leaving was not an option. Everyone around her was living life as an academic, so why not get onboard? Indeed, she later shared that this place was like a "bubble" and that she "popped it and jumped in." Her fellow classmates and the rich academic atmosphere created an "as if" (Greene, 1990) experience for Wendy. She began to apply herself "as if" she were one of the more confident and "serious" students, and "as if" she were one of the "everywhere" intellectuals.

While the scholarly environment motivated Wendy and "warmed up" (Deli, 2000) her academic aspirations, the bubble was, at times, suffocating: "There are times when you are under the gun here. Sometimes, you think, 'I've got to get out of here. I've just got to stop. I've got to talk to somebody about non-school things.'" It felt to Wendy like there was no place in the academically competitive Boston/Cambridge community to be just a regular person, someone who works nine-to-five and doesn't expect anything more of life. Indeed, life as an adult student was challenging for Wendy. She felt the need to "shut everything out" including all semblance of a "normal biography" that included a social and family life (Reay, Ball, & David, 2002) in order to focus on school. She observed that even with all the external and internal motivation, sometimes it was hard to keep going. At work she was thinking about school and at school she was thinking about sleep:

> It was just much more juggling. It demanded a lot of me. It was very demanding to be at work during the day and to have part of my mind somewhere else thinking about what I was going to be doing tonight. That was the hard part. Coming out of work, feeling stressed and low energy. Then having to give all of your attention, energy, and focus because it was serious, serious academic work.

Also, she received no real support from her family. The support was "noncommittal" at best. Her family expected her to be working her way up in a company and saving money for a house, not spending money on school. School was "something that you did when you were younger and if it didn't happen then, you worked." You didn't give up prime earning-potential years to split your attention between work and school: "You know, my father is just, like, 'Are you ever going to come out of school?' So there is no, 'Yeah, go and do it!' It's just, 'Okay, if that's what you think is right, that is what you should do.'" As result, she grew increasingly distant from her parents and felt more and more that she had little in common with her family:

> Talking to the family is almost pointless. Because, if it is not in their immediate sphere, they're not interested. It's a very small world at home. They're just dealing with what they're dealing with— very immediate day-to-day things. They aren't looking at the larger picture. [They say,] "We are just regular people; we're just folks." When you step outside of that circle, the world takes on a whole different look and meaning.

Wendy was one of only a few participants who described the class-inspired tensions between her and her family that is commonly reported among traditional-aged working-class college students. The other participants were able, as Zwerling (1992) documents, "to function in two worlds more effectively" (p. 53). Through successful work experiences and exposure to other people (outside their families) who held different views about a college education, the other participants created "safe havens" (p. 52) between themselves and their families. Additionally, Wendy was one of only a few participants who described a close relationship with her family that closeness seemed to be directly related to the strained relationship that developed when Wendy was at HES. As Roberts and Rosenwald (2001) noted: "It was their closeness before college that made negative developments in family relations especially unnerving for some; these changes were not experienced as trivial,

predictable annoyances, but as deeper and alarming losses" (p. 115). Indeed, Wendy, the

first member of her family to go to a four-year liberal arts college, felt like a pioneer: "It was

like being a settler in a covered wagon. You're just going to make your own way or you're

going to die. You're going to die in the wilderness." HES was a "do or die" proposition and

now she was going to find her own way or "die in the wilderness." Wendy did not want the

intensity of her feelings to go unnoticed by me. Moreover, failure would have meant a death

of some sort, the death of her dream to want more out of life. Her high-stakes feelings were

a result of knowing that: "I can't go back." Reay (2002) found that adult, working-class

students, far more than the middle-class students, were fearful of failing and "returning to a

less desirable place" (p. 409).

It took Wendy two years to feel comfortable at HES: "Somewhere in the middle

there it kicked in that I was smart enough to handle myself here." By "knuckling down" her

grades improved, her academic confidence grew, and her sense of belonging started to

solidify. It was right around this time, too, that things started to change for her at work. She

shared the story of being hired by two "smart guys" to help start up a new investment

company. When she interviewed with them she told them that she was going to school and

was "off-handed" about her affiliation with Harvard. Later, after she was hired, they asked

her why she downplayed her association with Harvard and chose not to communicate it as a

strength: "I guess I kind of passed it off that I just go to school there. They were like, 'How

could you just go to school there? We don't look at you like that.' "

They didn't treat her like that either. While she held a secretarial position, they

considered her a colleague, not just an assistant. She had intellectual conversations with her

bosses about her course work and current events and her opinions mattered to them. This

was a "big turning point" in Wendy's Harvard identity. For the first time other people she

respected thought that she was more then a "re-gu-lar" person. London (1992) found that when working-class students are moving toward another class status they feel "compelled to gauge the reactions of friends and family" (p. 8) to help them understand the significance of this identity change. It is through others' eyes that Wendy gained a new respect for herself and her education.

Although that job ended and she returned to life in the secretarial pool, she began to see herself differently at work, i.e., giving herself more intellectual credit and at school she was "feasting at an intellectual buffet." Wendy unabashedly embraced the liberal arts experience, which is noteworthy because the message at home was that college was about business or technical education. But Wendy had no doubt about the value of a liberal arts degree: "I just knew if I wanted to understand the world better that I had to know a little bit about everything, and then maybe a lot about one thing that I really loved." In particular, Wendy remembered an American painting course. It was her first interdisciplinary course, where she was getting "all the liberal arts together, history, art, philosophy." The instructor had his favorite painters, and one was Thomas Kohl. Wendy still got a chill when she thought about the Hudson Valley painters and the whole opening up of America: "They were embracing the religiosity of nature and how astonishing this country would become. They were moving west, moving away from the eastern seaboard and creating a whole new world." Knowing how Wendy viewed herself as a pioneer, and also knowing how Carl's choice to study astronomy was about searching the "outer edges" of his own life, it became apparent to me that the separation of psychosocial meanings of learning from the intellectual meanings is a false dichotomy.

A course on American and British women writers' similarly moved her. She was devastated by Toni Morrison's *Bluest Eye* and *Beloved.* Great literature, she observed: "Not

only coveys information, but conveys a certain feeling, a perspective. Somebody is trying to tell you something about a world that you may never see again or that doesn't really exist, but it is a world that you're going to have to think about and deal with." She also reported that learning to read French was a particularly class-changing experience, socioeconomic class, that is. In Wendy's family of origin there was: "None of this sort of highfalutin, 'Let's talk about philosophy at Harvard.'" There was also none of this learning to read French, either. For Wendy, this course was a clear sign that her class status was changing: "Reading a book that I had read as a child in French was just amazing. Being able to say I read it in French, okay, it was the *Red Balloon*, but you know, I was on my way, I was going to be reading Camus any minute now, watch me, watch me, I am going off the high diving board [laughter]." Through the "liberal arts buffet" Wendy learned that, unlike member of her family, at least to the extent they has shared with her, she was drawn to the theoretical, rather than the technical/business side of learning: "It's a feast for me intellectually to think theoretically and critically." Wendy recovered from her "troubled" (Reay, 2002), stop-and-start, academic history and moved from being afraid of opening her mouth or buying the wrong books, to reading French and relishing theoretical discourse. Wendy's innate yet timid sense of brightness was transformed into academic ability, and into owning an intellectual-self.

Wendy finally did it: seven years after arriving in Boston she earned her bachelor of liberal arts degree from the HES. Unlike Beatrice, she was not energized, but exhausted. All she wanted to do was sleep for six months. But much like Beatrice, she expected everything to dramatically change and it didn't— not right away. She was a Harvard graduate, and her assumption was that she was now entitled to high-powered jobs: "I was newly minted and here I come. I'll get the corner office. That didn't happen. I thought there is no power here

to this thing. How could I have spent all this time and nobody realizes that I can do more than type." Wendy who spent her entire professional life typing, photocopying, and stamping mail was assuming that with her newly-minted Harvard degree she would leave the clerical world behind. Others in her relationship circle assumed this as well, for she had to face identity attacks from all sides: potential employers, colleagues, and family, all having assumptions that as a Harvard graduate Wendy should be "running for senate" or "winning a Nobel prize":

> I was home back in May and somebody asked me what I was doing and I said I was going to temp until I decided on graduate school and my cousin's wife said, 'Gee, you think you would have some really big job.' I had to say to her that not everybody that comes out of Harvard makes a million bucks.

Her Harvard-graduate identity was severely shaken, but needing to earn a living, Wendy attempted to return to the types of jobs that she had before she earned the degree. For the first time in her life she discovered that she was overqualified: "For a long, long time I heard, you're so bright, but you're unsuited for this job. I heard that for awhile and that was annoying. Very annoying because I have to go about the business of earning a living. The minute you get that Harvard seal of approval, it literally seals your fate in some way." Wendy experienced a working-class adult student's greatest fear: earning a degree— spending all that time and money— only to find herself overqualified for half the jobs and underqualified for the others (Archer & Hutchings, 2000; Marks, 2003). Indeed, Archer and Hutchings (2000) found that many working-class adults didn't return to school because they thought that "being overqualified in an overcrowded job market was a waste of time, money, and effort, with the additional danger that one may become depressed and forced to do 'dirty jobs' " (p. 566). The researchers added that the language around "dirty" is "an assertion of the social mobility aspirations accorded by a degree, whereby certain manual work is rendered illegitimate" (p. 566). Wendy was living between these two worlds: under-

and over-qualified. Moreover, her college degree wasn't affording her the escape from the routine and manual tasks of clerical work. It was "a very difficult time." Instead of choosing to believe that she really was not a true Harvard graduate because she couldn't get the corner office, Wendy took comfort in her belief that many top-tier, Ivy-League graduates must have had a difficult time too. She turned people's negative reactions into positive self-affirming voices that more closely aligned with her heavily invested, Ivy-League graduate identity: "People at Yale must get the same thing." Wendy couldn't continue to work in jobs that she had before the degree. All this work and effort, as well as her identity change from a "re-gu-lar person" to a Harvard graduate, needed to mean something. She wanted that job back where the two bosses "saw something in me, saw that I was smart, saw that I was like them."

Perhaps, feeling like Roberts and Rosenwald's (2001) working-class college students who were acutely aware of their lack of "social capital" (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986), and hence, their inherent inability to compete on equal terms with middle- and upper-class counterparts for jobs, Wendy decided to access the Harvard alumni network. Specifically, she joined the Harvard Club in Boston, and met a career counselor who reinforced what she wanted to hear and believe: "She told me I was a Harvard graduate now. You can't be working the reception desk at lunch." Wendy was thrilled with the network. While there may be no initial power in the HES degree there was plenty of power in the network: "I met her because I was a Harvard alum through the network. Work the network. You have this amazing network. It's a whole new-world, this whole new environment."

After accessing the network, Wendy began to consider a number of future options. At first she thought of an MBA, and then she considered pursuing an economics degree at the London School of Economics. She also considered Stanford's Master of Liberal Arts program: "You know, it was just like all [graduate school] doors were suddenly wide open. If

you had told me ten years ago that I was going to pursue an MBA, I would have said, 'You're nuts. You should be locked up.'" As Gallacher, Crossan, Field, and Merrill (2002) found with their participants, Wendy (like Beatrice and Carl) was able to consider learning opportunities that she "would not have considered an option in the past" (p. 505). Through her ongoing work with her career counselor, Wendy decided that she wanted to work in publishing. Books were Wendy's passion: "Maybe I can be a part of a publishing house that publishes books that have not revolutionized literature the way the *Moby Dick* did or *Beloved*, but could give a new perspective on the world that is going to be important in the future." She also shared:

> I've got to find a place in the world using what I learned here to keep the doors wide open. When I think about after-school programs and the fact that children are learning to use computers that is fine. But wouldn't it be better for a child to be in an art class, book club, or in a boy's chorus? I think President Kennedy was right, if you have a world without art and music you don't have much of a populace. Educated people in government want to make students into consumers and give them more job skills. That stuff can only take you so far. I get teary when I see bookmobiles in low-income neighborhoods, books open up the world. You're just opening up the world to them.

As HES Wendy learned that there was more to her than a worker-self. Through the liberal arts curriculum the world of art and literature was opened up to her, and she was able, at the end of her academic journey, to own an intellectual-self. She wanted to find a way to help others do the same: "I don't think that you can come through here and eat at the buffet and not turn around and help feed someone else." But Wendy was nearly 40 years old. She didn't want to start at the filing desk at a publishing house; she wanted a higher-level job. She decided to earn a master's degree in publishing, so at least she could start in the middle. She was also anxious to put this degree and her newly formed intellectual identity to the test to see if she could get into graduate school. She wanted the validation that came from

getting accepted to college the old fashion way, that is, through standardized tests, cumulative GPAs, and letters of recommendation:

> I feel I got here through the back door. I didn't take the SAT. I didn't live in the freshman dorms. I never cheered at a Harvard football game. I know I've had the real thing, but somehow, on a certain social level, I feel like I haven't had the true Harvard experience. Going to graduate school is different. I took the GREs and scored fairly well, and then I went to see somebody about the program. I had an interview of sorts. So it's much more formal that way. So it's like, I've arrived now through the front door.

Wendy was nervous about getting accepted because she came from an open-enrollment, adult program. She didn't know how that was going to be received. This was Wendy's only mention of any doubts related to being an adult, night school student. Wendy didn't wear a scarlet letter A.

If the corner office was the first big test of the HES degree, applying to graduate school was the second. Wendy was accepted to a master's program in publishing at New York University. She felt validated. She saw the "power in the thing," and came to believe that she had more than just an average shot of getting in. She was a well-qualified candidate. Wendy also reported: "When I saw graduate students when I first got here I thought I'm so, I just so far away from that. I don't know if I'll ever reach that level because it seemed like only super-smart people went to graduate school." She was no longer a "re-gu-lar" person, she was a super-smart person. Moreover, while she didn't have the Rockefeller name, she could attempt to live like a Rockefeller. Wendy joined the Harvard Club of NYC:

> The NYC club just blows the socks off the Boston one. Oh, it's great. They have an onsite sushi chef. The guy gets up at three or four in the morning and goes off to Kennedy Airport picks up the fish for the sushi luncheon buffet Monday through Saturday. It's a little enclosed world. I saw a giant stuffed polar bear that Ted Roosevelt supposedly shot in the chest. NYC Harvard Club is next to the New York Yacht Club and they share space. The Harvard Club told me: "It's not full privileges at the Yacht Club, but its full privileges at the Penn Club, the Cornell Club, quite possible the Yale Club.

Wendy observed: "It was like when I was a kid and I visited Princeton and all those people in camel hair coats and wind blowing in their hair. This is insane. My parents were born right across the river from here in some awful tenement neighborhood and I'm sitting, umpteen years later, thinking about sitting at the French Club table and having a cocktail." The world that was so out of her grasp at age 14, she attempted to "own" it now, at 40: "It just took me a while to really own it. It is still very much a process. Sometimes I back away from it. That [earning the HES degree] wasn't that important." Wendy went through ups and downs with her Harvard-graduate identity. She still compared herself to Harvard College graduates and comes up short: "I still feel below those people who have been to Harvard College. They had that four years and they came right from high school as valedictorians. In some ways I feel like they have had that little bit more of the real thing than I've had. Because I've had it over a certain period of time while having to keep a roof over my head." But Wendy also made the comments: "True to the 'nature' of a Harvard student, mine was probably the first graduate school application to hit the doorstep" and "We are really kind of 'breed' unto ourselves." Through her word choices, "nature" and "breed," I learned that there were times when she owned fully her Harvard alumnus status.

Wendy had some doubts and wondered if all this education was going to mean anything in the real world where she needed a good paying job. She took out a loan for $40,000 to go to graduate school. She was 40-years-old, and had no home of her own. Her parents were worried because she was continuing to use up prime-earning potential years split between work and school. She was worried, too:

> Will I be able to pay back the loan? Will I ever own my own condo? I don't feel too, too bad about that. But there are still a lot of unanswered questions coming up over the horizon. I'm hoping that a BA from a great school, and now a master's from a great school, will push me up income wise.

Wendy took heart that HES was a risk that had worked out fine. She was traveling a different path than her parents, and had faith that she'd find her own way. She intended to keep asking for more out life, and took comfort in knowing that her name would forever be in the Harvard roll books: "Now, that's amazing!" Her fate, to some extent, had already been sealed... in a good way.

Wendy was sad about leaving Boston for New York City. She was leaving to start her master's program in publishing the day after our final interview. She told me that she spent time just walking in Harvard Yard, trying to remember the buildings, the paths, and the John Harvard statue. While she stood by the statue, a mother and father and their two young boys were walking through Harvard Yard. The smaller boy, around four years old, asked his mother: "What is this place?" And the mother turned to him and said in a big stage whisper: "If you are really, really smart, very, very lucky, you get to come here." Wendy stated: "It totally stunned me because the reverence in her voice, it almost brought me to tears it was so funny." Wendy was no longer laughing, but crying. The tears reminded me of the intense mixture of pride, shock, and, yes, guilt that she described when we began our interview. Do I own this Harvard-graduate identity? Do I deserve this reverence? Am I still a "re-gu-lar" person underneath this Harvard sheepskin? Most important, do I still *want* to be a "re-gul-lar" person?

1. Wendy's significant plot line: *Attempting to own her Harvard-graduate identity*

Wendy's significant plot line is "the total conversion of the excluded permitted access to what has previously been denied" (Reay's, 2002, p. 402). While she is not running track in a college sweatshirt without a care in the world, she is making her way to the French table at the Harvard Club for cocktails. The emotional core of Wendy's story was her ability

to achieve upward class mobility far more then anyone else in her family, and to find a way to truly own her Harvard-graduate identity.

Wendy began her adult life content with her working-class jobs because a college degree and upward mobility wasn't for "re-gul-lar" people like her. But as time went on, and (perhaps) because she lacked the social and intimate commitments of a husband and children, feelings of marginality and deprivation (Hopper & Osborn, 1975) surrounding her professional life began to grow. After changing careers a few times, she wasn't getting the plum assignments or advancing in the business world in the ways that she had hoped. She began to have a work history that, as Hopper and Osborn (1975) conclude, is a prime motive for returning to school: "an intense, but unsuccessful competition for jobs which she deemed desirable" (p. 80). Moreover, at age 30, she was looking toward her future and all she could see was a "black hole." Wendy wanted more and she viewed education, in Maxine Greene's (1990) words, as a "wall" that she must climb over to get where she wanted to be in life. Greene (1990) reminds us that even seeing the wall is a courageous act: "Acknowledging the wall, measuring it, the person is breaking with the immersion; because, when sunk in everydayness, there is only habit or recurrence or routine" (p. 40). Climbing the wall took courage, but with her independent nature, active orientation toward life (London, Wenker, & Hagstrom's, 1963), and her innate brightness, Wendy had the initial confidence to imagine success.

Once her learning career began in earnest, Wendy experienced what many in the field of education have concluded is typical for traditional-aged working class students: a sense of insecurity. She was filled with doubting questions: Do I belong here or will I be shamed here? However, with the knowledge that HES was made for "people like her," and propelled by the fear that this was her last chance, she grabbed hold of the intense academic

atmosphere as well as her fellow students' "seriousness," and kept moving forward. During this time she also experienced a break from her family and felt the tensions of choosing what for them was an "unreasonable" (Ochberg & Comeau, 2001) ambition. Through the liberal arts degree earning process, Wendy transformed from a woman who held timid feelings of brightness into someone who felt "really smart." She relished theoretical discourse, and went "off the high diving board" by reading Camus in French. As Gallacher, Crossan, Field, and Merrill (2002) found with their participants, Wendy experienced "a reconstruction of her social identity in which formal engagement in learning has a central role" (p. 505). But most important, she transformed from a "re-gu-lar," working-class person to a Harvard graduate, a "breed unto ourselves." She couldn't go back to her life. As Bateson's (1989) quote that began this case study surmises: "Just as the design of a building or a vase must be rethought when the scale has changed, so must the design of our lives" (p. 2). She needed a future plan that matched her newly-minted, sealed, and documented-in-the-roll-books, Harvard-graduate identity. Certainly, a selective-admissions graduate school program and a career in publishing would fit the bill. With her Harvard degree in hand, the "scale" of her life had changed, and she crafted a professional future to match it.

Wendy was not alone. Managing the "scale" of their Harvard-graduate identity was, for the majority of participants, a salient tension of their HES learning careers. While some played up the meaning of earning a Harvard degree, other played it down, but they all had an opinion about becoming a Harvard alumnus or alumna.

a.   Three responses to the Harvard-graduate identity

The open-enrollment program at the HES sent a message to the participants that this program was for "people like them," bright, working-class people, who deserved a second chance. This made the thought of joining the program possible. Graduation, however, was a

major turning point in the participants' HES learning careers. They weren't at all sure that

being a Harvard graduate was for "people like them." As HES students, they felt separate—

alienated even— from the larger student population; as HES graduates they were now among

the greater "elite" Harvard alumni community. The reactions to this "culturally threatening

space" (Gallacher, Crossan, Field, & Merrill, 2002) were threefold: (1) full assimilation, (2)

amazement and ongoing insecurity, and (3) annoyance and frustration.

Three other participants, Kevin, Tom, and Jeff, were, to varying degrees, like Wendy;

upon graduation they felt part of the Harvard "family" with their narratives suggesting a

comfort with accessing the privileges of this community, including considering themselves

among the best and brightest. As Jeff reported: "I wear my Harvard ring at every interview.

It symbolizes that I belong to this group." And Kevin said:

> When you graduate from Harvard you become the School. I'm a representative of
> this school and I carry myself that way. I really do. I will never forget, when the
> president of Harvard said on Commencement morning, "You're a part of the top
> one percent by earning a Harvard degree, but don't let this be your greatest
> accomplish, just don't let it be. You don't have to tell people you went to Harvard
> show it in your work." Those things really stuck with me. I'm part of the best.

Tom shared how he engaged in Ivy-League rivalries with colleagues at work, demonstrating

just how much he felt part of the "family": "One of the lawyers I work with graduated from

Stanford and he loves doing the Stanford/Harvard thing." These participants never

reported anger or frustration over being "just" Extension School graduates. Their identities

were closely aligned with a sense of belonging to this elite academic community.

Four participants, Beth, Gale, Jean, and Cheryl, remained in a state of amazement

and insecurity about being Harvard graduates. They were filled with gratitude and felt

"incredibly lucky," as if they had won the lottery, with one-to-a-million odds that "someone

like them" had a Harvard degree. Feelings about being an "impostor" and "sneaking in the

back door" lingered likely representing the fear that many Extension School students have

about stealing the "real" Harvard experience. The stealing feeling was so heightened for Beth that she reported:

> I have my degree framed in my bedroom and I see it first thing in the morning. Someday I think the phone is going to ring and it will be Larry Summers [President of Harvard]: "Beth, we've made a mistake. We don't give a Harvard degree to people like you. We will send a cab by to pick it up, okay?" It is really funny. But, I just feel really lucky to have been here.

Both Gale and Jean agreed that these feelings of amazement came from obtaining something that for most of their adult lives felt unattainable, part of "another world" or even, "another planet": As Jean stated: "Something so close to all of us living in the Boston area, but really isn't available in most people minds, and in my mind." For them having the degree was an out-of-body experience. They hadn't come to own it, for it was still viewed as a gift bestowed on them, not earned by them. Gale, who debated for months whether to hang her diploma up, and when asked where she went to college covers her mouth and mumbles the name, Harvard, said: "Who I am and my education are two separate things."

The largest number, six participants, Sue, Sara, Silvia, Beatrice, Maureen, and to some extent, Carl, were annoyed and frustrated by the fact that they couldn't take greater public pride in their HES degree. They felt that they had earned an academically rigorous and challenging liberal arts degree deserving respect, but they must discount their accomplishment due to society's sanction about taking pride in an open-enrollment program at one of the country's most elite institutions of higher education. Their comments are similar to the adult-student stigma stories and, I believe, represent an Extension School-graduate stigma. Schur (1971, 1980) reports that a stigmatized person will either accept the "spoiled identity" or "directly confront" it. The participants who remained in a state of amazement and insecurity have accepted their spoiled identity, while these participants attempted to confront it directly. Sue offered:

> If I went to Boston University Metropolitan College and if someone asked me where I got my undergraduate degree, I would say BU and no one would think twice about going crazy. If you go to Harvard you have launch off into how you're not a genius and how you're not this social misfit, or whatever other Harvard stereotype. That has always been a sore spot and it's not because of the anything that the Extension School or the program didn't give, or what I didn't get. Because I got so much! The possibilities here are amazing. You can work on research projects, you can do independent studies, and you can go to the day school[as a special student at Harvard College]. But it doesn't matter about that. It all boils down to that question: Where did you go to school? Which is kind of strange.

Maureen felt similarly that if she went to another evening program people wouldn't require her to add a qualifier, and that for her "it's really aggravating to hear that you're not a real Harvard graduate." As a result, she prefered not to discuss it all: "I would rather just keep my degree quite, and not explain that to anybody. It is really irritating." Jane summed up the sentiment of these participants: "It's an identity crisis for people at Harvard Extension School that can led to frustration. Are we or aren't we Harvard graduates?"

These participants were frustrated by the fact that they had worked so hard and learned so much, but the world wanted them— required them— to put their accomplishments in a sub-category by using the words "just" or "only" to describe their HES learning career. Indeed, the participants lived in a constant state of gauging how much information a person they just met needed to know about their degree in order for them to have an authentic relationship. Goffman (1963) wrote that for the person who has a concealed stigma:

> The issue is not that of managing tension generated during social contacts, but rather that of managing information about his failing [i.e., stigma]. To display or not to display; to tell or not to tell; to let on or not to let on; to lie or not to lie; and in each case, to whom, how, when, and where. (p. 42)

When describing how they "manage information" about their degree, the participants often used the phrase, "it all depends on who I am talking to." Their Harvard-graduate identity

shifted, given their relationship circles and geography. It appeared that if people in their relationship circle knew about the Extension School or had a more savvy understanding of academic institutions, then the participants rushed in with their qualifiers: "I got my degree at night," and it was "through the division of continuing education." They rushed in because they were fearful the others would humble them by saying: "You're not a real Harvard graduate." They chose not to use the qualifiers "just" or "only" in circumstances where the threat of being humbled was not eminent, that is, when interacting with people who didn't know about HES or weren't savvy about continuing education programs. In these social contacts it was "not necessary" to manage information about their degree, for "it would take too long" and "the people wouldn't understand." Moreover, as participants moved outside the Cambridge and Greater-Boston areas, they reported that nobody cared about the Extension School qualifier. Even if they did use their "just Extension School" phrase, the response from others was usually: "So, it's still Harvard." As Beatrice observed: "You go outside of Massachusetts or Boston and you say Harvard and people treat you like you've seen God."

All the participants who directly confronted their stigmatized Extension School graduate identity reported that it was the open-enrollment aspect of the degree that required them to add the qualifiers. They also added that affirming response from others about their Extension School degree never felt too validating, for they were never sure if the person was just humbling them privately, rather than publicly. As Sara observed:

> Well, it would be nice to say that I have a degree from Harvard, but you always have to say that you did it at Extension School and there are quite different responses to that. "Oh, that's open-enrollment; it's not really Harvard." Or some people are, "Oh great you must have been working then as well." It depends on who you are talking with and how much they know about the program. Sometimes when you take classes in the evening people tend think, "Oh you're just buying the degree." But even when people compliment you on doing it while working, you never know if they truly mean it.

Goffman (1963) offers: "The uncertainty arises not merely from the stigmatized individual's not knowing in which of several categories he will be placed, but also where the placement is favorable, from his knowing in their hearts the others may be defining him in terms of his stigma" (p. 144).

Participants who remained in a state of amazement and insecurity, as well as the participants who felt annoyance and frustration, experienced "identity ambivalence" (Goffman, 1963, p. 107) as a result of their HES-graduate stigma. Or, as Bourdieu (1999) would term, "positional suffering":

> Patrick Suskind's play *The Double Bass* presents an especially striking image of how painfully the social world may be experienced by people who, like the bass player in the orchestra, occupy an inferior, obscure position in a prestigious and privileged universe. The experience is no doubt all the more painful when the universe in which they participate just enough to feel their relatively low standing, is higher in social space overall. (p. 4)

The participants felt like "outcasts on the inside" (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 425), for they were "occupying an inferior, obscure position [Extension School graduate] in a prestigious and privilege universe [Harvard University]." Being HES graduates exacerbated the stigmatized feeling of the scarlet letter A: adult student, hence, they felt that society added an additional letter: the scarlet letter E, for Extension School graduate.

b. Conclusion to Wendy's learning career

After years of doing qualitative research with working-class college students, London (1992) found that some "cherish upward mobility, others are wary of it, and still others see it as incidental to other goals" (p. 7). The participants in my study were nearly evenly divided among these three categories, and the case studies themselves represent the divide. Carl was "wary" of upward mobility and found a way to combine his academic ambitions with his

working-class identity. Beatrice "viewed it as incidental to other goals," for she was far more interested in achieving professional success. Wendy, perhaps more than any other participant, "cherished" it. It represented the movement from one class to another; in fact, it was a jump from the working class straight to the upper class with yacht club privileges and a Teddy Roosevelt stuffed bear.

But cherishing the move to the upper class was not without its tensions, for Wendy's narrative is about the ongoing and uncomfortable process of "leaving off and trying on, the shedding of one social identity and the acquisition of another" (London, 1992, p. 8). London explains that working-class students who are in this in-between stage "experimented with displays of cultural symbols and artifacts that are associated with the new status group" (1992, p. 8). Wendy's decision to join the Boston and New York City Harvard Clubs and the alumni network are examples of her status-group experimentation. Additionally, Wendy still looked to others to gauge her identity change. Indeed, it was only when other people (e.g., smart bosses, a career counselor, and a graduate school admission committee) told her that she was worthy of this new identity that she believed it. Finally, by opting for graduate school (and incurring a large amount of debt), Wendy remained unsure if there was any real financial power behind her Harvard degree and her new class status.

In sum, Wendy's feelings of "marginality and deprivation" (Hopper & Osborn, 1975) were no longer related to her low station in life in terms of her occupation and education, but were related to her quandary about how to manage her higher station, that is, how to manage her Harvard-graduate identity. She was trying to "be somebody" (Luttrell, 1997), an upper-class, Harvard-graduate somebody. We can only hope that she finds a successful and rewarding job in publishing. If not, as Bourdieu (1999) warns, the failure she may feel could be even more intense than if she hadn't tried at all, for it will appear to her that she was

given all the opportunity in the world to succeed, and she still failed. The message then will be: "you had your chance" (p. 422). For those at the lower rungs of the ladder, using second-chance educational programs to change the "scale" (Bateson, 1989) of their lives is a risky business. Bourdieu (1999) predicts that in the end the "school system increasingly will seem like a mirage, the source of an immense, collective disappointment, a promised land which, like the horizon, recedes as one moves toward it" (p. 423). As Wendy herself said in our initial interviews, "there are a lot of unanswered questions coming up over the horizon."

A year after our initial interviews, I gave Wendy a call. She was still struggling with her Harvard alumnus identity. She told me that employers' reactions to her Harvard degree ran the gamut from disparaging, "You Harvard graduates don't think you need to work hard for living" to being overly impressed, "You wouldn't want this job, for you would be too bored given your intellect." She hoped all this would change once she had the master's degree and could leave temp work behind. At age 40, she was on the brink of graduating with her master's degree in publishing. Wendy was unsure that she would find a rewarding, well-paying job in publishing, but she was determined to give it try. She was networking daily, but reported to me that those in the field weren't impressed by the master's degree and communicated to her that the degree wasn't necessary. She was told that to succeed in publishing you have to work your way up from the file room (most likely at age 21, freshly minted from Wellesley or Harvard College, not 40, and freshly minted from HES or a master's degree from NYU) to the corner office; there were no mid-level entry points for those who came late to the game with no prior experience in the field. As Bourdieu (1999) predicted, her impending master's degree was a source of some disappointment.

Wendy tried to off set her disappointment and discouragement with optimism. She stated that with her Harvard undergraduate degree and her New York University master's

degree she was sure she would find fulfilling and financially satisfying employment, even if it wasn't in publishing. She did, however, wondered out loud to me: "If I was younger, if I had been brought in a family that encouraged education, it would have probably worked out for me in publishing, but now, I don't know... if only...if only we all were middle class [loud laughter]." Like Beatrice and Carl, Wendy felt like an "outcast on the inside" (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 425). She summed up immense courage to penetrate the ivy-clad walls of academia, and knuckled down and did the work in order to "win respect from the social order" (Sennett & Cobb, 1972, p. 135), but she now wondered: will it be enough?

Chapter VI. Implications: The Meaning of This Particular Landscape

> The first task is to particularize this profoundly a-historical landscape. And once the landscape is detailed and historicized in this way, the urgent need becomes to find a way of theorizing the result of such difference and particularly. Not in order to find a description that can be universally applied (the point is *not* to say that all working-class childhoods are the same, nor that the experience of them produces unique psychic structures). But so that the people in exile may start to use the autobiographical "I," and tell the stories of their life.
>
> Carolyn Kay Steedman (1986), *Landscape for a Good Woman*

While writer and scholar of the working-class experience, Carolyn Steedman (1986), is referring to memoir writing, I feel her words are an apt description of most qualitative research studies, and certainly, of this one. Findings from qualitative research are the result of locating ways to theorize the particular, and not an attempt to universalize human experience. The landscape of this qualitative study is the life stories of 18 working-class adults and their learning careers at the Harvard Extension School (HES). To illustrate the implications of this landscape, I offer a composite life story of a "typical" research participant. Then I discuss the significance of emerging meaning-making themes from all of my participants' stories, and offer suggestions for future research that might add not only to my own, but to the broad range of pervious studies in which my own is grounded (discussion in Chapter II).

A. Typical Participant

It is likely that the typical participant came from a single-parent home, and would characterize her childhood as independent. Her independent, self-sufficient childhood developed into an independent, "active" (London, Wenker, & Hagstrom, 1963) adulthood where discouraging or ambivalent family messages about a college education were ignored.

Although she never performed well in high school and dropped out of college once or twice before coming to HES, she felt bright; she felt she "caught onto things quicker than other people did[59]." She attributed her poor performance in secondary school not to a lack of ability, but to limited parental support, while her need to drop out of college was due to finances. Through her early work experiences (starting at age 14), as well as a family narrative that supported economic independence, she developed a strong work ethic, which led to an active, self-supporting work life. She never had trouble finding, keeping, or succeeding at work. But she felt this wasn't enough.

As she progressed through adulthood, she experienced growing feelings of "marginality and deprivation" (Hopper & Osborn, 1975) around her station in life. Her occupation or level-of-education was no longer acceptable. While other adults who experienced similar feelings might assume that change was impossible, she had the courage "to break with the notion of the taken-for-granted" (Greene, 1990, p. 37) and imagine different possibilities. Once she decided to return to school as an adult in her late thirties or early forties, not just any local adult education program would do. She eschewed the more common working-class student priorities of comfort, belonging, and familiarity in a university (Gallacher, Crossan, Field, & Merrill, 2002; Luttrell, 1997; Reay, 2002), in favor of prestige and academic rigor. She wanted to attend an adult education program that could finally confirm her brightness and quell mounting internal feelings of marginality and deprivation. She wanted Harvard, an institution that had the reputation for being the best and for recruiting the best and the brightest.

When she entered HES, she was a single adult with no children. She had time, after her full workday, to commit to academics. But once she began her education, she had little

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[59] Quotes without references are my participants' exact words.

time for anything but work and school and excluded all semblance of a "normal biography" (Reay, Ball, & David, 2002, p. 10) that included a social and family life. At HES she felt "comfortable," for it wasn't snobby. The faculty "wanted to be there" and "didn't talk down to her." Most important, the faculty treated her as a member of an intellectual community; they put her "culturally at ease as a learner" (Gallacher, Crossan, Field, & Merrill, 2002, p. 505). She also felt comfortable because she found "people like her": bright working-class people who knew they deserved a second chance. While she was able to risk discomfort or a sense of not belonging to begin her learning career at HES, she needed to feel comfortable and to know that she belonged in order to stay and finish her undergraduate degree.

Through her learning career at HES, she was able to recover from a "troubled" (Reay, 2002, p. 407) academic history. She became increasingly committed to academic work due to the academically rich "college atmosphere" (Graham & Long, 1998; Kuh, 1992; Terenzini, Pascarella, & Blimling, 1996) of Harvard University where intellectuals were all around her and the other students were "serious" about academic work. She had an "as if" (Greene, 1990) experience at HES, "as if" she were already a "serious" intellectual too. While the college atmosphere was critical to her academic focus and improved school performance, she was also more desperate to fit in and succeed this time around. Indeed, her "determination to succeed was matched only by her fear of failure" (Hopper & Osborn, 1975, p. 113).

Surprisingly, the liberal arts curriculum made it *easier* to invest her limited time and money in her academic work because it was "just for her." She replaced the needs of the marketplace, with scholarly interests and expanded her worker-self identity to include an intellectual self. She gained self-confidence, came to relish the theoretical side of learning, and found an academic passion. She experienced a "reconstruction of social identity"

(Gallacher, Crossan, Field, & Merrill, 2002, p. 505), where academic desires and ambitions moved from the margin to the center of her life. She imagined academic opportunities (e.g., applying to graduate schools at Harvard) that "never in a million years" would she have dreamed possible. However, due to her working-class background and the stigma of being an open-enrollment adult student at Harvard, publicly claiming an intellectual identity was no easy task.

While inner feelings of confidence, accomplishment, and academic ability were achieved through her learning career at HES, her self-worth validation from the outside world— "becoming somebody" (Luttrell, 1997; Reay, 2002)— lived on shifting ground. In Bourdieu's (1999) words, she experienced "positional suffering" (p. 4) due to the adult student stigma in general, and the Harvard Extension School student stigma in particular. Some people in her relationship circle were amazed and impressed that she had the stamina to work and go to school, at Harvard no less. Many others, however, were disrespectful and said to her: "Anyone can do that" and "You're not a real Harvard student." The humbling and self-worth identity threats from others required her to take a cautious public stance regarding her adult education. She needed to adopt a stigma management strategy (Goffman, 1963) in order to control information about herself. Indeed, her decisions regarding whether or not to share details about her student status depended on "who(m) she was talking to." She crafted different responses depending on her audience, for she didn't want people making too big a deal out of her HES degree, nor did she want them discrediting her academic achievements. Her Harvard-student identity remained ambivalent (Goffman, 1963) at best. The ambivalence was compounded by her desire to remain silent about her academic interests, for she was fearful of others' responses to her, a working-class person, asserting an intellectual identity.

Regardless, upon earning her degree she felt compelled to re-design her life to match the "scale" (Bateson, 1989, p. 10) of her newly-minted Harvard degree. The "entire world was now open" to her. But her life didn't change in the ways that she had hoped, at least not right away. The initial euphoria of believing that her Harvard degree offered her unlimited upward mobility began to diminish. Maybe her life hadn't changed at all; she was at a crossroads. Her next step was to realign her aspirations so that they were more commensurate with her age, work experience, and open-enrollment degree. If she were more financially secure, she might have taken a big leap, turn her back on socially accepted notions of age appropriate behavior and necessary achievement early in life, and applied to law school or started her own business. More likely, she decided that it was too financially risky to make a dramatic professional change, so she focused on her intellectual life by enrolling in graduate-level course work at HES. Or she applied to a "regular" part-time graduate school to prepare for a career that could meld her newly found academic passion (such as fine arts, linguistics, or psychology) with an attainable mid-level profession. If asked, she would admit that an influential part of her decision to earn a master's degree was to overwrite her open-enrollment ("back door"), stigmatized, adult-student identity with that of a selective admission ("front door"), well-regarded, graduate-student identity. At the onset of her learning career at HES, she assumed the undergraduate degree was going to be enough, but it turned out to be unsatisfactory. She wanted another degree, more validation, and a profession that was commensurate with her "warmed up" (Deli, 2001) expectations about what she could and should have out of life.

In the end, she is left with contradictory emotions. She "loved" her learning career at HES and "it was the best thing she ever did." It gave her confidence and she felt better about herself. However, she's more keenly aware than ever before that the rules of self-

worth and upward mobility are stacked against those who come late to the game and enter through a "back door." She wonders, as Freeborn (2000) concludes, whether "educating [her]self out of [her] own class, but doing it at an age where assimilating into the educated class is not realistic, not even entirely desirable, means that [she] becomes forever, neither flesh nor fowl" (p. 10). She had summoned immense courage to penetrate the ivy-clad walls of academia, and knuckled down and did the work in order to "win respect from the social order" (Sennett & Cobb, 1972, p. 135), but she now wonders if it was enough— perhaps it wasn't *selective* enough. She still looks to cross that "magic barrier beyond which she will receive the respect of 'anyone in America' " (Sennett & Cobb, 1972, p. 165). She's gained entrance to an Ivy-League graduate world but because of her working-class upbringing she doesn't belong emotionally and because of the program's open-enrollment, non-selective admissions policy she doesn't belong socially (and perhaps economically). She remains, in some respects, an "outcast on the inside" (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 425).

What can we learn from this "typical" story that can add to our understandings of the intersection of adult education, liberal arts learning, and working-class concerns?

B. Emerging Themes with Suggestions for Future Research

1. Adult Education

a. Motivation to return to school

Nearly a century of survey data has concluded time and time again that adults return to school for "employment-related reasons" (Merriam & Caffarell, 1999, p. 71). But what does this mean, exactly? The College Board recently published the most comprehensive nationwide study (80,000 households) of adult college students in 20 years. These researchers concluded that "employment-related" means "gaining new competencies to advance or change careers, and to stay current in their fields" (College Board, 2000, p. 1). It appears

then that adult students are returning to school to receive job training. While the belief that adults return to school for job training is the story that lives in the world, it did not live in this study. I can confidently state that none of the 18 adult women and men came to HES to receive job training. As Jeff, a 43-year old software engineer, who returned to HES to study literature, said: "Not too many people are getting job training by learning Shakespeare." The participants in this study returned to school for employment-*related* and intellectually-*related* reasons, with the emphasis on the relatedness to self-worth validation. Seven of the participants were interested in gaining credentials for higher-level jobs, but three participants felt morally compelled to return to school because they already held jobs that required a higher education. Eight felt bright, but uneducated in their own eyes, and most important, in the eyes of others. Even the seven who came for credentials, reported intellectually-*related* reasons to return to school, for example, to learn everything that "they have missed out on" or, in Sue's words, to learn all the " 'ologies', such as, psychology, sociology, anthropology, and biology." They also came to Harvard to claim what was rightfully theirs: the "best" education their time and money could buy, and one that could finally confirm their innate brightness and propel them to middle-class status.

Indeed, like adult education research West (1996), I found that the motivation to return to school was part of a larger psychological, sociological, and intellectual endeavor, and it had less to do with job preparation than it did with making a professional and intellectual life that felt fragmented into one that felt whole. Returning to HES, "represented a space to revise a personal narrative as part of the process of rebuilding and constantly reshaping a life" (West, 1996, p. 154). It was also about my participants, as Luttrell (1997) discovered of the women in her study, earning "their badges of honor" (p. 126). The finding that the participants in this study returned to school for self-worth validation and identity re-

construction more than job training, along with West (1996) and Luttrell's (1997) similar findings about adult students, offers compelling narrative evidence that the job training conclusion drawn from check-off box survey data can "resemble the observation of a carnival through a keyhole" (Bertaux & Thompson, 1997, p. 6). The implication being that the field of adult education needs to heed West's (1995) warning and consider that without qualitative research the complexity of an experience, as well as "potential theoretical understandings are lost" (West, 1995, p. 152). When making policy and curriculum decisions that affect all adult students, I suggest that the field of adult education produce more qualitative research and refer to qualitative research already available, to gain a fuller, more sociological and psychological understandings about the motivation to return to school. The survey-based conclusions that adult students are only interested in job-training seems to me, and to other adult education critics (Cunningham, 1989, 1993; Einsiedel, 1998; Foley, 1998; Haughey, 1998; Heaney, 1996; Lauzon, 2000; Thompson, 1993; Welton, 1993), to dominate the field's decision-making process. The landscape of this study suggests that richer more complex stories about adults' decisions to return to school need to live in the world side by side with the more frequently told and quoted job-training stories.

Given the focus on self-worth and identity formation as the motivation for returning to school as demonstrated by this qualitative study and others, it seems important for adult educators to be sensitive to the personal meaning-making function of the return-to-school journey. Academic advisors and faculty members, in particular, may want to investigate ways to attend to the fragmented and fragile identities of adult students and expand their practices to focus more on the *related* side of the employment-*related* and intellectually-*related* reasons for returning to school, especially the self-worth issues that live at the center of any life "reshaping and rebuilding" (West, 1996, p. 154) process. Adult educators need to explore

avenues to boost adult students' self-esteem, validation, and sense of comfort and belonging, for these are the elements that I and other adult education researchers (Gallacher, Crossan, Field, & Merrill, 2002; Reay, Ball, & David, 2002; Reay, 2002) have found to put adults students "culturally at ease as learners" (Gallacher, Crossan, Field, & Merrill, 2002, p. 505).

But this can't be done at the expense of maintaining high academic standards and expectations. The participants in my study and the studies listed above made the connection between being treated as a member of an intellectual community and discovering or relocating their ability to produce high-level academic work. As educational respondent for National Public Radio, Claudio Sancehz (2004), states:

> Deans, counselors, and to an extent, faculty can be positive, too positive, so that students feel it is all a fraud.... When it comes to dealing with students of color and nontraditional students, you give them rigorous coursework, you help them negotiate obstacles, and you treat them like human beings. (p. 4)

Also, advisors and faculty need to consider that adult students pursuing undergraduate degrees may be facing stigmatization due to their age and open-enrollment status (discussed in more detail in section c); therefore, they should review their daily practices to ensure that they are not, even inadvertently, compounding humbling experiences that adult students may encounter from friends and family. Most important, I suggest that adult educators provide opportunities for adult students to voice their stigmatized feelings and help adult students find alternative, empowering responses to the internalize oppression that they may feel when attacked by others who say to them: "That's only night school; anyone can do that." As Granfield (1991) asked: "Given the legitimacy of the meritocratic ideology, is it any wonder that upwardly mobile working-class students choose not to directly confront the devaluation they experience?" (p. 346). Adult students need support from knowledgeable and respected others to help them understand that merit is a political term

and as open-enrollment students they not only stand on legitimate academic ground, but can claim directly, confidently, and publicly an unapologetic intellectual identity.

Finally, self-worth validation in the form of adult education must, as well, be considered a political occurrence. Luttrell (1997) presents adult educators with a critical dilemma to ponder: adult education is in the business of validating self-worth by awarding "badges of honor" (p. 126), but should it be? The participants came to adult education for validation— to feel better about themselves; most did. Most left feeling confident and intellectually engaged. Many left with education levels more commensurate with their aspirations and expectations. These are all valuable and worthwhile outcomes, but are they so worthwhile that we can disregard the implication that adult education is in the business of perpetuating the belief that self-worth is so tightly bound to academic credentials? Many of the participants in the study felt that it was not what they knew that was valued by the greater society, but what they were *certified* to know. Nor was it who they were, but who they were *certified* to be. Nearly thirty years ago, Illich and Verne (1976) concluded that the US has become a society of institutionalized lifelong learning founded on the fear that without constant certification self-worth via job security is impossible to attain. This fear that without constant retooling and legitimacy from higher education institutions one is unworthy benefits no one more than adult education providers: "Professional educators, through the institution of permanent education, succeed in convincing men [and women] of their permanent incompetence" (Illich & Verne, 1976, as cited in Halsey, Lauder, Brown, & Wells, 1997, p. 12).

It appears that the downside of adult education's democratic process of making degrees and certificates more accessible is that the marketplace can in turn demand degrees and certificates, and, most important, make more and more salary and job-level decisions

based on these certifications rather than on ability and performance. Adult education's role in diminishing the value of work experience by increasing the market value of certifications, and simultaneously diminishing the value of self-education (i.e., uncertified knowledge) by increasing higher education's role in awarding "badges of honor" (Luttrell, 1997, p. 126), remains an open and compelling moral dilemma to consider, not only for adult education, but higher education in general, and our society at large.

b. Value of open-enrollment adult education

The value of open-enrollment education for traditional and non-traditional-aged working-class students has been well-documented by educational researchers. For example, Lavin and Hyllegard (1996) found that during CUNY's open-enrollment period (1970s to 1980s), working-class students earned bachelor degrees, and even graduate degrees, at much higher rates than the national average, and certainly at much higher rates than under the restrictive-admission policy. Cohen (1998) also found that working-class adult students admitted under less stringent admission standards to Smith College through the Ada Comstock scholars program, consistently out-performed the traditional-aged Smith College students. Their research raises questions about the accepted belief that working-class students without a proven record of academic performance in high school and high SAT scores won't perform well at college. My findings raise similar questions. The participants in this study were able to recover from "troubled" (Reay, 2002, p. 407) academic histories and claim an academically successful self, so much so that further education was the next step for the participants with eight out of the 18 participants in graduate school at the time of the study, and one other in the process of applying. It seems that if given the opportunity to be judged solely on their performance in open-enrollment college courses rather than on their high school grades and standardized test scores, working-class students with limited

"proven" academic ability early in life can succeed in four-year higher education institutions. They can prevail if the system lets them by "warming up" (Deli, 2001) rather than "cooling down" (Clark, 1960) their academic aspirations. The participants were in agreement that HES "warmed them up" and a number of them declared: "There is something about this place that made me aim higher."

The participants reported that this place, Harvard was able to "warm up" their academic aspirations because it provided access to an elite college campus, with its historic architecture, Nobel prizewinning scholars, intellectual faculty who "wanted to be there" and didn't "talk down" to them, "serious" students who "kept the level up." Perhaps, most important, HES offered a liberal arts curriculum that replaced needs of the marketplace with academic goals and exerted an intellectual influence that supported the notion that graduate school was their logical next step. Additionally, this place Harvard Extension School, through its open-enrollment policy, evening courses, affordable tuition, and comfortable, not snobby atmosphere sent the message to the participants that this program was designed for people like them, that is, bright, working-class adults deserving of a second chance. As Bourdieu (1990) determined: "Agents shape their aspirations according to concrete indices of the accessible and the inaccessible, of what is and is not 'for us' " (p. 64). It seems that for these participants, HES was an ideal balance of high academic expectations and comfort, as well as, perhaps, "obligation" (Nisan, 1990) to perform well, given their open-access to Harvard— in essence HES gave them the opportunity to play the iconic role of Harvard students. As C.Wright Mills (1959) wrote:

> The life of an individual cannot be adequately understood without reference to the institutions within which his biography is enacted. For this biography records the acquiring, dropping and modifying, and in a very intimate way moving from one role to another...Much of human life consists of playing such roles within specific institutions. (p. 161)

Conversely, Dougherty (1987), as well as other class-reproduction theorists (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Clark, 1960; Karabel, 1972; London; 1978; Zwerling, 1976), points out that there is something about community colleges that makes students aim lower and sends the message that community college is *only* for us (i.e., the poor and working class). He reports that often in community college there is a lack of seriousness from the students, the faculty tend to talk down to students, and the students believe that faculty don't want to be there: "The process sets up a vicious circle; students and faculty each find that their prejudices toward the other are powerfully confirmed" (p. 95). Additionally, Dougherty suggests that community colleges create an anti-intellectual atmosphere and wield "a vocational influence" by "spreading before students a vast array of attractively packaged vocational programs" (p. 96). As noted above, the exact opposite elements, including serious students, faculty members who wanted to be there and didn't talk down to them, and a liberal arts curriculum that wielded an intellectual influence, were critical to my participants' sense of comfort and heightened academic aspirations.

My study, however, was an exploratory expedition. More research is needed to identify the institutional conditions[60] and student attributes[61] that can elevate working-class students' academic aspirations. This suggestion for future research is urgently needed because it is at community colleges, not Harvard, that the majority of adult, working-class students will be educated.

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[60] See Graham and Long (1998), Kuh (1992), Terenzini, Pascarella, and Blimling (1996), and Tinto's (1975) research on the affects of the "college atmosphere" on students' academic aspirations.

[61] But it is important to remember that these participants already felt bright and were independent, risk takers, who, for the most part, were looking to leave their working-class backgrounds, at least in terms of their education, behind. Michael Goldstein (1974) found that working-class freshman at Brown University mirrored the middle-class freshman in terms of performance, major choice, career interest, hence he concluded that "it appears that pre-selection factors as opposed to the university experience itself are responsible for Brown's role as a mobility channel for working-class students" (p. 505). The college atmosphere didn't change the students' attitudes or behaviors, the university seemed to attract working-class students who were already committed to the value of an elite liberal arts education.

c. Hidden injury of open-enrollment adult education

While this research landscape emphasized the heightened academic aspirations and the intellectual atmosphere of Harvard's open-enrollment program, the research also suggests that open-enrollment programs have negative ramifications. Adult education researchers Benshoff and Lewis (1992) reported that adult students can face limited social acceptability because they are engaged in education past the "typical" age range for undergraduate learning. While not much has been reported in the literature since then, participants in this study felt the stigma of being out of sync with "ideal norms" (Neugarten, 1975 p. 27) of the appropriate age to earn an undergraduate degree. More important, the majority of participants felt stigmatized— experiencing a lack of respect and regard from others (Goffman, 1963)— because they attended an open-enrollment program. The open-enrollment policy that created the opportunity to return to school and provided the comfort to stay to finally finish their undergraduate degrees ultimately became a cross that the participants had to bear— the scarlet letter A, for adult student.

It appeared to many participants that higher education in the US is a rigid, tightly controlled social stratification mechanism designed to sort the wheat from chaff through early academic achievement in secondary school and standardized tests scores. Because the participants in this study bypassed these sorting mechanisms and found an alternative route to an elite education, they were humbled into place by others in an effort to maintain the social order: "Anyone can do that." It seemed to them that academic ability is not measured by performance in the classroom, but by pre-performance through a selective-admission process that ensures that only a few are allowed entrance. As Sennett and Cobb (1972) conclude:

> Calculations of ability create an image of a few individuals standing out from the masses, that to be an individual by virtue of ability is to have the right to transcend one's social origins. These are the basic suppositions of a society that produces feelings of powerlessness and inadequacy in the lives of the working class. (p. 62)

The message sent to HES adult working-class students was that they didn't have the "right" to transcend their social origins because of their age and their open-enrollment education. This message or "hidden injury" (Sennett & Cobb, 1972) of adult education also suggests that the "cooling down" (Clark, 1960) of academic and upward mobility aspirations is not solely the product of community colleges as Clark had found, but individuals— even loved ones— will also "cool down" working-class adult students' aspirations, an attitude that also serves to maintain the social order.

My research suggests that adult students may be living with painful stigmas due to age and open-enrollment status. It is, as Bourdieu (1999) concludes, a "positional suffering" (p. 4). While the suffering is relative and context specific, it is a form of suffering nonetheless, and Bourdieu warns against compounding the marginal feelings with dismissive comments such as: "You really don't have anything to complain about" or "You could be worse off, you know" (p. 4). I fear that this has been the private, if not the public response of many adult educators not wishing to face the second-class stigma of adult education, the rigidity of the social selection/social control aspect of higher education that can be contingent on "achievement early in life when the influences of parentage, of background culture, and class are at the highest and most explicit" (Lemann, 1999, p. 345), and most important, their own culpability in students' suffering. The implication is that we need more psychosocial research on the adult student experience, for, currently, the field of adult education appears to be curiously silent about the stigmas adult students face from their age and open-enrollment status.

With more research, adult educators will be in a better position to question the societal values that lie behind words such as "ability" and "merit." For example, what exactly is our society using SAT scores and early school performance to sift for? Is it merit, or is it the capacity to present the benefits of privilege and class standing? When someone performs well in school as an adult, but not as a child, why do we tend to believe that the criterion for judging her performance has been lowered: "It's only night school." Why do we not assume that the student's ability has risen after she found a "safe haven" (Zwerling, 1992, p. 52) from negative influences of her childhood socioeconomic status? These questions and many more need to be asked by adult education professionals and offered into public debate, rather than, what appears to me to be, the current *status quo* of silence about the social control function of higher education, the stigmatization of adult students, and the commonly accepted attitude toward ability that London, Wenkert, and Hagstrom (1963) attempted to *refute* forty years ago: "Intellectual ability is demonstrated early in life— if it doesn't appear then, it will never appear" (p. 149).

2. Liberal arts learning

All the participants in the study highly valued their liberal arts education. Even those who were initially interested in a professional degree were thankful that a liberal curriculum was all that the Extension School offered. The participants enjoyed exploring a variety of subjects, rather than simply choosing courses based on market value. Because of the liberal arts curriculum, they were able to replace demands of the marketplace with their own know or discovered academic passions; they complemented their worker self with an intellectual self. Indeed, one the greatest gifts of a liberal arts program, I believe, is that it provides an opportunity for working-class adults to "get onto something" (Percy, as cited in Greene, 1990, p. 40) or to have "something in [their] mind besides the everyday" (Horsman, 1990)

that is "just for them" and has nothing whatsoever to do with work. Whether it was Sanskrit, history of science, physics, medieval history, English literature, or gender studies, it was the exploration of academic (rather than vocational) disciplines that became the "something" that, even in limited ways, provided, in one of my participant's words an "oasis from learn-to-earn" and the opportunity to claim intellectual identities. Indeed, it was the liberal arts curriculum that exerted an intellectual influence on the participants (rather than the anti-intellectual vocational influence that Dougherty (1987) found in community colleges) to such an extent that most participants considered graduate school as the next step in order to meld their newly found academic passions with employment prospects. I assert from my research that regardless of the mounting job-related survey data, adult liberal arts program shouldn't be dwindling, but expanding, for once adults participate in liberal arts program they appreciate their value and working-class adults need more, not fewer opportunities to complement their worker self with an intellectual self.

Additionally, many participants made the connection from liberal arts learning to "giving back." It appears that gaining access to an elite education or gaining "access to what has previously been denied" (Reay, 2002, p. 402) inspired the desire to help others. As Wendy stated: "I don't think that you can come through here and eat at the buffet, and not turn around to help feed someone else." As Carl said: "I am drawn to lift others up" and as Beatrice stated: "It was really good for me to realize that there is more to life than making money, and although we all say that, we need to mean it. I mean it." Cohen (1998), Gallacher, Crossan, Field, and Merrill (2002), and Reay (2002) found similarly that working-class adults often return to college out of an interest to give back, particularly to those from their own working-class communities. Indeed, Cohen (1998) reported that one of the implications of her research was that adult liberal arts program shouldn't be dwindling, but

expanding, for working-class adults are far more interested in public service than their middle-class counterparts, and working-class intellectual capital is needed in working-class and poor communities. I couldn't agree more.

Early 20th century adult educators and modern day adult liberal arts education advocates (e.g., Taylor, Rockhill, & Fieldhouse, 1985) highlighted in the Literature Review seemed to be right: adult liberal arts education can stem the tide of professional education. Most important, it can inspire working-class adult students to pursue intellectual interests and work toward the public good. However, social change adult educators highlighted in the Literature Review (e.g., Thompson, 1980, 1982) may well have been right as well: adult liberal arts education didn't inspire critical, anti-capitalistic thinking. The participants in my study made limited connections to far-reaching social-change goals, particularly in the form of questioning the *status quo* of capitalism.

Social change educator and Workers Party political leader Gramsci's (1999) theories appear to live on the common ground between adult liberal arts education advocates and social change educators. He believed that it was essential for the working class to have the experience of learning for no particular end before embarking on education for professional or even political goals. Gramsci wrote fondly of his learning career where all students learned Latin and Greek grammar for no particular end except "to be themselves and know themselves consciously" (p. 37). In the early 20th century, Gramsci knew that Latin and Greek were impractical disciplines in the modern world and must be replaced, but he lamented the difficulty of finding equivalents. Perhaps in our learn-to-earn climate, adult liberal arts education is the apt replacement, but, my work would suggest, not in its current form. My study suggest that adult liberal arts education has the potential to support the development of "organic intellectuals" (Gramsci, 1999)— like Carl in this study— where

work, school, and politics can coexist and be mutually nourished to facilitate positive social change for the working class, but only if— and this is a big if— the adult liberal arts curriculum is infused with a class-consciousness by offering more courses in working-class history, literature, and politics.

The liberal arts canon has neglected working-class studies for too long. Van Galen (2000), a multicultural educator, concludes: "schools in the United States rarely teach labor history or working-class literature.... [Moreover] it is entirely possible for students to complete all their formal schooling through the university level without ever encountering serious analysis of social class" (p. 8). This must change. Members of the working class need to see themselves reflected in the canon, not to simply right an injustice, but to inspire social change. I believe that working-class studies can promote critical thinking and perhaps social change because the participants in my study often pointed to women's studies and African-American studies as their most memorable courses, ones that required them to reflect on themselves and question the hidden and unfair power structures that govern the world. In fact, Beatrice was so inspired by her women's studies class that she switched careers to offer her financial talent to a nonprofit organization that supports girls at risk.

In addition to stimulating critical reflection and providing a vehicle for social change, working-class studies could help adult working-class students, like the participants in my study, identify working-class role models to help them come out of the closet and publicly claim a working-class intellectual identity. Working-class intellectuals have a rich, yet forgotten history in this country (and around the world), and sharing information about this history and present circumstances of the working-class can help make working class and intellectual identities compatible. Finally, adult working-class students need critical theory

(e.g. the theoretical work of Marcuse, Fromm, and Habermas) to inspire larger social change

goals, and opportunities to question the *status quo* of capitalism.

3. Working-class concerns

a. Educational access and upward mobility

As stated in the Introduction, much has been written about how the standard

academic hurdles (high tuition with limited financial aid, necessity of a high GPA, a high

SAT score, and exemplary [of a certain genre] letters of recommendation) are used by

traditional higher educational institutions to track working-class students away from four-

year bachelor of liberal arts programs toward two-year vocational community colleges

(Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Hassan & Reynolds, 1987; Brint & Karabel, 1989; Karen, 1991;

Shaw & London, 1995; Lavin & Hyllegard, 1996; Levine & Nidiffer, 1996; Lemann, 1999;

Soliday, 1999). As already noted, critical theorist Ira Shor (1987), a leading investigator of the

tracking system, places hope in adult liberal arts education, for he believes that it presents an

alternative for adult working-class students:

> Many working adults who could not afford the time or money for full-time
> attendance will now find themselves able to add academic study space to their lives.
> This can lead to unpredictable critical and creative growth on an even larger scale
> than facilitated through full-time matriculation on a two-year campus. Because
> schooling through adult education makes smaller demands on your time and money,
> and because it is a form of study less ruled by careerism, you can get into the work
> with less anxiety, less vocational interference of thought, and more voluntary
> enthusiasm. [Adult education] provides more opportunities for intellectual growth.
> (Shor, 1987, p. 39-40)

One of the implications of this study is that Shor's hope is justified. Open-enrollment adult

education programs at universities don't track students away, but toward a four-year, elite,

liberal arts education, and these programs can offer "unpredictable critical and creative

growth" in terms of working class adult students claiming academic and intellectual selves.

But what about educating students for better jobs? Well, the jury is still out, because so many (nearly half) participants were in graduate school at the time of the study. However, Kevin, the Haitian-American student from Queens, is an upwardly mobile success story. Before HES, Kevin worked as licensed practical nurse and then a low-level office worker. Upon earning his HES degree, he moved back to New York City and found a high-level position in a financial firm, making enough money in his first year to pay off his mother's house. He concluded that this program "did nothing but lift me up."

Beth, Tom, Gale, Maureen, Jeff, and Brenda all, fairly happily, continued in their previous positions. Tom and Jeff have upper-level jobs in business, while Gale and Maureen, who hold lower-level office jobs, are pursuing master's degrees at HES. In terms of salary, Beatrice and Carl did not find higher-level jobs than those they had before their degree, but they are in more rewarding positions as far as independent work and public service. Jane, Lisa, Jean, Sue, Wendy, Silvia, Sara were all in graduate degree programs in an effort to achieve professional jobs in publishing, psychology, library science, and museum studies. Barbara was retired, and Cheryl started her own business. It appears that the program offered the highest immediate upward mobility to the participant just beyond traditional-college age, who took his degree to another state, where it is possible that the open-enrollment program at Harvard had less of a stigmatizing effect. Most, if they wanted upward mobility at all, needed to go to graduate to become eligible for careers more commensurate with their "warmed up" (Deli, 2001) professional expectations and to mitigate against the stigma of an open-enrollment program. Or they had to come to terms with the fact that they were certified "late" in life, so they adjusted their expectations to be more commensurate with their age.

My research was not designed as a study to learn the economic outcomes of adult education degrees; but the participants' narratives about their post-graduation lives indicate that there is much more to understand, particularly qualitatively, about adult students' upward mobility and how adult students contend with the stigma of age and open-enrollment ("back door") undergraduate degrees when looking for employment. It appears from my research that adult education was more about self-worth validation than upward mobility and that, for the most part, was acceptable to the participants. However, my research also suggests that the "cooling down" (Clark, 1960) of academic and upward mobility aspirations is not solely the product of community colleges and judgmental individuals close to adult students, but that the marketplace employs its own tactics to maintain the social order. More research is needed on the socioeconomic forces that maintain the social order. Most outcome research from the field of adult education tends to focus on post-graduation reflection about the university experience (see Donaldson & Graham, 1999 for a review of the literature), rather than post-graduation careers and satisfaction with upward mobility. Employment outcome research on adult students is needed, for the field of adult education has neglected this area of research for too long, and the implications are far reaching in terms of understanding how the marketplace does or doesn't maintain class divisions.

b. The working-class subject

Terepocki (2000) reports that throughout the sociology of education literature the "working-class subject is either eulogized or despised" (p. 48). She also warns that working-class actions have been viewed through the "bourgeois gaze," that is, via the lens of "middle-class theories, discourses, and practices" (p. 18). Additionally, Steedman (1986) concludes that much has been written about the working class that assumes their "homogeneity" and

their "psychological simplicity" (p. 7). These dominant stories rob the working class of their individuality and complexity, and hence continue to produce stereotypical versions of working-class life. In an effort to work against the "bourgeois gaze" and "psychological simplicity," I offer the following themes from my landscape that were in direct opposition to much previous research on working-class students. First, five participants came from families who *supported* their children going to college. The participants framed the support in terms of a strong commitment from their parent(s) that college was their next step after high school, advice about the importance of being on the college-track in secondary school, and earning good grades. The common feature in all the encouraging messages was having a parent (usually a mother) who always dreamed of going to college, but missed out. For these parents, college wasn't a foreign world into which they would lose their children; it was their own childhood wish that they wanted to see lived out through their children.

In addition, while most parents sent discouraging or ambivalent messages about going to college, many were interested in their children's non-institutional self-education through reading and participation in cultural events. These findings suggest that the working class may split education into two parts: self-education and institutional learning. As London, Wenker, and Hagstrom (1963) found, the working class are interested in the "larger society," "sustained intellectual effort," and they "value higher education" (p. 149). What working-class adults are skeptical about is school, not out of a naiveté about the value of education, but because they are keenly aware that schools are middle-class institutions that reward middle-class cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1990).

The participants themselves were similarly aware that secondary schools in particular were middle-class institutions that certified middle-class cultural capital. Their notion of their own brightness spotlights their understanding of unfair class practices in schools. The

participants maintained the belief in their brightness in the face of school systems that were telling them they weren't. They had the ability to create "spaces of recovery" (Reay, 2002, p. 409) around their experience of school because they understood how their class background affected their poor school performance. They found the courage to conclude that it wasn't they, but the schools that were wrong about their academic ability. This finding provides evidence that the working class may not just be victims of "symbolic violence" (Bourdieu, 1990) or engage in "resistant" (Willis, 1977) practices that ensure stagnation or downward mobility, but that they can also find adaptive responses to class oppression that protects them from negative identity threats and eventually lead to their upward mobility, and even to their embracing their intellectual selves.

Moreover, I expected, in fact, I assumed, that the participants would recount stories about how they were apprehensive about the value and applicability of a liberal arts degree. My assumption was based on my own experience and the research literature, which is skewed in the direction of portraying adult students in general (Merriam & Caffarell, 1999), and working-class students in particular (Ochberg & Comeau, 2001; Roberts & Rosenwald, 2001; Shor, 1987, 1988) as not in favor of liberal arts education. This was not the case. Most participants wanted a liberal arts curriculum and had little doubt about its value. This finding may be due to the fact that nearly half of the participants returned to school for intellectual and self-validation reasons, most were avid readers, and some came from working-class families that valued self-education.

While most research on working-class families characterizes households as authoritarian (Carnahan & Cancro, 1982; Gos, 1995), this was not a dominant theme in these participants' families. The majority of the participants shared narratives that placed parents not as do-as-I-say dictators, but as advisors who wanted, and encouraged, their children to

decide their own fates and make their own way in the world. When viewing independence through a middle-class lens (or gaze) it can appear as an abandonment of parental responsibility, but in these cases it seemed to be just what the participants needed to ensure successful independent adulthoods. As Tom reported: "The way in which we were raised and the home life that we had stressed being responsible, being self-sufficient, being able to have a good solid work ethic, I guess you would call it. We [my siblings and I] were always prepared to really do something with our lives. Each of us has done that." This wasn't only true for Tom and his siblings; each of the participants in my study had really done something with their lives as well.

Finally, educational researchers have found working-class students to have a lower sense of self-efficacy (Hellman, 1996) and self-esteem (McGregor, Mayleben, Buzzanga, Davis, & Becher, 1991). The participants in the study did not fall into this category. They were active, risk-taking adults who assumed they were bright. They communicated narratives of self-efficacy, that is, the belief that they could perform well, which, as Silver, Smith, and Green (2001) conclude, "is a key construct for explaining academic achievement" (p. 849). A firm connection between the successful student-attribute of self-efficacy and working-class independent self-sufficient childhoods is an area of family systems research that was beyond the scope of the study. However, the narrative connections that participants made offered an insight into the academic achievement benefits of working-class home life, which is an alternative story to the prevalent one in the literature that claims working-class students come from deviant families that impeded their academic progress (Hsiao, 1992; Inman & Mayes, 1999).

This research landscape offers a number of alternative stories about working-class students that need to live in the world side by side the other, more prevalent, and perhaps

stereotypical, stories. It also highlights the importance of life-story research that includes

discussions about childhood, for the connection between an independent childhood and an

independent, active adulthood would never have been made without this form of inquiry. As

Ryan and Solberg (1996) conclude: "working models of self and other are developed based

on the attachment relationship with the primary caregiver... parent-child ties are not

terminated during adolescence or adulthood" (p. 86). Adult education research should

consider that who adult students are today is grounded in who they were as children, in and

out of school[62].

C. Conclusions from This Particular Landscape

There are a few implications from this study, which I believe are beyond contention.

First, Maxine Greene (1988) was right, working-class adult students who take a break from

the everyday world of work are like Melville's "water-gazers" sitting on the dock "imagining

something better and more liberating for themselves" (p. 9). The participants in my study

had the courage "to break with the notion of the taken-for-granted" (Greene, 1990, p. 37),

and imagine different possibilities. Second, Harold Bloom (1994) was wrong. Amidst the

demands of full-time work, the working class are interested and up to the task of learning the

more difficult pleasures that a liberal arts education can offer. Whether it was Sanskrit,

history of science, physics, medieval history, English literature, or gender studies, the

participants came to relish the theoretical side of learning, and found an academic passion.

They experienced a "reconstruction of social identity" (Gallacher, Crossan, Field, & Merrill,

2002, p. 505), where academic desires and ambitions moved from the margin to the center

of their lives. Finally, open-enrollment education remains a shibboleth— a class divider

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[62] See Luttrell (1997) for further support for understanding the ties between childhood lives and memories of school, and adult education.

between those who performed well academically early in life and those, without the advantages of middle-class cultural capital, who didn't.

It is my hope that this particular and historicized landscape has uncovered employment-*related* and intellectually-*related* self-worth rewards of adult liberal arts education for working-class adult students, as well as, the possible stigmas or "hidden injuries" (Sennett & Cobb, 1972). Perhaps fellow adult education researchers will pursue the future research opportunities that I have highlighted through my analysis of the emerging meaning-making themes of this exploratory study, particularly the non-job-training reasons to return to school, adult student stigmatization based on age and open-enrollment programs, upward mobility possibilities and obstacles and, most important, the role of liberal arts education in helping working-class adults construct intellectual selves to complement their worker selves. Perhaps those in "exile," that is, adult students pursuing not job training, but intellectual validation through adult education, "can now have the autobiographical 'I' " (Steedman, 1996, p. 16) to write and speak their own stories about their learning careers. For a working-class adult student interested in the "more difficult pleasures" to find a way to come out of hiding and publicly claim her intellectual "I" would be, for me, a most worthwhile outcome of this study. I want other adult, working-class students— like Maureen in my study— to find the courage to say out loud to friends, family, and strangers: "I'm an intellectual."

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APPENDIX A: The Invitation

April 15, 2002

Dear 2000-2001 ALB Graduate,

I am writing to invite you to participate in a study on your Bachelor of Liberal Arts (ALB) degree learning experience. Your participation will contribute to an expanded appreciation of the journeys adult, liberal arts students go through toward the completion of their degrees and the meaning the degrees (and the journeys!) hold for them upon completion.

In addition to being the Director of the Undergraduate Degree Program at the Harvard Extension School, I am also a PhD degree candidate at Lesley University. In my research I hope to illuminate some of the factors that contribute to adult students' decisions to choose liberal arts degree programs; how people close to students, i.e., family and friends understand and interpret that choice; and finally, the meaning that the liberal arts education holds for adult students in their post ALB lives.

If you are interested in participating, I will ask you (1) to complete a brief education, family, and socioeconomic background questionnaire that should take no more than 10 minutes and (2) participate in an audio-taped 90-minute interview. The questionnaire is important, because I am particularly interested in understanding the academic and personal experiences of liberal arts students from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds.

On the back of this letter is a one-page information sheet, which gives you more information about the research process. If you are willing to participate, please read this information and either call me at (617) 495-9413 *or* email me at spreadbu@hudce.harvard.edu to set up an appointment at your convenience.

Dean Shinagel has given his formal approval of this research project on behalf of the Harvard Extension School.

I thank you in advance for your participation in this study.

Sincerely,
Suzanne Spreadbury, EdM
Director, Undergraduate Degree Program

<u>Research Information Sheet</u>

Participation in this research is completely voluntary. You can end your participation in this study at any point and you can decline to answer any question. This study has no impact on your status as an Extension School alumnus/a or future Extension School student status. There are no known risks associated with participation apart from feelings that may be stimulated by answering the questions.

Your identity as a participant in this study will remain confidential. Completed questionnaires will be viewed solely by me and stored in a locked cabinet. Your name will not be used in the transcription of the 90-minute audio-taped interview. Identifiers will include, however, graduation from the Extension School, age, gender, race, and socioeconomic status. For example, printed findings may be phrased in the following ways, "Middle-class women between the ages of 35 and 40 who graduated from the Extension School undergraduate degree program were in agreement about the value of liberal arts degree." Or, "Mark (not his real name), a 45-year-old-white male from a working-class background had this to say about his Extension School liberal arts experience."

As it stands now your participation in the research will consist of completing the questionnaire and one 90-minute interview. After data analysis, I may ask for follow-up interviews with some participants. This is completely voluntary and you can decline the request for a follow-up interview at any time.

The material generated from the research will be shared with three faculty members who are on my research committee at Lesley University and will be used either directly or indirectly in my PhD dissertation. In addition, I will provide Dean Shinagel a summary of the research results. It is possible that I may publish the findings of the research, and the Extension School may also wish to publish the findings in the *Alumni Bulletin* or other related publications. Again, I want to assure you that names will not be used in any publications, nor will I share any names with Lesley faculty or Extension School administration.

Thank You!

APPENDIX B: The Consent Form

Dear XXXXXXXX,

      This is an invitation to participate in my research on what adult, liberal arts students go through toward the completion of their degrees and the meaning the degree holds for them upon completion.

      Participation in this research is completely voluntary. You can end your participation in this study at any point and you can decline to answer any question. This study has no impact on your status as an Extension School alumnus/a or future Extension School student status. There are no known risks associated with participation apart from feelings that may be stimulated by answering the questions.

      Your identity as a participant in this study will remain confidential. Completed questionnaires will be viewed solely by me and stored in a locked cabinet. Your name will not be used in the transcription of the 90-minute audio-tapped interview. Identifiers will include, however, graduation from the Extension School, age, gender, race, and socioeconomic status. For example, printed findings may be phrased in the following ways, "Middle-class women between the ages of 35 and 40 who graduated from the Extension School undergraduate degree program were in agreement about the value of liberal arts degree." Or, "Mark (not his real name), a 45-year-old-white male from a working-class background had this to say about his Extension School liberal arts experience."

      As it stands now your participation in the research will consist of completing the questionnaire and one 90-minute interview. After data analysis, I may ask for follow-up interviews with some participants. This is completely voluntary and you can decline the request for a follow-up interview at any time.

      The material generated from the research will be shared with three faculty members who are on my research committee at Lesley University and will be used either directly or indirectly in my PhD dissertation. In addition, I will provide Dean Shinagel a summary of the research results. It is possible that I may publish the findings of the research, and the Extension School may also wish to publish the findings in the *Alumni Bulletin* or other related publications. Again, I want to assure you that names will not be used in any publications, nor will I share any names with Lesley faculty or Extension School administration.

      Thank you for participating in this study.

<div align="right">

Sincerely,
Suzanne Spreadbury, EdM
Director, Undergraduate Degree Programs

</div>

I agree to participate in the proposed research on my ALB experience. I understand that I will be asked to complete a questionnaire and participate in a 90-minute audio-tapped interview. I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary and that I can withdraw at any time. I can also refuse to answer any question, should I wish.
Student Signature _____

APPENDIX C: The Questionnaire

Please answer as many of the following questions as possible. Feel free to not answer any question and to put not applicable (N/A) next to any question that does not apply to your situation. We can go over any questions about the questionnaire before the interview.

Demographic Information
First Name _____ Last Name _____
Current Occupation _____Age _____

Race/Ethnicity: Black, Non-Hispanic ☐, Native American ☐, Asian Pacific Islander ☐, Hispanic ☐, White, Non-Hispanic American ☐, other _____

What socioeconomic status do you most closely identify? working class ☐, middle class ☐, upper middle class ☐, or other _____

Family Background
Father's/Guardian's current or past primary occupation _____
Father's/Guardian's highest educational level _____
                (e.g., elementary, high school, some college, BA, master's, PHD)
If attended college, did he attend right after high school or as an adult student?_____
Mother's/Guardian's current or past primary occupation _____
Mother's/Guardian's highest educational level _____
                (e.g., elementary, high school, some college, BA, master's, PhD)
If attended college, did she attend right after high school or as an adult student?_____
Do you have siblings_____?
If yes, how many earned an undergraduate degree (e.g., 4 out of 5)?_____
How many attended earned their undergraduate degree right after high school? _____

Growing up, would you characterize your socioeconomic status as poor ☐, working class ☐, middle class ☐, upper middle class ☐, or other _____

Education Message
Growing up, did your parents'/guardians want you to attend college?_____

If so, did your parents'/guardians <u>verbally</u> support college attendance (e.g., "You should go to college." "College is important." "You're going to college.")? _____

Did your parents'/guardians <u>actively</u> support your college attendance (e.g., checking homework, impressing upon you the importance of grades/activities, helped with/understood importance of SATs, offered help with the college application process)?
_____

Did your parents'/guardians <u>financially</u> support college attendance (e.g., had a college education savings account or communicated to you they were financially prepared to help with tuition costs)? _____

Did your parents'/guardians support community college education? _____

Did your parents'/guardians support post-undergraduate education, e.g., master's degree? __,

Would you characterize the dominant message about the purpose of college from your parents/guardians as job preparation ☐, personal enrichment ☐, no dominant message ☐, or other _____

Would you characterize your parents'/guardians' reactions to a liberal arts education as not in favor of liberal arts education☐, mixed reactions ☐, or in favor ☐? Other _____

Participant Education Information
Did you attend college right after high school?_____
If so, did you your parents/guardians pay for none ☐, some ☐, or all ☐ of your tuition?

Participant Extension School Information
Did you work while you were an Extension student?__ If yes, full time ☐, or part time ☐?
Were you single ☐, married/partnered ☐, widowed ☐, divorced ☐, other? _____
Were you actively taking care of children? _____ If so, how many?_____
Did you receive financial aid?_____ If so, did you receive scholarships ☐, loans ☐, or both ☐?
Did you receive tuition reimbursement funds? _____
If so, were these funds critical to your decision to return to school? _____

Did the liberal arts curriculum play a significant role ☐, mixed role ☐, not significant role ☐ in your decision to purse the ALB at Extension?

Would you characterize parents'/guardians reactions to your decision to pursue a liberal arts degree as no reaction ☐, mixed reaction ☐, negative reaction ☐, or positive reaction ☐?

Siblings? No reaction ☐, mixed reaction ☐, negative reaction ☐, or positive reaction ☐

Significant Other? No reaction ☐, mixed reaction ☐, negative reaction ☐, positive reaction ☐

Friends? No reaction ☐, mixed reaction ☐, negative reaction ☐, or positive reaction ☐

Children? No reaction ☐, mixed reaction ☐, negative reaction ☐, or positive reaction ☐

Could you write down a few words that describe your feelings about earning a liberal arts degree?

_____

_____

_____

_____

THANK YOU!

APPENDIX D: Guiding Questions

Tell me the story about how you came to the Harvard Extension School?

> Explore:
> How did they envision the degree fitting into their immediate or future plans? Were they thinking about a particular career, personal enrichment or scholarly interest (e.g., studying a particular subject)?
> How did the liberal arts degree program play a role in the decision?
> Explore previous academic background (high school and past college experience). Explore family stories about the meaning of higher education. Also explore family/friends' reaction to liberal arts learning.

What was a typical day like in the middle of the semester?

> Explore:
> Was it hard or easy to keep going and keep up the motivation? What was the balancing act like (work, family, and school)? What were they getting out of it to keep the motivation up? What made it hard? Did they ever think about dropping out? Were there people that made it hard or easy?
> Explore how they did it all and what were the motivating factors.

Reflecting back on your undergraduate career at HES, are there learning experiences that stand out in your mind?

> Explore:
> Were there significant people (students or instructors) that contributed to their learning? Did they focus on a particular major and why? Was there something particular about liberal arts learning (e.g., the interdisciplinary aspects, critical thinking, break away from professional thinking) that made their experiences significant?

There are many definitions of liberal arts, what is your personal definition?

> Explore:
> Do they think it is job preparation? Do they view it as separate from that and if so in what ways? What would have been different if they decided to pursue business or a more job related education? What would have been lost? What would have been gained?

What are your future plans?

> Explore:
> In what ways, if any, did the liberal arts education influence this vision?

APPENDIX E: Participants' Attributes Table

	Gender	Age	Race	Occupation	Self-Identified Class Status Growing Up
Silvia	F	27	Hispanic	Secretary	Working Class
Jane	F	27	White	Office Assistant	Middle Class
Kevin	M	28	Haitian-American	Office Assistant	Working Class
Sue	F	28	White	Waitress	Working Class
Sara	F	32	White, International Student from the Netherlands	Retail Sales Person	Middle Class
Beatrice	F	37	African-American	Broker	Middle Class
Wendy	F	37	White	Secretary	Working Class
Brenda	F	37	White	Carpenter	Middle Class
Jeff	M	41	White	Computer Software Engineer	Middle Class
Lisa	F	44	White	Bill Collector	Working Class
Gale	F	45	White	Secretary	Poor
Tom	M	46	White	Vice Presidents of Sales	Working Class
Maureen	F	46	White	Computer Technician	Poor
Jean	F	46	White	House Assessor	Poor
Beth	F	48	White	Secretary	Working Class
Carl	M	56	White	Truck Driver	Working Class
Cheryl	F	65	White	Nurse	Working Class
Barbara	F	80	White	Retired Foreign Service Officer	Poor