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### First-Generation Etc: Agency, Inequality, Practice, Habitus, and Reflection

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***FIRST-GENERATION, ETC.***  
***AGENCY, INEQUALITY, PRACTICE, HABITUS, AND REFLECTION***

By: Jon Hunsberger

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of  
Bucknell University  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Masters of Science in Education

Approved:

  
Advisor, Sue Ellen Henry

  
Department Chairperson, Abe Feuerstein

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April, 2020

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## *Abstract*

This autoethnography explores the author's first two years transitioning and acclimating to a selective college as a first-generation student from a working-class background who attended rural public schools. Grounding itself in post-structural theory, this thesis first explores how the author experienced upward social mobility in contrast with structuralist theories that suggest he would reproduce his social-class origins. Second this thesis concludes that the relative degree of legitimization the author's agency received is itself informed by structural inequality and a world that advantages certain cultural embodiments, dispositions, actions, and ways of being over others. Agency is seldom explicitly acknowledged in literature about first-generation and working-class students' experiences making it to, getting through, and moving on from college. Thus, the author's choice of theoretical framework and methodology is intentional: an agency-, practice-, *and* structure- oriented framework paired with autoethnography as a methodology enables a close-up look at how one student, the author, participated in social mobility via the enculturated and structured institution of higher education. In presenting an individual story, this thesis seeks to provide a framework for understanding how individuals with differently intersecting positionalities navigate a world grounded in structures of domination and founded in inequalities of power.

# *Chapter 1*

## *An Introduction*

### **Origins, Learning, and Learning about Origins**

In the Spring of 2018, two years after I had received my undergraduate degree from Bucknell, I was back in an Olin classroom as a part-time student. Through a partnership with an AmeriCorps service position, I was able to enroll in a graduate course. Because of the work I was doing with after-school programs in two nearby affordable housing communities, I decided to enroll in Multiculturalism in Education. While I anticipated that the course would be devoted to learning about others -- as I had not yet learned to view myself as being cultural, much less part of a multicultural society -- it turned out to be remarkably self-informing and warranting self-reflection.

In this class, we read Annette Lareau's *Unequal Childhoods* (2011) and I learned about the ways the working-class, working-poor environment I grew up in -- and the parenting strategies my mother employed as a result of the financial resources and cultural know-how we had access to -- under-prepared me for success in the middle-class privileging world so many American Dreamers aspire to. I learned about social reproduction and how structural inequalities tend to perpetuate the social-class one is born into.

This is the first time I began to consider myself working-class. And when I call myself working-class, I largely defer to the descriptors of life under the circumstances that Lareau reveals in the working-class and working-poor families in her study, particularly in the ways she describes childhoods so similar to mine. Compared to those middle-class children in her sample who had their time organized and orchestrated by parents, Lareau (2011 -- originally published

in 2003) found that working-class children had much more authority over the ways their time was spent. Lareau does not deem this a lack of parenting, but rather a cultural strategy. She calls the parenting logic of the working-class parents in her study the Accomplishment of Natural Growth (Lareau, 2011).

### *Origins*

When I was three years old, my then-single mother moved me and my two siblings to a dilapidated, coal-colored house in what I now consider my hometown, Lykens. The property housed the home, a big front lawn, a coal shed, another shed, a garage, and a massive walnut tree. My and my siblings' summer days were spent making our own fun out there. My brother built bike ramps out of wood and dirt, and he constructed an elaborate tree house in the walnut tree. At one point, my mom bought me an old race car bed frame which we put outside, under the walnut tree, and filled it with sand. I remember putting an old, wooden garage door over the sandbox and using defunct and rusty metal gadgets to construct a makeshift ship. I created, I used my hands, and I made my own fun. For the most part -- yet always loosely supervised by my or friends' parents -- I had control over where and how my time was spent.

More than the ways my time was or was not structured, other aspects of my upbringing mark me as working-class. My mom's side of the family is from rural West Virginia and my father's side of the family is from rural Pennsylvania. Both of their parents grew up on farms. Financially, we were lower-income. My mom worked exceptionally hard to provide us with what she could, and she did an amazing job. When I call myself working-class, it is this history and these experiences I refer to.



### *Pathways and Destinations*

I do not see myself entirely represented in Lareau's (2011) conclusions, though. While my childhood, upbringing, and origins resembled those working-class children let to grow naturally, my destination resemble the concertedly cultivated middle-class. Social reproduction's obdurate and structural workings have not visibly inhibited me. I went to, did quite well in, and completed college.

In the same semester that I learned about my social-class background as working class, I also learned that I was an upwardly mobile first-generation college student, which means I was a college student whose parents did not themselves go to college. By socioeconomic metrics, I had bridged a divide between working- and middle-class worlds. First-generation student experiences tend not to be marked by such a simple bridging, however. Rather, they tend to be marked by both challenges and changes stemming from -- beyond the quantifiability of socioeconomic status -- the qualitative reality of social-class background. Whereas socioeconomic measures include factors such as occupation, level of education, and income, social-class represents a lived history of access to resources, material conditions, and the way life is lived under capital-fueled constraints and privileges (Lareau, 2011; Lareau and Weininger, 2008; Ortner, 2003; Ortner, 2006).

With these new ideas swirling around my self-reflecting mind, I began to put names to the challenges I'd experienced that tainted my transition to Bucknell and that tainted my academic experiences after high school and my resultant and mixed feelings of belonging in academia. Until this point, I had repressed these experiences and memories. Realizing there was more to my story than bad grades and quitting teams, majors, and my faith began to give more shape and closure to my time spent at Bucknell as an undergrad.

I was not, however, willing to write my story off as entirely shaped by the disadvantages I had apparently experienced as a result of being an underrepresented student -- in terms of social-class -- in higher education. I began to wonder about my friends in high school who enrolled in college but didn't finish and who wanted to go to college but weren't -- for a number of reasons -- able to. I wondered what about me and my experience was different. I ultimately reckoned that I was also -- among the disadvantages -- advantaged, and I wanted to learn more about this intricate reality -- my life -- I'd been firsthand living but did not have the vocabulary to reconcile, until recently.

### **The Self -- [Auto] Ethnographic Learning and Inquiring**

And so, I ventured inward, asking: *what intersectional combination of advantages and disadvantages marked my experience as a first-generation student from a working-class background who experienced upward mobility via higher education? And why?* In pursuit of answers to this question, I also began to wonder: what structural and human insight can we draw from such an individually and subjectively examined and lived experience?

These research question incorporates my methodology -- autoethnography -- but jump a few steps in sequencing. Originally, I was broadly interested in the experiences of folks like me from a hometown and high school like mine within higher education, but I was eager to tell my story because I felt I had something worthwhile to say. I felt that my individual story would not neglect telling the stories of others, which, as a committed qualitative inquirer I am always eager to do. I felt that I could tell a subjective, individual story that highlighted the ways all humans live lives which are simultaneously intricate and nuanced yet simply patterned by causes and effects. Exposing these causes to reconcile their effects is an additional goal of this thesis. With a deep dive, I want to tell a story about water and the waters all humans live in. That is, the time

and cultures and structures all humans live in. With autoethnography, I want to tell a story about a singular humanness and lens that I have lived and witnessed, and I want to reveal humanity's inextricably knotted structuring and structured nature.

I have always valued self-reflection, but I was not aware of its place in scholarship and academia. Since reading a few of Arthur Bochner's (2014, 2018) I have become enamored by the possibility of intentionally venturing inward -- emotionally, scholarly, humanly, critically, and sensitively. It is with this -- my -- lens, history, and passion that I write this thesis.

In tandem with my decision to autoethnographically explore my own experiencing upward social mobility, I began to look for a literature-based foundation to build from. Unbeknownst to me, many people had researched and written about the topic of first-generation and working-class students in the academy. Similar to my resonating with Annette Lareau's work, I began to see pieces of myself in these literatures, but never quite fitting perfectly.

### **The Self -- Within and Without the Literature**

My early forays (Fall, 2018) into these literatures primarily focused on first-generation students. Authors of this literature tend to write primarily about the academic, financial, cultural, and social challenges first-generation students tend to experience within higher education (Pascarella et al., 2004; Terenzini et al., 1996). Further on in my search (Summer, 2019) I began reading literature about working-class students. Authors of this literature wrote about the same challenges but more frequently concerned themselves with the ways working-class students experience social-class change and transformation as a result of social mobility (Aries and Seider, 2005; Lee and Kramer, 2013; Lehmann, 2014). Both of these sets of literatures come to similar conclusions -- that first-generation and working-class students face the brunt of structural inequalities in their pursuit of receiving a higher education. On the one hand, authors of first-

generation student literature tend to write from a deficit framework; they deem first-generation students as disadvantaged and lacking something -- oftentimes the advantageous capital their continuing-generation peers have access to. On the other, authors of working-class student literature tend to acknowledge that structural inequalities fuel the challenges these students experience. The latter scholars tend to infuse habitus -- a social theory concept developed by Bourdieu (1977, 1990a, 1990b) that essentially highlights the ways culture and social-class are not just “out there” but are “in here” and -- into their structural critiques. They deduce that higher education privileges habitus accustomed to middle- and upper-classness and marginalizes habitus accustomed to working-classness.

At first glance, my story as a first-generation student from a working-class background -- and stories like mine -- have already been told. However, in maintaining self-reflection as I continued to read I began to notice patterns of exclusion and gaps in literature that did not seem to account for the conclusions I was coming to regarding my own experience.

Altogether, authors who acknowledge the ways structural inequalities challenge and change first-generation and working-class students ultimately critique divisive structures, institutions, and systems like education, but in doing so they tend to neglect the subjectivities of the students about which they write. They gloss over the agency marginalized and underrepresented students enact in living amid and in navigating through these structural inequalities.

In neglecting the agentic, subjective experiences of those upwardly-mobile first-generation and working-class students, authors that critique structure alone also neglect the various intersectional positionalities these students bring with them to structured, structuring, and agency-driven lives. First-generation students and working-class students are not a cultural,

social-class, and disadvantaged monolith. In fact, within these very structural inequalities further inequalities persist, realized in the ways advantage and disadvantage dynamically and intersectionally coexist in the individual experience. Such a coexistence of structure and agency is not explicitly apparent in a majority of literature regarding those students who are underrepresented in terms of their social-class -- i.e. those being first-generation, those from working-class backgrounds, or both. Neglecting agency is not, I don't think, intentionally malicious. Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, for example, (potentially over-) emphasizes the weight and bearing of dominant structures so much so that the agency those dominated would have is not evident. Where agency tends to be acknowledged is in the founding, maintenance, and perpetuations of dominating structures, not, unfortunately, in the possibility of unmaking and remaking them. Nearly all of the authors reviewed in Chapter 3 build their analysis from his theoretical ideas, particularly regarding habitus and capital. Because agency is liminally observed in Bourdieu's work, scholarly findings grounded in his theoretical assumptions themselves tend to overemphasize the structural to the detriment of the agentic.

This gap ultimately stems from both methodological *and* theoretical limitations. This thesis seeks to address both. Autoethnography allows a close-up view at the messy and rhizomatic nature of structuring and structured social human existence. The post-structural rather than structural theoretical framework on which I ground this autoethnography takes us the rest of the way.

### **The Self -- Within the Theory**

Many, if not all, of the primary sources referenced above and reviewed in Chapter 3 utilize the theoretical work of Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu in some way. He has famously written about capital, habitus, and field -- a schematic framework for understanding how individuals

function co-constitutively in a world both structured and structuring. This is to say that humans have not only created the structures under which they live but -- in their establishment -- these structures then reciprocally govern and influence what further structuring takes place. Because so many of the authors referenced herein build from Bourdieuan theory, I have chosen to adopt the framework as well but to amend it with the post-structuralist social theory of anthropologist Sherry Ortner so as to signal the importance of agency. Where structuralists focus heavily on the structural aspect of social theory, post-structuralists highlight that structures are made and can be re-made by agents. Ortner's work is particularly useful because she highlights how our current inequality bearing structures are the result of inequalities of power realized through domination, oppression, and exploitation. Such power differentials have been perpetuated through time and are thus -- in a structuralist mindset -- thought to be solidly obdurate. However, Ortner also conceptualizes structures as cultural and thus malleable, transformable, and restructurable.

An additional key aspect of Ortner's (2006) work is the universality of power and agency in individuals. Both function as a double-edge of a singular blade -- power and agency "from above" is realized as domination and power and agency "from below" is realized as resistance (p. 139).

Applied to the topic of first-generation and working-class students in academia, implementing such a framework allows us to acknowledge the agency and power inherent in lives thought to be governed -- challenged and changed -- by heavy structures. What this amounts to is infusing agency and a human capacity to choose and act in self-advocating ways into the structural interplay in hopes of moving the conversation forward, from deficit to structural and from structural to post-structural and beyond, always with an ear to the ways humans talk about their own lives. These moves are a broad goal of this thesis.

## **Interpretations -- A Teaser**

A more concise goal of this thesis is to better understand how first-generation and working-class students specifically (and underrepresented, marginalized students and marginalized people generally) do not idly and passively experience structural inequalities. Rather, they agentively and actively respond. However, within this inequality there is a further inequality that is oftentimes informed by an individual's structured experience along lines of social-class, race, and gender. Agency, while universally embodied, enacted, and wielded, is unequally legitimated, realized, and received by the structures in which it operates.

Altogether, this thesis represents my thought process in coming to these conclusions, particularly by highlighting the ways guided self-reflection pulled me to think about the politics of my place in the world. In some words, this amounts to learning about the passion I've been fortunate enough to follow through continual access to education. The literature and theory I use in this piece imply a common train of thought over many years: that the world is unequal and that structures perpetuate this inequality. This idea is not novel, yet I hope to build from it. An additional way my thesis contributes to the literature is by insisting that I, other working-class students like me, and underrepresented students in general, who have experienced upward social mobility through education are not only the products of social structures but also our agency. This thesis project has me expanding on these ideas in two ways. First, there are multiple dimensions of inequality. These multiple dimensions intersectionally inform the way any individual experiences the world.

Second, as long as our structures function unequally at a fundamental level, inequality will be a social phenomenon people ubiquitously take part in. Because inequality is systemic, one either works with the grain of the system or against it (Kendi, 2019). Following Ortner

(2006), I like to think of working with the grain as acting in dominance and working against the grain as acting in resistance -- “a double-edged blade” (p. 139). The key here is that on the flip side of dominance is not passivity or ‘being dominated’. Rather, the polar opposite -- in a dichotomous frame of reference -- of domination is pushing back against domination, or resisting being dominated. And like the ways we are intersectional, so too is our relationship with dominance and resistance. One’s life and social embodiment inform the way structural inequalities weigh on them: how much they are dominant and how much they are dominated and thus resistant.

This is where my -- or any individual -- story comes in. As I highlight above, when aided by social theory and literature in reflecting on my past, I was made to pause. What, really, about me was different? I had learned enough about the real advantages being white and being a man afforded me in the modern world and felt conflicted. I could not deeply resonate with the first-generation label for at least two reasons. For one, my story somehow defied the label’s ‘challenged’ and ‘changed’ claims. For two, the label and what I’d read about it did not seem to explicitly acknowledge the rhizomatic experiences of the labeled.

While much my story defied the label, I do not want to imply that the challenges first-generation and working-class students *do* experience in higher education are null. Rather, they are varyingly experienced. While first-generation students tend to experience cultural, social, academic, and financial challenges, I experienced varying degrees of each of these. Binaries in the human experience are unrealistic; there’s always much more to say about the middle (I would hope earth-observers see more than the two poles when they look at our planet). All of this is to say that I find myself experiencing an intersectional combination of both resistance and



dominance, the meshing of which allowed (and allows) me to advantageously navigate (i.e. achieve mobility in) inequality perpetuating structures.

The components of one's intersectionality can be fickle, and my life could have easily followed a different trajectory. For example, for reasons readers will come to know, if my mom had not met my stepdad Scott, I would not be writing this thesis. I would not have gone to Bucknell. I do not know where I would be, but I know I wouldn't be here, and I like being here. I am fortunate, but I can look back and say it was not all hard work. From a purely structural point of view where social reproduction looms large, those who 'make it' are often analyzed from their individual level contributions, rather than from their intersectional combination of structured and socialized agency. In our hierarchically stratified and structured world, ascendance through the ranks requires engaging in an intersectional combination of domination *and* -- ironically -- resistance.

Another way to think about this is in terms of privilege or social advantage and disadvantage, another "double edged sword" (Ortner, 2006, p. 139). Dominant and resistant do not only refer to overt acts of dominance and resistance, but rather participation in ancestral histories of domination and resistance that manifest themselves presently. Over time, white supremacy, patriarchy, capitalism, and colonialism have all contributed to the current landscape of structural inequality. We each partake in different ways. This thesis is an investigation into my partaking, particularly through the lens of transitioning to college as a first-generation student from a working-class background.

My making it to, getting through, thriving within, and completing college stems from an intersectional array of advantage and disadvantage. In the ways that I was advantaged, dominant structures legitimated my existence and agency, affording me structural support. In the context of

first-generation students, I was socially and financially advantaged. In the ways that I was disadvantaged, structural support aided me in advantageously navigating -- or resisting -- the challenges and changes that structural inequalities *did* impress on me. In the context of first-generation students, I was academically and culturally disadvantaged. However, social support equipped me with some tools which made advocating for myself early on feasible. Such social support allowed me to distance myself from the dominant culture while maintaining a sense of self as belonging -- if I continued to work hard enough -- in the academic setting.

My experience is thus an intersectional composition of disadvantage and advantage, capitalized upon through my human agency capacity. The ways that I utilized the support that was afforded me does not highlight my agency. Rather, the fact that the support I had available to me *was* able to be capitalized upon granted structural legitimacy to the steps, the “confident actions,” and agency I invested (McIntosh, 1988). My action itself is not privileged -- in its universality, agency exists beyond human-manufactured inequality -- but the blocks on which I was able to stabilize myself privilege and advantage me. This includes not only -- as we uncover below -- dominant and advantageous capital (Carter, 2003, 2005), but the intersecting and composite agent wielding them.

All of this is unpacked in the chapters that follow. To wrap up this introductory chapter and get on with it, I conclude with an overview of the layout of this thesis.

### **Overview of the Thesis**

This thesis is organized into five chapters, including this first introductory chapter. In Chapter 2, I lay out the theoretical framework from which I build my ideas and ground my thinking. This just so happens to be the theoretical framework much of the empirical literature builds itself on. In this way, I ultimately propose a unanimous move from structural to post-

structural frameworks and, in ever-refinement, beyond. Thus, Chapter 3 is devoted to reviewing a wide array of literature regarding first-generation and working-class students in academia who persist and experience social mobility. Chapter 4 is devoted to an autoethnographic, self-reflexive project. In reflecting on a fixed time frame, I seek to learn from my transition to Bucknell, an affluent, private liberal arts college just up the road from my hometown, where I attended a rural, under-resourced public high school. In this thesis, I focus only on my first four semesters and the summers mixed in between. In this span, I quit track and field, redefined my spiritual self, and switched my academic major. I was challenged, I changed, and I chose to change in responding to challenges. Each of these choices was both an exhibition of agency and also were responses to some of the structural constraints and inequalities I experienced as a first-generation student. To reconstruct the events in my mind and to get into the mind of my past self in these moments, I reviewed and drew from old Facebook messages and email threads. Snippets of some of these are utilized in this fourth chapter. Specifics regarding this ‘data gathering’ process and other methodological considerations are found in Appendix I. The fifth and final chapter of this thesis is a conclusion. In Chapter 5, I review the entire piece and highlight the main points I would like readers to leave with. I also provide a few, brief conclusions regarding insights about theory, autoethnography, qualitative inquiry, and practical takeaways for those who work with first-generation or underrepresented students in higher education or education generally.

## ***Chapter 2***

### ***A Theoretical Framework***

#### **Introduction**

Throughout this thesis manuscript, I make use of two theoretical frameworks: Social Reproduction Theory as it has been developed by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and Practice Theory as it has been developed by anthropologist Sherry Ortner. The former is of the structuralist tradition and the latter post-structuralist. This distinction is useful throughout the present paper, as it is a goal of this work to portray the social world less deterministically than structural thinkers often do (Ortner, 2006). In adopting Ortner's Practice Theory, I hope to expand upon Bourdieu's Social Reproduction Theory and some key theoretical concepts -- namely capital, habitus, and field. This expansion maintains a critique of looming and dominant structures and acknowledges in agents -- particularly those resisting domination -- a capacity for self-advocacy, an awareness of their positionality, and a hope for radical social transformation (Ortner, 2006, p. 139).

#### **Goals and Organization**

Social Reproduction theory considers why there is a tendency for "working-class children to end up in working-class jobs," with answers to this question ranging from deterministic theories to theories granting individuals relative autonomy within culturally constructed means (MacLeod, 2009, p. 13). The fundamental assumption of Practice Theory is that people as social actors and agents perpetually interplay with their culture and structures through practicing and living (Ortner, 2006). A combination of Social Reproduction Theory and Practice Theory allows us to acknowledge the realities of social reproduction but goes beyond, asking how agentic

individuals might influence and transform such socially-reproductive structures. Synthesizing Ortner and Bourdieu allows theorists to conceptualize individuals as social actors who engage with different degrees of success or legitimization within culturally, historically, and power-imbalanced structures. Taken together, these theories allow both determinism (structure-heavy) *and* autonomy or free-will (agency-heavy) to be understood as both influenced by any individual's social class origins and influencing any individual's social class destinations.

Before continuing this analysis of the intersection of theories, though, it is useful to first examine each individually so as to acknowledge each theory's specific contributions to their combined power in viewing the realities of human lives justly. First, I review Bourdieu's key theoretical concepts: capital, habitus, and field. Second, carrying this vocabulary forward, I summarize Bourdieu's Theory of Social Reproduction. Third, I briefly summarize Practice Theory's structuralist origins, particularly *via* Bourdieu's thoughts and writings. Lastly, I incorporate Ortner's Practice Theory contributions, which infuse history, culture, and power into the typical agent-structure interplay. With their individual propositions laid out, we mosey on enmeshed.

### **Capital, Habitus, and Field**

Capital, habitus, and field are integral to understanding the way Bourdieu renders the social world. And as much as they are integral, so too are they entangled, inseparable, and conversing. To understand one requires engaging with the others (and then seems to beseech consistent reviewing).

Altogether, capital -- particularly in its cultural and social forms -- is transactional, an immateriality exchangeable between individuals who each embody habitus which simultaneously shape -- through action -- and are shaped by -- through structuration -- the fields in which they

function. In other words, capital is related to resources and access to resources -- economic, cultural, social, or material -- which comprise fields that inculcate any given individual's habitus. Where capital is transactional, field is environmental and cultural. Fields play a part in establishing what capital has what value and is comprised by habitus-holders acting with legitimacy within it. Habitus informs both what capital one has access to and is itself both socially and environmentally structured. This is a key point, for habitus, its formation, and how it is valued is not willy-nilly different strokes for different folks, but rather tends to align with hierarchically stratified social-class positionings.

Crucially, within Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction, not only are cultures and social mores being reproduced, but material conditions, accesses to resources, and qualities of life. Played out in real time, inequality has expanded. Mindless profiteering and an ignorance of (or blindness to) how our systems maintain social stratification has yielded late-capitalism, where the wealth discrepancy between poor and rich is ever-expansive and where what it means to be middle-class -- secure, comfortable, and resourced -- has shifted for many to *precarity*, particularly following the Great Recession of 2008 (Cooper, 2014 and Ortner, 2006).

And while conceptually inseparable, it is advantageous to first consider them each individually by drawing from a wide range of Bourdieu's work (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu, 1983 within Richardson, 1986; Bourdieu, 1990a; Bourdieu, 1990b; Bourdieu, 1992). We begin with capital, the transactional feature.

### ***Capital***

Bourdieu (1983), in "Forms of Capital," writes that capital is "what makes the games of society... something other than simple games of chance offering at every moment the possibility of a miracle." (p. 241). Capital, then, orders (structures) and is ordered (structured), and thus

renders the social world sequential. In terms of education, those who succeed within the system - or those for whom education 'works' -- are those whose habitus-manifested capital is legitimized by the expectations of the teachers, administrators, and the administered curriculum. Beyond the self, students bring capital to school: how they talk -- linguistic capital; who they talk to -- social capital; and what they talk about -- cultural capital.

It is useful to think about these subtypes of capital alongside the (possibly) more obvious form: economic, for in the present capitalistic enterprise, where markets, competition, profit, investment, and return terminologies abound, our *being* in social spaces has the potential to be converted into financial assets, but only if our modes of socializing are advantageous in our direct environment. Bourdieu (1983) writes, "depending on the field in which it functions... capital can present itself in three fundamental guises: as economic capital..., as cultural capital..., and as social capital..." (p. 243).

Within the lacunae in the quotation above, Bourdieu (1983) elaborates individually on these subtypes of capital, particularly regarding the possibility of both cultural and social capital being converted into economic resources. Economic capital essentially functions as money and maintains value ubiquitously; however, cultural and social capital function differently. Because social and cultural capital have been distanced from monetary value (because they do not *directly* convert into capitalistic schemes), they function "on certain conditions," sometimes convertible into money and other times not. Convertibility depends on the field in which the transaction is attempted and the habitus of the social actor by which the capital is wielded. Again, "depending on the field..." (Bourdieu, 1983, p. 243).

"On certain conditions" is critical phrasing here. Bourdieu (1983) writes, "priceless things have their price, and the extreme difficulty of converting certain practices and certain

objects into money is due only to the fact that this conversion is refused in the very intention that produces them..." (p. 242). "Refused in the very intention that produces them..." here seems to allude to the managerial/working-class divide found in capitalist systems. If taken this way, Bourdieu is arguing that the ways that varying forms of cultural and social capital differ in their convertibility to economic capital are senseless save for their obvious, "intended" function, which is to fuel capitalism and thus maintain social-class division. Certain cultural and social practices are thus diminished and said to have no or little value because a capitalistic enterprise only deals with money, yet, while blinding itself to the fact that it does so, it values the cultural and social practices *associated with money*. This feedback loop -- positive for some and negative for others "on certain conditions" and "depending on the field" -- thus maintains that "certain practices" are achievable not only by economic positioning, but by implicitly valued, (made-to-be) non-economic factors, i.e. social and cultural capital (pp. 242-3).

One's experience within this feedback loop is not random, but rather, again, ordered -- "something other than simple games of chance" (Bourdieu, 1983, p. 241), due in large part to capital accumulation over time, whether, on the one hand, rendered advantageous, valuable, and legitimate, or, on the other, disadvantageous and illegitimate. Following the logic of writing so far, as well as recalling writing on 'social class' in the introduction, it should be clear that social class, distinct from yet often times alongside socioeconomic status, is what is being perpetuated here. Social classes are presently stratified as such because of historic and capitalistic perpetuations, which necessitate there being an "under class," a class associated with laboring rather than managing and associated with jobs *not* traditionally requiring an education.

Bourdieu (1983) explains that social class is structured and maintained by obdurate cycles of legitimization and delegitimization: "... the structure of the distribution of the different



types and subtypes of capital at a given moment in time represent the immanent structure of the social world, i.e., the set of constraints, inscribed in the very reality of that world, which govern its functioning in a durable way, determining the chances of success for practices.” (p. 242).

Those whose “chances” are constrained are those who, in seeking social mobility, must navigate dominant structures with a currency -- capital -- that is undervalued. And they are those who are met with implicit, systemically unacknowledged challenges -- rather than points of access -- in utilizing one’s self-and-other-made social performance, or, in other words, a combination of one’s habitus, social capital, and cultural capital.

It should be clear at this point that cultural and social capital are essential forms of capital. Indeed, more than only money is valued. “Priceless things have their price” (Bourdieu, 1983, p. 242) means: *how* money is made, i.e. occupations; *what* such money allows one to buy, i.e. possessions; *what* such money and possessions allow one to do -- all have value. And *who* this “*how*” and *who* these “*whats*” connect one to also have a socially -- and even *systemically* - - determined value. It is precisely under the presumption that value pertains *only* to money that harmful, neoliberal ideologies can and do prevail. And so, with this justification, let us venture into what specifically Bourdieu (1983) writes about cultural and social capital, beginning with cultural.

### *Cultural Capital*

Bourdieu (1983) asserts that cultural capital can be best understood in three states: embodied, objectified, and institutionalized. Cultural capital is broadly associated with “tastes” or “preferences” concerning food, dress, language, how one spends their time, what one spends their time doing, what art one consumes, and if one consumes art, to name a few. In the embodied state of cultural capital, one’s capital amidst this list is influenced heavily by time

spent engaging in any manner of such items. One's embodied cultural capital would be best understood by summing one's habits and how one spends their time, but which are also deeply entrenched in the economic capital associated with such habits and goings-on.

Objectified cultural capital, conversely, considers what one might be able to do -- or might know what to do -- with a given "object" or "media," such as a piece of art, which, Bourdieu (1983) writes, "[are] transmissible in ... materiality" but not "the possession of the means of 'consuming'" (p. 246). Institutionalized cultural capital, lastly, describes what 'out there' is valuable in dominant societal structures. The institutionalized cultural capital of a school, for example, is an ever-changing and composite mosaic, representative of the cultural capital of those both 1) designing the pedagogy and curriculum and 2) those for whom the pedagogy and curriculum is designed (the second point I elaborate upon below under the subheading "Social Reproduction Theory"). Cultural capital as embodied and objectified in Bourdieu's theorizing thus describes value pertaining to the self as disposed and to the self as having knowledge of culturally valued objects, valued as such by institutionalized cultural capital.

### *Social Capital*

Social capital concerns networks and relationships and how these are valued within social systems. Bourdieu (1983) writes, "the volume of the social capital possessed by a given agent thus depends on the size of the network of connections he can effectively mobilize and on the volume of the capital possessed in his own right by each of those to whom he is connected" (p. 249). One's social capital is thus measured by who one can call on for advantageous action but which is simultaneously contingent on the social capital arrangement of the called. In short, social capital concerns how many and how valuable one's social connections are.

As is noted above, capital, habitus, and field are inextricable. Any individual's capital draws from their socially established habitus, which is formed by those proximal social actors who challenge or reify dominant and personal fields around them. Having considered just what Bourdieu means by capital, some of its subtypes, and its impact on social reproduction, let's move on to habitus and field.

### ***Habitus***

In *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, Bourdieu (1992) describes habitus as "socialized subjectivity" (p. 126). Socialized here implies that the habitus is formed, not primarily from within, but from without, structured by the objective conditions into which any given person is born and grows and lives. Subjectivity here implies that the habitus is individualized -- grants agency and perspective to the holder and experienced and lived individually. Nonetheless, habitus must be understood as simultaneously individual and social, formed by social structures and other habitus-holders, themselves structured, pressing on the individual. Elsewhere, in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1970), Bourdieu describes habitus as "history turned into nature" (p. 78). History here adds a time aspect to this, for not only is one's environment a determining factor of one's disposition toward the world; according to Bourdieu (1970), we develop the habitus we embody by absorbing the social practices of others, which, for children, are more often than not their parents, family, or immediate environment and the social class accompaniment therein. The social practices, norms, behaviors, and responses of others in the immediate environment thus structure growing habitus accordingly.

Habitus is what one in their entire embodiment -- in objects, concepts, and ideas -- of play, of hygiene, of dining, of leisure, of dialogue, of posture, of dress - brings to school with them. Thus, more than a body, or a self, it is what one's body knows and, more generally, what

one has come to know as a result of experiencing their social world. Bourdieu (1970) writes that the habitus elicits “dispositions durably inculcated by objective conditions ... [which] engender aspirations and practices objectively compatible with these objective requirements” (p. 77). He further explains, “The habitus is... durably installed” ... a “generative principle” ...that “produces practices which tend to reproduce the regularities immanent in the objective conditions of the production of their generative principle...” (Bourdieu, 1970, p. 78). From these quotations, habitus can be understood as (a part of) one’s socialized individuality rooted at the intersection of person and environment, again “socially subjective” (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 126). Conceptualized across time, habitus is individual and collective, “the product of history ... of individual and collective practices” manifesting itself in an “individual embodiment” and “a system of dispositions” (Bourdieu, 1970, p. 82).

In *The Logic of Practice* (1980), Bourdieu writes that habitus operates unconsciously and aside from the embodier’s will (p. 56). Largely manifesting itself as dispositions, preferences, and tastes -- dispositions disposed thusly by one’s proximal environment and social actors acting therein -- habitus, until meeting misalignment or maladaptation, is thus largely concealed from its holder. That is, until it encounters an environment where social actors are normalized or disposed differently one is blind to their habitus. Bourdieu writes, “Every time [habitus] is confronted with objective conditions identical with or similar to those of which it is the product, habitus is perfectly ‘adapted’ to the *field* without any *conscious* search for purposive adaptation...” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 129). Thus, our way of being -- our sense of self as disposed to and with the world -- resides relatively covert until encountering adversity or confusion.

Bourdieu utilizes a fish and water metaphor to help illustrate this concept. A fish beached out of water would instantaneously know that it was just before in water, in a space where actions, dispositions, and orientations were unconscious, fluid, logical, and habitual. In Bourdieu's (1990a) theory of social reproduction, those "privileged" in pedagogic, curricular, and educational communication are those unaware of the water surrounding them. Those "disinherited" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 210) or those who have habits inculcated in a non-dominant social-class environment, are fish out of water. So why is there no ruckus? Even though they are fish out of water, they are not able to name their state as such because of the unconscious nature of habitus which the advantaged embody. Habitus is concealed from social actors as long as they remain in the environment which established their habitus; once transgressed, one's accustomed disposition -- norms, behaviors, responses, expectations -- are thrown into flux. This key point grounds Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction (covered in-depth below), namely that those who embody habits predisposed to the expectations of education do not see themselves as fish in water. Those whose habits are predisposed elsewhere experience confusion regarding the norms of the environment. Thus, because those who are privileged are blind to the concealed nature of their advantaged habitus, claims like "I can't breathe here" fizzle out. And when the fish in water are blind to their being in water, the fish out of water suffer.

This metaphor is usefully expanded in the context of fish as accustomed to saltwater or freshwater rather than in or out of water. A saltwater fish, or habitus holder, who has never been outside of their briny environment, which we can call the dominant *field*, will likely discredit the discomfort of a fish accustomed to freshwater attempting to navigate a saltwater environment. Meritocratic and boot-strap ideologies which render individual success as a direct product of effort and hard work make such a dismissal trivial. We are taught to believe that our efforts

propel us. While not entirely discreditable, such a presumption neglects the ways that some fish are, at birth, equipped with the basic tools for surviving and thriving in the dominant, saltwater environment while others are not. It is crucial to acknowledge that the saltwater environment is not in and of itself dominant, but manufactured to be.

To visualize this metaphor, try not to -- although such ecosystemic diversity exists -- think about those freshwater fish residing in meandering streams, pristine lakes, and rushing rivers. Instead, envision them on the margins of a great saltwater sea, dabbling in and attempting to navigate an environment that is stifling. And while stifling, those freshwater fish are not able to name it as such because saltwater fish do not distinguish between salt and fresh -- it's just water (such blindness fuels colorblind ideologies, the meritocracy, and the idea that rugged individualism is the only means by which social mobility occurs).

We can unpack this metaphor further and frame it more theoretically by conceptualizing freshwater and saltwater as fields and water as a structure. First, let us consider fields.

### ***Field***

In the metaphor above regarding fish and water, we have thus far looked into fish, which in this metaphor represent habitus-holders. Let us now transition to the aforementioned saltwater and freshwater, which in this metaphor represent fields, first by revisiting and then by building on a previously utilized quote: “Every time [habitus] is confronted with objective conditions identical with or similar to those of which it is the product, habitus is perfectly ‘adapted’ to the *field* without any *conscious* search for purposive adaptation...” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, 129). The emphasis -- via italics -- placed on ‘conscious’ above is better understood alongside another quote. Precisely concerning the relationship between habitus and field, Bourdieu converses with Wacquant (1992):

“Social reality exists... in fields and in habitus, outside and inside of agents. And when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it is like a ‘fish in water’: it does not feel the weight of the water, and it takes the world about itself for granted...

habitus, being the social embodied... is ‘at home’ in the field it inhabits...” (pp. 127-8)

Taken together, two immediate questions arise: what descriptively is the social reality existing “outside... of agents,” i.e. field? And, on the topic of habitus’ relationships with fields to which they are objectively conditioned, what results from a habitus maladapted to a field, i.e. what of the “fish out of water?”

The latter inquiry is of particular relevance to this manuscript’s cardinal inquiry; however, the first is usefully answered here. So, what is “the field”? Wacquant writes, “a field is a patterned system of objective forces, a relational configuration endowed with a specific gravity which it imposes on all objects and agents which enter it” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 17). In our now ongoing metaphor, saltwater acts as a field for those fish swimming in it -- it requires that the fish it habituates embody specific components, or characteristics, some so ingrained they are called normal (“specific gravity”), the most obvious being the ability to survive in a saltwater environment. All within the field succumb to its gravity, yet only some, again, are accustomed to the pull.

### *Contextualizing the present use of these terms*

In developing these terms, Bourdieu was thinking extensively about how the social world around him was functioning. He first observed, and then he formulated. And so, we’ve done things a bit backwards here; however, intentionally. Let us begin to consider where and how these terms function in context -- just beyond the metaphor yet nonetheless still assisted by it, to

where Bourdieu (1990a) saw them in action: in educational inequality manifesting itself as social reproduction.

However, before making that jump, let's consider where, in the metaphorical "field" landscape, humans have established schooling as a socially-mobilizing institution, either in saltwater or freshwater. For consistency with the metaphor (because it does not matter what we call chicken and what we call egg), we situate education within saltwater because being educated is socially advantageous and "privileged" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 210). The point I am trying to make is best understood within a parallel that branches metaphor and reality. In the metaphor (and yet in the logical reality of the metaphor), fish accustomed to freshwater who enter a saltwater environment are processually limited. Indeed, basic biology tells us the reason freshwater fish are unable to survive in saltwater, and it does not stem from their lacking anything in particular. Instead, freshwater fish bodies already have a high enough concentration of salt, so much so that, once in saltwater, their bodies' osmotic processes become overwhelmed (Kültz, 2015).

Outside the metaphor (and under the lens of this thesis), college uneducated or working-class habitus-holders (a key distinction regarding curriculum) who nonetheless take part in education experience cultural and habitu{s}al stifling, or friction. While the metaphor begins to break down at this point, a simple conclusion can be reached. Freshwater fish tend to stay in freshwater fields, but not for lack of effort. Being a freshwater in a saltwater is *both* uncomfortable and "blindly" called comfortable by those for whom it is habitu{s}al (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 210), i.e. saltwater fish. There *are* those freshwater fish who adapt to saltwater environments, and the lived impact of this phenomenon is addressed more directly and less obscurely in the following chapters. For now, we wrap up contextualizing capital, habitus, and



field within the realm of education before looking extensively at the guiding theoretical frames employed hereafter.

Having described Bourdieu's concepts of capital, habitus, and field, let's turn to their implementation and functionality by elaborating upon his theory of social reproduction.

### **Social Reproduction Theory**

Bourdieu's (1990a) theory of social reproduction posits that upward social mobility is significantly limited for those from working-class and poor backgrounds because of oppressive, inequality perpetuating structures, of which Bourdieu ranks education prominently. While educational institutions are envisioned as bastions of mobility -- great equalizers -- Bourdieu finds that they instead reproduce the inequality they seek to lessen. In coming to and in support of this conclusion, he developed the terminology introduced above: capital, habitus, and field. Students bring a *habitus* with them to school, an individuality shaped by their social-and-classed environment which equips them with certain forms of *capital*. Students utilize this capital to navigate both the social and cultural aspects of education -- a *field* -- the "objective forces" which pull on all school personnel, whether they be students, teachers, or administrators (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 17). However, this brief rundown is not descriptive enough.

The crux of the matter stems from the fact that education as an institution implicitly *values* certain forms and exhibitions of capital over others -- predominantly through pedagogy and curriculum, or the ways teaching is implemented, how learning is measured, and what students are required to learn (Bourdieu, 1990a). Whether or not the capital one brings to school is deemed valuable depends on one's habitus, which is primordially determined by social-class background. In this case, relevant social-class backgrounds, environments, and circumstances fall into two categories: being *educated* (or from a home environment comprising adults who

have a formal education) and the financial, occupational, and social assets that come with this, i.e. being middle- or upper-class; and *being uneducated* (or from a home environment comprising adults who do not have a formal education), and the accompanied assets, i.e. being working-class or poor. In short, Bourdieu (1990a) argues that habitus-holding students from *educated* social-class environments are inherently benefited in the ways they interface with education because their habitus are instilled with its social-class profits. And so, we can rewrite the rundown above in the following way: schools as *fields* value certain forms of *capital*, capital which is more readily accessible to those students with *habitus* inculcated in environments already harvesting education's yesteryear bounties. While admittedly dense, I aim to unpack this logic below.

How do schools perpetuate the inequality they seek to diminish? Bourdieu reckons that individuals occupy differentially resourced social-class locations. These locations -- what Bourdieu might call objective conditions -- are defined by parent occupation or parent level of education. Beyond socioeconomic status, which describes characteristics like occupation, income, and level of education, the term social class sheds light on the reality that socioeconomic factors are far from value-free and are indeed value-stratified.

Thus, regarding social reproduction within educational institutions, schools advantage those whose social-class predisposes them to the expectations of education. However, more than a status or disposition, social-class is cultural -- so too with curriculum, so too with pedagogy. And just as pedagogy is cultural, it is also socially classed, because any established curriculum and mode of teaching where students are expected to achieve a certain mark will tend to advantage those from habitus-households who, having been there, can anticipate and cultivate their children to do well. And yet the academic portion of this is just that, a piece. The habitus

one brings to school influences the wieldable means by which one interfaces with their environment, namely capital: how one socializes, with whom one socializes, how one dresses, what one eats, and what one talks about. In this way, pedagogy is more than what is taught, it is inextricable from the socio-cultural field of education. Sociologists of education commonly refer to this phenomenon as the hidden curriculum (Rosenbaum, 1976; Giroux and Purpel, 1983).

Indeed, Bourdieu (1990a) surmises that schools administer a culture- and disposition-infused pedagogy, which caters to those students whose embodied habitus privies them to such cultural know-how. At the same time that any pedagogy would advantage those whose habitus is predisposed to its expectations (i.e. a habitus arising from a household or family or parents who had themselves been educated or are in professions likened to dominant culture), pedagogy disadvantages those whose habitus is not predisposed to schooling's expectations.

The ramifications of social reproduction should be clear: education is not an equalizer because schools embrace pedagogies which aim to bring students to a particular level of capital attainment, which is contingent upon a student being habitu{s}ally predisposed toward such attainment. "All pedagogic action," Bourdieu (1990a) writes, "is, objectively, symbolic violence insofar as it is the imposition of a cultural arbitrary by an arbitrary power" (p. 5). He further explains,

"... because [Pedagogical actions - PAs] correspond to the material and symbolic interests of groups or classes differently situated within the power relations [i.e. dominant], these pedagogical actions always tend to reproduce the structure of the distribution of cultural capital among these groups or classes, thereby contributing to the reproduction of the social structure." (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 11).

Pedagogical actions are thus socially and culturally infused because the institutions which distribute them desire to hand down to subsequent generations a part of past cultural history, and thus a cultural history, thus a culture. Who then is primed to receive, respond to, and act upon the established pedagogy in schools? And further, who is not and what is the impact?

Not only do the embraced curricula and pedagogy tend to exclude those culturally predisposed elsewhere; Bourdieu (1990a) goes on to suggest that these even habitus disadvantaged students who do well in school will inevitably experience a lagging-behind effect while learning alongside their habitus-privileged peers. Because students begin schooling with different points of preparation -- social, cultural, and academic -- and are expected to not only meet but exceed expectations prescribed by the curriculum and pedagogy, students less-prepared are always, in a sense, attempting to catch up. Bourdieu (1977) calls this the hysteresis effect. In his book *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, he describes this phenomenon:

“as a result of the hysteresis effect necessarily implied in the logic of the constitution of habitus, practices are always liable to incur negative sanctions when the environment with which they are actually confronted is too distant from that to which they are objectively fitted” (p. 77).

-- and --

“The hysteresis of habitus... is doubtless one of the foundations of the structural lag between opportunities and the dispositions to grasp them...” (p. 83).

He ultimately concludes that those who are culturally attuned to the pedagogical communication in schools *themselves* reproduce what it means to be educated or rightly disposed. And because of this dynamic, those under-privileged in these institutionalized structures will remain -- even though as a result of education ‘educated’ -- where they began on the stratified, social class

ladder, i.e. perpetually ‘under’ those for whom education and its benefits pervade the nurturance allotted them. In other words, a habitus predisposed to the objective conditions of an uneducated household will meet interference in the field of education, which advantages those who are privy to its expectations, having already been predisposed to them as a result of being born in an educated home. These “negative sanctions,” no matter what advances are made for the habitus predisposed elsewhere, produce the lagging effect (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 77).

An additional consequence of schools functioning in this socially reproductive manner stems from the privilege-blindness that accompanies those culturally predisposed to the expectations of schooling. Those freshwater fish in saltwater who do not achieve the same degree of success as their peers from advantageous social-class backgrounds are seen as deficient for two prominent reasons. First, they are seen as deficient because their habitus-embodiments do not match those of their habitus-privileged peers for whom the education-field *reproduces their* -- rather than *mobilizes-them-to* -- privilege, and, second, because they are blind to this reality.

From the discussions of habitus above, we can deduce that such blindness stems from the concealed nature of the habitus, concealed as such within the fields in which it functions fluidly - - “it does not feel the weight of the water” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; pp. 127-8). And in our extended metaphor, saltwater fish that are predisposed to processing high concentrations of salt in their environment are likely to dismiss the outcries of freshwater fish struggling to acclimate. For freshwater fish, the degree and aura of salt is noticeably salient, but for saltwater fish it is nothing out of the ordinary. Thus, naming the salty environment a hindrance -- as a freshwater fish is wont to do in a field outside their own norm -- does not resonate with saltwater fish. They are blind to the fact that education has been established in a salty environment and is

thus infused with salt (again, in the real, biological sense, salt which nonetheless freshwater fish have, but in a different organismic fashion -- Kültz, 2015).

Additionally, Bourdieu (1990a) says that privileged people being blind to their advantages results in the marginalized or under-resourced students resorting to self-blame or developing a false-consciousness, believing that their fallings-short -- while systemic in origin -- are personal in nature (p. 210). Because of education's socially reproductive consequences, those from under-resourced (disadvantageous capitally) social-class positionings who fare poorly in education are written off as personal failures rather than systemic failings, by both those advantaged *and* those disadvantaged. As Bourdieu (1990a) writes, somewhat cryptically, "the unnatural idea of culture by birth presupposes and produces blindness to the functions of the educational institution, which ensures the profitability of cultural capital and legitimates its transmission by dissimulating the fact that it performs this function" (p. 210).

### ***Wrapping-up and Contextualizing Social Reproduction Theory***

Thus, for Bourdieu, education serves as an oppressive structure which forces people into adhering and sticking to their familial -- origin{al} -- habitus, because the schools transmit pedagogies and curricula that, by their nature, serve to reproduce the educated/uneducated inequality. This dynamic occurs because schools, by administering a certain cultural pedagogy, allow those inherently familiar with the pedagogy to adapt more readily to its expectations. Those unfamiliar with the pedagogy must not only succeed in school but first must meet the norms of expectation. Thus, the inequality is perpetuated and social class distinctions are reproduced.

As an expansion of these ideas and their relevance, let's consider sociologist Annette Lareau's (2011) work and findings from her family-based ethnographic study *Unequal*

*Childhoods*. Working from Bourdieu's theoretical framing, Lareau (2011) ethnographically investigates family life, childhood, social class, and race and how their intersections influence educational experiences. She and her research team spent an extensive amount of time in the homes of middle-class, working-class, and working-poor families. They observed family life, how time was or was not organized, how parents talked or did not talk to children, and how children talked or did not talk to adults. Further, they observed how this impacted the educational experiences of the children.

Overall, Lareau (2011) uncovered the very obvious ways Bourdieu's Theory of Social Reproduction is lived out, from the pedagogical violence to the hysteresis effect. In observing family life, she revealed two patterns of cultural and social-class based logics of child-rearing that parents implemented with their children: concerted cultivation and the accomplishment of natural growth. Because of the various resources and capital -- financial, educational, and social -- the families in different social-classes had access to, the strategies they adopted for raising their children were different.

The practices of middle-class parents are deemed "concerted cultivation" because of the ways these parents structured, monitored, and advocated for their children's time. The middle-class parents in Lareau's (2011) utilized the resources and capital afforded their social-class position to cultivate school-ready, extracurricularly-involved, test-prepped, and, eventually, college-bound young adults (Lareau and Weininger, 2008). The middle-class parents in Lareau's study were more often than not themselves graduates of college, whereas the working-class and working-poor parents were not. The resources and capital they brought to raising their children followed accordingly.

Lareau (2011) calls the cultural child-rearing logic of working-class and working-poor parents the accomplishment of natural growth. Whereas middle-class parents structured their children's time in organized, extracurricular activities, working-class parents tended to "organize their children's lives so they spent time in and around home, in informal play with peers, siblings, and cousins" (p. 238). While these children developed a sense of "autonomy" as a result of managing the particulars of their own time, such advantageous efforts are not advantaged by the institution of education, which, in its reproductive fashion, privileges children cultivated concertedly.

Importantly, Lareau (2011) makes clear that both concerted cultivation and the accomplishment of natural growth require extensive effort on the part of the parents; however, she is quick to note that institutions (such as school) privilege concerted cultivation practices over accomplishment of natural growth -- and for no good reason. There are merits to each. Those reared in the accomplishment of natural growth tended to -- in addition to being autonomous -- develop greater creative capacities, be more closely connected to kin, and did not complain about boredom. The relative -- structurally valued -- benefits of concerted cultivation, however, trump the advantages with which children in working-class and working-poor households enter adulthood. Those reared in concerted cultivation are -- oftentimes "automatic[ally] and unconscious[ly]" or habitu{s}ally (p. 239) -- primed to function in institutionally-advantaged ways. They enter adulthood feeling special, individualistic, comfortable interfacing with authority figures, and, generally, competitive (an effective skill in a capitalist system). Both, indeed, are advantageous, but one is advantaged.

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Overall, structures overpower agency in Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction (and even in Lareau's work, arguably), and yet while there seems to be little hope for upward social mobility for those socially marginalized, Bourdieu does not imply that humans are without the capacity to act and undo systemic inequalities. Rather, structures are *so* shaped in modes of domination that the current structurations and the ways they are used serve to function as vehicles of social reproduction, of which all habitus-holders existent within said structures are drivers. Some 'freshwater fish', however, even through the salt-watery structure of education, *do* achieve upward mobility. They navigate the hysteresis effect and become poster-children, but trickle-up progress masks the greater reproductive functionality of inequality-perpetuating structures. Of such systems, Bourdieu (1992) writes, "... social collectives such as bureaucracies have built-in propensities to perpetuate their being, something akin to a memory or a loyalty that is *nothing other than the 'sum' of routines and conducts of agents...* relying on their know-how, their habitus..." (p. 139).

Take, for example, education, in which teachers, parents, administrators, and students each play a part in *social* reproduction. Taken altogether, *social*, here, garners a meaning beyond only the *reproduction* of *social*-class stratification, a reading which does not directly imply or leave space for agency, anywhere. If we interpret *social* as collective or collectively informed, we can see that there is a collaboration inherent in the perpetuation of such structures (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Administrators, teachers, parents, and students play their own, habitus- (and personally-) informed role. For indeed, the perpetuation of educational stratification rests not only on the existence of pedagogy and curriculum, but also on it being governed, taught, supported, and learned.

In the sense that structures comprise individual components, each of which acts out its structured function, every habitus-holder in a given structure is an agent, albeit structured to be a certain kind of agent to fulfill the immanent structure of said structure. And while acknowledging agentive capacity, Bourdieu's (1992) emphasis tends to remain on habitus, "a structuring and structured structure" (p. 139). He envisions habitus-holding agents as situated somewhere between being fully capable of conscious self-advocacy and wholly at the whim of deep structures. And "even though these agents are the product of [these deep] structure[s] and continually make and remake [them]... they may even radically transform [them] under definite structural conditions" (p. 140). Agents, of course, but in their potential for transformation structured all the while.

And so, while not deterministic to the degree of human degradation, Bourdieu's conceptualization of the social world leaves readers with an unclear hope for those agentive marginalized and freshwater folks to transform the world to a more equitable space (a hope which Ortner, below, revitalizes). While I and others might mark him off as structure-heavy, leaving questionable room for agency or change, I think it is worthwhile to acknowledge that to these critiques he defends his position, granting some leeway but deferring to his structural logic:

"[habitus] is durable, but not eternal! Having said this, I must immediately add that there is a probability, inscribed in the social destiny associated with definite social conditions, that experiences will confirm habitus, because most people are statistically bound to encounter circumstances that tend to agree with those that originally fashioned their habitus" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: p. 133).

Nonetheless amidst all of this structure I envision something more. For, I ask, what of those who break and defy statistical projections? What of those who break the chains of normalcy, of social

reproduction? And what of those who don't? In other words, where are the people in these structures, in these structured experiences? And how can a deeper understanding of how these phenomena are subjectively experienced highlight the need for structural change?

Going forward -- not as refutation but as an acknowledgement of understanding as it relates to personal experiences intersecting with time -- I incorporate anthropologist Sherry Ortner's post-structuralist thinking, particularly as she writes about a social world informed by a theory of practice. Before venturing there, though, it is useful to consider what Bourdieu, whose vocabulary we are now familiar with and who is himself a founding, structural practice theorist, has to say about the agent-structure interplay.

### **Practice Theory**

While the main way I would like to incorporate Practice Theory is through the lens and theorizing of Sherry Ortner, it is most sensible to establish practice theory at its origins. Practice theories enumerated the scholarly landscape in the late 70s and early 80s, and I am choosing in particular to follow Bourdieu's practice theorizing so as to remain in a similar headspace and make lasting connections across terminology for the remainder of the piece by building off of social reproduction theory, capital theory, and conceptualizations of habitus and field. After briefly introducing the theory from the structuralist, Bourdieuan perspective, we move into the post-structuralist tradition, following Sherry Ortner's enriching expansions of practice theory by considering how the agent and structure interplay has been, is, and will for the foreseeable future be impacted by power, history, and evolving understandings of culture.

In his book *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977), Bourdieu sets out to expose the "objective limits of objectivism" in an attempt to move beyond functionalism, which situated agents as a function of -- rather than as co-constituent with or agents in the production of --

structures. Further, he aims to move toward “a dialectic of the internalization of externality and the externalization of internality” (p. 72). The prominent constituents of practice theory are: agents, or people, social actors, habitus-holders; practices, or what -- politically -- people do (Ortner, 1984); and structures, which I think of as culture or ideology established by agents but abstracted from them. In Bourdieu’s envisioning, we should imagine the social world as balanced between what people have done or made, i.e. structures, and what social actors, i.e. agents, are currently doing or making. Agents internalize the external, or the environmental press which structures ubiquitously employ, and agents in turn, in their socially influential action (i.e. living), impact the external, the structure. In moving beyond functionalism, the *practice* in Practice Theory is critical; no longer were social theorists conceptualizing humans as *only* structured by their environment, or functions of it. Now, structuralist thinkers positioned individuals as dialectically engaging with structures, or *practicing* -- rather than “project[ing] or plan[ning]” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 138).

In Practice Theory, there persists an inevitable communication between people and their environment as well as between the past, the present, and the future. An inclusive consideration of time, Bourdieu (1977) contends, is vital for practice theory. He writes, “To restore to practice its practical truth, we must therefore reintroduce time into the theoretical representation of a practice which, temporally structured, is intrinsically defined by its tempo” (Bourdieu, 1977; p. 8). Of titular pertinence, “practice” in practice theory alludes to human action never quite being certain, again with a consideration of time and ever-fleeting present moments. Actions are, in essence, always “practices,” because the outcome, while possibly expected, is ultimately unknown. Of this uncertainty, Bourdieu (1977) writes, “even in cases in which the agents’ habitus are perfectly harmonized and the interlocking of actions and reactions is totally

predictable from the outside, uncertainty remains as to the outcome...” (p. 9). This is because we live in a social world that is never entirely individual. Individual practices secure *certainty* “as to the outcome” when socialized structures deem them so worthy or apt.

The question immediately arises (again, in different wording), what of those agents whose practices structures deem illegitimate? What of those whose habitus conflicts with an unfamiliar field? What of the fish out of water? The freshwater fish in saltwater? While it may be philosophically savvy (and logical) to surmise and posit that we can never quite know what “action” will yield what “reaction,” some in this agent-structure interplay, as a result of their persistently traversing fields, experience what Bourdieu has called a cleft habitus (Bourdieu, 2004; p. 111). I allude to this concept in Chapter 4 but don’t go into further detail here.

Having briefly laid out Bourdieuan practice theory, it is now useful to move into Ortnerian practice theory, in which the above questions are given further attention. In her 2006 book *Anthropology and Social Theory*, Ortner builds upon prominent early practice theorists of the late 70s and early 80s, who, like Bourdieu (as well as Anthony Giddens and Marshall Sahlins), sought to move beyond the constraint- and structure-heavy social theories that pervaded the social-science disciplines of the functionalist period. She finds that practice theory of this time period is limited in three particular ways: 1) in its lacking consideration of how power impacts the practices and social relations within agent-structure dialectic interplay; 2) how histories of power, dominance, and resistance impact present experiences of practice and future possibilities for transformation; and 3) how understanding ‘culture’ in its evolving sense leaves space for social transformation (Ortner, 2006).

The remainder of this theoretical framework is thus devoted to understanding practice theory through the enriching lenses Ortner has provided, namely power, history, and culture.

Placed alongside Bourdieuan practice theory, social reproduction theory, and other theoretical tenets herein, it is my hope to carry what we can of these concepts forward, bringing not only practice theory under the post-structuralist scope, but social reproduction as well (which is undoubtedly tied to practices and structuration). Later on in the paper, we undertake this same hope with the prominent structural features of Bourdieu's social theory, namely capital, habitus, and field. On all of this structure, we bring Ortner's post-structural incorporations of power, history, and culture to bear.

### *Power*

"Practice theory" Ortner (2006) writes regarding structuralist renditions, "did not ignore power... but neither did it make it central to the theoretical framework in the ways that seemed called for by [contemporaneous] work on inequality and domination" (Ortner, 2006; p. 4). Power theorists (such as Raymond Williams, Michel Foucault, and James Scott) were thoroughly engaged with these very topics in three prominent ways: by investigating the "production of power" in both macro structures as well as micro interpersonal interactions; by acknowledging resistant, active practices in thought-to-be-passive, dominated agents; and by envisioning structures not as entirely external but as perpetually "renewed, recreated, defended, and modified...[and] also continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged" (Williams quoted in Ortner, 2006; p. 8).

Agents, structures, and their interplay intersecting with power thus allows for an enlightened conceptualization of practice theory that goes beyond the classic, individuals structuring structures and structures structuring individuals, interplay. By pairing power with the interplay, we can better understand who gets to practice what -- and why -- as well as whose practices are structurally resonant or structurally deviant and, further, what the implications of

each are. This distinction and expansion of practice theory is particularly relevant in the later chapters of this piece, in which I envision power-equipped and cultural-agents as shaping and shaped by historically- and through power- institutionalized structures. Through the autoethnography featured in Chapter 4, I represent and see myself as a power-equipped, cultural agent navigating the historically shaped structure that is higher education, particularly at a selective school like Bucknell University. Investigating what relative, best understood through intersectionality, power I did have and how this equipped me for this particular space is an investigative goal of this thesis.

### *History*

The logic for incorporating power into practice theory is not far from the logic for historicizing it. Present power configurations are best understood in the context of past politics, themselves resulting from people practicing. Ortner (2006) notes that practice theory in its early development was (in agreement with Bourdieu) “intrinsically temporal,” (p. 9) as the agent-structure interplay relies on past practices (akin to structures) informing present ones (practiced by agents). The structures formed and perpetuated by past-present agents are those which inform the practices now-present agents employ. And yet, practice theorists such as Bourdieu, Ortner (2006) writes, “never really tried to look at the ways in which real histories are shaped by practices within and against existing ‘structures’” (p. 9). Thus, *historicized* practice theory understands the present practices of structuring and structured agents as remnants of the past -- the specifics of which are undoubtedly politicized and imbued with differentials of power. The aspect of history is important in the remainder of this work because the present shape of structures and whose agency is legitimized -- as a result of power and privilege -- in their shape

is relevant to understanding my own practices within higher education, a structured and enculturated institution.

### *Culture*

Further, Ortner (2006) incorporates culture into practice theory for quite practical reasons, again entwined with and harking back to “power, history, and social transformation” (p. 18). She writes, “Social transformation... involves the transformation of ‘culture’” (p. 18), culture as both a ‘constraining’ and ‘enabling’ force, simultaneously structuring agents yet providing a structuring capacity for agents themselves. Enriching practice theory’s basic premise -- the agent-structure interplay -- with a concept of culture that both shapes and is shaped by practitioners thus allows a reading of the social world as fluid, albeit inertial and nonetheless resistant to change for reasons of, for example, power and history. If we can imagine that at its core the lived-present is embodying a culture, indeed a sequential cultural perspective which comprises its shapers’ practices inasmuch as it guides them, then there is a possibility for change. Ortner (2006) writes about her adherence to a practice theory framework, “... the idea that the world is ‘made’ ... through the actions of ordinary people also meant that it could be unmade and remade” (p. 17).

Let us recall briefly some of Bourdieu’s words quoted above. He writes, “even in cases in which the agents’ habitus are perfectly harmonized and the interlocking of actions and reactions is totally predictable from the outside, uncertainty remains as to the outcome...” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 9). While “uncertain,” there is questionable hope in the simultaneously ambiguous yet strangely rigid “under definite structural conditions” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 138). By infusing agency into this conversation of structure -- themselves cultural features marked by histories of unequal power -- a possibility for restructuring becomes clearer. Ortner (2006) helps



us revitalize this very hope by situating agency more prominently -- at least in relation to Bourdieu -- in the practice theory, agent-structure interplay conversation.

### *Agency*

Even from its origins, practice theory has allowed space for change, and it distances itself -- even alongside strong structuralist thinking -- from absolute determinism. However, in the structuralist frame, possibilities for en-masse mobilization through current structures -- or even the possibilities of up-ending them -- are not clear. As such, Ortner's rendering of theory and consolidation of impressive scholarship from the late 1970s and early 1980s paves the theoretical pathway on which this present thesis is founded. While social transformation is possible, and while practice theory as a social theory *allows space for* such a possibility, social reproduction is presently a troubling phenomenon (which Ortner would undoubtedly agree with). And so, by incorporating Ortner, I bring post-structuralism to bear on social reproduction theory in hopes of better understanding the role of individual agents -- as well as habitus, capital, and field -- in this dynamic structured structures (habitus) structuring (agents) structures interplay. The remainder of this chapter is thus devoted to agency.

How are the cycles of social reproduction broken? In short, when practices change systems change. However, systems that are established through practices based on differentials of power create systems which are power-unequal -- they center some and marginalize others. It should be clear now that when Ortner (2006) brings power, history, and culture to bear on Practice Theory, she also brings power, history, and culture to bear on agents and structures. And so Ortner's Practice Theory comprises practices, agents, and structures culturally situated in histories of unequal power, so enculturated that the those in *dominant*-power positions have a large stake in the phenomenon of social reproduction, making it all the more challenging to up-

end the top-heavy structures. However, there is hope, for at the same time that Ortner acknowledges the universality of human agency (referencing Sewell, 1992), she also acknowledges that agents always operate with power: “power itself is double-edged, operating from above as domination and from below as resistance” (Ortner, 2006, p. 139).

Dominant systems can change. Ortner writes from an anthropological and feminist perspective and is thus keenly aware of how women over time have persistently practiced resistance in the face patriarchal structures. If agency is universal in humans and if agents are always operating with power, either from above or below, one must wonder why inequality persists as such. It is no wonder that, elsewhere, Ortner (1984) writes “the study of practice is the study of all forms of human action, but from a particular -- political -- angle.” Practices enacted by empowered agents “from above” as domination are not value-free, they support systemic inequalities (intentionality, Ortner acknowledges, is another aspect of agency). Practices enacted by empowered agents “from below” as resistance push back against such domination, but, while nonetheless empowered, inequality persists in having such “from below” agency legitimated. In making this point, Ortner (2006) quotes Sewell (1992):

It is... important... to insist that the agency exercised by different persons is far from uniform, that agency differs enormously in both kind and extent. What kinds of desires people can have, what intentions they can form, and what sorts of creative transpositions they can carry out vary dramatically from one social world to another.... structures ... empower agents differentially, which also implies that they embody the desires, intentions, and knowledges of agents differentially as well. Structures, and the human agencies they endow, are laden with differences of power. (p. 20-21)

And so where is this hope I've been alluding to? If within this so-called possibility for social transformation there are yet differentials of power, hindered agentive capacities, and -- expansive and widespread inequality, where is the hope for something different? There is hope in the power resistant-agents do have, in the reality that culture is fluid and changeable, and in the history of a dominant-agent-driven world already and persistently experiencing ungrounding. There is hope in numbers, in persistence, and in voices. Hope stems from the histories of systems already ungrounded and in those ungrounding. The shtick is that we cannot stop -- if ever resistive-agents would sit passively in marginalization -- and we must be vigilant in adapting to the ever-changing power-unequal-structures systemically supported by practicing, dominant-agents (especially, in this case, those *intentionally* practicing).

A final note on the Sewell quote used above is in order. While I would wager that differentials in power do influence how one's agency is legitimized, their capacity remains intact. For those who seem to sit passively in marginalization, I am confident that a more thorough, subjective understanding of their lived life would complicate this perception. We live in a complex time, where power-structures -- ever-the-more threatened by resistant agents demanding justice -- are themselves aware of their unmaking. Their eventual demise rests in the persistence of a mobilized and mobilizing counter-culture, non-normative, and resistive-agent force.

## **Conclusion**

Thus, in writing this theory chapter as such, it is my hope to establish a framework that brings social reproduction theory into the post-structural world and which re-envisioning habitus, field, and capital. I hope to expand, rather than refute as null, past social theory into the present

tense. Bourdieu wrote from a set of personal experiences within a social and political time, itself structured and himself structuring. Ortner is no different. Nor am I.

Nor are the authors whose scholarship I review in the following chapter: a literature review. Many work from similar theoretical bases and some even exercise liberty in -- like me -- re-evaluating Bourdieuan concepts like habitus as they research and tell the stories of students from under-represented class-backgrounds within higher education, either in getting to college, transitioning to college, settling into college, or moving on and going home from -- wherever *culturally* that may now be -- college. They are investigating the question posed above, namely “what of those whose habitus conflicts with the field?” What in students allows them to thrive in these circumstances which Bourdieu paints so grimly, and how can we envision people are more “in control” of their experience than otherwise “controlled”?

And, because this thesis is ultimately about me and my subjective positionality, the leading and looming question remains, “what of the freshwater fish in saltwater?” A subjective tale, yes; however, grounded in practice, structure, and agency and oriented toward social, economic, racial, and environmental justice (Denzin, 2003).

# *Chapter 3*

## *A Review of Literature*

### **Introduction**

This chapter presents a review of literature about first-generation and working-class students' experiences within higher education. I have split it into three sections. The first section is concerned with literature about how first-generation and working-class students on college campuses experience education differently than their continuing-generation peers. This literature reports findings that suggest such students are challenged *in addition* to their peers. College is ubiquitously challenging. It is designed thusly, but these authors reveal how precollege-characteristics, social class background, family income, or the sort of high school one went to -- to name a few -- can negatively impact the way one experiences college academically, socially, culturally, and developmentally. The second section concerns the impacts of persisting through these challenges. This literature paints first-generation and working-class students as, in persisting through challenges, changed, oftentimes echoing Bourdieuan theory, particularly by employing his habitus and capital terminology. These authors hone in on the social-class mobility that working-class students experience as they navigate higher education and wonder how -- if social-class is changing -- one's habitus changes as well.

The first two sections comprise ultimately pit falling literature, albeit in different ways and to different degrees. Authors writing about the challenges that first-generation college students tend to frequently situate them as lacking something or at a deficit. And authors writing about the changes upwardly mobile students experience tend to passivize (or at least do not overtly instill agency in) students who are changing. Few studies acknowledge the *choices* that

working-class students make -- *amidst* the challenges and the changes and despite the real ways that education's systemic inequality impacts them -- in navigating the far from value-free yet (American) dreamy prospects of upward social mobility. The third section is thus devoted to a few (seemingly) disparate pieces of literature which grant varying degrees of agency and autonomy to first-generation and working-class students within educational settings broadly. Altogether, this literature review will have explored: the challenges first-generation students face; in persisting, the changes they experience; and the choice-power which should be granted them in navigating challenges and changes.

Two caveats are useful before we begin. First, I have chosen to pull literature from various disciplines and research methodologies. Some write in sociology, others in education, and yet others in social psychology. Some utilize qualitative methods (Aries and Seider, 2005; Armstrong and Hamilton, 2013; Granfield, 1991; Hurst, 2010 and 2012; Jack, 2019; Lee, 2016; Lee and Kramer, 2013; Lehmann, 2007, 2009, and 2014; London, 1992; Morton, 2019; and Reay et al., 2009), and others utilize quantitative (Choy, 2002; Ishitani, 2006; Pascarella et al., 2004; Pike and Kuh, 2005; Terenzini et al., 1996; Walpole, 2003). Some authors write about "working-class" students (Granfield, 1991; Hurst, 2010 and 2012; Lehmann, 2007, 2009, and 2014; and Reay et al., 2009). Others write about "first-generation" students (Ishitani, 2006; Pascarella et al., 2004; Pike and Kuh, 2005; Terenzini et al., 1996). Yet others write about "lower-income/low-SES" students (Aries and Seider, 2005; Walpole, 2003). While these descriptors are definitionally distinct, the research questions regarding how each group experiences higher education stem from their sharing a similar root: whether working-class, first-generation, or lower-income, these students are each ultimately part of an underrepresented social-class student population (arguably a contiguous one). The impacts of being underrepresented social-class wise

are different but related to the impacts of being underrepresented in terms of, for example, race, but nonetheless these impacts are both lived and realized differently. However, they are also undoubtedly intersectional, which is a point developed in Chapter 4.

The second caveat concerns the autoethnographic methodology I make use of in this thesis and how this influences not only the literature reviewed below but also what I draw from it. The literature reviewed herein is not fully comprehensive of all literature regarding social-class underrepresentation within higher-education and the subsequent impacts of such a phenomenon. Both the literature and what I draw from it is partial and chosen, based on details pertinent to my experiencing higher education as a white, male, working-class student, particularly at a private, liberal arts college which enrolls many white, affluent, and private-high-school-educated students. With the challenges, changes, and choices of working-class students laid out, our research question -- which, to reiterate asks, *what intersectional combination of advantages and disadvantages (and, as a result, legitimated agency) marked my experience as a first-generation student from a working-class background who experienced upward mobility via higher education?* -- will be thoroughly revealed. We will then move on into the methodological and autoethnographic portions of the manuscript, open to potential responses.

### **A Source of Challenges -- Cultural Mismatch**

This 'challenges' section is most usefully introduced by briefly laying out from where a fraction of these in-addition challenges stem: unequal access to institutionally value resources and capital and the different, respective patterns of child-rearing and institutionally-advantaged support that emerge from this unequal access. Lareau and Weininger (2008) utilize follow-up interviews from Lareau's (2011) study *Unequal Childhoods*. In this study, they seek to

understand how the classed and cultural logics of child-rearing -- concerted cultivation and the accomplishment of natural growth -- continued to influence her original interviewees' paths taken and decisions made as they transitioned to adulthood. Lareau and Weininger (2008) were particularly interested in whether or not the participants decided to go to college after high school, and, if they did, how different child-rearing logics (and thus social-classes) influenced their getting-to and making-it-through college processes (Lareau and Weininger, 2008).

For the most part, Lareau and Weininger (2008) analyze how these socially-classed logics of child-rearing influenced children's' transitions to adulthood through the lens of involvement. As their children entered their teens (and oftentimes even before), middle-class parents managed and organized their children's daily lives and -- with a greater "knowledge of the educational system" (Lareau and Weininger, 2008, p. 120) -- assisted them in college preparation and application processes. This is an extension of the concerted cultivation these same parents afforded their children in elementary school. For these families, the college application process was a "family affair" (p. 119).

On the other hand, working-class and working-poor parents entrusted the school personnel like teachers and guidance counselors to prepare their children for advantageous pathways en route post-secondary schooling. While definitely advantageous, this sort of support can only go so far especially when juxtaposed alongside the "countless hours of involvement" on part of middle-class parents (Lareau and Weininger, 2008, p. 120). Working-class and working-poor parents are no less devoted and committed to their children's' success; however, because parents in these social-classes tend to themselves be college-uneducated, their experiential knowledge of higher educational systems means the support they give is aspirational and not always tangibly realized. Working-class and working-poor parents acknowledge the extent of



their experience and in its place trust that the school will support their children and help seal the deal.

Lareau and Weininger (2008) write predominantly about how the child-rearing strategies of parents from different social-class locations prepare children differently in making it to and getting through college. Stephens et al. (2012) come to similar -- although in some of the details conflicting -- conclusions; however, their focus is on culture: of spaces and of individuals. They deem the culture of higher education as itself middle-classed and argue that students from working-class backgrounds experience a cultural mismatch as they navigate the college landscape.

Stephens et al. (2012) employ cultural mismatch theory to better understand how success within university environments necessitates adherence to a “culture of independence” to which some students are primed to acculturate (or who are already encultured) and others are not. They call the sociocultural dispositions students bring with them to college *models of self*, or “sets of social norms, each providing a different guide or blueprint for how people should relate to others and to the social world” (p. 1180). There are two prominent models (although necessarily there are many in-between these two poles): one oriented toward independence, the other toward interdependence, and they align with different social classes. The independent model of self emphasizes *individualism and control and influence over expectations*. Students attending college from middle-class or well-resourced backgrounds tend to, because of the social and material conditions of their upbringing, embody cultural models of self tied to “norms of independence,” which “focus on individual development, personal choice, and self-expression prior to college” (p. 1180).

In contrast, Stephens et al. (2012) write that the interdependent model of self emphasizes *connectivity and flexibility and adherence to expectations*. Stephens et al. (2012) map the interdependent model of self onto working-class and working-poor families. They rationalize this both by citing Lareau's (2011) findings as well as by giving weight to the real ways social-class inequalities impact one's material conditions, subsequent qualities of life, and especially how one sees themselves in-relation to others. Simply put, because of social-class inequalities, students attending college from working-class or under resourced backgrounds have experienced life differently than those from well-resourced backgrounds. They bring with them models of self -- influenced by material and social conditions associated with these realities -- tied to persisting amidst "limited economic capital, environmental constraints and uncertainty, and few opportunities for choice, control, and influence" (p. 1180).

Whereas those college-students from middle-class backgrounds' sense of developed individualism helps them thrive at college, the ways working-class students are accustomed to tackling tasks and hardship collectively is not -- on the surface -- an asset. This is because higher educational culture, in mobilizing to and reproducing middle- and upper-class norms and culture, advantages those privy to its ranks above those oriented otherwise (Stephens et al., 2012; Bourdieu, 1990a).

If we take Stephens et al. (2012), Lareau (2011), and Lareau and Weininger (2008) together, clearly none of these cultural models-of-self or cultural logics of child-rearing inherently convey disadvantage or inequality. Indeed, Lareau (2011) writes, "both [child-rearing logics]... offer intrinsic benefits (and burdens) for parents and their children" (p. 241); however, institutions hold their own "model-of-self" shape -- what Stephens and crew call norms -- which is molded by those majority-wise comprising its historic ranks, namely those able to readily

access and succeed in -- in the myriad ways necessary -- education, namely those from educated environments, namely those concertedly cultivated, namely those from middle- or upper-class backgrounds. Thus, the institution of higher education embodies a cultural model catering to independence. And so, while both models of self have their *individual* merits, success within modern social institutions necessitates adherence to one over the other (Stephens et al., 2012 and Lareau, 2011). Again -- both are advantageous, one is advantaged.

Higher education does not legitimate independent models of self only because it has historically matriculated students embodying the habits constituent of such norms. Through “curricula, institutional policies, and teaching practices,” the independent cultural model of success is reified (Stephens et al., 2012). Specifically, Stephens et al. reference universities’ expectations of students to be self-reliant and self-driven in their motivation, in developing their voice, in expressing their ideas, and in paving their own way. These assertions stem from one of their studies in which they surveyed university administrators to gauge their expectations for incoming students and found that these administrators valued norms aligned with independence rather than interdependence. Stephens et al. (2012) do not rebuke independence-oriented values in themselves, but rather the extent to which institutions of higher education push narrow bars of success and achievement, bars which their enrolling student bodies are -- by consequence -- unequally predisposed or primed to meet.

In conclusion, the factors influencing the ways working-class students experience higher education differently than their peers are complex. It is not sufficient to only talk about the cultural mismatch, but rather one must also consider the academic mismatch stemming from under-resourced schools which, for various reasons not explored here, under-prepare students for college persistence and which first-generation students and working-class students tend to attend.

And one must also consider how house-held “college knowledge” (Hooker and Brand, 2010) advantageously prepares those students with it and leaves others, for whom it is absent, to their own devices. And one must consider how financial resources and constraints impact the coming-to and making-it-through college-goings of those from lower-income social-class and socioeconomic locations, particularly with the pressures of financing college on one’s own amidst the baseline challenges of college. Finally, one must consider how each of these simultaneously intersects with the others creating an interconnected web of real, lived experience for each student in the academy. The following “pre-college” and “college” sub-sections highlight the financial, academic, social, and culture factors that *challenge* first-generation and working-class students’ experiences before they get to college, while they are in college, or oftentimes both.

### **Challenges -- Pre-college and College**

In an effort to support the claims above, the remainder of this ‘challenges’ section is divided into two subsections devoted to exploring how authors have been writing about the noteworthy and different ways that first-generation and working-class students are experiencing higher education. The first subsection -- “Pre-college” -- looks at the realities and constraints which, under the current functioning of educational structures, inform the cultural mismatch, particularly as working-class students look into and plan for college. The second subsection -- “College” -- looks at the extended, intersecting implications of the cultural mismatch, particularly at the ways they manifest themselves in social, academic, and financial challenges (mismatches) once working-class students arrive at and make their way through college.

Taken altogether, these subsections lay out the in-addition challenges working-class students experience along a few, inextricably intersecting threads: cultural, social, financial, and

academic. Beyond and intersecting with the cultural mismatch, there are social and financial differences which impact working-class students in the academy. The social aspects stem not only from feelings of belonging (Stephens et al., 2015) but also from learned, interpersonal behavior and etiquette (Jack, 2019; Lareau, 2011). The financial aspects, while not prevalent to the same degree for every working-class student, can impact the amount and quality of time students are able to spend on advantageous, school-related engagement (Astin, 1984). Within the educational environment where academic achievements -- such as grades -- are measured quite rigidly, such cultural, social, and financial pulls impact the degree to which one is able to -- to the same degree that those not experiencing such pulls do -- succeed in school, or academically.

Nonetheless, success in college is predicated on getting to college, which, for all students and families, is a process that requires extensive planning, research, and financing. For working-class students, the onus of navigating this process often rests on individual students, rather than a joint, family effort. Thus, the college experiences of first-generation and working-class students -- arguably more than others -- have “pre-college” roots.

### *Pre-college*

The purpose of this subsection is to better understand the cultural mismatch as not only something predicated on cultural differences brought to a university setting, but also something deeply rooted in lived, social-class experience. For indeed, tied to the cultural selves which students bring with them to college are the social-class and socioeconomic circumstances apparent in homes and schools and lives, which -- to reiterate Stephens et al.’s (2012) claim -- are realized as persisting amidst “limited economic capital, environmental constraints and uncertainty, and few opportunities for choice, control, and influence” (p. 1180). One way that choice is inhibited by one’s working-class or poor social-class background is in selecting what

college to attend. And on the topic of college choice, it is necessary to consider the rising costs of higher education and how this impacts the sorts of colleges financially under-resourced families and individuals are able to attend. And we must pair this reality alongside the widespread, cultural, and ever-growing push for college credential attainment as if it were *the* benchmark for success and one of the only legitimate pathways to financial security and individual betterment. First, we look at school choice and the financial aspects influencing this phenomenon for those from under resourced families. Second, we look at the amount and kind of support working-class students have in, after choosing a school, enrolling, persisting, growing, and ultimately, as we will see below, changing.

### *School Choice*

In their large-scale, longitudinal survey and data analysis of college students from eighteen different colleges, Terenzini et al. (1996) found that first-generation students were more likely to attend “less selective institutions than their peers whose parents both held a bachelor’s degree or higher” (p. 276). Through quantitative analyses of students at varyingly competitive public and private schools, Alon and Tienda (2005) demonstrate that the selectivity of a college bears significantly on whether or not -- in their study -- racially underrepresented students complete their degrees. They found that the more selective a college, the more likely that racially minoritized students graduated. While their study neglects a class analysis, I anticipate that, should they have looked at social-class, their conclusions would have been comparable. In reaching these conclusions, they nullify the “mismatch hypothesis” -- which in their context means the assumption that the lower graduation rates of minoritized students stems from academic under preparedness alone. Nonetheless, I include these findings to highlight 1) the unequal distribution of first-generation students attending selective colleges (Terenzini et al.,

1996) and 2) the degree to which the selectivity of colleges impacts the graduation rates of underrepresented students therein (Alon and Tienda, 2005).

Regarding school choice, education researcher Anthony Jack (2019) puts an interesting twist on access amongst lower-income students. He distinguishes between two types of working-class students: the privileged poor and the doubly disadvantaged. He developed these subgroups through observations over-time and put them into action by interviewing 103 students at an “elite college in the northeast U.S.” and telling their stories (p. 199). The privileged poor are those lower-income students who, through scholarship opportunities, are able to attend social and culturally advantageous preparatory schools before entering college. These well-resourced and oftentimes privately-funded schools, themselves comprising students from families financially secure enough to enroll them (most often those with college educations), instill in such students the advantageous “cultural models” desired by higher educational institutions (Stephens et al., 2012). Attendance at such schools can pay cascading dividends, opening doors of access to selective institutions, which, while still financially daunting to many lower-income families, can be funded through scholarship opportunities.

The doubly disadvantaged are those lower-income students who follow more traditional first-generation or working-class student pathways to college, i.e. *not* attending secondary schools that equip them advantageously for college, at least compared to the privileged poor. Thus, the doubly disadvantaged (hence their moniker) are those lower-income students who attend selective colleges without the preparation afforded their privileged poor peers. Nonetheless, both groups of students are lower-income and this shared reality informs the experiences (albeit in different, intersectional ways) of both groups once on-campus.

Jack (2019) makes useful note that, although the privileged poor are in many ways advantaged and privileged as a result of their attending preparatory schools, they often still feel the financial stresses associated with being lower-income, and the impacts of this are noticeable. Regardless of the cultural, social, and academic preparation available to the privileged poor, both they and their doubly disadvantaged peers traded time for money by working in college. And while some jobs in college function co-curricularly in that they enrich one's academic experiences, Jack (2019) found that the better, more reliable jobs were those which served other students and placed workers at an additional social disadvantage. Nonetheless, time spent working is time not available for spending elsewhere. The impacts of this discrepancy are discussed below, but for now let us look at how financial challenges, in addition to during college, impact the pre-college decisions of those financially under-resourced students.

#### *School Cost-, Benefit-, and Debt-Analysis*

Financial trials abound in the modern college choice landscape for those both of these subgroups which Jack (2019) has identified. However, I would be remiss to imply that paying for college is *easy* for even those who are financially secure. For indeed, the cost of college has risen dramatically -- beyond what inflation might project -- in the past two decades, regardless of school selectivity or type. Still, how one funds college is personally impacting. Whether one or one's family is able to pay out of pocket, draw from a gradually developed college fund, take out loans, or receive grants and scholarships, the increased cost of college has become ubiquitously straining; however, the strain is unequally distributed and strikes those lower-income students most acutely.

To reiterate, in Jack's (2019) study, even those assisted through scholarships and grants, in both groups, had to work-on campus to supplement costs of housing, food, and books. Many



lower-income students, however, do not receive the degree of funding that folks in his study do. Many lower-income students, their families, or a combination of both must manage the debt which accompanies the increasingly valued (while arguably increasingly *valuable*) college credential. For lower-income families, managing debt is not as simple as making monthly payments or withdrawing from a college fund. Many lower-income families that send their children to college do not have substantial -- or any -- savings accounts and thus additional debt can be a monumental burden (Furquim et al., 2017; Hillman et al., 2015). Hillman et al. (2015) -- within their large, quantitatively analyzed sample -- empirically show how plans (and the possibility of planning) to pay for college costs depend both on family income and parental level of education. Lower-income parents of eventual first-generation students saved less, less frequently had a savings account to draw from, and were thus less financially prepared to help pay for college than the upper-income families in the study. Parental education, Hillman et al. (2015) found, had a profound impact on early financial planning. They surmised that this stems from an anticipation to -- themselves having gone to college -- eventually “cultivate” their child’s pathway to college (p. 2 and p. 21).

So how do lower-income students finance the rising cost of higher education? Furquim et al. (2017) found that first-generation students -- who are more often than not also lower-income -- “borrowed more frequently and in greater amounts” than their continuing-generation peers, who notably in their study, are also borrowing more (pp. 85-6). The reality is that the present emanates precarity, increasingly so for the once-secure middle-class (Cooper, 2014; Ortner, 2006). And yet, for all students drowning in debt amidst the ever-shaky, insecure job market, those lower-income in this mix inevitably fare most poorly (Perry and Spencer, 2018; Scott-Clayton, 2018). And while money in itself is beneficial for navigating the financial costs of

college, the barriers lining the pre-college journeys of first-generation and working-class students are not only financial, but draw from experience. Hillman et al. (2015) found that parents who had gone to college were not only able to help finance an education, but they were also financially secure enough to plan ahead, which further lessened the financial hit of rising tuition costs.

Money, however, is not the only capital at play; our commercial landscape operates culturally and socially, as well. College-educated parents are thus also privileged in their ability to support their children in advantageous and advantaged ways, having been there and done that - in applying to college, in selecting courses, and in anticipating what is to come.

#### *Advantageous Support in Getting-to and Making-it-through College*

The picture painted in the above section runs the risk of situating aspiring students from college uneducated households as going-it-alone, unsupported. This is not the case. The case is, rather, that those parents who did not go to college support their children differently -- in ways they can and know how, but often without the “college knowledge” available to others (Conley, 2005; Hooker and Brand, 2010). In these cases, difference often aligns with disadvantage. Sociologist Elizabeth Lee, in her interview-based study of how social-class influences social-life on college campuses, reckons that the parents of working-class students are “conflicted role-models” (Lee, 2016: pp. 32-36). She conducted multiple interviews with twenty-six lower-income and working-class. The parents of these students, many of whom are first-generation, support and encourage the college dreams, plans, and enrollment of their children, but their support oftentimes does not match the “college knowledge” available to the children of college-educated parents. Lee writes, “parents who themselves attended college not only understand the process of applying for admission more clearly than parents who have not but are also more

likely to be immersed in communities that provide additional sources of information for their children...” (Lee, 2016: p. 34). The parents of the students in Lee’s study supported and encouraged the educational aspirations of their children; however, the extent to which this support manifests itself in directly applicable utility is limited. Lee’s qualitative findings align well with Choy’s (2002) statistical analysis of how having parents who did not go to college impacts students’ academic planning and achievement. Examining three longitudinal studies, Choy (2002) found that those prospective students with college uneducated parents received less help in applying and, once enrolled, in making curricular choices.

At this point, one might ask whether or not such a responsibility should be placed on parents, but the question is unfounded. The rub is that -- regardless of should or shouldn’t -- the quality and kind of support that college-educated parents impart on their college-going children need not be intentional because it is cultural, infused in the environment (Lareau, 2011; Stephens et al., 2012).

Schools also play a part in how they prepare their students for college and life in young adulthood. As Jack (2019) rationalizes in his distinguishing between the doubly disadvantaged and the privileged poor, “high schools play a powerful role in shaping students’ cultural competencies, serving not only as judges of academic success, but also as crafters of students’ strategies for achieving it” (p. 21). And while his study is limited to those lower-income students now attending an elite, affluent college where lower-income students are exceptionally underrepresented, the realities of unequal high school preparation remain. Jack (2019) describes the high schools of the doubly disadvantaged as “distressed, overcrowded, and under-resourced” that employ under-supported teachers who oftentimes have less experience “than their counterparts in more affluent communities” (p. 11).

In this section, we have looked at some of the pre-college factors that influence and inform the challenges first-generation students, students from working-class backgrounds, and lower-income students are likely to experience once they arrive at college. The weight of these pre-college challenges stems from the fact that the parents of these students have oftentimes themselves not gone to college. The support these college-uneducated parents are able to provide to their children -- whether that be academically, financially, culturally, or socially -- often fails to serve as advantageously as the parental support afforded to continuing-generation students. And while it may seem quite doom and gloom, there *are* those first-generation, lower-income, working-class, or doubly disadvantaged students who do make it to college, albeit in fewer numbers than their peers from college educated families. They, thus, comprise the aforementioned underrepresented social-class student population. And in addition to facing barriers to entry, barriers and in-addition challenges persist when enrolled.

### *College*

College success is often measured in terms of academic achievement and performance, and so it makes sense to begin this section in the academic realm. First, a caveat is in order: that working-class and first-generation students experience academic challenges does not imply anything about their intellectual capabilities. Indeed, these challenges are often times not individual, but rather structural-inequality-based. There macro-systems -- like capitalist class division, the myth of the meritocracy, and credentialism -- in place that allow such inequalities to persist (Labaree, 1977). These factors are not random, but are a byproduct of current structuring. Whatever academic under-preparation first-generation or working-class students may tend to experience in higher education cannot be said to stem from lacking individual effort. As such, there must be a thorough consideration of the resources available to schools one has attended and

the experiences that students have had as well as the kind of support and relationships, or lack thereof of either, they have felt, garnered, and built.

As an extension of this caveat, without a structural analysis of why such social and educational inequalities exist the literature reviewed in this chapter -- above, below, and herein -- runs the risk of perpetually painting these social class and cultural newcomers to higher education as at a deficit, or as lacking something that their peers have. As this chapter continues, the literature reviewed moves away from this deficit framework. An advantageous move away from deficit frameworks brings us to structural analyses of educational inequality, the most useful of which also equips students, within structures, with agency, particularly those navigating the changes inherent in present social mobility. In the broader extent of this thesis, moving away from a deficit framework equates acknowledging in people an agentive capacity amidst real, structural constraints. Deficit frameworks seem to highlight how individuals experience structural inequality; however, by not overtly acknowledging the agency in those most structurally constrained, these thought processes passivize said individuals. More on this below. For now, we review the -- while ultimately deficit oriented -- literature that portrays the challenges first-generation and working-class students experience in higher education. It is useful to start with and understand these challenges extensively because they are real. My issue with deficit frameworks is not that they are wrong, but rather that they do not go push far enough toward understanding the sources of challenges and inequality. And in not going far enough, they ultimately propose surface level remedies for deeply rooted, and systemic -- what amount to be -- injustices.

### *Differences in Academic Achievement and Performance*

Scholars have extensively acknowledged the academic performance gap apparent among first-generation and working-class students in college. For example, to harken again back to the large-scale, longitudinal survey studies conducted and analyzed by the education-research crews listed above, first-generation and lower-SES students reported spending less time outside of class studying, less credit-hour enrollment across three years, lower overall grade-point averages (GPAs) (Pascarella et al., 2004; Pike and Kuh, 2005; Terenzini et al., 1996; Walpole, 2003). First-generation students in Choy's (2002) study tended to not follow "rigorous" tracks and thus "appear[ed] ... less academically prepared than other students" (Choy, 2002: p. xxxi). Terenzini (1996) found that first-generation students reported having weaker reading, math, and critical thinking skills in their first year, and Pike and Kuh (2005) found that first-generation students reported experiencing less overall learning and intellectual development than their continuing-generation peers. It should not be surprising, then, that Terenzini (1996) also found that first-generation students were also less likely to be enrolled in honors programs. And while Pascarella et al. (2004) found that, overall, first-generation students ameliorated this apparent performance gap by year three, early and *additionally* challenging experiences in academics as well as in the social dimension related to feelings of belonging or 'fitting in' (Lehmann 2007) can make reaching later years a feat in itself (Ishitani, 2003, 2006). If not for lack of individual effort or intellectual capabilities, what gives?

### *How are students spending their time?*

Alongside academic obligations, Terenzini et al. (1996), Pascarella et al. (2004), and Walpole (2003) all found that first-generation and lower-SES students spent significantly more time working, either off-campus or on, coinciding with their spending less time studying and in

classes. While it is debatable the degree to which such disparate obligations negatively impact the academic experiences of students, it cannot be ignored that such students have less time to devote to advantageous curricular and extracurricular events. Pike and Kuh (2005) found that first-generation students were less engaged and Pascarella et al. (2004) found that they were involved in fewer extracurricular activities than their peers.

Does co-curricular involvement really matter, though? Education researcher Alexander Astin has theorized that “physical and psychological energy... devote[d] to the academic experience” (Astin, 1984, p. 1) is advantageous for retention, degree completion, and overall student development. This much should be obvious. The crux of the matter is that students who work alongside going to school do not always have the freedom to partake in such advantageous co-curriculars. Some avenues of advantageous involvement include participation in honors programs, living on-campus, interacting with faculty members, and simply remaining immersed in the campus environment and making good use of its resources (Astin, 1984). My hope here is not to paint working-class students as unable to involve themselves in these ways, but rather, with what else has been laid out, to expose the obvious barriers facing them in doing so.

What are the ramifications of being less involved in such traditionally advantageous ways? First-generation students tend to deem their college environments less-supportive than do their peers (Stephens et al., 2012). Follow Stephens et al.’s (2012) proposition via cultural mismatch theory, this is unsurprising; indeed, the college environment may expect a *specific* kind of involvement from students, a degree and type of involvement potentially more unlikely from lower-income college students. In other words, if support from a university environment is predicated on a student fitting a certain mold, it is unsurprising that students who don’t fit such a mold feel unsupported.

*Social impacts of being a working-student not having disposable financial resources*

That students from underrepresented social-class backgrounds tend to feel unsupported by their campus environment is unsurprising given that the financial demands on them oftentimes warrant their working significantly more hours -- beyond the curricular -- than their peers. More time spent working results in less time spent involving and integrating oneself into the campus climate in advantageous ways. However, even for those working-class students who do -- or might wish to -- integrate themselves or become involved, challenges persist. Research suggests that lower-income students experience ostracism and barriers to entry, which interrupts making the most out of such experiences (Pike and Kuh, 2005) and seeking out other traditional pathways to involvement, like participation in Greek-life (Hamilton and Armstrong, 2013).

In their ethnographic research project, *Paying for the Party*, sociologists Elizabeth Armstrong and Laura Hamilton spent extensive time observing the “party scene” at a four-year residential college, particularly within sororities and the women that approached and frequented their ranks. Those students “marginalized or disadvantaged” by their social class background in their study fared poorly in these processes -- organizations oftentimes blind to their discrimination and classism (Hamilton and Armstrong, 2013, p. 74).

While participation in a Greek-letter organization is by no means a requirement for an advantageous higher education experience, upper-class students have dominated the history of being involved in them. Thus, not only is their participation in them expected but they also join them anticipating advantageous social outcomes. Similar to “college knowledge,” first-generation and working-class students are without the -- here “cultural” -- knowledge required to participate and advantageously benefit from Greek life. Pursuing such an experience and the experience of Greek life itself runs the risk of being worse -- and possibly even harmful -- for



those first-generation and working-class than it might be for upper-class, culturally-pre-accustomed students. In addition, being underrepresented -- by definition -- implies inherent challenges in establishing community across similar experiences. On some college campuses, the rush scene (for sororities as well as fraternities) is socially lucrative. Few, however, are privy to its expectations, pulls, and pressures beforehand. Fewer are primed to navigate them.

Beyond the traditional party scene, participation in academically, socially, or culturally advantageous opportunities often rests on financial security or disposable income. Study abroad experiences, unpaid internships, internships requiring travel, break trips with groups of friends, or even attending cultural events on-campus all require additional financial investment, beyond tuition, room, and board (Jack, 2019). The benefits of such extra- and co-curricular experiences are well-known (Astin, 1984), and the inequity facing students unable to participate in them manifests itself in numerous ways. Grants and scholarship opportunities are an option but, on top of already stressful and in-addition challenging schedules, time devoted to writing application materials might not be an option.

To reiterate, the challenges first-generation, working-class, and lower-income students tend to experience do not disappear when these students make it to the collegiate ranks. In other words, inequality reaches beyond opportunity and access. Students that do not have an advantaged (*vs.* advantageous) combination of the financial, academic, and social resources that their continuing-generation peers do often find themselves experiencing a disconnect with the broader culture (Stephens et al., 2012). Nevertheless, some first-generation and working-class students who experience the challenges reviewed above do persist and through persistence achieve degree completion. The question arises, however, about the impact of such persistence. What of those students who are able to turn a cultural mismatch into a match? And to draw from

the theoretical framework: what of the freshwater fish in saltwater, specifically the freshwater fish that adapts to the saltwater environment for the sake of social mobility? The next section concerns itself with the changes these students are likely to experience as a result of adapting to the cultural expectations of a space previously foreign.

### **Challenges and Change -- Students Themselves Changed**

This section reviews literature about how success and achievement for those cultural newcomers in a higher educational environment oftentimes necessitates that they *change* in ways their continuing-generation peers are not compelled to. These *in addition* changes are associated with the college process in general -- regarding development, maturity, and growing up -- and as a result of the internal, dispositional changes which come with persisting amidst challenges that pull one culturally.

“College changes all students” (London, 1992, p. 10); however, like the challenges listed above, there are changes are *in-addition* for first-generation students, some of which “may take the student into uncharted cultural territory” (London, 1992, p. 10). This is unsurprising if we return again to cultural mismatch theory and what persisting through college for underrepresented social-class students might mean. Stephens et al. (2012) propose that students generally are benefited if they experience a culture match rather than mismatch.

If the culture of higher education is distinct to such a degree from the cultural selves students from underrepresented social-class backgrounds bring with them to college, then we must seriously consider the dispositional, habitu{s}al impacts of acculturating. We must consider the ramifications first, for the self, and second, for relationships, the relationships within both the mobilizing-to and mobilizing-from environments. And so, I have split this section into two parts, each incorporating the empirical work of scholars who have researched these very changes. The

first section explores the impact of the cultural change of college attendance on the self, and the second concerns the impact of the cultural change on one's relationships, in particular how traversing such meaningful boundaries can position one precariously between paths and people: the route to one's destination, the breadcrumb trail left behind, and the differently-classed passersby that such straddling necessitates one navigate.

### ***What in the self is changing?***

Many studies explore the changes cultural newcomer students report experiencing as a result of attending college (Aries and Seider, 2005; Granfield, 1991; Hurst, 2010; Hurst, 2012; Lara, 1992; Lee, 2016; Lee and Kramer, 2013; Lehmann, 2009; Lehmann, 2014; London, 1992; Reay et al., 2009)

In their qualitative and comparative study, Aries and Seider (2005) sought to learn about the different ways students from lower-income backgrounds developed class-based identities depending on the sort of college they went to. They interviewed 30 students; 15 from a small, private, liberal arts college and 15 from a larger, public, state university. At the former, which they call "Little Ivy," Aries and Seider (2005) found that lower-income students' experiences were "marked... by the assimilation of aspects of speech, attire, and behavior commonly associated with the middle and upper classes" (Aries and Seider, 2005, p. 431). At the public institution, such drastic assimilation patterns did not emerge. They surmise that this is due to the student-bodies at larger, public universities comprising more students from lower-income backgrounds and households with college-uneducated parents. Thus, the student-body and its culture also impact the degree to which students from underrepresented backgrounds feel pulled to acculturate.

Granfield (1991), in his interview-based research project, highlights how the class-culture *shape* of the college space impacts what underrepresented students are pressured to adhere to, to change to. In his study with working-class students at an elite law school, Granfield (1991) found that clothing and what one student calls “good social skills” (p. 340) were an important part of participation in the pervasive upper-class norms of the environment (Granfield, 1991).

Language, clothing, and behavior all relate closely to habitus and capital; however, as has been alluded to, things like language, clothing, and behavior are not *only* individual, but social (habitus = “socialized subjectivity”). Thus, they not only impact the self but also one’s relationships, both to those in the cultural environment one mobilizes to and to those in the cultural environment one mobilizes from.

Philosopher Jennifer Morton writes about the -- simultaneously singular yet social -- ethical impacts of upward mobility in her philosophical, autobiographical, and interview-based book *Moving Up without Losing Your Way* (2019). She gives three reasons why one must pay attention to the ways social mobility is lived-out presently. Upward mobility via education impacts and fosters, she writes, particular kinds of “relationships with family and friends, connection to one’s community, and one’s sense of identity” (Morton, 2019, p. 8). Underrepresented social-class college-student success “incur[s] significant *ethical* costs” because of the distancing -- from family, home, self, and the culture(s) of each -- implied in the process (2019, p. 150, emphasis added). Such distancing is not a requirement of those for whom a college degree functions social-reproductively (focusing here on U.S. students within U.S. higher education), but it is for those for whom education serves to socially (and culturally) mobilize (Hurst, 2012).

### ***The impact of such changes on relationships***

Scholars have been writing broadly for decades about the “hidden injuries” accrued and uncovered by those upwardly mobile (Sennett and Cobb, 1972) and, more recently, about how college students from working-class and lower-income backgrounds experience this phenomenon while en route the increasingly-pushed college-credential pathway (Hurst, 2012; Lara, 1992; Lee, 2016; Lee and Kramer, 2013; London, 1992; Lehmann, 2013). Aligned with Morton (2019), theorists and researchers here often write about how this implicit cultural-pull impacts relationships: to people and place, both old and new; as well as within one’s fluidly changing self.

In conversations with students, London (1992) learned that individual tastes in music, clothing, and food as well as political ideologies served as “symbols of separation and mobility” (1992, p. 9). ‘Separation from what?’ and ‘Mobility to where?’ are two important ponderings which highlight again, the simultaneously social and singular phenomenon under speculation.

“Moving up. . .”, London (1992) writes, “requires a ‘leaving off’ and a ‘taking on’, the shedding of one social identity and the acquisition of another” (London, 1992, p. 8). Through mobility, one acquires a new cultural “model of self,” one which, following Stephens et al.’s logic, transforms the way one relates to the social world (Stephens et al., 2012). We must therefore consider how culturally-changed students navigate home and home relationships.

### ***‘Separation from what?’ -- Separations***

Hurst (2012), in her mixed-method and narrative-based study on working-class students, usefully acknowledges that the ways return journeys impact students must be understood on an individual basis. She writes of students who begrudge going home because of scarce resources as well as students who, while eager to maintain connections, find themselves distant as a result and

in the nature of their time away. Lee and Kramer (2013) spoke with 29 working-class and lower-income students who indicated that “over time, ... [found] that their conversational repertoires... shifted such that they have difficulty communicating with the friends and family members they left behind at home” (Lee and Kramer, 2013, p. 26). Such “frictions” required a management of one’s fluid identity and manifest themselves in a simultaneous array of concealing changes and growth while “faking” an unchanged and static version of self (p. 27). “Faking”, they note, arises in Granfield’s (1991) work as well, but rather than faking participation in a previous environment, Granfield writes about students faking participation in their new collegiate environments. In an extended qualitative study with 26 lower-income and working-class students, Lee (2016) found that, like Hurst (2012), even for those who intended to remain connected with “hometown friends,” there was “discomfort, awkwardness, or pain” when attempting to manage the differences apparent in the disparate routes each took following high school (Lee, 2016, p. 183).

It is worth noting that, as London (1992) reckoned, “college changes all students” (London, 1992, p. 10). In a similar vein, life changes all people. The “hometown friends” and college uneducated, working-class, or lower-income parents, too, are changing. Some parents of upwardly mobile students are even benefited and take part in a retroactive mobilization of sorts as a result of their children’s’ achievements (Rondini, 2015). As much as one grows having left their home en route to upward mobility, so too do those who remain. Nonetheless, we give this phenomenon -- that students experiencing social mobility feel pressures to change culturally -- attention because of its “hidden” nature within “class-less” U.S. culture in tandem with the unrelenting pursuit of the American Dream through upward social mobility, a vehicle frequently fueled by education.

And in a different, yet related sense, the assets, skills, and credentials one develops through education can in themselves limit upwardly mobile students' return journeys home. Not only, in some cases, have such students been encouraged to move on from their area, those who desire to return are oftentimes overqualified for employment there. This is especially true of rural areas, as Kefalas and Carr (2009) detail in their book *Hollowing out the Middle*, concerning what is now commonly referred to as “the brain drain,” where rural communities pour resources into a handful of aspiring students so that they can attend and succeed in college. The crucial flip side of this dynamic is that the resources put into these students rarely get recycled back into the communities from which they move on. And the allocation of resources is so severe and concentrated in the few who leave that those who do remain in the area are themselves frequently undereducated about how best to use their time following high-school (Kefalas and Carr, 2009).

### ***‘Mobility to where?’ -- Destinations***

We must also consider how culturally-changed students navigate culturally-new spaces. The college environment is but one of the relatively new cultural spaces upwardly-mobile students are likely to navigate as a result of changing through education. Examples of others are graduate schools and work spaces and environments that require post-secondary college credentials (Granfield, 1992; Rivera, 2015).

Lehmann (2013) writes about the risk for working-class students to continue feeling like “cultural outsiders” when entering “traditional[ly] middle-class” fields like law or medicine, which success in “depends on possession of specific forms of cultural, social, and personal capital that goes beyond credentials” (Lehmann, 2013, p. 12). The acquisition of these advantageous forms of capital oftentimes elude working-class students for the reasons discussed in the ‘challenges’ section above. They are tied to financial resources and what financial

resources can allow one to do, such as take part in unpaid internships. While beneficial for social-capital, such experiences may not be accessible to those who are less-financially secure and need consistent income. Social networks inherited through parents' traditionally middle- or upper-class connections must be acknowledged as well (Rivera, 2015).

### ***Conclusion to the Subsection -- Moving on from the middle***

It should not be surprising that each author above, in analyzing the lived experiences of social mobility, has come up with their own way of naming the nebulously socio-cultural experience of upward mobility. And yet, despite these differences, a common thread that tends to emerge is a description of this in-between conundrum; however, few go beyond description into the realm of choice and agency amidst change. Without highlighting the agentic capacity of those experiencing upward mobility, we run the risk of passivizing them. When I use “passivizing” here and elsewhere, I allude to linguistic voice. In passive-voice grammatical structure, *nouns* are *verbed* -- or students are changed -- and in active-voice grammatical structure, *nouns* do *verbs* -- or students change (themselves). The following and final ‘choices’ subsection comprises literature disparately combined to bring active-oriented readings into this so far passive-oriented conversation (where nonetheless a combination of structure and agency is most accurate and just). I ultimately hope to diminish the tendency to work in deficit-frameworks and to promote a structural understanding of agents and their inevitable co-existence in -- and relationship with -- the structures they live in (and so too can enliven).

### **Challenges, Changes, and Choices -- Students Changing Themselves**

Reay, Crozier, and Clayton (2009), a research team who conducted an interview-based study with working-class students at an elite institution in the United Kingdom, highlight an



important detail about the changes students who are either first-generation, working-class, or lower-income are likely to experience in such elite spaces -- namely, that they are not passive in their experiencing the cultural impacts of social mobility. In other words, working-class students, in experiencing mobility, are not only challenged and changed, but conscious and choosing. Reay et al. (2009) found that those students who were able to meta-reflect on their education and name the real impact their social-class had on their experiences relieved some of the turmoil associated with habitus dislocation enlisted above. The students they spoke with “all have a reflexive critique of the costs and losses, as well as the gains, in attending” elite educational spaces (p. 1116). The authors do note, however, that the students they spoke with have “managed tensions between habitus and field since early childhood” and thus have developed “reflexive habituses” capable of “generating opportunities and academic success” (Reay et al., 2009, p. 1115-6). Students in their study, I would posit, are not holistically different than other working-class students, whether they be lower-income, first-generation, working-class or a combination. While the geographic and chrono-political context of their study is certainly critical for understanding the ways in which their participants lived out this capacity for reflexive, class-conscious self-awareness, people wholesale are owed such a capacity.

For now, it suffices to say that we should not view the dislocative, in-addition changes discussed above as only engendering in students feelings of being lost in the middle or as passive recipients of the changes they are experiencing. Rather, we must envision students living this phenomenon as conscious and choosing (to continue to change or not) and that subsequent impacts -- to self and to others, new and old -- are interruptible, reconcilable, and interpretable.

Before moving into the autoethnographic analysis wherein I explicate this claim, we conclude this chapter by reviewing a few pieces of literature which grant agency -- some more

explicitly than others -- amidst the prospect of acculturation and assimilation to marginalized social actors in educational settings. While the authors reviewed above, I doubt, would deem their interviewees and participants choice-*less*, few are overt about the agentic aspect, like Bourdieu, of the practice theory interplay. And they tend not to highlight the choices working-class students make and the agency they enact in navigating these changes. An agentic reading acknowledges the changes that students such as these must seemingly go through but puts them in them in the driver's seat, rather than as passive recipients of such identity and culture-based self-change.

Thus far, Granfield's (1991) findings have been situated in the 'changes' section; however, his stigma *management* (Goffman, 1986) theoretical framework implies 'choices' (persons 'managing,' i.e. practicing) and highlights the students in his study's *activity* in changing rather than *passivity* in being changed. These students *observe* their environment and their marginal place, they *manage* their presentation, and they *navigate* the potential paths within their own mobility.

And yet, an acknowledgement of choices does not diminish the bind working-class students in elite educative spaces are likely to experience. Granfield finds that if working-class students want to be seen as legitimately occupying elite spaces, they have to "disengage from their backgrounds" (Granfield, 1991, p. 339). Such disengagement, Granfield deduces, requires "concealing class backgrounds," in an effort to "pass" (a term Goffman uses) as belonging in the dominant space (Granfield, 1991, p. 339).

Such efforts at disengaging and concealing -- without consistent *practice* -- remain surface level, however, as presentations and facades. And with consistent practice, students experience "identity ambivalence" (Granfield, citing Goffman, 1963, p. 107), which, akin to

“straddling” (Lubrano, 2004), brings us full circle to the resultant findings of the “changes” section. Still, these sections function distinctly. While ‘choices’ subsume ‘changes’ which subsume ‘challenges,’ a goal of this chapter is to, again, guide readers to the crux of the matter: choice and agency. While choice-capacity should necessarily be granted to each underrepresented (social-class- or other-wise) student, the degree to which any given individual choice is legitimized by dominant structures highlights yet another inequality in this matter. “Passing,” to continue using Goffman’s (1963) language, is an intersectional privilege, the legitimacy of which transcends social-class boundaries and must be understood in the contexts of both race and gender (a task undertaken in-part in Chapter 4, the autoethnographic portion of the thesis). Carter’s (2003, 2005) work is a good segue into such an intersectional, agency acknowledging framework.

In two pieces of scholarship drawing from the same sample (n=68), an article (2003) and a book (2005), Sociologist Prudence Carter writes about the adaptive strategies that lower-income black and brown students employ in juggling school participation and success with community affiliation. In a time where scholars were researching school success among racially underrepresented students, Carter brings a cultural capital framework to bear on and critique oppositional culture theory. Whereas authors working from this point of view surmise that black students reproached educational achievement because they associated success in school with “acting white” (Fordham and Ogbu, 1986), Carter unravels these blanket claims and complicates the narrative toward “a more complete and nuanced understanding of how culture ultimately affects the prospects of mobility for lower status social groups” (Carter, 2003, p. 1).

Similar to Granfield (1991), Carter’s theoretical framing is critical for interpreting her research findings, particularly as she lays it out in her 2003 article. Where this manuscript’s

theoretical framework highlights cultural capital broadly (chapter 2), Carter usefully distinguishes between dominant and non-dominant forms of cultural capital. In the context of what has been covered thus far, dominant cultural capital describes that cultural capital which aligns with institutionalized cultural capital and non-dominant cultural capital describes that cultural capital which is, thus, not institutionally valued. In the educational context in which Carter roots her research, non-dominant cultural capital is closely related to lower-income, black cultural capital, particularly because of the way "... a privileged few [in our society] get to define what knowledge is or to define the images of the intelligent student" (Carter, 2005, p. 6). These privileged few are wealthy, white, and educated.

Working from the dominant and non-dominant cultural capital framework (among others not discussed at length here), Carter sets out to complicate the notion that black and brown students "reject academic excellence because they perceive it as 'acting white'" (Carter, 2005, p. v) by interviewing such students to gain greater insight into how they orient themselves toward school. Carter finds that students chose to wield different amounts of both dominant (white) and non-dominant (black or brown) cultural capital. Carter designates those who wield dominant cultural capital more than non-dominant cultural capital as (dominant) cultural mainstreamers. She designates those who wield non-dominant cultural capital more than dominant cultural capital as non-compliant believers. And she designates those who wield both dominant and non-dominant forms of cultural capital as cultural straddlers. Each of these subgroups, in *choosing* to utilize different forms of cultural capital, navigate the resultant consequences, particularly regarding whether or not their choices strain or reify their affiliation with their "in-group" (Carter, 2003, p. 138), or those from their communities.

What is crucial to acknowledge here is that the students in Carter's study acknowledged the stakes inherent in their mobility, in receiving an education that could propel them. They understood where, and from where, their varying degrees of cultural capital wielding would take them. And in understanding this, they made choices, some to resist the current, others to flow with it, and yet others to remain somewhere in the middle. Nonetheless, they chose.

Paralleling Carter's work, it is my hope to complicate the narrative surrounding first-generation and working-class students who are experiencing upward mobility, particularly those who are able to attend selective institutions. I want to shift the focus away from the challenges and changes toward the choices students make, amidst challenges and despite changes, so that we may see a more complete and nuanced picture. Inevitably, by focusing on choices as such, the prior two foci are not only revealed but understood more genuinely and humanly. And in granting such agency to each student, I also want to acknowledge the intersectional privileges and powers that accompany choices and agency and which situate some more advantageously than others in making choices -- amidst challenges and despite changes -- gracefully or confidently (McIntosh, 1988). For indeed, a deep motivating factor in writing this piece is uncovering the unequal systems which propelled me social-class-wise upward and not my neighbors and friends.

## **Conclusion**

A closing note on the methodological function of the empirical studies reviewed above is in order. With what has been discussed so far, I hope to have painted a picture of the pathways those working-class students are likely to encounter as they navigate the increasingly lucrative landscapes of higher education and beyond. They experience challenges as a result of their being underrepresented social-class wise. In the face of challenges, they drop-out, stop-out, or persist.

In persistence (although rightly in *all of these*), they change. And in changing, they make choices along the way.

The quantitative studies enumerating the ‘challenges’ section lack a depth which individual stories grant access to. Nonetheless, they do a good job at exposing some of the basic inequalities fueling the phenomenon in question. All literature in the ‘changes’ section finds itself on, if not wholly qualitative methodologies, mixed-methods with a driving, qualitative component. The interview and ethnographic-based studies herein grant access to this aforementioned depth. It is no wonder why the ‘changes’ that accompany the ‘challenges’ are revealed when exploring lived human experiences and stories. The ‘choices’ section -- while sparse -- also comprises qualitative literature, the agency and choice-capacity contributions of which, I firmly believe, would not otherwise be gleanable.

While it is certainly not the case that the scholars outside the ‘choices’ section rid the students they write about of their agency, it is nonetheless true that a capacity for choice is not their primary focus and thus is missing from analysis and findings. In this regard, theoretical frameworks and orientations are useful and should be carefully chosen. Many authors in the ‘changes’ section employ Bourdieuan theory, which, as has been shown, tends to deterministically passivize individuals. However, even for those whom agency is not explicitly highlighted, such as with Granfield (1991), readings which regard individuals with agency are both possible and logical. And Carter (2003, 2005), although working from a Bourdieuan framework, grants agency to those students she spent time with both by tweaking and complicating the ordinarily structural concepts as well as through critiquing rather structural assertions (Fordham and Ogbu, 1986). What is clear to me at this point is that agentive readings, in our current structuration, themselves require enacted choice and a will to write human lives

more equitably and justly, while nonetheless maintaining a critique of the systems which necessitate and allow us to dominate each other.

Still, it is worth noting that, even for those in the “challenges” and “changes” subsections who write about students who drop out (Ishitani, 2006; Lehmann, 2007), who persist, who fake it to make it (Granfield, 1991), or who resist domination (Ortner, 2006), agency is not missing. It is unobserved. By observing agency and bringing it to the forefront of analyses, we are able to see how it intersects crucially with power in meaningful ways, ways which oftentimes *determine* -- or, less rigidly, influence -- whether or not one’s choice is legitimized. If one’s action pushes back against the norms we fish have been inculcated to call water, one runs the risk of having their choice delegitimized. It is my hope with my own autoethnography to show the ways agency worked for me, and -- in our current structuration -- why.

As should be clear, this literature review takes the shape of a funnel. The first, ‘challenges’ section is enumerated with literature, citations, data, large sample sizes, and findings. The second, “changes” section comprises less overall literature and unique findings, yet is still relatively substantial. The third section, as I have concocted it, is sparse. There are scant pieces of literature which examine fully the processes of choice within change and transformation as a result of education, much less in the narrow confines of choice and change as a first-generation student. It is this gap that I envision my autoethnographic analysis informing, for I believe this gap to be not one of neglect or ignorance but one of methodological inaccessibility and limitations within chosen methods of investigation. In comprehensively and after-the-fact viewing my own experiencing higher education, both as a first-generation student from a working-class social-class background (an underrepresented and marginalized position) as well as a white, geographically local man (well-represented and privileged positions), it is my

hope to instill an inherency of choice within individuals. While at the same time, it is necessary to understand how agency -- enacted from differentially positioned and socialized bodies - functions in structures of unequal power and domination. My agency and its functioning in my favor -- because it did -- is a result of advantageous forms of capital and embodiment, advantageous in that the environment (field) in which I utilized them they were legitimated, heard, and received. And so, on the one hand, I seek to promote that humans -- and for the sake of this paper, first-generation students -- in their embodiments are agentive, choosing, and positionally conscious. On the other hand, it is my hope that readers will understand current structures and systems, of which education is a prominent one, as socially unequal in their distribution of advantageous goods and services as well as in their legitimizing certain forms of agency while delegitimizing others.



# *Chapter 4*

## *An Autoethnography*

### **Introduction**

Deciding where I would focus my undergraduate academic efforts has been an ever-evolving process. When I arrived at Bucknell in the fall of 2012, I was riding the high of an enriching high school experience and was eager to translate my tripartite Christian, student-athlete and science-invested self to a new environment: college, just up the road from where I grew up. By the end of my second undergraduate summer, I had changed. I had quit the track team (first year), I re-evaluated my Christian identity (second year), I stopped pursuing physics (third year), and yet fully committed myself to studies in other disciplines, particularly Classics and Ancient Mediterranean Studies.

As the literature review might suggest, being a first-generation student from a working-class background, I did experience some challenges stemming from some of the disadvantages facing social-class underrepresented students in education. These challenges impacted the ‘changed’ trajectory I lay out just above. However, I was also supported and guided and privileged, and the resources in these fonts impacted this trajectory too. Through this support, I persisted and changed. In changing, however unanticipated it may have been, I made choices, choices which nonetheless were contingent on the support, guidance, and privilege afforded me.

To demonstrate the challenges I experienced, how I changed, and the choices I made at Bucknell in relation to these challenges and changes, I have organized this chapter into three sections. In the first section, I highlight the ways my experience as a working-class first-generation student overlaps with the “challenges” subsection of the literature review. In other

words, this first section highlights where I was challenged -- particularly in ways pertaining to the first-generation student experience -- or under-privileged. This section is further divided into cultural and academic aspects of these challenges, as not every challenge conveyed in the literature review applies to my context. Indeed, a goal of this project overall is to better understand people as intersectionally contextualized.

Thus, in the second section, I highlight the ways my experience as a working-class first-generation student deviates from the “challenges” subsection of the literature review, showing where I was privileged. This second section comprises three parts: social advantages, financial advantages, and proximity-to-home -- or geographic -- advantages. These first two sections highlight how my access to dominant (i.e. legitimized when enacted in the field) forms of social, cultural, and economic capital impacted how I was able to navigate social spaces. The third section highlights the ways my experience as a working-class first-generation student is lived, chosen, and transformative. In other words, this third section highlights the ways in which I wielded (chose to wield, i.e. agency) structurally legitimized forms of capital. In addition, this third section also highlights the impact this transformation had on my relationships to others, both in new, mobilizing-to environments and in old, mobilizing-from environments.

Overall, this chapter is a story of my past, told along a thread which persists into my present and which has brought me to writing this thesis: my investment in learning. And while I focus on the first two years of my college experience, lived and living stories seem to refuse containment in time. Any boundaries I set bleed into the then-future and have root in the then-past. I have been wrestling with containing the story, thinking that autoethnography needs structuring. This desire for rigidity is slowly dissipating, though, as I have come to realize that autoethnography is as much in the living as it is in the meaning-making of the living, which is an

ever-continuous, present effort, part of which is documented below. As much as I am curious to feel and experience -- with what I know now -- what I lived then, I over time feel less and less pulled toward the mythical authenticity it might yield. The meaning I make of my past is necessarily a product of my present, and I look back from this ever-changing vantage: interpreting, remembering, reflecting, learning, and looking back on a static history that itself was once lived.

Stories are -- among other things -- products of pasts. I thus conclude the remainder of this introduction with a few vignettes that highlight a prominent theme in my life's trajectory: a passion for learning. The vignettes below thus constitute the thread around which this autoethnography revolves. The challenges, changes, and choices within my higher educational experience as a first-generation student from a working-class cultural background are each tied to my impassioned pursuit of academia. Should my priorities have been oriented elsewhere, I do not know where I would be today. I do, however, know that I would not be telling this story, writing this thesis, and living this life. Having my roots and sense of self deeply rooted in learning and being a student supported me throughout the relative degree of up-and-down triumphs and trials I experienced. This pursuit of knowledge is also ultimately what has taken me the farthest away from home. Education is powerful. Ideas are powerful. And both of these have empowered me -- socially, culturally, agentively, consciously -- and while I do believe in a baseline level of intelligence inherent in humans -- and life -- generally, formalized education has enriched my understanding of the world, particularly because of the ways it granted me access to the thoughts, minds, hearts, and passions of others outside of my experience and outside of my time.

This story, however, is not about destinations and points but pathways and processes, organized, to reiterate, as challenges, complications to challenges, and changes and choices. We proceed in that order, starting at the beginning of my time at Bucknell where, in transitioning to a new environment, I met substantial challenges. While I sequence the events somewhat chronologically, I have also broken time at some points to introduce thematically resonant material. Where this happens, I clarify with timestamps (where useful), dates, and contexts, aligned to the right of the page and underlined. First, some context:

### **Context**

2003 -- Third Grade

*4x6=24, 7x8=56, 9x5=45, math*

The room is bright. Above us, a dropped-ceiling with chalky-white tiles encompass an array of panel-sized fluorescent lights that gleam onto a polished, tile floor below us. In the middle are low desks, white boards, students, a teacher; an elementary-school classroom. I'm sitting in the middle of the room, waiting for the laminated sheets of paper being passed back the row, and I am excited. I've been practicing my times tables, the 1-10 grid, and we're about to play a math game.

When we had played this game before, students would race against each other to see who could get through a sheet of multiplication problems most quickly. *Two times two equals four, three times four equals twelve, six times seven equals forty-two*. Winning, here, required a combination of quick-speaking and mental math. I was pretty quick, quick enough to incur the attention of our teacher, Ms. J. She insisted I race her rather than the other students. *Five times two equals ten, seven times eight equals fifty-six*.

I don't quite remember the results of what turned into a competition (i.e. whether or not I won), but the prospect of ascending the ranks to be on par with the teacher surged something within me. This memory stands out prominently in my mind -- I remember feeling intelligent. It was fun to be good at math -- I esteemed it highly and it felt like others did, too. Anything STEM related always seemed to carry more weight than other subjects. And if it wasn't math or science (which didn't really appeal to me until middle-school), it was building and constructing. I was always building something.

This 3rd grade classroom moment was one of the first times I remember *feeling* smart, and it was on the topic of math and numbers. I seemed to grasp the subject relatively well, and thereafter mathematics continued to be something I was good at and took deep pride in practicing.

The possibility of competing against an adult was pivotal. I not only felt intelligent, but I felt especially intelligent in relation to my peers who I don't recall having the opportunity to compete with the teacher. For all I know, other students -- in my or others' classrooms -- may have competed with the teacher. Crucially, however, my memory paints the scene dramatically, poignantly. *I* got to prove what I knew to an adult. My young ego swelled and I continued pursuing school and resting in the affirmation moments like these gave me. When I was doing math, I felt intelligent and capable.

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2012 - June -- High School Graduation

*Force = mass x acceleration, free-body diagrams, physics, science*

My parents are driving me to my high school for graduation. It's a beautiful day. The sun is shining. Chairs are set out in Upper Dauphin's quaint football stadium, chairs for me and my

ninety-or-so other classmates. This is the same stadium in which I'd spent countless hours training, conditioning, winning, losing, making and missing blocks, securing and fouling out throws. In the car with me, I have a coat hanger full of medals, all but one of which I'd won in football, wrestling, or track, and all of which I would wear that evening to commemorate the high school accomplishments that made this event significant to me. On top of all of these athletic medals, I intentionally place one donning "Science." I and a team of three others won these medals at a science competition the year before. I wore this medal for the past and for the future; not only because I was proud of how well our small school competed against other schools, but also because I wanted to make the statement that, above all, I was indeed a learner, a student of the sciences. And in a few, short months, I would be en route to Bucknell University, where I would start my studies as a physics major and continue my athletic efforts on the track and field team, throwing shot-put and discus. A student first nonetheless.

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2014 - August -- Junior Year of College

*Kets, wave functions, matrices  
paideuo, paideuso, epaideusa, pepaideuka, pepaideumai, epaideuthein*

It's the beginning of my third year at Bucknell. I just got back from my second summer in Greece. In the semester prior, I gave myself an ultimatum: if I came home from this summer passionate about Classics and archaeology, I would stop pursuing physics and math. After spending eight weeks, quite literally, in the field, excavating ancient Byzantine and Greek material culture on an undergraduate research grant, my mind was well-made up. Still, I'm pulled to give Physics one more try -- I was, after all, enrolled in the Quantum Mechanics course I had been looking forward to since high school. As it happens, after our first day of class, I

begrudgingly email my professor, partially about a reading assignment, but particularly about my leaving it:

*Hello Professor,*

*8/27/2014*

*First, I hope your semester is off to a good start. I am looking forward to taking this Quantum Mechanics class with you, for the time being\*\*.*

*Here is my reading question: Why does a state have kets and/or bras? You mentioned today in class that they have to deal with row and column matrices, but I am still quite confused as to what they really mean, and are they interchangeable ever, in some cases?*

*\*\*I am not sure if I am going to stay enrolled in this class. I have been conflicted in the past semesters whether or not I want to continue in Physics or put my main focus on Classics, so, depending on how I feel these next few classes go for me, I may or may not drop for a Classics course. Please don't think that my dropping of the class, if it happens, is any of your doing or because of you. It is merely something I have been dealing with over the past year.*

*See you Friday,*

*-Jon Hunsberger*

I had already done part of our assignment for the following class, but it had been painful.

Reading physics textbooks took the most out of me -- reading over and over and over again, attempting to connect the figures to the words, the formulae to the concepts. I spent so much time in my physics instructors' offices, and I loathed attempting physics work alone. In this email, I proved that I attempted the assignment and in the same breath alluded to my possible departure from the course. I did not go back Friday, and, even as I wrote the email, I do not think I planned to.

The loose formalities I showed this professor are a testament to the bind I was in -- the physics department had greatly supported me with encouragement, opportunities, effective teaching, and time, yet I could not shake the feeling that I would not be able to keep up. Regardless of how my grades were increasing over the course of my time enrolled in the courses, my feelings of rightness in physics -- and of myself as a physicist -- ever-dwindled as we began our foray into the depths of the discipline, resulting particularly from early, challenging experiences. I think I wanted physics to work out, but it wasn't and it ultimately didn't. At this point, I had settled on my direction at Bucknell -- my studies -- and my efforts in physics were

not worth the pain the trudging caused me. I was not fulfilled by this work, at least not to the point that I was fulfilled by the Ancient Greek and Classical coursework I had otherwise been involved in. For at the same time that I was beginning to consider dropping Physics, I was simultaneously increasing my involvement with the Classics department, wherein I had started taking courses in Ancient Greek two semesters prior. I initially intended, like many Bucknell students, to double major in Classics and Physics, but the lucrative potential of a Physics credential was not enough motivation for me to persist through the inadequacy I felt when I compared my knowledge of the subject with my peers’.

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With this thread established, let’s now venture into the events that accompanied and informed its trajectory, starting with the challenges -- or disadvantages -- then proceeding to the complications to the challenges -- or advantages. Afterward, we return to the thread in order to better understand how the intersectional combination of these advantages and disadvantages impacted me and my inner workings -- my agency as well as my habitus -- by the beginning of my third year at Bucknell -- where this autoethnography leaves off -- and beyond.

### **Challenges**

Transitioning to Bucknell for me was challenging: culturally and academically. And in these challenging times, I clung to what comfort I could, to the comfort I did not see hindering my persistence at Bucknell. I clung to my spirituality, a solace from the stress and an alternative, in my mind, to the social norm. I clung to my Christian friends and mentors, both at Bucknell and at home, and also to friends from back home. I vented to them about the ways Bucknell was challenging me -- in ways I could not have anticipated -- and I reminisced with them,



remembering good times in high school, in sports, and in community. And I clung to my love of learning, even though -- early on -- it was incredibly unclear to me how learning could accompany the failing or near-failing exam grades I was receiving. I was not ready for the discomfort that would come with the way college would change me; nonetheless, the discomfort obdurately proceeded to meet me... to a point -- coincidentally where this chapter's focus leaves off.

### 2012 - August -- Move-in Day

On Friday, August 20th, my mom, Scott (my step-dad), and I packed what few belongings I have decided to take with me into Scott's blue Honda Fit. Accompanying me in the backseat and filling the trunk space are some clothing, a small mini-fridge, my computer, my laptop, some books, and some knick-knacks. The trip is easy -- one we frequently take -- on mostly country roads until we meet Sunbury and catch Route 15 up to Lewisburg. Throughout my life, my mom and I have taken many trips to this area, as the Selinsgrove strip is the closest shopping outlet to our home. After making the short, ten-mile drive past the strip and toward Lewisburg, we arrive at Bucknell, littered with blue and orange balloons. We pull into the Vedder circle, are greeted by orientation staff and students, and start the process of moving in. My room is on the fourth floor, and since my roommate is not yet there, I get to pick what bed I want. I choose the one closest to the window. I love the sunlight and know my thoughtful, academic ponderings would be best accompanied by overlookings of the comings and goings of students and campus life below.

My mom and Scott are both helping me move my things in. After everything is unpacked from the car and in my room, my mom begins to help me put my clothing away and organize my things on my desk. I always bring knick-knacks with me; items reminiscent of the past, whether

they be gifts, objects to which I've attached relational or sentimental value, or notes from those who care about me. On this occasion, I brought a picture frame an old friend had gotten me. The frame is a sculpted, stark-black hand that holds two sheets of glass, between which I crowded four, memorable pictures: one of my Pappaw, one of my Nanna, one of me and my mom, and one of my dad. I brought a magnetic spindle toy that had previously been my brother's, and I brought a small *Diskobolos* figurine that my sister had gotten me.

After we loosely set things up in my room, my mom, Scott, and I go to the cafeteria for the new-student luncheon. After lunch, my mom and Scott head back home. I am excited and anxious.

\*\*\*

Three days after I moved in to my first-year residence hall, I send this email to Housing Services at 3:41pm:

*To whom it may concern,*

**8/20/2012**

*I am having difficulty in my current dorm. On my application I designated that I preferred a single dorm. I know this is not an easy request to accommodate, but my needs are real. My roommate has already "gone out" twice and once came back under the effects of alcohol, where he doesn't remember what he did. I am not trying to snitch on him, because I know students do this. I want to let you know that I want no part of it, and when students come into my room as I am trying to sleep, and get me out of bed to go to a party, I get very frustrated. This environment is already adding unnecessary stress to my life. I don't drink and I don't use drugs. I am at this school for the education, and I cannot study or focus in my room. Me being on this hall will hinder my academic ability and potential.*

*What I am asking for is a relocation. I will go anywhere where I can be to myself or at least surrounded by those like me. If you have ANY spots in Choice housing, I would like that. Also, any single dorm. The activities going on around me are against my beliefs and religion. I don't feel that I should need to pay for schooling and housing if I am going to be placed where I cannot perform to my full potential.*

*I will take anything you have. On any location of campus.*

*Please consider my request.*

*Thank you,*

*Jon*

What happened in these three days that prompted me to send this email? In the grand scheme of things, I'm not sure it was anything -- for better or worse -- out of the typical, college transition process. However, orientation and the first few days of classes struck *me* discordantly. In a mixture of homesickness, discomfort with the new, and venturing into the unknown, I was distressed, anxious, uncomfortable, and wondering what I had gotten myself into. Orientation is an incredibly social, busy-ness orient{ing}ed experience, one which caught my introverted and shy side off-guard. While not all bad, most challenging was my inability to see others in the socially-isolated predicament I found myself in, which, at the time, appeared to stem from my aversion to partying. From my jaded perspective, my hallmates were enjoying themselves. As a freshwater fish in a saltwater environment, I was unable to deem my environment stifling, at least not until these years later.

This social predicament was the first of numerous moments in my experience that highlight the ways in which I was accustomed to a different sort of water -- or environment -- than my peers on-campus, particularly those on first-year my hall. In relation to my hallmates, there are at least two ways I was culturally conflicted. First, because the party-scene at Bucknell appealed to some of my hallmates but did not appeal to me, I felt socioculturally isolated. And second, the pieces of clothing -- athletic shorts, t-shirts, and jeans -- I brought to school with me were different than the norm, and -- albeit subtly -- this made clear to me from early on that I had a different kind of preparation for what was to come than the students around me. These cultural conflicts were concentrated in the early days of my time at Bucknell and I was relieved of the brunt of their weight when my request to change rooms was accommodated.

However, I also struggled academically, and these early, academic challenges impacted my sense of self-esteem, my confidence, and my ability to see myself as worthy of being a

Bucknell student, particularly in the field I was then pursuing: physics. These pressures to do well academically did push me to develop good work habits and allowed me to employ my strong work ethic, but there are residual effects, often manifesting themselves in feelings of being an imposter in academia.

Before writing about the cultural and academic challenges in particular, it is worth contextualizing 18-year-old Jon, the self I brought with me to Bucknell in 2012. I then explore some of the challenges I can recall, some resulting from who I was and what I expected of Bucknell when I arrived, others resulting from Bucknell's expectations of me.

### ***Cultural and Academic Challenges***

#### *Context*

Overall, this subsection concerns the impact of early experiences in an unfamiliar cultural space. It is usefully introduced by some context, particularly context which clarifies who I was (rendered through memory, what I was saying, and who I was saying it to) in the months leading up to college. In what follows, I incorporate a small piece of my college application essay, which I wrote about my grandfather, and I quote messages I shared with high school friends. For anonymity purposes, I amalgamate these friends into one character, named James. To be clear, James is a composition of a few friends from my high school, and while I don't utilize many of James' words, it is worth noting that -- in reality -- the words *I* was saying were directed at different people, each with their own contexts and histories with me.

#### *College Application Essay:*

Written September, 2011 ... the beginning of my senior year of high school:

"I am honored to have had my grandfather be a part of my life. His love for God and his faithful attendance to church inspire me. He gave abundantly to the church, and people continue to speak of how they miss him. I want to be like my grandfather and I want to mirror his lifestyle

and values. No matter what was going on in his life, he would put others first. His personality is something I want to mimic. He was kind to all and never judged others. He was the most generous, funny, faithful, loving, and lively person I knew. He loved to live and lived to love. He has had an enormous impact on my life.”

---

*Conversation with James:*

I've been friends with James since I was around ten years old. We play many sports together, are actively involved in our church's youth group, and spend a lot of time together outside of organized activities.

On March 31st, 2012, It's a few days after one of our (starting to become) regular, Valley high school parties. James was not at the party, but knows that I was. I say to him, “just so you know... I'm still me. I don't know why I'm acting different, but I am. I'm not being bad, I think I'm just trying to figure out where I fit in.”

On May 25th, 2012, James and I bicker, arguing about the type of friends we have been to each other. I say, “I cannot wait til I go to college and I don't have to put up with you anymore.” He calls my bluff, and I respond “...and you're not even worth arguing with... funny thing, I won't lose any rest about this, and I won't ever feel the need to contact you again.”

On the 18th of June, I'm back to berating James. He has again pointed out that I'm being shitty, and I don't want to hear it. I say, “you realize that we'll have no contact after this summer, right? I'm excited for the relief of being away from you. That might be a bit harsh, but I've had enough of you thinking you're the best out there.”

Things escalate as James responds, “coming from you that means nothing. You may be big but you act like you're a god. It's been real, thanks. Have fun at college. When you realize that we were behind you 100% of the time, we will be waiting.”

I say, “I'm going to one of the best colleges in Pennsylvania, where I was accepted solely on academics. I graduated tenth in my class and was the top ranked guy. I have a district medal in the three sports I played and went to regionals my first year of wrestling. I was offered scholarships to big schools in football. What do you have to show?”

James responds, “Oh, congrats! You're still not nearly as good as you act. I may not be as smart as you, or as athletic as you, but I've done a lot that you haven't. I've lived my life, and I'm happy with that. I don't need you in it. I don't know why you always come back to me because I am obviously not on your level. You're going to go to Bucknell, yes, but then you'll start drinking like you want to all the time, and you'll get angry, you'll get in trouble. And that will interfere with your academics and athletics. So good luck!”

Looking back on this 2012 summer is hard and juxtaposed with 2011 college-essay words is even harder. There's a lot of pain in my 2012 self. Not only was I in pain, anticipating the way

my life was going to change now that I had graduated from high school, but I also inflicted pain on my friends. I was obviously tormented. I brought with me to Bucknell a self resonant with the essay I wrote about my grandfather -- kind, gentle, generous, and caring -- but also an egotistical, entitled, and prideful self. These two seemingly dichotomous poles occupied an odd space in my mind: poles with a void in between. Adherence to one meant an outright neglect of the other. In some spaces, I was a Christian, embodying the example my grandfather had set for me in public spaces and, for example, in my college application letter. In other, more private spaces like chat rooms, I was cruel to and got angry at those who would criticize me.

### ***Sociocultural Challenges -- Alcohol***

My rationale for employing the word “sociocultural” is straightforward. People often refer to a “*social scene*” when they talk about Bucknell’s party *culture*. For example, in their book *Paying for the Party* sociologists Armstrong and Hamilton (2013) reveal the cultural and social-class factors influencing the functionality of the party scene on college campuses. Culture is lived both socially and individually, and my individual aversion to the party scene carried low social-value, ultimately isolating me from the broader culture. Nevertheless, I was able to find my solace elsewhere; however, finding such a space was fraught with some challenges.

As is clear from my conversations with James, I was not entirely averse to alcohol before coming to college. However, something about going to Bucknell felt like a fresh start, and a fresh start looked like forging new, healthy habits. In my mind, healthy habits looked like abstinence from college party culture and an adherence to my academics, athletics, and Christian faith. There were social costs in making this decision. In my recollection, I was one of very few on my hall who did not go to parties during the first few nights of orientation. On the one hand, I did not want to reaffirm my James’ presaging, that I would succumb to pressures which would

interfere with my priorities. And on the other, because I associated drinking and partying with stress and discomfort in a new environment, I fled to the other pole in my dichotomized mind: Christianity.

And so, when my hallmates asked me to join them in “going out” after our first full day of orientation, I declined. I needed to decompress a bit, and hoped to get to bed early, rested enough to tackle the full schedule of events the following day.

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2012 - August

*Night 1, Friday, August 17th:* I’m asleep. It’s probably 10:00pm. The door opens and two hallmates quietly whisper my name to wake me up. They come over to the side of my bed and want me to come to a downtown house for a party to meet some people. I’m resistant. They are - - reasonably -- persistent. These were good people who were trying to help me get acquainted with the community; while I saw this pressure to go downtown as a pressure to drink, which I’d already sworn off, it really was a pressure to spend time with them, to get to know the people I’d potentially be spending a lot of time with the next few years. I give in and join them.

The party is lowkey. There’s background music playing, and it’s easy to converse with people. I declined a hospitable offer of jungle juice. No one seems to bat an eye -- I’m not pressured to drink. I meet some people, feeling ambivalent about it all, and I’m back to my room and in bed within about an hour, half relieved that I wasn’t pressured to stay and half annoyed I was ushered out of bed in the first place. This scenario was harmless, but the mindset with which I encountered it yielded the volatility which make it yet memorable. In conjunction with the next few nights, I slowly began to feel like there wasn’t much of a place for me at Bucknell.

*Night 2, Saturday, August 18th:* I'm having trouble sleeping. Music is playing pretty loudly in the room next door. It's around midnight. My hallmates are hanging out. After the busy-ness of orientation, however, I am exhausted. Laying there awake, unable to sleep, I begin to feel entirely alone, neglected, disregarded, and unhappy. I want to go home.

*Night 3, Sunday, August 19th:* I am asleep until a hallmate wanders into the room, thinking it is theirs. My roommate is around the hall somewhere but not in the room, so the door is unlocked. They seem drunk -- stumbling around and making noise. I do not feel unsafe, but, again, annoyed. I can tell who it is, but I'm hesitant to say anything. I lay there quietly. They turn the light on, quickly realize it isn't their room, and leave.

*Day 4, Monday, August 20th:* I wake up early the next morning, tired and frustrated from three continuous nights of interrupted sleep. I don't really know what to do or what my options are. In my head, I'm thinking it might be best to just go home, although I doubt I realized the ramifications of such a choice. After a while, my RA walks down the hall and, because my door is open, stops by and asks how things are going. It's hard for me to keep it together. I begin to cry and tell him how the past three nights have affected me, how I'm feeling homesick, and how I'm worrying about classes beginning and whether or not, with the current living situation, I'll be able to focus on my school work. He acknowledges my discomfort, supports me, says he will communicate with his supervisor, and refers me to the housing services email address. I draft the email displayed above, send it, and hope for the best. It was challenging for me to see an alternative. I could not see myself staying at Bucknell if I had to continue living in Vedder.

Early on at Bucknell, I did not only feel different because of my choosing not to party, but I also felt different because of the relative possessions I had brought with me to campus, a prominent one being the clothing I wore. It is subtle, and while I am not exactly sure how deeply



this impacted my sense of belonging, I have a rather vivid memory of the event detailed below. And because I remember it, I know that at the time it meant something to me. Clothing and my presentation have always meant something to me. What follows is an attempt to unpack that meaning.

### ***Cultural Challenges -- Clothing and Presentation***

Even though I hesitate to label it as such, I was raised in a lower-income, working-class household for most of my childhood (I say most because the introduction of Scott into our family -- obviously -- transformed our individual and shared social-class over time), and I developed a sense of self and a disposition toward the world necessarily contiguous with my family's access to financial resources. The most obvious manifestation of this reality presents itself in the clothing I wore as a child and teen. Growing up, I recall family friends dropping off large, black plastic bags of hand-me-down clothing on the stoop behind our house. Some of the clothes I wore came from this lot. My mom and I would also shop clearance racks at the mall and shops in Selinsgrove -- memorably -- once a year in August, a week or so before the school year began. We would also shop at Wal-Mart, and we would, of course, make good use of the local Goodwill.

As of late, I have come to take a great deal of pride in thrifting and being frugal; however, growing up, I was constantly aware of my clothing. I never wore (or had financial access to) American Eagle, Aeropostale, Hollister, which, for my high school, were the preppy brands. This awareness of the clothing I had access to oftentimes manifested itself in shame when I was shopping with my mom at thrift stores. To this day, whenever my mom and I are shopping at my hometown Goodwill and the front door opens, my instinct is to look at who it is, to determine if they know me, and to then catastrophize what the result might be if people

learned I shopped there. Of course, it was only recently that I realized they, too, were in Goodwill and likely felt similarly about seeing folks they knew in the store. Nonetheless, I was self-conscious of my clothing.

On top of limited disposable income to put toward clothing, I also have a large frame (made larger by constant weight lifting), long arms, and long legs. This makes it challenging to find jeans, khakis, dress shirts, and suits that fit me comfortably without ordering individual pieces tailor-made. I thus, like many other athletes in my high school, wore a lot of athletic shorts and t-shirts. Along with the few pairs of jeans I did own, I brought this compilation of clothing plus a pair of tight-fitting khakis to campus with me in August of 2012. I did not, unfortunately, bring the suit I had worn to graduation festivities a few months prior. I did not think I'd need it; I was packing for school.

#### 2012 - August -- First Night

Bucknell's orientation is busy -- the program is designed to bring students up to the speed of campus, to acclimate them to the environment, to orient them to Bucknell. I don't know what I was envisioning, but I did not pack for a number of the occasions ahead. On the evening of move-in day, there's hub-bub about an event for all new students. Everyone is picking out outfits, referring to ties, dress pants, dresses, and skirts, and I don't have dressy clothing with me. Thankfully, one student on the hall, conveniently sized similarly to me, offers to lend me a shirt and a tie. With my ill-fitting khakis, it works out. However, from this moment on I am aware that I have brought different things to college than my hallmate peers. I did not yet know what else I was *missing* and would need to ask others for.

It's worth noting that my clothing wasn't *worse* than others'; however, it was noticeably *different*. I deem the clothing I wore as a cultural and social-class aspect because of the way my

clothing choices are tied to my family's financial resources. At Bucknell, there is an obvious, visible, and displayed culture of wealth and affluence, particularly by the student-body. The clothing I brought with me marked me as different, and I felt different on day one.

For the sake of clarity, I was not *made* to feel ostracized because of my clothing, it just sort of happened (the gravitational pull of a field). Similar to my being invited -- albeit a bit disruptively -- to the party on night two, these occurrences are not in themselves bad. They take their shape and are meaning-made in my context.

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Fall, 2012

Sometime before I came to Bucknell, my mom gave me a large, framed picture depicting a scene from the bible. I eventually brought it with me to campus to use as decor. On move-in day, I hung it on the wall above my computer monitor because I liked the story, the imagery, and the picture generally; however, in a few days' time it began to symbolize something more -- I soon looked to it as a reminder of where I was and why (I thought) I was there. The picture was of Daniel in the lions' den. He was cast there, left to be torn apart by lions for praying to his God rather than to the King. Before I came to college, this story did not *mean* that much to me. After (un)settling into orientation, however, the picture took on a different, lived resonance.

For most of my first two years but particularly early on during my first semester, I envisioned myself as Daniel cast into an environment that was meant to devour him. This story gave me hope, largely because I knew how it ended -- Daniel prayed to God for safety, the lions left him alone, and he was pardoned. Like Daniel, I imagined I would persevere, remain faithful, and would one day emerge from the den.

In my head, the den I was cast into was the social-culture at Bucknell, and my abstaining from drinking alcohol was persisting against both the tide of lions around me and the wicked *field* that put me in this predicament, this gravity that pulled at me, which, if I resisted, isolated me.

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Eight days after I sent that email to housing, my request was accommodated and two days after that I moved into a single room in Larison Cottage, a substance-free community comprising students who -- simply put -- did not want alcohol in their living spaces. This concluded the bulk of drinking (“sociocultural”) pressures I felt, and moving to Larison Cottage was one of the best things that could have happened to me. While sociocultural pressures regarding drinking ceased once I moved out of Vedder, I did continue to struggle early on, particularly in academics, and the lions’ den took on yet again a new shape and yet again a new meaning.

### ***Academic Challenges -- Nebulous Aspirations and Nebulous Realities***

2012 - August, First Day of Classes

It’s 2pm on the first day of classes, August 22nd. I’m walking briskly out of Rooke Chem toward Vedder. Metaphorically indicative of my experience thus far, the sun auspiciously shines; the heat, however, inauspiciously glares. I’m frantic to get to my room and begin working on all the homework I have to get done for Friday. At this point on the first day, I had already been to three of my four classes: Physics 211 at 10am, my foundation seminar *Visual and Mathematical Patterns* at 11am, and Calculus I and 1pm. I would have my final class, *Christianity*, the next morning at 8am.

I already felt like I had too much homework, and it was making my head spin: reading for three classes; assigned problems for calculus and physics; some writing for my foundations

course. I call my mom and I'm in tears, unsure how I'm equipped to get all of this done, much less to do it well. She is supportive. She tells me I will persevere, that I can do this, that it will get better, and that it's only my first day. She was right, but I was in a haze of self-doubt. My first few days and nights on campus instilled a cascading fear in me, that I would not be able to get enough sleep, that I would not be able to continue doing track, that I would not be able to keep up my grades, and that I would ultimately fail out of college.

Later that night, I'm sitting in my lamp lit room next to the window working on a physics problem set. I'm desperate to find a routine and am hopeful that my problem-solving habits from high school physics translate to this course. They do, but only so far. These questions seem to be asking me to go a step further than I'm used to, beyond what I know how to do and what I've learned to do. I feel as if I'm being challenged to grow, desperately grasping at a "things like this take time -- this is not easy for anyone" mentality, but it is evasive.

I remember going to hallmates and friends for help with challenging homework like this. A lot of them were engineers, so they were also in physics and calculus courses. Although they too by this point were hunkered down, toiling away, their time spent seemed to result in answers, understanding, and learning. They seemed to effortlessly know what to do in these problems. And if they didn't know what to do, they could *think*, lights would turn on, and they would figure it out, as if privy to a logical thread communicated by the professors to some and not others. Maybe I just wasn't listening?

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I did quite well in high school academically, and, as is clear in my gloating conversations with James, I was aware and proud of it. Aside from an earth science class in 9th grade, I don't recall ever getting a grade lower than an A. Part of this success and achievement I can attribute

to my working hard, other parts I can attribute to the relative, mid-level caliber of my high school, and others still I attribute to advantageous support (undoubtedly, my experiences rests at the intersections of these factors). I do not recall being very challenged by my high school's curriculum; however, because it was relatively straightforward, I was able to invest myself widely. On top of classes, I was also a three-sport athlete and spent a lot of time volunteering with my church's youth group. I probably spent 11-12 hours a day at my high school in various capacities, especially during my senior year. When we got out of class at 2:30pm, I would either go to the weight room or to practice. Weekends consisted of church activities and athletic events. I was busy, and I managed to balance it well. While I anticipated a change of pace in college, I did not anticipate how steep the curve would be.

Sports meant a lot to me in high school, particularly track and field. I threw shot-put and discus -- quite well, thanks to the coaching I received. I did well enough that Bucknell offered me a spot on their roster. I was excited to continue throwing at Bucknell, but ended up quitting the team halfway through my first semester. A substantial part of my decision to quit was so that I could devote more time to academics. In my reckoning, I needed to, because things were not going as I had planned.

On Monday, September 24th, I sent my requested grade card from the past week to one of our Track and Field coaches. At this point, I'm still on the team:

Physics Exam - 67%  
Calculus Exam - 75%  
Foundation Seminar Paper - A  
Christianity - No grades yet

Receiving exam grades like this was hard for me, and placed an abysmal mark on my time spent thus far at Bucknell. I finally had something to show, and in the classes that meant the most to me, what I could show was nothing to call home about.

The weeks prior to and following this were similarly burdensome, until I finally -- reluctantly -- decided to leave the track team on the 10th of October. Much like moving from Vedder to Larison Cottage, quitting the track team was a critical moment for me.

Nevertheless, academic struggles persisted in different ways. While I had more time to devote to academics, more time spent with math and physics did not always translate into better grades. Even if grades did not reflect the effort I was putting in, I had to believe my tireless hours spent *trying* would translate into something. And even when the grades did get better -- because they did -- I rarely felt like I was *getting it*, and my confidence in the subject remained low.

$$7 \times 1 = 7 \dots 4 \times 0 = 0 \dots$$

No longer was I dabbling in times-tables, in two-dimensional projectile motion. It was getting challenging for me to see myself as a future practitioner of this discipline. Still, I stuck with it, hoping that elementary confidences and high school dreams would carry me, that one day I'd grasp the unspoken, connect the dots, and come to the conclusions on my own.

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Feelings of being lost in academics at Bucknell persisted until approximately August 2014, when I decided to drop Physics and pursue Classics solely. Semesters prior, I continued to be manic about physics and math homework, classes, and exams, and I began to wonder whether such stress was worth it if I couldn't see myself pursuing either of them in the future. A conversation with my mom during my third semester at Bucknell highlights the distress building in me. This semester was particularly challenging because of how much the material reminded me of where I had excelled in high school: classical mechanics. Unbeknownst to me, however, were the unseen dimensions and forces lurking beneath what used to be simple and masterable.

On November 18th of 2013, during midterm week before Bucknell's Thanksgiving break, I share the following concerns and conversation with my mother:

Jon: I am glad I get to come home for a few days next week, Mom. School is depressing me, and I need to get away for a little bit. I am looking forward to talking to you about things.

Mom: Do you want to talk now?

Jon: We don't have to talk now... I am just sick of everything about school. It's just a waste of my time :(

Mom: I know it is hard work and challenging. I do not think it is a waste of time. You will get through this and you will be home for a few days.

Jon: well... at least math and physics are [a waste]. I am not comprehending any of it. I don't want to do that stuff after college, and being in the classes, working hard, and not seeing any successful results is depressing. And it's not just that... I have to go through this crap for two more years. I feel like there is so much pressure on me to do well, and I don't know why. I just want to feel normal and like it's okay not to be perfect, but I can't.

Mom: son, this is not about being perfect. It is about working hard at something you want to do with your life. I don't know what to say about the physics, have you considered speaking with a mentor there?

Jon: I work hard and it feels like I get nothing... I'm just about to give up on working hard. It's pointless.

Mom: You will find a way to persevere. I know you can do it. What about your next semester classes?

Jon: I am taking some interesting ones.... I would rather not be taking math and physics, but I don't know what else I am supposed to do. I feel pressured into taking these physics classes, even though I do badly in them.

Mom: It sounds like you need some guidance from someone that helps students figure this stuff out. Stephanie could recommend someone for you to talk with. Hope it helps.

Jon: I am going to talk to Stephanie. She will be able to help somewhat. Thanks mom.

In this 2013 Fall semester, I was enrolled in one physics, one math, and two classics courses. I recall physics this semester as posing particular challenges to me. The course was harder than the others I had taken, and my grades reflected it. The professor did, however, acknowledge this and curved grades accordingly. No matter how many times he told our class "a fifty is pretty much a seventy," "seventies" still irked me. Was my achievement in high school a fluke? I felt like the amount of time and care I was putting in should have been eliciting better grades. Following this logic, it should not be hard to see why I eventually made the full switch to Classics, focusing on ancient Greek. The amount of time and effort I put into ancient Greek would translate not only into higher grades but would also result in continuously better understandings, comprehensive understandings, of the subject in question. I do not recall such an equation -- effort, care, time,



and passion yielding quantifiable results (grades), much less learning or understanding -- in the Physics or Mathematics courses I was taking, at least not to the same, satisfying degree as when I was studying Ancient Greek.

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2012 - August

Rewind to my first year. It's the end of the second day of classes, August 23rd, approximately 10pm, and I'm again sitting in my room in Vedder. I'm working on a mix of assignments, referring to notes I took in our first physics lecture this morning. There's gotta be something I can use from the lecture that will help me with the homework I've been struggling with. I glance at my laptop screen, and there's a message from Kathryn, someone I only know peripherally through my hometown church and family friends. Kathryn has just started her third year of college at a nearby university and has, somehow, heard about my plight -- that I'm having second thoughts about Bucknell. We went to the same high school, and she acknowledges the challenges she faced in adjusting to the college workload. I respond:

Thanks, Kathryn. I appreciate your consideration. I have been having trouble, and I am second thinking my decision. It seems nothing has been going right so far. I came here expecting to be able to handle the workload, expecting to be in a dorm where I would be able to focus, sleep, study. My expectations were completely wrong. I am having my ups and downs. Right now I'm at an up. I have decided to take the homework that I am clueless about to the professor and ask for assistance. As for the rooming situation, I am doing all that I can to get myself into a single room. That would be a great help to me. And on top of all of that, I am expected to play division I track and field. It's taken a huge toll on me. Oh, and me not being a party freak also creates some gaps. I'm okay with being alone, but I don't like the temptations or having random drunk people barge into my room in the middle of the night and wake me.

This message encapsulates the extent of stressors impacting me, regarding school, throwing, and the drinking culture around me; however, Kathryn's contacting me also crucially highlights the sort of support and backing I had. I don't think I'd ever held a conversation with Kathryn. We knew each other only in passing. Word got around, though, that I was struggling and support was

there for me. Being affirmed in this way was crucial for my persistence. After a bit of back and forth, I conclude the conversation:

“Most of [your advice] has crossed my mind at some point in these past few days. Hearing it from another person makes it more concrete in my head, though... something I can rely on. Thank you again.”

Kathryn offers encouragement and advice whenever I should need it, and we part virtual ways until October 17th. Seven days after I left the Track team, I message Kathryn, ecstatic to be without the stress my athletic commitments had been causing me:

“Just so you know... I thank you very much for your willingness to help me in my rough transition to college. I love it, now. I have no stress whatsoever and I enjoy doing the work. It’s really becoming a great time!”

Admittedly, “no stress” is an exaggeration, because I know how exam periods continued to stress me. Nonetheless, I was doing better and was excited to be doing better. Support got me here and continued to get me through the aforementioned and dreaded midterms and finals. Kathryn’s messaging me equipped me with social capital -- not only because of the advantageous advice and suggestions she gave me, like alternative places to study, study groups, and office hours, but also because such an intervention showed me that people from my high school *could* do this. Kathryn is not the only positive example of someone that supported me in this way. In cases thereafter where I was struggling, I connected with people and aired my grievances in chat boxes, particularly to those close to me, like James, my mom, and my sister.

### ***Conclusion to the Subsection***

A number of the challenges reviewed in the previous chapter are tied to my being a first-generation student from a working-class background. First, I came in academically under-prepared compared to my peers, which resulted in (relative) academic under-performance (Pascarella et al., 2004; Pike and Kuh, 2005; Terenzini et al., 1996; Walpole, 2003). Second, the

support I received from most, influential adults in my life was aspirational -- rather than pragmatic and experience-based “college knowledge” (nonetheless effective) (Choy, 2002; Conley 2005; Hooker and Brand, 2010; Lee, 2016). Third, the style of my upbringing and the associated cultural norms were different than many students I was going to classes with. My disposition interfered with the differently paced, differently social-classed, and differently cultured space of Bucknell (Lareau, 2003; Stephens et al. 2012). And lastly, early on, I felt somewhat an outsider, both in terms of presentation regarding my clothing and because of my choice to distance myself from alcohol related socializing.

Nonetheless, I not only survived but also started to -- over time -- thrive. And so, let’s move into the second subsection of this chapter, wherein I lay out the ways I was advantaged. Together with this first subsection, a complicated, intersectional picture of first-generation student experience should be evident.

### **Complications and Capital**

This section highlights the ways my experience as a working-class first-generation student deviates from the “challenges” subsection of the literature review and, thus, shows where I was privileged. There are three ways that see myself as having been particularly advantaged: 1) in the social capital afforded me, by an incredibly courteous sibling who had also gone to Bucknell a few years prior and the connections that accompanied this support; 2) in the ways I was financially supported, again through family -- via my step-father’s employment and an inheritance from my father who passed away early in my life; and 3) in my being close to home geographically and comfortable in the vibes of rural Pennsylvania. These “privileges” are of course in addition to the ways my being a white man has impacted my experience. I have been

thinking a lot about how race, class, and gender intersect throughout this project. In Chapter 5 of this thesis -- the conclusion -- I give more attention to this topic.

### *Social Support*

At 7:24am, on August 22nd, the morning of the first day of classes, I received a Facebook message from my sister. She knew I was having some trouble and sent me a Vlogbrothers video entitled “Is College Worth It?,” and we share this brief back and forth:

Sister: you’re going to learn a ton of stuff in classes. And you’re also going to learn a ton of stuff about people, and a ton of stuff about Jon.

Jon: I just don’t want to be stressed.

Sister: You probably will be stressed, unfortunately. I was incredibly stressed. But seeing a good grade, or having a professor make good comments on your essay, makes it all worth it.

I hadn’t even gone to classes yet and I was already anticipating distress. And this was new to me -- school itself rarely stressed me out or gave me anxiety.

Particularly in the first few years of undergraduate years, my sister served as an invaluable resource for me. On the one hand, she supported me and encouraged me and on the other, she helped me get acquainted with some professors in my eventual undergraduate major. Examples of each follow.

Even before I had arrived at Bucknell my sister encouraged me to try taking an Ancient Greek language course in the Classics department, which resulted in my meeting Professor Stephanie Larson. My sister also mentioned that Larson did archaeological work with her colleague Kevin Daly, in Thebes, Greece. What could have been a fun fact to know turned into a life-changing opportunity.

On Monday, August 20th, I’m sitting in an interest-meeting for Ancient Greek language courses. During orientation, there is time set aside for students to attend prospective language seminars, as the core curriculum requires students to take a language course. I’m in the front of

the classroom. Larson comes in, gives her spiel, and concludes the talk. After most people depart, I approach the front of the classroom and introduce myself to Larson, saying “Hi, I think you might know my sister, Allison Hunsberger. I’m her brother, Jon. I want to take Ancient Greek, but don’t think I can this semester because of scheduling conflicts. I would love to join next Fall, though. My sister also mentioned that you lead a dig in Greece?”

By the end of the semester, I had applied and been accepted to go on the archaeological dig with Professors Larson and Daly. While a connection to my sister undoubtedly helped secure me a spot, Larson assured me that, without the connection, I might have been a shoe-in because of my history of athletics and physical labor. Nonetheless, the connection introduced me to and secured the possibility, which secured my persistence at Bucknell because I had something to look forward to. By the culmination of my undergraduate Bucknell career, I had spent four summers, a total of thirty-two weeks, on an archaeological dig in Thebes, Greece -- the realization of a childhood dream, one which predates my fascination with math and science.

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Summer, 2002

Having watched *Holes* the night before, this morning my cousin and I are watching *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* at my nanna and Pappaw’s house, a well-kept, double-wide mobile-home tucked away near the foot of a rolling-hills mountain and on the outskirts of the small, Valley town of Berrysburg. The house property butts up against two, large chicken houses, which my grandparents manage and maintain. When the movie is over, we head outside to the garage to get some tools. We’ve been inspired to dig. We gather some shovels and make for the woods, eager to get into the dirt to see what we can find.

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While physics and math courses caused me grief, being able to look forward to future semesters where I would also be taking Greek and Classics courses helped me persist. My sister talked so highly about Greek and the professors she had. For a while, anticipating a future in Greek and Greece made the grumblings that physics and math drew out of me worth it. However, eventually the prospect of taking more courses in Classics trumped the drudgery that I anticipated would accompany the remainder of my physics course load. And so, I made the ultimatum referenced above, that if I came home from my second summer in Greece loving the work I was doing I would pursue it fully. Clearly, after my second summer in Greece I chose to stop chasing Physics. A prominent rationale in this decision was: while fascinated by Physics and Math, I rarely saw myself as capable of using what I was learning in a future career (or even being learned enough to). It's not that I couldn't *see* people around me -- I was surrounded by professors and physicists. The up and down, passing and failing, bad and good, oscillatory nature of my relationship with STEM -- since coming to college -- had me feeling like, no matter how hard I worked, I would not be able to do it as well as others. I felt completely differently in the discipline of Classics. When I was studying Ancient Greek, I was inundated with self-affirmation and my confidence began to build. And when I was digging in Greece, I witnessed first-hand its applicability. This language and the cultures that marked its history began to make good sense to me. And while I was nonetheless still challenged in this discipline-- as one should be -- the challenges felt approachable, the barriers and boundaries permeable. My study habits began to help me, and finally felt like I was learning, like I was *getting it*. I was making connections and coming to the conclusions. And I was able to see its utility in an academic, working world.

I could not have made this decision on my own, however, and my sister was a support in this arena as well. In the beginning of the spring semester of my second year, I message my sister about my desire to stop pursuing physics because of the stress it causes me:

Jon: I honestly am not sure why I am doing physics still. I feel pressured to continue with it, because I feel like it would not look great to just have a classics degree. I dunno why it matters to me... when it really doesn't matter to me.

Sister: well, what do you want to do with... life? When i was in school, I thought a lot about what I wanted to study, and it took me a while to land on classics. What kinds of jobs do you want? Archaeology? Phd? Physics? Physics teacher?

Jon: I want to get a PhD, but I lack so much confidence that I can barely see myself getting a master's.

Sister: well, that's bullshit! You won't get confidence until you do that stuff. The confidence doesn't come until it's too late. You need to do what it takes to have a good life. It's hard and it sucks. But when you do, you'll be happy. That's how it works, though. That's what it's like getting a foundation.

Jon: not for everyone... it feels like this is NOT something everyone here is worrying about so much.

Sister: for us. I know you, you're like me. And if you think you want to pursue classics and archaeology, these summers in Greece and taking other language courses will really help you, like hebrew or latin. Just something to think about.

Jon: I think i want to do classics and archaeology. After this summer, I think I'll be able to make a pretty solid decision whether or not I want to do it.

Sister: at that point, you might also know what to do with physics. Remember that when you're stressed, it's hard to put things into context. When you were in Greece digging, it was exciting and felt right, and I bet when you go back, you'll feel certain about it again. You have to trust yourself.

Jon: I will do that.

As I have mentioned elsewhere, the support my sister afforded me was invaluable. Equally invaluable was the possibility of us going to a school like Bucknell.

When I was in elementary school, my mom met my now step-dad, Scott. Soon after they met, the two of them married. Around the same time, Scott got an IT job at Bucknell University, where, after a few years of employee service, he could provide two dependents full tuition payment at Bucknell, should they be accepted. My sister and I were these lucky two. I now move onto the financial support section.

## ***Financial Support***

This section on financial support is best separated into two sections: circumstances and impacts. My relative financial security throughout and after college stem from circumstances I had little control over but which nonetheless tremendously impacted me.

### *Circumstances*

When I was two years old, my dad died. Growing up, I knew little about him. Before he died, he and my mom had been divorced. There wasn't much talk about him, in my recollection, for what I suspect were reasons of pain and moving on. I did know, however, that my siblings and I inherited a small amount of money from him, money which my mom kept in bank accounts for us until we were 18.

In 2003, my mom married Scott. Soon after, Scott got a job in tech support on Bucknell's campus. In 2005 my sister was accepted to Bucknell and would have tuition costs covered through Scott's employment. In 2012, I was accepted to Bucknell and was able to finance my education similarly.

In part due to financial necessity and in part due to conviction and principle, my parents decided that higher education was something I would fund on my own. And so, I covered the cost of books, housing, and food. Through state grants and the money I inherited from my father, I was able to manage the costs without incurring debt.

I knew that the money would run out eventually, though, and my main concern was housing. I applied to be a residential advisor (RA) for my third, junior year. I was inclined to do so not only for financial reasons (RAs are compensated for their labor with housing coverage) but also because of the crucial role my own RA played for me.



## *Impacts*

The possibilities of me getting to, making it through, and thriving within college without debt (and in general) rest on the shoulders of others -- on people like Scott who not only took a job at Bucknell but who chose to remain there, on my mom who was diligent about how and when my inheritance money should be used, and on my sister who helped connect me to, again, Professor Larson. For example, the inheritance money from my father, in addition to being used for first- and second-years' books, housing, and meal plans, also helped finance my first flight to Greece. Afterward, through this growing relationship with Professors Larson and Daly, I applied for research grants with Larson and had my second and third summer trips to Greece well funded.

In this way, financial support not only provided me with a sense of mental clarity -- i.e. not having the looming reality of debt mark my graduation-horizon -- which in itself is quite advantageous. It also made opportunities like return-trips to Greece an option.

The financial support I had also directly influenced my decision to quit the track team. If I were a student-athlete at a different school, I would have been on a financial scholarship. Because paying for my education at Bucknell was not contingent on my remaining on the track team, the consequences of quitting were on the surface quite minimal. At the time, I did not consider that I was leaving a community and a team; my choice was individually motivated. From day one, because of the challenges I was experiencing in general, I didn't really give myself a chance to become involved and integrated with the throwing cohort. We come back to this theme in the third subsection, below, wherein I write about how my tripartite, student-athlete-Christian identity met conflict when I arrived at Bucknell. To conclude this section, however, let's dive into another prominent advantage I had as a first-generation student from a

working-class background in college -- namely, my proximity to home and the possibility of returning to, with ease, a more comfortable environment when life on-campus overwhelmed me. This is a respite not all first-generation or working-class students are afforded.

### *Close-to-Home Support*

2012 - August -- After the first full week of classes

On Friday, August 31st at around 4pm in the afternoon, I'm in the car with Scott as he commutes home for the weekend. My first, full week of classes is over and I'm eager to be able to spend some time at home this weekend. And I'm excited to see my mom, who told me she would be -- like all evenings I can remember -- cooking food for all of us. We eat dinner together, and soon afterward I'm off to my high school to watch my alma mater play football. James picks me up in the alley behind my house. It's good to be back with my friends.

On Sunday morning of the same weekend, I walk to the church about two blocks away from my parents' home, 9am for Sunday school and 10am for the regular service. That evening, I attend the weekly youth group I had been so active in throughout high school. I sleep a bit restlessly that night, anxious about heading back to school yet nevertheless thankful for the weekend spent surrounded by care, comfort, and a routine I'm used to. I'm up early the next morning to ride with Scott to work. At 6am, I say goodbye to my mom, hop in the car with Scott, and I'm back to campus for another week by 7am.

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By the end of my first semester, I had spent nearly half of my weekends at home in Lykens, many of which resemble the one portrayed above. I got to eat dinner with my family, see friends, attend sporting events, go hiking, go to church, and go to youth group. In my second

semester, I went home less often, but the closeness and possibility of going home remained. On any given week-day I had the option of heading home with Scott.

At first, going home on the weekends was something I didn't have to give a second-thought -- it allowed me some distance from the weekend-party environment at Bucknell (something since living in Vedder I had no desire to be around). Plus, I got to see my parents, nanna, siblings, and friends. Initially, I was able to bring school work home with me. However, as course workloads ramped up in my first and second semesters, going home began to conflict with time I felt compelled to commit to my studies. Going home was a solace, but a busy solace. I persisted through this push-pull in my first semester, either working long hours to get ahead before heading home on Friday afternoon or cramming in work the moment I returned on Monday morning. I would take school work home, but the environment was not conducive to productivity. I eventually decided that taking school work home was not worth it if I never took it out of my backpack. In the same vein, it made little sense to continue going home if I would be absorbed by school work rather than spending time with family and friends. It was hard to strike a balance, and in my second semester, I started to go home only during breaks and on certain, planned occasions. Nonetheless, throughout my four years at Bucknell, the possibility of going home -- of exiting distress through an escape hatch -- remained. Even if I pulled the lever less and less over time, I had a choice and such security supported me.

### ***Conclusion to the Subsection***

A number of the challenges reviewed in the previous chapter did not impact my first-generation student experience, and where my experience deviates from what is anticipated for first-generation students from working-class backgrounds, I was advantaged. First, Scott's joining our family provided me the prospect of going to a selective college. In terms of access to

a selective institution, my school choice was not entirely limited (Terenzini et al., 1996). And the benefits from Scott's employment at Bucknell, in addition to the inheritance from my father, afforded me immense financial support. Neither I nor my family accrued any debt while I pursued my undergraduate degree. And as much as the cultural mismatch impacted me, my ease of access to my home community afforded me a respite from discomfort whenever I should need it.

Thus, my experience deviates from some of the common challenges facing first-generation students. And in the advantages these differences yielded me, I found my way through. Nonetheless, persisting in a new cultural environment, taking on new norms of conduct and culture, slowly had the effect of distancing me from my home culture.

However, in the process of reflecting on these macro-level changes, I learned that -- on a micro-level -- I made choices and enacted agency. Literature in the previous chapter regarding changes often neglects the agentic consciousness in individuals experiencing upward mobility that has the effect of altering their social-class in addition to their socio-economic status, i.e. upward mobility that has cultural consequences. In the following, final section of this chapter, I review the processes of these changes and choices, particularly in the context of my quitting the track team and redefining my Christian identity. To conclude the section, I include a segment on where and how my agency functioned, and I pay close attention to whether it functioned resistively, dominantly, or both (Ortner, 2006). We then carry this thread into Chapter 5, the conclusion.

## **Choice and Change**

This section is about change and choice. By the beginning of my third year at Bucknell, I was different than when I enrolled, when I ventured with my parents to campus in Scott's blue Honda Fit. My identity in high school revolved around three, important -- and sometimes conflicting -- aspects.

First, I was a student. An avidly curious learner, I liked school and the tasks put in front of me. In high school, I was given the chance to explore subjects, and I chose science. In my junior year of high school, I took physics, chemistry, and pre-calculus. These courses and my learning and success in them inspired me to, should I be able to go to college, pursue the STEM world. I was most taken by physics.

Second, I was an athlete. In the eighth grade, our high school's new football coach was scouting our middle-school hallways for potential athletes. He saw me, my big frame, and encouraged me to begin going to the weight room. Every day after school, I would get on a bus that would take me to the weight room at the high school. I worked hard, and eventually made the varsity football team in my first year of high school. I was beginning to feel like an athlete, and decided to translate some of my skills and maintain strength by joining the track team. In the spring of my second year in high school, I began throwing shot put and discus. I did well enough that Bucknell eventually offered me a spot on their team. Since I was always affiliated with the prospect of going to Bucknell because of the financial assistance from Scott's employment, this seemed like a no-brainer. Equally serendipitous, my high school throwing coach was himself a Bucknell alum, and so I liked the idea that I would be following in the footsteps of someone I respected so greatly.

Third, I was a Christian. Growing up, I'd always gone to church. In my earlier years, my mom would drive my siblings and I about thirty minutes to a welcoming, thriving Assembly of God church. Later on, we began going to a Methodist church right in my hometown. Over time, I got involved with the youth group. I began investing myself deeply into this community, serving on council meetings, helping organize events, and leading activities. I began going to bible studies, praise and worship services, Sunday school, and church on a weekly basis. The church was a big part of my life, and I became a community member in this way.

I perceived myself to be -- as much as any teen can -- relatively unwavering in my Christian faith until I started going to high school parties with friends where there was alcohol. There was never alcohol in my house growing up, and there was a lot of Christianity. Even though I wasn't coached to believe they needed to be, I dichotomized the two. For example, on one occasion, I remember hearing that my brother (who at the time was around 17) had been "caught" (by the police) sleeping in his car after a party. He decided that he didn't want to drive home, so he stayed in his car until the morning. As I overheard the story, there were brief, only subtle mentions of alcohol. Nonetheless, I villainized him. For days, I didn't look at him and I ignored him. In my head, he had greatly misstepped. I thought he was a Christian, and drinking or being around alcohol, I'd come to believe, was not Christian.

When pressures arose in my own high school senior year to go to a party where there would be alcohol, I was made to pause. Should I be doing this? What will it mean for my faith? I gave into peer pressure and started going to parties and drinking alcohol. Unexpectedly, little changed. Largely because these two social circles had little overlap, I was able to go to a party on a Friday night and still go to church and youth group on a Sunday. I was living two lives with

little apparent interference. However, my friend James' words began to shatter this delusion just a few months before I went to college:

James: You're going to go to Bucknell, yes, but then you'll start drinking like you want to all the time, and you'll get angry, you'll get in trouble. And that will interfere with your academics and athletics. So good luck!

In writing this message, James essentially held a mirror up to me and I began to think a lot about my actions. I was living (at least) two lives in one, the tensions between which drew out anger, rage, aggression, guilt, and shame.

As I anticipated the party culture at Bucknell and as I reflected on the ways drinking could become a bad habit for me, I stymied the possibility of partying at college. I wanted no part of it. In its place, I would be devoting myself to my academics, to my athletics, and, of course, to the flip-side of the same coin, my Christian identity and eventual Christian community. By the beginning of my third academic year, however, I had made substantial choices and changes regarding my identity, a few of which have been alluded to above: I had quit the track team, I had deconstructed my Christian identity and distanced myself from formal religious practice, and I had changed my academic direction, ultimately dropping Physics and pursuing Classics.

Crucial to note, none of these choices were made in a vacuum. In my challenging transition and throughout my acclimation to college, I let go of parts of who I was in high school and who I had until that point been. I let go of people, of possibilities, and prospects, many of which were at one point tied deeply to my sense of self and which connected me to my hometown community. And yet I was able to make choices, and I was guided and supported in making them. It is this story I hope to paint in this final section below, a story of intersectionality and complication, agency and structure, habitus and home, capital and mobility, and my choices

and my changes. Life upon close speculation is copiously ambiguous, elusive, chaotic, and strange. I do my best and hope for comprehensiveness and clarity.

The remainder of this section is usefully divided into two subsections. The first subsection is about my adjustment to Bucknell academics and culture and how these outside, new pressures in addition to my own, established priorities yielded conflict. This conflict compelled me to make a choice -- namely, to quit the track team in my first semester and, even with the enticing prospect of returning a year later, to continue to prioritize academics over athletics. The second subsection is about how my polarized disposition toward Christianity ← and → drinking was thrown into flux during my first summer in Greece. Having this dichotomy challenged influenced my eventual, critical redefinition of my Christian faith. While one might anticipate a third subsection about my choice to drop physics and pursue classics, details pertaining to this topic constitute the thread that holds this document together. In other words, my “coming to Classics” story should be thoroughly revealed, and I hope readers will connect the dots that have been provided throughout this chapter.

The purpose of the third section is to situate the changes I went through as a first-generation student from a working-class background as a result of socialized-yet-individually-made choices. This will serve as a good segue into the following chapter, wherein I bring together the threads left loose within the theory, literature, and autoethnography chapters.

### ***Redefining my Physical Self***

My first few nights at Bucknell were challenging. I felt disconnected from the peers on my hall, and I felt like a pariah because I chose not to go to parties. For these reasons, I was desperate -- even as an introvert -- to find a community. Oddly enough, I was nowhere near without one. The track team at Bucknell, especially the throwers, are an incredible cohort, tightly



united and close-knit. Such unity is a legacy that seasoned throwers are passionate about maintaining. I did not turn to my track teammates, however, and this wasn't because I felt ostracized. While I never felt pressured to drink when I socialized with them, I do remember feeling like it was odd that I didn't want to.

The teammates were both convivial and congenial. This healthy mix did not compute in my head, as I had already written off drinking and -- quite harshly -- those I associated with it. It should not be surprising, then, that I sought out community amongst those at the other end of this self-constructed, no middle-ground void -- Christians.

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2012, Fall Semester

I found DiscipleMakers Christian Fellowship (DCF) in my second week at Bucknell, a few days before I had moved to Larison Cottage. Conveniently, they were holding a bible study in a common room on the ground floor of Vedder -- what used to be the "living room" and which is now a slew of offices. I started spending time with this small but growing community by joining them at weekly bible-studies.

As classes and coursework began to ramp up in the first few weeks, I was able to establish a groove in my regular schedule. I spent most of my time studying and doing school work, an hour or so each day either at track practice or lifting weights, a few hours a week with DCF, and a lot of time at home on the weekends. I deemed this groove working until I received my first calculus and physics exam scores, after which I seriously began thinking about ways I could focus more on school. I began to look at my schedule and commitments for extraneous uses of time, and track was consistently my largest, extracurricular pull. While, realistically, I could have shifted any of these priorities to give myself more time for school work, the prospect

of quitting track soothed something in my incessantly stressing mind simply because of how much more time I knew a life without it would give me. I was also growingly aware of what commitments were directly serving me and what weren't (selfish, but undoubtedly true at the time). For example, I could have spent less time with DCF or less time at home on the weekends, but these two benefited me in similar and crucial ways: they temporarily removed me -- the former (to me) ideologically and the latter physically -- from a culture and an environment I had at this point warded off -- namely the party scene. Something had to give.

My mind was made up, and I just needed to seal the deal. Reflecting on early, poor academic and social experiences at Bucknell urged me to think forward, to think about how I was going to get myself through this education. Throwing did not seem to be in the cards I'd been dealt, and so on October 10th -- seven weeks into the semester -- I scheduled a meeting with the head track and field coach to tell him I was quitting the track team because of how the schedule was taking away from the time I felt I needed to put toward school work in order to succeed.

After quitting, an incredible amount of relief swept over me. Highlighted in my message with Kathryn above, my entire perspective changed:

From ... *"nothing has been going right so far"*  
To ... *"I love it, now. I have no stress whatsoever and I enjoy doing the work. It's really becoming a great time!"*

While nonetheless academics continued to pose particular challenges to me, quitting the track team was a necessary choice that immediately reinforced my agency. After I parted ways with the team, I had more time to devote to both academics and to DCF. This story and sequence of choices does not end here.

2013, Fall Semester

In mid-August, a few weeks before I'm about to head back to campus for my second year at Bucknell, I receive a message from a prior throwing teammate. He tells me that their long-standing throwing coach is retiring and that the new coach is going to be none other than my coach from high school. I checked in with my old high school coach to verify, and we both entertained the possibility of me joining the team again and giving college athletics a second chance. I was, after all, marginally more equipped to manage my time nowadays. Part of me considered it a no-brainer, yet another part wonders if I'm pursuing a life that has already passed by. My head begins to race, wondering "who gets this chance? Who gets the opportunity to be coached by the same person in both high school and college?" I'm thoroughly considering rejoining the team, but request some time to think about such a big decision. I ultimately decide to refrain. On September 16th, I send the following email to my high school throwing coach (adapted for clarity):

*Hello Coach,*

*9/16/2013*

*I have come to a conclusion, and, though it is hard for me to say, that conclusion is that I cannot commit to being on the track team this semester. I feel like I'm at Bucknell for an atypical reason, one resonating with my growing, Christian faith and with my pursuit of academics. For the past month since I had heard that you were coaching at Bucknell, I was constantly thinking in my head, "I need to do this. Who gets this opportunity? I can throw again, be an athlete again," but I realized that these are the wrong motives. If I were to join the team at this point, I fear it would be for the wrong reasons, for reasons of self-worth. I feel pressured by how good this opportunity is, and in some ways it feels like a step back from where I've moved forward to.*

*Thank you for wanting what is best for me while also leaving that decision up to me.*

*-Jon*

By the time I arrived on campus for my second, undergraduate year, I had started thinking about the world, about others, and about my life differently. Overall, I changed a lot within my first year at Bucknell. I began to deeply identify with my Christian faith and my Christian

community, both at home and on-campus. My first summer in Greece, though, put a tumult in my deeply-seated notions of normal, particularly in my own strict and rigid orientations toward recreationally drinking and religion.

The combined impact of being immersed in a new culture while being around new people who had little expectation of me presented a realm of possibility (one I wasn't aware I took advantage of until doing this autoethnography): to learn, to grow, to be, and to be challenged -- in an unhinged yet safe environment. I took advantage of this and brought back to campus, for my second year, a new version of myself. It is with this self that I told my high school coach the choice I'd made and why. To better understand what brought me to this point, let's move into the next subsection, which focuses on the choices I made in redefining my spirituality.

### *Redefining my Spiritual Self*

April - 2013 -- End of my Second Semester

As the second semester of my first year began to wind down, I eagerly anticipated the trip I'd be taking to Greece in a few weeks. This would be my first time leaving the United States. It would also mark the most substantial trip I or nearly anyone in my close family would have taken. As I looked forward to the summer, I was also reflecting on the past year and how much I had grown, particularly in my Christian faith. My choice to distance myself from the social-scene at Bucknell ushered me to the flip side of my mentally-made coin: Christianity.

By the end of my first year at Bucknell, my Christian faith formed the lens through which I lived my life. My second semester in particular was littered with events that evidence my pursuit of this growing-passion: I was appointed President of Bucknell's DCF cohort, I helped lead a weekend-long youth retreat with younger students from my hometown youth group, I ministered to a group of students from my high school called God's Puzzle Pieces. Given these

commitments, it should be no surprise that on top of the luggage I brought with me to Greece, there was a bible. Removed from my Christian community, especially the newfound network I'd developed at Bucknell, I knew reading scriptures would help keep me grounded in this grand, new experience.

2013 - June -- Thebes, Greece

After our first, full day of work, our supervisors treat us to dinner at a taverna in-town. The twenty of us are crowded around a line of assembled tables, extending into the pedestrian walk-way which meets the front-face of the restaurant. As we're perusing the menus, a server comes around and takes drink orders. I let those who can speak Greek do the ordering. Soon after, carafes of red and white wine -- some requested and some complimentary -- begin to line our table. I'm offered some wine, and I accept. This experience -- and experiences like it that dismantled the idea in my head that alcohol could not be healthily consumed -- were foundational for breaking the bonds I'd forged -- and had been forged in me -- between drinking alcohol and adhering to my faith. Still, whenever I would drink, I wondered how the act in itself was impacting my Christian faith. Whereas I had previously dichotomized the two, I slowly began to see that they could healthily coexist. However, this vignette painted above breaks only the rigidity of one of the poles I'd constructed. Nevertheless, my rigid Christian faith also experienced some ambiguity-induced unsettling this summer.

2013 - July -- Thebes, Greece

I forget how Ben and I became such good friends. When I met him, he intrigued me - he was quiet, contemplative, and obviously spiritually-guided -- yet differently than I was. Ben's spirituality did not adhere to any singular religion, but seemed to be -- like a spirit -- nebulous yet tangible, loose but graspable, moving yet supportive and secure and safe. Ben himself was

doing his own soul searching, and he wanted to learn about me and my faith journey. As it happens, I also began to learn about him and his faith journey, what he believed, how he viewed the world, and what he cared about. I started to admire Ben for his careful yet wandering wonder of the world.

About halfway through the summer, Ben, myself, and two others made plans to rent a taxi from Thebes to Meteora, a complex of monasteries that precariously rest atop rocky spires. It is an impossibly divine landscape, and trekking through these rocks with Ben was special. As I look back, I can tell that by this point Ben's unconscious example-setting was changing the way I thought about my faith, my spirituality, my past, and my future. I had a lot of thinking to do after this summer, and Ben deeply influenced my spiritual growth and maturity thereafter. By spending time with Ben, I learned that life and spirituality need not be so rigid. I learned that I could work to shed the self-critical, guilt-burdening ideation of religion I'd self-constructed and, further, I learned that I could push back, be critical, and question. And eventually, I concluded that questioning, ambiguity, uncertainty, and unknowingness could be healthy and, paradoxically, spiritually stabilizing.

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#### 2013 → 2014, Second year at Bucknell

In the fall semester of my second year, during one of DCF's executive board meetings, I confide in my friends that I think I need to step down from my position as president:

“I don't feel like I am as invested as I should be. And I think someone else would be able to do a better job at setting an example. I still want to be involved with DCF, but I don't think being the front-face leader is the best option for me or the community. I've always considered myself more of a behind-the-scenes person anyway.”

After this point, I slowly withdrew from the Christian community I had strongly established myself in only a year prior. By the beginning of my third year, I had entirely removed myself.

This final result was a process, however, one sparked upon my return to Bucknell after my first,

transformational summer in Greece. For example, in my second year, I remember a pivotal moment along the way to my eventual redefinition of my Christianity. I was pacing the floor of my room in Kress, unsure why my days were marked by a haze of guilt if I didn't pray before a meal, if I hadn't read my bible that day. My emotions were sporadic, and the negative ones drained me and demotivated me from maintaining the stride I was beginning to develop in academics.

By this point, I was still struggling through physics, but I'd started taking Classics courses toward what would be my major. While seemingly ungraspable physics work nevertheless frustrated me, trying to make sense of it and seeing minor break-through moments - - regardless of their infrequency -- satisfied me. And now that I was taking ancient Greek, I was studying something affirming and in which I was beginning to see my efforts rewarded, my study habits having an effect. Within this growth, having good days marked bad by senseless, petty guilt was becoming too much. I began to realize that the rigid, unforgiving confines I had set up for myself were limiting me. I told myself that I needed to take a step away from worrying so much about sin and guilt. Until this point I'd blindly assumed the path my faith journey had taken, and I needed to go my own way. If I found my way back on my own, all the better. If I found myself on a different spiritual path, so be it -- I needed to take some control over what was until this point controlling me. I needed to trust that my efforts were good enough, and, if they weren't, that I would work to revise them and do better, not languish in -- ultimately -- self-inscribed guilt, remorse, and condemnation.

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This story regarding my spiritual journey is not so simple, however, and easy closure is elusive. After making the decision to work at reconstituting my spirituality, I wrestled with the

decision I had made and went back and forth for a while. I remember popping into DCF on occasion to reconnect with people, and I remember chatting with some of my friends about my upcoming return trip to Greece. While my first summer in Greece was positive -- because it challenged the ultimately limiting schema I had established regarding alcohol and Christianity -- rejoining the Christian community jolted me. My friends and mentors, I thought, did not know what I had experienced. I felt like I was living two lives again, but instead of James holding a mirror to me, I was now the wielder. This quick change of pace and my immediate subsuming of the President role in DCF had me second-guessing how good it actually was. I didn't know if I was being a good role-model. I began to villainize myself for socializing with alcohol, even though I knew the environment was healthy.

After spending my second year at Bucknell in this flux, I was cautious about going to Greece again. And even though by the middle of this second year I had stepped down from my role as President and had distanced myself from the DCF community, I nevertheless continued to desire the fellowship that accompanied this once-fruitful aspect of my identity. The dualistic schema I had built was ruptured, but I knew leaving altogether meant more than just leaving a community; it distanced me from my family, my hometown community, and a support network. Nonetheless, after my second summer in Greece -- which again reinforced healthy, cultural associations with drinking and socializing -- I came back to campus for a third year at Bucknell. Rather abruptly, I cut my ties with DCF and my Christian community, including the friends I'd made there. At the time, I did not know how to describe the changes I was going through. This is also around the same time that I finally decided to finally stop pursuing physics. My plate was empty and ready for filling. I filled it with an intensity for academics that carried me through my final two years without a clue where it might take me.



Worth noting is the blatant picking-and-choosing nature of my then relationship with Christianity. In my head, while the dichotomy between Christianity and drinking -- or, really, any activity I deemed secular -- was being challenged, the structures of it remained. I suspect -- and hope -- that this 'redefinition' effort will be a lifelong one.

### ***Conclusion to the Subsection***

By the beginning of my third year at Bucknell, I was -- on the surface -- fundamentally different than when I entered. The ways I was spending my time had changed dramatically. I had changed -- socially and culturally. However, crucially, as I hope this final subsection makes clear, I chose and enacted agency in making these decisions, agency which was legitimized because of the social capital accompanying me in enacting them.

This is to say: these changes are necessarily a part of my experiencing higher education as a first-generation, working-class student, but they are also more. And I hope that with these stories we can begin to understand the rhizomatic nature of existence, of experience, of people -- entangled yet substantial; messy yet whole; vast yet concentrated; teleological yet achronological; growing, extending, and intersecting into themselves and beyond themselves.

### **Conclusion to Chapter**

#### ***Agency***

Going to college challenged and changed me. Along the way I made choices, many of which were in response to these very challenges. And because the challenges I experienced were oftentimes tied to socially-classed, habitu{s}al, and identity-based aspects of my experience, the choices I made in order to navigate the challenges resulted in social-class changes.

In the literature review, changes that accompany social mobility for first-generation and working-class students serve to simultaneously distance them from their home -- or mobilizing-from -- culture and community while at the same time hinder or limit the sense of belonging they feel in their mobilizing-to environment. As I first began to analyze and think about my own social mobility story, I went in with the mindset that I was somewhere in the middle. By looking back critically, however, I have been able to deconstruct this ultimately passivizing model and see in myself as agentic in the process. Not only was I changed, but I chose to be changed. While I may not have been able to fully anticipate the impact of what being upwardly mobile meant for someone like me, for my relationships, for my sense of self, or for my cultural history, I know that I anticipated that I was changing, and I continued to choose to change.

When I arrived at Bucknell in 2012, I was a chorded self, tripartitely wound with my identity invested in academics, athletics, and my Christian faith. I began to fray as I navigated the college space and interfaced with an unfamiliar, cultural field that pulled on me in ways I was not privy to. First, I retreated to my Christian roots in the face of social-pressures for the sake of achieving what I'd set out to academically and athletically. Second, I prioritized academics -- not once but twice -- over athletics by choosing to quit the track team in the middle of my first semester. Choosing against athletics was choosing against what my community back home expected, against the aspiring student-athlete they knew. It removed me -- slightly -- away from an old, hometown, high school part of myself.

After I decided to quit track, I thrived in my Christian faith and all the while persisted through academic challenges. When I went to Greece and began taking Ancient Greek, both my conceptualization of what academia and what spirituality (particularly as it was bound to abstinence from alcohol) could mean had changed. I came back from that summer a different

person, and I began to critique my Christianity as well as my self-retributive pursuit of physics. My eventual halting the pursuit of self-as-Christian and self-as-physicist took me, like my quitting the track team, further away from the self that was established in my home culture and context.

And while I maintained the student, learner-oriented thread of myself, persistent in me since at least the third grade, my pursuing this thread had the effect of further distancing me. No longer was my pursuing an education connected -- in terms of subject or discipline -- to what I had learned at home. I had stopped pursuing physics and math and was exploring the world. I was becoming educated, I was invested in the idea of perpetually learning, and, while I did not know where it would take me, I knew I was venturing into (partially) unmapped territory.

And so, while I am an upwardly mobile first-generation student from a working-class background who was challenged and changed as a result of their educational experiences, I also chose and was conscious of the path I moved along. In the same environment that at many, early points made me feel like I should desist, I learned the rules of the game, and, through support and wieldings of capital, succeeded.

Where is Ortnerian agency and practice in this mix? Was I resisting or dominating? In my intersectional positionality I was disadvantaged social-class-wise under capitalism yet advantaged by a “freedom of confident action,” (McIntosh, 1989) -- i.e. agency -- in my existence as a white man under a patriarchal and white-as-supreme United States context. My agency was neither singularly resistive nor singularly dominant. It was somehow both. In feeling equipped to email housing as early and as assertively as I did, I enacted a sense of entitlement reminiscent of children concertedly cultivated (Lareau, 2011). However, my desperate appeal to change rooms stemmed from the cultural, preparatory, and social dissimilarity I felt in relation

to my peers. In high school, I was thoroughly involved in extracurricular activities, but at my own choosing and purview. Let to naturally grow I cultivated myself, so much so that, once I knew I was going to Bucknell, I took pride in my own accomplishments in getting there. However, I neglected that the possibility of me going there hinged on the support of others -- either indirectly, in terms of Scott's fortuitous employment there or directly, through the encouragement of athletic coaches who told me I could get a sports scholarship at Bucknell *even if* Scott didn't work there.

When I arrived at Bucknell, getting myself out of what I deemed a toxic living space comprised dominant, power-from-above agency which was spurred on by my feeling a social and cultural minority. In this way, my agentic capacity was ignited by a desire to resist the systemic discomfort I felt overwhelming me, and I wielded advantageous social capital in the form of entitlement. "*I don't think that I should have to pay for schooling and housing if I am going to be placed where I cannot perform to my full potential.*" I certainly was paying for housing, however the nod to paying for schooling was definitely a sympathy-grab.

The choices that I made thereafter -- to quit the track team, to begin defining my spiritual self as Christian, to not rejoin the track team, to redefine my spiritual self away from Christianity, and to ultimately pursue Classics over Physics -- all stem from my early experiences at Bucknell. All of these choices are tied to my lifelong adherence to learning and school. And all are tied to my social mobility. In the process of each of these choices, I was keenly aware of the costs associated with the changes these choices represented. However, understanding them as "costs" has overtime lost resonance. I do not feel at a loss. Certainly, reintegrating myself into my home community and into the relationships therein has been a challenge, but it has been worth navigating. I also understand my privilege here, for in

conversations of social-mobility I think it's worth acknowledging how far one is expected to go, how far the mobility takes them.

On this note, while I no longer feel comfortable calling the ramifications of my choices and changes "costs," I no longer see myself as somewhere in the middle, between working-class and middle-class, or between origins and destinations. I find that I simply *am*; yes, separated from origins but grounded in the choices I have made in getting here. I have two feet down, and I am not split. I know there is privilege in this assertion, and this is also choice and agency. I do not want to feel split -- even if in some ways I am -- or straddling -- even if the world sees me that way. My feeling this way certainly could stem from the academic fields I'm currently invested in -- education, qualitative inquiry, human sciences, autoethnography -- and it is certainly entwined with the privileges I embody in any-given space. However, when I think of social mobility now, I no longer anticipate destinations and origins as distinct, but lived. I envision lives as processes, as journeys, and as histories. Therefore, I aim not to be in the middle, nor straddling, but coexistent in spaces and intersectionally experiencing the world. The possibility of straddling rests on static, unmoving ideas of social-class, and I'm not willing to look at class or people with such a singularly focused lens. If more people understood their positionalities as intersectional, composed of different histories of marginalization and domination and power and resistance, we might begin to break out of these binary, dualistic, and ultimately limiting systems.

Such polarized imaginations of the social world run the risk of neglecting the holism of color in the spectrum in-between. A prominent breaking-point, for me, was obviously when my Christian-secular dichotomous schema was dismantled and challenged; however, I was only able to come to this conclusion through a reflection on my past -- i.e. writing this autoethnography. It

was challenging to see in the moment. While I don't think it's realistic to suggest that everyone should be conducting an autoethnography such as this, I do think it is worthwhile to highlight the importance of self-reflection and intersectional experiences so that, in the midst of living, more people can grasp the reality of both their agency as well as of structures that may be inhibiting the most profitable employment of it.

Again, the agency I have been able to enact is a combination of both resistance and domination, or non-dominant and dominant forms of capital, of advantage and disadvantage. In some words, my agency is structured according to the intersectional positionality the present social world affords me. I am fortunate, because along the way, the priorities and passions I have been clinging to -- since Rocket Math days -- have worked out.

However, I am aware of some of the rarity in a story like mine. Not all students from contexts such as mine who seek out higher education make it to or finish college (and many might not even want to). In the Spring of 2018, I began looking back at my high school classmates, those who went to colleges like Bucknell (few), those who went to state schools (some), those who went to community colleges (some), those who went to trade schools (some), those who didn't pursue higher education (most). And I began to think critically about what separated us. I began to realize that, amidst disadvantage, I was advantaged, and that not all of my success was a result of hard work, but mainly of the support I received from others (as well as structures).

The origins of this project arise out of my reconciling this reality -- I asked and still ask myself why I was able to receive the education I did when so many of my friends started college -- some accumulating debt -- and ultimately didn't finish (yet). A goal of this project is to expose the ways educational structures perpetuate inequality -- in their current, increasingly neoliberal

formation -- ad infinitum. By concealing the mechanisms of social reproduction and allowing some to erupt through its ranks, those individuals who grasp at mobility but miss the mark have instilled in them a feeling of personal -- rather than structural -- failure. Realistically, though, “failure” is a questionably appropriate word. Systemic failings that persist can arguably be called structural workings, workings which need refounding, rethinking, and democratic transforming.

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In closing this chapter, I have highlighted agency and where and how I have found my agency to be functioning. There is more to the picture, however, particularly regarding a point I started to make just above, regarding my changed -- not quite in the middle -- self. In the following, final chapter I explore the structuring and structured nature of my habitus as necessarily agency-informed and agency-informing.

## *Chapter 5*

### *A Conclusion*

To conclude this thesis, I have separated this chapter into three parts. In the first and most substantial section, I bring the preceding chapters together to highlight the takeaways regarding the habitus and agency interplay I see functioning within my own social mobilization via higher education. Second, I provide a few, briefer conclusions I've sporadically arrived at, about a variety of topics: social and human theory, autoethnography, qualitative inquiry, and practical takeaways for readers who interface with students. Third, I bookend the thesis with a musing about what reflecting on these topics has done for me and what societal impact I hope a growing interest and investment in autoethnographic inquiry (Chapter 4) -- which grounds itself in human thought and theory (Chapter 2) and which enters and enriches empirical scholarly conversations (Chapter 3) -- might realize.

#### **Bringing It All Together**

In the conclusion to the previous chapter, I highlighted that I, as a first-generation student from a working-class background, wielded both structurally dominant and structurally non-dominant forms of capital to navigate my way through a culturally stifling field. While we have leaned into the freshwater fish in saltwater metaphor previously, under these dominant/non-dominant specifics it begins to break down and I'm going to need to be a bit more explicit about my meaning. First, this fish and environment metaphor tends to highlight the impact of the environment on the fish but does not explicitly highlight the fish's response to this press. Second, the human world does not so clearly distinguish between fresh and saltwater.



Saltwater and freshwater are two distinct and hardly contiguous environments. Saltwater tends to stay saltwater and freshwater tends to stay freshwater. Freshwater fish tend to stay where they are and saltwater fish the same; these systems reproduce themselves. The human, cultural, and social-classed world is not so simply delineated. Let's make the parallels we can. If saltwater is a dominant field or environment comprising middle-class and upper-class habitus-holders and their actions, then freshwater can be considered a non-dominant field or environment comprising working-class and working-poor habitus-holders and their actions. And under capitalist class-division, the two necessarily coexist and function inextricably. Indeed, these two, distinctly classed fields exist and operate under the same structure, capitalism.

I've been reiterating the analogy about freshwater fish in a saltwater environment exhaustively. My interest in this conundrum is not so much about the lone, stifled -- i.e. challenged -- fish. With this individual scope, any fish accustomed to freshwater (non-dominant) more than saltwater (dominant) is going to experience some discomfort. This thesis has been an extended exploration of my discomfort in these systems and my responses to them. I have thus been interested in how one experiences traversing the meta-metaphorical bridge between cultural fields, particularly via social mobility through education. Social mobility via education -- particularly higher education -- not only introduces those from college-uneducated environments to a new cultural field, but it also tends to grant them access to social mobility from a previous cultural field to a different cultural field -- from freshwater to saltwater. Education not only equips people with advantageous socioeconomic potential but also introduces them to the culture and social-class of the dominant establishment. It, thus, inculcates one to function more comfortably in a saltwater, middle-class resourced environment. There are, however, challenges in this adaptive and socially-mobile process (Hurst, 2010; Hurst, 2012; Lee, 2016; Lee and

Kramer, 2013; Lehmann, 2009; Lehmann, 2014). A freshwater fish that adapts -- if it could -- to saltwater would experience a shift in internal, biological processes. Now equipped to function in the new environment, the possibility of reintegrating into one's original, freshwater environment incurs more challenges. These internal, cultural pulls are not expected for those fish born and raised in saltwater.

In partial metaphor and under real, capitalist class stratification, saltwater is valued more highly in terms of status, socioeconomics, and social-class. Credentialism and the push to get a degree, to get a job, and to fulfill the American Dream of becoming happily middle-class has corporatized higher education (Labaree, 1997). Itself a structuring ideology, something like Credentialism helps reproduce middle-classness in the children of middle-class families. For many middle-class children, college is in the plans -- financially, academically, culturally, and socially (Lareau, 2011; Lareau and Weininger, 2008).

Working-class families, on the other hand, are often made up of parents without a college education. In terms of advantageously preparing a child for college, working-class parents have fewer capially-valued resources at their disposal compared to middle-class families. An obvious example of this is a middle-class parent who can support their child through experiential knowledge and a working-class parent who supports their child by talking to friends, reading articles, and hoping what they can do is enough. A more subtle example are the parenting logics parents from different classes employ to prepare their children differently -- yet reproductively -- for life in early adulthood.

Even those working-class students who ascend the ranks of the ladder via social mobility do not always find themselves feeling nor being accepted as middle-class. This is because social-class is not only a static marker of status. In our current world, one does not just become middle

or working-class. Whereas socioeconomic status is a more quantifying and quantifiable marker, social class encompasses material history and conditions and thus encompasses histories of privilege, marginalization, exploitation, dominance, resistance, and identity. All of this is to say that even those working-class and first-generation students who become upwardly mobile have had a much more complicated, oftentimes self-driven, journey toward the middle-class world than those who were born there. This ongoing and veiled dilemma -- which is structural not individual -- is akin to the hysteresis effect Bourdieu describes. Those for whom higher education functions reproductively have a foundational history of middle-class culture and resources to build on in coming of age middle-class. Those for whom higher education functions as upward social mobility of course draw on their own foundational histories, but their working-class or working-poor histories are culturally and systemically under-valued in this new environment.

That social mobility is a structurally unequal process is not a new idea. The literature reviewed in Chapter 3 considers both the experiences of freshwater fish in saltwater -- i.e. Challenges -- and the experiences of those traversing the cultural bridge -- i.e. Changes. However, by focusing on structures, the discussion thus far has neglected the practicing agents that maintain, perpetuate, or challenge them. Thus, my goal from the outset has been to better understand the agency of individuals in these very structural workings, particularly those students who are -- like myself -- first-generation from a working-class background. I take this approach in hopes that we can envision those people and students whose aspirations and dreams require social mobility as actively navigating and making choices about their experiences of social-class change rather than as passive, challenged, and changed.

In attempting to see the agency of first-generation college students, I undertook an autoethnographic investigation of my first two years of college, focusing close-up on the ways I chose to change my habitus and identity as a result of experiencing challenges. This analysis demonstrates that I was a recipient of the culture and social-class of the dominant establishment as a result of higher education, but I also made foundationally changing choices in my first two years that culturally distanced me from home. At the beginning of my third year, I chose to succumb and to acculturate. Having persisted through the challenges college had thrown at me, I saw the pursuit of Bucknell culture as inherently good and simultaneously looked at my home culture as somehow less-than, something worth moving away from. I was wrong, caught in a haze without the vocabulary to disperse the fog.

2015 - July -- Third Summer in Greece

Out on the Ismenion Hill, the sun is blazing, the cicadas have just started chirping, and I'm getting to know new people on the excavation team. As I demonstrate some of the shoveling techniques I'd developed over the last two summers, someone says, "Wow, you make this look easy. It makes sense that you grew up on a farm!" I immediately retorted, "I did not grow up on a farm! Where did you hear that from??" One of the excavation supervisors who was also a professor of my sister's had mentioned off-hand to people that my grandparents owned chicken houses and that I had some experience working on a chicken farm. This translated into the assertion above, which riled me to my core. I unconsciously rebuked my roots.

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Viewed from an action-oriented framework like I propose above, structural challenges and changes do not go away, but rather reveal a new light which considers the internal processes that influence upwardly-mobile students' cultural changes. An agency-acknowledging

framework aims to put people in the driver's seat of their experience as much as possible, and where this feat is not so easily achieved, it aims to expose the dominant, historic, and power-imbalanced structural weights, shapes, and boxes that seek to keep them in the passenger's seat. Agency is relatively straightforward to see in my experience, but this is not always the case. Where agency is less evident, I do not want to imply passivity, but suggest rather that structural inequalities differentially value the agency one exhibits based on how it resonates social-class-wise, race-wise, gender-wise. In other words, structural inequalities are discriminatory around the axis of access to power (Sewell, 1992).

In the fish metaphor, that freshwater and saltwater are visibly indistinguishable is an advantage. While born into a freshwater, non-dominant environment, freshwater habitus-holders witness the lives of saltwater habitus-holders quite often, especially beginning at the age of 5 or 6 when they enroll in school. Here, students who have *habiti* not privy to the expectations of school do not passively undergo social reproduction. Rather, they are simultaneously aware of both their marginalized positionality and of the ways privileged students navigate the space successfully. I am not willing to believe that those who are marginalized are unaware of the ways their agency, embodiment, histories, and existence are valued differently by the dominantly-structured world. Existence in marginalization is, at a basic level, resistance. Persisting against marginalization is *undoubtedly* resistance.

Carter (2003, 2005) highlights agentic capital wielding by marginalized youth in her work. The lower-income black and brown students she spoke with observed the ways privileged students -- both in terms of social-class and race -- in the school were getting by, achieving, and succeeding. Some students in her study chose to utilize the dominant forms of capital their privileged peers wielded in order to propel themselves socially. Others chose to act against the

norms of success dictated by their systemically privileged peers. Yet others attempted to dabble in each of culturally and structurally-stratified realms. Regardless of how they lived, they were consciously choosing. These students calculated how they would choose by weighing the costs and the benefits, by balancing their aspirations for school with the risk of connections changing back home, and oftentimes found a combination of these two worlds to be no easy task.

This distinction between dominant and non-dominant capital is vital for the discussion of my own upward mobility via education as a first-generation student from a working-class background. I, too, made choices, and I was also aware of the goals and passions I wanted to follow as much as I was aware of where and how far it was taking me. I would not have used this vocabulary of social-class, upward mobility, first-generation students, and challenges, changes, and choices -- for I did not know it -- but I know the decisions I *felt* compelled to make -- quitting the track team, redefining myself spiritually, putting my passion for science and math on hold -- were not easy and took extensive self-deliberation. Even though I was getting the chance to follow my dreams, I knew these choices were changing me and slowly distancing me from where I had come from -- the people, the culture, the place, and the community. Such an awareness did not, however, make the challenges less challenging or the changes less changing. Crucially, though, I chose. Crucially, those in Carter's (2003, 2005) studies chose. Crucially, people choose, full stop. That human agency is always legitimized and received well by dominant -- thought to be "normal" -- structures is currently a fantasy, however. Present, dominant structures unequally distribute power and privilege, so as to maintain their profiteering position, and dictate whose agency means something valuable and whose does not. Nonetheless, agency is a human trait. Ortner's (2006) double-edged sword is again worth recalling. Those at the bottom employ agency and power to fight and resist to be seen and heard -- for equality --

and those at the top employ agency that perpetuates their privilege and dominant status -- for inequality.

Building off of Carter's (2003, 2005) work as well as Ortner's (2006) writing about the double-edged nature of power, let me be clear about what I mean regarding dominance and resistance. We can then further examine my own story as an intersectional combination of both, particularly regarding my changing habitus in relation to origins and destinations.

### ***Dominance/Resistance***

When I write "dominant," I tend to, for the time being, leave out the intentionality of those in dominant positions of power who, in their agentic living, perpetuate unequal systems. A focus on intent is worthwhile for those concerned with who is responsible for the establishment and perpetuation of oppressive structures. People are, however, living beyond foundations and establishments. Humans of the 21st century live within the perpetuations, manifestations, and distorted guises of ideologies grounded and founded in inequality and domination (in large part, these are institutions co-opted by neoliberalism, like education). Distance from foundations does not imply a separation, but an ideological, structural, and systemic momentum and inertia. Within the realm of structural inequality, a focus on individual intent runs the risk of losing sight of the ubiquitous nature of systemic inequalities of the collective present. For indeed, intending to or not, inequality at a systemic level implies that humans coming and going within systems take part in the system. And so, I defer to a logic Kendi (2019) proposes in his book *How to be an Antiracist*. Kendi (2019) pushes readers to move away from the ultimately unhelpful racist/not-racist distinction, which tends to distract people from the reality that modern inequality is systemically as well as individually perpetuated. Inequality is no longer perpetuated only by individuals, but by systems, structures, and policies

people have promoted and in which people *are always acting*. Actions, therefore, go either against or with the grain. In place of labeling something racist or not racist, Kendi instead proposes that we use the distinction racist and anti-racist. In this way, any action that reinforces systemic racism is racist, and any action that aims to dismantle systemic racism is anti-racist.

I would like to carry Kendi's logic to Ortner's writing about power and agency as a double-edged sword, "operating from above as domination and from below as resistance" (Ortner, 2006, p. 139). Taken together, dominance and resistance function similarly to racism and anti-racism in that not resisting against dominant-structures is, in effect, reifying dominant structures and as such enacting dominance, acting dominantly.

And so, I call the help-seeking assertiveness I exhibited when emailing housing a dominant form of agency because of the ways it aligns with the dominant culture of the student body of affluent and selective universities. For example, I am envisioning students who feel education is something owed to them, largely as a result of the environments that helped nurture them. However, my household and childhood environment did not instill this in me. My social and academic experiences in education, however, did.

Thinking back to third grade Rocket Math with Ms. J., I was praised for doing well in math and I remember being told what I could do with the abilities I had. This instilled in me an aspirationally dominant habitus, one which inspired me to set my dreams in academia even though I, at the time, had no real pathway to get there. A pathway revealed itself when my mom married Scott. If Scott had not entered our lives, I do not know where I would be, but I would not have had access to a selective school like Bucknell, nor would I have had the same support that assisted me in persisting there. And so, I arrived at Bucknell embodying both resistance and dominance in an intersectionally powered working-class, white, and male body.



The question still remains, what of my habitus? What part of my freshwater process changed as a result of adapting to an environment that once stifled me? And how did this impact my relationships to my home environment and people at home who did not undergo the same, class-mobilizing changes I did? Having described just what I mean by resistance and dominant agency, let's now consider how they functioned within a singular individual -- me -- and how the choices I made in my first two years at Bucknell transformed the habitus I brought to Bucknell with me.

### ***Re-thinking Habitus***

When I first began reading Bourdieu's work, I was thinking about habitus quite statically. Overtime, however, I have thought about its quasi-physicality, particularly in its relationship to agency, fields, identity, and structures. I was thinking mechanically about how it actually changed. Now, as a result of reflecting on my life in the ways that I have, I see habitus as a simultaneously inward and outward process which registers the agentic capacity and will of a given person and the enveloping field at the same time. Let me try to elaborate upon this proposition by contextualizing my thoughts in my lived experience.

When I arrived at Bucknell, my habitus was oriented to the conditions of the various social-classed spaces I lived in for substantial amounts of time: my physical home, my hometown, and my school. In my experience of them, all of these factors embodied working-class culture. Bucknell, while just up the road from my home, was thus a foreign cultural environment to me. I was unlike many students for at least three reasons: 1) I did not go to a private high school, 2) my public high school was not nationally ranked, and 3) I was not wealthy. In fact, I was a financially independent student with a modest savings account who had been educated at an under resourced public high school. And, taking into account that I was a

first-generation college student without the college wherewithal afforded by college-educated parents, I was different than the ordinary Bucknell student. However, I was not altogether capitally -- and thus habitus-wise -- dissimilar.

Intersectionally, as I highlighted above, I embody both dominant advantage and non-dominant disadvantage. Combined, these constitute the habitus with which I navigate social spaces and relationships with others, so how did this -- the way I navigated social spaces and relationships -- change over time? Literature regarding habitus tends to write singularly about social-class origins while neglecting the life lived thereafter, the trials and triumphs that dictate experience from there on, and the ways that people, in the end, shape and make each other.

What complicated my habitus? In part, the privileges I explored in the previous, autoethnography chapter highlight the ways my habitus was complicated -- by social, financial, and close-to-home support; however, I think a few, concerted-cultivation-esque moments impacted the destinations I thought possible for a habitus such as mine.

In third grade, when my teacher picked me out and competed against me, I was concertedly cultivated. In my first year of high school, when I started doing well enough in football that my coach told me I could one day play in the NFL, I was concertedly cultivated. And I suppose by concertedly cultivated, here, I mean people who were themselves mobile -- teachers, coaches -- saw something in me that pushed me to see something in myself. In reality, they individualized me. For while I got to race the teacher in math and while I got the prospect of going to the NFL, I don't recall others being given such -- what I now deem -- praise. Amidst a collective, I was made to feel individual and entitled. Both of these aspects are part of a large and looming dominant culture (Lareau, 2011; Lareau and Weininger, 2008; Stephens et al., 2012).

I can vividly replay these memories in my head, recalling setting and place and people and feelings. Support like this does help affirm people, but it is not equally distributed. As Kefalas and Carr (2009) detail, under-resourced schools like the one I went to tend to funnel the resources they do have into a few students. Such support propels students, but often to the point that they, after experiencing upward mobility, do not -- or do not feel able to -- return home. Supported students themselves may achieve upward mobility, but at whose expense? In this neoliberal, capitalist machine which has co-opted the institution of education, a few trickling up through the ranks under the guise of hard work serves to maintain the system which only works if it intergenerationally reproduces the social-classes on the lower tier of manufactured stratification (MacLeod, 2009). Or, of course, if through the hysteresis effect the “lower” moves up but their position on the ladder remains the same. My story is a fragmentary picture of this reality -- everyone’s is.

How then did my habitus actually change throughout my first two years at Bucknell? For the sake of fulfilling my academic prioritizations within an academic environment that halted me, I chose to let go of pieces of myself which were homemade. Home made me the athlete I was. Home made me the Christian I was. Home made me the student I was and still am.

A crucial part of my habitus story is that I have always been drawn to school and learning. Not only was I encouraged early on by my third-grade teacher Ms. J., this encouragement reified a-- or what would become a -- passion (as much as a third grader can have) about learning and school. Such motivation is a structural and dominant advantage. Where does this motivation stem from? Who has it and who doesn’t? First, I believe the possibility of having this motivation, toward school, is both structured and chosen, based on one’s experiences with phenomena associated with pursuing the motivation. That is, it is based on whether or not

one's agency is legitimated or delegitimated by the social world around them. Second, I am inclined to think that one's is connected to individual success being the product of social support. Indeed, we make each other, in pain and in praise. *We take part in* making each other, for we also make ourselves. My mother read to me. My siblings set a good example for me. My teachers challenged me, encouraged me, and supported me. People saw something in me. A combination of these factors and more have a hand in my advantageous orientation toward schooling, the pursuit of which had me constantly wondering what it might be like to be an archaeologist, a physicist, or an educator. This motivation primed me for the support I received from adults in my life to dream big, work hard, and go to college.

It is a commonly held notion that the functions of secondary schools are to prepare their pupils for post-secondary learning. In establishing such a baseline trajectory and desired outcome of education, the institution of education limits those whose interests and would-be vocations fall outside of the, again, dominant norm. This is but one of the dimensions of the structural inequalities related to social reproduction in education. Combined with some other dimensions, a (arguably *the*) source of my college transition challenges and changes become more clear.

While my intersectional white, working-class, and male identity might not have meant much around my hometown where more than 90% were white and working-class, it did mean something in the field of Bucknell. At home, my habitus aligned with the expectations of the field around me. At Bucknell, this habitus clashed. No longer was being working-class the norm; however, some aspects of what I'd been indoctrinated in did position me well, such as a sense of self-worth so high and mighty that I took drastic steps to eliminate the early discomfort I felt stemming from those parts that didn't position me well. Had I not been concertedly cultivated by my peers and teachers in high school, I doubt I would have felt worthy of demanding a room-

change or committed to persevering academically. On the flip side, it is so clear to me that my high school prepared me differently than many of the students I went to classes with at Bucknell. I had to work exceptionally hard to meet my own standards as well as the standards I perceived Bucknell and the student-body had of me. I never cut myself a break, and always followed my academic passion, despite the ways I anticipated -- even if I could not then name them -- the ways my choices were distancing me from my hometown, from some of my friends, and from some of my family.

Thinking about choice as well as habitus in these fine-grained, subjective, and individually-lived ways has led me to think about the possibility of a new meaning of habitus that is intricately entwined with agency, much like structures and the agents that comprise them in the dialectic interplay of Practice Theory. In this way, we can imagine the individual-self as microcosmic of the collective-world. As agents collectively inform structures, agency individually informs habitus. And as structures press on agents, habitus presses on agency.

### *Self-Practice Theory*

Just as structures and agents are the constituents of Practice Theory, habitus and agency appear to me to be the constituents of something microcosmic, Self-Practice Theory.

Practice Theory's main constituents are structure and agency; however, throughout the course of this thesis, varying shapes of structure have come up. We've talked about: habitus, a structured and structuring structure; fields, which themselves have a habitus; and structures, the structures themselves. What I'd like to focus on in this section is the Practice Theory relationship between habitus and agency, particularly as they inhabit the same body and are socialized yet lived individually. By 'lived individually,' I mean to suggest that any given individual's

combination of habitus and agency is simultaneously, co-constitutively subjective and structured.

I am hoping that we can begin to envision Practice Theory not only as macro but also as micro -- on the collective scale of big structures and the agents structuring and structured by them but also on the individual scale of habitus and agency structuring and structured by it. For in the similar way that structures influence agents, one's habitus necessarily influences their agency, and vice-versa. A hope of this analysis is that we begin to envision each human as complexly functioning, as both structured and structuring -- themselves an agent with agency -- yet nonetheless living in a history of social and power inequality which may diminish the potential realization of said agency.

This proposition is made clearer with some spatializing. At one point in this project when I was writing the chapter on theory, I became fixated on the existential shapes, if there are any, of these theoretical concepts. Habitus as a socialized subjectivity meant that it lay somewhere in the body, altering the way one sees the world but also as a body, interfacing with the outside world. I began to think about the shapes of fields and of culture and of structures. I mostly began to wonder what the difference between field and structure were.

And so, I began to think quasi-physically in concentric, ephemerally-bounded --yet respecting their orders of influence -- spheres. The innermost piece of socially theorized humans in a Practice Theory framework is agency. This internal drive for self-preservation, enacted to remain comfortable and, if made uncomfortable, perpetually pushing, thriving, surviving to be make oneself whole again, to be in equilibrium. The next innermost piece is the process of habitus, which gauges at once the agency of the associated life force and at the same time gauges the field surrounding it. The habitu{s}al process seeks fluidity and when met with interference it

responds with resistance or acquiescence. Enough living habitus-holding agents establish a field or culture around them which includes norms of dress, tastes, dispositions, social mores.

Essentially, fields establish what the transferrable forms of capital are -- whether they be social, cultural, linguistic, embodied. Any action an agentive habitus holder makes is essentially valued capitally. If one's action deviates from the norm of the field, it has lower value; adhering to the norms, valued higher. Because habitus-holders are agentive and can choose to enact power and thus domination, these differentially valued assets over time have taken the form of, like Ortner suggests, domination and resistance.

And the field, which is established by the habitus-holders majority-wise and in-power through history comprising its cultural ranks, is itself established by structures. These structures can influence the culture of fields but are ultimately ephemeral ideas that, once established and perpetuated, become indoctrinated into the thinking of virtually everyone in the fields under its purview. Examples of this are hierarchy, domination, competition, individualism.

And so, innermost to outermost → agency, habitus, field, structure. What about practices? "The study of practice," Ortner (1984) writes, "is after all the study of all forms of human action, but from a particular -- political -- angle" (p. 149). Practices are any actions that an agentive habitus-holder makes. The politics of that action are determined by the way it aligns or interfaces with the surrounding field.

Ponderings of a structural theory of practice, at both the micro and macro levels, allow for an understanding of self and other as structured and structuring. Post-structurally, the agent-structural interplay under a practice framework is post-structurally understood by keen incorporations of power, history, and culture. While agentive, histories of inequalities of power mean the present inequality is systemically entrenched. However inertial, though, structures are

cultural through individual and collective practice made, unmakeable, and re-makeable (Ortner, 2006).

Coming to these theoretical and overall conclusions has been a process of discernment, self-reflection, and learning. Having covered my main takeaways, I now move into a few, briefer conclusions about the process of writing this thesis and what I hope people who work with students can practically implement into their relationships and interactions with all of their students.

## **Other Conclusions**

### ***Theoretical Conclusions***

When I set out to write this thesis's theory chapter, I was simultaneously becoming increasingly aware of how theory gets made and who gets to make it. I began to wonder how someone like Bourdieu came to be, how someone who has theorized so much about the social world has gotten to such a point. And I started to realize that, while Bourdieu had a chance and took it, the ideas and his yearning to conceptualize social existence more saliently was not one of genius, but one of humanness, of existence.

I also began to see him as a product of his time, his lenses, his own existence, and I began to understand his place in the great and limited (as is anything not yet democratic nor representative) theoretical waves of social thought. Thus, I began to view Bourdieu's work as both great and yet limited. Ortner's work compelled me because she brought an acknowledgement of power inequality -- and histories of domination and oppression -- to bear on the complex, inherently made and inherently re-makeable culture of social existence. She also introduced me to a worldview that did not relegate individuals wholly to the whims of what they



had created. She instilled a hope in me that, through resistance to domination, marginalized agents will see justice. By reading Ortner, I was able to start conceptualizing theory as something made by ordinary people who were given a voice, as something locked in a context and imagined through lived lenses, and therefore as something that should bring more people into conversation and that should be dialectic, perpetually re-contrived, and perpetually patched or even re-sewn.

All of this is to say that, through engaging in autoethnography with the theoretical framework herein, I have come to my own conclusions regarding these human -- developed by theorists -- concepts. In examining a lived story -- one I am so close to -- I have been able to look at habitus, capital, and agency as lived. And I have been able to look at field and structure as lived-in and -- through being lived in -- created and re-created.

### *Autoethnographic Conclusions*

The overall process of writing the autoethnography of this thesis has allowed me to learn and come to conclusions about my life that I otherwise would not have, not only about theory and literature but also about my own life and meaning-making. Writing has been learning, psychoanalyzing, growing, and making connections. Writing has been more caringly redefining my past. Through ethnographic self-reflection, I have been able to focus less particularly on individual fallings-short, successes, missteps, joys, and pains and to become more conscious of structures, systemic inequalities, and my individual -- and humanity's altogether -- concerted precarity under current regimes of power and self- and other-domination.

As a result of writing the narrative piece about quitting track, for example, I have been able to re-remember how -- with what I know now -- the events happened, to put together what forces and structures were influencing me, and better understand how I responded and why I responded that way. When I was living it, I did not have a name for how my first semester

challenged me, how it made me feel, and how that tinged and tinges the way I envision myself in academic spaces, specifically my feeling of legitimacy in academic spaces (and particularly those STEM oriented). I did not know what it meant to be a first-generation student. I did not know what rural and urban *really* meant. I did not know what public and private school meant. I did not know what it meant to grow up in a single-parent home or in a blended-family home. I did not see how each of these intersected with my family's position on capitalism's ladder. We are working-class, but like so many of these realities, so little about them made sense to me until I was granted the tools to say something about them in a larger, structural context. Because I can now see the challenges I faced (not only in college but in life in general) as rooted in something systemic, I no longer hold myself hostage for the choices I felt I had to make.

There are days when I remember how much, at one point, I so dreamed about being an athlete in college, about being a physicist, about being an archaeologist, or about going to seminary. Whereas I used to envision the choices I made -- to pursue, to move on, to quit -- as choices made out of necessity, I can now look back more caringly.

### ***Qualitative Inquiry Conclusions***

I go to such great lengths to tell this story first because I have found so much therapeutic value in this autoethnographic process and second because I think others can benefit from critical and informed self-reflection as well. I also tell my story in this way to become familiar with the deep, rhizomatic complexities of life, so that when people share stories with me, either in general or for other, activism-oriented qualitative work, I can listen well and say the most salient, real, and subjectively informed things about their lives in context.

A well-situated, contextualized, and amplified story serves two purposes. It highlights: a subjective yet socialized present moment of our world; and, the necessity for things to, as they

currently stand, change. In listening to others' and telling my own story, I hope to listen to and help tell the story of others. I understand that not everyone has a platform to hear, analyze, and publish -- or reflect, analyze, and tell their own -- stories. I want people who have been silenced to be able to tell their story to someone who is trying to have an informed idea about the life they've been living. In the ways we have been silenced, I think we desire to resist. I want people to know there are others out there advocating for them and their intersectional complexity, so that they too can feel empowered to take small steps of self-advocacy, reinvigorating in oneself the agency that's always been there but that may have been systemically, structurally, interpersonally (as a result of systemic and structural stampedes), and (in some cases) intrapersonally trampled.

I believe that those who work in education, in academia, and with students can be benefited by revering stories, qualitative research, relationships, and human agency in these ways.

People around the "bottom" of the socio-historically stratified ladder are those who spark, ignite, and illuminate the deepest recesses most needing change. We -- particularly those with the platform, like those who work with students desiring to pursue their dreams through education -- must help each other be better equipped for the striving that is to come if we wish to see a better world for people -- it is possible; we need to believe it is. While I am where I am in part because of the ways my intersectional positionality rendered my agency legitimate, my being is also the product of support, encouragement, and guidance. As much as we are self-made through our agency, we are also other-made, by structures and by each other. And so, I wrap up these brief conclusions with a few specific, practical takeaways for those who work with students.

### *Conclusions for those who work with students*

There are two desired outcomes of this thesis for those who work with students: first, I want to encourage educators, student affairs professionals, faculty, and people generally to effectively reflect on their own experience so as to better understand one's place in the social world. Through self-reflection, I have been able to reconcile my structured and structuring place in the world. In envisioning the self thusly, I have been able to better empathize with people who have and are living lives differently than mine.

Second, with this enriched understanding of self, I want to encourage readers to see others in a similar light, as alive and living, experiencing the world, structured and structuring. Empathy, in this framework, is justice-oriented, as one seeks not only to understand the experience of another but also seeks to understand why lives and experiences are different, an intersectional combination of self-, other-, and structured making.

For some readers, the recommendation to engage in such self-reflection might be unwelcome. For some, reflecting means the possibility of re-living pain. For this reason, I want to make clear that I hope not to prescribe a process, destination, or journey. Rather, this thesis and all of its contents are subjectively descriptive, describing my experience in the world and the meaning I have made out of it. I recommend that self-reflection and traversing autoethnographic pathways should be journeys and processes, not destinations sought after. I have valued deep self-thought for as long as I can remember. When engaging in scholarly and artful self-reflection became a possibility, I was gently and caringly guided toward it, not directed, and I actively chose to continue pursuing it.

I will also mention that my journey toward self-reflection is directly tied to my intersectional positionality consisting of entwined threads of dominance and resistance.

Engaging in this project and particularly in this methodology has been helpful for me in the constant, perpetual effort of dismantling my own privilege blindness. White and male privilege presents those embodying these positions with a peculiar advantage that does not readily equip them with a lens to view the world as unequal because it has not been unequal for them -- particularly not in contemporary conversations of identity politics. Few -- in the end -- fare well under *systemic* inequality that perpetuates structures grounded in histories of domination and exploitation.

### **Closing Remarks**

*“A genuine democracy requires hope, dissent, and criticism...” Denzin (2003) writes, “... performance [auto] ethnography is a strategic means to these political ends” (p. 259).*

When I set out to write this project, I hoped to tell my story as a means of exposing structural inequalities. When I first learned about what it meant to be a first-generation student, I initially felt gratified. I finally had a name for the distress I'd been feeling in those early, formidable moments at Bucknell which prod still at my psyche. And yet, two years out from receiving my bachelor's degree, I could not ignore how, amidst the formidable I was incredibly fortunate, advantaged, and privileged to be where I was considering where I came from.

I began to think about my friends from high school -- many of whom were themselves first-generation students and some who were not -- who had had starkly different college experiences than me. Some finished, others dropped out, others failed out, yet others were kicked out. I was eager to know what distinguished me from them. Was it about who worked harder? Was it the different colleges we went to? Was it the different kind of support we had? The amount of money we had? I could not figure it out, but that's because this is not only an individual matter. Socio-structural inequalities pervade the mobilizing trajectories that the

American Dream tells people they are owed, that if they work hard enough, if they persist, if they go into debt, if they get that degree, then they will succeed, then they will be happy.

After mulling over this newfound “marginality,” I began to critically question whether my being a first-generation student from a working-class background constituted anything other than a set of deficits. I had, after all, done relatively well. It was challenging for me to accept that, though I had succeeded, I had been challenged; though I had finished, I thought about stopping. And it’s still hard for me to write about. I sometimes feel as if this is not a story I should be telling -- not that *I* shouldn’t be telling it but that it might not be worth telling. It is, however, the only story I have, and in our currently-structured, inequality-entrenched world, I am hopeful that the more we expose crooked systems from a place of lived emotionality, prosperity, and destitution, the better. And in its honest depiction of my life -- acknowledging the embodiments of both advantage and disadvantage -- I am hopeful that readers will come away from reading this autoethnography looking more critically and caringly at themselves, their positionalities, their “coming to” stories, their marginality and privilege -- at their rhizomatic, intersectional histories. And I am hopeful that readers will, having looked once inward, extend an empathy to others that is so powerful it merits a perpetual re-understanding of self and other in the places we inhabit within the social world.

And I have hopes for those who have gone to school, those for whom education has reproduced their social-class and those for whom education has socially-mobilized. I am hopeful that those who have fallen through the cracks of a broken educational system can begin to rewire their adaptive senses to no longer, if they ever have, see themselves as solely responsible for not reaching the dreams they were taught to dream. And I am hopeful that those who have ascended the social ladder through education’s bountiful gifts will look not at the system as faultless, but at

their possibility as a fortunate, intersectional combination of hard work and support from others. And, finally, I am hopeful that those for whom education has perpetuated their inherited social-class privilege will not remain blind to their advantage and will develop a resistance-mindset which. A populace with a more structurally-critical self-reflective understanding of humanity will solidify these hopes into realities and will awaken people to what needs to be done in order to see a world more unanimously just and democratic.

Thank you for reading,

-Jon

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## *Appendix I*

### *A Methodology -- Self-reflection and Auto-ethnography*

#### **“Coming to ...” Autoethnography (Bochner, 2014)**

I came across autoethnography at a critical time in my learning. After being exposed to the ways modern educational structures prepare, serve, and educate students unequally (in the multiculturalism in education course), I began to reflect on my experience as a first-generation student from a working-class background. I did not, however, see an immediate route to doing critical and serious work on my own story. I felt I had the tools -- I have always been self-reflective and eager to learn from the only true vantage I have access to, my own -- but there didn't seem to be a place for the self-investigation in the research I was learning about and from until I learned about autoethnography.

In the semester after I had taken the Multiculturalism course, I was then enrolled in a qualitative research methods course, where, for the most part, we learned about other-oriented human-centered inquiry. I became immediately hooked to the prospect of using people's stories to inform the need for structural change that lessens and diminishes inequality. Because I was interested in experiences like my own, my first inclination in this research realm was to learn more about how others like me, namely first-generation students, had experienced education. I did not yet know that self-reflective work was deemed as research, publishable, or scholarly.

Somewhat randomly, I happened upon an article by Communication scholar Arthur Bochner (2018), a positivist quantifier turned interpretivist autoethnographer. I emailed Art directly after reading the article, writing “reading this piece of yours really made me feel energized and known. You wrote into qualitative research the kind of compassion and orientation



toward goodness that I envision myself adopting, when/if I engage in research of my own.” To my surprise, he quickly responded. He thanked me and gave me -- in my eyes -- a call to action, saying, “You might like to take a look at my book, *Coming to Narrative: A Personal History of Paradigm Change in the Human Sciences* (2014). I believe it speaks directly to the issue you raise about feeling spoken or listened to and understood.”

Above all, Art’s (2014) book was educational for me and “changed me as I read it” (as I wrote to him in an email some time later after I had finished the book). It taught me about theories, ideas, people, justice, life, emotions, and academia. And it taught me about the person in the paradigm and by extension the agent in the structure (in these same months is when I first read Sherry Ortner’s (2006) book). Inspired by Art and his compassionate, critical, reflective, human-oriented writing and teaching through-the-self, I thus desire that these pages function and serve readers similarly.

This thesis, however, is not directly modeled on Art’s book. While my choosing to examine my own experiences in education stemmed from reading his work, the form of this thesis diverges from narrative, performative, or explicitly interpretive autoethnography. This is because of the context of my learning about autoethnography, in a qualitative education research methods course. In the discipline of education, research -- qualitative or quantitative or mixed -- tends to be written in a few chunks: a theoretical framework, a literature review, and a segment on data and analysis. For the most part, I have adopted this form and format. The autoethnography chapter is essentially a data chapter, and I am the singular data point.

However, while technically the “autoethnography” is confined to a chapter, this entire piece is autoethnographic. I have heard the common adage from many sources at this point -- all writing or scholarship is veiled autobiography -- but most memorably from my thesis advisor,

Sue Ellen. This writing is no different. Since learning about educational inequality, social-class, and my structured and structuring place in the world, just two years ago, everything I have read has been new and -- what feels like -- elementary learning. Where the autoethnography chapter focuses on my first two years of college, the theory and literature review chapters are essentially an autoethnography of my social and human science learning as of the past two years. In this way, Chapters 2 and 3 are slices of my story and pieces of my learning. As readers read along, know you have followed my thought processes, my learning, and my education. In this way, writing is a form of learning, a creation of knowledge, and a form of teaching, the self as instrument, life as classroom.

Writing has also been creating -- what I hope to be -- something artful and evocative (Bochner and Ellis, 2016). In the most basic sense, considering this thesis “artful” is an attempt to distinguish it far from “science,” to which positivistic research desires adhering (Glesne, 2016). Since learning about qualitative research and inquiry and autoethnography, that my research be “scientific,” “objective,” or “rigorously gathered” has become a low priority. From the outset of my learning about the various orientations to research, I knew where and to whom my commitments resided. The questions I was most drawn to, the answers I was seeking, and the research I saw myself conducting, didn’t have anything to do with science, quantifiable data, generalizability, replicability, or verifiability. My own critical and intentional self-reflection coupled with attempts at empathy persuaded me that human stories, experiences, and existences were not so easily contained, measured, or observed. Rather than committed to objectivity and concrete findings, I was instead passionate about people, voices, empowerment, justice, individual experience, collective (cultural) experience, existence, joy, and pain (Bochner, 2016; Bochner, 2017; Ellis, 2004).

When I consider this grocery list of attributes I aspire to, I sometimes wonder if the autoethnography I've done here is up to the standards of the great thinkers who have paved the way -- which, for me, are Art Bochner and Sociologist of Communication Carolyn Ellis. Thankfully, these doubts rarely sink their teeth in. I'm constantly reminded that autoethnography, like qualitative research, is without a boilerplate (Pratt, 2009). Rather, autoethnography is a self-made medium -- whether that be a canvas, a piece of paper, or a stage. That autoethnography lacks a boilerplate should not imply that it lacks a consistent thread or grounding. What binds autoethnography together at its core is the ethnographer, the self, and the self-aware and self-reflective agent. Additionally, worth noting is that autoethnographers do not write in a vacuous echo-chamber. The theory that authors ground their work on, the literary conversations they enter and add to, and the form or medium they choose to display their art in are all extensions of a meta-methodology, a primal connectivity, and an original boilerplate → the human experience. In doing autoethnography, we uphold and amplify the subjective, yet never in a contextless void. For autoethnography's emphasis on contextualized subjectivity and its subsequent highlighting of the individual's meaningful position in the collectivity of human experience, I thus incorporate this self-meaning-making methodology into my educational research.

Another prominent reason for my choosing autoethnography is its groundedness in -- without a preference for any -- each of the following: the individual and self, the individual in the collective, the individual's bearing on the collective, and the collective's bearing on the individual. In this way, autoethnography is political and makes political statements. In my last two years of college, I began to become aware of my politicized place in the world. Since then, I have been unable to remain blind to my privileges, and as a result I unable to remain blind to the

pains of humans and the world -- the pains of the resistant, the pains of the dominant as a result of dominating, the intersectional pains of our politicized yet self-individualized positionalities in a collective world that -- although it claims to be -- remains unblind to skin color, embodiment, and access to capital. Nonetheless, *pain*.

Finally, autoethnography grounds itself in emotionality. When I began this thesis project, I knew one thing: I wanted to better understand the first-generation student experience by looking at my own transition to Bucknell. As authentically as possible, I wanted to recreate the pivotal, watershed moments I saw contributing to my trials and triumphs, so I decided to look back at old Facebook messages and emails. I did not expect them to be so emotionally revealing. As I reviewed past conversations, words, relationships, and emotions, I was drawn back in time, able to re-experience with hindsight the peaks and valleys of my once-daily life. I discuss the specifics of this -- what amounts to be a -- “method,” in the following subsection.

In the end, I have chosen to use autoethnography as a guiding methodology because, with it, I have been able to center the human experience without discounting the multiplicity of humans and their cultures, histories, power, practices, and agencies. Having laid out my rationale for choosing to use autoethnography, we now turn to my choice of method within the methodology.

### **Method -- An Attempt to Re-Experience Past-Present Moments**

When I settled on incorporating autoethnography into my eventual master’s thesis, I knew I wanted to tell an authentic -- as close to its being lived -- story about my college experience as a first-generation student. Because of the timing of my learning about this label, I was only able to view my transition and acclimation challenges at Bucknell through the lens of being first-generation in hindsight. When I learned about educational inequality and how my

class background influenced my experiences, I had a lot of questions. Thus, I wanted to recreate the moments as they were lived so as to map on or deviate from what a majority of literature was proposing about people like me. To get as close as possible, I sifted through nearly every Facebook or email exchange from around the time I had applied to Bucknell up until the summer after I had graduated. This amounted to a huge amount of material. My initial plan was to look at my habitus trajectory from convocation to commencement, but the prospects, given my scope, proved too grandiose. And so, I ultimately decided to focus on my first two years at Bucknell, intending to highlight the same habitus-focused trajectory yet situated around pivotal, watershed moment choices I made. These choices were in response to challenges and resulted in changes. This framework arose coincidentally with the organizational structure of the third chapter of this thesis, the literature review.

When I finally got to using them, I did some coding within the documents, mostly to help me organize my thoughts and to reorganize my understanding of the events as I had lived them. I first coded the documents chronologically. Next, I coded for conversation versus context. Some documents consisted of conversations surrounding choice-driven watershed moments, such as my housing struggles early on, my quitting the track team, my redefining my spirituality, and my dropping Physics to pursue Classics. Other documents are contextual. Rather than highlighting words shared with others, context-coded documents helped me piece back together the temporality and lived nature of these changes. For example, going into the project, I was fuzzy on the details regarding my distancing from DiscipleMakers Christian Fellowship, but in my messages and emails, I found some clarity when I looked at who I was talking, when I was talking to them, and what I was talking about.

Beyond context and conversation codes, I also coded for academics, athletic, and spiritual. Each of these codes corresponds to the three overall changes I experienced in my first two years at Bucknell. In particular, these codes alongside the chronological ordering helped me better understand the intertwined nature of my experiencing them. With this organization, I began to look at my experience a bit more holistically.

It is worth noting that I did have a hand in picking a choosing what went into this thesis and what didn't. Realistically, however, this is true for any qualitative research project. We choose the story we tell, even when prompted from a distance with as little bias as possible, as objectively as possible. I struggled to know whether or not I should highlight certain details, such as my drinking in high school. Even though I did decide to incorporate these details -- because they are critical for the story I wanted to tell -- I will be the first to acknowledge that I did leave other details out. For example, my relationships with people from my hometown area changed dramatically, despite my closeness to home, as I became more acquainted with the expectations of and life at Bucknell. And I do not tell some stories about romantic relationships, friendships at Bucknell, and mentoring professors, even though they were as much a part of my life as any other prevalent details included herein. This story is also truncated by my choosing to confer the details of my first and second years and not my third and fourth. A foray into these years would undoubtedly connect more dots. Needless to say, I had to make some choices. Regardless of gaps, I tell the story aware of the gaps and with a connectedness to the present, my present self. In this way, no matter what gaps -- and no matter how big they might be -- constructing this thesis is an auto-biographical and autoethnographic process that consists of my *entire* past, despite what I have chosen to leave out.

While the piece is ultimately non-fictional, I have taken some liberties in constructing the thesis so as to protect the anonymity of those mentioned throughout. For example, “James” in the autoethnography chapter is an amalgamation of multiple friends, combined into one. I made this choice after thorough reflection on my friendships in high school. In recognizing that I was oftentimes mean to my friends, I decided to coalesce the emotional vectors into one. I also chose the name James because it was my grandfather’s name. When I read my college application essay -- which is about my deep respect and admiration of my Pappaw -- alongside my beratements of friends, I was struck with the double-life I was living.

In some cases, I also changed small details of stories. This choice occasionally diminishes the lived emotional states that corroborated the substantial choices I ended up making. A good example of where this lapse of thorough detailing is in the way I told the story about quitting track. The picture I paint in the body of this thesis is one of mutuality between myself and a prominent authority figure on the track team, but the actual experience was a bit different. I set up a time to discuss my feeling overwhelmed by school work, and I mentioned considering some of my options. One of these options, I thought, would be to stop doing track, or at least take some time off, so that I could build a better foundation in my academics. I expressed how hard classes had been for me, how I was having a difficult time finding the time to get the work done, much less to get it done well. I told him that the current track schedule was taking up a lot of my time. He said, “well sometimes you gotta suck it up and stop being a fucking baby.” Even though he immediately went red in the face with embarrassment, apologizing quickly, the die had been cast. I walked out of the office and didn’t look back until the following year, when I considered rejoining the team to be an athlete for my high school coach who had recently been hired at Bucknell. In an effort to “clear the air” and discuss my rejoining the team, I met with my

old high school coach and this “prominent authority figure.” During our meeting, it became clear to me that the man who had neglected to hear my pleas and transitional hardships was only interested in having me back on the team because of my athletic potential. He was not concerned with the self I’d cultivated in the year since I had quit, since I’d left a substantial part of my identity behind for the sake of my studies. After this hiatus from organized team sports, I was different, and at that point I was beginning to figure out my priorities. What “clearing the air” amounted to was brushing over the words that he said to me and disregarding the impact those words had.

Overall, the “method” of utilizing Facebook messages and emails has been incredibly valuable for me. Re-viewing past-present moments has allowed me to piece together events as they happened, which was of particular importance to me because of my desire to situate my story within a theoretical framework and to build on existing literature about the first-generation student from a working-class background phenomenon. I feel fortunate to live in a time where I have access to these records. If I had been writing this same project ten or twenty years earlier or later, I don’t think I would have had the same opportunity to look back on such a substantial part of my own human data with such clarity.

### **Etc.**

In utilizing personal messages and emails to piece together the story of my past and my history, I exercise both caution and criticism. I exercise caution because I am hesitant to rely on “data” to talk about (my own) humanness and life, which transcends the static confines a scientific fixation on data has come to represent to me. However, I have come to the conclusion that this thesis in particular is part historical -- there-and-then (Chapter 4) -- as well as present and lived -- here-and-now (Chapters 1-5, the Appendix, Acknowledgements, References, etc...).



Nevertheless, caution remains and should remain in some capacity because, even after traversing my past as I have, I still feel as if there is more to say, more to discover, and more meaning to make.

And I exercised criticism and critical lenses because I knew that looking back from a more mature and learned vantage would reveal that I at one point knew less and that I had been immature, manipulative, and cruel, even to some of my closest friends. And I knew how my individual experience was simultaneously socialized. Even though my story is individually lived, it is socially constructed, and what I say about my story implicates those in my life as much as it implicates me. Using messages afforded me a scaffolding from which to re-remember what wasn't caught in messages and emails, to surmise what I was feeling when I was writing them, and to even track how emotions during critical moments changed from day to day, person to person, and hour to hour. My memory alone could not have provided such -- what I now deem -- vital insights and would not have yielded the same narrative and analysis I am proud to have developed throughout this thesis. Still, I do not claim to have "gotten it right" with this approach or method. Rather, I am at once pursuing both authenticity at the individual -- my -- level as well as the inevitable ambiguity that comes with social humanness. In other words, I strive for authenticity because I know my memory is fallible, I know that I have blind spots, and I know that the story I tell implicates others within my story, whose renditions of these events might tell a different tale. In short, I have done what I can and I have done it as well -- with what I know now -- as I know how to.

Using past correspondences -- whether they be letters or email -- as a record to draw from is not an incredibly novel approach (Bochner, 2016; Ellis, 2004). For example, when I first read Bochner's (2016) book, I was impressed with the way he used and examined email

correspondence and letters to highlight his own personal, philosophic, methodological, and paradigmatic orientations. While similar in approach, however, the quantity and quality of conversational, social, historic, and human data available to me for the purpose of this project is unprecedented. Really, with how frequently people text and use email, everyone has a massive record, some of which is easily retrievable. Of particular note are the Facebook messages, which, at the time, I was sending to friends and others without ever considering they would be used in a project like this. I could not have known that a ten-years older, future version of myself would be analyzing my words. Because of this, the messages tend to be emotionally and humanly raw, indicative of moments, of mindsets, of pain and pleasure, and of a simultaneously socialized and individualized piece of history.

Overall, I skimmed through thousands of pages of chat logs in an effort to identify what details were pertinent to this project, namely those about the challenges I experienced at Bucknell and how responding to these challenges changed me. This goal required an in-depth understanding of self before Bucknell and a more expansive project about habitus and identity change would extend beyond my undergraduate time at Bucknell.

To close out this Appendix, I briefly consider how I might approach autoethnography a second time after completing this trial run, particularly in regards to planning, the inevitable fall-through -- or at least tweaking -- of plans, and what actually gets written down, namely the outcomes of plans. While I went in with thousands of pages of documents to analyze, planning to code, code, code and make these grand connections between my conversations with different people, I ended up dramatically changing my approach when I started writing the actual autoethnography. While planning was vital for what I had eventually written and for arriving at the ideas that continuously inspired me to keep going, the particulars of plans did not come to

fruition. I am convinced that such a phenomenon is a quintessential part of creative, artful processes, and I am ultimately grateful to have embraced them. In the future, I won't plan any less with fewer, more malleable goals and inspirations. Rather, I will continue to plan as I have but with an awareness of the possibilities of change and transformation, and I will plan with an awareness that writing and creating are processes of learning, revealing unanticipatable insights, outcomes, findings, and meaning.