ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation: WHO CARES? STUDENT-FACULTY INTERACTION AT A RESEARCH UNIVERSITY

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High quality interaction with faculty is central to undergraduate student success (Kuh et al. 2010). A wealth of existing research uses students' ratings of quality of interaction with faculty to analyze undergraduates' engagement in educationally purposive activities. But how do students actually make meaning of the interactions that inform their ratings? What do undergraduates at a public research institution in the early 21st century United States count as high quality interaction with faculty? For Becker and colleagues (1968), a "GPA perspective" provided the lens through which all undergraduates made meaning of interaction with faculty. But do such generalizations adequately explain how students make meaning of quality of interaction with faculty now? The answer is: it's complicated. Specifically, I find that from students' perspectives, high quality interaction happens *when faculty care*. Caring, in the view of undergraduates participating in this study, means supporting students in embodying or coming to embody the qualities the institution values. But students' perceptions of the qualities their institution values are not uniform. In an ethnographic study involving 35 voluntary undergraduate participants for three years in in-depth interviews and participant observation, as well as a content analysis of an instructor-reviewing web site, I analyze students' perceptions of institutional ideals, how they see themselves in relation to those ideals, and these understandings shape their approaches to with faculty. Specifically, I find two evaluative stories for what counts as care in interaction with faculty, with social class strongly shaping – but not determining – meanings made and interactions elicited. In the first, care entails "remaking the grading." In the second, care both produces and is produced by educationally purposive practices. I find that the institution, in spite of its stated ideals and stated commitment to student engagement, tends to reward the former understanding of care much more directly than the latter.

WHO CARES?
STUDENT-FACULTY INTERACTION AT A RESEARCH UNIVERSITY

by

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CHAPTER 1: Student-Faculty Interaction and Student Engagement in US Higher Education

There is no golden age of undergraduate-faculty relations. Ensuring high quality interaction between students and faculty at research universities in the United States will never be an issue of "*Let's go back to Era X or Y*." There is nothing to go back to. In fact, long before research universities were wedded to the research enterprise, alumni memoirs of college life saved a special nostalgia for descriptions of pranks pulled on professors – some of which were so barbed as to suggest "disrespect as well as distance" between teachers and their charges (Horowitz 1987: 24). Memoirists recounted young gentlemen-scholars horsewhipping professors on campus quads and detonating classroom bombs fashioned from cork, quills, and inkwells (Bowman and Santos 2013). And school records reveal an apparently longstanding tradition of parental protesting of teachers' allegedly undue disciplining of their offspring. As one Jeffersonian-era father challenged a University of Virginia professor who had sanctioned his son: "It seems extremely improbable that [my son] should have so soon repeated a bombing attempt" (Bowman and Santos 2013: 3).

The so-called academic revolution of the mid-twentieth century, stirred up by the G.I. Bill, the Cold War, and the Civil Rights movement, ushered in a whole new epoch of student-faculty interaction. The restructuring of university budgets and missions impacted faculty work as well as the composition of student bodies. And in turn, the nature of student-faculty relationships changed profoundly (Jencks and Riesman 1968; Clark and Trow 1966). For one thing, students whose families and communities had long experienced exclusion from higher education began to gain broader access. These students were not the privileged gentlemen-scholars of prior generations, but rather veterans, working-class students, and students of color, some with spouses, children, or other dependents, and most with parents and elders who had been largely shut out from higher education. These students needed their studies to yield a source of support and mobility for their families; they sought marketable professional skills and training (Thelin 2004).

At the same time, institutions began to rely more and more on external funding of research from government agencies, and thus, faculty jobs increasingly centered on research output (Jencks and Riesman 1968). Interactions with students had an ever more tenuous position in faculty work. And at research universities particularly, student-faculty interaction garnered little institutional support (Clark and Trow 1968).

This changed landscape gave students a different view of interaction with faculty. In particular, students became increasingly attentive to the evaluations of student work that faculty reported to schools – also known as "grades." In the first half of the 20th century, caring about grades had been a mark of "outsider" status – of marginalization on the basis of race, class, and gender (Horowitz 1987). "Gentlemen's C's" had sufficed for those set to inherit family property and social standing. A new urgency characterized how undergraduate student bodies viewed their grades (Becker et al. 1968; Horowitz 1987). But through the upheaval of two World Wars, a Great Depression, and a nascent Civil Rights movement, credentialism came creeping in: even many of the most privileged students began to need professions in order to reproduce family status, and those professions demanded ever higher credentials for licensure and certification (Collins 1979). Accessing programs that offered those credentials demanded proof that the student in question could "make the grade" (Becker et al. 1968).

Those old pranks on professors served no one in this new milieu. Students and teachers alike were in need of détente: faculty for the sake of getting their research done, students for the sake of getting their grades. As sociologists Howard Becker, Blanche Geer, and Everett Hughes (1968) observed it, students and faculty were entering into a de facto contract. They described the terms of the contract students sought in this way: *I, the student, will leave you, the faculty, alone, as soon as you tell me precisely what I need to do to make the grade and maximize my GPA*. Faculty, eager to be left alone so as to fulfill their many and increasing obligations unrelated to students, were amenable. This contract, Becker and colleagues concluded, came to define student-faculty interaction at late-20th century research universities.

Becker and colleagues' conclusions about student-faculty interaction served as the root of a literature about how undergraduates experience college. This literature is often referred to as "the experiential core of college life." Following Becker et al. (1968), studies of the experiential core of college life center on examining students' higher education interactions in the context in which they take place, and the ways in which students make meaning of these experiences. However, with the exception of Becker et al. (1968), most of these studies turn their attention to students' social and extracurricular experiences. These studies are primarily qualitative studies – rich in contextual detail, and with less emphasis on producing findings that are meant to be universally generalizable.

Quite apart from Becker and colleagues and the literature their work gave rise to is a massive corpus of studies dealing explicitly with "student-faculty interaction" as the key variable. This much larger literature shades the scholarly backdrop for scholarly and administrative conversations about undergraduates' interactions with faculty. In general, it is not particularly concerned about students' *own* processes of making meaning of these interactions. Rather, it leans on data collected through surveys, which, by design, supply students with terms for evaluating interaction with faculty – thus, the terms of researchers and institutions administering the surveys.

While these two literatures deal with many similar inquiries, they are only infrequently in any kind of conversation with each other. I discuss them here in an effort to begin that conversation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Experiential Core of College Life

With *Making the Grade*, Becker, Geer, and Hughes (1968) arguably gave birth to a new literature within studies of higher education – a literature focused on students' own experiences of higher education. While they saw a great deal of research focused on measuring particular outcomes, they saw very little scholarly interest in students' experiences of their college efforts. This, they argued, was a major oversight:

> Everyone writes about college students. Many people have studied them. Yet in all the vast literature that has accumulated, we find very little that gives any sense of either the overall dimensions of college life, as students see them, or of the ordinary, routine everyday character it has for them. (Becker, Geer, and Hughes 1968: 1)

If the vast difference in size of the literatures of student-faculty interaction and the experiential core of college life are any indication, Becker, Geer, and Hughes (1968) comments here remain relevant. Becker and his colleagues were not the first to turn scholarly attention to the experiences at the core of college life (e.g. Waller 1937, Sinclair 1923), but their work, titled *Making the Grade,* made clear the importance of rich data about student experiences for understanding the social forces shaping students' educational outcomes. And they saw the changes of the academic revolution profoundly impacting student experiences.

These changes shifted the setting in which students and faculty encountered each other, shifting the kinds of interactions students and faculty had. Institutions had begun to use grades like capital, and as such, students learned to see interactions and activities in terms of how they would impact GPA, as nearly all students now needed grades for access to further credentials. At the same time, nearly all faculty needed students to leave them to their research. Hence, Becker, Geer, and Hughes (1968) saw a de facto "contract" materialize: students used interaction with faculty to elicit all possible information about grades, and in order to be left alone, faculty provided it.

Specifically, they observed the forging of the contract as a twofold process: first, they worked to get all possible information about effort that a faculty member would require in exchange for the desired grade; second, they fulfilled that required effort in exchange for the grade they felt faculty had promised in return. As Becker and colleagues (1968) saw it, undergraduates of the mid-20th century believed that once grade information was extracted, *anyone* could make the grade: it was all about ascertaining effort through interaction.

When the book was published in 1968, the GPA perspective appeared rather benign to administrators and policymakers, who were much more overcome with fear of radical student activism (Horowitz 1987; Thelin 2004). Becker et al.'s (1968) work receded from scholarly attention for approximately two decades. Moreover, this particular historical period also saw the height of the Cold War and a correspondingly heightened interest in area studies and science and technology expertise. As such, higher education enjoyed particularly adequate funding with still reasonably affordable tuitions (Kerr 2001). With many students involved in activism, many faculty and administrators involved in well-funded research, and costs under relative control, the GPA perspective may have been briefly subdued (Becker 1995; Horowitz 1987).

This changed, however, when the Reagan administration and Secretary of Education William Bennett began to cut higher education funding, decrying what they saw as the politicization of academic life on campuses ("To reclaim a legacy", Bennett 1984, 2013). Tuitions spiked (which Bennett [1987] controversially attributed to the availability of federal aid). It was in this context, however, that historian Helen Horowitz (1987) observed the prescience of Becker et al.'s

(1968) findings. GPA appeared to dominate students' academic lives, as GPAs were the currency through which students maintained loans and scholarships to pay those increasing tuitions, and through which they gained admission to graduate and professional schools in order to obtain the ever-higher credentials needed not only for social mobility, but even simply for the reproduction of social statuses (Collins 1979). Nearly all college students, Horowitz (1987) argued, were now "outsiders": everyone's status depended on grades. This perspective grew to govern interactions between students and teachers.

As the "hub" connecting students to a whole range of social institutions – including labor markets, marriage markets, professions, and governments – what goes on within colleges and universities could now clearly be seen as a major factor in broader patterns of social stratification (Stevens, Armstrong, and Arum 2008). And as such, interactions experienced within that "hub" matter. Qualitative data is necessarily central to scholarly efforts to shed light on these experiences (Gerber and Cheung 2008: 313). These insights form the framework of a growing body of studies – many, but not all, based on qualitative data – referred to as studies of the "experiential core of college life" (Stevens, Armstrong, and Arum 2008; Armstrong and Hamilton 2013).

Much of this research has focused most intently on the social and extracurricular aspects of students' higher education experiences, while reaffirming Becker et al.'s (1968) findings about academic experiences and student-teacher interactions as *part* of those experiences (but not the central story) (e.g. Moffatt 1987; Nathan 2005; Grigsby 2009; Babcock and Marks 2010). Such a focus has enabled researchers to show how students' identities relate to their senses of belonging at their institutions, and how these senses of belonging shape their actual experiences of relating to institutional processes and practices (Mullen 2009; Armstrong and Hamilton 2013).

In particular, this research shows that higher education processes and practices that are particularly complex – even convoluted – for students from working-class and/or lower socio-economic status backgrounds (Goldrick-Rab 2006). For instance, nearly half of all students who enroll in a four-year institution will transfer to another institution, and between 15 and 19 percent will make more than two moves (McCormick 2003). A quarter to a third of those entering four-year schools will also take time off from school – withdrawing their enrollment for a semester or a year or more (Berkner 2002). Goldrick-Rab (2006) finds that students with greater socio-economic resources are more likely to experience either a sustained, continuous college period, or "fluid mobility," the ability to move relatively seamlessly from one institution to the next or from one enrollment pause to a re-enrollment. Students from low and middling socioeconomic backgrounds are much more likely to experience interruption of both time and place. Goldrick-Rab (2006) writes:

> Given the significant link between social class and interrupted schooling, it seems reasonable to conjecture that low-SES students who change schools interrupt their schooling not because they are shopping, partying, or choosing to take time off to "find themselves," but because they have suffered academically or financially in school. (p. 73)

Such findings highlight the need to look not simply at access to higher education, but at which students go to which institutions, what resources they find there, and what experiences they have as a result (cf. Mullen 2009; Stuber 2011; Armstrong and Hamilton 2013).

Where prior research indicated that social mobility corresponded most smoothly with enrollment at the most selective institution to which a student was accepted (Bowen and Bok 1998), nuanced studies of student experiences pose robust challenges to this conclusion. For example, Armstrong and Hamilton (2013) find that for some working-class, lower middle-class, and even middle-class students, transferring out of a flagship public school and into a regional campus (4-year or community college) led to higher paying and higher status occupations upon graduation, while their peers who remained at the flagship graduated into low-wage jobs that did not require a college degree. Perhaps this is because regional campuses tend to be closer to students' homes and closer to supportive social networks, and because there are more commuter students, more first-generation students, and more who work in addition to their studies, the "party culture" that characterizes many prestigious institutions is much less pervasive, if it even exists at all (Armstrong and Hamilton 2013; cf. Lopez-Turley 2009). While four-year flagships certainly have students who share many of these features, Armstrong and Hamilton (2013) observe that such students are less visible to each other, particularly when well-resourced organizations like the Greek system loom large over campus social life.

Programs on campus that affirm students' identities and aspirations – and that influence students' identities and aspirations as tools with which to help them navigate institutional processes – are also central to students' sense of belonging at their school. Such programs develop in relation to the student bodies an institution has traditionally-served and in relation to the commitment an institution has to ensuring the success of different student groups (Stuber 2011; Armstrong and Hamilton 2013; Bergerson 2007). For instance, Stuber (2011) finds that middle and upper-middle class students at a flagship public university find their identities affirmed by the legacy connection they may have with the campus – coming to football games with their alumni parents, or growing up listening to loved ones' college stories, and thus developing mental maps of college life. Thus, the programs that are already structured into the university tend to benefit these students, who may then see their success there as evidence of their own merit or excellence (cf. Mullen 2009; Stevens 2007). On the other hand, at a selective private liberal arts college that had traditionally served a white and wealthy student body, Stuber (2011) observes that the school's close-knit, four-year long program supporting first-generation college students created a much more satisfying college experience than their peers at the flagship public school felt.

Such institutional efforts appear also be related to meanings students make of their place in campus culture as a whole and the ways in which they believe that others see them. As the trilogy of "River" studies (*The Shape of the River, The Source of the River,* and *Taming the River*) find, perceptions of belonging on campus are indeed highly correlated with academic performance (Bowen and Bok 1999; Massey et al. 2003; Charles et al. 2009). The stereotype threat African American and Latino students face on predominantly white campuses takes a toll on academic performance but not on educational expectations or aspirations (Charles et al. 2009). As such, dense networks of peer support and well-resourced programs that ensure students' feelings of belonging are integral to the core of college students' experiences of higher education (cf. Harper 2010, 2012).

Student-Faculty Interaction: A Benchmark of Student Engagement

Studies of student-faculty interaction are now largely situated in a body of scholarship built around the concept of student engagement. Student engagement research evolves from several generations of the study of student development and how college affects students (Pascarella and Terenzini 2005; Feldman and Newcomb 1969). This vast literature has culminated in the production of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), a tool institutions can use to gauge the extent to which their students are engaging in the educationally purposive practices that student engagement research has shown strongly and positively correlated to student success and desired outcomes of higher education, including institutional persistence and satisfaction, cognitive and intellectual development, and post-graduate employment. NSSE is now used at more than 1,550 US colleges and universities, including SU.[1]

Why All This Talk about Student Engagement? Why Now?

In this section, I will present a broad overview of the concept of student engagement and its relationship to broader discourses in and around US higher education. In subsequent sections, I outline the contours of student-faculty interaction

[1] http://nsse.iub.edu/html/about.cfm (Last Accessed 12 March 2014).

scholarship and the way in which it is situated in research on student engagement. First, however, it is useful to unpack this term "student engagement" and where it comes from in order to examine its impact on scholarly work on student-faculty interaction. According to student engagement scholars and to NSSE, student engagement is the two-way street between students and their institutions (Kuh 2003). It is the extent to which institutions enable and support their students in practicing educationally purposive activities (Kuh et al. 2010).

Student-faculty interaction[2] is one of five benchmarks of educationally purposive practice. In this literature, student-faculty interaction encompasses a whole set of educationally purposive practices. For instance, NSSE lists the following interactions with faculty as potentially purposive activities on its explanation of the five benchmarks:

- Discussed grades or assignments with an instructor
- Talked about career plans with a faculty member or advisor
- Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with faculty members outside of class
- Worked with faculty members on activities other than coursework (committees, orientation, student-life activities, etc.)

[2] Significantly, NSSE – and most of the student-faculty interaction literature – say nothing about whom students see as "faculty." This is an increasingly important question, given that over 70% of instructors at institutions like SU are contingent instructors. I find participating students in this study counting all those who teach them as faculty, but I find that the complexity of what this huge range of faculty responsibilities entails creates both disappointment and frustration for many students (see Chapter 5).

- Received prompt written or oral feedback from faculty on your academic performance
- Worked with a faculty member on a research project[3]

From such interactions, student engagement scholars observe, students can see how scholars and experts on particular issues or areas of inquiry solve conceptual and practical puzzles. And in such interactions, student engagement scholars conclude, students can cultivate relationships with faculty who may then become mentors and models of life-long learning (Kuh et al. 2010).

NSSE gauges the extent to which an institution's students participate in the educationally purposive practices that comprise student engagement. Students who agree to participate in the survey respond to a battery of questions that ask, for example, how often a student speaks to faculty ("Very often," "Often," "Sometimes" or "Never"?). It asks, further, that students "Indicate the quality of your interactions with [faculty] at your institution" using a scale in which 1 is "Poor" and 7 is "Excellent."[4]

Student response data allow for blueprints that enable broad, cross-institutional comparisons. This is particularly useful as a counterbalance to prevailing ways of evaluating the quality of institutions of higher education. For instance, data on students' participation in educationally purposive practices offers a lens that mass media ranking systems, such as the *US News and World Report*'s annual college

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3 From "Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practices." http://nsse.iub.edu/pdf/nsse_benchmarks.pdf. Last accessed 12 March 2014.
4 From NSSE 2013 Survey Instrument. http://nsse.iub.edu/pdf/survey_instruments/2014/NSSE%202014%20-%20US%20English.pdf (Last accessed 12 March 2014).

rankings, cannot. Whereas *US News and World Report* rankings reward schools for things their students do before ever matriculating (e.g. high school class rank, SAT scores) and on qualities of institutions independent of the educational quality they provide for students (e.g. how many applications a school receives as compared to how many students it admits), NSSE refocuses attention on the extent to which schools create effective educational environments that support students' engagement in educationally purposive practices.

All this talk about engagement arises in response to a particular set of cultural and political forces surrounding US higher education at this time. Student debt, for one thing, is skyrocketing: in the spring of 2012, US student debt exceeded the debt amassed with American credit cards by over a hundred billion dollars.[5] Yet returns on investment in undergraduate education are difficult to calculate and at times appear quite uncertain (cf. Katz and Goldin 2009; Hacker and Dreifus 2010; Arum and Roksa 2011). An increasing number of students, alumni, and parents bear the weight of this uncertainty. For instance, in a nationally representative sample of over 2,000 adults, a Pew Center (2011) survey entitled "Is College Worth It?" found a majority of Americans leaning toward "no." Even though 94% of parent-respondents said they wanted their own children to attend college, 57% of respondents overall believed that colleges fail to provide students and families with value that meets or exceeds their investments.

Policymakers corroborate this concern. In 2006, for example, a report commissioned by President George W. Bush's Secretary of Education, Margaret

[5] http://www.npr.org/blogs/money/2012/04/18/150909686/what-america-owes-in-student-loans (Last accessed 1 May 2012).

Spellings, charged that although the US needs to be able to claim global "postsecondary superiority," it cannot do so, because US colleges and universities are not "adding" the economic value to students' lives that other nations' schools are (Spellings Commission 2006). And more recently, President Barack Obama's administration has undertaken its own federal college ranking system, based on student outcomes data. Federal financial aid would then flow in relation to a college's position in the rankings. Hence, just as *US News and World Report* rankings have influenced institutional behavior – encouraging institutions to practice "savvy quantification" to "represent [themselves in the best possible statistical light" (Stevens 2006) – federal rankings based on student outcomes could push institutions pursue actions that consistently ensure student success.

NSSE and the body of scholarship around it have contributed to such conversations, so much so that the idea of student engagement has made the crossover, so to speak, into everyday language on campus, in Congress, and among educational leaders. Engagement is a buzzword. It mushrooms across the memos and orations of policymakers, college deans, and administrators (cf. Bok 2006: 255). It stars in the titles of required coursework (e.g. SU's "Global Engagement Requirement"). At the same time, Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) make coursework from some of the most prestigious higher education institutions on the globe available to anyone with access to the Internet. MOOC students can earn certificates for the completion of courses in computer programming, human anatomy, Civil Rights movement history, sustainability, and hundreds of other subject areas. Such certificates are already being accepted as transfer credits at some brick and mortar colleges and universities[6]. The American Council on Education (ACE) has begun reviewing MOOCs for accreditation, thus encouraging a much larger number of colleges to grant credit for them. One key element of the review process, ACE president Molly Broad stated, will be "evidence of student engagement."[7]

Where faculty-student ratios were once all-important measures of prestige in colleges' and universities' promotional materials, an increasing number of institutions now seek to prove their prestige by publicizing how many hundreds of thousands of students enrolled in one star professor's MOOC. Aside from the bragging rights that accompany these massive enrollments, some argue that MOOCs have much greater potential for engaging students than older methods of instruction, including lectures and even physical classrooms themselves.[8] There is the seeming opportunity for making educational access and achievement truly meritocratic, as fabled through the tales of the 12-year-old girl in Pakistan who completed her college-level Physics MOOC with highest distinction and the student in Kazakhstan whose MOOC-completion certificate earned him a raft of high-paying job offers (Koller 2012). There is the delight, as one commentator puts it, of "getting Ivy League (or Ivy

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6 http://chronicle.com/blogs/wiredcampus/georgia-state-u-to-grant-course-credit-for-moocs/41795 (Accessed 14 January 2013)
7 http://chronicle.com/article/MOOCs-Take-a-Major-Step/135750/ (Accessed 15 November 2012)
8 E.g. "The Classroom is Obsolete: It's Time for Something New", <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/07/29/37nair.h30.html> (Accessed 29 April 2012); "Replacing the Obsolete Classroom" < http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/too-simple-fail/201104/replacing-the-obsolete-classroom-digital-tutoring> (Accessed 29 April 2012).

League equivalent) wisdom free"[9]. There is the thrill of learning from superstar professors (or for some MOOC instructors, the thrill of becoming a superstar professor). Says one early MOOC teacher: "I feel like there's a red pill and a blue pill…And you can take the blue pill and go back to your classroom and lecture your 20 students. But I've taken the red pill, and I've seen Wonderland" (Thrun in DeSantis 2012)). Above all, however, as one MOOC platform's founder put it, MOOCs enable learning and intellectual exploration that is not only free of cost, it is also free of risk – there is no risk of the shame of a poor grade or the mark of a failed or incomplete course on a transcript (Koller 2012). There is no risk of embarrassing one's self by asking an instructor to repeat what was just said, because crucial points of lessons can be reviewed over and over again at the click of one's own mouse. In other words, students can engage in a way that meets their needs, learning styles, and schedules.

Undergraduates on Engagement

There is no literature on how undergraduates themselves talk about engagement. Yet undergraduates *do* talk of engagement, particularly to discuss quality of interaction with instructors and/or instructional quality. I pause here to note this absence in the literature, as it is important to demonstrate the ubiquity that the term "student engagement" has in higher education communities, and students' uses show that engagement has made the crossover from institutional language to the everyday lexicons of students themselves, speaking among themselves and not in response to researchers. For example, the following excerpts come from

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9 "Two Cheers for Web U!" *New York Times*, April 13, 2013. (AJ Jacobs).

OurStateU.com, where students use the term in its adjective and verb forms to describe the impact instructors have on them:

> Dr. Patterson is a phenomenal professor, engaging lecturer, and an all-around wonderful person. However, he is simply not interested in teaching lower-level classes. *(STEM, 100-level, No grade data provided)*

> Dr. Ezim is really a genius professor. It was an honor having him teach in my class. He is really good at engaging the students in his presentations and even better at stimulating thinking and logic. It was the first time that I was actually asking the 'why' question in a history class. Of course as such an intelligent professor, he has very high expectations which makes the class a little intimidating but so usefull [sic] at the same time. I would say don't take the class if your major doesn't relate to the subject and be happy if you're required to take it… (*Humanities, 200-level, Grade Expected: A)*

> He isn't very engaging and kind of assumes you understands [sic] perfectly what he is doing. (*STEM, 300-level, No grade data provided)*

> My class was three hours long, and she talked the entire time, and I struggled to stay engaged. (*Humanities, 200-level, Grade*

Expected: B)

So ubiquitous is this term, "engagement," then, that students do not merely reserve the term for responding to questions posed by deans or educators or researchers, from whom they have heard engagement-talk in promotional materials, "welcome" addresses, graduation speeches, surveys, and summary reports. Rather, as these passages show, students have adopted the term for communicating *with each other*, for use in making meaning of academic experiences.[10]

Roots of Student Engagement Research: From Questions about Developing Students to a Science of Student Development

NSSE draws directly on decades of empirical research on student development and the institutional contexts in which student development takes place.[11] However, it follows inquiries and expositions, both scholarly and anecdotal, on the question of how to develop undergraduate students that date as far back as the founding of the earliest institutions of higher education in the U.S. in the 17th century

[10] This is a distinct development from anthropologist Michael Moffatt's (1987) finding of "undergraduate cynical," or students' nonchalant approach to discussing academic work (even when they really did care about it). Moffatt saw this discursive practice as students' challenge to "deanspeak" or the grandiose language about academic life and learning communities that Moffatt saw administrators (who are largely removed from everyday undergraduate life) using to describe undergraduate education. However, Stuber (2011) and Nathan (2005) find something similar to the engagement language students are using here, regarding the best practice buzzwords of a previous research-era. Where student development literature previously extolled "involvement" as the key to student success (e.g. Astin 1984; Kuh 1991), and institutions encouraged and rewarded "involvement" as an ideal, Stuber (2011) and Nathan (2005) observed students producing an onslaught of flyers, promotions, and commands to each other to "get involved!"

[11] http://nsse.iub.edu/pdf/NSSE_Timeline.pdf (Accessed 16 November 2012).

(Thelin 2004). As higher education historians chronicle, nearly every generation of higher education insiders and observers has questioned – and decried – the degree to which its crop of students was engaged in academic work. A popular banner in 1890s dormitories, for example, enjoined dorm dwellers "Don't Let Your Studies Interfere with Your Education," and a 1920s board game called "Let's Go to College" depicted academic work as a treacherous obstacle to winning (Thelin 2004: 168, 255-6). And sociologist W.E.B. DuBois included the following observations in his role as Howard University's commencement speaker in 1930:

> Our college man today is, on the average, a man untouched by real culture. He deliberately surrenders to selfish and even silly ideals, swarming into semiprofessional athletics and Greek letter societies, and affecting to despise scholarship and the hard grind of research. The greatest meetings of the Negro college year like those of the white college year have become vulgar exhibitions of liquor, extravagance, and fur coats. We have in our colleges a growing mass of stupidity and indifference. (DuBois 1930: 2)

It is possible that such behaviors persisted at least in part because students' immersion in other activities opened up space for faculty to pursue the kinds of esoteric studies that held little significance for students or the board members to whom U.S. college educators – unlike the already-free-to-be-esoteric Oxford and Cambridge dons many U.S. Protestant college founders held in contempt – had to answer (Thelin 2004).

Yet while privileged collegians romped in their festivities, college “outsiders” including working-class students, Jewish students, and students of color at predominantly white institutions were ridiculed for being “grinds,” or more precisely, for engaging with academic work and with faculty members (Horowitz 1987). The GI Bill of 1944 swelled the ranks of these outsiders: the veterans seeking degrees through its provisions were not seeking pleasure-filled college days, but rather entry to middle-class life and the economic stability of the professions. They needed college not for the collegian lifestyle, but for credentials they could earn there (Horowitz 1987: 246). At the same time as this rapid growth and shift of student populations, institutions began to depend upon the research output of their faculties for funding and recognition (Jencks and Riesman 1968; Clark and Trow 1966). Institutions and board members increasingly expected faculty to be “less and less preoccupied with educating young people, more and more preoccupied with…doing scholarly research that advances their discipline” (Jencks and Riesman 1962: 13). It was in this context that sociologists Burton Clark and Martin Trow (1966) warned that the “increasingly routinized and impersonal character of undergraduate education” would progressively and persistently discourage students from serious academic efforts (p. 53).

Establishing Student Development Theories

Empirical research into students’ development in college began to flourish in the decades following the Second World War, perhaps both as a product of this so-called academic revolution with its unyielding demand for published research, and as an effort at intervening in the way this research mandate necessarily channeled faculty attention away from undergraduates. How institutions would impact students as individuals became a key thread in the emerging student development literature. Scholars created typologies in effort to account for the kinds of developmental experiences individuals might have. In *The Reasonable Adventurer: A Study of the Development of Thirty-Six Undergraduates at Princeton*, psychologist Roy Heath (1964) attempted to lay out a schema for intellectual and identity development among college students by examining the experiences of thirty-six of his advisees. Drawing on the developmental frameworks laid out by Piaget and Erickson, Heath identified three types of students, Hustlers, Non-committers, and Plungers, who make their ways, with varying degrees of success, toward an apex of developing which Heath termed "reasonable adventur[ing]."

Like Heath, Clark and Trow (1966) created a typology of students to describe their development in college. Clark and Trow's typology, however, centered on peer groups. Clark and Trow (1966) theorized that structures discouraging students from serious engagement with academic work would contribute to the elevation of the status of peer groups who avoided academic work (e.g. "nonconformists" and "collegiate" who were, respectively, contrarian and country clubbish, as well as "grinds" who cared only about grades). Clark and Trow (1966) argued that peer groups formed according to the intersection of two dimensions - orientations toward their institution and orientation to ideas --and largely shaped the ways in which their members interacted with the institution

Like Heath, William Perry (1970) began his research on college students' ethical and intellectual development from the perspective that to evaluate students' thinking and the development of their ways of thinking, one must first engage with actual students. Perry outlined nine stages or positions in college students' approaches to knowledge: from dualistic, right-or-wrong thinking to the recognition that intellectual and ethical commitment are ongoing, evolving activities that require responsibility and continuous integration of knowledge through experience, engagement the with others, and reflection. Significantly, Perry observes that his findings emerged through "daily counseling with students" regarding their academic work (1970: 3-4). Thus, the ways in which Heath and Perry focused on actual students and their processes of intellectual development may in some ways be seen as resistance to the "academic revolution" and its shrinking attention to the needs of students.

Terenzini and Pascarella (1977) questioned the extent to which these typologies could hold up under empirical scrutiny, contending that they may be more aesthetically appealing than empirically useful. Nevertheless later scholars did continue to create typologies of students to describe how individual students develop in college. Kuh, Hu, and Vesper (2000) proposed that a more empirically effective way of examining individual students' development is to look at the activities in which students participate. They identify ten types of students using NSSE data, organized according to their level of engagement. At one end of the spectrum of these ten groups are "disengaged" students, characterized by low effort in school work and in extracurricular activities, and little substantive interaction with peers or with professors and university personnel; at the other end of this spectrum are the "intellectuals," characterized by high levels of effort and high levels of education-related interaction with peers and faculty. The disengaged group is the largest among the ten (18% of all respondents); intellectuals the smallest (7%). Kuh, Hu, and Vesper (2000) find that five of their ten types – intellectuals, individualists, scientists, conventionals, and collegiates – are associated with above average learning gains, while the remaining five – disengaged, grinds (who work only on academic tasks but have little substantive interaction with peers and faculty), recreators (who devote high levels of effort to sports and exercise but not to academics), socializers (who devote effort to social interaction separate from educational pursuits), and artists (who devote high levels of effort and substantive interaction to those also engaged with their art but not to other educationally-purposive activities) – are associated with below-average gains. From this, Kuh, Hu, and Vesper (2000) conclude that peer groups matter and that students' learning gains in college are associated with the types of activities to which they devote effort (cf. Pascarella and Terenzini 2005).

By the end of the 1960s, studies of college students' behaviors and development were so numerous that social psychologists Feldman and Newcomb's (1969) "push [for] comprehensive and systematic analysis" of the literature, *The Impact of College on Students*, was nearly 500 pages long (p. xi). Feldman and Newcomb speculated that scholarly inquiry in this arena might have been fueled in part by the tendency of some members of elder generations to express distress over the deficiencies they perceived in those still in possession of their youth. They point, for example, to particularly influential study with its rather nihilistic conclusion that academic work in higher education has no impact on students' basic values or ways of thinking, whose author writes:

> A dominant characteristic of students in the current

> generation is that they are gloriously contented both in regard to their present day-to-day activity and their outlook for the future. Few of them are worried…The great majority appear unabashedly self-centered…Only a minority seem to value their college education in terms of its intellectual contribution. (Jacob 1957: 3)

Feldman and Newcomb (1969) found such studies unduly pessimistic. Their own conclusion was less value-laden: peer groups, they argued – shaped in part by major fields of study – exerted the most influence on the development of students in college.

Psychologist C. Robert Pace (1990) also attempted to speak back to the proliferation of studies seeming to rise out of the assumption that college students were morally and academically disengaged. Through his work on the College Student Experiences Questionnaire in the late 1970s and 1980s, Pace (1990) drew attention to the importance of both academic curriculum and extra-curricula for high quality college education experiences. Higher education scholar Alexander Astin (1984, 1993) corroborated these findings, emphasizing again the finding that peers seem to matter most. As such, Astin (1984, 1993) developed a theory of student involvement that tied successful college outcomes to the energy a student spends on academics and campus life, with peer groups heavily influencing students' degrees of involvement (cf. Clark and Trow 1966; Kuh, Hu, and Vesper 2000).

While Astin's (1984, 1993) model seemed apt for 18-22 year old campus-residing students enrolled in full-time course loads, it tacitly painted a grim picture of the prospects for success for growing numbers of students who did not fit into the narrow profile scholars and institutions used to conceive of students and their needs. Sociologist Vincent Tinto (1987) observed that such models ignored the broader social forces shaping college students' experiences and their access to opportunities to become involved in college life. Tinto (1987) proposed examining students' departures from college as a way of shedding light on what institutions could do to engage more students more effectively – including and especially those who commuted to campus, who cared for families in addition to their studies, and who worked many more hours than the "traditional" college student who was much more likely to have the time to thrust him or herself into campus life. Tinto (1997) identified academic work – classrooms particularly – as the key site for creating the community and social cohesion that would promote student success across differences in social class, employment status, age, and residential status.

The Two-Way Street: Scholarly Attention to the Role of Institutions in Student Development

Tinto's work catalyzed scholarly activity around the kinds of responsibility certain institutional configurations bring to bear on student development and the ways in which these configurations might impact heterogeneous groups of students quite differently, benefitting some while systematically disadvantaging others.[12]

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[12] Tinto, a sociologist, drew on Durkheim's theory of suicide as a product of anomie, or lack of integration into the collective norms and sentiments of a community. Some scholars read Tinto's reference to suicide not in a Durkheimian way – where communities bear responsibility for suicide rates – but in a way that understood suicide as an act of an isolated individual. Hence some criticized Tinto for blaming individual students for leaving college rather than assessing the role of the institution and the different roles different types of institutions might play for different types of students (Tierney 1992).

In *Involving Colleges*, student affairs scholar George Kuh (1991) picked up these questions to reframe Astin's involvement as a "two-way street" – a dialogic relationship between institutional factors and student behaviors. Around the same time, however, Ernest Boyer's (1987) report *College: The Undergraduate Experience in America*, found that such dialogic relationships were in short supply at U.S. research universities, where undergraduate experiences were marked by minimal interaction between faculty and students. In fact, the scholarship and practice of student affairs had grown in large part because of the growth of the student affairs profession, on whose expertise and experience campuses relied to know students and their needs (Evans et al. 2009). Where Perry and Heath, as teachers and researchers, examined student experiences from direct and ongoing relationships with students themselves, it was now student affairs scholars who responded most resoundingly to the damning argument of the Boyer Report. Arthur Chickering and Zelda Gamson (1987) offered colleges "Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education," including steps for encouraging frequent student-faculty contact, enhancing cooperation among students, facilitating active learning, providing prompt feedback, communicating high expectations, ensuring time on task, and respecting diverse talents and ways of learning.

As student affairs research built on Chickering and Gamson's (1987; cf. Chickering and Reisser 1993) work, the literature increasingly highlighted the ways in which institutional practices played a major role in student learning and persistence (Pascarella and Terrenzini 2005; Kuh et al. 2006). Drawing on this research, Kuh and collaborators developed a new instrument "to evaluate the quality of undergraduate education – not based on institutional resources and public reputation," as well as a framework for student success centered on what institutions could do to engage students in educationally effective practices (Hayek and Kuh 2002). The goal of this instrument, National Survey of Student Engagement, would be to provide data colleges and universities could use to increase and deepen such engagement.

Challenges of Measuring Student Engagement

Kuh and colleagues (2001) developed five benchmarks of student engagement around which NSSE would be organized: 1) level of academic challenge; 2) active and collaborative learning; 3) student interaction with faculty members; 4) supportive campus environment; 5) enriching educational experiences. Its annual results and its growing number of partner institutions would enable researchers, educators, and administrators to ask "how are we doing at engaging students" and to compare responses to that question across time and across institutions (Schroeder and Kuh 2004). In this way, engagement would be a measure of institutional quality – not a judgment of individual students (Kuh 2001). NSSE data has been able to illustrate positive links between institutions' respective depths of student engagement and their students' persistence to degree (Kuh et al. 2008), their students' leadership development, character development, deep learning and critical thinking skills (Pascarella, Seifert, and Blaich 2008), and their students' academic performance (Carini, Kuh, and Klein 2006). Kuh (2009) reports that now, at least in part because of the availability and prominence of NSSE data, "virtually every reform report [reflects] the important link between student engagement and desired outcomes of college" (p. 684).

While engaging students to help them achieve desired outcomes of college is a goal elegant in its simplicity, the work of capturing what student engagement looks like in practice is much less clear cut. A growing number of scholars question whether NSSE, or indeed any survey-based research, can render an adequate picture of the components of student engagement in order to design research instruments that can provide institutions with feedback that they can use to more effectively engage their students (LaNasa, Cabrera, and Tangsrud 2009; Campbell and Cabrera 2011; Porter 2011; Harper and Quaye 2009). For example, the five NSSE benchmarks are meant to represent categories of practices that seem to have the most impact on engaging students in educationally effective experiences.

Yet, closer analyses of the NSSE survey instrument suggest that isolating these five factors from each other creates a misleading picture: for example, should an institution enhance its curricular diversity requirements or provide new computer lab equipment to enhance the educationally enriching experiences it offers its students? (LaNasa, Cabrera, and Tangsrud 2009). Other argue that the five benchmarks do not actually measure distinct domains of student engagement (Campbell and Cabrera 2011). This is problematic, as the positive links between student engagement and desired outcomes of college that research with NSSE data have found hinge on the validity of the survey instrument itself. What is more, NSSE asks students to respond to questions about interactions with faculty, but says nothing about whom students see as "faculty." This is an increasingly important question, given that over 70% of instructors at institutions like State University, where I conducted this study, are not regular faculty. Moreover, survey data cannot tell us how students are making meaning of quality of interaction with faculty when they provide such ratings in response to a survey.

Such limitations raise questions about the validity of survey data for gaining valid insight into students' experiences (Porter 2011). But perhaps the most important limitation of all is that there can a substantial gap between what people say about what they do and what they actually do (Porter 2011). Surveys may compel respondents to give what they perceive to be socially desirable responses to questions (Tourangeau et al. 2000). Undergraduates are no exception: "college students only rarely report accurate information about their behaviors" (Porter 2011: 49). And what is more, white, female, 18-22 year olds are overrepresented among NSSE respondents relative to actual student populations (NSSE 2012; Porter and Whitcomb 2005). As students participate on a voluntary basis, it may be that this group of students feels better positioned to give socially desirable responses, thus omitting crucial insights about the experiences of heterogeneous student groups, as well as omitting crucial insights about why they might opt not to participate. On top of it all, students may find themselves inundated by requests for their feedback – requests from their colleges, from organizations and enterprises both related and unrelated to their institutions. Even the executive leadership of NSSE acknowledges that no one is immune to survey fatigue, and that the current generation of college students is accustomed to being asked to complete a survey at nearly every turn of their lives (McCormick and McClenney 2012).

What is more, different student populations experience college differently –differences that may be hidden in or erased by the means that survey data produce. Student affairs scholars Steven Harper and John Quaye (2009) thus argue for a context-specific approach to student engagement, asking how institutions and their practitioners enable engagement at every level of interaction – in the classroom, in departments and schools, in programming and advising, and so on. How does the culture at each of these levels inhibit or facilitate engagement, and for whom? As Harper and Quaye (2009) argue

> …creating optimal learning environments in which all students feel connected is difficult, but nonetheless important. Educators must have the requisite skills and expertise to analyze the campus environment and determine where gaps in engagement and achievement exist. More importantly, they must resist the urge to act without considering the effects of potential solutions and instead must spend time understanding the obstacles facing disengaged students. (p. 8)

The survey model of examining student engagement has been widely funded – and indeed fits well with the dominant paradigm of educational assessment that privileges large scale comparison (Olivas 2011). In the next section, I explore how this paradigm has impacted student-faculty interaction research specifically, and how inquiries in this area have addressed the demanding and vital challenge of creating learning environments in which *all* students feel connected (Harper and Quaye 2009: 8).

Three Generations of Student-Faculty Interaction Research

There is no shortage of studies of student-faculty interaction. There is, however, notably little actual interaction between students and faculty presented in these studies. It is possible to identify three distinct generations of scholarly inquiry on student-faculty interaction. Across these generations of inquiry, one finds that the objective of producing broadly generalizable findings takes priority over providing rich contextual detail and insight into the ways that real life interactions take shape in context. Such priorities are far from surprising as these three threads of research begin in response to the changes of the academic revolution and its accompanying shift in the structure of faculty work. From this change came inquiry into faculty roles and the different ways of interacting within these roles. Next came inquiry into the effectiveness of such interaction – how student-faculty interaction impacts student outcomes. Finally, the current era of student-faculty interaction is one some scholars have called a paradigm of "student-centeredness." In this section, I discuss each of these eras in turn and conclude with a discussion of two distinct sets of implications emerging from the "student-centered" paradigm.

Faculty Roles

Faculty roles in students' college experiences became an area of practical and scholarly interest in response to the academic revolution. What were faculty being called on to do? Which of these bids for their time and energy were supported by institutions and how? Scholars began to examine here how interaction with students fit into the increasingly varied and complex roles faculty filled following changes in the budgets and missions of universities in the middle of the 20th century. In the midst of these changes, many observers worried that undergraduate education would take on an increasingly impersonal and bureaucratic character as student populations grew and diversified and faculty became ever more preoccupied with research (Clark & Trow, 1966; Jencks & Riesman, 1968; Feldman & Newcomb, 1969). In response, some researchers inquired about the place of student-faculty interaction in these changing structural contexts.

How and in what capacities would faculty interact with students under these new conditions? Some scholars began by identifying different roles faculty filled. In particular, Snow (1973) named six different faculty roles, instructor, academic advisor, career advisor, friend, counselor, and campus citizen, suggesting that it was important to the frequency and duration of interactions with students across each of these roles. Wilson, Woods, and Gaff (1974) built on found that academic (instructional or academic advising) conversations were the most frequent types of interaction and the longest in duration.

Significantly, however, Gamson (1967) found that disciplinary culture played a major role in the capacities and degrees to which faculty interacted with students. In her study of changes in curriculum in two departments, Gamson concludes that faculty in the social sciences take a more personal approach to students while faculty in the natural sciences faced significant pressure to standardize responses to students and their work.

Student Outcomes

The next generation of studies observed that all this research on student-faculty interaction seemed to presume that it was good without providing empirical evidence of how such interactions impact students, and more importantly, how such interactions contribute to student success (Pascarella 1980). These studies, in keeping with inquiries in student development on “how college affects students” (Pascarella and Terenzini 2005; cf. Feldman and Newcomb 1969), use student-faculty interaction as an independent variable and test its relationship to desired outcomes of higher education including intellectual development, persistence toward degree, and academic achievement (Endo and Harpel 1982; Astin 1984; Kuh and Hu 2001; Umbach and Wawrzynski 2005).

While this generation of studies was more student-focused than the previous generation (which, indeed, focused not on students but on faculty), the studies asked little about how students’ experiences of interaction with faculty might vary and how those varied experiences might contribute to different outcomes. In other words, there is little discussion here of how race and class identities, particularly, might impact student-faculty interaction.

There was however, an increasing interest in the impact of gender and experiences of student-faculty interaction. A now-famous paper, “The Classroom Climate: A Chilly One for Women, published in 1982 by the Association of American Colleges (Hall and Sandler 1982), detailed subtle messages women receive in the classroom that code it as “masculine” space. The article provides brief overviews of challenges that “women minority students” and “older women students face." In particular, these women were particularly subject to faculty assumptions and to negative faculty behaviors including "ignoring, interrupting, maintaining physical distance…[and] patronizing…" (Hall and Sandler 1982). Hall and Sandler (1982) point out that the impact on student outcomes is elusive and hard to measure, but that certainly one outcome would be that the students experiencing such behaviors are less likely to participate in formal or informal interchanges with faculty.

Student-Centered Research on Student-Faculty Interaction

The findings of student outcomes research and student development research led to the emergence of more "student-centered" inquiry (Barr and Tagg 1995). Chickering and Gamson (1987) provided one of the earliest and most renowned distillations of these now-vast bodies of scholarship, translating the results and recommendations of such studies into "Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education." First among these principles was the importance of interaction between students and faculty:

> Frequent student-faculty contact in and out of class is the most important factor in student motivation and involvement. Faculty concern helps students get through rough times and keep on working. Knowing a few faculty members well enhances students' intellectual commitment and encourages them to think about their own values and future plans. (Chickering and Gamson 1987: 3).

The student-centered paradigm in student-faculty interaction research attempts to show how students' experiences relate to this goal.

These studies, centered on the question of what it takes (interactionally as well as institutionally) to foster student success, can be broken into three interrelated categories. First are studies of students' perceptions and experiences of faculty approachability. Second are studies of how interaction with faculty impact students' sense of belonging at an institution. Third, I will discuss how the voluminous literature on student ratings of instruction relates to the student-centered paradigm. Finally, I will discuss two (quite different) sets of implications of the student-centered paradigm.

Approachability

In their study of how faculty roles impact student-faculty interaction, Wilson, Woods, and Gaff (1974) argued that faculty's most important arena of interaction with students was around academics, and that it was not disciplinary culture that mattered in such interactions (as Gamson [1967] had argued) but rather "approachability," or the accessibility cues faculty gave off. They found that these cues that faculty gave off through pedagogy impacted how students sought out-of-class contact (academic or otherwise).

Later research expanded the concept of approachability. For instance, scholars found that both students' and instructors' respective gender and race identities shaped students' perceptions of instructors' approachability, thus shaping the extent to which students were willing to seek interaction with faculty (Naddler and Naddler 1994). Cox et al. (2010) built on this, finding that students' perceptions of accessibility have much to do with the interplay of students' and faculty's respective identities, and how identity shapes students perceptions of things like tone of voice and facial expression. Hence when students described their understandings of an approachable faculty member, they linked approachability to these seemingly ephemeral, interpersonal characteristics.

Sense of Belonging

Drawing on Tinto's (1993) idea of the importance of students' feelings of integration into, or solidarity with, their institutions, Hurtado and Carter (1997) turned scholarly attention toward students' sense of belonging at their institutions. Specifically, they asked what kinds of first and second year experiences contributed to Latino students' sense of belonging on their campuses. They found that student-faculty interaction had a significant role to play in the development of students' senses of belonging. Following this thread, subsequent researchers found that student-faculty interaction had a positive impact on other factors associated with sense of belonging, including GPA and learning gains (Anaya and Cole 2001), intellectual self-concept (Cole 2007), an broadened access to information about opportunities on and off campus, or social capital (Dika 2012).

But access to the kind of student-faculty interaction that facilitates this sense of belonging is not evenly distributed. At selective, predominantly white institutions in the US, a majority of faculty are white (Harper and Quaye 2009). Hence in addition to structural barriers to student-faculty interaction at such institutions (e.g. large class sizes, faculty research responsibilities) – and in keeping with the findings of the approachability literature (e.g. Naddler and Naddler 1994; Cox et al. 2010) – students from underrepresented groups (e.g. racial and ethnic minorities, working-class students, and/or first-generation college students) are less likely to have frequent, personal contact with faculty (Hurtado et al. 2011). Indeed, multiple studies corroborate this finding that faculty support makes a significant contribution to students' undergraduate academic success and post-graduation opportunities, but that this support is more frequently extended to white students (Kim and Sax 2009; Comeaux and Harrison 2007).

Student Ratings of Instruction

I will not review the entirety of the voluminous literature on student ratings of instruction here (cf. Centra 2009; Theall 1990). However, it is necessary to outline it briefly as this literature presents a kind of student-centeredness that is substantively different than the kind of student-centeredness presented in the sense of belonging literature. Student ratings of instruction (or university-administered course evaluations) became common practice following student activist movements of the 1960s. Some scholars present the ensuing institutionalization of course evaluations as an administrative effort to placate student-discontents, who wished to speak back to their institutions about the fairness (or unfairness) of faculty evaluations of student performances (Clark 2008). Other commentators have posited that the practice continues because it allows students to feel as though they are getting their money's worth.[13]

In any case, a whole literature has grown around the question of how valid student ratings of instruction might be. This literature finds student ratings of instruction to be highly valid, in that student ratings of instruction correspond to student achievement (as measured by grades) (Cohen 1991; Centra 1977, 1993, 2003; Theall 1990). However, though the extent to which students receive desired grades does appear to impact course evaluations, scholars find that the effect is low (Gigliotti and Foster 1990) and a "removable contaminant of student ratings" (Greenwald and Gillmore 1997). Interestingly, at least *one* of the scholars most active in this literature – along with a number of the studies supporting validity of student ratings of instruction – is funded by the Educational Testing Services (ETS) (e.g. Centra 2009, 2003, 1977) – a for-profit company that, in addition to other ventures, markets tools for administering student ratings of instruction.

Implications of the Student-Centered Paradigm

As with many lines of inquiry, the value of the student-centered paradigm in student-faculty interaction research lies in how questions posed and dialogues evoked therein get put to use in institutional policy and in everyday practice. There are many possibilities for how student-centered research can be put to use, but there are two

[13] http://chronicle.com/blogs/conversation/2013/03/01/the-unnecessary-agony-of-student-evaluations/ (Last accessed 15 March 2014).

broad themes that scholars and commentators use to discuss these possibilities. The first theme is student-consumerism, or the idea that institutions enact what they call a student-centered approach in order to treat students like consumers purchasing a product (and to keep them satisfied to keep revenues high). The second theme is, again, how student-centered research can contribute to the sense of belonging, necessarily student-centered, associated with equitable patterns of excellence and achievement in higher education.

Student-Consumerism

> Customers do not expect to have to struggle to acquire the product or service they are buying, nor do they expect to experience discomfort, to be negatively evaluated by service providers, or to be chastised for disrespect to those who serve. As one student said: 'I don't think the teacher should be able to require that we get to class on time, after all we are paying for the class!'(Grigsby 2009: 172)

Rising college costs – and inexorable student debt – may make it difficult for undergraduates *not* to see themselves, at times, as consumers dealing with a product. But as Grigsby's (2009) analysis above indicates, such a perspective has important implications for interactions between students and faculty. In particular, this passage suggests that a consumerist perspective among students shapes how students evaluate quality of interaction with faculty: specifically, ease becomes not even the gold standard, but the baseline.

An increasing body of scholarship corroborates this concern. For instance, a study of grading data from over 200 four-year US colleges and universities from 1940-2009 finds that the most common grade given at such institutions is now an A (Rojstaczer and Healy 2012). In 2009, A's represented 43% of all letter grades given, compared to 15% in 1960 and 31% in 1988 (Rojstaczer and Healy 2012). Arum and Roksa (2011) argue that this grade inflation is indicative of an epidemic of "limited learning" in US higher education: faculty appease student-consumers with easy grades, and students use course evaluations to demand easy grades.

Commentator and scholars observe that institutions themselves feed this consumerist perspective. For one thing, there is a veritable arms race among US four-year schools in which institutions frantically build climbing walls, lazy rivers, and other luxury leisure pursuits in order to attract applicants (thereby allowing college admissions to be more selective – which attracts supposedly higher quality applicants, capable of paying full tuition) (Selingo 2013; Babcock and Marks 2010). The cost incurred in this rush to improve luxury leisure facilities shows up in students' tuition, thereby contributing to the exponential growth in college costs – and hence, in student debt (Selingo 2013).

This apparently vicious cycle has implications not only for the grades students expect to receive, but also for the content students expect to cover in class. Scholar-blogger Tressie McMillan Cottom (2013) writes that when institutions allow students to take on the role of consumers, curricula remain whitewashed and devoid of inquiry into past and present formations of racism. For instance, Cottom (2013) recounts the case of English professor Shannon Gibney, who – after suggesting during a class discussion that a noose on display in the campus newsroom could alienate students of color – was the subject of a discrimination complaint filed by three white students who said her discussion of racism made them uncomfortable. Gibney was reprimanded under her institution's anti-discrimination policy. Feelings of discomfort in the classroom can be, as Cottom (2013) observes, "bad for business."[14] And as businesses, institutions want to insure that they do not anger or alienate potential consumers.

How Student-Centered Research Can Contribute to Building Expansive and Equitable Senses of Belonging

Some commentators link the student-centered research and practice to a rise in consumerist attitudes.[15] While it is important to explore these connections, claims of a causal relationship oversimplify and overlook the practical applications of student-centered inquiry and analysis. On the contrary, student centered research can provide institutions and educators with data about where gaps in institutional capacities to build students' senses of belonging. In other words, student-centered research can show us ways that institutions can do better at building solidarity between undergraduates and their academic communities (Harper and Quaye 2009).

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[14] http://www.slate.com/articles/life/counter_narrative/2013/12/minneapolis_professor_shannon_gibney_reprimanded_for_talking_about_racism.html (Last Accessed 16 March 2014).

[15] See, for example, this commentary by the director of lifelong learning programs at UC San Diego: "Life Long Customers: The Response to Student Consumerism" < http://www.evolllution.com/opinions/lifelong-customers-response-student-consumerism/> (Last accessed 13 July 2014).

Indeed, student-centered research can show what exactly it is that colleges and universities *do* that does or does not help diverse groups of students succeed in higher education (e.g. Kuh et al. 2010). Much of this research now, however, is survey-based and suited toward making broad generalizations and cross-institutional comparisons. In other words, Becker et al.'s (1968) brand of student-centered research – investigating students' actual practices and the ways they make meaning of those practices – plays a marginal role at best in contemporary student-centered research on student-faculty interaction. Instead, studies picking up Becker et al.'s (1968) research thread are housed under a literature of a different name, not student-faculty interaction as a piece of student engagement research, but rather studies of the "experiential core of college life," discussed in the section above.

` The trend in student-faculty interaction literature leans toward large scale data sets, allowing for cross-institutional comparisons and for tracking patterns in the experiences of heterogeneous student populations. These studies greatly inform my own research questions. The study I have designed, however, fits much more closely into the experiential core of college life, aiming to shed light on what students' experiences can tell us about institutional processes, the extent to which such processes accomplish what they intend to do for students, and how different students may experience these processes quite differently – by showing actual interactions and the meanings students make of them in the contexts in which they are situated.

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

These literatures provide empirical evidence of how student-faculty interactions matter in students' higher education experiences and outcomes. Yet this vast body of literature on student-faculty interaction – linked as it is to the administrator-embraced literature of student engagement – has largely squeezed students' actual experiences and students' own terms of making meaning of their experiences out of focus. There is no experiential core in the literature of student-faculty interaction. Hence, these two literatures need to be read together.

What is more, these literatures provide empirical evidence of how different student populations not only experience college quite differently – but that they also experience interaction with faculty quite differently. The data they provide bear witness to the relationship between these differential experiences and broader systematic social inequalities of class, race, and gender.

But because the student-faculty interaction literature makes little space for students' actual interactions and understandings of them, and because the literature of the experiential core of higher education has not, since Becker et al. (1968) zoomed in on student-faculty interaction, I designed my study to speak to these gaps. I wanted to see the texture of interactions between students and faculty and the relationship of these interactions and understandings of them to students' identities and understandings of their relationship to their institution. I posed the following questions:

1. How do students make meaning of interaction with faculty at a 21st century research institution? How are these meanings situated

in relation to their own identities?

2. How do undergraduates themselves evaluate quality of interaction with faculty? We know from the student engagement literature that quality of interaction with faculty matters to student engagement with their institutions and hence to student success in higher education. But what are *students'* terms of evaluation?

I call this dissertation "Who Cares?" because in all this literature on students' higher education experiences and in particular, their interaction with faculty, discussion of care is notably absent. Yet when undergraduates talk about quality of interaction with faculty, care is an ever-present theme. How students understand care and what it means for faculty to care reveals a great deal about their expectations of schooling and of teaching and learning relationships.

This study examines how, from students' perspectives, high quality interaction happens *when faculty care*. Caring, in the view of undergraduates participating in this study, means supporting students in their efforts to embody *perceived institutional ideals*. But students' perceptions of institutional ideals and the ways in which it is possible to embody them are far from uniform. I attempt to illustrate this by mapping out two distinct sets of expectations about care, with social class strongly shaping – though not determining – these expectations and the interactions they elicit.

In the first, care has to do with "remaking the grading," as the student perceives the institution's ideal student as a producer of concrete, measurable honors or virtues. Faculty who care, in this view, remake the grading when a student has a personal need that threatens his or her ability to produce measurable virtues[16] – thus threatening that student's relationship to the institutional ideal he or she perceives. These expectations stem from students' experiences of lifestyles that their families and prior schooling institutions have built around the "production of measurable virtue" in order to prepare the perfect college application (Stevens 206; cf. Demerath 2009; Friedman 2013). In most cases, such lifestyles demand material resources much more readily available to the upper-middle classes.

In the second set of expectations, students see care as a relationship that they can build with faculty through educationally purposive practices, or practices that the institution upholds as best practices for effective learning.[17] Care here is a relational

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[18] As such, I recruited volunteers from a general student population. Comparisons emerged only later, through data analysis. But consistent with the patterns I found, students' reasons for choosing to participate and/or staying in the study reflected the evaluative stories they told about interaction with faculty. Specifically, students who told stories of "remaking the grading" largely saw themselves as "helping" me – as providing me with crucial insights about the institution and how it could better serve their personal needs. Students who told stories of high expectations, on the other hand, saw participation in the study as a way of gaining institutional insight that they could use to sharpen their educationally purposive practices.

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process that can support students in the effort of working toward the perceived institutional ideal of learning and preparing for future social and economic contributions through educationally purposive practices. (Indeed, there is strong grounding for this kind of perception of institutional ideals as institutions themselves make such ideals explicit in mission statements and accounts of best practices.)

The two sets of expectations about care detailed in this study thus represent two different kinds of claims to care. Stated differently,

talk of care – students' understandings how instructors do or do not care for them – constitutes a hinge around which the undergraduates participating in this study make meaning of interactional quality. However, students deploy distinct understandings of what counts as care. And the institution does not support these evaluative criteria (and the interactions they guide) evenly. Both sets of criteria for evaluating care, however, construct care as a social practice: an exchange to which people and institutions attach value and expectations (Hochschild 1983). Caring requires that the carer uphold a certain set of "feeling rules," or expectations about what is owed in a given interaction (Hochschild 1983: 76). Status acts as a shield against punishment for failing to meet feeling rules (Hochschild 1983: 174). Hence, embodying a perceived institutional ideal can provide status on which to demand care and to enforce a particular set of feeling rules.

There are, however, a number of variations on this theme of care. These variations reflect students' identities and lived experiences. The fact that students'

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participation in the study as a way of gaining institutional insight that they could use to sharpen their educationally purposive practices.

identities and experiences matter greatly in their understandings of care means it is necessary to point out that U.S. college student populations are more heterogeneous than ever before (Harper and Quaye 2009). Undergraduates come to college with a great diversity of experiences, and these experiences profoundly shape how they expect to interact with their institutions and with institutional representatives. Faculty, or rather, instructors who teach undergraduates, are key institutional representatives. Students' interactions with them and the meanings they make of these interactions shape how students situate themselves in relation to their institution (Becker et al. 1968). Hence, how students make meaning of what counts as high quality interaction with faculty can tell us much about how students form the expectations they have of their institutions of higher education.

Moreover, I did not organize this study to compare how social class backgrounds influence students' evaluations of interaction with faculty. Rather, I designed the study to revisit Becker, Geer, and Hughes' (1968) analyses in the context of a contemporary research university.[18] Accordingly, these distinct evaluative stories emerge from student experiences' rather than a comparative research design. Even so, a clear pattern emerges around who tells these tales. How students perceive institutional ideals has to do with their stock of knowledge about

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institutions, their experiences with institutions and formal organizations (Berger and Luckman 1968). That pattern has to do with how students "know" institutions, or how they perceive their institutional knowledge and how they use those ways of knowing in interaction. In particular, I find that it is quite important to identify how institutional processes differentially encourage and reward the kinds of student-faculty interactions that deploy knowledge of how to work institutions over the kinds of interactions that construct knowledge of how institutions work.

And so in many ways, this is a story of one way that institutions reproduce patterns of privilege and inequity through support (and lack of support) of particular kinds of interactions. To show this, I examine how students who tell and enact stories of "remaking the grading" identify with the "measurable virtues" that institutions of higher education reward in the admissions process (Stevens 2006). I explore the strong social class dimensions to stories of remaking the grading: in particular the ways that students telling this tale are influenced by the competitive, achievement-oriented environments that they experienced prior to their higher education experiences. Hence, these social class dimensions are manifested through understandings as much (or more) than demographics: students telling this tale are traditional-aged, full time students coming from highly competitive high school environments, but not all students with this profile come to this understanding.

Social class shapes who tells tales of "remaking the grading," but social class does not determine the evaluative stories students use to make meaning of quality of interaction with faculty. Stories of high expectations come from students with a range of social class backgrounds. Conditioning these students' stories, however, are their own perceptions that they are somehow not fully or not yet their institution's ideal student. They seek further insight into their institution (through interaction with faculty) to try to achieve these ideals, and they seek closer knowledge of these ideals to facilitate closer and more meaningful interaction with faculty, with whom they hope to establish mentoring relationships.

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

In Chapter 1, I have reviewed scholarly treatment of student-faculty interaction and its relationships to student experiences of higher education and to desired outcomes of higher education, including student engagement in educationally purposive activities, student development, and sense of belonging within institutions and the learning communities they provide. I have offered a brief overview of what these data and analyses can tell us about why student-faculty interaction matters. Finally, I have suggested an avenue of inquiry in this field that has both conceptual and practical importance: how exactly do students make meaning quality of interaction with faculty? I propose that the meaning making processes they employ can tell us something about their sense of belonging at their institutions.

Chapter 2 presents the theoretical framework for this study. Specifically, I situate my research questions in the theoretical frames of symbolic interactionism and the sociology of evaluation. Because this study asks not only how undergraduates experience interaction with faculty, but also the terms by which students evaluate the quality of interaction they have with faculty, these two theoretical paradigms help me shed light on what interactions and the ways people make meaning of them can tell us about students' experiences of higher education and how institutions pattern these experiences and understandings of them.

Chapter 3 discusses the research design for this study. In particular, I discuss why ethnographic methods are particularly appropriate to the questions this study poses. This dissertation reflects three years of ethnographic study at "State University" (SU) a public research institution in a mid-Atlantic state. In it, I follow 35 undergraduate students via both semi-structured and open-ended interviews, semesterly check-ins, and field observations of their academic experiences. I also conduct a content analysis of OurStateU.com, an SU-specific instructor-reviewing website with over 10,323 reviews of SU instructors written by a total of 4,120 SU student reviewers since the site's founding by SU computer science majors in late 2007.[19]

Chapter 4 presents the experiences of students who identify high quality interaction with faculty as interactions of "remaking the grading," in that these interactions remake standards to ensure that students being graded are always graded as the institution's ideal. This understanding of what counts as high quality interaction corresponds to a strategy these students use in interacting with faculty. I call this strategy "Remaking the Grading." I show how SU's institutional structures tend to support - perhaps inadvertently – the use of this strategy.

[19] By available counts in March 2014.

Chapter 5 shows the experiences of students who define high quality interaction as relationships that develop through educationally purposive practices – interactions that will then deepen the effectiveness of these practices. These understandings support strategies aimed at living up to institutional ideals of what educationally purpose practices ought to look at. I identify this strategy as "Living Up" to represent the efforts of those who used it to "live up" to institutional ideals. I find, however, that SU's structures and processes tend to undercut the expectations of many students who hold this understanding of high quality.

Chapter 6 touches on implications of these findings for institutional policy and for pedagogical practice. In it, I affirm the importance of high quality student-faculty interaction for student success in higher education.

CHAPTER 2: Interaction, Inequity, and Institutions of Higher Education:

A Conceptual Framework

This is a study of student-faculty interaction at a research university. But it is also a call for a paradigm shift in research on student-faculty interaction: a shift from the current "student-centered" paradigm – which focuses on student characteristics and outcomes and how these characteristics and outcomes can be correlated with variables meant to represent student-faculty interaction — to a relationship-centered paradigm that centers on students' relationships with those who teach them and how institutional contexts shape those relationships and the meanings students make of them. Such a paradigm depends on analysis of the actual interactions through which those relationships form, along with analysis of how people make meaning of those interactions, and analysis of how institutional contexts shape and constrain those interactions and meanings made of them. For this reason, I frame this research in the theoretical tradition of symbolic interaction.

Symbolic interaction sees people's doings as socially situated (Goffman 1983: 2). A symbolic interactionist perspective presumes that social life is complex and collectively accomplished through the interactions people have in the contexts in which they are situated. A symbolic interactionist framework provides conceptual tools for examining how the things that people actually *do* give life to ideas and institutions and to the relationships people have with each other. Such a framework can help to show how ideas and institutions and people's relationships with each other in turn informs their behavior.

Because my research asks not only how undergraduates experience interaction with faculty, but also how these experiences shape the terms by which students evaluate the quality of interaction they have with faculty, I link the symbolic interactionist tradition to the emergent area of a sociology of evaluation (Lamont 2012). Connecting these two areas of inquiry is important both theoretically and practically. It is important theoretically because the ways that people evaluate interactions have an impact on the interactions they actually have, and the interactions they actually have impact the ways they evaluate further interactions. It is important practically because students' perceptions of quality of interaction with faculty are a key indicator of student engagement, which some scholarly research robustly links with student success (Kuh et al. 2010; Hurtado et al. 2011; Cole and Griffin 2013).

Research reveals that the quality of interaction with faculty that students experience appears to vary with students' identities and with systematic social inequities related to identity categories such as race, class, and gender (Hurtado et al. 2011; Cole and Griffin 2013). The sociology of evaluation draws on core concepts from Pierre Bourdieu's theory of stratification and the reproduction of inequality, and in particular, on the concepts of habitus and cultural capital (cf. Bourdieu 1984; Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). In this study, I use the conceptual tools of symbolic interaction and the sociology of evaluation to examine 1) how undergraduates evaluate quality of interaction with faculty and 2) how their processes of evaluating quality of interaction can shed light on how they experience their institutions of higher education, and 3) how they experience the often uneven ways that these institutions distribute resources and opportunities.

The theoretical constructs of symbolic interaction and the sociology of evaluation are particularly apt for the research questions I pose in this study. Again, I ask*: in what ways do undergraduates at a 21st-century research institution make meaning of interaction with faculty? And how do those students evaluate quality of interaction with faculty on their own terms (as opposed to the terms used by institutions and researchers on course evaluations and surveys)*? Symbolic interaction takes interaction as a key unit of analysis that enables insight into how people make meaning of their social worlds. The sociology of evaluation examines evaluation as a social process. Evaluation is, of course, a kind of meaning making. While the sociology of evaluation does not tie itself to symbolic interactionism, a focus on what people are actually doing – as symbolic interaction supports – can shed light on evaluation as a social process. Similarly, the sociology of evaluation supports inquiry into how people draw lines between worthiness and unworthiness and reveals how those understandings shape interactions between people and in turn shape how people experience institutions and institutional processes that distribute resources and opportunities. Calling on these two theoretical constructs together enables this study to show how an institutional context shapes how students understand interaction with faculty.

Symbolic Interaction

The sociological tradition of symbolic interaction emerges from the social thought of American Pragmatist philosophers John Dewey and George Herbert Mead, whose work emphasized the importance of the social origins and social impacts of ideas. Seeing how ideas and understandings have roots in and consequences for real people's real lives, Dewey (1917) insisted, was of utmost importance in the effort to create and sustain democratic institutions. It was the responsibility of institutions (and particularly institutions of education), Dewey (1917) argued, to ensure ongoing communication of these understandings and ongoing analysis of them. In the Pragmatist view, democratic processes depended upon the rigorous testing and retesting of ideas to see how they relate to the world as people experience it (Dewey 1917).

Symbolic interaction established an empirical program to show how people make meaning of experience. Sociologist Herbert Blumer worked to translate key ideas of pragmatism – for example the idea that democratic decision-making processes must include understandings of people's experiences – into a research program that a largely positivist post-War academy would take seriously. Blumer's program of symbolic interaction hinged on two core tenets: first, that meaning is socially produced, with interaction as the element of production; second, that methods of inquiry must be consistent with the phenomena they aim to study (Becker and McCall 1990; Blumer 1969). Hence, to study how people make meaning of experience, researchers must observe the interactions through which this experience takes place and through which people form their understandings. Theories of how people interact - implicit or explicit in institutional processes, in politics, and in democratic society more broadly - are only valid inasmuch as they account for what people are actually doing and how they are actually making meaning of those actions (Blumer 1969: 151).

Interaction, to be observed in the context in which it takes place, would be the basic unit of observation in Blumer's nascent program. Blumer (1969) identifies three key premises upon which such a research program would rest. The first premise is that that people act toward things (objects, events, situations, processes, people) based on the meanings they make of them; that meaning is created through interaction. Human events are made up of the people who take part in them, including the parts they take in real, physical interactions, and the roles they play in the imagination of other others involved. People respond to what is going on based on the responses others give to their actions. This leads to the second premise, the idea that meaning arises from interaction.

Blumer's second premise of a symbolic interactionist research program, the idea that meanings arise from interaction, suggests that examining interactions can tell us a great deal about the meanings people make of an event, an experience, or an idea. Such meanings made include the meanings a person comes to make of him or herself. These meanings organize how people respond to the activity around them. In other words, interactions and meanings made of them shape further interactions. Hence interactions are not isolated, but rather situated in ongoing processes. This is Blumer's third premise.

In the third premise of a symbolic interactionist research program, Blumer explains that the meanings people form are continuously shaped by their interactions – that meanings are continuously under construction. This means that symbolic interactionist studies must not isolate any one interaction, but rather must situate it in the context of countless other interactions and the settings that shape them. Practically, this means that interaction is a process – one that is not neutral. And because intearctions and meanings made of them are processual, ongoing, and situated rather than neutral, so must be any analysis of interaction. This makes the study of interaction a living enterprise, subject to ongoing dialogue. This dialogue is vital to the study of interaction, as neglect of the *dynamics* of the social lives under study may trap researchers under the very variables that are supposed to be the building blocks of their insights (Blumer 1969: 127).

But Blumer represented meaning making as a process that takes place independent from people's emotions. He had little to say about the role of emotions in interactions and understandings formed of them. This was a deficiency sociologist Arlie Hochscild (1983) observed of the early decades of symbolic interactionist research: it offered no concept of emotion or emotion work, without which symbolic interactionism would be inadequate for studying what it takes for people to care in situations where other individuals and institutions call on them to do so (p. 265). Some people, given the social contexts in which they are situated, are called upon – or even compelled – to demonstrate more care for certain people than others. In short, people have to make meaning of situations, to evaluate what matters, who matters, why and how.

Hochschild (1983) illustrates how "feeling rules," or norms of a given cultural context outline what a person ought to feel in a particular situation. Interactions often call upon individuals to manage their emotions in order to display the expected feeling. Professions that require employees to "care" about the happiness and comfort of clients exert strenuous demands on employees' emotion management. This emotional labor is a resource often demanded of those in positions of lesser power – a kind of exploitation in which the worker has to sell his or her feelings to produce value for the employer. The employee's workplace interactions become *care work*, where those in power enforce expectations that employees care and that they do so in the way that the institution defines care.

Twenty-first century U.S. research institutions tacitly define the care they expect faculty to show for students via survey questions asking students to evaluate quality of interaction with faculty in end of semester course evaluations or to rate quality of interaction with faculty on a scale of 1-7 as in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) (see Chapter 1). Institutions look to faculty to score highly on these items, but place little emphasis on understanding how students make meaning of what counts as high quality interaction. Lacking insight on this important question, it becomes difficult to see whose expectations of care work institutions support and reinforce, and how such support and reinforcement patterns interactions (and inequities).

Interactions as the "Beating Heart" of Institutions

The emerging literature of *inhabited institutions* draws on symbolic interactionism to show how interactions are the "beating heart of institutions" (Hallett and Ventresca 2006: 215). Decades of critical responses to symbolic interactionist research programs and studies have shaped this emerging literature and its ideas about what interaction can or cannot show about institutional patterns and power relationships. Indeed, it is now clear interactions can show a great deal about how institutions reproduce patterns of inequity. But many sociologists have not always seen it this way.

Symbolic interaction challenged the perspectives that dominated mid-twentieth century sociology. As such, it faced criticism launched from many angles. Positivists discounted symbolic interaction as unscientific: how could symbolic its research be tested, if interactions in the real-life settings in which they occur can never be replicated? (Maines 1977; Stryker 1987). Others tied the perspective to Blumer alone, denying that symbolic interaction had any viability as a research program outside Blumer's work, and further argued that Blumer overestimated the sociological relevance of George Herbert Mead (Maines 1977). Still others contended that symbolic interaction is apolitical, falsely shrouding itself in neutrality and supportive of an unjust status quo (Maines 1977). Perhaps most damning of all, however, were arguments contending that symbolic interaction could offer no insight about social structure or configurations of power (Coser 1976).

The proposition that symbolic interaction had little to say about social structure prompted many to show exactly how symbolic interaction could shed light on institutions and power relations. Perhaps most prominent among these responses was Erving Goffman's 1982 Presidential Address to the American Sociological Association in which he argued that interactions are inscribed in space and time and context. Social structures, Goffman (1983) argued, are both dependent on and vulnerable to people's interactions (p. 8).

To show how analysis of interaction could enable analysis of power and structure, Randall Collins (1981) drew on Goffman and Durkheim to emphasize a rich sociological tradition of attending to interaction. Collins (1981) posited that interaction precedes social structure – interactions exist before structures, the "micro" comes before the "macro" to use the terms of a quintessential sociological debate. Collins (1981) theorized that interactions produce the emotional energy that animates the social order and the ways that people participate in that order, reproducing or challenging it, actively or passively. The interaction rituals generate emotional energy that gets harnessed by institutions. And if those rituals, once they are employed by institutions, continue to generate that energy, then they serve as the lifeblood of those institutions.

Symbolic interaction also grew through the interests and methods of inquiry it shared with the field of cultural studies (Becker and McCall 1990). Much work in cultural studies shows how institutions (often, schools) produce knowledge and how that knowledge may be drafted into the service of reproducing existing power relationships (e.g. Rist 1970; Willis 1977; Apple 1985). Inquiries that show interaction in context, then, can shed light on power relationships and how structures enable and constrain particular configurations of power (Denzin 1991).

Arjun Appadurai (1996) argued that interactionist research tools - methods of inquiry examining how people experience social context - can show the dynamics of power relationships and the ways in which these dynamics shape not only what people do, but what people imagine to be possible. These dynamics are complex and involve not only institutions themselves but the ways in which ideas, money, media, technology, and people travel in and out and between institutions around the world. The *social work of the imagination*, as Appadurai (1996: 52) put it, is the bedrock of ethnography: the possibilities people imagine are rooted in their experiences of these dynamics. And at the same time those imagined possibilities have a profound impact on the ways people interact with these dynamics.

Interactions may then rightly be seen as the "beating heart" of institutions (Hallett and Ventresca 2006: 215). From this premise, the emerging literature of "inhabited institutions" contends that examining interaction can show how certain organizational configurations persist and how they change (Hallett 2010; Hallett and Ventresca 2006). People do not simply enact institutional routines in formulaic ways. Nor do they remake institutions entirely through their actions. Rather, they inhabit institutions, and their interactions bring institutional processes to life (Hallett and Ventresca 2006).

Institutional theorists have argued that institutions - including public universities like SU - legitimate their priorities and efforts to achieve them through "myths" or "rational theor[ies] of how" they operate, to explain their actions in ways that aim to shape how their constituents make sense of them (Meyer and Rowan 1977: 342). Myths, as Hallett (2010) observes, can provide a storyline for certain actions and interpretations of them. But institutional actions are not always in line with their myths. Where myth and action are "loosely coupled," institutions remain the same even as reforms are touted (Bidwell 2001). Hallett (2010) describes institutional efforts to tighten the alignment of myth and action as "recoupling."

The recoupling of myth and action, Hallett (2010) finds, tends to create turmoil among institutional inhabitants. Over time, turmoil may cast in doubt on the very myths that endowed reform efforts with authority (Hallett 2010: 70). Hallett (2010) sees at least two components to turmoil. First is "epistemic distress," or the experience of finding meanings and expectations rendered unavailable. Second is the formation of partisan interpretations to deal with this uncertainty and the creation of battle lines along these partisan understandings. Such formations influence how people interact at present, how they make sense of the past, as well as how they plan to interact in the future (Everitt 2013).

But where is the power in these processes? How do systematic social inequities shape the interactions that give life to institutions and institutional change? Institutions are both sites where interactions occur and sites composed of interactions. Interactions are thus central to how power operates in institutions and how power relationships are created and reinforced. I draw now on key concepts from theories of social stratification to inquire into how inequity impacts the ways in which people interact within institutions of higher education. These concepts link the symbolic interactionist tradition, with its attention to interaction and meaning-making in the context of which these processes take place, to the emerging sociology of evaluation, which attends much more closely to power relations and inequities that shape how people form understandings of what matters, of what is worthy.

Interaction and Systematic Social Inequities in Institutions of Higher Education

Systematic social inequities shape students' experiences and interactions at every gate they must pass through en route to higher education and during it. This matters deeply in the reproduction of social statuses if higher education is, as some theorize, a "hub" that connects people to further social institutions and resources (Stevens et al. 2008). Students' interactions in this "hub" thus can tell us much about how systematic social inequities get reproduced (or challenged) in the everyday goings-on of an institution of higher education. Bourdieu's theory of the reproduction of inequality offers key conceptual tools for the analysis of such interactions.

Habitus

Bourdieu's (1984) concept of habitus refers to an individual's internalized ways of knowing and seeing the world. Inequity, as Pierre Bourdieu (1984) famously theorized, is not simply about differences in wealth. It is a whole web of social relationships that endows individuals with particular preferences and everyday practices, with particular resources and currencies for accessing further resources. It hinges upon what people desire and consider beautiful or worthy and how those tastes and practices of enacting them position people in relationship to what institutions reward as beautiful and worthy. Ways of knowing and seeing incline a person to respond to people, things, ideas, and processes in particular ways. This gives a person a "feel for the game" in a given social context. Depending on the social contexts with which they have the most everyday experiences, individuals will have a much better feel for the game on some fields than on others.

The stakes of an individual's "feel for the game" are high when they interact with institutions that control or distribute important social resources. Schools are such an institution. Schooling is of course far from the only institution that reproduces inequity, but in a democracy, schools *do* have the explicit aim of creating and preserving equality of opportunity and equity in access to social resources. Thus, in a democratic society, the persistence of inequity in schools is troubling enough; evidence that schools themselves perpetuate this inequity would appear to be just cause for large scale change.

In schools, Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) argued, elites are the ones who produce educational programs. They set curricula; they determine standards for pedagogy. They do so from the perspectives that they have developed in their own habitus. As such, the standards they set enable easier access to opportunity for those most like the elites setting the rules. In other words, elite and middle class students come to school with a feel for the game cultivated throughout their everyday experiences. Yet when they succeed in school, systems of credentialing claim they have done so by their own merit. These students thus carry with them a kind of currency that schools value - a *cultural capital*, or set of knowledges, skills, and dispositions that they can use to acquire advantages.

Schools and Social Class

Annette Lareau (2010) provides empirical evidence of how inequities of social class actually play out in the interactions families have with schools. In an ethnographic study of middle- and working-class white and black families in a northeastern U.S. city, Lareau finds that middle-class parents intentionally cultivate in children a familiarity with formal organizations through their emphasis on involvement in specialized activities. Many middle-class families fashion a whole lifestyle around around these activities, which they extol as building blocks of a strong college application and as practice in the kinds of dispositions needed for competitive careers (cf. Friedman 2013; Stevens 2006).

Lareau (2010) observes furthermore that middle-class parents encourage their children to negotiate with authority figures in these organizations (like soccer clubs, gymnastics centers, and arts programs) as well as in schools. Parents model this kind of negotiation through their own questioning of teachers' pedagogic practices and schools' systems of distributing recognition, such as invitations to participate in gifted and talented programs. For example, middle-class parents whose children do not score high enough on placement tests to gain entry into these programs may have their children privately tested, and then lobby for these externally obtained scores to replaces the scores the school used. Similarly, anthropologist Peter Demerath (2009) finds that in one very affluent public high school, if private tests did not enable parents to make the case that students were gifted and talented, similar testing services could be used to ensure that students received extra time on tests and other favorable accommodations. One teacher at the school explained it to Demerath (2009) this way: "There are no average kids [here]. You are either gifted or special ed. And special ed. is a good thing here" (p. 56).

Lareau (2010) calls these middle-class parenting practices the strategy of concerted cultivation. She compares this strategy to that of working-class parents, in which children are seen as capable of growing into responsible adulthood if they respect and are respected by the adults with whom they interact - kin as well as authorities like teachers and school personnel - whose professional expertise working-class parents, in contrast to middle-class parents, do not challenge or confront in search of special favors for their children.

Social Class and Student-Teacher Interaction

Lareau's (2010) study draws heavily upon the work of anthropologist Shirley Brice Heath (1983). Heath (1983) observed the use of language in working-class and middle-class families in a North Carolina mill town as the textile industry began to move from the American South to the global South. She found that middle-class families invariably spent time each day talking about "the schedule": the calendar was the linchpin of family life and family discussion (Heath 1983: 243). They also described people in terms of formal credentials - what degrees and certifications they hold. And they constantly questioned children: asking questions with no answers (*Why can't life be simpler?*), questions with obvious answers ("Where is your nose?"), and questions that stood in for formal directives ("What do you say?") (p. 253). When these children arrived at school, they found their home language patterns in use in oral and written communication.

The working-class families in Heath's (1983) study, both white and black, spoke directly. They reserved questions for when they genuinely wanted to know the answer. Hence the typical middle-class parents' "Where's your nose?" question would seem ridiculous to the mill workers' children. Uses of time and space were not ruled by a calendar but by the flow of everyday social interactions and decision-making processes within the community (p. 232). And, if describing someone, these families tended to prioritize a person's relationships to other people rather than his or her formal credentials. Yet when working-class children arrived at school, they met with expectations to communicate in the way of middle-class families:

> [The working-class] children have not had their perception of items and events monitored by a schema in adults' heads of what and when they should learn [before they enter school]. They have had to find their own schemata in the complex, multi-channeled stream of stimuli about them, for neither talk, time, nor space is set aside especially for them…No one lifts labels and features out of their contexts for explication; no one requests repetitions…Thus their entry into a classroom which depends on responses based on lifting items and events out of context is a shock. Their abilities to contextualize, to remember what may seem to the teacher to be an unrelated event as similar to another, to link seemingly disparate factors in their explanations, and to create highly imaginative stories are suppressed in the classroom. (Heath 1983: 353)

Middle class children, on the other hand, are more accustomed to classroom practices that require "naming and labeling" and describing things and events apart from their context. That schools and other powerful institutions represent school success as the product of individual merit may encourage students who do succeed to develop an “air of entitlement”: a belief that they are owed rewards and awards for their intelligence (Heath 1983: 242).

Lareau (2010) leaned on Heath (1983) to illustrate the theories of Pierre Bourdieu. Heath (1983), in turn, drew on British sociologist of education, Basil Bernstein (1971), whose concepts are much less frequently a part of contemporary U.S. sociological conversations on inequity in schooling than Bourdieu’s. Bernstein (1971) theorizes that one of the chief aims of the middle-class family is to produce a child who embodies what schools and formal organizations identify as excellent, but at the same time to ensure that he or she is seen as fully unique in his or her excellence. This process of individualization takes place through family members’ “scrupulous observation” of the child’s every action, and through verbal recognition and communication about these actions (Bernstein 1971: 27). In addition, the middle-class family prioritizes control over the environments in which their child engages. Because the child has been so highly individualized and because families place a premium on control, the middle-class child learns to approach authority in terms of personal need and expects to have these needs met.

Bernstein (1971) contrasts middle-class families’ *personal approach to authority* with working-class families’ *positional approach to authority*. In this latter approach, families present people in terms of relationships. Authority may be earned through relationships or endowed through positions, but regardless, children must learn their position in relation to authority and communicate accordingly.

Bernstein (1971) describes the language patterns of middle- and working-class families respectively as elaborated and restricted codes. The elaborated code refers to ways of speaking that can be abstracted from their immediate context and still be meaningful. For example, describing a person in terms of credentials ostensibly enables a listener to know something about that person without having to know anything about that person's relationships with other people. Restricted codes, on the other hand, depend on immediate context for meaning. Descriptions of a person in terms of their relationships to others will not convey intended meanings if a listener does not know the people in relation to whom they are described. For Bernstein, the middle-class speaker is more practiced at using the elaborated codes favored by formal organizations. Combined with his or her personal approach to authority, the middle-class speaker is primed to make demands on institutions that institutions may be hard-pressed to discount.

Social Class Intersects with Other Systematic Social Inequities

Bourdieu's concept of habitus – and subsequent scholars' developments of it - show the reproduction of inequality through tastes, preferences, and presentations of self. They show that ongoing experiences of interaction shape how people see themselves not only in relation to others, but in relation to institutions. These interactions play a vital role in what people come to expect of institutions: how people expect that institutions will see and treat them, and what they expect institutions to do for them, and what they expect to do in order to gain access to institutions and the social resources they organize.

The accounts of habitus noted above privilege social class as having the greatest impact on students' experiences of navigating schools. Laureau

(2010) in fact describes social class as having an impact greater than the impact of race on parenting practices and children's ensuing experiences in schools. As the student-faculty interaction literature described in Chapter 1 makes clear, however, race, class, and gender impact students' experiences, and it would be quite difficult, if not futile, to isolate the impact of anyone of these components of identity over overs (Collins 2004, 2012). Race, class, and gender intersect to produce students' expectations of their institutions and the ways that students gain access to institutional resources (Khan 2010).

Institutions of Higher Education and the Sociology of Evaluation

Evaluation is a social process (Lamont 2012). How people draw boundaries between what they define as worthy or unworthy shapes who gets access to resources and opportunities, as the guardians of those resources and opportunities may be loathe to share them with those with whom they do not share a "cultural style" - or set of manners, tastes, and dispositions (Lamont 1992). Evaluation then is not separate from systematic inequities that pervade other aspects of social life: the symbolic boundaries produced through evaluation are necessary but not sufficient conditions for social boundaries. People's experiences of power in their relationships with social structures, with disciplinary practices, with media representations, and with other people profoundly impact what they consider worthy or unworthy (Collins 2009).

A sociology of evaluation responds to a gap sociologist Michele Lamont (1992) observes in dominant social theories of stratification. Such theories, Lamont (1992) contends, focus too much on the workings of institutions and categories long institutionalized in social science research, such as race, class, and gender as fixed demographic variables, at the expense of questions about how people's tastes or preferences are impacted by power structures. These theories may also ignore how power operates in interactions related to how people make meaning of what is worthy or unworthy of attention or care or resources. A sociology evaluation highlights these distinctions.

Lamont critiques and builds on Bourdieu's concept of habitus to argue that people draw symbolic boundaries around what they consider worthy, and they protect these boundaries not only with institutional processes, but also through everyday interactions that then have bearing on people's relationships to institutions. For example, why do people on a hiring committee prefer one candidate to another when the two possess similar credentials? Why might a receptionist prefer a particular inquirer, offering him or her privileged information or a choice appointment slot not made available to others? How are these preferences linked to experiences of race, class, gender, and access (or lack thereof) to opportunities and resources within institutions? People may be loathe to share resources (both concrete resources, like job offers or college admissions, and intangibles like respect and trust) with those with whom they do not share a cultural style (Lamont 1992). As such, social processes of evaluation powerfully impact how resources become available to different people. For this reason, Lamont (1992, 2012) argues that sociologists need to analyze not only how evaluative standards get institutionalized, but also how people relate to these standards and apply them in formal and informal processes of evaluation.

Toward this end, Mitchell Stevens (2006) offers a richly detailed illustration of how one college defines and enacts its criteria of worthiness in evaluating prospective students. Their standards of evaluation, and the standards used by their institutional peers, come to define much about how privileged families organize children's lives and activities. These standards reward the *production of measurable virtue*: achievements that can be enumerated on college applications and which colleges in turn can use to enhance their own institutional profiles. Such measurable virtues of course include SAT scores, GPAs, academic class ranks, and AP test scores, but also include emphasis on prestigious activities that can be documented on a resume. Because they are "keenly aware of the terms of elite college admission:

> Affluent families...do everything in their power to make their children into ideal applicants...They nurture athletic talent through myriad youth sports programs. They channel kids with empathetic hearts toward exotic and traceable forms of humanitarian service. In the process of doing all this, affluent families fashion an entire way of life organized around the production of measurable virtue in children. (Stevens 2006: 15)

Because the measurable virtues of these students in turn elevate a school's own status in all-important college ranking schemes, admissions officers tell "evaluative stories" about these applicants that celebrate their worthiness. The lifestyles that affluent families are able to afford - once openly the sole criteria for college access - get recoded as individual merit and evidence of achievement and hard work. Hence, when it comes to admissions, Stevens shows, participation on a pricy athletic travel team counts for more than dominance on a neighborhood blacktop, even for applicants who will never compete in intercollegiate athletics. A two-week humanitarian service trip abroad trumps two years of daily care for a loved one or contribution to a family budget.

Evaluative storytelling is a collective activity. In the college admissions process, colleges *and* families *and* complex organizational machineries construct a picture of the worthy applicant that reflects the child-rearing strategies of affluent parents. (In addition, Friedman [2013] observes, there is a whole economy based on constructing this "worthy applicant," with many adults whose careers and livelihoods depend upon demand for the types of activities in which this candidate must participate.) How people engage with these stories will impact the ways they interact with others and with institutions; it will impact the meanings they and others make of each other and of their interactions.

Evaluating Care

Evaluating care, then – what counts as care, how care is enacted and experienced – is also deeply social. Hochschild (1983) calls the terms governing the evaluation of care the *feeling rules* of a given context. Status shapes one's relationship to feeling rules. As Hochschild puts it, the lower one's status, the more his or her feelings, or ways of seeing, become subject to discredit (p. 173). Commercialization, of course, impacts status: Hochschild observes that commercialization subjects feeling to the rules of mass production, in which the worker's feelings are a product that produces value for the commercial organization, and the worker is subject to feeling rules that benefit the organization.

Feelings and feeling rules that emerge from relationships between people become subject to discredit.

Care as a relationship is squeezed out in organizations under pressure to make a profit, as the production of care through relationships may be inefficient and unpredictable. Educational institutions, under pressure to maintain and increase enrollments, to secure grants and funding from states and foundations, are no exception. Education scholar Angela Valenzuela (1999) calls this squeezing out of relationships of care *subtractive schooling*, a situation she finds particularly detrimental for students of color, who have historical reason to distrust schools and educators who have eliminated these students' heritages from curricula and devalued their identities. Without caring student-teacher relationships, Valenzuela (!999) observes that schools compromise students' learning and their access to future opportunities.

Valenzuela is not alone in finding that care matters in education, and in student learning particularly (cf. Dance 2003; Ladson-Billings 2009). Education scholar Nel Noddings (2005) theorizes that this is because students listen to people to whom they matter and who matter to them (p. 36). In a comprehensive review of best practices in K-12 education, Linda Darling-Hammond (1997) concludes:

> Relationships matter for learning. Students' trust in their teachers helps them develop the commitment and motivation needed to tackle challenging learning tasks. Teachers' connections to and understanding s of their students helps those students develop the commitment and capacity to surmount the hurdles that

> accompany ambitious learning…success depends as much on the strength of these relationships…as on knowledge of students' learning styles and technical skills. (p. 134)

The bottom line is that care may be compromised when subject to the feeling rules of an organization under pressure to produce profits and measurable outcomes. Care is not efficiently produced or measured. It is not easily standardized. Relationships matter. Interactions matter.

Framing the Research Questions of this Study

In this study, I ask how undergraduates evaluate quality of interaction with faculty. What are the social experiences underlying these evaluations? How do these experiences shape what students expect of interaction with faculty? How do they shape the interactions students actually have?

Scholars find that the interactions undergraduates have within their institutions of higher education impact higher education outcomes in a range of quantifiable ways, including likelihood of persistence toward degree, scores on standardized tests of critical thinking, to post-collegiate earnings (Kuh et al. 2010; Arum and Roksa 2011; Hu and Wolniak 2013). Undergraduates' perceptions of the quality of interaction they with faculty impact their approaches to learning (Laird et al. 2013; Kuh et al. 2010; see also Chapter 1). Hence, how students make meaning of the quality of interaction they have with those who teach them in turn shapes how they interact with their institutions and what sorts of resources and support become available to them through those interactions (NSSE 2013).

We know that systematic social inequities shape students' pathways to higher education and experiences within it (Stevens 2006; Armstrong and Hamilton 2013). We know that how people are positioned in relations to these inequities shapes their experiences of relating to institutions and to authority (Bernstein 1971; Heath 1983; Lareau 2010). A symbolic interactionist perspective holds that these experiences will shape people's interactions and the meanings people make of interaction.

Survey research defines criteria of evaluation for respondents (e.g. NSSE asks students to rate quality of interaction with faculty on a scale of 1-7; the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education asks if faculty elicit critical thinking practices from students *Very Often, Often, Sometimes, Rarely*, or *Never*). Hence, it is necessary to complement such research with investigation of how students come to evaluate quality of interaction with those who teach them-- to seek to understand where their evaluation criteria come from, how these criteria impact the interactions and relationships students seek and value with those who teach them, and how institutions shape and constrain actual interactions and understandings of them. Hence I investigate the following questions: how do undergraduates at SU make meaning of the quality of interaction they have with their college teachers? How do these understandings of quality have origins in and impacts on the actual interactions they have with those who teach them? How does SU shape undergraduates' "evaluative storytelling" practices? How do these interactions and understandings of them shape the kinds of teaching and learning relationships undergraduates imagine are possible at a place like SU?

CHAPTER 3: Research Design, Methods, and Data

Usually, it is not the problem that determines the method, but the method that shapes the problem. Our commitment to one or the other model of science [reflexive science vs. positive science], it turns out, endures across the problems we choose to investigate.

--Michael Burawoy (1998: 30)

I *thought* I saw a problem first: engaging students in academic work requires understanding what students are actually doing when they "do" academic work. When it comes to undergraduate coursework at a public research institution, there is not much time for such understanding – neither for instructors nor for students. In other words, at the outset of this project, I disagreed with Burawoy's (1998: 30) claim that research begins with the method, not the problem. But then again, what I wanted to know was *what are undergraduates actually doing with those who teach them*? What do their everyday interactions – and the processes structuring those interactions, the norms regulating them, the expectations coloring them, and the relationships with other people woven into them – actually look like, from students' perspectives? So perhaps this project did unfold as Burawoy (1998: 30) theorizes. Wanting to know about students' everyday interactions with their college teachers and the ways they made meaning of those interactions means that I did in fact begin from a model of scientific inquiry. What I would study would have to be studied in context, *in vivo*, so that I could see the situations that students experienced and learn their terms for interpreting these experiences. I was starting with reflexive science (Burawoy 1998).

Methodology shapes the research questions and investigates the problem at hand; it shapes what counts as "data" in that investigation, and how that data is to be organized, analyzed, and interpreted (Denzin and Lincoln 2011). An ethnographic methodology takes experience and the everyday as data (Willis 2000). It provides methodological tools for building inquiries on a symbolic interactionist frame: tools that focus on people, what they are actually doing, the contexts in which they are doing it, and the meanings they make of what they are doing (Becker et al. 1968; Becker et al. 2012; Anderson et al. 2004). Ethnography can show the social origins and social impacts of those understandings (Appadurai 1996; cf. Dewey 1910). It can organize these data to produce narratives that challenge existing images of people, their presentations of self, their everyday lives, and their potential as human beings and as members of society (Ladson-Billings 2009; Dance 2003). From these narratives emerge opportunities for evaluating existing relationships and systems and for strategizing to create, sustain, or bolster social systems that more deeply realize these human potentials (Ladson-Billings 2009; Lawrence-Lightfoot 1984; Dance 2003).[20]

Data in my study are undergraduate students' interactions with those who teach them and the meanings students make of those interactions. In many ways, my

[20] Please see Chapter 2 for a more thorough discussion of the construction of ethnographic knowledge.

study takes cues from the questions and reasoning that Howard Becker, Blanche Geer, and Everett Hughes (1968) offer in their inimitable *Making the Grade: The Academic Side of College Life*. Most research on college students, they write:

> … has a little of the character of industrial research designed to improve the efficiency of some production process. It asks whether the educational job is getting done: Are students learning? How much? What things? It asks under what conditions the job is done best: In large classes or small? With lectures or discussions? Under what kinds of college organization? It asks how the character of the materials used affects the product: Do the intellectual, attitudinal, emotional, and social traits of the students influence the efficiency of the educational process? Or, more subtly, does the combination of students of different kinds in one campus population influence the results? These are serious questions, of course. But they are teachers' questions…Suffice it to say that [our] questions [are] of this general order: What is it that is asked of me [the student] in my academic work? What is it that I want of myself in that work? How do I go about satisfying these demands? What will happen to me if I succeed, or if I fail to meet them? (Becker et al. 1968: 3-4)

I quote Becker, Geer, and Hughes (1968) at length here because their questions have guided my own. But I am also interested in the "teachers' questions": not so much those which Becker and colleagues list here, but the question of what it takes to engage undergraduates in educationally purposive interactions that they also see as high quality interaction. Narratives that show the social work of students' imaginations' – to borrow Appadurai's (1996) term – can help educators re-evaluate existing systems in which undergraduate academic interactions are situated at public, research institutions.

Research Design

I designed this study to focus on the meanings that undergraduates make of interactions with those who teach them at a public research university. Examining meaning making is a key strength of symbolic interactionism: people interact with things based on meanings made of them (Blumer 1969). Appadurai (1996) describes ethnographic methods as tools for such investigations: rich accounts of people's daily lives and the conditions under which those lives are lived shed light on the "social work of the imagination," or the social origins and social impacts of the understandings people form of their worlds (p. 52). Hence this project is an ethnographic study following the academic experiences of thirty-five undergraduate students at a public research university in a mid-Atlantic state from 2010-2013. My aim was to see how students' understandings of their academic experiences– particularly their experiences with their college teachers – formed over the course of their college careers. In addition, I wanted to see what sorts of structures, expectations, norms, and interpersonal interactions might impact these understandings.

Dialogue with research participants is central to the construction of ethnographic knowledge (Dance et al. 2010; Ladson-Billings 2009; Burawoy 1998; Willis 2000). I designed this study to be in dialogue with undergraduate students regarding their academic experiences. For this reason, all participants are volunteers, included on the basis of their willingness to participate – to spend a rather large number of hours both talking to and being followed by a graduate student researcher. As such, participants are not representative of the larger student body at State University, nor are they representative of groups associated with their own racial, ethnic, gender, or social class identities. However, participating students roughly resemble the demographic characteristics of State University's undergraduate student body in that 51.4% of study participants are male (compared to 53% of SU undergraduates), 48.5% are female (compared to SU's 47%), 42.8% are white (compared to 62.2% of SU undergraduates), 34.3% are African American (compared to 12% of SU undergraduates), and 22.9% are of other racial and ethnic backgrounds (20% at SU). Twenty-three percent of students in my sample are first-generation college students. In analyzing the data, I found more analytic leverage in comparing the experiences of those participants based on the degrees to which they realized their academic expectations: whose academic expectations were sustained compared with those whose academic expectations were "downgraded" compared with those whose academic expectations remained in constant flux. Race, class, and gender appear integral to the "life" of students' academic expectations at SU. However, my study was not designed to leverage conclusions on the basis of a priori differences among students, but rather to see inductively how students make meaning of interactions with their college teachers. I explain the patterns I identify in sections that follow (see Chapters 4 and 5).

If the research is to create dialogue with research participants, it is then

the researcher's responsibility to create conditions for reciprocal interactions (Dance, Gutiérrez, and Hermes 2010), or conditions in which qualitative research relationships are collaborations rather than investigations or interrogations. Reciprocal interactions, Dance and colleagues (2010) argue, are necessary if the researcher is to understand participants' experiences from participants' standpoints and to place those understandings in dialogue with the context in which they are situated. Their argument builds on Randall Collins' (2004) notion of the *situation* – not individuals– as the appropriate unit of analysis in sociological studies of interaction. Participants are not targets for the researcher's gaze, but co-constructors of the knowledge emerging from the study. I direct my questions and my analyses toward the situations in which students interact with the structures, norms, expectations and people involved in their experiences of academic work. To see those situations, I needed to design my study to be in dialogue with my student-participants, to collaborate with them, creating conditions for reciprocal interaction. Such reciprocity is key in understanding situations as participants experience them.

Why State University? Selecting the Site of the Study

Burawoy (1998) argues that ethnography can be an "extended case method," in which in-depth study of a specific context prompts connections to questions that apply elsewhere. In other words, analysis of one particular case can extend insight into other similar cases by highlighting the broader social forces at play in the case under examination. It is then possible to ask how similar social forces might be at play in other cases (Burawoy 1998: 5). But how does the researcher select the case? Flyvbjerg (2006) identifies two main types of case selection: random selection, to avoid systematic biases, and information-oriented selection, in which the researcher's expectations about a case inform his or her choice of case (p. 230). In this study, I take the latter approach. I selected State University because it is a large, public research institution whose undergraduates have over 90 majors to choose from, including the option to create their own major field of study. In addition, it has recently turned close attention to undergraduate students' academic experiences through an overhaul of the general education curriculum. Public universities, however, have to answer to multiple stakeholders – many of whom have different demands regarding institutional mission and action. What these institutions actually do reflect efforts to respond to these sometimes-conflicting demands (Gumport 2007). I sketch out some of State University's efforts in the introduction to the research site below; but my expectations for selecting this particular case was that undergraduate academic experiences at State University could provide a lens for looking at undergraduate academic experiences in other similar cases. State University undergraduates' academic experiences arise out of unique identities, life histories, and the everyday situations they enter into, but they may also serve as a metaphor (Flyvbjerg 2006: 232-3).

A Snapshot of State University: Introducing the Site of the Study

State University opened in the mid-nineteenth century. Like the many "land grant" institutions bolstered by funds from the Morrill Act of 1862, State

University first focused on agricultural education. Even as it added charming white-columned, red-bricked academic and administrative buildings to its campus, it preserved a small farm and stock of animals who now have as neighbors a department of astro-technology and the parking lot of an 18,000-seat basketball arena named for a corporate benefactor. And while some of State University's academic buildings also bear the names of benefactors, a good many receive their formal names from the departments housed within them. Think along the lines of something like a Chemistry-Chemical Science Building, an Economics Hall, and a Philosophy-Film – the latter a pairing at which many appear baffled. "That's so random," some say, when they encounter a student bound for class in that particular edifice. Others speculate that Philosophy-Film – constructed in 1976, when surges of student activism were likely fresh in the minds of nervous administrators – represents a conspiracy to keep all the potential leftists contained. Those who spend enough time there, however, know that the building, like many spaces for the liberal arts, sprinkles decaying plaster dust upon a wide array of political practices and beliefs and the minds and bodies who practice and believe them.

A pot-holed and roughly-used route which travels all the way up and down the East Coast separates the main part of campus from a quad of fraternity and sorority houses, a recreational facility, a lab, and a community of residence halls. A brick wall marks the line between the University and the congested street, in case there were any doubts about where one ends and the other begins. But it is low enough that a short-legged dog or an inexperienced skateboarder could pop up onto it, and few would blink to observe either. On pretty days, those short-legged dogs along with great big dogs and puppies might rip around a lush green lawn with owners, friends, and Frisbees for hours before those who wield the leashes have to depart campus, headed perhaps for one of the pet-friendly luxury student apartments just steps from campus, rented houses, or family homes. As they or anyone else make their way down campus sidewalks and drives, they would pass up to a hundred vertically hung flags, each featuring a headshot of distinguished tenured faculty members, flanked by the word "RESEARCH."

But as in any institution, what is visible is rarely a wholly representative view. Just as State University's banner faculty members make up a tiny fraction of those involved in the enterprise of educating undergraduates, so-called "traditional" college students – or those between the ages of 18 and 24, who do not work full time and who live on or near campus, so often adding vibrance to campus' beautiful, open spaces – comprise only 25% of those enrolled at 4-year universities (NACAC 2008). 66% of State University students graduate within four years, but the University does not provide disaggregated data to indicate how traditional students and commuter and working students travel different paths toward graduation. State University students fill commuter parking lots, ride buses, shuttles, light rail, bikes, and scooters from work to class to home and back. Some use motorized transportation (scooters, particularly) just to make it up to a mile across campus in the 10 minutes between undergraduate class periods. Many, whose classes run in back-to-back slots, must arrive late and leave early.

Even so, the image of the "traditional student" as "normal" SU student seems to reign supreme in the collective imagination of many SU students and faculty alike. At the meeting of a faculty committee on blended and online learning, for instance, when a faculty member described SU as a "primarily residential campus," a college dean (and the dean of a vocationally-oriented college, no less) replied, "I've been here thirty years, and that's the first time I have ever heard anyone feel the need to distinguish *this* as a residential campus. Of course it is." Analogously, traditional-aged, resident students participating in this project would frequently inform me when there was an "old dude," "somebody's grandmother," or anyone else over the age of 25 in one of their classes. Wayne, who transferred from a nearby community college at age 22 captured the sentiment of many of the non-"traditional" participants in this study when he remarked, "When you are a commuter, you're on the outside looking in."

During the period in which I conducted fieldwork, from 2010-13, State University implemented a major overhaul of its undergraduate general education curriculum – an overhaul which underwent years of planning through which glossy documents with high academic ideals printed in them were born. This curriculum would laudably aspire to enable students to, for example, "establish the ability to thrive both intellectually and materially and to support themselves, their families, and their communities through a broad understanding of the world in which they live and work" and to "define the ethical imperatives necessary to create a just society in their own communities and in the larger world." In addition to this curricular transformation, and to several innovative undergraduate academic programs unveiled during this time, State University recruited a handful of its eminent faculty members to teach Massively Open Online Courses (MOOCs), garnering national publicity and campus visits from education-innovation luminaries. Even so, nearly all of my study participants as well as their peers whom I spent time with responded with a resounding "Huh?" when I asked what they had heard about these MOOCs. Ambitions of administrators and benefits for undergraduates do not always run in tandem.

In this same time, State University also made a move first to cut nine of its varsity sports teams, and then one year later to reinstate them through a switch in athletic conferences. More than many other aspects of campus activity, athletic conferences signify whom an institution sees as its peers (Stevens et al. 2008). The switch will likely draw a new pool of applicants eager to be part of the conference's fan culture (Armstrong and Hamilton 2013). Already in this conference is State University's most ardently emulated institutional peer, another flagship land grant public research campus, which tends to occupy a slot anywhere from 10 to 15 spaces above State University on the all-powerful *U.S. News and World Report* rankings.[21]

In the 2011-2012 academic year, State University counted over 26,000 undergraduate students (plus another 10,000 graduate students). Twelve percent of undergraduate students at the University identified themselves on their applications as Black, fifteen percent as Asian or Pacific Islander, six percent as Hispanic, and fifty-eight percent as White. Undergraduate identified themselves as male numbered

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21 Indeed, it is the power of *U.S. News and World Report* that studies of student engagement are particularly well suited to challenge (Campbell and Cabrera 2011). These rankings give little attention to what institutions do for undergraduates and much greater weight to the "measurable virtues" of SAT scores and class ranks which students use as currency in the college application process. A focus on student engagement examines student experiences at the institution.

somewhat higher than those who identified as female (53% and 47% respectively). Close to 3,000 students entered as transfer students in the fall semester, and over 1,2000 in the spring. 76% of all undergraduate students were state residents, 23% "out-of-state," and 2% "international." State University does not make available data about the age, employment status, or socio-economic class of its student body.

Creating a Sample of State University Students: Recruitment Methods

To create the participant group, I again followed Flyvbjerg's (2006) description of information-oriented selection where the researcher's expectations inform what he or she includes in the study. In this case, I expected that State University students' academic experiences would be connected in complex ways to many social factors including race, class, gender, age, types and locations of educational institutions attended prior to State University, employment status and history, and major fields of study. Because I expected that these factors had complex relationships to students' experiences – and because I expected that these complex relationships shape *all* students' experiences in complex ways, I designed the sample around volunteers willing to interact in-depth and over time in order to try to get at this complexity. This is a somewhat different approach from the growing, significant, and insightful bodies of research that disaggregate student data primarily by race, class, and gender to show relationships between students' identities and outcomes (cf. Harper and Quaye 2009; Cole 2007; Kim and Sax 2009, 2011).

Yet because my research question asks what students' respective practices of engaging with academic work on an everyday basis actually look like, I did not seek to draw conclusions or make predictions on the basis of predefined factors. Rather, I wanted to see the complexity of how students entered into and interacted with the academic situations they experienced at State University. I expected that designing a study in which I would interact extensively and reciprocally with participants would give me access to richer data than are typically available via survey research that can only ask respondents for proxy indicators of social class or employment status (e.g. questions of household income, occupation, and/or hours worked per week), as they do not have the time, space, or privilege to construct, for example, life histories or employment histories with respondents (Armstrong and Hamilton 2009: 263). Expecting participants' experiences would provide a lens for asking questions of students in other situations with other experiences – and not for making inference or predictions about the types of experiences a student with a certain profile is likely to have – I thus created a "paradigmatic" sample (Flyvbjerg 2006: 230).

Because being part of such a study would be time consuming, and because I had no direct compensation to offer potential participants for their time, energy, and insights, my sample would be volunteers, participating on the basis of continued willingness and capacity to let me interact with them. I recruited students through introductory-level general education requirement-fulfilling courses. I did so for the following reasons: 1.) introductory-level general education courses contain students from a wide range of major fields of study; 2.) introductory-level general education courses are designed for students early in their undergraduate careers, and I hoped to have at least some participants who were likely to be at State University for multiple semesters to come; 3) introductory-level general education courses can seat students at every stage of degree-completion, from first-years to transfers to those completing a final set of credits before graduation, and I hoped participants with a range of academic experiences at State University. I used personal networks to obtain permission from instructors of such courses. With instructor permission, I visited classrooms to announce my interest in undergraduate students' academic experiences and to invite those willing to participate in an initial interview to email me. I did this in three courses in the fall semester of 2010 and two in the fall semester of 2011. In this way, I obtained 34 students for in-depth initial interviews and observations (please see "Introduction to the Participants" and Participants Chart at the end of this chapter). My criteria for inclusion in the study were that students be both *enrolled (part or full time) as undergraduates* at State University and *degree-seeking*.

Getting to Know Student Participants: Data Collection Procedures

The intent of this study was to document patterns in students' understandings of interaction with their college teachers. Because interaction with faculty has been shown to be highly beneficial to college students, I wanted to see what institutional and interpersonal conditions facilitated such interactions. By drawing on the "social work of [students'] imaginations," to borrow Appadurai's (1996) term, I attempted to create a picture of student-faculty interaction as students see it so that institutions might see improvements they might make in the roadmaps they offer their students to support them toward productive and meaningful interactions with faculty and with higher education experiences more broadly.

Gloria Ladson-Billings (2009) demonstrates how ethnographic research lends itself to practical application when participants share the *how* of their practices in a given context: how they go about what they do, how they make meaning of where they are situated and what they experience there. To gather this "how," I follow Ladson-Billings' (2009) primary strategies for collecting and recording participants' experiences. First, I used in-depth interviewing; second, "field observation" and interaction (Goffman 1979); and third, informal conversations (with participants' classmates, instructors, family members, friends, roommates, and romantic partners). I will describe the procedures I used for each of these below, as well as how these strategies led me to a fourth data source – an instructor-reviewing Website specific to State University where I conducted a content analysis.[22]

1.) In-depth interviewing:

I devised an interview protocol with themes I wanted to cover, though my primary intention for initial interviews was, as Ladson-Billings (2009) puts it, "really…simply to have a good conversation with each" student (p. 183). I wanted students to represent their educational experiences on their own terms: in-depth interviewing makes space for such self-representation to happen (McCracken 1988). However, because an interview – and an initial interview, at that – is a formal interaction between two people who often do not know each other in multiple contexts, I knew that it would take multiple, reciprocal interactions to

[22] I obtained Institutional Research Board (IRB) approval for the study in December 2010, renewed in December 2011, January 2013, and July 2013 to continue data collection until July 2014

form understanding of the ways in which they represented their experiences (Dance et al. 2010).

When a student responded to my recruitment announcement, we would begin an email exchange to set up an initial interview. I offered my shared campus office space as a potential site, or any location on or near campus which the student found more convenient or comfortable. My initial interview protocol contained the following questions:

- How did you make your way to State University? What kinds of support did you have from family members, academic mentors, and/or peers and friends in getting here?
- How did you come to enroll in the [course in which I made a recruitment announcement]?
- What course of study are you following/planning to follow here at State University, and how did you select it? What are your classes like this semester? (Previous semesters, if applicable?)
- What kinds of interactions have you had with your instructors here?
- How would you describe yourself as a student?
- With whom do you discuss your academic experiences? What kinds of discussions do you have?
- What were your previous schooling experiences like? How do your State University experiences compare?
- What do you hope to do, academically, at State University? What do you hope your academic experiences

here at State University will do for you?

- Could we meet again – for another interview, for me to join you for a typical "academic day," or both?

Initial interviews lasted between 48 and 158 minutes. At the beginning of each interview, I sought informed consent by describing the research project, including my objectives and research question, and what we would do together when we interacted. If participants agreed (and all did), I presented them with my IRB-approved consent form. I recorded and transcribed each interview (with the exception of two, who preferred not to be taped and for whom I took detailed notes and with whom I checked quotes for accuracy), and offered participants a copy of transcripts. Topics, ideas, and experiences discussed questions and content of further in-depth interviews, as well as conversations held during observations/interactions.

2.) <u>Field observation and interaction</u>:

"[You get data by] subjecting yourself, your own body, and your own personality, and your own social situation, to the set of contingencies that play upon a set of individuals, so that you can physically and ecologically penetrate their circle of responses to their social situation….or whatever. So that you are close to them while they are responding to what life does to them. I feel that the way this is done is not to, of course, just listen to what they talk about, but to pick up on their minor grunts and groans as they respond to what life does to them…That 'tunes' your body right up….You're empathetic enough –because you've been taking the same crap they've been taking – to sense what it is that they are responding to. To me, that's the core of observation."

- Erving Goffman (1989: 125)

Context matters deeply in ethnography (Burawoy 1998; Willis 2000). I wanted to see, firsthand, the contexts in which participants' academic experiences at State University were taking place. To do this, I scheduled with participants times that I could accompany them through their "academic day" or part of it. I obtained written permission from instructors if I was accompanying students to a class. I spent at least 10 hours with each participant outside of interviews, with the exception of five students. Of these five, three were graduating seniors at the time of our initial interview. Another left the university due to family needs the semester after our initial interview, and the fifth student was one with whom I was unable to coordinate schedules, although we maintained email contact. These latter two were returning students with previous Bachelors degrees in other fields; both are male in their 50s and 60s.

It is difficult to say, however, just how many hours of observation I logged. While there were some participants I saw only during scheduled interaction times, others came to find me and "hung out" at my desk in the Art-Sociology building, observed the undergraduate classes I was teaching, invited me to campus events or shows in which they were performing, made plans for lunch or coffee, requested that I "follow" or "friend" them on social networking Websites, and called, texted, or emailed me to talk. I kept detailed records of *scheduled* interactions and observations. Of student-initiated interactions, I made brief notes from which to generate questions in in-depth interviews or during scheduled interactions so as not to betray the trust students extended toward me. I wanted students to decide whether or not they wished to speak about these issues on the record.

During interactions, I made field notes either as I observed – if possible – or immediately following. These notes were open-ended, although what I observed was "tuned" to the field by the relationship I had with the particular participant I was with, as well as by my readings of student engagement literature, ethnographies of education, and studies of the "experiential core" of college life. I used concepts and questions from these literatures extensively in my analyses of the data generated through my field notes, but did not set out explicitly to "cover" these concepts or questions in observations and interactions with participants. But I paid particular attention to themes in the student engagement literature, including:

- Students' respective presentations of self in the situation and interactions at hand (Goffman 1959; Dance 2003; Harper and Quaye 2009).
- Students' relationships with State University, as an institution. Clark and Trow (1966) theorize that the approaches students take to the institution at which they study impact the ways they interact with academic work.
- Students' activities, both academic and extra-curricular, and the "time on task" they give to these activities (Kuh, Hu, and Vesper 2002; Schroeder and Kuh 2003; Astin 1984; Stuber 2011).
- The frequencies with which students speak in class, and the types of contributions they make (Kinzie and Kuh 2004; Laird et al. 2008).

- Kinds and qualities of interactions students have with instructors (Harper and Quaye 2009; Laird et al. 2008; Pascarella and Terenzini 2005).
- Kinds and qualities of interactions students had with classmates and/or academic peers (Harper 2012, 2010; Laird et al. 2008; Pascarella and Terenzini 2005).
- The relationship between the ways in which students use time in the classroom and the ways in which instructors use time in the classroom (Pascarella and Terenzini 2005; Darling-Hammond 2013).
- Types and qualities of feedback instructors offer students, and the relationship of that feedback to learning goals/ course objectives (Kuh et al. 2010).
- Kinds and qualities of student preparation for class meetings and assignments (Arum and Roksa 2011).
- Ways in which students created and/or used opportunities to connect academic work from different classes (Kinzie and Kuh 2004).
- Ways in which students' perspectives developed in relation to academic experiences (Harper and Quaye 2009; Laird et al. 2008).

Because I used a "constant comparative" to organizing my data (Charmaz 2006), I asked these questions again throughout the process of data analysis. I describe my analysis procedures later in this chapter.

3. Informal Conversations:

Informal conversations with participants' friends, classmates, family members, instructors, and significant others took place during scheduled and unscheduled interactions with participants. I followed participants' leads in introducing myself and my relationship to the participant, though I always made sure to identify myself as a researcher studying undergraduate academic experiences. These informal interactions enabled me to inquire further about a particular situation I had observed, and to gain an understanding of the kinds of relationships and resources and opportunities my participants had to process and discuss their academic experiences. I did not obtain informed consent for these conversations (though again, I made my presence as a researcher studying undergraduate academic experiences known and assured those I spoke with that I would not expose them in my research). As in observations and interactions with participants, I made open-ended notes about informal conversations and at times brought these notes to participants for further conversations. These informal conversations were another way of "tuning up" to participants and the context in which they were situated (Goffman 1989). I could hear the "grunts and groans," as Goffman (1989) puts it, not just of study participants, but of people they regularly interacted with, and I could see the ways in which my participants responded to those grunts and groans. In other words, I could peek at how my undergraduate student *participants* "tuned up" to the field.

4. <u>Content Analysis</u>:

Documentary evidence can be a rich source of insight into a particular context (Denzin and Lincoln 2011: 14). Getting "tuned up," as Goffman (1989:

129) put it, to the field of State University undergraduate experiences meant that I could not *not* become familiar with "OurStateU.com." OurStateU.com, an instructor-reviewing website specific to State University. I learned about OurStateU.com through study participants and informal conversations with study participants' classmates and friends. Many of them identified the site as a place to "find someone [an instructor] who is really easy" or to locate a "guaranteed good grade" or an "easy A." One honor student described use of the site as a sort of symbolic boundary between types of students: "I'm not one of those who goes on there. I don't have that kind of flexibility in my schedule…I just really wanted to boost my GPA last semester, so I did that [used OurStateU.com and] got a 4.0 last semester." Much as sociologist Markella Rutherford (2011) observes of U.S. parents' relationships to advice in parenting magazines, "even those who disdain [the texts] consider themselves familiar with the genre and its content" (p. 36). So it appears to be with undergraduates and instructor-reviewing websites. Nevertheless, it is important to state explicitly that reviewers on these sites do not represent all undergraduates and are not meant to. Content from OurStateU.com can show the parameters of a discourse about instructor-student interaction; it cannot show the views and voices of all those whose experiences are impacted by that discourse.

OurStateU.com reviews are by no means a direct measure of the quality of interaction between instructors and undergraduate students; rather, they provide a barometer of cultural assumptions shaping how students make meaning of interactions with their instructors. As of February 17, 2013, the site contained 9,112 reviews of 1,885 instructors by 3,593 unique reviewers. Unlike larger professor rating sites that cater to students across multiple institutions (e.g. ratemyprofessors.com or koofers.com), OurStateU.com features user-generated text in place of site-defined attributes (e.g. rating scales of ease or “hotness”). Users may identify themselves with any user name they choose, or they may remain anonymous. In order to review an instructor, users must enter their schedule into the site, which uses a database to link the course to the appropriate instructor. This ensures that particularly enthusiastic or disgruntled users may express their evaluation of an instructor through one review of any word length but may enter no more than one review per course with any instructor. Users may also opt to assign a rating of 1 to 5 stars for the instructor at hand and to enter an expected grade if they choose. Reviews range from three words (e.g. “BEST.PROFESSOR.EVER.”) to 933 words, with the average just over 115 words per review. However, on average, the lower the rating, the higher the average word-count. One-star ratings averaged over 140 words per review, two stars at 128 reviews, three stars 121, four stars 111, and five stars 98 words.

The site is designed for students to provide information about academic work to other students, with reviews of instructors as the vehicle for doing so. Thus, by design, the content on OurStateU.com is a kind of *peer group conversation*. As Gamson (1992) writes, peer group conversations enable observation of the “process of people constructing and negotiating shared meaning using their natural vocabulary” (p. 17). I used a symbolic interactionist lens to examine how OurStateU.com users construct and negotiate those meanings on the site. Specifically, I looked at the words and storytelling devices reviewers use to represent interactions with instructors. The sequence and relationships among elements of language, as Randall Collins (2004) observes, are powerful meaning-making tools: "Grammar [is] the most public" of efforts to achieve rhythm in conversation, through which to share meaning in interaction (p. 216; cf. p. 71).

Content Analysis Sample Construction and Coding Procedures

To efficiently analyze this vast amount of content, I created two samples of OurStateU.com content: a random sample of all OurStateU.com reviews and a random sample of reviews for a series of courses specially "featured" in the newly overhauled undergraduate general education curriculum. I will describe the construction of each sample in turn. I began with the overall random sample. Entering an alphabetically ordered list of reviewed instructors into an Excel spreadsheet, I assigned each instructor a random number between 1 and 1,885 using the command =Randbetween(1,1885). I then sorted the list to select those numbered 1-100. Among the 100 randomly selected instructors, there were a total of 522 reviews (on average of 5.22 reviews per instructor – slightly higher than the overall site average of 4.83 reviews per instructor). In this data set, 58 instructors are male and 42 are female. 281 (53.83%) of the reviews report expecting a grade of A in the course they took with the reviewed instructor; 133 (25.48%) expect B's; 20 (3.8%) expect C's; one expected a D; two (3.8%) expect F's; 85 (16.28%) do not report grade expectations. From this group of reviews of 100 instructors, I again used an Excel spreadsheet to randomly select *100 reviews*. I openly coded this sample, asking, "How does the reviewer represent the instructor? Self? Peers/readers? What are the people represented as doing? What interactions are described and how?" I coded each line of each review, constantly comparing my emerging results to more preliminary results and questions (Charmaz 2006). From this initial coding, I began to identify broader themes and patterns in the data. As I continued coding reviews, I used these broad themes to refine my open codes into finer codes and categories in order to develop a complete coding scheme.[23] I used NVivo9 to assist with coding and analysis of all reviews.

Limitations of the Content Analysis

Scholarly literatures and my preliminary ethnographic data suggest a number of other ways to construct a sample other than random selection. For one, existing research (Mullen 2009; Stuber 2011; Lareau 2003; Brantlinger 2003; Demerath et al. 2009; Harper and Quaye 2009; Harper 2012) suggest that students' interactions with instructors and the meanings they make of them may vary significantly with students' racial and social class backgrounds. There is no way to effectively know anything about OurStateU.com users' social class or racial backgrounds – nor about their gender, sexuality, or even their majors unless they volunteer related information in their reviews. My own research also suggests that students' identities and experiences have great bearing on the ways they tell stories about their academic experiences and interactions with instructors – as well as the academic interactions they engage in more broadly speaking. Students' identities and experiences provide an important site of analytic leverage for examining the kinds of stories students tell about their interactions with their instructors – leverage not available to me in this content analysis.

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[23] Interrater reliability for this coding scheme was 0.94 on six randomly selected reviews (50 out of 53 coding references).

Instructors' identities also provide a potentially important source of analytic leverage. A wealth of scholarly literature points to the insight that instructors' identities matter very much in teacher-student interactions (e.g. hooks 1994; Ladson-Billings 2009). It would be possible to use university and departmental websites to purposively select a sample of instructors who represent the gender and racial identities of the instructional faculty and staff of State University. However because I am interested in the frames students construct for making meaning of interaction with their instructors, I have chosen a random sample in order to analyze students' discourse about interactions with instructors from a broader angle.

When I told Sean, a junior business major at State University and a friend of a study participant, that I am conducting a content analysis of reviews on OurStateU.com, a site he uses each semester when he registers for courses, he appears concerned: "That data. There's a word for that in statistics – what is it? Skewed? – Your data's going to be skewed." Sean explained OurStateU.com in much the same way that many participants in that ethnographic study do: as a biased source of information that is nonetheless a useful tool for managing GPA and academic workload, for ascertaining the amount of control a student will be able to have over time, energy, and grades in a coming semester. The reviews do not represent all undergraduate students, because, as Sarah, another participant put it, reviews are written only by "kids who either love a class or absolutely hate it." In fact, some reviews themselves bear witness to Sarah's statement, with reviewers remarking that the occasion of writing a review is rare one:

WHAT A GREAT CLASS! I only ever write reviews if I am

> *positively compelled to do so*. (Public Health; 200-level; Grade Expected: A).

> *I have never in my life posted anything like this and I am doing it not to get even but to do a service to the [State University] community: no one should be subjected to what I have experienced this semester*. (Math; 100-level; Grade Expected: N/A)

These statements, along with those of Sean and other ethnographic participants lend themselves to a hypothesis that reviewers' accounts of instructors on OurStateU.com would be laden with hyperbole and with ad hominem assaults. And yet, only 6% were coded for hyperbole (e.g. "*BEST.PROFESSOR.EVER*."; "*This class is the WORST!*"), and only 10% for ad hominem attacks (e.g. *"[Surname] is a HORRIBLE teacher..... Enough said. Simply put. Well he's not horrible, but it's nearly impossible to do well in his class…His tests are made up of stupid analogies, examples, etc. I studied an entire chapter and it was only 1 stupid question on the exam…lectures are boring as hell! All he does it mumble over the mic*."). Yet the peer group conversation visible through OurStateU.com speaks to the data I collected through the other three procedural components of this study. This peer group conversation says something important about the ways in which State University experiences relate to pervasive perspectives among State University undergraduates regarding interactions with academic work. I place the perspectives OurStateU.com reviews represent both in direct conversation with my study participants and in indirect conversation with experiences and ideas they shared through interviews, observations, and informal interactions.

Reflexivity, Relationships, and Researcher Bias

Representation is a practice of power (Hall 1997). To represent is to claim authority to assert the meanings the one representing makes of a situation, experience, or identity as valid, true, or worthwhile. For a researcher, the researcher process entails striving to gain authority from which to represent a situation according to a set of epistemologically specified terms. In positivist models of research, the researcher is detached from the research context – or actively manipulates the context to try to neutralize its impact or make it disappear (Burawoy 1998). A positivist ethnographer, for example, would claim detachment from the context under study. Such ethnographies were typical of European colonizers' accounts of colonized peoples' lives (Said 1978; Smith 1999). Critical approaches to ethnographic research, however, emphasize dialogue and reciprocal interactions with participants (Ladson-Billings 2009; Dance et al. 2010). Working from this critical approach means that my identity and the relationships I developed with participants impact my research: both the data I collected and my analyses of it.

I have to start again here with Goffman (1989), whose advice on this theme I believe I followed even before I knew he had offered it and I was following it. Says he:

> You have to be willing to be a horse's ass…The world consists of becoming very good at doing some stupid little things, like running a boat, or dealing, or something like that, you see. And you're going to be an ass at that sort of thing. And

> that's one reason why you have to be young to do fieldwork. It's harder to be an ass when you're old… (Goffman 1989: 128).

I was willing. I had to try to become good at some ("stupid little"?) things that many of my participants were very good at: social media status updates, strategic "Liking," "re-tweeting," negotiating which social media site was appropriate for which type of communication, the art of scheduling appointments with tech-savvy eighteen-year-olds. I was a horse's ass. But I was also fairly young. I began this study at age 26, married, and already-graduated from college prior to the emergence of Facebook and Twitter. I had been a teacher before entering graduate school - and continued to teach on a part-time basis both at State University and elsewhere. In fact, I was teaching introductory-level undergraduate courses throughout the duration of the study. I am also white, conventional in appearance and dress, and come from a secure, two-parent, two-earner upbringing in which my family was securely upper-middle class and steadfastly oriented toward educational credentials (Heath 1983; Lareau 2003; Brantlinger 2003; Demerath 2009). My greatest resource in reaching out to participants was my sustained willingness to be an ass – or perhaps more precisely, to endure my own "awkwardness" (to use many of my 18-22 year old students' favorite word) – in order to get to know participants and to show them that I wanted to see experiences from their perspectives: I bungled text messages exchanges, I made known my own failings in the classroom both as a student and a teacher, and had little success in overcoming shyness when called on to speak in students' seminars and discussion section meetings, or to "yield and push" my body downstage in one participant's modern dance elective, or to "be present" enough in my hamstrings and my mind in order to touch my toes in another participant's yoga course.

Critical theorist and ethnographer Nancy Naples (2003) writes that insider status is not any specific social identity, but a set of interactions and processes experienced as one moves through particular power dynamics. Goffman (1989) contends that one moves through these power dynamics to become an insider by totally immersing oneself into the field site: do not take a spouse, do not take a partner, do not take anything except maybe a paperback thriller for otherwise lonely hours when you are not furiously typing field notes. This wisdom I could not follow. I had to maintain my teaching job, I had to continue living in my home and attending to affairs that had little to do with my research participants, including doing the laundry and the dishes and scrubbing the bathroom. And I was not about to leave my spouse: I *wanted* to maintain my marriage. Indeed, leaving it all behind to immerse myself in participants' world, as Goffman (1989) advocates, would not have been particularly productive for total immersion into participants' academic experiences: as I describe in the Introduction to Participants, below, participating students had a whole range of living situations, family and home lives, and daily responsibilities to communities and organizations outside of State University. There is, in other words, no way I could have "left" my own situation and entered totally into "theirs." There is no "theirs" there. Instead, I had to balance. But then again, this is what my participants had to do, too.

Indeed, keeping my feet in "my" world enabled a reciprocal relationship with participants that I could not have provided if I were just "one of them." As a teacher, I could offer academic assistance when students requested it of me, which many did regularly (including editing papers, sharing reference materials, guiding reference material searches, and so on). I served as a reference for internships, jobs, scholarships, and summer program applications. I wrote several recommendations for graduate school applications. And because I had stable, living wages through my work, I could also treat them to lunch, coffee, snacks, and the occasional celebratory drink (for those over 21) in thanks for the time they very generously (and uncompensated-ly) shared with me.

Throughout the course of our interactions, I shared with them the inchoate meanings I was making through the research process. This sharing kept me aware of the assumptions I brought to this work, and it kept me committed to the embodied approach to research that Naples (2003) describes:

> An embodied perspective (one that is tied to particular locations and particular positions in the community) emphasizes how researchers' social positions…influence what questions we ask, whom we approach in the field, how we make sense of our fieldwork experience, and how we analyze and report our findings. (p. 197)

Thus it was incumbent on me neither to take participants' comments or experiences at face value, nor to assume that my rendering of those comments or experiences to be definitive representations. Rather, I had to account for the questions I was asking, and account for the ways in which my questions shaped what I was seeing. Willis and Trondman (2002) quote Pascal: "I must do as the artist, stand at a distance; but not too far" (p. 399).

As tends to happen when people meet years, I "aged" over the course of the study. And I grew more sensitive to traditional-aged students' references to thirty-year-olds as "middle-aged." I grew more rigorous as a teacher, perhaps largely because I had witnessed countless examples of how rigor and empathy can and must coexist. I continue to work to put what I have learned into action. I think of participants and thank them, silently and explicitly, as I do.

Data Analysis

Willis (2000) argues that analyzing and interpreting ethnographic data are one and the same process. In taking an "embodied approach," I am aware that the questions I ask in gathering data, organizing it, evaluating it, and constructing from it a significant, evidence-rich story to tell are questions that I pose from my particular social location (Naples 2003: 197). That social location chains my powers of analysis and interpretation to each other. The work of analysis and interpretation is what makes it possible for the researcher to share his or her practices with others dealing with similar questions and issues (cf. Ladson-Billings 2009: 186). And a visionary pragmatist ethic of accountability means taking responsibility for the implications of the questions I ask and the practices of inquiry I use and for the impact they will have on people's lives and experiences. It is because knowledge claims *do* impact people's lives that analysis and interpretation together demand rigor.

I used a "constant comparative" approach to put each situation I encountered with participants (each line of dialogue, each interaction) in conversation with each other piece of data constructed through this study (Charmaz 2006). In other words, I analyze participants' experiences in relation to each other and to the social context in which they are situated: "presenting, explaining, and analyzing" the social forces in which those experiences are located (Willis and Trondman 2002: 395). The objective of this analysis is to go beyond reporting the "nitty-gritty of everyday life" to show patterns and potential for change (Willis and Trondman 2002: 399). To even begin to see what social forces were at play, however, I continuously analyzed each piece of data to other pieces of data gathered through the study (Charmaz 2006). I asked questions of the data that emerged from these comparisons (Charmaz 2006). To keep track of these patterns, I wrote memos, using the writing process as tool for analyzing and interpreting the experiences I had with research participants in the research site (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Charmaz 2006).

This constant comparative approach led me to include another source of data – content analysis – in this project (OurStateU.com, described above). The data OurStateU.com provided were substantively different from the data I collected with participants themselves in that I, the researcher, had nothing to do with eliciting the OurStateU.com reviewers' words or interpretations of their academic experiences. As such, I could triangulate meanings expressed through OurStateU.com with the experiences and understandings my participants shared with me.

In addition, I put my data in constant comparison with scholarly literatures on student engagement, the experiential core of college life, and effective teaching and learning practices, which served as "sensitizing concepts" for my own analysis and interpretation (Blumer 1969). While my overarching question of how undergraduates experience interaction with faculty guided me to an open-ended approach in interviewing and in making field notes through observations and informal conversations, what I paid attention to came from my relationships with participants as well as with on-going scholarly conversations about what sorts of social, normative, cultural, and interpersonal relationships might affect their academic lives (please see the field observations and interactions procedures described above). I used these questions again as I read and re-read field notes and interview transcripts and as I wrote memos and created categories – or "codes" – through which to keep track of patterns I observed in the data (Charmaz 2006). I used NVivo9 to record these codes.

Throughout the process of analysis and interpretation, my so-called "unit of analysis" was the situation in which interaction takes place - not the individuals interacting (R. Collins 2004). I asked what was going on structurally, normatively, culturally, and interpersonally to give rise to this particular situation and to the understandings a participant formed of that particular situation (P. Collins 2009). Even in the case of OurStateU.com reviews, it was the situation as the reviewer presented it on which I focused my analyses.

Burawoy (1998) writes that the ethnographer's predicament is that he or she must live in the social world under study. However, this predicament also proves to be an advantage, as "living" in the "world" I study, I was able to take my analyses back to participants – to put my meaning-making in conversation with theirs, and to use these conversations to generate further questions to take back to the data. Some call this "member checking" (Creswell 2007; Lincoln and Guba 1989). These "checks" were conversations of the nature I had with participants throughout the research process. In them I "checked" to make sure I had rendered their experience of a situation and the understandings they had of it faithfully. I sought participants' critical comments, and I put these comments back into conversation with my own analysis and interpretation of the data.

Issues of Validity

It is not only those who espouse the positivist tradition who might express concern about the validity of my analyses given my relationships with research participants. Herbert Gans (1999), for example, who was trained in the pragmatist, symbolic interactionist tradition, argues that the ethnographic approach to fieldwork is dangerous and self-centered. In many cases, he writes, ethnographic fieldwork becomes "mainly an excuse for the researcher to ruminate on how the site felt to him or her" (Gans 1999: 542). Gans (1999) continues:

> Too much [ethnographic research] has almost nothing to do with research. Too much of it rejects the epistemological and operational principles of [symbolic interactionist fieldwork] beginning with researcher detachment and ending with systematic analysis. (p. 543)

In keeping with the tradition of American pragmatism, Gans (1999) demonstrates faith in empirical inquiry and in subjecting what emerges from such inquiry to rigorous testing (Dewey 1916: 223-4). Patricia Hill Collins (2000) adds to this tradition an explicit emphasis on two particular ethics that must accompany knowledge construction: an ethic of caring and an ethic of personal accountability. In the visionary pragmatist epistemology she puts forward, the construction of knowledge (both through scientific research and through social ties and interactions) comes with the responsibility of being "held accountable for their knowledge claims" as well as for the impact those knowledge claims have on other people (Collins 2000: 265).

My relationships with my research participants have "tuned" me to the context of my research site as well as to the impact my knowledge claims may have on the people there. Context specific knowledge has value within the context itself, for the researcher learning to navigate that context and learning which kinds of analytical tools are required to produce context-specific knowledge, and for the lens it provides for examining other contexts (Flyvbjerg 2006). I do see the case I am studying through this ethnography as a learning process for myself as the researcher hoping to inform my own teaching practice. But it is also a lens for informing practices in contexts beyond the immediate context of this study. Improving teaching practice requires concrete, context-dependent knowledge and analytical tools for evaluating and sharing that concrete, context-dependent knowledge (Darling-Hammond 2013). For those of us in the "learning profession," teacher education scholar Linda Darling-Hammond (2013) argues, our work depends on learning about learning and the structural, normative, cultural, and interpersonal contexts in which it takes place.

Limitations of the Study

By asking what student engagement looks like in everyday practice at a large, public research university, my study by its design can only *answer* questions about the practices of those directly participating in it. These participants are not representative of all State University undergraduates, and so their experiences do not speak for all State University undergraduates. Thus, what comes from this study is not a definitive or predictive answer about anything. My findings can only serve as "paradigmatically" – as a lens through which to ask questions about other students' experiences in similar contexts (Flyvbjerg 2006). Thus, these questions may not "translate" directly to student experiences with academic work at other types of institutions, and they certainly cannot gauge differences between student experiences at different types of institutions, or differences in experiences among students of different groups within the same institutional context. There is a growing body of research into both these worthy questions (Harper and Quaye 2009; Stuber 2011; Mullen 2009; Gerber and Cheung 2008). It is my hope that the questions emerging from this context-specific study might inform questions that get asked elsewhere.

Introduction to the Participants

The category of "college student" is rather a mythical one (NACAC 2008). When "college students" are described in the media as well as everyday discourse on the campus of State University, the issues presented most often concern the "traditional college student" who is between ages 18-24, who does not work a full-time job in addition to school, and who has spent little time, if any, "outside" the educational "pipeline" of K-12 followed by higher education. In reality, so-called traditional students represent only 25% of all students enrolled in college-level education. Only 10% of the students enrolled in college-level education are both "traditional" and living on a college campus (NACAC 2008). Nearly every participant in this study – college students all, notwithstanding only

10 of them fit criteria for the label "traditional" college student — at some point in time referred to the mythical "college student" to describe the expectations they feel about who is and is not a typical "college student."

Only four participants in this study were not in their teens or twenties during the course of the research. Of these four, two are women and two are men. I lost contact with both men –one who left the university and one who took only one to two courses each semester – after the first year of the study. Eleven students were transfer students having attended either a community college or another four-year institution (before degree completion – the two men with whom I lost contact had prior Bachelors degrees and are not counted as transfers though they had attended more than one higher education institution). Fourteen study participants commute to campus, meaning that they do not live in university residences or in near-campus apartments with other students. All of the transfers commute.

Seventeen participants identified as female and eighteen as male. Only one participant identified as queer or gay during the course of the research process; one identified as bisexual. Twelve identify themselves as Black (including three who identify as "Nigerian," one as "Ethiopian," one as "half Dominican," and one as "Guyanese"), fifteen as various European-American heritages (including "Caucausian," "Irish," "Italian," "English," "Russian," and "White/Jewish"), and one as "Egyptian," one as "Vietnamese," one as "Puerto Rican," one as "Indian/Oriya," one as "Korean American," one as "Chinese/Hong Kong," one as "White/Filipino." Seven are first-generation college students. Fourteen study behavioral or social sciences as their major (including Psychology, Sociology, Government/Politics, and Criminology), comprising the largest field from which participants came. Others studied Arts and Humanities (8), Biological or Chemical Sciences (7), Public Health (3), Engineering (2), and Music Education (1).

As volunteers, participants are a self-selected group. Students ostensibly responded to my announcement based on some feeling of interest, and remained with the study perhaps out of kindness and perhaps also out of interest in the core concerns of the study. It is also quite possible that the students who chose to participate did so because they wanted an opportunity to discuss academic experiences – and this study spoke to a particular need. Many spoke about not having a reliable mentor to turn to for academic advise; some spoke about ongoing frustrations with academic bureaucracies; others discussed feeling “left out” or on-the-outside because they commuted or had transferred or were older than the “traditional” college student. (See Appendix I: Participants)

A Note on Social Class and Participants’ Academic Experiences

“We know the surest path to the middle class is some form of higher education,” President Barack Obama said on May 31, 2013 in a plea to Congress to keep student loan rates from rising.[24] He and many other politicians and policymakers often make similar statements. College and class in the United States have a long and complicated history together (please see literature reviews in Chapter 1), and thus research on college experiences and outcomes often says something about – or has implications regarding – social class and social mobility. Tracking mobility means

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[24] http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-politics/wp/2013/05/31/obama-to-push-congress-on-student-loans/. (Accessed 31 May 2013).

that social class has to be operationalized somehow. Common proxies for class include parental education levels, income, occupation, or some combination of these (Hout 2012; Beller 2009; Hamilton and Armstrong 2013). With rapidly rising college costs and the extraordinary student loan burden many contemporary college students face, it is imperative that higher education researchers show the relationship between social class and college experiences if institutions and federal and state governments are to enable equitable higher education opportunities of the sort to which Obama alludes – that allegedly *sure* "path to the middle class." For this reason, a growing body of excellent research compares the experiences of working-class and/or first-generation students with the experiences of middle, upper-middle, and wealthy students (e.g. Stuber 2011; Mullen 2009; Stevens 2007; Armstrong and Hamilton 2013; cf. Lareau 2003).

Social class was not central or explicit in my study design even though it is central to much of the literature I reviewed in designing this study. In other words, I did not set out to take a comparative approach to social class, despite my appreciation of the growing wealth of studies in the experiential core of college life and student-faculty interaction literatures that do use social class as a key variable. Social class intersects with other social factors, including race and gender, as well as lived experiences in complex ways (Collins 2013). I sought an ethnographic approach that would not simplify these complexities prior to seeing them in action. Some richness might be lost if I attempted to compare, for example, the experiences of working-class students to those of middle-class students. So instead, like Armstrong and Hamilton (2013), I use the richness of the experiences students' shared to use Pierre Bourdieu's notion of class shaping a person's *habitus* – their preferences, their taken-for-granted assumptions about social norms and expectations, the groups with whom they identify themselves, as well as their approaches to language (cf. Bernstein 2000), and "ways with words" (Heath 1983). And like Armstrong and Hamilton (2013), I hope to show how the richness of participants' experiences reveals the "messiness" of class (p. 264). I briefly sketch social class profiles of four students who identify themselves as "middle class" to illustrate this "messiness," to say something about the complexities of social class and undergraduate academic experiences.

Four "Middle Class" Students

Chloe was the first in her family to receive a college degree, although her grandmother had taken some college classes. She attended an under-resourced, predominantly African American public high school in an urban district where only four members of her graduating class enrolled in college. She knew at least one of those college-bound students left her studies, at least for a time, and Chloe herself transferred from her initial institution to be closer to home because of costs associated with travel and tuition. Her mother and grandmother worked in stable civil service jobs, as did adults in the families her own family was closest with. As such, she thought of her family as middle class:

> My high school was like, I don't know the word for it, but it was kind of like underprivileged kids. They kind of shunned me because I was more privileged than them. I mean, I'm not wealthy, but my friends that I've had since I was little their parents have jobs,

government jobs.

She felt this privilege shaped her aspirations, and enabled her to gain access to what resources were available at her high school: "when they figure out you care, they can care." Chloe and her family secured grants and loans that enabled her to focus on school without the burden of a job, though she had transfered from the small and caring college at which she began her studies to State University because of the cost of tuition and travel home. She loved the institution at which she began. State University was not the same. But things would be better still, she thought, for her little brother, who had the opportunity to go live with his father and step-mother in a better school district an hour away from Chloe's home with her mother and grandmother. There, he found he liked track and field and improved quickly. Meanwhile, Chloe showered him with information about college, about finding the right school and getting into a good course of study and activities that might garner more than just piecemeal grants and loans: up close and personal higher education insight of the sort that she herself would have liked to have. Chloe now works as a college counselor at a charter high school in her home city, where she has her own apartment just far enough from her mother and grandmother.

Liz was also the first in her family to earn a degree. She transferred into State University from a community college to ensure that the overall price of her degree would be more affordable. She felt ambivalent about being a full time college student at State University. At her two-year institution, just minutes from her home, she was able to work twenty hours a week. Commuting five days a week to State University meant that ten to fifteen of those possible work hours got swallowed up in traffic. Her family insisted that she stop working and focus on school. "I feel like such a moocher," she said. To cope with those feelings, she told herself that school would be her job. Through her studies, Liz felt she found the "words" to describe complexities of social class that she had already perceived:

> I'd say we [my family] are middle class, but I think maybe we weren't always. When I was 10, both my parents changed jobs, they were more managers, and so it was different then. [Brother, four years younger than Liz] he grew up with the more middle class entitlement. [Laughs].

Liz decided on a Sociology major, with plans to work in education, hoping some day to be a high school counselor. She noted feeling particular connections to instructors who shared that they had working-class origins. Upon graduation, Liz married her long-time boyfriend/fiancé, a civil servant in a fairly high-paying job for which his high school degree and on-the-job experience were enough. Liz returned to the hourly job she had worked while at the community college, and eight months after graduation was still looking for a way into the education career to which she aspired.

On the other hand, both of Rick's parents had college degrees and professional careers. While on most forms or surveys, Rick's family would appear squarely middle-class, his college experiences align more closely with those of working class students. Rick's mother died in a car accident the summer after he graduated from high school and just days before he was to start at his local community college. Shortly thereafter, Rick's father took an early retirement option from his job and began to "gambl[e] a lot." Rick's mother had saved for her only child's college education. They had agreed together that he would begin in the more protected community college environment and then transfer to a four-year school when he was more certain of an academic path. But Rick was still not sure of his academic path, although he kept with the plan of transferring to State University. Because he felt he had not fully upheld the bargain with his mother, he decided he should pay out of pocket for as much of his State University tuition as he could rather than use up her gift in a way that violated their agreed-upon terms. And so he waited tables up to 30 hours a week and commuted from his family home over an hour away, crashing on a nearer-residing friend's couch most Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays. He often mused of his degree plans that he might "drop it altogether and join the military," although he followed up such comments recalling his mother's firm belief in his need for a Bachelors, and that he was curious to "see where I can go" with the credential. He still has at least two more semesters' worth of credits to complete before he will be eligible to graduate.

Both of Allie's parents also had college degrees in addition to advanced degrees. Her father had a professional job in a major metropolitan area, and her mother had not worked outside the home since Allie and her younger sister were born. Both Allie and her sister attended public high school in their very affluent and overwhelmingly white district a few states up the coast from State University. But Allie describes her success in school as a product of individual labor rather than shared resources:

> I was pretty self-driven all the way. I was kind of like…one of those all around kids…I wasn't too happy about coming here. This was my safety school. The reason I came here was because my

> senior year in high school the teachers went on strike and they didn't write letters of recommendation for any of the seniors applying to college…that impacted my class so greatly, like no one got into the school they wanted to go to…I had the grades to get into all those [Ivy League] schools I applied to.

In contrast to the *relative privilege* through which Chloe, for example, explains her experiences, Allie describes *relative deprivation*, a pattern Stuber (2011) finds common among middle and upper-middle class college students. While culturally very much a part of the upper-middle class, even Allie's social class realities were not static. During her final semester at State University, the week before she was to travel to visit the two reasonably highly ranked law schools to which she was accepted and for which her parents had agreed to pay, Allie's father was laid off from his job. Unable to sell the house they could no longer afford, her parents would be unable to pay her law school tuition. Allie applied for loans and chose the school located in a region of the country with a lesser cost of living.

The characteristics of social class that matter most for this study are the experiences through which people form expectations of institutions, the interactions that form those expectations, and the interactions that emerge in relationship to those expectations. These experiences are not products of social class alone, but rather emerge from systematic social inequities (including social class, race, and gender). What is important about these experiences is not exactly what it is about social class, race, and gender identities that shape them, but rather that relationships to these systematic social inequities do as social class theorists Bourdieu (1984;

with Passeron 1977) and Lamont (1992) postulate: they condition preferences and the symbolic boundaries people draw around what they see as worthy. These processes of evaluation shape how people interact with institutions and those they encounter within them as well as how they make meaning of these interactions.

CHAPTER 4: Remaking the Grading: Can Points Add Up to Care?

'I'm Soo Sorry and She Doesn't Even Care'

Detritus documents the hours Lyndsey and Felicia have held down their study spot: Red Bull cans and calorie-free juice bottles, empty Dorito bags and a sprinkling of bright orange dust, gum wrappers, chop stick wrappers, and one plastic container with capsized garnishes and a crumpled paper napkin soaking up a small puddle of soy sauce. In the middle of it all, the two sophomores glow, hovered over the screens of their nearly identical chic silver laptops. They have decided they want to major in Psychology – a limited enrollment program at SU – and they have an exam tomorrow in their introductory "weed-out" course. As the afternoon passes into evening, they have put their intense focus on pause only to offer prompt responses to text messages and to greet a precious few select, present-in-the-flesh individuals making their way through this high-traffic, food-friendly space on the bottom floor of SU's main library.

The women are quiet and busy, mouths already slightly open, when Lyndsey lets out a gasp. Deadlines had expired for not one but two weekly assignments for a lower-level Public Health class, a course she signed up for this semester because of its reputation on campus and on OurStateU.com as an "easy A." The first of these forgotten assignments is already eight days past due. Lyndsey types frantically on her computer for the next 30 seconds or so. And then keyboards go silent again. Lyndsey cries out once more half an hour later. A response to her earlier bout of typing has arrived. "*Whaat?*" she whimpers at the message:

> Lyndsey,
>
> See syllabus regarding policy on late assignments.
>
> Best,
>
> LVC[25]

Below it, Lyndsey's original message:

> Hi! so i was just checking blackboard for the upcoming due dates and saw that i never turned in Chapter 5&6 responses. I must have completely blanked. i really have no idea that i didn't do it. hopefully there is something i can do. i'm sooo sorry!!

I have Lyndsey's syllabi; I pull up the Public Health course. I am upbeat when I respond that by the looks of it, partial credit is still available for both of Lyndsey's belated submissions. And then I watch in dismay as my words hit Lyndsey like a blunt weapon. These are dirty words, *partial credit*, and they deflate poor Lyndsey, who truly accidentally "just totally forgot. I mean, I told her I was sorry... I really need a solid A in this class, and she doesn't care."

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[25] I have changed all names, course titles, and any otherwise identifying information about students, instructors, and specific courses.

Calculating effort prior to course enrollment each semester was central to Lyndsey's plan for achieving academic success. The "easy A" course she was supposed to be able to forget freed up time for the "weed-out" course she wanted to invest time and energy in; it offered what she expected would be free insulation for any cold winters that might befall her GPA. This chapter will show how Lyndsey's tactics for calculating effort before semesters ever began were far from unique. It will also show how such tactics shaped interactions students have with faculty, as well as how these tactics shaped some students' notions of "care" in student-faculty relationships.

A New Look at Becker, Geer, and Hughes' "GPA Perspective"

Lyndsey's calculations would hardly surprise Max Weber (1904), who theorized that modern, capitalist society creates a need to quantify and control every known variable of social life. These quests for efficiency and predictability, Erving Goffman (1967) elaborated, allow people to manage the problems that arise from uncertainty. Such uncertainty, or "fatefulness," weakens a person's potential power and influence, because it places them at the mercy of unfavorable events (p. 174-5). Hence, Goffman (1967) wrote, people seeking power seek "forms of insurance" against the "untoward," to embrace the "Calvinistic solution to life" (p. 175).

Charging undergraduates with Calvinism is nothing new. It has been well over fifty years since Becker, Geer, and Hughes (1968) analyzed the emergence of a means-ends approach students took to interacting with faculty in the wake of the "academic revolution," wherein grades became the primary way in which universities acknowledged and rewarded their students. These researchers crafted a now-classic metaphor – that students and faculty negotiate a "contract" wherein faculty agree to tell students exactly what they need to do to "make the grade" in exchange for students otherwise leaving them well enough alone. Anyone, students told Becker, Geer, and Hughes (1968), *really anyone who got to college*, could make the grade if they could calculate effort appropriately. The key, they believed, was to get all the details about grading from faculty, and then they could put in the effort.

GPAs continue to matter to institutions and therefore to their students. But institutional and cultural dynamics around grading have changed. Perhaps foremost among these dynamics is grade inflation. By the late 2000s, A's have come to represent 43% of all letter grades given in US 4-year college and universities, compared to 15% in 1960 and 31% in 1988 (Rojstaczer and Healy 2012). Grade inflation colors the background of the interactions I observed, as does another process that has shaped the scene we see here: the extent to which grades and test scores have defined current college students' entire scholastic lives. They and their loved ones have been receiving and fretting over their grades, test scores, or both since Kindergarten, Pre-Kindergarten, or even prior.

These processes set the stage on which undergraduates engage with their institutions of higher education. The interactions and observations described here hinge on the ease of access to repositories of university-provided grade data and the proliferation of grading information-sharing conversations. At SU, the number of A's, B's, C's, D's, and F's an instructor assigns in any given course are available through the university's online course evaluation system. Students have integrated these data into the student-created and operated OurStateU.com. Any student-user can then supplement these distributions with their own description of what it took, in their experience, to "make the grade." So where conversations among undergraduates about grading are nothing new, the number of people participating in any one conversation can increase exponentially, and the information that they share is inscribed indefinitely into the world-wide web. This means that a Google search of any SU instructor's name turns up a bar graph of the grades he or she has given and a litany of comments on the effort it took or did not take to make them.[26] In addition, during the course of my fieldwork, the Student Government Association successfully lobbied the Faculty Senate for all course syllabi to be made available prior to course registration.

These dynamics enabled many students to see the "contract," so to speak, as something separate from – and settled prior to – face-to-face interaction with faculty. And a contract fixed prior to interaction opens up space for negotiating contingencies. In the sections that follow, I describe the processes of 1.) defining effort prior to interaction, 2.) interaction to negotiate contingencies and interactional tools for doing so, and 3.) the social-class-based dimensions of these interactional strategies. In this way, Chapter 4 directly addresses both of my research questions. We will see here some terms that certain students use for evaluating quality of interaction. And we will see how these terms of evaluation are situated in the context of their lives, their

[26] In addition to OurStateU.com, cross-institutional databases such as RateMyProfessors.com and Koofers.com provide similar information. I focused on OurStateU.com as this was where students I encountered and SU's student newspaper directed most attention and enthusiasm.

experiences, and the particular institutional setting in which they are now situated. What is more, we will also see a subtle yet significant difference in how the present students' terms for evaluating quality of interaction with faculty differ from the terms employed by the students in Becker et al.'s (1968) study. Specifically, instead of defining effort required to "make the grade" through interaction with faculty, as Becker et al. (1968) observed, the students we will meet in this chapter both expected and worked to define effort prior to interaction with faculty.

Defining Effort Prior *to Interaction*

It is no secret that very large institutions like SU have a very large array of courses, which vary on the basis of discipline, class size, course level, and even classroom seating, windows, and times of day, to say nothing of the variations formed by the people actually present (or not present) in them. Becker, Geer, and Hughes (1968) saw each of these structural features impacting the relationship between teacher and student. Even so, they argued, regardless of course type or organization, the student's approach to effort remains the same:

> Students decide what the terms of the contract are by observing the words and actions of the teacher as the semester goes on…[O]ver those four and a half months…they search for an understanding of what the teacher will demand in return for a given grade. (Becker et al. 1968: 63)

> In short, when a student first enters a class, he does not know what will be required of him and on what basis he will be judged…The ambiguity, however, decreases as the course continues. (Becker et al. 1968: 70)

It is interaction that burns off this fog of ambiguity, Becker and colleagues conclude. Students see how instructors grade early papers and tests, they observe how instructors behave in the classroom, and even if they have little to no personalized contact with the instructor, they learn through indirect interaction – observing the instructor's way of speaking, praising, critiquing, lecturing, and highlighting what will or will not be part of the grade—exactly what effort they must put into their class performance. From these interactions, "students decide what the terms of the contract are" (Becker et al. 1968: 81).

Here, on the other hand, is how the SU student newspaper's 2012 editorial board sees students entering into contract with faculty:

> In a few weeks, the maze of class registration will start again. Students will be trying to find class times that work with their schedules or attempting to work it out so they don't have to be up before 10am any day, coordinating with their friends so they're not alone, and most importantly, figuring out which classes they'll be able to manage in one semester. Outside of reviews from OurStateU.com and anecdotes from peers who have taken the class already, students have little means of knowing exactly what they're signing up for. There's no way to see what the teacher has planned for the class – or has done in

> the past – leaving students simply hoping they have not signed up for too much… [27]

While Becker et al. (1968) represent the contract as emerging through interaction, the 2012 editorial –published in response to a student government initiative to mandate that faculty make syllabi available before registration (up to five months prior to the start of a course) –presents the student-faculty contract as something that precedes interaction. What accounts for the difference?

Recall Lyndsey's forgotten Public Health assignments. Here, her central problem was not figuring out exactly "what will be required of [her] and on what basis [she] will be judged." She had that information from the syllabus, and she got further information (about the importance of the syllabus) from her email exchange with her instructor. The problem vexing Lyndsey most was that she had planned, in advance, exactly what grade she would get in the class (an A), for exactly what amount of effort (little). And now, only part way through the semester, that plan was in jeopardy. But how had she been so confident to make such plans in the first place?

OurStateU.com played no small part. Lyndsey found the course there, through a feature enabling users to search by "GPA," or the average of grades given in any given course, across all sections and all students, since the creation of OurStateU.com in 2008. The "GPA" for this particular course was a 3.76, with 57% of grades given over the four semesters that the course had been offered since the site was established

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[27] < http://www.diamondbackonline.com/opinion/article_dbafcafc-02d0-11e2-ab6d-001a4bcf6878.html>. (Last accessed 3 February 2014). (If I use this piece elsewhere, I will remove the source to protect confidentiality/anonymity of the research site.)

as A's. 18% of all grades given in the course over these semesters were A+'s.[28] As the course was lower-level with no prerequisites, Lyndsey had reasoned that if she needed an A, this seemed a likely place to find it.

In addition to grade data for each course in SU's current course catalog, OurStateU.com compiled reviews of instructors teaching them. In my content analysis of a random sample of 100 of these reviews, 74% of reviews presented expositions on required effort as a central focus. The following four examples are typical of reviews reinforcing the idea it is necessary to be able to define effort prior to enrollment:

> You MUST go to lecture. Don't think you can just rely on the slides posted online…Pay attention…he often says plainly what will be on the exams and/or what to completely ignore…Lots of these suggestions seem kind of inconvenient and maybe even annoying to have to do…Trust me…DO YOURSELF A FAVOR and listen to me. I beg you. *(200-level, STEM, Grade Expected: B)*
>
> ***
>
> Save yourself the time and stress. Don't take this class. Get another professor for this class – it is an INTRODUCTORY class. *(200-level, Business, Grade Expected: B)*
>
> ***

[28] OurStateU.com aggregates grade data from SU itself. The same grade information, though not with the "GPA" indicator, is available in SU's own course evaluation system.

Beware: To those ones who are taking this class in the future. Please do not expect this course will be a easy A. Professor Gupta is an Excellent professor. Her lectures are moderate to attend, you can say it might be boring or interesting. It will all depend on how much effort and time you spend. The two midterms average was approximately (I can't remember exactly) about 53%. Considering this horrifying test result, ones planning to take this course and expect to received [sic] an A should be prepared to:

A) successfully bond with statistics

B) spend moderate to high hours of studying

C) pull all-nighters to ace the final

There was about 4 people who received a high A. Her curve saved many students to receive a higher grade. Also her drop-lower midterm and add 15% to final exam OR if both midterms not taken, final accounts to 60% of your final grade policy is very beneficial. In my opinion, the course was very confusing which made me force to actually understand the topic. The grade you received will have a high relationship between the time you are willing to spend. She is very knowledgeable about the course. My last advice is that try enjoying the course or force yourself to enjoy the course.

(300-level, Social Science, No grade data provide)

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Just participate in class and complete the assignments on

> time and you will get an A easily. *(200-level, Public Health, Grade Expected: A)*

Interestingly, the necessity of defining effort prior to enrollment is not simply to "make the grade" but rather the need to "do yourself a favor" and avoid the "time and stress" of confronting more work than expected.

Forty-two of these reviews use at least one imperative statement in which reviewer speaks directly to reader to say *here is what you need to do if you want to make an A*. In 23 cases, these are warnings to the reader to stay away: *you will not make an A, or at least not for any effort that you can count on ahead of time*. The second review above, and the following two below illustrate such warnings:

> Will fuck up your GPA and probably laugh about it to her cats. Doesn't care that shes messing with your future. Tried to give us a 2% curve until there was an uproar. *(200-level STEM, Grade Expected: B)*

***

> Do not take this class! She literally expects you to memorize half the book in depth. She does NOT curve but she does drop the lowest test score, which still won't help you. She really doesn't care about her students. Her lectures are boring and she isn't helpful…I asked my other friends in [a prior offering of the same course with a different professor], and he told me he didn't have to memorize much at all. Her exams are also a bit long…On the bright side, she was an approachable professor. *(100-level, STEM, No grade data provided*)

In this latter review, the reviewer relates "care" to expectations about effort: care as the degree to which the instructor's expectations about rewards for effort match what the student expected entering the course. The reviewer distinguishes this notion of care from the interpersonal quality of "approachab[ility]."

It is important to note that 6% (N=6) of OurStateU.com reviews construct a different definition of care. Care, for these reviewers, can exist despite the unpleasant surprises of unexpected effort. But in making this case, these reviewers acknowledge that their understandings of what counts as care may differ from those of their peers:

> …Dr. Higgins is definitely not approachable, but I don't mean that he's a monster. Just bad dad. He'll teach you what you need to know in a way that makes you want to hate him. He seems to care about his students, but doesn't like to show it. He hints at test questions and test[s] you on them. So his tests are pretty straightforward. Whatever he repeats in class about, he'll test you on. But you'll have to study somewhat. (*300-level, STEM, Grade Expected: A)*
>
> ***
>
> Whoa! Don't listen to the bad reviews [previously written about this instructor]. They're plain naïve. Dr. Redy is an amazing professor. I'm writing this review 2 semesters after taking Redy, and I can honestly say she is one in a million. She cares about her students and keeps her lectures entertaining. She is more than willing to get to know every last student in her 300-kid lecture hall. There are other professors you will have to take who don't give fudge about your future, your grade or anything about you… (*100-level, STEM, Graded*

> *Expected: B*)
>
> ***
>
> Professor Carrington is very energetic and genuinely cares for her students. You will enjoy her classes, however I cannot emphasize this enough: THERE IS A LOT OF WORK. Like everyday, an hours worth. Minimum. Unless you are really into English or want to actually expand your writing ability, do so, but at your own risk. She grades very roughly and demands no less than your best effort for a traditionally easy class. *(100-level, Humanities, Grade Expected: A*)
>
> ***
>
> Dr. Nettle is really a genius professor. It was an honor having him teach in my class. He is really good at engaging the students in his presentations and even better at stimulating thinking and logic. It was the first time that I was actually asking the 'why' question in a history class. Of course, as such an intelligent professor he has very high expectations which makes the class a little intimidating but so usefull [sic] at the same time. I would say don't take the class if your major doesn't relate to the subject, and be happy if you're required to take it because buildings and theories disscusted [sic] ate [sic] the roots of architecture! (200-level, Humanities, Grade Expected: A)

For OurStateU.com users, these reviews acknowledge, being able to define effort in advance of enrollment likely outweighs a "one in a million experience" with a “really genius professor” who “genuinely cares” -- even if the reviewers themselves disagree. This kind of care, in other words, comes with warnings: *expect to be expected to put in more effort than you had expected*. Or, take another class.

Unexpected Effort Violates the “Contract”

These acknowledgements of differing definitions of care on OurStateU.com were outliers. As Dr. Redy’s reviewer implies in cautioning readers “Don’t listen to the bad reviews” coming from people unhappy with the grades they received, unexpected efforts are the font from which grievances flow. Twenty-four percent of OurStateU.com reviews sampled detail unexpected effort. Nineteen of these are unambiguously negative in tone. The following two examples illustrate OurStateU.com’s general sentiments toward unexpected effort:

> I love history, but this teacher was horrible. You learn interesting things in the class, but her lessons are in no kind of chronological order, but she expects you to know everything in that order. She also requires a lot, and I mean a lot of reading. I usually don’t mind reading but when it is 8hrs worth every [week] it gets old. And you have to take tedious notes while reading because she wants you to know every detail in the readings the next day. She doesn’t do the teaching, she goes over the readings. I was really excited about this class, and I was very disappointed. *(400-level, Social Science, Grade Expected: B)*
>
> Business writing as a class is irritating, but Professor

> Talcott managed to make it worse. There is an annoying amount of group where there was really no need for it…Final project is a 15+ page business proposal based on research. This is supposed to be an easy but helpful course for juniors and seniors trying to fulfill a ridiculous requirement and it ended up being way too much work.
> *(300-level, Humanities, Grade Expected: A)*

Perhaps because the contract, as Becker, Geer, and Hughes (1968) observe it, is under construction from interaction to interaction, *Making the Grade* deals little with perceived contract violations[29]. But for SU students who see contracts pre-exisiting interaction, unexpected effort is a serious transgression. Even though instructors might argue they have little involvement in the pre-existing contracts students perceive, OurStateU.com users argue that instructors know – or are responsible for knowing – what students expect from their course. Professor Talcott's course is a "ridiculous requirement" that is "supposed to be easy"; the Social Science professor "disappoint[s]" her 400-level student with heavy reading requirements; Professor Carrington (the 100-level Humanities instructor mentioned in the section above) turns a "traditionally easy class" into one that requires a warning.

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[29] An exception is the following passage:

> Should [a professor], in [students'] view, fail to live up to his end of the bargain by ignoring or changing any provisions of the agreement, they will be angry and upset. Since they often "construct" the terms of the agreement out of an analysis of what may be offhand remarks by the instructor, he may be quite unaware that such a binding commitment has been attributed to him and may well violate it unintentionally. Indeed, he would probably refuse to agree to its terms in the first place if the bargaining were more explicit. (Becker et al. 65)

Like Lyndsey, mechanical engineering major David and neurobiology major Pallavi were avid OurStateU.com users. Pallavi stressed that the parameters of effort for any given course laid out on the site were "extremely true," though she had difficulty explaining why. For Pallavi and her friends, "it just works," and every semester, from her sophomore year (when she discovered it) forward, she counted on it to manage her workload. For David it worked because "they know…Teachers know…they know when it's supposed to be an easy class."

Not acting on that knowledge accordingly, both Pallavi and David agreed, left many students with few choices but to breach the contract on their end. I never observed Pallavi or David act in a way that was inconsistent with the academic honor code, however both students voiced empathy for those who did. Explains Pallavi:

> It's like, it's extremely hard…You have to balance everything… And I feel like, sometimes it's unfair when kids do well on something, because it's like, well, I had all these other things…So, I can understand why people do it [take shortcuts]… I always do [the work], but I can understand why people don't.

For David, if a course was not part of one's major than it was not part of the effort most students agreed to undertake in the first place. And if you did not agree to an effort, but were still required to undertake it, any contract a student perceived would feel violated by the other party, inviting a student's own violations. And the incidents of academic dishonesty I did observe fit with David's description.

Civil engineering student Jenna, part of a highly selective and prestigious academic honors program, had chosen a math class required by her major because she had heard – through peers and through online reviews – that there was no need to attend lectures and no penalty for not attending. Mid-semester, however, without notice or explanation from instructor or department, the teacher of the course changed. And to combat what seemed to be an epidemic of absenteeism, the new instructor instituted daily clicker quizzes (though only for extra credit, as, in fairness, it had not been part of the syllabus). Jenna knew of the shift, as she did attend class on occasion, and she was enthusiastic about the extra credit opportunity.

On the day of one of our regularly scheduled meetings during Jenna's junior year, I sat in my first session of the new instructor's course, scouring backs of heads for Jenna's waterfall of blond hair. But I could not find her in what was now a substantially fuller room than it had been with the previous instructor. Nor did I find her as students poured out into the halls after clicking in their quiz answers at the end of class. I stood in the hall, looking around. And then a door to a set of emergency stairs opened, and in breezed Jenna, waving to certain exiting classmates as she came over to give me a hug. "I skipped today," she announced. And then a male voice from behind: "What are you doing here?" Jenna: "I told you I had a meeting." She introduces me to the male student, we bid him farewell, and Jenna and I head to the student union. I ask her about missing the bonus points. She laughs that she "better have gotten them": "That kid you met today, he had my clicker. So it worked out."

Because Jenna had signed up for her particular section of the math course on the premise that attendance was not necessary and non-attendance was not detrimental, it felt unfair to her to miss out on bonus points for not going to class when going to class was not an effort she had planned for her semester.

She accounted for other evasions of academic integrity in similar terms. For instance, she explains, general education requirements were not an effort she agreed to undertake:

> I came here with a lot of [gen ed credits, filled through APs]…but I needed to get my [Arts and Humanities requirement] which are my two least favorite things. I hate English, I hate writing. I took [200-level literature course]. It was like, I don't even know what it was. I had to read like 8 books. I didn't read them but I got an A in the class. You have one paper to write the whole semester. Like a 12-page paper…so I just used what I already had from high school…I'm just glad I came in with a lot [of credits]. I know what I want to do. I know a lot of people who don't, and that's why [general education classes] are there, but I don't need [them], because I know what I want to do. I wouldn't have taken those classes [without the requirements].

Legitimate efforts, for Jenna, were those to which she agreed, in advance. Anything else was a violation. Jenna did not rank direct interaction with faculty as a priority in dealing with these perceived violations, in part, she felt, because classes for her major were so large and so rigorous, that no one would care how she felt about any efforts she had not anticipated. Others took a different view: direct interaction was necessary to make provisions for unexpected efforts or for efforts that did not meet with their expected rewards.

Writing Care into the Contract: Apologizing; Eliciting Empathy

Before he joined us in his usual seat at the front of the classroom, Matt's friend Zach padded up to the instructor of their 200-level social science elective.

> Zach: I wanted to tell you the reason I left early the other day was because I have been really sick. I went to the doctor – my mother came to get me. They think I have walking pneumonia again. I'm really sorry. I can get a doctor's note or whatever. I didn't want you to think I was being rude or anything.
>
> Instructor: Oh no! I hope you feel better!
>
> Zach: Thanks! Also, the next day I went to that lecture. I had to leave early because I felt awful, but is there any way I could get some extra credit?
>
> Instructor: Oh! What did you think? What were you able to stay for?
>
> Zach: Honestly, I don't even know. I just, I literally felt awful.
>
> Instructor: Oh I'm sorry to hear it.
>
> Zach: Thanks. So can I maybe still get some extra credit for going?
>
> Instructor: Mmm, well…I'll have to think about that.

Sickness, busy-ness, or "completely blank[ing]" (as with Lyndsey's Public Health homework) opened up potential for avoiding inspection even with regard to predefined and expected efforts. Contracts could not always accommodate present needs, raising the specter of unexpected effort. In such cases, I frequently observed two interactional strategies for creating this space to avoid inspection.

Matt in fact demonstrates both of these, sometimes synonymous, strategies here: apologizing and working to elicit the instructor's empathy.

Negotiating contingencies differs from the construction of the "contract" as Becker et al. (1968) observed it in two significant ways: first, interacting to account for contingencies has to do with individual needs. The key question at stake is not: *How will the instructor deal with performance in this class?* (Becker et al. 1968: 64). But rather, *How will the instructor deal with me and my particular situation right now?* Second, the interactional strategies of apologizing and eliciting empathy suggest a different attitude toward grades than that which Becker and colleagues observed. For the University of Kansas students in the late 1950s, the opportunity to earn grades is an opportunity to demonstrate mature adulthood, the ability to take care of one's self. The practices of apologizing and eliciting empathy suggest that for some students who use them, the need to get grades comes with the burden of being at another's mercy, the burden of feeling unable to care for one's self.

The idea that grades leave some students feeling in *need* of care rather than equipped to take care of themselves suggests a shift from the meaning that Becker and colleagues (1968) found undergraduates making of grades. For instance, in the example above, Zach makes a plea for pathos. He makes a plea for personalized attention in a system that otherwise feels quite impersonal: at the time of this incident, during his sophomore year, he has not declared a major. Both Zach and Matt were preparing to apply to the Business school, and a high GPA was a necessary criterion – an impersonal indicator on which futures hinged. Zach needed the highest grades he could possibly get, meaning every point-opportunity had to be exploited.

But that left students like Zach at the mercy of those who do the grading – who decide what these point-opportunities will be. And these decisions were made without regard for his personal needs. He would have stayed at that extra credit opportunity, he pleads, were he not sick enough that his mother had to come get him. There must be something else he can do for extra credit, he implores, at a time when he is well.

Advocating for personal needs is a strategy Annette Lareau (2010) suggests that children learn from a style of middle-class parenting she calls "concerted cultivation." Middle-class parents, she observes, believed that they had "the right and responsibility to intervene in the classroom" and "did not hesitate to criticize teachers'" assignments, tests, projects, or pedagogical approaches if they perceived these approaches to challenge, in any way, their child's individual needs (p. 177).

Zach, Matt, Lyndsey, David, Jenna, and Pallavi – the students discussed in this chapter thus far – all came from upper-middle class families, and from prior schooling situations where other upper-middle class students formed what they saw as the center of the student body. (I discuss this further in the section that follows.) For such students, from competitive, resume-focused environments, grades and test scores and other resume-worthy pursuits had colored their lives since pre-kindergarten (Friedman 2013; Stevens 2006). The need for grades and test scores and other virtues that could be measured and documented was relentless, leaving the students stuck in endless pursuit of them feeling vulnerable and in need of care.

Apologizing and eliciting empathy were individualized interactional tools that, for many students, fit the task of pursuing such care. Though I did on occasion observe classrooms of students working to elicit an instructor's empathy (e.g. bargaining for an extended paper deadline amidst the onslaught of mid-terms), these strategies appeared much more frequently as individual approaches. In part, this may have had something to do with the "hugeness" of SU: as Jason put it, "You're more timid in a class with 200 or 100 people." But to pin the individual approach on class size alone would be misleading. As a classmate of Eddie's, a white woman majoring in Sociology observed (to a class) that any time one speaks in front of a class, of any size, "there's all this judging." Exposing personal needs is, after all, a vulnerable enterprise.

GPA is, as Becker et al. (1968) observed, at base an impersonal system: "the exchange of performance for grades is, formally and institutionally, what [a] class is about" (p. 79). If, as Lareau (2010) suggests, middle-class students have learned that interventions for personal needs often result in greater access to institutional rewards, apologies and/or efforts to elicit empathy open up space for such maneuvers. As we will see in the example below, however, apologizing and eliciting empathy need not always go together.

The following exchange took place in a course on Audiology that I regularly attended with Justicia, a Sociology and Math major who herself had a hearing impediment and was thus interested in the field. The instructor was a man in his early 40s, who frequently stayed after class to talk with students about the field of audiology and working in it. He regularly held planned review sessions, and added in impromptu sessions on several occasions. He shared with students his own return to graduate school in his 30s to earn his PhD, as he himself believed that caring teachers were central to preparation for fulfilling careers. He continued to work clinically, and thus his classes took place at night. On this particular evening, he has handed back a test. Most of the students have left. Justicia is methodically working through her graded exam when a young woman, the only other student still in the room, sighs aloud to the instructor:

> Student: I thought I did so much better on this one. I am just such a poor memorizer, so tests like this are always really stinky for me.
>
> Teacher: What did you get on this one again?
>
> Student: An 88. And I got an 80 on the last one. It's not like I have to get only A's, but now it's just really not possible [to get an A in the course].
>
> Teacher: Well, when I'm looking at final grades, I will see your improvement, and that counts for something.
>
> Student: The problem is that this class is based on four tests, and that is just stinky for me. And audiology is what I want to do with my life, so I put so much into this.
>
> Teacher: Aren't most classes at this level based on tests?
>
> Student: No, in 311 we had labs and papers and cases.
>
> Teacher: Well, I can see your effort and engagement. And clearly you are learning the material.
>
> Student: I mean, look at my study guide. I've got everything – all the Power Points – I write all over them. It's just that I'm a horrible memorizer, and so that means tests are stinky for me.
>
> Teacher: Do you think it's possible you might get overwhelmed by the study guides?

Student: [Her syllables shift from plaintive and lyrical to clipped and curt.] What do you mean?

Teacher: Well, worrying about individual bullet points more than how they go together, maybe?

Student: No, I mean, look at my notes. Look at my Power Points [flapping the print-outs]. I have everything. The problem is that I am a horrible memorizer, and these tests are about memorization.

Teacher: Sometimes I wonder if Power Point makes things more difficult.

Student: More difficult than *what*? Than you just talking? Are you kidding? It's been proven, like studies have proven that Power Point makes it better. I couldn't learn if you were just talking.

I never spoke with this student (and she did not appear to notice or at least pretended not to care that Justicia and I were present during this dialogue). I do not fully know where she is coming from. And this kind of pathos argument – an argument teetering down from pathos toward full-on ad hominem attack – was hardly something I saw on an everyday basis. More often, unwanted feedback from faculty resulted in after-the-fact comments, and perhaps avoidance of future interaction. (For example, when Allie's faculty mentor through the honors college, a Biology professor, extolled to her the virtues a Biology degree when she was considering switching her major from Biology to Public Health, Allie wanly defended her interest in Public Health, and only after leaving his office said aloud, "Ugh, it's like, 'Don't tell me what to do.'")

The audiology student argues that the teacher's methods of evaluation put her at a disadvantage; she claims Herculean efforts only to fall short of glory.

She needs the teacher to know how this impacts her – how she thinks it impacts her future. When he alludes to a different approach to studying, the interaction takes a turn for the worse. She *knows* how to study for a test, she contends. She appears to have a certain notion of what effort ought to result in what outcome.

There is little doubt that she has elicited his empathy: his tone is sympathetic, he responds to her concerns, he looks at her tests and materials. But this seems not to be the kind of empathy that she seeks. Empathy is incomplete without acknowledgement of where the feeling is coming from. And in this case, the feeling is coming from the institution's formal rewards systems. These tests and grades, the student charges, can wound her GPA, her resume, her plans for working in audiology. And surely this must feel frightening if her institution offers her no compelling reason to see how a connection with this professor and practitioner in her desired field might help her career more than an A.

Remaking the Grading: Social (Class) Origins of Ensuring that Institutions Care about Individual Needs

Scholars have long observed that social class has informed students' understandings of grades and the strategies they use for pursuing (or not) pursuing them. For instance, concern for grades had once been the burden only of "outsiders" – working-class students, commuter students, students from marginalized groups (Thelin 2006; Horowitz 1987). "Gentlemen" set their sights on C's: why bother with grades when academic work had no effect on inheritance? Their institutions of higher education saw and rewarded their familial prestige rather than their academic work (Bowman and Santos 2013).

It was Becker et al. (1968) who contended that social class no longer mattered in these understandings: everyone needed grades because everyone needed ever-higher credentials. Professional occupations – which came to have greater bearing on social status through the 20th century (Collins 1979) – required credentials. And decisions about eligibility for credentials often hinge on grades.

And so, the GPA perspective with its focus on "making the grade" was, as Becker and colleagues (1968) showed, a shift in student-faculty interaction that reflected major changes in institutions of higher education following the Second World War.[30] "Making the grade" – or trying to – was something Becker and colleagues (1968) saw as a (newly) universal enterprise among undergraduates on the University of Kansas campus.

More than half a century later on a similar campus many states away, "remaking the grading" does not appear quite so universal. Rather, remaking the grading reveals how those with a "familiar rapport" with their institution use that rapport to demonstrate a kind of virtuosity around institutional rules – a mastery of the "tricks of the trade" (Bourdieu 1984: 234, 426). The practices of apologizing and eliciting empathy seem to be learned strategies for ensuring impersonal structures meet personal needs. They were ways of signaling virtuosity.

These strategies were often variations on approaches to interaction that students from privileged educational backgrounds had been coached in. For example, many had received advice to "just talk to your teachers, they want to hear from you,"

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[30] Please see Chapter 1 for a fuller discussion of these changes, the so-called "Academic Revolution" (Jencks and Riesman 1968; Clark and Trow 1966).

as Erick put it. This wisdom informed what Erick saw as his skill of knowing how to keep in touch with his teachers, to keep them apprised of his personal needs. Erick came to SU for the "photojournalism scene." Hailing from an elite private high school in a West Coast state, he brightened up SU's drab mid-Atlantic winters with his high-end fluorescent t-shirts and a California cool that was a rare commodity at SU. He worked for a campus publication put out by the living-learning honors program he was a part of, and he frequently missed class to cover events. (And when he did attend, he lugged his expensive camera equipment with him into lecture halls). He showed a similar pride around his "teacher-handling" skills, at times even offering tutorials for select friends. After one such lesson given to Jason, his buddy, sometime-classmate, and a participant in this study, I asked Erick where he learned to do this. He shrugged, smiled: "I just always have. Teachers like it when you keep in touch."

Here is how Erick "kept in touch," as observed in one general education course he and Jason took together:

> Erick introduces himself personally at the end of class, shaking the young-ish female instructor's hand and telling her how interested he is in her subject. He adds that he is the photo editor for [honors group publication], and he thinks what they are learning in class will be very relevant to his photojournalism, and he'll be very torn on the occasions when he has to miss class for his photojournalism work, which he wants the instructor to know, only happens in necessary circumstances. The instructor looks pleased to be interacting with a student; most of the others seemed to have fled. She says

> something to the effect of looking forward to hearing more about his work when they discuss relevant topics in class, naming a few specifically. Erick replies that in fact, *next* class is one that he will have to miss: "I just want you to know that my grades are really important to me, so please let me know if I miss anything important from class."

Erick makes a fairly seamless move here from doing "deference" toward intellectual content to doing "deference" toward grades, where deference is the "little salutations, compliments, and apologies which punctuate social intercourse" (Goffman 1967: 57). Hallett (2007) finds deference is potential symbolic power: doing deference can induce compliance. And Goffman's (1967) argument that receiving deference requires first showing it are corroborated by this interaction: when Erick does deference to course content, the instructor reciprocates with deference for Erick's potential expertise in it. When Erick does deference to grades, his hope appears to be that his instructor will defer to his care for grades in grading his work, in particular not holding missed classes against his grade.

Indeed, Erick used similar plans elsewhere as well to avoid inspection or the repercussions of inspections (in the form of graded work or opportunities for points) that he felt to be unjust. For instance when he missed an extra credit opportunity that took place in a class session he had missed, he approached the instructor: "I was just wondering if I could make up the extra credit, or do a different extra credit?" The instructor declined, assuring him his grades seemed fine. Erick persisted, remarking on how much the extra credit opportunity would mean to him: "My grades are just really important to me." The instructor again declines to offer make-up extra credit. As Jason, Erick, and I left, Erick reported feeling "judged": "I mean, I'm sorry for my busy schedule."

Lyndsey's strategy of being honest with her professors (as when she informed her Public Health professor that she "completely blanked") came from a similar kind of coaching Lyndsey had received in her prior schooling – a received wisdom that it is good educational practice to reach out and be open about personal needs. Lyndsey was the younger daughter of divorced parents who were both the children of Caribbean immigrants, and she came to SU from the wealthy suburbs of a major metropolitan area several states away. Her high school had emphasized college preparation from day one. It was, as she described it, "really competitive…one of those schools, like that it's a public school, but it might as well have been private. A public school that really just could have been private, but completely public, and we lived in the district." In fact, her high school was ranked by U.S. News and World Report as one of the top thirty in the nation and one of the top ten in its state. It offered an array of Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) courses, many of which Lyndsey took. She never once expressed to me any of her academic frustrations as doubts about her college readiness.

Lyndsey was comfortable enough with the idea of college coursework to send documented correspondence to an instructor in the style of a text message to a friend, and to include in this correspondence a request for special consideration in grading. From the perspective of social theorist Basil Bernstein (1971), students like Lyndsey, who grow up in relative social and economic privilege, learn a way of communicating that flows smoothly across the contexts in which they find themselves, from home to school to places of business. They routinely free what they wish to communicate from the constraints of any particular context. They do so through use of standard, or prestige, forms of grammar rather than localized variants, and through explicit attention to a regulative context. In other words, the middle class child learns to demonstrate awareness of authority relationships through his or her ways with words, addressing the teacher differently than a peer and differently still from a familiar adult (Bernstein 1971; Heath 1983).

Bernstein called the language middle-class children and their families speak the "elaborated code" – a universalized mode of communication requiring little translation or clarification, seen as legitimate by authority figures who are then willing to open gates for them to access rewards and opportunities. One great advantage of the middle-classes is the fluency they gain both in using elaborated codes and in switching back and forth between elaborated codes and codes "restricted" to the particular context from which they emerge because of their access to formal organizations and authority figures in formal organizations. They get many opportunities to practice the elaborated code. A second great advantage that these privileged classes have is their ability to restrict access to these arenas. Those who do not have access have less opportunity to practice. Less practice means less fluency in the language formal organizations favor (Bernstein 1971: 176).

More recent research has highlighted the advantage middle-class children gain from the time they spend in formal organizations. The lives of middle-class children and their families, finds sociologist Annette Lareau (2010), are jampacked with activities run by adults – many of which require fees and formal applications to participate. Family schedules center on children's formal activity schedules (Lareau 2010: 63; Heath 1983: 243). One key reason for this is because such activities "certify" children's capacities and experiences (in contrast to free play or informal activities that do not produce credentials of any sort). Formal activities help families produce "measurable virtues" for their children, which can be documented on resumes and college applications (Stevens 2006; cf. Lareau 2010; Friedman 2013).

What is more, middle class children may often see their parents take an interventionist approach to these activities – and to the work of the adults who organize them (cf. Friedman 2013). For example, Lareau (2010) observes as a ten-year-old gymnastics student watches her mother march back into the gym after a practice to ask the teacher "Is there a problem?" (p. 172-3). The teacher that day had offered many (presumably too many) corrections of little Stacey's technique. By observing her mother's response to this less-than-ideal situation, Stacey got a lesson that "it is reasonable to expect organizations to accommodate the specialized needs of an individual," and that there is a particular language – indirect criticism, or questioning ("Is there a problem?") – for conveying expectations without openly initiating conflict (Lareau 2010: 173).

Such lessons – the special priority that participation in formal organizations takes in middle-class family life; the power of language to demand that formal organizations meet personal needs – do not merely increase students' feelings of familiarity with formal organizations like schools. They also enhance students' understandings of how to achieve desired ends within such organizations. For Bernstein (1971), the elaborated code reveals a kind of embodied knowledge of how to navigate formal organizations and how to gain advantages within them. Lareau (2010) and others provide empirical evidence to show that middle-class children and families spend large amounts of time and energy relating to formal organizations (cf. Friedman 2013; Stevens 2006). These extensive experiences enable them to develop familiarity with formal organizations and the ways they allocate rewards.

But in contrast to Bernstein's (1971) theory of social class and its "codes," Lyndsey's use of language does not suggest fluency. She uses neither of the two key features of the elaborated code Bernstein articulated: she does not deploy prestige forms of grammar or spelling (e.g. inconsistent capitalization and colloquial orthography ["i'm soooo sorry!"]) in the service of her request, nor does she compose her email in a way that demonstrates awareness of the instructor-student relationship as the institution defines it. What she does deploy here is the knowledge that regardless of how the institution *defines* the instructor-student relationship, it does not *see* it. What SU (and other credentialing institutions, perhaps including her prior schools) see and reward are grades.

Remaking the grading is an interactional toolkit that many students bring with them to SU. The following episode took place in a class session led by upper-level undergraduates in SU's prestigious and highly selective academic Honors program for the program's incoming first-year students. The topic at hand was academic integrity. Justicia, an Honors student herself, a participant in this study double majoring in Math and Sociology, and a senior at the time of this episode, was leading the discussion:

> Justicia runs the first-years through the "Is it Plagiarism?" scenarios she had prepared so that they could talk about what constitutes academic dishonesty and why academic integrity matters. "Tell me, plagiarism, yes or no?" she says, and begins to read the scenarios aloud: someone uses information from websites without providing references; someone paraphrases ideas without citing them; still another "recycles" her own work to turn in for other classes. When it becomes clear, however, that all the scenarios Justicia reads out are in fact punishable instances of plagiarism – violations that would cost students not simply a loss of points on the assignments themselves but could potentially result in a grade of "XF" in the course, a ruckus starts rising up, up, up, until it very nearly swallows Justicia's lesson plan. "It's so random," one young man calls out. "It's like they *want* you to fail!" hollers another. Cell phones are down, faces are up; nods and noises of agreement echo around the room.

The "why academic integrity matters" piece of the lesson plan ended up lost in a conversation about fairness. For these students, the tactics Justicia described were things "everybody" did, because they "had" to in order to get all the work they had to do done and come out with the grades they expected. The rules felt "random," they argued, because only very few would get caught, and those who did get caught might suspect they were being targeted by an instructor who "want[ed] [them] to fail."

Even as SU's Honor Code forbids academic dishonesty, it rewards students who are adept at remaking the grading. To rise in the *U.S. News and World Report* rankings, SU, like many a U.S. college or university, needs incoming undergraduates who were in the top 10% of their high school classes. They offer special incentives, like the Honors program these first-year students were entering, to attract such students. If students achieve certain institutionally desired outcomes, such as admission to further prestigious credentialing programs, systematic efforts to examine the tactics that got them there may be rather anemic.

Affluent, competitive "college prep" environments may sharpen the tools used for remaking the grading. Anthropologist Peter Demerath (2009) found that in one affluent public high school, compromises of academic integrity often result in celebrated outcomes. Parents participated too. For example, some privately tested students who were not immediately admitted to gifted and talented programs. And if private tests did not enable parents to convince officials that their student belonged in gifted and talented education, then similar testing services were employed to ensure students received extra time on tests and other favorable accommodations. One teacher explained it to Demearath (2009) this way: "There are no average kids. You are either gifted or special ed. And special ed. is a good thing here" (p. 56).

The students in this study who "remade" the grading when they could came from similar environments: largely affluent and highly competitive. They believed that "everyone" from their high schools attended four-year colleges directly after high school. The few they knew of who did not were seen to be deviating sharply from expectations. David's description of two high school friends attending community college is telling:

> The community college is basically extended high school. I don't really see it as college. Most people don't. I guess you could say they went to college, but not really.

David's assessment of what counts as a worthy educational biography is hardly unique among the students in this group. In fact, for many, attending SU itself, as a selective but not most-selective four-year school signified a falling-short. Only one in this group of eleven, Jenna, described her decision to attend SU as fulfilling her own expectations and those of her family and community, because SU would allow her to participate simultaneously in three notably selective sub-groups: honors academics, the engineering school, and the Greek system. As Public Health major Jason put it, coming to SU was a result of having been "a bad student in high school." Everyone at his competitive elite high school had been gifted, and the "good" students only went to the Ivy League.

Social class appears to be more influential here than race or gender. Five of these students I regularly observed engaging in these practices are white, two are Asian American, two Black, and one Indian American. Five are female; six are male. Yet while social class conditions this narrative, it does not determine it. Not all students from similar class backgrounds adopted these interactional tools. I discuss contrasting approaches in the next chapter.

"Just Checking," or How Else Can I Show Faculty 'I Care about Your

Class!'

To say that those who engaged in remaking the grading saw re-made grades alone as high quality interaction with faculty would be a fallacy. But the strategies of remaking the grading resurfaced in student attempts to interact with faculty on a deeper level. I call these the "just checking" strategies after an oft-repeated phrase I heard throughout my fieldwork – a phrase I frequently heard participants use when trying to create a reason to interact with a teacher.

"Just checking" questions are concrete and have clear answers. Often these answers are found in the syllabus. And the common (and quite reasonable) instructor response of "Please see the syllabus" could deflate some students, who felt their attempt at interaction had been rejected. Anthropologist Rebekah Nathan (2005) interprets these kinds of questions quite differently. Nathan calls students' strategies of "just checking" the "art of the technical question." She interprets the art of the technical question as a tool students use to elicit even more information about grading – quite like Becker et al. (1968) observed students interacting with faculty.

But "just checking" questions did not produce information about grading that students did not already have. As one young woman put it after her "just checking" question was referred to the syllabus, "I *know* it's in the syllabus. I can *read*. I wanted to talk to *him* [professor] about it." But in many cases, students long engaged in remaking the grading had a limited interactional repertoire when it came to interacting with those teaching them. Here Danielle, respectively, on the matter:

> Like, I want to have a relationship with my professor, but I am really nervous and I don't know what to talk to them about. Like,

> ‘Hi, my name is Dani, help me study or something?’ I really don’t know what to say...

At the time she made this comment, Danielle was a junior. She maintained an astronomical GPA, even with a Chemistry major, and she earned multiple scholarships both before and during her college career. Similarly, Pallavi echoed Danielle’s concerns and added to them what she perceived as the importance of having a concrete question if one hoped at all to establish any sort of connection:

> I wouldn’t really go to [a teacher] and be like, ‘Oh hey’ …If you go to a teacher and just be like, ‘Hi, I’d like to introduce myself,’ they’re like, ‘Do you have any questions?’ They kind of want you to ask them something, so if you don’t have any questions, then you kind of can’t go to them.

These (rarely satisfying) strategies of establishing connection are comfortably situated in the toolkits these students already possess for interaction with faculty. In the story below, I show a typical – albeit prolonged – way such interactions play out.

The Chorus of “Just Checking”

By Lyndsey’s senior year – nearly two years after the nearly-forgotten Public Health assignments – Lyndsey was enrolled in an upper-level social science requirement for her Communication major. She liked the class; she could see how the content was relevant to the career she had decided to pursue in public relations. And she loved the professor. She thought he was “adorable” (“*Like my grandfather*!” her friend from class cooed). She wanted his respect; she wanted to show him that she was competent, capable, and that she cared about the subject matter. The class was small by SU standards – 30 advanced undergraduates, with 22 to 25 showing up on any given day – and the professor succeeded in getting the class talking about everything from pop culture, drug use, and fashion to international trade, global terror networks, and social movements.

On this particular day, the professor arrives late. Seven minutes late. "Hi," he says, plopping his books down on the podium. No one replies. And then Lyndsey:

"Can we talk about the paper at some point?" Her sparkly slip-on sneakers are kicked out from under her desk, nearly touching the table that their distinguished professor has made a makeshift seat.

"Talk about it now," he agrees, launching into a list of example approaches to the assignment, quite similar to those listed on the assignment sheet distributed in class last week while Lyndsey clacks away, trying to type his words verbatim into her notes. The professor pauses. Lyndsey's hand shoots up again. He nods in her direction, inviting her to speak.

"So, just checking – do we have class next Wednesday?" Next Wednesday is the day before Thanksgiving. The University will be open.

The professor throws out his arms in theatrical dismay. "The speed of travel keeps getting faster, and the time people say they need to get home keeps getting longer. I'll be here next Wednesday. Will anyone else be here?"

Stray giggles, then silence.

Lyndsey is smiling, though somewhat nervously. "So the paper is due the Monday after?"

Professor: "It's on the syllabus. Anyone have the syllabus?"

Silence.

Professor: “Carved in stone on the syllabus.”

Then Lyndsey: “If we have drafts next Monday, could you look at them?”

Professor: “Sure.”

Lyndsey: “Should we email them to you, or do you want it printed out?”

Professor: “That’s on the syllabus too. Paper. Bring me paper. It’s due the Monday after Thanksgiving, on paper, per syllabus. Paper drafts any time before that. More questions?”

The professor is pleasantly disgruntled here, partly amused with his brood. And it is clear that the students *like* him. They smile when he walks in (often quite late), timid hands go up when he asks questions, laughter is forthcoming for most of his TV references, and students quickly jump in to help him when he attempts to speak of fashion. And yet, even here, even in this relatively small seminar at the senior level with strong evidence of student-faculty rapport, “just checking,” is the sharpest tool in these students’ interactional toolkits.

Conclusion

“Remaking the grading” marks a shift from the “making the grade” perspective that Becker and colleagues (1968) observed in the early wake of the academic revolution. In that era, students approached interaction with faculty as a process of obtaining information about grading, interacting to find out exactly what it would take to “make the grade.” In many ways, however, SU students in the second decade of the 21st century do not need to interact with faculty to get this information. Data about effort and outcomes that particular amounts of effort will produce abound in the ever-popular OurStateU.com along SU's own course evaluation system, repositories of syllabi, and the university's response to the student government's early syllabus mandate.

And so, students who see effort as something they *can* define prior to interaction approach actual interactions with faculty differently. Having already determined the grade they will get and the effort it will require, their interactions with faculty center on not losing the grade they plan to get. In other words, student-faculty interaction here is a little bit less about "making the grade" and a little bit more about "remaking the grading."

Two interactional tools for remaking the grading are apologizing and eliciting empathy. In these interactions, students work to create space in the already-established "contract" for personal exceptions. For students with a GPAs and resumes perspective, caring is not simply about accepting apologies (as Zach's professor did) and empathizing (as the audiology professor did), but about a very specific kind of empathy: empathizing by cooperating in students' need to produce measurable virtue, by ensuring that the student still gets the A they expected for roughly the amount of effort that he or she had expected.

Where Becker et al. (1968) observed students representing grades and the grading system as a resource for establishing mature, adult identities, the tactics of apologizing and eliciting empathy paint a rather different picture. The degree to which institutions demand and reward "measurable virtue" leaves students focused on pursuing it feeling vulnerable and in a position of never having enough.

Grades, for those whose educational biographies have prioritized and emphasized the production of measurable virtue, leave students in need of care rather than providing grounds for proving they are able to care for themselves. For these students, faculty who "care" implicitly recognize this and respond with what students know institutions value most.

There are clear social class dimensions to the interactional style of "remaking the grading." Each of the students who employed it came from relatively wealthy backgrounds and had highly competitive and "college-prep"-focused high school experiences. In addition, as full-time students without full -or demanding part-time jobs (none worked for pay more than 5 hours per week), GPAs and honors for academic work and extracurricular involvement were their primary means of relating both to SU and to the economy more broadly.

A rich body of sociological research illustrates how middle class students gain an embodied knowledge of formal organizations through the "concerted cultivation" their families provide (Lareau 2010; Friedman 2013). Bourdieu calls this a "familiar rapport" (Bourdieu 1996), in which students natively speak the institutional language (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Bernstein 1971; Heath 1983; Lareau 2010). Looking at student-faculty interaction, however, I find that such familiar rapport may be more of a "limited repertoire." These students speak the language of measurable virtue, a dialect of SU's institutional language, to be sure, but a dialect different from the dialect of other institutional inhabitants. Students with a GPAs and resumes perspective are fluent in a dialect that helps them access institutional rewards, but this is not equivalent to thorough institutional knowledge. Hence it is important to distinguish here in a way that Bourdieu (1996) does not the limited nature of the "familiar rapport." There is, in other words, a difference between knowing how institutions work and knowing how to work institutions. The next chapter discusses this further.

CHAPTER 5: The Downside of Living Up

Rick transferred to State University (SU) a semester before earning his Associate's degree at a local community college. He knew SU – a massive research institution and the flagship of his state's university system – was big, full of opportunity, a place where "you really have to be proactive on your own." So he was. When he did not do well on his first exam in a "weed-out" biology lecture, he was concerned but hopeful: there were resources available to help him. He reviewed his test with his TA and decided that if his professor had office hours, maybe he ought to review the test again, with the professor. And so off he went to the office hours of this tenured academic with many years experience teaching the course. After Rick introduced himself, the professor commented: "You should really be talking about this with [your TA]." Post-visit, Rick observed: "He didn't seem very interested in talking to me." In fact, Rick continued, even the layout of his office sent the message that student interaction was not a priority: "His desk is facing the wall. It didn't seem like a very good place to talk to a teacher." The D Rick had earned on his first exam gave way to something more like a D+ on his second exam. But Rick was not ready to give up.

Stop number two was Dr. Dell, his physics instructor. This time, Rick armed himself with a specific question. It was not directly related to course material, but Rick was curious, and based on his experience in his biology professor's office, he figured having something to ask might at least break the ice. So Rick took his question and headed to Dr. Dell's office hours. Dr. Dell did not have an answer. However, Rick was elated when he reported back that Dr. Dell "went out of his way to ask someone else about it, which was really cool, and he came back and was like, 'This is how it works'.... I was like, 'Wow.'"

Rick attended Dr. Dell's office hours again, and he began to meet other students there too. At one point there was a group so large they had to find "this bigger room, like a conference room, like a mini-classroom." Rick decided to take another class with Dr. Dell the following semester; Rick asked him which courses he would be teaching. The answer? None. Dr. Dell was a visiting researcher. Rick was disappointed, but still impressed:

> The fact that he had a research thing going on, he worked here for research purposes, but also, could even, in a sense, well, some people are like, 'Teaching isn't bad," but he was like, "I really like this!"

Rick did well in the physics class, but because he had done poorly in biology, he was unable to enroll in the more advance biology courses he would need for pre-med. He changed his major, targeting athletic training. During his first semester in his new major, he took a required "activities course" on movement. Rick loved it and signed up for an elective with the instructor, an adjunct, the following semester. But chatting with his instructor before and after class, Rick began to worry about where his interests were leading him - would his course of study prepare him for not just a job, but a career? He knew what the departmental website said (career opportunities abound!), but that teacher he so admired? Rick learned through their after-class conversations that "he's also a server in a restaurant, so I don't know, he's still a server, I'm already a server...I just really don't know." Rick did not sign up for courses the next semester; he did sign on to more shifts at his restaurant.

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Rick's experience sheds light on the main idea I will deal with in this chapter: that students' awareness of institutional ideals of student-faculty interaction and their everyday practices aimed at living up to those ideals too often did not result in what they understood to be high quality interaction. This was largely due to a lack of institutional support for both teaching and learning relationships and for the interactions –sometimes time-consuming and rarely resulting in an immediate, measurable outcome – through which such relationships are built. While there are cases in which students in this study succeeded in using their efforts to live up to institutional ideals to build teaching and learning relationships, such cases (for example, Thomas, profiled in this chapter) are the exception rather than the rule.

What is more, short falls of these educationally purposive practices – in spite of institutional ideals claiming to support them – appear to have the steepest effect on students already facing significant obstacles to college success. (For example, think of students like Rick who at times worked nearly 40 hours per week to pay for tuition or who had few close significant others with experiential knowledge of higher education). In other words, distance between institutional ideals and students' everyday practices appears to reveal another way in which advantage accumulates to the already advantaged while disadvantage mounts for those already facing difficulty.

In contrast to the students who deploy a strategy of "remaking the grading" to seek care from faculty, students who use a strategy of "living up" to institutional ideals intentionally worked to build knowledge of SU and the resources it provides for teaching and learning relationships. While remaking the grading relies on implicit knowledge of how to negotiate for personal needs within an institutional environment or assume that what they do as universally advisable (things that "everyone" does or ought to do), living up to institutional ideals entails that students make explicit their aim to understand the particular institutional context in which they are situated as a basis for developing relationships.

Like Chapter 4, Chapter 5 also addresses my first research question – *what terms do students use to define for themselves what counts as high quality interaction with faculty?* What becomes clear here is that there are striking differences in the terms different students use to evaluate quality of interaction with faculty, and that these differences are socially patterned. Whereas Becker, Geer, and Hughes (1968) found that the GPA perspective to be a lens that nearly all undergraduates used to evaluate quality of interaction with faculty in the mid-20^{th} century, I find that the priority students place on the implicit workings of institutional rewards systems (Chapter 4) versus on an institution's explicit ideals (Chapter 5) shape terms used to evaluate quality of interaction with faculty. In addition, it also addresses my second research question – the question of how students make meaning of interaction with faculty, as meaning-making practices are situated in a particular socio-historical and institutional context by showing how these students who look to SU's stated ideals to develop expectations about student-faculty interaction came to take this approach. I use the literature of inhabited institutions to show one way that "loose coupling," or the distance between institutional narratives explaining formal structures and people's interactions with those formal structures that I discussed in Chapter 2, plays out in everyday life.

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Scholarship on student-faculty interaction shows that undergraduates learn norms for interacting with faculty over time spent at their institutions. Confusion may reign in the early years, but as they advance in their programs, they gain know-how and confidence (Cotten and Wilson 2006; Kuh and Hu 2001). Yet two problems emerge if institutions accept this status-quo of early-year uncertainty. First, existing research suggests that early contact with faculty contributes to better institutional experiences and better outcomes in terms of grades, post-graduation prospects, and institutional satisfaction (Fuentes et al. 2012; Tinto 1997). So students able to access such early contact – often students involved in special programs such as Honors Colleges or living-learning programs (Cotten and Wilson 2006; Kuh and Hu 2001) – are at a considerable advantage over peers outside such programs. In addition, those within such programs are more likely to be traditional-aged, full-time, residential students than to be working, care-taking, or commuting students (Silverman et al. 2009).

This foreshadows a second problem with leaving students to learn student-faculty interaction norms over time. When nearly one-third of US undergraduates take non-linear paths toward their degrees – moving, like Rick, between institutions, often multiple times, and/or punctuating semesters of study with semesters of greater focus on working for pay –leaving student-faculty interaction up to incremental sense-making means students like Rick have a much steeper climb toward learning the norms. What is more is that non-linear students are more likely to commute, care for families, work full-time or close to full-time (Silverman et al. 2009), compounding the challenges they face in realizing long term teaching and learning relationships with faculty.

For Rick, layers of complication piled onto his pursuit of meaningful interaction with faculty when he discovered that at a research institution like SU, he and fellow students were not the only ones feeling unmoored at SU – nearly all his instructors seemed to be on the move, too. Visiting instructors, teachers moonlighting as waiters, graduate students, and the occasional professor with a squadron of TAs filled his schedule. And in this, Rick is no outlier. Contingent instructors comprise over 70% of instructional staff at schools like SU (Street et al. 2012), and they fulfill myriad roles and responsibilities simultaneous to teaching courses, from practicing as professionals in their specific fields to teaching courses at up to half-a-dozen different institutions to working toward graduate degrees and/or to simply cobbling together unrelated paychecks just to get by. In short, even when students like Rick create bonds with those who teach them, there is no guarantee that those faculty will be around the next semester, as Rick experienced with Dr. Dell. And those whom they are able to find again, as with Rick's movement instructor, may not have access to the sorts of institutional resources that regular faculty have at their disposal (from title and authority that lend prestige to recommendation letters, to deep understanding of institutional culture and norms, to private office spaces for meeting with students outside of class).

The Problem with Roadmaps in a Loosely Coupled Institutional Environment

Scholars and practitioners affirm the importance of challenging assumptions that students "just know" how things work at their institutions – or that they can or should "figure it out" for themselves (Kuh et al. 2010). Such assumptions, long held at many of the most visible and celebrated colleges and universities in the US, sustain patterns of inequity in two clear ways. First, these assumptions tacitly benefit those who have mental maps (or social networks) of their campus or others like it at their disposal from generations of alumni kin and other insider connections. It is no coincidence that such students tend to be white and upper-middle class, as this group has enjoyed many, many generations of higher education access (Kim and Sax 2009; Cole and Griffin 2013). Second, when institutions assume students will "figure it out," they leave those without insider advantages to fend for themselves, reproducing inequitable patterns of stop-out and institutional dissatisfaction for others for under-represented groups (Harper and Quaye 2009; Tinto 1993). Hence, providing students with "roadmaps" for success at every stage of their engagement with their particular institution is widely recognized as a best practice in higher education (Kuh et al. 2010; Harper and Quaye 2009).

At the same time, however, scholars who study how institutions work find that they operate most smoothly when everyday work activities are "loosely coupled" with formal rules (Meyer and Rowan 1977; Hallett 2010). In their famous article, "Institutional Organizations: Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony," Meyer and Rowan (1977) ushered in what many believe to be a new era of institutional analysis (Hallett 2010; Weick 1976). Their argument is very much what their title suggests it would be: formal structure is myth. It is the story that people tell of how things work – a story that legitimates an institution's activities to both internal and external audiences. It is very rarely the prescription for everyday operations.

Meyer and Rowan (1977) describe this loose coupling of myth and everyday reality as a strength. Loose coupling allows local actors to respond to local needs, to be creative in their meeting their daily work demands. Loose coupling allows myth to remain a social resource: a source of shared understandings that can be interpreted as needed. Inspections to bring about tighter coupling can destroy morale by "violat[ing] the assumption that everyone is acting with competence and in good faith" (Meyer and Rowan 1977: 359; cf. Hallett 2010).

If most institutional actors keep their everyday activities quite distant from formal rules, how effective can any roadmap be? As Kuh and colleagues (2010) envision it, roadmaps to success begin not from formal institutional rules but from effective educational practices. Drawing on data from decades of research in the field followed by 20 in-depth case studies at a wide variety of US colleges and universities, Kuh and colleagues (2010) find that "what students *do* during college" counts far more than any content that they learn or any characteristics they embody (p. 8).

Providing roadmaps to student success means, then, that institutions both build channels for these effective educational practices *and* clearly and explicitly show students how to access these channels (Kuh et al. 2010). The five benchmarks of effective educational practice include extent of opportunities for active and collaborative learning, academic challenge, interaction with faculty, enriching educational experiences, and perceptions and experiences of a supportive educational environment (Kuh et al. 2010). These five benchmarks are the same dimensions along which the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) assess the extent to which institutions engage their students in educationally purposive practices.

Like NSSE's questions about student-faculty interaction, Kuh and colleagues (2010) observe that interactions like discussing grades or assignments with instructors, talking about career plans with faculty, getting prompt feedback on academic performance and so on are interactions that let

> …students see first-hand how experts identify and solve practical problem. Through such interactions, teachers become role models, mentors, and guides for continuous life-long learning. (p. 12)

Yet as Meyer and Rowan's (1977) concept of loose coupling suggests, institutions may enumerate such best practices, but inhabitants will use institutional decrees in localized and creative ways. For instance, SU embraces best practice research and resources (e.g. NSSE) that advocate for student-faculty interaction as a means of providing students with mentors and models of life-long learning. But one would be hard-pressed to interpret the dialogue Justicia's audiology classmate had with their professor (see 124) as an interaction setting student and teacher on a shared road toward "continuous, lifelong learning," as the NSSE represents student-faculty interactions. And similarly, when Rick went to see his biology teacher during office hours, he felt as though his professor wanted nothing to do with their current interaction, let alone any in the future.

But research indicates that if the university were to step in and inspect the kinds of interactions students have with faculty, counterproductive results would ensue. It would shake people's confidence and good faith in each other and in their institution (Meyer and Rowan 1977; Hallett 2010).[31] So roadmaps to effective educational practice may work a little bit more like myths than blueprints. Many institutional researchers have argued that this kind of loose coupling is a good thing: it allows myth to remain a social resource (Meyer and Rowan 1977; Weick 1976; Hallett 2010).

The question emerges, however, of whether this social resource is distributed equitably. Who benefits when myth and reality are loosely coupled, and who is left to struggle? Research finds that in highly competitive STEM fields, close interaction with faculty is a key factor in persistence and success, but that underrepresented students (seeking out institutional roadmaps) are leaked out of the pipeline as students who arrive with "mental" (or social) institutional maps carry on (Hurtado et al. 2011). Similarly, it is possible to imagine that Justicia's audiology classmate saw herself engaging core ideas and discussing career plans with her teacher in a way that might serve her as she worked to her hoped-for future. It is more difficult to read in ways that Rick might have benefitted from his struggle to find a faculty mentor – a struggle that contributed to his stopping out, restarting, and ultimately chugging along, one course per semester, such that as I write this, six years after Rick first matriculated in

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[31] Some might argue that NSSE does provide that inspection and does so in a way that is not disruptive. However, as Porter (2011) points out, surveys report respondents' perceptions, not objective realities. And as Schumann (2002) observes, there is likely to be a qualitative difference between the perceptions of people who choose to respond to a particular survey and those who opt out.

an institution of higher education, it will be several semesters still before Rick receives a Bachelor's degree.

In short, while myths loosely coupled to everyday realities may seem an adequate social resource to some, other students like Rick and his peers whose experiences I will describe in the sections that follow, sought to learn institutional ideals in order to "tightly couple" it to their own everyday practices. While they had varying degrees of success with this endeavor, they largely met with disappointment. With four notable exceptions, these students experienced a steep downside for their high expectations – even when those expectations supported their engagement in educationally purposive practices.

Institutional Awareness: To Live Up to the Ideal

Compared to students in the previous chapter who prioritized "remaking the grading" or ensuring other forms of measurable virtue as a primary standard of evaluating quality of interaction with faculty, students whose experiences I describe in this chapter highlight took a different approach. Though they came to SU with a wide range of experiences, and they left SU on a range of paths, they shared a similar strategy for approaching interaction with faculty during their time at SU. The most succinct way of explaining this strategy is to say they prioritized gaining knowledge of their institution and its norms and using that knowledge to try to cultivate relationships with those who taught them.

To be sure, their successes in this arena varied. But it is notable that these students, who maintained a focus on what I will call "institutional awareness" throughout their time at SU make up the larger group in this study. This of course may stem from the study design: participants were volunteers who responded to a request to share their thoughts on their academic experiences and remained in the study with at least some idea that I had some interest in teaching and learning relationships and student-faculty interactions. But I think it is also indicative of a depth of desire for meaningful teaching and learning relationships in undergraduate education that may not get discussed often enough.

By "institutional awareness," I mean that the students who enacted this placed an explicit value on learning the structure of SU and responding to its complex processes appropriately. By placing an explicit value on this, I mean that these students plainly stated (and demonstrated, repeatedly) their aim to figure out how the institution worked so that they could live up to what it had to offer. For instance:

> This is a very large school, and one of the first things that jumps out to me…is the level of interactivity…When you [professors] have that many kids, you can't be as attentive…Some professors try to address that, but by and large, I think it's very difficult to keep a hold of that in the [SU] classroom…So I make sure I sit in the front. *(Roger, transfer, initial interview)*

> I knew coming here would be hard. I was like, I am a transfer student, and as much as I want to say I know what's going on, I

> really don't. I've never been at a four-year school. So when I got home [after orientation] I had a bit of a meltdown…I got in touch with an advisor, and we got all my transfer [credit from community college], and she was like, what do you want to do, and I told her Psychology, so she got me on track to start my Psych courses. *(Liz, transfer, initial interview)*

Institutional awareness entailed consistent, intentional attention to the structures and norms of the setting where they were located. Liz and Roger did not believe that institutional know-how was going to happen by osmosis. They did believe, however, that it could come through deliberate study.

Participants who practiced institutional awareness varied in the extent to which they sought to couple their everyday realities to formal institutional rules. Roger, for instance, believed that "differences in the structure of the school[s]" he had attended – SU, his previous, out-of-state public research institution, and his private high school – led to "differences in how they want you to engage." While attuned to these differences, he felt some freedom to use strategies from his prior institutions to realize his objective at SU.

At the other end of the institutional awareness spectrum, there was Chloe, who worked to make the myth incarnate. It was not that Chloe was merely conformist to the rules. Rather, she described her approach like this:

> If you're going to go, go as far as you can go…You've got to show people who you are, but they won't see you unless you go where they are looking… I don't have that one-on-one [here], but if

they see me, then I maybe can get it.

This was how she had excelled in prior schooling experiences. She figured out how things worked, she worked to excel within the space available to her, and people took notice, reaching out to her, bringing, she believed, a full breadth of institutional resources to her disposal. For instance, Chloe's high school class graduated 104 students from a ninth grade class that had begun with around 500. From her graduating class, Chloe was one of four students to attend a four-year school. Her experience there influenced her philosophy at SU. In our initial interview, she explained what she learned from her high school:

> Some [people] give the school a bad name…[But] they definitely look out for you. Once they figured out who I was, and my work ethic, they took care of me, giving me scholarship papers, and my counselor, she is always helping me out, and she still is, and I appreciate that, because she didn't have to help me after I graduate…Who knows where I would have been if [my high school] didn't help.

And so Chloe placed a high value on figuring out where she needed to be, how she needed to be, what she needed to do in relation to how things worked at SU, so that she could be seen as someone who cared. Indeed, institutional awareness played no small part in her decision to respond to my call for participants in this study. I was, after all, researching her institution, and such a person would have to have *some* insight to share.[32]

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[32] It is useful here to compare Chloe's reasons for participating to those of Allie, who engaged actively in "remaking the grading" and saw herself largely as SU's ideal student. When I asked Allie at the end of our initial interview

Social Origins of Institutional Awareness

While students who expressed institutional awareness came from richly varied social and educational backgrounds, they shared a common feeling. Each, respectively, felt deviant from what he or she believed the institution saw as its ideal. The ways they described origins of these feelings centered on three – in some cases, interrelated – themes: pathways to enrollment at SU, commuting to campus, and work experiences. In fact, all of these categories have some relationship to how researchers define "traditional" college students: in terms of age, campus residence, and ability to devote full-time attention to studies (NACAC 2009). In other words, these 24 students saw themselves as non-traditional SU students, even though by some standards 9 of them would be counted as traditional students. But these 9, despite their age, their residences on or within walking distance of campus, and their status as full-time students, felt that stereotype threats associated with their identities made them feel "other."

Non-linear pathways

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why she was interested in participating in this project, she responded, "I like helping people." Similarly, as we traveled around campus together, me following her through her academic days, if we happened to encounter undergraduates I knew that she did not, she often responded with a kind of alarm – aloof when I introduced her, and then after parting with that person, raising her eyebrows and asking me, "How do you know *him*?" or "How do you know *her*?" Once, one of the students we encountered, Drew, was also a participant in this study. Drew was a slightly older undergraduate, and one who dressed very professionally on an everyday basis. Allie displayed some alarm: "Why is *he* in the study?" The same way that she had, I explained: he volunteered. She reared her head back a bit when she replied, "Oh," disappointed, it seemed, to feel as though she had not been specially selected.

Fifteen students in the study took non-linear paths to SU. These paths included enrollment in at least one, and in two cases three, institutions of higher education prior to matriculation at SU and/or more than one year out of school altogether. (In other words, I do not include "gap years," taken by two participants in the study, Micah and Sarah, in defining a non-linear path.)

It was not simply taking non-linear paths, as up to one-third of college students now do, that made these students "deviant." It was that they *felt* deviant – they felt they did not fit SU's vision of its ideal student. Roger, who was 21 when he began at SU, and who had gone directly from high school to a four-year institution in a neighboring state, explained the way that pathway to SU affected his relationship with the institution:

> Roger: You know, I didn't start here, I didn't go through all that [first-year experience] with them [classmates]…I did that at [first institution], so that's where I feel it…
>
> Meg: Feel what, like connection? Solidarity?
>
> Roger: Exactly, solidarity. Because, I mean, honestly, this place wasn't even on my radar…

Roger had left his first institution when tuition hikes made out-of-state costs burdensome for his family. He transferred the spring semester of his sophomore year to his local community college, then took summer courses at a more renowned community college in a neighboring county at his father's behest to fulfill pre-requisites for an Economics major at SU. Returning to our conversation on "solidarity":

Meg: So you think those feelings matter to SU? They prefer students who feel that?

Roger: Of course they do. They want you to feel that, 'cause that's what gets people involved and all 'My school's the best.'

Meg: So how do they do that [get people feeling solidarity] besides people just always wanting to go there?

Roger: Well so, at [first institution], we actually did this thing where we broke in Guinness Book of World Records. It was a really cheap way to break a Guinness World Record, but nevertheless it was really thrilling. We had this, I wanna say, event center, which is their main athletics facility. All the freshmen were gathered around, we had flashlights, and you had a certain color, and when you zoom out on the whole display, you see [school nickname] and apparently if I am recalling correctly, we had the largest ever human-made logo with flashlights. That was really interesting and something I will never forget. So I think that's exactly what it did, build solidarity.

Meg: And so it's harder for you to feel that here without that [those kinds of experiences]?

Roger: Yeah.

Roger (and Liz) traveled through three prior institutions before arriving at SU. However, both Roger and Liz were roughly the same age as most of their classmates. They did not believe people necessarily noticed them as different. Rather, it was an issue of how they saw themselves and how they perceived the ideal SU student.

Linda, on the other hand, felt visible. A university employee who had earned her Associate's Degree 30 years prior to beginning her Bachelor's studies at SU, she commented that her visibility had both benefits and drawbacks:

> For better or worse, I stand out…People remember me, they recognize me…I get preferential treatment sometimes.

Indeed, she typically sat front and center, as her classmates' busy screens distracted her any time she sat elsewhere. But she worried that, for instructors, her presence – made even more visible by proximity –was sometimes unsettling. She remarked of one instructor something similar to what she had observed of others:

> Linda: I think I make him self-conscious.
>
> Meg: About what? His experience?
>
> Linda: He *is* very young. I am old enough to be his mother.

In fact, when Linda *did* find professors who were her peers or elders – whose courses fit her schedule and needs – she was excited: "There is just something about having a teacher be older than you."

Commuting

At times, some homed in on commuting to class as a source of "other-ness" from the institutional ideal. While all of the students on non-linear pathways commuted, and some who associated their feelings of otherness with commuting had also attended prior institutions (and/or taken time away from school), living apart from the campus action heightened the sensitivities of some who were "traditional-aged" regarding how SU and its representatives saw them. "So many professors just assume, oh, you must live on campus, you can work on the group project whenever. But nooo," Wayne remarked in one of many iterations of a similar sentiment. "When you are a commuter, you are on the outside looking in."

Wayne lived a bus ride away from campus in his family home, and despite a rich scholarly literature on the potential alienation of commuter students on primarily residential campuses (Tinto 1997, 1993), I some times gave Wayne some skepticism about the commuter outsider-ness he expressed. Tall, attractive, and outgoing, Wayne had more classmates of feminine persuasions bending over backwards to try to work with him or for him – group-projects or otherwise – than I could count. Thousands of SU students commuted. Parking lots doubled the size of campus. I sometimes taught courses where half or more of the class commuted. How could SU feel so insensitive?

Yet assumptions about where and how undergraduates live did slip out of the mouths and everyday practices of key institutional representatives. Most notably was an incident not part of my field research, but which took place during a meeting for faculty and staff on blended and online learning (which struck me as a bit ironic). Here, a dean of one of SU's most esteemed colleges announced, "Yesterday, I heard someone describe this [SU] as a 'primarily residential campus.' In thirty years here, I've *never* heard t*hat*. What else would it be?"

The depth of Wayne's worry that faculty might see him as a less-than-ideal student due to his commuter status were paralleled by the concerns of Ademola, who traveled up to 75 minutes in traffic each way to get to campus from his parents' home. Because of this distance and because of the rush hour nightmares that could accumulate in the final stretches of his morning drive, Ademola told all his instructors at the beginning of every semester (and sometimes reminded them throughout): "I'm a commuter student." Justicia did the same.

On top of these worries about how faculty saw them, the nine who felt "othered" by commuting, all roughly traditional-aged, felt a degree of separation from their peers – an isolation they saw campus life as designed to overcome. While not all had consistently strong desires to live on campus, they did perceive campus residence as an institutional preference for the proximity it afforded to academic and social resources.

Stereotype Threat

Five of the 24 students who prioritized "institutional awareness" were campus-residing, traditional-aged students who came directly to SU upon their high school graduations. Their feelings of deviance from an institutional ideal would, on a survey, questionnaire, or application form, be difficult to isolate and quantify. In fact, four of these five were part of a most-selective academic honors program (as was Justicia, a commuter student, who expressed fear of being stereotyped only when she arrived late to class – often not because of her commute, but because of the long walk across campus and the short interim period between classes). These honors students had been wooed to campus from amid a slew of other, arguably more prestigious college options, and had, for the most part, decided upon SU because of the quality of the honors program and the amount of academic scholarship money SU had offered them.

One worried that the institution might feel some obligation to her because of her race and class (Faith), another because of his race, class, and sexuality (Eddie), another still because of her immigrant family (Helen). They worried that their academic recognition came with what social psychologist Claude Steele (2010) calls a “stereotype threat” – a threat of looming assumptions (from peers and just, as Faith put it, “people in general”) that they were wanted only to help SU carve its desired image with regard to diversity.

Thomas and Anne, on the other hand, were both white and from upper-middle class families. Thomas, an honors student, and Anne, a student-athlete, also worried about stereotype threat. For Thomas, the threat hung in the air around being white and male. He worried that people would not see him as especially academically worthy, but simply as privileged – and further would see him as oblivious or entitled to his privilege, to boot. For Anne, the student-athlete, it felt as though professors and students alike held negative perceptions of student-athletes’ academic capacities.[33]

These respective feelings of deviance from an institutional ideal heightened these 24 students’ awareness of how their institution and its representatives saw them. Such feelings kept them motivated to learn and deploy knowledge of the institution so

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33 However, at least as far as faculty are concerned, research shows that faculty are as satisfied or more satisfied with the academic performance and commitment of all student-athletes except for male basketball and football players (Lawrence et al. 2007). To be sure, however, Anne’s perceptions about stereotype threat from other students were not unfounded. I routinely heard undergraduates complain about student-athletes’ special treatment at SU at every stage from admissions to general college requirements to upper-level courses – and about what they perceived to be student-athletes’ lesser academic capacity and commitment. I rarely saw any substantial evidence in support of these claims.

that they could carry out effective educational practices and meet the institution's ideal, whether people expected them to or not.

Educationally Purposive Practices

I remember gasping. The professor of Chloe's upper-level applied research course – a tenure track assistant professor – introduced herself to the class with her name, her prior institution, and these words: ""I'm actually a researcher. What I do here and at [previous institution] is primarily research. So I'm just teaching on the side, and I hope you'll bear with me." Chloe, on the other hand, expressed gratitude: "I'm glad she told us that, because this class is going to be hard for me, so now I know I need to be extra, put myself out there extra." She has already committed the professor's office number and scheduled office hours to memory by the end of the first class. She would be there. In two years at SU, she had learned something about having people who identified first as researchers for teachers. The thing to do was go to them, connect with them: "It's like, this [class] is not one of [their] conferences, we don't know all the stuff that [they] kn0w, so you [herself, or students in general] have to try to talk to them." Only most faculty who preferred research did not give, what Chloe perceived as this same courtesy of letting students know, up front and in plain language, that their priority was not teaching but research, and discovering it the hard way led to disappointment.

Seeking out instructors in and out of class to discuss assignments, readings, and ideas are key interactions that researchers of student engagement identify as "educationally purposive practices" and as bases for the development of meaningful student-faculty relationships (Kuh et al. 2010; NSSE 2013). These kinds of practices ostensibly give students a "first-hand" view into "how experts think about and solve practical problems...[positioning] teachers [as] role models, mentors, and guides for continuous, life-long learning."[34]

Research links educationally purposive practices to desired outcomes of higher education, including not only learning and personal development, but also post-graduate employment and higher earnings (Kuh et al. 2010; Hu and Wolniak 2013). Chloe's plan in this course accomplishes at least three of the educationally purposive practices NSSE seeks to measure: working to meet academic challenge, active and collaborative learning through seeking out opportunities to discuss class ideas outside of the classroom, and discussing course material and ideas with her professor.

Such an educationally purposive approach was Chloe's classroom norm. In fact, she was always discussing class ideas outside of class. Her family demanded it: "They're always like, what are you learning, what are they teaching you?" or "What did you say in class today?" and "Did you get into any debates again this week?" On times when I saw her tweeting in class, she was tweeting class notes in 140-character snippets for the benefit of her grandmother.

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34 NSSE 2013 Benchmarks. < http://nsse.iub.edu/pdf/nsse_benchmarks.pdf>. Last Accessed 2 March 2014.

Chloe was not alone in using her coursework to try to build connections with teachers and with those she cared about. Wayne put it this way:

> I want to come across as the guy who knows his stuff… Where I know my stuff, where my teacher knows I know my stuff, and we're on a different level. It's not the stuff in the class, it's about me and you, maybe you do research, and you have to teach and you don't want to teach, but you like the stuff, and if I can come in and deliver….Then maybe I can set myself apart.

Similar goals shaped where other students sat in class, how they responded to their teachers' questions, how they raised their own questions, and how they did course readings and preparatory work, in addition to the ways in which they approached their actual graded assignments. And it shaped how they evaluated courses and the faculty teaching them.

Working with faculty on projects that are not directly course-related or for a grade, but rather a piece of the professor's own work – is another key indicator of the kind of student-faculty interaction that NSSE identifies as creating mentoring relationships between teachers and students. What such surveys cannot capture, however, are the ways in which students try but do not manage to become involved in such collaborations, as in the case of Rick, whose odyssey for a meaningful mentoring relationship with a faculty member opens this chapter. Things transpired similarly for Ademola.

Ademola had asked his university advisor about doing research with faculty. The advisor pointed him to a database for undergraduate research where professors listed and described projects for which they were hiring undergraduate research assistants. Ademola emailed a handful of professors in a variety of fields, sometimes receiving responses, sometimes not. Of the responses he did receive: postings were old or hiring was over or his skill set did not seem quite right. So he was thrilled then, when a distinguished professor in the department of his major -- one with whom he had taken two classes, both in which he earned A's – announced that he would hire two undergraduate assistants to help with a project. Ademola applied, and the professor invited him in for an interview. He asked me for pointers because he was "only a little nervous." I saw him a few days later:

> Meg: How did it go?
>
> Ademola: I didn't get nervous. But he didn't hire me.

Hallett (2010) calls the process of trying to bring everyday work activities in line with myth "recoupling": the tightening of a once-loose relationship between organizations' rational theories of how things work and the way things actually work. The process of recoupling Hallett (2010) examines shows recoupling as a top-down phenomenon. It is the people in position to make rules that set recoupling in motion. But students like Chloe and Rick, who attempt to use the best-practices their institution espouses, to use their institutions' formal theories of how student-faculty interaction work, can also be seen as attempting to initiate a kind of recoupling.

In Hallett's (2010) study, recoupling brings on turmoil as the myths that were once a social resource no longer support the meanings they were once used to make. Without such frames, people feel distress and struggle to find and share meanings of their everyday work that others find adequate. In this struggle, partisan positions emerge. "Battle lines" are drawn. In my study, however, recoupling initiatives are moving from the bottom up. Chloe and Rick and Ademola are working to live up to the myth, to their institution's rational theories of how things work.

There is little research on how people in positions of lesser power work to couple myth to everyday reality. In my study, bottom-up recoupling efforts (educationally purposive practices enacted in effort to live up to institutional myths of how student-faculty interactions ought to work) make few dents in how things *actually* work. While distress ensues for those whose practices do not have their desired impact, the institution itself does not change. There is no turmoil, as Hallett (2010) finds in top-down recoupling efforts. The impact here is on inhabitants' morale and potential collective sentiment. Future studies should examine bottom-up recoupling efforts and how they may differ from the kind of recoupling processes Hallett (2010) studied. One site where such efforts can be seen is for example Fairfax County, Virginia teachers' "work to the rule" protest, in which teachers protest exploitive working conditions by only performing the work written into their contracts, and none of the work which is not. (So they are not, for example, replying to parent emails).[35] Further research is necessary to draw broader conclusions about the impact of bottom-up recoupling initiatives. I discuss the primary impact I observed – lowered morale – in the section that follows.

Let Downs: Discovering Ideals are Not Roadmap

35 <http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/fairfax-county-teachers-propose-cutting-extras-in-protest-of-lagging-salaries/2014/03/01/9b158ee4-9fd4-11e3-b8d8-94577ff66b28_story.html>. Last Accessed 2 March 2, 2014

When Rick, whose story opened this chapter, took a leave of absence from SU (returning part-time two semesters later to chip away at his degree), he lived out a trend that decades of institutional policy have endeavored to mitigate. This trend, observed by Vincent Tinto (1993, 1997), occurs when colleges and universities jeopardize working students' success by failing to draw them into institutional life through the classroom. Tinto's research on "stopping out," first published in the early 1980s, drew a connection between leaving college and Emile Durkheim's (1897/1997) concept of *anomie*. Anomie, or normlessness, results when institutions fail to foster social solidarity among the people who must interact with them. Quite famously, Durkheim connected anomie to a rise in suicide rates.

So when Tinto (1993) explained stopping out as a product of anomie – in doing so, relating Durkheim's theory of anomie and suicide – critical eyebrows rose (e.g. Tierney 1992). It is possible that some of Tinto's critics had not read Durkheim and interpreted Tinto's use of Durkheim's work on anomie and suicide as a statement that students who stopped out were insufficiently involved in college life. On the contrary, Tinto (and Durkheim) held institutions responsible for generating a collective spirit among those engaged with them.

As Roger's memories of his first institution illustrate, institutions *can* create solidarity – and may do a particularly good job of it with first-year, traditional-aged students as Roger was when he began there. But as Tinto points out, tactics that successfully foster feelings of solidarity for some groups of students are far from sufficient for all students. Tinto (1993) observed that students who commute or work a significant number of hours each week (full or heavy part-time) relate to campus primarily through the classroom. Thus, institutions must recognize the classroom as a key site for creating institutional solidarity.

Tinto's (1993) work and the work of student development scholars (e.g. Pascarella and Terenzini 2005) ushered in what some call a "student-centered shift" in research and policy related to students' higher education success (cf. Barr and Tagg 1995). Many institutions, including SU, rhetorically embraced Chickering and Gamson's (1986) now-famous "Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education," of which the first of these seven outlined the importance of student-faculty interaction:

> Frequent student-faculty contact in and out of classes is the most important factor in student motivation and involvement. Faculty concern helps students get through rough times and keep on working. Knowing a few faculty members well enhances students' intellectual commitment and encourages them to think about their own values and future plans.

Among the formal institutional rules emerging in this period were required office hours for all courses, increased attention to student ratings of instruction (Hoyt and Cashin 1977), and eventually, as technology developed, the encouragement of student-faculty email contact (Chickering and Ehrmann 1996).

Students like Rick and the others in this group who worried that they might be seen as deviant from the institution's student-ideal saw these formal offerings – office hours, aggressive course evaluation marketing, instructor emails, course websites, learning management systems, and so on – and sought to make use of them in the ways they believed they were intended: for fostering, as Chickering and Gamson (1987) put it, “frequent student-faculty contact.” Like Rick, Erica also stopped out and returned part-time. But then she went full-time and is finishing as I write this dissertation. I share here notes from a day with her just before she left SU for an undecided period of time.

Erica Reads the Institutional Roadmap

It was beautiful outside. When I met Erica at 7:55a.m. in front of Psychology building before her 8 o’clock class, the mid-April morning made every known promise of a perfect spring day. Erica smiled. She gave me a hug. I had not seen her since before Spring Break. I asked how she was doing. Her reply: “You know when it’s this beautiful, so beautiful, and you think, I should feel happy, I’m in a beautiful place, but you kind of don’t?” She kept smiling as she said it.

The sophomore from several states away was still figuring out her major. She had come in aiming for a major in Psychology, aspiring to work as a school counselor. The first-year “weed-out” lecture had been rough. She took it twice. And then she decided to seek an alternative route. The previous semester, she tried out Education. This semester, she was leaning toward an applied major oriented toward Social Work. We would not trek over to the Social Work department until later in the day. This 8 a.m. class was a general college requirement in Communication that happens to use a classroom in the Psych building, the stage of so many of Erica’s previous year’s struggles.

We enter the classroom to find a handful of the class’s 30 students already there. Two, a white male and an Asian-American female, who each look to be about 18, are detailing for the instructor, Dr. Marconi, an approximately 30-year old white man, the gaming systems they played as children. The instructor gasps, "Wow. I didn't have any gaming systems until middle school." Erica misses no beat on the conversation and says to him: "Are you the oldest?" The instructor, unsurprisingly, looks surprised at this personal – and apparently accurate – turn: "Yes." Erica: "That's why."

Class proceeds no differently from usual, the instructor building good rapport with the students who have both made it to class and remained awake. They are discussing types of fallacies in arguments: *ad hominem* attacks, *post hoc ergo propter* superstitions, manipulative appeals to pathos. As we walk to her next class, a general education requirement in Sociology, she tells me she is considering a leave of absence, which crossed her mind while visiting home over Spring Break. She had brought it up on the phone with her mother the previous night. Her mother had cried; Erica would break her heart, she said, if she left college. "Now there's a pathos argument if ever I heard one," says Erica wryly, as we settle into her Sociology lecture.

This class was much larger, and its instructor much less prompt. He arrives 12 minutes into the 50-minute session. The topic of the day is Environmental Problems. The instructor begins to lecture on ethanol and corn production. The instructor, who has a European accent, announces that: "In America, we check two things. The weather and the gas prices." No one laughs except me. "Now," he continues, "we are going to watch a little short 25-minute film." He cues up "The Story of

Stuff." A student behind me groans: "I already saw this in another class."

Erica had already seen the video in another class as well. She did not mind seeing it again because she "hate[s] this class – the *worst*" she has had at SU. "There has got to be a better way to teach it," she comments, as we head for her Social Work intro course – a course she is enjoying with a professor, Dr. Hancock, she finds "really interesting." Dr. Hancock, a youngish white woman, speaks frequently about her own research in the field – much of it abroad, including a recent research fellowship that she has mentioned in every class session I have attended.

I have convinced Erica to go to Dr. Hancock's office hours, which are directly after class. We have prepared several questions. First, she can talk with Dr. Hancock about other courses she teaches, and what courses in the field she finds most interesting and helpful for an undergraduate getting started on a major in the discipline. Next, she can ask Dr. Hancock more about her own research. And as Erica is interested in studying abroad, she can ask Dr. Hancock if she knows about any related fieldwork experiences or study programs.

After class, I wait for Erica down the hall from Dr. Hancock's office. She comes out minutes after she entered. "She [Dr. Hancock] just kept saying, 'You need to go talk to Elizabeth, you need to go talk to Elizabeth' [the undergraduate program coordinator]…Oh, and she told me Elizabeth could help me find some internship or volunteer work, maybe with a Latino group." Erica, who is Puerto Rican, had said nothing about wanting to work with Latinos or Spanish-speaking groups. "*I don't even speak Spanish!*" Erica had wanted to say to her, but said "Thank you" instead.

We go directly to the undergraduate office so that Erica can make an appointment with Elizabeth. When it is time for that appointment, two days later, Erica has already decided that she will ask: "What would it look like on my transcript if I went home for a semester?" And when she asks this, Elizabeth replies: "It would look completely normal." By the end of the session, Erica has made up her mind. When exams finish, she is going home.

On Erica's Success

When Erica returns to campus almost a year later, she declares a major in Communication. That 8a.m. general education course she took the previous year was the best she had had at SU, the instructor the most open, most receptive to dialogue with students. Erica decides on a 9 credit-hour load, to make sure she can do the work. She takes two courses in each session of summer school, and the next year, both semesters, full-time – including two courses with Dr. Marconi. At the moment I am writing this, Erica is registered to graduate with a degree in Communication in eight weeks. The major had its ups and downs, and few professors were like Marconi. Erica sums up the whole experience succinctly: "It's a degree."

In her persistence toward her degree, Erica was doing exactly what Tinto (1993) predicted that students who did not feel connected to the institution through traditional channels sought to do. Despite being traditional-aged and a full-time student, Erica was admitted to SU through a conditional acceptance program that required her to spend her first semester in a special program that separated her and her cohort from other first-years. Students in this program could not live on campus, and their classes were at night to allow them to find their own day job or internship if they desired. Even though Erica was able to enroll in regular courses after her first semester, she never shook the feeling that she was not SU's ideal student.

And so she did as Tinto (1993) theorized: she searched for a sense of solidarity with the institution *through the classroom*. Student-faculty interaction plays a key role in such searches. Erica sought and used the formal channels to which SU gave her access to for interacting with faculty: office hours, class attendance, and in-class interaction. And she navigated these formally provided channels with educationally purposive practices: for instance, planning and pursuing discussions of course material outside of class, and seeking out faculty to discuss future plans of study and work. As an institution that uses the National Survey of Student Engagement to assess student engagement, the things Erica was doing to try to connect with faculty are among what NSSE defines as best practices of student engagement – practices that SU at least rhetorically embraces.

What Erica's experience shows is that institutions can *promote* students' educationally purposive interaction with faculty by laying them out in formal documents, by assessing student engagement with tools like NSSE, and so on. But, in Erica's case, such promotion did not *produce* any consistent educationally purposive interaction with faculty. It seemed that SU had invested little in supporting faculty in meeting students like Erica anywhere close to halfway in their educationally purposive practices. Erica's success came at a high cost: the question of "do I belong here?" at least temporarily overshadowed her educationally purposive practices. Her institution had little response to the work she was doing to interact with her teachers in educationally purposive ways.

What is the Impact of Contingent Teaching Labor on Students?

Those who share expectations in line with Tinto's (1997) notion of the classroom as a site of building solidarity and a sense of belonging at their institution (with student-faculty interaction as a means for doing so) experienced more disappointment than satisfaction regarding their quality of interaction with instructors. As illustrated through Rick's and Erica's stories, such disappointment accumulated through multiple experiences, over multiple semesters.

One interesting commonality in these accumulations of disappointment, however, was the temporary lift these students received from contingent instructors: e.g. Dr. Marconi, an adjunct, for Erica; Dr. Dell, a visiting researcher for Rick; and the dancer-teacher-waiter who taught Rick's series of movement courses for his physical education studies.

These contingent instructors and others often made clear why and how they were at SU – that the class at hand was a primary responsibility. As Chloe observed of the adjunct professor of an advanced Psychology course, "She's just so sweet, she's like, 'I'm teaching you, but you're also teaching me. That's why we are here, to learn together." Ann made a similar observation of her two favorite instructors one semester, both of whom (unbeknownst to Ann) were adjuncts. When I asked her why these two were her favorites, she did not hesitate to reply, "I just really prefer the people who are like, 'I am here to teach.'"

That semester, Ann was deciding on a major and had narrowed it down to the two disciplines in which her two favorite instructors were teaching. As registration neared, she went to meet with the social science instructor:

> I asked her what she was teaching next semester, because I want to take all her classes, and she was like, 'Well, I won't be here next semester…' because she's leaving for like a regular job somewhere. She was just a really special person. That is a really big loss for SU.

Ann met with the other adjunct instructor, who had taught for multiple semesters in her applied Public Health field. She offered Ann advice on courses to take if she chose the major, including what she herself might be teaching. And days later, Ann declared her major in the instructor's department.

There is little research on the impact that contingent teaching labor has on undergraduates' experiences, and what little research there is presents conflicting evidence. For example, Umbach (2007) finds that contingent faculty are less effective than regular, tenured or tenure-track faculty when it comes to engaging students in educationally purposive practices. Yet a case study by economists at Northwestern University found that undergraduates made more learning gains when their instructors were adjuncts than tenure track (Figlio et al. 2013). Both studies have limitations: as we saw in Chapter 4, students' perceptions of their own educationally purposive practices are not always practices educators would consider educationally purposive (e.g. Negotiating for a make-up extra credit opportunity and asking forgiveness for forgotten assignments would count as discussing grades with faculty, an educationally purposive practice. But to what extent do these activities produce mentoring relationships, modeling how experts think about complex problems, as NSSE says student-faculty interaction, at its best, can do?) And the Northwestern study focuses only on this one elite institution, where adjuncts are often practicing professionals in their field or preeminent scholars brought to teach for a term or two who may have a significantly lighter workload than some adjuncts at institutions like SU, who must travel between multiple institutions in the same term, teaching several hundred students at each site (Figlio et al. 2013).

My study suggests that there is a need for further qualitative research focused on the kinds of interactions students have with contingent faculty in a variety of disciplines and at a variety of stages in their studies. Among this group of participants – students concerned the institution might see them as less-than its ideal – when interacting with contingent instructors, students sensed that these faculty cared about them and their academic success by 1) conveying that they, the faculty, were, as Ann put it, "here to teach"; and 2) by demonstrating willingness to share what they knew about the institution with students. Further studies could investigate whether these findings hold elsewhere, focusing on when and how contingent faculty send these messages in comparison to when and how regular faculty send these messages.

Exceptions: Up with High Expectations

There are five notable exceptions in this group of students concerned that they did not fit SU's student-ideal. These five students had high expectations about gaining a sense of institutional solidarity through the classroom and through interaction with faculty, and in fact, they did build such senses of solidarity through this very sort of interaction. Drew, Linda, Helen, Thomas, and Eddie established mentoring relationships with faculty through educationally purposive interactions beginning in the classroom.

These students' experiences were quite diverse, but they held different plies of a common thread. That common thread was the layered relationship they had with SU: they were each, respectively, SU undergraduates, recognized members of special academic programs, *and* SU employees (serving in roles from departmental assistants, undergraduate teaching assistants and in Linda's case, an executive assistant to a departmental chair). On the face of it, they seemed to be very different kinds of students from one another: a mother with adult children, an enlisted military man simultaneously training to become an officer while completing his undergraduate studies, and three traditional aged students –the two first-generation American children of refugees (one a first-generation college student) – and one a white upper middle-class male with a pile of AP credits on his transcript followed by some very focused upper-level studies in his major-turned-area-of research.

Their layered positions gave them insight on faculty who tended to welcome or even seek continuous teaching and learning interactions. Their positions also gave them insider knowledge about how programs worked that they could use to make meaning of interaction with faculty more generally. As Thomas remarked to me in reference to his supervisor, a tenured professor, in a neurological research center:

> Bob keeps saying he *has* to teach this semester, but it's just hard for him because he was on sabbatical last semester…*You* should try to go on sabbatical as soon as possible after you finish your dissertation.

Thomas' research position gave him a great deal of insight about how research universities work. In fact, he felt secure enough about his knowledge of how things worked to advise me to seek a sabbatical as soon as I finished my dissertation.

Eddie's position was not a research position, but through a class, he became involved in a student group that the professor of the class ran. The "class alumni" continued to meet (some even after their SU graduations), developing and practicing ways of educating other undergraduate students about sexualities, their course theme. Eddie took this course the first semester of his sophomore year, and he maintained a close relationship with the professor in addition to developing relationships with the professors in whose courses he and his former classmates were invited to speak. In other words, their professor helped them build further relationships with other faculty as well as with undergraduates. Through his work with one of these professors, Eddie found a work-study position that helped him finance a study-abroad experience his junior year.

The experiences of these five suggest that where faculty have capacity to engage students through the classroom for further interaction, study, and collaborative learning beyond the classroom, teaching and learning relationships flourish. This is no surprise, nor is this a finding unique to this study (cf. Pascarella and Terenzini 2005; Kuh et al. 2010). But to find this anew in the present study highlights the importance of institutional support for student-faculty interaction – interaction that may begin in sites that already make it possible, classrooms – and institutional support for continuing to develop those relationships beyond the classroom.

Conclusion

SU, like many of its peer institutions, seeks to gauge and assess student engagement using its own battery of survey tools and multi-institutional tools like the National Survey for Student Engagement. The findings from this chapter and the preceding chapter show that students are not measurable in the way that institutions like SU seem to want them to be. Their actual activities do not align with the institutions' understanding (or lack thereof) of those activities. This chapter shows that for students who see themselves as somehow departing from the institutional ideal, institutional rules and processes are a source of information about educationally purposive practices and how those educationally purposive practices might be deployed to develop relationships with faculty. However for all but five of the students in this group, the institutional rules and processes they used as guides led them down dead ends in their pursuit of high quality and ongoing interaction with faculty.

This suggests that the "roadmaps" SU currently provides are not sufficient: they do not account for the highly varied paths that both students *and* faculty are on. There is increasing talk of the need for greater accountability in higher education (e.g. Arum and Roksa 2011; Obama's "Better Bargain for the Middle Class"[36]). Higher education research indeed indicates that when institutions structure themselves in such a way as to engender educationally purposive practices – and when they provide "roadmaps" to students on how to navigate these structures – the distribution of desired outcomes looks more equitable (e.g. Kuh et al. 2010; Harper and Quaye

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36 http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/08/22/fact-sheet-president-s-plan-make-college-more-affordable-better-bargain-. Last Accessed 4 March 2014.

2009). The bottom line here is that those roadmaps can be immensely valuable when institutions hold themselves accountable to how exactly they are providing support for student-faculty interaction in and out of the classroom – for students whatever path toward degree they are on. This means institutions must be prepared to provide support for the kinds of teaching and learning interactions not immediately captured in assessment outcomes and accountability data.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION: Who Really Cares?

There is an answer to the question that this dissertation perhaps piquingly poses - the question of who cares about student-faculty interaction at a public research institution. The answer is that SU undergraduates care. They care very much about interaction with faculty. They talk about it, write about it, stew over it, and sometimes rage about it. They look to interaction with faculty as a way to work towards what they believe their institution wants them to be. They link interaction with faculty with the educationally purposive practices that researchers and institutions tout. Yet as we have seen here, students' understandings of what kinds of interactions constitute those educationally purposive practices that their institution at least rhetorically values can diverge significantly from what administrators and student engagement scholars had in mind. But one key implication of this study is the very fact that undergraduates care about interaction with faculty and look for care in interaction with faculty reveals opportunity for real, valuable teaching and learning relationships.

In this study, I have highlighted two quite different interactional approaches undergraduates use to seek care in interaction with faculty: "remaking the grading" and "living up" to perceived institutional ideals. In the former, students effectively use interactions with faculty to try to spend cultural capital in ways that will yield outcomes that their institution tracks and uses to allocate tangible rewards. In the latter, students use interaction with faculty as a way to seek mentorship that will enable them to live up to institutional ideals. These interactional approaches are, of course, ideal types (Weber 1904). Ideal types help us envision features of a phenomenon that distinguish it from other phenomena. Ideal types rarely, if ever, appear in the real world, where the features of phenomena are never one way or another – this type or that type only.

This is to say that remakers of grading sometimes did try to "live up" to institutional ideals by demonstrating moments of institutional awareness. And students seeking to live up to institutional ideals also had moments of remaking the grading – or at least inclinations toward it that they fought to overcome. Think, for instance, of Thomas, deciding not to ask for an A on the Social Psychology paper on which he received a B, because he realized he had learned from the comments Dr. S wrote in the margins of his work, and that he respected those comments, even though he badly wanted an A. ("I like A's," he sighed.)

Types of interactions students pursue can change over time, as well, both in the short-term, as we see with Thomas, above, and over the three years of this study. Inclinations toward remaking the grading can be overcome, as Thomas demonstrates. And efforts to live up to institutional ideals can be thwarted. What I saw in this study that I did not expect was a number of students – Rick, Erica, Anthony, Wayne, Micah – stopping out not because they were in poor academic standing nor even because they were experiencing insurmountable financial challenges. They stopped out because the institution was serving them so poorly: they could not see a promise emerging from their efforts. Some of these students (Erica, Rick, and Wayne), of course, came back, and Erica and Wayne completed their degrees. But they left because SU was not showing them a way that they could live up to the institutional ideals they sought to achieve.

The bottom line of students' varying practices of making meaning of interaction with faculty is that the institution sets the stage for student-faculty interaction. The institution patterns how students and faculty encounter each other, how they see each other, and how they understand each other. And SU offers no consistent material resources for undergraduates to interact with faculty. There are pockets of resources: for instance, Allie's honors' program experience, Thomas' undergraduate research experience, Erica's seminar in the provost's pilot Innovation program. But SU does not provide consistent, universally accessible settings for student faculty interaction. It does not endow student-faculty interaction with sustained, material commitments such that any student, at any time in their SU career, can expect to find that their understandings of what it means to experience care in interaction with faculty might expand.

And so the effect is that students are left to figure out interaction with faculty for themselves, to pursue care in whatever way is most readily available to them. By leaving students to their own devices, the outcome of student-faculty interaction at SU is the reproduction of inequity: students primed to produce outcomes that the institution measures accumulate institutional rewards. There is, as we have seen in Chapter 4, a strong social class influence on such priming. On the other hand those students who prioritize the interactional inefficiencies of relationship formation over measured outcomes come away frustrated. While social class alone is not a determining factor of students' priorities in interaction with faculty, class plays a powerful role in the ways that students seek care from faculty. And because SU, like many large research institutions in the United States, allocates little support for consistent, sustained teaching and learning relationships in which institutional values can be modeled and practiced, those who enter student-faculty interactions with privilege tend to walk away with privilege reaffirmed.

But it is difficult to see how student-faculty interaction reproduces inequity without seeing actual interactions through the lenses of students themselves. Higher education publications provide a plethora of faculty perspectives on interaction with students. Administrators innundate students with survey requests. Scholars compile and cross tabulate student data to show broad patterns in students' ratings of quality of interaction with faculty. All of these views have the unintended consequence of reinforcing that administrative aphorism: we treasure what we measure. We care about the numeric outcome; we care less about the interactions and understandings behind them.

The value of this dissertation is that it brings an explicit focus on interaction into conversation with a sociology of evaluation - which sees the formation of understandings about what counts as worthy or unworthy as social processes with origins in relationships between individuals and institutions, among individuals, and in cultural milieu. How students form understandings of quality of interaction with faculty is a social process - a social process that has an impact on actual interactions with faculty. And a salient feature of these interactions at a large public research institution is the way in which they reinforce class privilege.

The power of social class in student-faculty interaction was not something I expected to find in designing this study. Indeed, I did not design the study to highlight social class as a key variable. I designed the study to get to know student volunteers over time and in as much depth as possible. In many ways, the study design proved effective: I remain in contact with these students who come and visit whenever they return to SU's campus, who send texts, emails, and even physical mail throughout the year. Their successes became my successes; their frustrations, my frustrations.

This raises the question of being too close. In the eyes of one early reader of this dissertation remarked, I present the "remakers of grading" in far too positive a light - a misstep the reader empathized with, seeing that these students opened their lives to me - and I present the "live-er-upp-ers" as plagued by deficit. These comments came as a surprise, as I felt just the opposite in writing. Indeed, as discussed in Chapter 3, many of those "living up" sought to cultivate and deepen our research relationship, as I became for them an institutional representative with whom they could interact in depth. "Remakers of grading" were less eager for us to get to know each other.

My research design also raises alert for only sharing one party's points of view. There are no faculty understandings in this study of student-faculty interaction - only faculty as students interact with and understand them. This is by design. Faculty perspectives on interaction with students are readily available. Instructors fill blogs, popular presses, and peer-reviewed publications with reflections on what they do with students and how their own unique backgrounds shape those interactions. Student perspectives have their best shot of entering into these venues if they come in the form of survey responses.

Surveys, of course, eliminate the entanglements of personal relationships and feelings from the research endeavor - entanglements that may, for some readers, lessen the value or impact of this study. Nevertheless, at least two major empirical insights arise from this study that can be investigated elsewhere and through other methods. The first is that the skill sets of class privilege are no complete repertoire - that students with privilege may in fact be at a deficit when it comes to cultivating teaching and learning relationships. The second is that the educationally purposive practices touted by student engagement research are also insufficient for producing teaching and learning relationships. I describe these insights in the section that follows.

Major Empirical Insights of this Study

This research offers two major empirical insights, each of which have practical and theoretical implications that may inform further research and/or institutional policy and practice. The first is that students who "remake the grading" use what Bourdieu (1996) called a "familiar rapport" with the ways that formal organizations distribute rewards. Yet this familiar rapport is no complete repertoire: these students appear likely to have a limited interactional repertoire when it comes to teaching and learning relationships. When it comes to building these teaching and learning relationships, even – or perhaps especially – students adept at negotiating with institutional rewards systems may need explicit support and training. This is a key practical and policy implication derived from the findings of this study. The second major contribution is that educationally purposive practices are not enough to ensure high quality student-faculty interaction. In this section, I outline these empirical contributions; in the following section, I outline how the practical and theoretical implications might inform further work.

The “familiar rapport” as a limited interactional repertoire is a theme undergirding much research about the educational experiences of upper-middle class students, yet it is a theme that has remained tacit. Research on the experiential core of college life shows upper-middle class students feel a kind of entitlement that carries them through many institutional processes (e.g. Stuber 2011; Stevens 2006). Sociologists of education have also shown that middle class parenting practices, including negotiating with authority figures for favorable conditions for a child’s individual needs, inform how students interact with their schools and form expectations of institutions and of institutional representatives (e.g. Lareau 2010; Demerath 2009). The “familiar rapport” arises as a result of such experiences: privileged students come to know how to “work” institutions to their own favor. Remaking the grading is an expression of this.

This dissertation highlights what sorts of interactions accomplish “working” the institution in the context of student-faculty interaction. I find that students who are primed to “produce measurable virtue” learn to define and quantify effort and outcomes prior to interaction with faculty, such that when they do interact with faculty, interactions center on “remaking the grading” by attempting to elicit empathy and by apologizing. In this view, faculty who “care” are those who provide the desired response to these strategies. This very limited interactional repertoire gets used again and again because the institution rewards the results it brings: measurable virtues bring recognition. What goes largely unrecognized are the interactions and relationships that go into the making of those metrics.

Literature on the experiential core of college life shows that upper-middle class students gain a whole host of advantages from lifestyles aimed at the production of measurable virtue. Because they know the currency the institution trafficks in, they are primed to move relatively smoothly through it. This focus on advantages is certainly necessary and important. But a focus on the advantages that upper-middle class students bring with them to their institutions of higher education obscures the fact that these students are may possess some real and serious deficits.

No doubt the word deficit is strong - dangerously so. Researchers and educators have too often taken deficit-mentalities into educational interactions and policies, resulting in experiences that are deeply negative for students (e.g. Dance 2003). I use it here because the experiences of developing familiar rapport with educational institutions appears to lead to some serious gaps in approaches to teaching and learning interactions, gaps that limit the kinds of interactions that student engagement scholars find to have high impact on student learning (Kuh et al. 2010). Without explicit recognition of the limited nature of privileged - and even highly "measurably virtuous" students' interactional repertoires - institutions and educators risk inadvertently reinforcing the notion that the interactional strategies of "remaking the grading" are acceptable and even worthy of reward. However, as this dissertation shows, these interactional strategies sharply limit how teaching and learning relationship unfold. Acknowledging a deficit here means that institutions must take action to address it. The deficit is not in students' capacities, but in institutional action to redress a pedagogically counterproductive status quo.

The second major empirical contribution of this dissertation is the finding that educationally purposive practices may not be enough to ensure high quality student-faculty interactions. Student engagement scholars provide robust evidence to show that student engagement itself is a two-way street in which institutions create the conditions in which students can engage in educationally purposive practices, including student-faculty interactions such as discussing course material in and out of class, discussing career plans with faculty, and preparing for class meetings in order to engage in class discussions (cf. Kuh et al. 2010). Through such educationally purposive practices, students engage with what their institutions have to offer in a way that scholars find to be highly correlated with every desired outcome of higher education (cf. Kuh et al. 2010).

Yet my data reveal that some SU students who engage in educationally purposive practices researchers and institutions like SU encourage - both directly, via policies like those mandating regular office hours for all instructors, and more indirectly, via campus promotional literature touting institutional (and faculty) commitment to undergraduate education - do not consistently find the kinds of high quality student-faculty relationships that the student engagement literature suggests these practices will lead them to find. On the contrary, for many SU undergraduates, educationally purposive practices have no consistent connection with the development of meaningful and ongoing relationships with faculty. One reason for this has to do with SU's large numbers of contingent instructors: many students established high quality interaction with instructors via educationally purposive practices only to find that those instructors were not around the next semester.

SU students who relied on educationally purposive practices to establish high quality interaction with faculty shared a feeling that they each, in some way, might fall short of institutional ideals. As commuters, transfers, returners, working students, or traditional students who felt they had much work to do to meet SU's ideals, these students made use of institutionally recommended channels - such as office hours, use of syllabi, use of instructors' in-class suggestions -- to connect with those who taught them and to strive for the institutional ideals they saw themselves as not yet fulfilling. The inconsistency with which these practices translated into meaningful, lasting relationships suggests that it is not enough for institutions to espouse and promote educationally purposive practices: they must also commit to supporting relationships.

Student engagement research holds that ongoing and high quality student-faculty relationships support students in the development of critical thinking and complex reasoning skills, that they demonstrate for students how to pose and handle difficult questions (NSSE 2013). Contemporary undergraduates have a great deal of experience sitting on the receiving end of questions: even NSSE directors acknowledge that this is the most surveyed generation in history (McCormick and McClenney 2012). They are prepared, in other words, to be asked questions. They may get less guidance and support in the practice of asking the questions themselves. Critical educator Myles Horton put it this way: "Until [students] pose the question that has some relevance to them, they're not going to pay attention to it" (Horton and Freire 1990: 107).

For Horton, posing questions required supportive and consistent relationships. This means that institutions like SU, which seek student engagement and strive to develop students' critical thinking and complex reasoning skills need to take an active role in nurturing and sustaining such relationships. Yet for SU and a growing number of institutions and researchers, student engagement is about metrics produced via surveys, or questions posed *to* students, and about measurable outcomes that can be used to make a compelling case regarding effectiveness to external funding entities. But as my data show, the interactions that go into student responses to these questions matter to students' experiences and to their learning. And such metrics cover up those interactions: it is immensely difficult, if not impossible, to quantify the quality of student-faculty interaction. Dewey (1916) writes that schools and educators "never educate directly, only by means of environment" (p. 22). A metric-focused environment teaches students that pedagogical interactions - the raw material of teaching and learning relationships - are important only insomuch as they facilitate convenience for student and/ or teacher in the effort to supply answers to those questions.

Practical Applications and Research Extensions

So what do we do about such an environment? What does it take to create an environment that consistently and equitably enables teaching and learning relationships that foster the kind of intellectual mentorship for which NSSE and student engagement scholars advocate? I propose three lines of inquiry that may help to get at these questions. First, sociologists, student engagement scholars, and scholars of teaching and learning need to provide more insight into institutional programming that does *not* reward the limited repertoire. Second, researchers need to create portraits of what institutional support for consistent, equitable, and meaningful student-faculty relationships looks like at a research university. Third, researchers should show more in-depth evidence of what assessment can look like - particularly when the desired learning outcome is a process of learning to pose and deal with difficult questions.

There is a great deal of literature illustrating how institutions reward the limited interactional repertoire by emphasizing the “production of measurable virtue” (e.g. Stevens 2006; Demerath 2009; Stuber 2009). There is much less research on how institutions may expand and transform the limited repertoire in the service of fostering meaningful and productive teaching and learning relationships. One key exemplar, however, is the “test optional” movement of institutions that have removed the standardized testing requirement from their admissions process (Hiss 2013; Soares 2012). Students are thus evaluated and rewarded for their potential contributions to the academic community (Soares 2012) rather than their ability to produce measurable virtue. As such, they see their institutions valuing relationships (or at least potential relationships) over metrics. Scholars find that going test-optional tends to produce excellent college academic outcomes for students from a much broader diversity of backgrounds than SAT scores predict (Hiss 2013; Soares 2012). Further research should investigate how students make meaning of test-optional policies, what messages institutional moves away from rewarding the production of measurable virtue send to students, and what impact this has on their approaches to and experiences of teaching and learning relationships.

A second line of inquiry entails seeking out rich and diverse cases of institutional support for student-faculty interaction. Existing research touches on how some institutions prioritize student-faculty interaction as one way of "creating conditions that matter to student success" (Kuh et al. 2010). But further research should analyze the institutional conditions that lead to such prioritization. It should ask how institutions can and do support the cultivation of mentoring relationships for students on every path traveled toward degree. Comparative case study research - analysis of specific programs, as well as analysis of a range of institutional types - would be fruitful here. With these comparative institutional analyses as a backdrop, researchers can then investigate how differing types of institutional support shape the ways students approach and make meaning of student-faculty interaction.

A third line of inquiry has to do with student-faculty interaction and assessment. The importance of assessing what college students learn will only escalate as the Obama administration finalizes and promotes its system of college rankings, which features a calculation of returns on investment associated with particular institutions. Sociologists Arum and Roksa (2011) have promoted the Collegiate Learning Assessment, a standardized test, for this purpose. Such assessments result in cleanly measurable outcomes that facilitate cross-institutional comparisons. But further research in Sociology and in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning should investigate how it is possible to assess a learning process, such as the process of learning to pose and deal with complex questions. And following this, researchers should examine how different types of assessment shape institutional support for student-faculty interaction and students' understandings of and approaches to interaction with faculty.

Becker Revisited

Finally, one driving element of this study was the objective of revisiting Becker, Geer, and Hughes' (1968) mid-20th century ethnography of student-faculty interaction at a public research institution by examining student-faculty interaction at another public research institution in the second decade of the 21st century. Here is what has not changed in the nearly six and a half decades since Becker et al. (1968) conducted the research on which they based their now-classic work, *Making the Grade*: students care about what they think institutions reward. Here is what has changed since Becker et al.'s (1968) study: it is increasingly clear that different students have different ways of interpreting what it is that institutions reward and how those rewards are distributed. These meaning making practices shape students' expectations of interaction with faculty and the ways in which they evaluate what counts as high quality interaction with faculty.

Students think faculty care when interaction with faculty helps them attain what it is that they think institutions reward. But where Becker et al. (1968) identified one lens – the GPA perspective – through which students understood institutional rewards and therefore interaction with faculty, I find key differences among students. These differences hinge on how students believe the institution sees them. I identify two general perspectives: students who see themselves as an institutional asset already worthy of institutional rewards, and students who see themselves as working to live up to institutional ideals. The relationship between these perspectives and students' actual experiences interacting with faculty are even further complicated by the changes in how 21st –century research universities make space for student-faculty interaction: for instance, dramatic shifts in how staffing of undergraduate courses and a proliferation of special programs used to entice traditional-aged, residential students with hefty resumes of "measurable virtues" (Stevens 2006) to choose SU but a dearth of such opportunities (and hence an even larger hole in student-faculty interaction opportunities) for transfer students and commuter students.

This dissertation provides an alternative view to two dominant discourses of student engagement in undergraduate academic work, and in particular of undergraduates' experiences of interacting with faculty. I argue here that students' perceptions of what institutions value shape the approaches they take to interacting with faculty, and the practices and perceptions to which institutions give actual value – via processes and practices of distributing rewards and recognition (e.g. GPAs and entry into special programs) – shape what is available for whom in those approaches. To see how students experience these institutional processes, this dissertation has contended that it is necessary to complement large-scale quantitative studies, currently the dominant research paradigm for studying student engagement (e.g. NSSE) with qualitative data that sheds light on students' actual experiences of interacting with faculty. Second, this dissertation updates Becker, Geer, and Hughes' (1968) ubiquitous metaphor of student-faculty interaction as a contract, in which students and faculty interact to negotiate effort.

Becker, Geer, and Hughes' (1968) contract metaphor paints a picture of undergraduate education as a business transaction – a picture that many contemporary commentators continue to elaborate on in growing dialogues, debates, and diatribes on student-consumerism. These discourses largely frame students' consumerist attitudes – and administrators' zeal to market and sell their institution as a product – as the source of the problem. Becker, Geer, and Hughes' (1968) original questions remain relevant: how do actors within an institution make sense of the way the institution allocates rewards and opportunities? How do these understandings shape interaction? The problem then is not students as entitled consumers (as some contend) nor the extent to which faculty and institutions must "give the customers what they want."[1] The key issue at stake is the messages institutions give students about what is valued, and the extent to which institutions can provide pathways for every one of their students to realize those values.

Becker, Geer, and Hughes (1968) provided a powerful and lasting illustration of how institutional changes in higher education at mid-20th century impacted student-faculty interaction as well as the ways students make meaning of interaction with faculty. The resulting GPA perspective, undergraduates' view of interaction with faculty in which definitions of quality hinge on the extent to which students could extract, via interaction, exactly what it would take to "make the grade," delineated a massive shift from prior generations in which care about grades marked students as outsiders. But the GPA perspective, which Becker et al. (1968) attributed to nearly all undergraduates, stemmed from increased need for grades in order to secure ever-higher credentials that students needed not only to *attain* social status, but even to simply reproduce it in the post-World War II economy. Faculty, also subject to these narrower (or "hyperrationalized" [Ritzer 2010]) standards of professionalization, tacitly supported the GPA perspective by entering into "contract" with students, agreeing to give students all information they sought about grades provided that students leave them alone to conduct their research (Becker et al. 1968).

We now have a wealth of empirical data revealing the importance of student-faculty interaction to undergraduates' success in higher education. Three "generations" of student-faculty interaction studies have shown how the academic revolution impacted faculty relationships to students, student outcomes, and the ways that institutions and researchers talk about, if not actually *educate,* undergraduates. We have empirical evidence to support the notion that when students perceive high quality interaction with faculty, the engage more in educationally effective practices, which are correlated with every desired outcome of higher education from persistence and retention to higher early career earnings (Tinto 1997; Hu and Wolniak 2013; Kuh et al. 2010). In addition, we know from this data that there are many ways in which students' diverse lived experiences shape their higher education experiences, including their interactions with and expectations of interactions with faculty (Hurtado et al. 2011; Harper and Quaye 2009). This diversity impacts interactions with faculty and understandings and expectations of them (Hurtado et al. 2011; Harper and Quaye 2009). In other words, to understand how students make meaning of quality of interaction with faculty, it is necessary to know where students are coming from.

This dissertation contends that undergraduates make meaning of student-faculty interaction largely in relation to their understandings of how their institution sees them. These understandings of one's relationship-to-institution have strong social class dimensions. In other words, social class explains students' relationships to their institution and the understandings students have of interaction with faculty. To explain, of course, is quite different than to determine. Social class need not be fate when it comes to student-faculty interaction, but the institution's structures and resources have much to do with who is able to challenge likely outcomes.

Students' understandings of interaction with faculty are also impacted by the significant institutional and cultural changes higher education more generally. Public research institutions - have undergone in significant decades, including decreased public funding for higher education and skyrocketing student debt, increased pressure on institutions to produce metrics that quantify returns on students' investments, increased pressure to rise in popular media rankings, such as those of *US News and World Report*, and institutions' increased reliance on contingent labor. These changes shape the expectations students, families, and the general public have of these institutions, in turn shaping students' approaches to interaction with faculty.

While much of what Becker et al. (1968) observed remains true for contemporary undergraduates -- the importance of grades and ever-higher credentials for nearly all students, ever-narrower definitions of faculty work, students' perception of some sort of contract with faculty enabling these needs to be met -- this study adds this following nuance to Becker et al.'s conclusions. That is, there is no one single undergraduate perspective on quality of interaction with faculty, but rather that there are distinct expectations about quality of interaction that emerge from how students see themselves in relation to their institution. In this dissertation, I identify two distinct approaches that students use to make meaning of their relationship to SU and to form their expectations and strategies for interacting with faculty. I refer to these as “remaking the grading” (detailed in Chapter 4) and “living up” (detailed in Chapter 5). While students may regularly invoke “care” to describe what counts as high quality interaction with faculty, the ways they account for what it means to “care” vary in relation to their expectations and strategies for interaction with faculty. For “remakers” of grading, faculty who care remake the grading to align with student requests. For those “living up,” care means faculty work to know students and know how they can support them in living up to institutional ideals.

Remakers of grading highlight still another difference from Becker et al.’s conclusions. In remaking the grading, students describe high quality interaction with faculty as interaction in which students are able to “remake the grading” to suit personal needs for A’s earned through a convenient amount of effort. In such interactions, students determine an amount of effort they are willing to invest in the work an instructor requires prior to ever interacting with the instructor. When unexpected effort arises, students negotiate for accommodations based on personal need, and faculty who “care” demonstrate this care by remaking graded expectations to fit this personal need, thereby resulting in what the student understands to be high quality interaction. This is quite distinct from the GPA perspective Becker et al. (1968) observed, in which students determined effort *through interaction* and in which high quality interaction was interaction in which faculty were clear in those interactions about required effort. The social class dimensions of remaking the grading also add a layer of complexity to student-faculty interaction as

Becker, Geer, and Hughes (1968) observed it.

Students who enacted "remaking the grading" in sharing their understandings of faculty who "cared" shared a particular set of social class-influenced schooling experiences. Namely, they came from competitive, college-prep environments that strongly emphasized what Mitchell Stevens (2006) calls the "production of measurable virtue" as the highest standard of educational excellence. Producing such "measurable virtues" requires substantial financial and social resources, and as such, these students came largely from relatively affluent families, they had socialized primarily with other affluent peers, and spent time in schooling environments with primarily affluent student bodies. Most important to the remaking the grading approach, however, was the fact that SU readily rewarded the successful production of measurable virtue (through selection for special honors programs and/ or selective opportunities). In no small part, SU did so because such students carried with them SAT scores and high school class ranks that would raise SU's profile in US News and World Report rankings. The effect was that students engaged in the production of measurable virtue came to see their pursuits as equivalent to institutional ideals -- and to see accomplishment of "measurable virtue" as tantamount to embodying institutional ideals. The impact on interaction with faculty was that students came to see measurable virtues as counting for much more than teaching and learning relationships, as evidenced, for instance, in the audiology student who made a case that an A on a test would be more beneficial to her hoped-for career as an audiologist than a relationship with her professor, a practicing clinician in the field (see page 14, above). For these students, care means assistance in the production of measurable virtue, as measurable virtue is what they perceive institutions value the most.

For students who prioritized "living up" to institutional ideals, care is an ongoing relationship that enables the kind of ongoing interactions that support growth and intellectual development. For these students, high quality of interaction with faculty is interaction that actualizes the potential of institutional channels *for* student-faculty interaction, as interaction achieved through educationally purposive practices that fosters further educationally purposive practices and institutional success. Again, there are strong social class dimensions influencing this perspective. The students who invoke this understanding of care have fewer similarities in their prior schooling experiences than the previous group. They attended a range of high schools in a range of decades with a range of family and employment experiences. What they share is a feeling of deviance from institutional ideals. Because the institution rewards the production of measurable virtue and by extension the social and financial resources needed to produce it, students whose schools and schooling environments contained less of these resources at times expressed concern that they lacked some qualities the institution desired. In addition, because SU, like many flagship public institutions, predominantly portrayed images of SU students as 18-22 years old, living on campus, able to participate in campus organizations, and so on, commuting and returner students felt that they were not SU's "banner students." At the same time, however, there were a few traditional aged, campus residing students who linked their expectations of care to educationally purposive and institutionally appropriate practices.

The actual student-faculty interactions this second group of students experienced varied much more than those of the previous group, and they were much less often centered on grades. In fact, what they found was that the avenues SU offered for student-faculty interaction were paved rather inconsistently. They worked to establish relationships through office hours, through dialogue in, after, and prior to class, through careful preparation for class and discussion of course material with loved ones -- all practices hailed by researchers and institutions as vital to student success in undergraduate education (e.g. Kuh et al. 2010). Yet frequently they found that the instructors they established relationships with were not around the next semester - they were contingent faculty, or visiting instructors, or they were graduate students. And even when such instructors were around the following semester, they often did not have the insider knowledge of the institution or programs of study that students hoped to obtain. While some students in this group did manage to establish lasting relationships with faculty members, they more often did so through employment on campus than through the classroom.

Concluding Thoughts

Becker and colleagues' (1968) metaphor of the "contract" between students and faculty as the standard on which students' understandings of quality of interaction with faculty hinge has made the crossover from a research finding to an everyday image present in many a discussion about student-faculty interaction in higher education. Many comment that these contracts are no longer metaphoric, but concrete and real in the form of ever longer and more precisely worded syllabi - syllabi written as though they were legal contracts.[37]

Despite this, as data in Chapter 4 suggest, some students never read the syllabus. Historian Daniel Perry blogged that syllabi, as contracts, are becoming much more like the End-User Agreements preceding some digital downloads: “something... which one glaces at briefly, clicks ‘agree to terms,’ and moves on to the product without reading any of the document.”[38] In this paradigm, faculty become customer service agents, a fear brought to fruition in at least one Assistant Professor job posting that listed “PROVIDE EXCELLENT CUSTOMER SERVICE” as a position requirement.

Consumerism is a backdrop on which student-faculty interactions are set at SU, but this may not differentiate higher education so much from a wide range of contemporary institutional settings, in which the language and expectations of consumerism continuously deepen their reach into everyday life. My data show, however, that expectations about student-faculty interaction are couched in the

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37 See, for example, Jeff Sandefer in the New York Times’ “Room For Debate”. http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2012/09/17/professors-and-the-students-who-grade-them/universities-should-use-student-evaluations-to-give-customers-what-they-want (Last accessed 30 April 2014).

38 See for example, this post in Inside Higher Ed: http://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/library_babel_fish/the_syllabus_as_tos#sthash.ndwQMwjn.dpbs (Last accessed 30 April 2014).

language of care, a much more complicated construct - with at least two quite different sets of expectations among undergraduates.

Demands for care, as Arlie Hochschild (1983) has shown, are very much a part of consumerism, and care work is often marginalized with care providers relegated to a lower status than those who demand it. Institutions like SU reward this kind of marginalization when they leave teaching and learning relationships to chance or for rewarding those who produce prestigious amounts of measurable virtue. And as such, institutions end up rewarding consumerist approaches to student-faculty interaction, benefitting the student-consumer who demands that instructors "remake the grading" at the expense of students who use educationally purposive practices to try to build meaningful teaching and learning relationships. The result of this situation is that too many students are deprived of the kind of environment needed to practice posing and dealing with difficult questions. It is the responsibility of higher education institutions to help students reimagine what teaching and learning relationships can be: to model for them what kinds of interactions it takes to build those relationships, and to provide structured support for creating an environment in which that building process can take place. But the fact that students look at interaction with faculty as sites where care is possible at all reflects not simply a crisis of consumer entitlement: it reveals potential for meaningful interaction.

APPENDIX: Chart of Participants

NAME	Gender	Age at Enrollment	Major	Race (ethnicity, if self-identified)	Highest level of parental education
Pallavi	F	18	Neurobiology	Asian (Indian, Oriya)	Graduate degree
Lyndsey	F	18	Criminology	Black	High school
Chloe	F	21	Sociology	Black	High school
Erica	F	18	Family Science	Hispanic (Puerto Rican)	High school
Danielle	F	18	Chemistry	Black	Bachelor's degree
Lulit	F	18	Sociology	Black (Ethiopian)	Graduate degree
Allie	F	18	Philosophy	White	Graduate degree
Faith	F	18	Family Science	Black	College
AJ	M	18	Family Science	Black	High school
Anthony	M	52	Music Educatio	White (Italian)	High school
Mark	M	18	Kinesiology	White	Bachelor's degree
Ademola	M	18	Sociology	Black (Nigerian)	Bachelor's degree
Jason	M	18	Kinesiology	Asian	Bachelor's degree
David	M	18	Engineering	Asian (Korean)	Graduate degree
William	M	20	Art History	White (English)	Graduate degree
Nathan	M	20	Sociology	White	Bachelor's degree
Drew	M	22	Criminology	White	Bachelor's degree
Rachel	F	22	Linguistics	White	Bachelor's degree
Henry	M	18	English	White	Graduate degree
Eddie	M	18	Sociology	Asian (Vietnamese)	High school equivalency
Matt	M	18	Kinesiology	White (Brazilian)	Bachelor's degree
Ferdinand	M	18	Engineering	Black (Nigerian)	Bachelor's degree
Elissa	F	18	Afr.Am. Studies	Black (Guyanese)	Bachelor's degree
Jim	M	68	Biology	White	High School
Sarah	F	19	Political Science	White	Graduate degree
Sanaa	F	50	Sociology	Arabic	Graduate degree
Roger	M	21	Sociology	Black	Bachelor's degree
Liz	F	21	Sociology	White	High school
Micah	M	19	Jewish Studies	White	Graduate degree
	F	18	Engineering	White	Graduate degree
Rick	M	20	Kinesiology	White/Asian	Bachelor's degree
Wayne	M	20	Sociology	Black (Nigerian)	Bachelor's degree
Linda	F	48	Communication	White	High school

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