2013

Opportunities for All? Race, Class, and Inequality at Elite Colleges

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4/20/2013

Acknowledgements

Writing my thesis would not have been possible without the support of many people. I would like to especially thank my thesis advisor, Lee Cuba, who graciously guided me throughout this journey. I would also like to thank the Africana Studies department, my family and friends, as well as countless others would offered my their encouragement.

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Introduction: Inequality at Elite Colleges

Since the 1970s, elite colleges and universities have made great strides in creating more diverse campus communities. They have created ethnic studies departments and hired school administrators for specific multicultural groups. Most importantly, elite institutions have recruited and admitted more students from historically underrepresented groups. During this time the number of black students at these schools have significantly increased. But this progress is tempered by several unsettling facts. First, black students are still underrepresented at these schools even after decades of increased attention to racial diversity. Among the applicants to selective colleges and universities in 1997, black students comprised only 7% while whites and Asians comprised 68% and 20% respectively (Espenshade and Radford 2009). Secondly, the majority of the black students who are admitted are the best positioned to go onto college. Nearly 75% of black applicants come from families that are middle to upper class. Thirty five percent of the black students who matriculate at private elite colleges are lower to working class (Espenshade and Radford 2009). Lower and working class black students are not represented at America's best colleges and universities.

Previous studies have offered general profiles of the black students who attend America's best institutions. There is a lack of research that provides nuanced data of the kinds of privileges these students have. In this study, I focus on a small groups of students, whom I call the NECASL cohort, who attend five elite liberal arts colleges in New England. The chapters to follow will explore how cultural capital and habitus shape black college students' choices throughout their academic careers. Habitus is important to Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction because it leads to specific behaviors and practices that in turn create outcomes that

create a specific kind of social structure. For example, NECASL students' habitus propels them to attend to an elite liberal arts college (behavior) and then this privilege setting then in turn creates a middle to upper-middle class lifestyle for students.

This study answers the following questions: what similarities are there among the black students being admitted to elite colleges? What advantages are these students gaining during their time in college? What challenges do they face at predominately white colleges? I answer these questions by using interviews with black college students who participated in the New England Consortium on Assessment and Student Learning (NECASL). NECASL is a longitudinal study that followed the class of 2010 at seven selective liberal arts colleges over the course of their undergraduate career. The goal of the collaborative project is to better understand how students make learn, make important academic decisions, and learn. Ultimately the research conducted by NECASL is used to "improve the educational experience of students and faculty" (NECASL 2012).

When I began my research, I did not intend to use the NECASL data. My initial plan was to study racial and class inequalities at one elite college. I was going to distribute a survey to black students from all class years and conduct group interviews with a smaller group of survey respondents. I received over thirty responses. Though 20 out of 30 survey respondents agreed to participate in interviews, only four participated. Luckily, I was able to use the NECASL data, which benefitted my study in ways I was not anticipating. My sample then included 28 students from five colleges instead of one.[1] An additional benefit of using the NECASL data is that I was able to follow these students throughout the course of their undergraduate career. The students were interviewed three times in their first year, twice a year for their sophomore to senior years,

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[1] Though there are seven schools in the NECASL project, I chose the schools for the study that had a consistent group of black participants who remained in the sample over the ten rounds.

and once in the first year after graduation. Because I was using longitudinal data, I was able to track students' changes throughout their time in college. There were also some disadvantages to using the NECASL data. The most challenging problem was that I was unable to interview the students myself. While there was a great amount of responses to work with, it took some maneuvering to choose the best interview questions that fit within my research goals.

<u>Methodology</u>

I began by choosing the NECASL schools that had a consistent number of black students who conducted all ten rounds of interviews. This meant using five out of the seven schools which gave me a sample of 28 students. Next, I went through the interview schedules and chose the questions that fit best with my research goals. Below, I list these questions and explain my rationale for choosing them.

Round 1 – First Year, Fall

- *When did you start looking at potential colleges?*
- *What types of schools (e.g., large/small, urban/rural) did you consider?*
- *What kinds of things were you looking for in choosing a college? (location, size, demographics, etc.)*
- *Who was most involved/influential in the search and your decision-making process (you, friends, family, guidance counselor)?*
- *What schools did you apply to?*
- *Why did you, in the end, choose to come to _____ College?*

The responses to these questions offer details about NECASL students' college search process. Since I argue that capital influences expectations and behaviors, I needed to gauge what kinds of capital (financial, human, social, or cultural) the NECASL cohort had when applying to college. The questions about the characteristics they found most desirable show students' individual preferences, but it also explains what purposes students' see college will serve for them. For example, for a student college may be a time for self-exploration and choose a large school with

numerous academic majors. Another student may look for a small college which reputations for a specific field.

Round 2 – First Year, Spring

- *How would you define diversity at _____ College?*
- *Based on your experience thus far, what can you say about diversity at _____?*
  (Probe for specific one or more examples.)
- *Has your academic experience been affected by this diversity? If so, in what ways?*
- *Has your residential or social experience been affected by this diversity? If so, in what ways?*

These questions were chosen to gauge the NECASL cohorts' initial definitions of and experiences with diversity. The responses are used as benchmark to understand if, and how, their time in college changes their definitions.

Round 5 – Sophomore Year, Spring

- *Have you declared a major?*
- *What did you choose to major in? What attracted you to this field? Was a specific course or specific professor instrumental in your decision? Or career plans?*
- *What kinds of grades had you been getting in courses in this field before officially declaring it as your major? Did those grades play a role in your decision?*
- *What, if anything, made you hesitate?*
- *Is this the major you were interested in when you entered _____?*
- *Who played a significant role in helping your reach that decision? Were any faculty members important in your decision?*
- *Did you talk with your parents about your major?*
  - *Alumni?*
  - *Other students?*
  - *Staff?*

By the end of the sophomore year, most students have declared a major. The questions allow students to discuss the various factors that influenced their decision. Because of the difficulties some students may have making this decision, I also wanted to know if they considered the advice from friends, parents, etc. This group of people can have differing ideas about whether the major should be practical and translate easily to specific occupation, such as biology with a pre-

medicine track. Others may think they are earning skills, such as quantitative reasoning, verbal and written communication, that makes them attractive employees. The expectation of what a specific degree can earn belies one's own habitus and cultural capital.

Round 6 – Junior Year, Fall

- *What would make this a successful semester for you? (Probe: Why is that particularly important to you?) What would make this a successful year for you? (Probe: Why is that particularly important to you?)*
- *Now thinking ahead to the end of college, what would make the next two years successful for you? What questions are most on your mind?*
- *How often have you gone to see your professors this semester outside of class? Why did you go to see them?*

By the fall of their junior year, most students have declared their majors and are beginning to think ahead to their post-graduation plans. Though these plans are usually tentative, students are thinking ahead nonetheless. The answers to these questions allow me to understand what students consider important at this stage in their academic careers.

- *What are the most important identities to you? (Probes: ethnic, racial, gender, sexual, political, religious).*
- *Have you thought about these?*
- *Have those identities become more apparent to you since coming to college?*
- *Have those identities changed since coming to college?*
- *Have some become less important?*

Like the questions about diversity, I chose these questions about identity in order to gauge students' ideas about themselves mid-way in their college careers. The interviewers asked about identities (plural) because there are many aspects that the students may find important. I chose this question to see if, and how, their racial identities were part of how they defined themselves overall.

Round 8 – Senior Year, Fall

- *Did you have a job or internship over the summer?*
  - *Was your job or internship related to your major? For pay only? An internship or service learning opportunity?*
  - *Why did you choose it?*

- o *How did you find about it?*
- o *To what extent did you feel prepared?*
- o *What did you learn?*
- o *To what extent did you summer experience change you view of you academic experience? Plans?*
- *To what extent did you feel pressured to have an internship this past summer?*
- *What's most on your mind as senior year gets underway?*

Since students are in the final year of college, I wanted to see what, if any, steps they took to plan ahead for their future. I also wanted to see what resources students were using if they sought summer jobs or internships since I argue the availability of such resources leads to particular behaviors and expectations.

- *Since coming to college have your views about diversity changed?*
- *Describe an interaction with someone different than you that went well? Did not go well?*

This is the second time students were asked about their ideas of diversity. After more time on their campuses, students' ideas may or may not have changed. It is important to understand how much of an impact their college environments are having on this critical part of student learning. Students are also engaging diversity through interactions, and so I chose to focus on see the effects of positive and negative interactions. Race may or may not have become more important to the students' after their time at a predominately white college. But, based on previous research, it most likely affected their interactions with their peers or professors in some way.

Round 9 – Senior Year, Spring

- *How satisfied have you been with academic experience at __College?*
- *Describe a typical __College student?*
- *What are the strengths/weaknesses of the college*?

These final questions were chosen mainly to see how students thought about their entire time at their colleges. While the previous rounds focused on particular themes or events, I chose these questions to understand how all of the same interactions, decisions, and events fit within students' larger impression of their college experience.

<u>Black College Students</u>

The quantitative and qualitative data on black students at predominately white colleges is robust. Much of this research focuses on the challenges black students face at these colleges. Even though more black men and women are going to predominately white colleges since the 1970s, black students continue to have lower retention rates and lower GPAs than their white and Asian counterparts (Allen 1992; Bowen and Bok 1998; Espenshade and Radford 2009; Massey et al. 2008) Elite colleges are in a unique position to assist in the fight for greater social mobility because these schools have larger endowments to support students who have high financial need.

They are also better able to recruit high achieving students from lower socioeconomic statuses. Their pool of qualified applicants is also higher. Yet black students continue to be underrepresented at elite colleges and underperform compared to their white and Asian counterparts. The explanations for this disparity have spanned the spectrum of social scientific discourse. Today, the prevailing explanations fall into one of four categories: capital deficiency, the resistance model, psychological effects of discrimination such as stereotype threat, and attachment theory.

Capital Deficiency

Capital deficiency theories propose that black students' underperformance can be attributed to a lack of capital, be it financial, human, and/or cultural. Essentially, it argues that black students' material conditions, or social position, negatively impacts their academic performance. It is important to emphasize the ways these forms of capital intersect. High human capital is also

often associated with high incomes (financial capital) or exposure to high society (cultural capital).

Parents with financial capital are able to provide children with a plethora of educational resources that positively affect their outcomes. Parents who are wealthy can choose which neighborhoods to live in based on the security of the community and the quality of the schools. The can afford to avoid highly segregated neighborhoods. These schools, whether public or private, are well funded, have better quality teachers, and can offer Advanced Placement courses, which are predictors of college performance and readiness. Lower and working class families are more likely to live in highly segregated neighborhoods. Segregated neighborhoods are more likely to be lower-income, have less community resources, and are less secure. As expected, black and Latino students experienced disadvantages because they were more likely than their white and Asian peers to come from segregated communities (Massey et al. 2008). When preparing for college, wealthy parents can also afford SAT prep classes or application consultants. Their children are also more likely to apply, get accepted, and enroll in highly selective colleges (Espenshade and Radford 2009).

Human capital is an additional resource families have that positively impact their children's academic achievement. It is the set of skills and credentials that a worker possesses that leads to economic returns. Like business owners who invest in their companies with the prospect of greater productivity, parents with higher degrees invest in their children to ensure their future success. Higher income parents are more actively involved in managing their children's education. They engage in the parenting style that Annette Lareau (2003) calls

"concerted cultivation." The goal of concerted cultivation is to develop children's talents through structure, discipline, and active involvement by the parents. Lareau found that the children from

middle-class families that practiced this parenting style, across racial lines, had their days filled with schools, sports, music lessons, and other structured activities. Parents managed by their children's lives in order to ensure that they are consistently stimulated and challenged in and outside of school. The lower income parents engaged in a different parenting style, the "accomplishment of natural growth," in which parents were less actively involved and instead left children to develop their own talents and interests. Lower income parents were primarily concerned with keeping children safe, providing for their needs, and regulating their behavior.

Though Lareau did not make any claims that one parenting style was better than another, research suggests concerted cultivation is associated with greater academic achievement. Research on applicants to the country's most selective colleges and universities support Lareau's claim. Sixty percent of middle class and upper middle class applicants who applied to the country's most selective colleges and universities reported that their parents or another adult assisted them with their homework often to very often. However, only 43% of working class and 17% of lower income students reported the same levels of involvement in homework (Espenshade and Radford 2009). Parents with lower incomes are less likely to have college degrees and more likely to have been poorly educated themselves, making them unable to effectively assist their children with their homework. Applicants also reported varying levels in the expectations their parents had about the quality or type of college they would attend depending on their socioeconomic status. Only 10% of lower income applicants reported that their parents had an opinion about the quality of their prospective college compared to nearly 70% of upper middle class applicants (Espenshade and Radford 2009). Parents who have low levels of education are less able to prepare their children for college because they themselves are

unfamiliar with the college process. Since blacks have lower rates of college attendance and graduation, their children are most impacted by the lack of human capital.

Another form of capital is cultural capital. Cultural capital in its most basic sense can be defined as the knowledge of the rules of behavior. It is the acquired dispositions, practices, and symbols that are idiosyncratic to a particular social class. These acquired articles of culture have the potential to assist in gaining specific goals. Unlike human and financial capital, cultural capital is not necessarily connected to material resources. Instead, it centers on the Weberian definition of status, which is determined by the social prestige of one's position. Because of this, cultural capital emphasizes the power of non-monetary privilege. For example, the advantages to attending an elite college extends beyond the prospective gains in earnings. Elite college graduates are also afforded the social prestige and the positive assumptions about intellectual ability.

Bourdieu and Passeron (1990; 1977, 1986) developed the concept of cultural capital in order to better understand the reproduction of social status in France. Bourdieu argued that high status social groups confer their articles of culture to their children through socialization. When the children of the elite enter school, they come equipped with cultural capital in the form of speech patterns and knowledge of and experience with high art. The educational system, which uses the culture of high status groups as the marker of sophistication, then rewards the children who are most familiar with high status culture (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990).

Habitus, while not the same as cultural capital, is a related concept. The environment in which one is socialized influences his/her orientation to the world. Sensibilities of what is possible and appropriate is shaped by the cultural capital and shared experiences of the status group to which one belongs. Habitus is, therefore, a framework that structures one's reality.

Though it is not deterministic, it guides behaviors and thinking (Swartz 1977; Wacquant 2005). For example, the expectation that someone will attend college does not develop accidentally, but is developed through constant socialization in an environment that reinforces the idea that college attendance is not only possible but is expected. Furthermore, the influence of cultural capital and habitus can be seen in the expectations about the quality of college someone will attend. While one student may apply to mainly middle ranked schools and an Ivy League university as a "reach," another student may apply to all elite schools with an Ivy as a "safety." Essentially, the relationship between one's social position and the behaviors and attitudes follow this model: one's social status shapes his or her worldview, or habitus. These sensibilities, expectations, and values then lead one to make particular choices which reproduce his or her position within society.

Dimaggio and Mohr (1985) found cultural capital to have a significant effect on students' educational outcomes. Dimaggio and Mohr define cultural capital differently than the way I define it in this study. They define cultural capital in terms of cultural consumption, or the "interest in and familiarity with traditional high-culture forms," such as high art, museum visits, and classical music. According to Dimaggio and Mohr, measuring cultural capital in terms of cultural activities is useful because it is most significant and most available across a range of ages and geographical regions (1985).[2] They found that the cultural capital of men and women's fathers had a greater effect on students' educational attainment and college attendance than their father's education. Cultural capital also had a significant impact on the frequency students self-

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[2] While I agree that cultural consumption is an important part of cultural capital, I disagree with such a narrow conception of American cultural capital. Dimaggio and Mohr (1985) do not account for the attitudes and preferences that are a central part of Bourdieu's definition of cultural capital. It is not simply a preference for and appreciation of classical music, but also attitudes that are associated with high status groups. In the American context, some of these attitudes include self-motivation, ingenuity, and aggressiveness (Lamont and Lareau 1988).

reported that they discussed future plans with their teachers, counselors, and peers during high school. Lastly, students' completion of college, the likelihood that they would attend graduate school and their educational attainment were effected by their level of cultural capital.

Culture is an important tool that is used to delineate between those who belong in a group and those who do not (Lamont 1992). In the case of elites, those who have disproportionate access to and control over resources (Khan 2010), the cultural dispositions that constitute elite identity is used to reflect social position as well as (re)producing it (Bourdieu 1986). Access to such capital is intentionally limited, because if everyone could identify as being elite, then no one would be elite. One of the greatest avenues to attaining cultural capital is through schooling, particularly, elite schooling. Elite schools can be characterized as "some of the greatest sources of mobility" in that they are able to increase the level of accessibility historically marginalized groups have had to their resources (Khan 2010: 372). However, elite schools continue to select from the most privileged of society, who are white, from middle to upper middle class families. The same holds true among blacks. The majority of black college students are upper middle to middle class and are not the first in their family to attend college (Bowen and Bok 1998; Espenshade and Radford 2009; Massey et al. 2008). Yet these students still do not perform as well as their white and Asian peers.

Resistance Model

The racial achievement gap has also been attributed to differences in culture, mainly a resistance to American cultural values. Unlike capital deficiency explanations which attribute these disparities to social structure, researchers who support the resistance model argue blacks do not have as high achievement as their white and Asian peers because they have adopted a

counterproductive culture which resists academic achievement. John Ogbu's (1978) theory of oppositional culture is the most common conception of the resistance model.

Racial and ethnic minorities continue to face systematic racism and discrimination. They are passed up for jobs, promotions, and other opportunities. Their potential for success in terms of earnings, status, and self-esteem is formally and informally capped, not on the basis of their individual abilities, but because of racism. Essentially, minorities do not have equal access to opportunities, such as education and employment, which are supposed to lead to better life outcomes. In response, they develop what Ogbu calls a "cultural inversion" in which minority groups associate certain behaviors and values with their oppressors and, in turn, see these behaviors as an affront to their own culture's values (Ogbu 1978). This is particularly true for certain minority groups whose incorporation, or lack thereof, into American society has been marred by oppression.

Ogbu classifies racial and ethnic groups depending on the manner in which they became minorities. Voluntary minorities are those who immigrated willingly to a country, such as Italian Americans. Involuntary or caste like minorities, such as African Americans and Native Americans, are groups that were conquered or brought against their will to a country. This classification is useful in understanding why some minorities, like Asian Americans, excel in school, while others do not. Because voluntary minorities are not oppressed, they have greater access to gainful employment and social status and as a result are more motivated to work hard in school. Involuntary minorities, such as blacks, resist working hard in school and earning good grades because the opportunity structure is blocked to them (Ogbu 1978). Even if they excel at school, black have little hope that they will not be barred from pursuing their dreams. Furthermore, Ogbu argues black students resist academic achievement by equating working hard

and doing well in school with "acting white" (2003). The "acting white" hypothesis has received much attention by sociologists and educators alike. Even President Obama claimed that young black students are not rising to their potential because they consider reading to be something white people do (C-SPAN 2004).

But some qualitative and quantitative research do not support Ogbu's "acting white" hypothesis and theory of oppositional culture. For example, Prudence Carter (2005) argues academic underperformance is not associated with black culture or resistance to white culture. She does state that there is a difference in "cultural tastes" or cultural capital between racial and ethnic groups. Black students consider those who use particular white, middle-class styles of speech, dress, and mannerisms as "acting white." Massey and his colleagues (2008) also found that the high school peer groups of black and Latino students who attend selective colleges and universities do not resist high achievement. In fact, black and Latino students in the study had peer groups in high school that were more concerned with high achievement than their white peers. MacLeod (2010), in his ethnography of young men from a housing project, found that the students were resistant to academic achievement were not black, but young white men who did not have the educational and employment opportunities as the black men.

Stereotype Threat

The psychological effects of discrimination has also been considered by scholars who try to explain the disparities in academic achievement. Stereotype threat is one such explanation. Stereotype threat refers to the risk perceived by minorities to confirm a negative stereotype associated with one's group (Steele and Aronson 1995; Steele 1997). They may perceive the risk of being stereotyped as less intelligent, more disruptive, or inferior to their white peers. Steele and Aronson (1995) propose that when the stereotype "demeans something as important as

intellectual ability, this threat can be disruptive enough… to impair intellectual performance"
(808). Steele tested his hypothesis by using scores from standardized tests administered to blacks
and whites. Even recording race was significant enough to negatively affect black's performance
on the tests (Steele 1997).

During the immediate instance when students perceived the threat, stereotype threat
impaired performance by producing anxiety which caused black students to reduce their test
taking speed and accuracy, even though they were motivated to complete the tests (Aronson,
Fried, and Good 2002; Steele and Aronson 1995; Steele, Spencer, and Aronson 2002). In other
words, black students spent more time answering less questions and with less accuracy. When
the students were told that their scores did not assess their intellectual abilities, removing any
threat of stereotyping, their scores improved significantly. (Steele and Aronson 1995; Steele
1997; Woodcock et al. 2012).

The effects of stereotype threat extend beyond the immediate situation in which the threat
occurred. Steele proposed that black students who are repeatedly exposed to threats protect
themselves from fulfilling these stereotypes about themselves and their race by disengaging and
"disidentifying" from the domains in which the threats occur (Steele 1997). In this case, it is
academic domains. The theory suggests that students do not risk the chance of confirming
stereotypes about themselves or their racial group by putting less effort in school (Aronson,
Blanton, and Cooper 1995; Aronson et al. 2002; Steele et al. 2002). This concept of
disidentification has received mixed support. Consistent exposure to the anxieties engendered by
stereotype threat did not result in disidentification among black college students who were
pursuing majors in the sciences (Woodcock et al. 2012). Furthermore, Morgan and Mehta (2004)
found support for a more limited understanding of disidentification. Using longitudinal data, they

found a weaker relationship between an academic self-concept and academic achievement among black students compared to their white peers. Black students in the study were less trusting of standardized performance evaluations to assess their academic abilities. This supports Steele's claim that black students who experience stereotype threat do not rely on testing to accurately assess their intellectual abilities (Steele 1997). Yet, Morgan and Mehta (2004) also found that even though black students disidentify with the scores of standardized tests, they still remain as fully identified with academic achievement as whites. The authors believe discounting performance evaluations prevents the undermining of their scholastic identities. Also, black students may remain identified with school because of external reinforcements, such as peers, family, and communities, which commend academic achievement.

Most of the testing of stereotype threat occurs in laboratories rather than the real world. Outside of the controlled setting of the laboratory, there are countless variables that may interact to cause black underachievement. However, there is sociological evidence of the correlation between stereotype threat and academic performance. For example, Massey and his colleagues (2008) support the claims that Steele made regarding the negative effects stereotypes threat has on academic performance. Black and Latino students who attended selective colleges and universities who either expressed doubts about their abilities and were self-conscious about the views of their teachers or who identified with the majority racial group (white) more than the minority and doubted their racial groups abilities, were 20% more likely to fail a course during their first term.

Attachment Theory

The previous explanations of the racial achievement gap have not considered the level of attachment black students feel to their schools. Attachment theory argues that students' retention

is dependent on their feelings of connectedness and involvement in school as well as the extent to which they are engaged and served by school administrators, faculty, and staff (Tinto 1987). Not only is retention determined in part by these factors, but academic performance is as well (Brewer 1990). Unfortunately, many students of color who attend predominately white colleges and universities express feelings of exclusion and discomfort, which affect their levels of achievement and ability to graduate from these institutions (Feagin, Vera, and Imani 1996; Green 1989; Hughes 1987). These students consider themselves to be only "guest[s] in someone else's house" (Daniels 1991: 5). Because students of color are guests and not family, "they must…keep out of certain rooms in the house, and always be on their best behavior…[They] have no history in the house they occupy…their paraphernalia, paintings, scents, and sounds do not appear" (Turner 1994: 356). Part of this discomfort and "guest-only" status comes from the negative racialized experiences with which students of color must contend at predominately white institutions.

Feagin and his colleagues (1996) argued that there is a struggle at predominately white campuses between preserving their legacy of being historically white institutions in both demographic and cultural terms, on the one hand, and at the same time becoming more racially diverse. The black college students who attend these school are caught in the middle of this struggle. They have to contend with the hostilities, both overt and covert, aimed at them because they are a racial minority in a community that marginalizes them. Black parents have to contend with the dilemma between wanting their children to get an education which will lead to further advancement, or suffer through the racism they experience at college. Black students must make the agonizing decision between dropping out or endure the suffering at their schools. The authors used the three related concepts, social space, human misrecognition, and social time, or

collective memory, to show how the college at the center of the study, State University, and other colleges continue to be places that are not conducive to the success of black students. Feagin et al (1996) argue that black students and parents described the physical spaces they lived in in terms of social characteristics. For example, State University's campus was considered "white," not as a physical description, but because the majority of the students, faculty, and administrative staff were white. Black students discussed not going to particular fraternity houses or local businesses because they were white spaces that did not welcome nonwhites. In opposition to the "hostile" spaces black students frequently encountered, they carved out safe spaces where they felt comfortable to be themselves without the threat of being discriminated against or stereotyped. In other words, these black students used made social spaces where they were protected from misrecognition.

Misrecognition is the failure to see another person or group of people as fully human, possessing a range of traits, behaviors, and values (Feagin et al. 1996). Black students at State University were frequently misrecognized by white students, faculty, and staff. Interviewees reported having to deal with racial slurs being hurled at them and being stereotyped by their peers as having certain interests, such as in basketball. To protect themselves, black students formed close friendships with other blacks in order to "survive." White professors also misrecognized students by making inappropriate racial jokes or comments to students. One student recounted a professor discouraging her from pursuing a career in engineering because "black women [did not] make it" in that field. Instead of professors being mentors for black students, they were as responsible for misrecognizing them as their white peers.

The final concept the authors used to test the attachment theory is social time. In the study, social time is used both for and against the black students. Black students and (parents)

found strength by connecting their present struggles to those of their ancestors. They recognized the racial progress that has been achieved over the years, yet the students and parents still understood that they were a part of a continuing struggle for equality. Time, or collective memory, also works against black students in that the hegemonic collective memory is one that denies racism and black culture. The authors used the examples of the school yearbook to emphasize the detriments of having a campus collective memory that excluded blacks. A black student received a school yearbook that had very few black students in the pictures that commemorated the school's clubs, sports teams, and events. This collective memory that privileges whites was not unique to State University. The authors argues that this was the case at most predominately white colleges. For example, in an interview with a black student who visited an Ivy League school, a student described the school's culture as "reek[ing] of old white men, just lily whiteness, oozing from the corners!" (Feagin, Vera, and Imani 1996). The symbols that represented the Ivy League school's culture and memories did not represent her own history and culture. The challenge for black students, then, is to persist and succeed in college environments in which they are not represented in the collective memory and live in racially hostile spaces where their peers and professors do not recognize their full humanity.

Though research on black students' experiences at white colleges have been influential in shaping scholarly and policy discourses, scholars often have failed to consider the effects of social class on students' feelings of attachment to their schools. Aiming to fill this gap, Torres (2009) offers a qualitative evaluation of how black students who attended an elite liberal arts college in the Northeast exhibited feelings of exclusion and discomfort that she attributes to both race and class marginalization. In the study, Torres found that class differences for non-affluent blacks resulted in "culture shock" because they were immersed in "an overwhelmingly white

environment" (2009: 892). Most of the affluent black students did not experience this shock because of prior experience with affluent white students in their high schools. Elizabeth Aries (2008) made similar claims in her study of first year students at Amherst College. Though affluent and lower-income black students shared many experiences, there were differences within the racial group because of social class. Affluent blacks were advantaged because they had social, cultural, and economic capital that they were able to use in social and academic interactions. In other words, the lower-income black students had to deal with the effects of capital deficiency while affluent blacks did not. For example, lower-income blacks did not travel during breaks and had to balance their work study jobs with their academic obligations.

Though black students at Amherst has differing experiences because of the social class differences, the two groups had many shared experiences because of their race. Both groups experienced the misrecognition that characterized much of the interactions between blacks and whites in Feagin et al (1996) such as racial stereotyping and/or racially offensive comments or jokes. Black students recounted having to represent their race in class discussions. Blacks were also given the responsibility of breaking into white social groups. When they did not, black students were seen to be self-segregating though white students did not make the effort to welcome their black peers. Though this happened infrequently, they still had a powerful effect, in that black students became weary of making close bonds with their white peers. Furthermore, black students were pleased with how their first year went despite the racialized experiences. They did not describe their schools as racially hostile and did not say they were struggling for survival. This is contrary to Feagin and his colleagues' characterization of State University.

My study continues in the line of Aries and other works that explore the experiences of black students at elite colleges. However, it diverges from past research by considering the lack

of economic diversity among black students within elite institutions. Elite colleges admit black students who were in best position to pursue college. The NECASL group are no different. Chapter 2 discusses the social, cultural, and financial capital NECASL students used when they were searching and applying to college. Using Bourdieu's concept of habitus, I demonstrate how these resources created the expectation that the NECASL students would attend a selective college. Chapter 3 demonstrates how NECASL students continue to gain capital during their time at their colleges which further defines their worldviews, or habitus. This is demonstrated by the way the cohort chose their majors, how they interacted with professors, and how the students used their summers to prepare for their prospective careers.

Chapter 4 continues in the spirit of previous research about black college students at predominately white institutions. I use Rosabeth Kanter's (2008) model of tokenism to describe the shared experiences of black students across the five colleges in the study. Like Kanter, I argue that blacks are treated as tokens, or symbols for their entire race instead of as individuals, because of their underrepresentation on their campuses. This chapter discusses the effects of tokenism on some students' identities. I conclude the study by summarizing my findings in Chapter 5. I also offer suggestions about what elite colleges can do to fulfill their promise to create more diverse and inclusive communities. Because elite colleges and universities are in the best position to contribute to greater social mobility and equality, it is important that they think creatively and act more aggressively to accomplish this goal.

Chapter 1: Entering with Privilege

Introduction

Quantitative studies offer much needed information about the black students who attend elite colleges and universities. But, qualitative research is able to nuance this robust data by looking at the particular forms of capital students have and use to get into these colleges. This chapter does just this by looking specifically at the college search process. This process is comprised of three stages: predisposition, college search, and college enrollment (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989). Students' choices during all of these stages are influenced by their individual personalities and motivations, but they are also affected by the students' social position and environments. Students begin choosing colleges by developing dispositions towards college attendance, which occurs through socialization in home and/or school environments that encourage students' educational and professional aspirations. These predispositions can begin well before middle school, possibly kindergarten (Cabrera and La Nasa 2000).

Because of the limitations of the data, we are unable to know what the NECASL cohorts' predispositions were. There is however, ample information on when interviewees began to look for schools, what kinds of resources they used when they were searching, and what kinds of characteristics they were looking for. In other words, there is data on students' college search and enrollment phases. The college search, which takes place during the first two years of high school, involves gathering information about various institutions, such as location, majors, demographics, and quality of instruction. It is followed by the selection of a list of schools that the student can potentially attend. Students base their decision to enroll in at a school on a series

of reasons, be it the cost of tuition, the location of the school, or the majors offered. Let us now look at the resources NECASL students used when they were making these decisions.

During their first semester of college, the NECASL cohort was asked a series of questions regarding their search and enrollment experiences. The majority of students began their searches during their sophomore and junior years of high school. Monica, for example, said she began to look for schools during her sophomore year when she began to receive recruitment material. Erica went on her first college visit during her sophomore year. Students who began to look for schools before their junior year comprised less than 30% of the sample. The rest of the students began to seriously search for prospective schools during their junior year. Only two students said they began their search during their senior year. Overall, NECASL students began their searches early. They also had a network of support to help them through this process.

Sources of Support during College Search Phase

NECASL students used several resources such as peers, siblings, teachers, and online resources but school counselors and parents were the most cited sources of assistance. Counselors are important assets in the college search and application process. High school counselors who work directly with students and parents can immensely impact students' educational aspirations and plans as well as knowledge of financial aid (Flint 1993; Hossler, Schmidt, and Blouse 1991). Counselors foster and support students' college aspirations by providing information about college. Counselors also help parents understand their role in supporting their children during the application process (McDonough 2008). The majority of NECASL students were able to benefit from this valuable resource when they were searching and applying to schools.

Four interviewees reported receiving generous assistance from guidance counselors when they were searching for and applying to college. Kayla, for example, built a close relationship with her counselor, who was then better able to gauge her needs and interests. She described her relationship with her counselor fondly:

> Actually [my counselor] was really influential…he interviewed me and gave the admissions [staff] a different perspective about me, which I thought was cool. He also gave me a list of schools that he thought I might be interested in according to my personality. He really got to know me.

Similarly, Dionne reported receiving the most assistance when applying to college from her school counselor. In fact, it was Dionne's guidance counselor who recommended that she apply to women's colleges. Like many students, she was able to draw on the knowledge of her counselor to find schools that would best suit her needs. Alisha described her college search stages as mainly her decision, but she still sought her counselors' input. She asked her counselor if her list of schools were "strong in the sciences or in a particular field."

Counselors were also used in conjunction with other resources, such as parents. Mya, for example, said her mother and school counselor provided the most assistance when she was searching for colleges. Baldwin also received the most assistance from his mother, who is an alumnus of the school he attended, as well as his college counselor. Jasmine consulted the Fiske and Princeton Review college guides and her peers who were already in college, in addition to her counselor. For these students, their college counselors were not the main source of support, but an additional resource they could use.

A small number of interviewees, however, did not have school counselors who were directly involved in their college search stage. Fatima described her counselor as "not the greatest" and was unable to provide the help she needed. Instead of informing her about different schools, her counselor mainly handled her transcripts and other paperwork. Fatima was unable to receive as extensive of assistance from her school's counselors as some other interviewees. But

she was able to use alternative resources such as the internet and older peers to make important decisions about college. Her plan to attend college was not significantly hindered by the lack of actively involved college counselors.

Parental Assistance

Parents also assisted the NECASL cohort as they searched for and applied to colleges. Some students' parents took a supporting role by helping them stay organized, attend college visits, and offering financial suggestions. Erica, for example, said her father "went college tripping" with her and that her parents were "supportive" overall. Mya's mother helped her research for schools and took her to visit various campuses. Other students said their parents were intimately involved in the college search process. Marcus credited his parents as the main source of assistance when he was creating a list of schools that he intended to apply to. He said, "I went through the guidebooks and all the information I could get about colleges… [got] a little help from guidance counselors, but 99 percent of it was my parents." Chad's mother was largely responsible for initiating contacts with alumni from various schools. He said, "[My mother] made sure that I had all the connections that I needed to have. Made sure I know who I needed to talk to." Patrice considered her father to be influential in helping her narrow her list of schools. She described her father as "really knowledgeable about the good schools and what you can do with this degree and where you can go with that." Furthermore, Patrice's father advised her to apply to the college she was attending because having a degree from there would get her "farther than a lot of other places." Kim's mother acted as an admissions consultant and was intimately involved all throughout her college application process. Kim recalled spending months with her mother choosing between schools and fine tuning application materials. Though the process was tedious, Kim benefitted from the invaluable knowledge her mother had about colleges.

Two students in the NECASL cohort did not receive parental assistance because their parents did not attend college. These students were still able to use other resources to make their college search easier. For example, Tiffany said she did not receive assistance from either of her parents. Her mother did not graduate high school and her father went to school abroad. Tiffany also did not use her high school counselor often while she was searching for and applying to colleges. She said, "the school had a lot of people and I felt like, I didn't really, I don't want to say that I didn't need their help. I just felt like they were too busy over there and I just did my own stuff." One might think it was either a stroke of great luck or complete self-reliance that Tiffany would find herself at one of the nation's top liberal arts colleges. But such an assessment would be inaccurate. Tiffany did indeed research schools independently by going online and requesting brochures.

Tiffany also had additional assistance from an educational program she participated in. The program was founded in 2007 as a part of her hometown's K-12 college and career readiness initiative with the goal of placing high achieving students from public schools into some of the country's leading colleges and universities. Through extensive mentoring, the program's participants are prepped for SATs and attend essay writing sessions. They also learn "strategies to selecting reach, target and safety colleges," as well as life skills such as, "self-advocacy with professors, time and money management skills and conflict resolution." Participants also visit partnering colleges, have application fees waived, and are provided full tuition for all four years of college. These are some of the resources Tiffany had available when she was applying to college, even though she did not have parental assistance or help from high school counselors. Without discrediting Tiffany's efforts, it is fair to say that she did not go through the search phase alone or without the information she needed to make an informed decision.

Desirable Characteristics of Prospective Schools

The last phase of college choice is college enrollment. After students search for schools, they must generate a list of schools they could potentially attend (Hossler and Gallagher 1987). NECASL students applied to some of the most selective colleges and universities in the country. These included Swarthmore, Dartmouth, Harvard, Rice, Brown, and Columbia. While some students list of schools comprised of the most selective schools in the country, other students also applied to schools that were not as highly ranked. Schools such as University of Georgia, Northeastern, and the University of Hartford were also mentioned.

The decision to attend a school was dependent on a range of factors, such as tuition or distance from family. The resources that particular schools have available was also important. Students in this sample were very clear about the kinds of resources and opportunities their prospective alma maters should provide. More specifically, the NECASL cohort was strategic about applying to schools that offered them valuable professional and academic opportunities. These opportunities ranged from study abroad to small class sizes in order to build close relationships with professors. Tiffany, for example, wanted to attend a small school because she did not receive much attention from teachers and counselors in her large high school. Baldwin listed the kinds of attributes he wanted in college when said, "Good academics and good math and science, and good arts and nice people. I wanted my degree to be worth something." Several interviewees applied to schools because of the schools strong academic reputation in a particular fields. Amber expressed her reasons for applying to two NECASL colleges:

> The reason I'm interested in government is because I want to study international relations [and]…I want to study languages as well, and [College X]… [has] more languages than [College Y] But, yeah, I did end up choosing between those two schools, and even though I was interested in languages, my priority was still international studies. And I just ended up thinking that [College Y] was better for international studies.

Making these strategic decisions between schools was common for students in the cohort. Several students discussed being attracted to schools because of strong natural sciences programs

or psychology. Not all students may have known which discipline they wanted to concentrate in, however many chose their specific liberal arts colleges because it's overall academic rigor.

Reputation and ranking of the school was also an important characteristic of the colleges students applied to. Interviewees mentioned using ranking tools such as US News and World Reports and the Princeton Review. For many students, ranking and notoriety was a characteristic that was essential to the kind of school they would attend. For example, Garrett accomplished his goal of attending a "prestigious school," which he defined as having a high ranking. Patrice said she was interested in attending Dartmouth in large part because of its reputation:

> Looking back, there's really nothing that makes it stand out as far as academics or as far as the, the campus, that makes it any better than [my college] or Duke to me...But so I guess, Dartmouth, it was just the name…They had a lot of opportunities. I don't even know what the opportunities were. I just really, I wanted to go to Dartmouth so bad.

Though Patrice is not the standard for all the interviewees, academic reputation and prestige was a common concern among NECASL students.

Studies indicate there are benefits to graduating from elite schools. Those who attended a highly selective and highly ranked institution experience higher future incomes and greater career advancement (Bowen and Bok 1998). The decision to attend a highly ranked college is not solely an arbitrary or superficial one. It reveals, in part, both an appreciation for and knowledge of the value of an elite education. Bourdieu's concept of habitus helps illuminate the significance of the NECASL students' concern with attending elite colleges.

Habitus is a socially constructed schema used for interacting with the world. It is acquired through socialization and is influenced in part by the capital (financial, cultural, or human) available to students. The concept proposes that individually performed actions are based, in large part, on social defined perceptions, appreciations, and actions of a social class (Swartz 1977). In the case of the black college students at the center of my study, their subjective

aspirations about college, that they will attend a *good* college, have been influenced by socially defined their home and high school environments. Students had assistance since they began to search for schools. Of the 18 students whose first-generation status is available, 13 were not the first in their families to attend college. Instead, their siblings or parents were able to guide and support them throughout their college choice process. Parents and counselors encouraged the students' choices. In fact, some counselors and parents steered the students to elite schools.

Conclusion

In many ways, the students at the center of this study are outliers. The black NECASL students attend a four year college, which is not the case for most black college students. The majority of black college students attend two-year institutions (US Census Bureau 2012). The NECASL cohort is also exceptional in that they attend some of the top colleges in the country. They received generous support and assistance from their schools, families, and peers as they applied to college. The students had a strong network that they were able to tap into. For most black students applying to college, this is not the case. Black students are more likely to have parents who are not college graduates and therefore are unable to rely on parents to provide students with the information to make informed decisions about college. Also, even though black students are more likely to rely on college counselors to assist them as they make their college plans, black students are also least likely to have high quality counselors (McDonough 2008; Paul 2002). This group understood the value and potential power an elite education has. The NECASL cohort had parents, counselors, and additional resources to help them plan their college careers. Such a network developed a framework in which attending a prestigious college was virtually inevitable.

Chapter 2: Making Gains

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated how the NECASL students approached the college choice process from an advantaged position. The NECASL students were able to use the capital of their parents and college counselors as they were applying to college. This privilege does not end once they are admitted; instead it continues to influence how they made important academic and professional decisions. In this chapter, I focus on the influence of cultural capital and habitus on NECASL student's choice of major and their future career plans. The questions this chapter answers are: Are students gaining capital during their time in college? What ways, if any, is it shaping their academic and professional decisions?

The concept of cultural capital was initially considered to be transmitted during the early years of children's education. Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) argued children from high status groups enter school with markers of cultural capital they gained through socialization in home and they are rewarded in schools for displaying their capital. Schools were not neutral institutions but instead, rewarded children from the dominant class because they spoke in a particular manner and were knowledgeable about high culture. While early childhood education was the focus of Bourdieu and Passeron's theory, cultural capital can continue to be gained and reinforced throughout the academic career. This chapter will show how this happens by looking at how the NECASL students chose their majors, interacted with professors, and participated in summer internships or jobs.

Choosing Majors

After students have decided which college to attend, they are quickly confronted with the pressing matter of choosing which field to concentrate in over the course of their undergraduate career. The college major is an important decision because colleges require students to declare a major and students place and immense sense of importance on the decision. The undergraduate major is also significant to study because it can be influence students' labor market outcomes. For example, engineering majors earned $44,000 one year after graduation, while education majors made $27,000 (NCES 2003). Because of this, it is important to understand if and how future employment concerns influenced NECASL students by the time they declared their majors in their sophomore year. For NECASL students, there was a combination of factors that informed their decision such as general interest, required credits, and grades. While students mentioned a combination of reasons, I separated their responses into three groups: time to graduation, grades, and genuine interest.

Time Constraints

For several students, the time they had to complete their majors weighed heavily into their decision making. This was the case for Mya, who had a difficult time choosing a major. Though she pursued her initial interest in engineering and economics, she decided to major in German Studies partly because she already had several credits towards the major. Mya said, "It's a common sense move, I have the credits, I'm going abroad [to Germany] where I'm going to get most of my requirements done, I might as well do it." Jasmine also felt she needed to make a "compromise" between her academic interests in international relations and the time she had to complete a major. She said, "I wanted to like try to turn to international relations but it was kind of too late by then. And then [Political Science] is kind of a compromise I guess."

Jordan felt the need to find a major she was both interested in and could finish in four years. Because of her interests ranged from biology to architecture she had to make a difficult decision about which major to declare. Jordan explained why she decided not to major in biology: "Well part of it is that I needed to pick a major that I could finish in time because I've been taking classes all over the place trying to figure out what I want to do. And because of that, like certain majors like science majors I can't really finish in time, in four years." Though they were making compromises, students in this group enjoyed the majors they chose. Jasmine, for example, enjoyed Political Science because it was "dynamic:" "You can offer your own opinion and analysis" while still involving "fact and theory."

Grades

Poor and high grades in courses either discouraged or encouraged students to declare majors in particular fields. Toni wanted to major in music but dropped it because of a poor grade. "I kept pursuing the major but then after a while...I spoke to all my other professors and it seems like I'm stronger as a writer. So I decided to...declare an American studies major." Though a poor grade discouraged Toni from pursuing her initial interests, she was still able to identify her skills and chose a discipline that best suited these skills. Patrice had a similar experience with an economics course. "I was doing really bad on my problem sets and they weren't getting any better, even with the extra help. So I just knew like it was something I just needed to let go." Like Toni, Patrice chose to find a major that used her strengths, which she believed were reading and writing. She then decided to major in government. Not all students were discouraged by low grades in courses in the fields they wanted to major in. For example, Erica was interested in art history but did not receive as high of a grade she had hoped for in an art history course she was taking. "The fact that I did fine [not an exceptionally high score] didn't dissuade me from majoring in art history, it just made me want to work harder and just showed that I really did like

it."

A few interviewees said they were encouraged to choose majors because of high grades. This was the case for Gwen after she took a Sociology course. She explained why she decided to continue to pursue the major:

> After Sociology 101, that was one of my best classes, I got an A-minus in that class…[T]hat did help me consider, help me to consider what I wanted to do or what to do with sociology. Because I figured, it's something I was interested in and I was, you know, I seemed to be doing well in it, you know, so it made sense to continue on.

Marcus became interested in history after taking a German history course that he did very well in. He believed his success in the class was a result of his genuine interest which motivated him to "spend more time on it" and "dig deeper into the material." Like Gwen, Marcus's high grades in a course that he was interested in helped inform his decision to major in history. The group of students who explicitly stated they chose majors because of high or low grades in courses required for majors is small. This may be because most students received fair to high grades in their courses. Those students who fell in between the ends of low to high grades may have been encouraged to continue with a major, but not as much as those students who did not do as well as they intended or did better than they expected.

Genuine Interest

All of the interviewees expressed genuine interest in their majors. Several students said they "loved" the material and were inspired by professors or peers to pursue new interests they had not considered before. Chad, for example, was keenly interested in music and also enjoyed economics, which influenced his decision to major in both fields. He said, "Music was just something I just enjoyed the most so it was like, I'll do that. And composition, just the focus on that was, it was the most interesting for me. Econ, I guess I like it…I don't know. I enjoy it also."

After Alisha took an anthropology course, she "fell in love with" the subject and decided to major in it. She enjoyed the material and the "diverse ways" it could be applied. Dionne also took a course in a discipline that piqued her interest. She described herself as indecisive and had no leanings toward any major when she entered college. After taking a sociology course her second semester with an influential professor, she was sold:

> My first sociology class I think was my second semester of sophomore year and I really, really liked this professor, X, she was just amazing…She's one of those professors you would just come in to see even if you had nothing to talk about, you know. And like that's when I was thinking that I really wanted to take sociology with this professor.

Jordan took an architecture course during her first year in college that she enjoyed so much, she decided to continue to taking courses in the department. She said this about her decision:

> I think [my architecture courses] really helped broaden my perspectives about academics and what I could do…I just always thought certain majors would be better, so that kind of opened my mind and made me realize it's more about what I kind of enjoy more so than what I know will make me more money in the end. So I think that helped change just the way I thought about academics in college.

A few students entered college with intended majors and kept them after taking courses in the subject. Kayla and Kim were two such students. Both were majoring in psychology. This is common for students majoring in STEM fields, particularly those who were pre-med. The pre-med track has a high number of required courses which necessitate students begin completing them as early as possible. Kayla said this about her interest in psychiatry:

> I just was just so intrigued to know that there's doctors out there who are interested in [mental illness] and willing to help patients under these conditions. And I was like this is what I have to do. And I love talking with people and trying to understanding their problems and finding solutions. And so I knew that was [for] me.

Kim knew she wanted to pursue psychology long before college. She said, "It always has been and always will be because I love psychology… I've decided that I think I was in middle school

or high school without really knowing what it was." Kim's interest in psychology was only confirmed once entering college. "I came to college and I loved it. I love all the aspects of it."

Students tried to match their major with their interests, strength, and other practical reasons such as grades and credits. Future employment was not a determinant of their major choice, but students were still concerned about their career prospects once they declared a major. Of the 22 students interviewed in their sophomore year, 15 expressed concern about how their majors would prepare them for future jobs. This concern came from the students and, for three interviewees, from their parents as well. Marcus said this about his parents response to his decision to major in history: "I knew my parents might have some problems with the practicality of it, but you know, I wasn't about to…go to college to take their major." Nicole was also concerned about explaining the practicality of her sociology major to her parents:

> I have immigrant parents. You know? I don't know if they're exposed to sociology as a field. So I had to explain to them well "I'm a sociology major." Like it doesn't really translate into anything for them. So explaining what I can do with it or explaining to them that it's not so much about your major than it is about your skills… I mean that was just a little difficult. But they've been very open-minded.

Keith's mother was focused on his prospective job prospects after majoring in history. He said, "she was not concerned…she wanted to know if I had any real plans." After conversing with his mother, Keith became more concerned about his future career plans:

> It made me wonder what I am I really going to do with a history degree and hesitated like should I wait and see? Should I try to explore more areas? But in the end I felt like history would be the best for me and I could be a history teacher with my education minor and I liked that.

Most interviewees were uncertain about what kinds of jobs they would pursue after graduation. Baldwin, who was majoring in English, was concerned about this uncertainty. "I guess the only lingering uncertainty I have is [about] the future, that perhaps I won't enjoy the financial security that other…students will from being doctors or lawyers or investment bankers." Mya was also unclear about her future plans with her major in German Studies. "I

hesitated [choosing German Studies]. I think it might have been because just trying to figure out…what am I going to do with this major." Other students shared this concern. Erica became less concerned with choosing a major that had a directly related occupation, yet she still did not want to "come out jobless from school." Her worry may be over-stated but she, like many of her peers, considered having some kind of career plan helpful. Jasmine's feeling about choosing a major spoke to this concern:

> Even though you're told to take whatever you want. It doesn't matter what your next job or whatever's going to be. But I still like value thinking about the next step and thinking about what skill set I'm preparing myself for. For the next whatever comes after [college].

To avoid the job uncertainty of having liberal arts majors, three students inquired about prospective careers in their disciplines. Alisha was anxious about what she could do with a degree in anthropology if she chose not to pursue medicine. Her worries were eased when she spoke to a professor:

> I went to talk with the chair of the anthropology department, just to talk about which prospects are out there for people who major in this field. And she gave me a lot of information. So I guess that helped me make my decision.

Before Gwen inquired about her options, she thought she was limited to social work or nonprofit work with her sociology degree. She sought advice from professors and other students when she was deciding whether or not to declare the major:

> I've spoken to people, you know, professors and students and they said well you know, for a major like that, you really can't go wrong because you can do so many different things with it. I mean, there are people who are sociology majors and become lawyers, people with sociology majors and have worked for nonprofits… I figured okay, well if that's what it's like, then okay, if you major in something like that, you know, as long as I have some open options it's okay.

Marcus was hesitant to pursue a major in history because of the perceived job insecurity. But his uncertainty subsided when he considered the value in the skills he was learning. He said,

"I kind of think to myself, they'll never be a shortage of demand for people who can write, speak well, and communicate ideas well. And I think [those are] probably one of the biggest thing[s] I learn in history."

Only one interviewee who mentioned future careers had a clear job path. Kim confidently stated she wanted to be a clinical psychologist. The only bit of doubt in her career plans was whether she wanted to work with children or adults. Though there is pressure to choose a major that is related to a job, NECASL students did not consider job specificity to be one of the reasons they chose their majors. Instead, they were concerned with choosing majors that engaged them, matched their skills, and were able to be completed during four years. This approach to choosing a major is indicative either of naivety about the competition in the labor market or confidence in their ability to be desirable employees in spite of liberal arts majors. To a large extent, this confidence is a privilege college graduates from specific kinds of schools can enjoy. Declines in manufacturing and increases in the service and technology sectors has led to an increasing demand for more educated workers, who can write and communicate well (Roksa and Levey 2010). Students with liberal arts degrees may be better situated to compete in the modern economy because of these schools emphasis on writing and analytical thinking across disciplines. NECASL students were at least partially aware of this because they emphasized the skills they were gaining that would make them attractive to employers. The privilege of having a degree from an elite institution may also have influenced the students' choices. Though their degree may be in the humanities, they still are earning credentials from prestigious institutions which can attest to the students' intellectual abilities.

Cultural Capital and Attitude Changes

Major choices is not the only way we can see cultural capital and habitus influencing the

NECASL students. Their behaviors and attitudes also reflect the changes they experienced. Students in the NECASL cohort exhibited what Annette Lareau calls a sense of entitlement, which describes the parenting styles of middle class parents and children in her study titled *Unequal Childhoods* (Lareau 2003). It is a sense that one's needs and preferences should be met not simply by one's peers, but also by those in superior positions as well as institutions with which one interacts. A sense of entitlement, Lareau asserts, is instilled in children whose parents engage in a parenting style she calls "concerted cultivation" in which children develop their talents in a structured and concerted manner. A "sense of constraint" was instilled in children whose parents facilitated the "accomplishment of natural growth" (Lareau 2011)[3]. Four students in the NECASL cohort demonstrated this "sense of entitlement" when it came to interacting with professors outside of class. These students visited professors during office hours frequently throughout a semester. Monica said she became more comfortable doing so during her time in college:

> [I visit my professors] Once a week. Not every professor but you know, a professor at least once a week probably. Multiple times. Especially after you've written papers or whatever and it's just something that you can do. And so like once you do that you're like well, it's just something I can do all the time. So if I just need to I can go.

Brandon considered office hours to be compulsory if he was not doing as well as he wanted to in a course. He said, "I feel like if I get a test back and…it may be the second test we've taken and both of them have just not been what I think it should be, okay, office hours are in order." Speaking with professors outside of class was not only a means for discussing grades and strategies for improving work. Students also used it as a way to develop more personal

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[3] I am unable to make any assessment about whether the NECASL students were raised in homes where a "sense of constraint" or "concerted cultivation" was the norm. However, Lareau's typology of parenting style can be used in my study to gauge whether students are gaining cultural capital. Both "concerted cultivation" and a "sense of constrain" represent opposite forms of habitus. Those who act with a "sense of constraint" considers authority as acting on them whereas "concerted cultivation" sees their resources (people with more authority included) as obligated to assist them.

connections with their professors. Keith, for example, frequently emailed his professors, "just to ask them little questions about something." Likewise, Kim consistently met with a particular professor after her class with the professor ended. She said, "I'm in [Professor X's office] at least a few times a month. Either about case studies or about tests or just to update him on my situation with my internship."

With ease and confidence, these students were able to engage with professors in order to ensure their needs and concerns as students were being met sufficiently. Whether they discussed grades or general interests, NECASL students used this resource to enhance their educational experiences. Whether students visited their professors outside of class was also dependent on their personalities. Students from home or schooling environments that reinforced a sense of entitlement may still not have felt comfortable going to professors outside of class. But the significance of this finding is that students said they have begun to do exhibit these behaviors since entering college. Their college environments influenced them to seek out assistance from professors when they needed it. In other words, they gained a sense of entitlement (or had it reinforced) at their schools.

The rigorous academic environment engendered a new sense of motivation and determination in eight students. They believed they were more focused and driven as a result of their college experiences. The reasons for this increased sense of self-motivation and determination varied. Alisha described herself as quiet and reserved before college. After her two years, however, she described herself as "more aggressive." She said:

> Everyone for the most part, most people here are very driven. They know what they want. They're going for it…if you're the kind of person who even if you do know what you want but you're not out there…speaking up about it then opportunities will pass you by. So I've learned that you just have to speak up and let people know what's on your mind.

Jasmine shared a similar sentiment. She felt she became more aggressive about pursuing opportunities. She said, "Like I see something I want to do and I just go for it and kind of just make it happen instead of kind of waiting on the sidelines." Jasmine also attributes this change to her school's culture, but also because she was making more independent choices since beginning school. Patrice experienced a serious academic challenge that engendered the change: I failed a class last semester, so that's given me like a whole new outlook on everything. It disappointed like my family, so that was pretty bad…I think I've become more serious about school, much more career oriented, goal oriented. Kayla described herself as "more mature" and "more outgoing in classes." She was able to "speak up more and feel more comfortable" doing so.

These NECASL students had various experiences, either failing classes or being around people who they thought were very driven. Lamont and Lareau argue that aggressiveness and self-motivation are some of the valued attitudes and personal styles of cultural capital in the American context (Lamont and Lareau 1988). The theory of cultural capital and habitus were based on the social and cultural values of French society. While the concepts are useful for cultures that non-French, the markers of high status culture are not the same across societies. Lamont and Lareau state:

> Rather than the aloofness, originality, and non-profit (monetary) orientation [that is valued in French legitimate culture]…some evidence suggests that aggressiveness, competence, entrepeneurship, self-reliance, self-directiveness, problem-solving activism, and adaptability are desirable personal styles in the American context (1988: 163).

The NECASL students who described themselves as being more focused, goal-oriented, and more active in seeking assistance from professors are exhibiting these markers of American cultural capital.

Junior Year Concerns

Students were asked what was most on their mind as their junior year was underway. For many of the NECASL students, eleven in total, post graduation plans were particularly important. At one college, of the six students interviewed, only one did not express concern for

their plans after graduation during their junior year. Alisha was worried because she had not finalized her career plans. She asked herself, "Where will I be and what will I be doing?" Nicole was concerned about finding a job by the spring of her senior year so that she could postpone graduate school. Jasmine expressed concern about finalizing career plans. She said, "I think I'm still kind of trying to figure it out, but still I'm undecided as to what would be best for me and my skill set."

Interviewees from the other colleges also had post graduation plans on their minds, but also had more immediate concerns. Kayla, for example was anxious about pre-med requirements she was completing that semester. While these classes were important to her, she was also concerned about her life after graduation. Kayla said, "I'm just worried about my future. Because I know like I'm leaving college and so then you're just in a whole different world. It's so scary." Kayla, like other students, had to manage her immediate obligations as an undergraduate student as well as make preparations for life after college. There were a few students who were primarily thinking about their undergraduate responsibilities. Fatima, for example, was looking forward to studying abroad while Tiffany was looking forward to writing her honors project the following year. Even when students detailed their curricular and extracurricular demands, students were already thinking about finalizing their plans.

Finding jobs and internships is a common concern for college students. For the NECASL cohort, the economy only exacerbated these common worries. The class of 2010 were among the first waves of students confronted with the 2008 economic downturn. Between 2007 and 2008, workers younger than 30 experienced the most declines in employment, particularly those under 20. In fact, one study suggests the loss of jobs for persons under 30 accounted for 70% of the net reduction in total civilian employment (Sum and McLaughlin 2008). By 2010, the year the NECASL cohort graduated, the unemployment rate for young workers (ages 16-24) was 19.6%,

the highest it had been since 1947 (Maloney 2010). Like many college students, the students hoped to find jobs within their intended field. The NECASL cohort was very aware of the little time they had to enjoy the security of college. Unlike their parents and older peers, they were preparing to enter an economic climate that was not advantageous, even for graduates of elite liberal arts colleges.

This kind of economy was one that worried experienced workers, much less recent college graduates. The NECASL cohort was aware that they would not enjoy the job security that many of their older peers and parents experienced. To gain as much advantage in the workforce or in graduate school, getting summer internships or jobs was extremely important.

Habitus and NECASL students' summer plans

Most students spent their summer before their senior year either working, interning, or conducting research. A few students conducted research either with their schools or in other places. Tiffany conducted field work in Maui for her honors project. She shadowed a Mauian performer whom she met two years prior. She exhibited the aggressive, plan-oriented attitudes of associated with the elite in order to set up the field work. Tiffany described how she reached out to her contact:

> I thought it would be a good idea…and when he performed [two years ago at my school] I asked if I would come to Maui, would he teach me and let me follow him around, and he was like yes, so I emailed him and followed up.

Tiffany, who had only spent one year in college when she first made the connection with the Maui performer, was ambitious and fastidious in establishing a contact to use for future. She also had a key resource to fund and support her research project. Tiffany was a member of the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship (MMUF). The program is aimed at reducing the underrepresentation of people of color in academia. Undergraduate fellows receive funding for

national and international summer research, research support during the academic year as well as the access to the large MMUF network (Mellon Mays Foundation 2013).

Baldwin was also a Mellon Mays fellow and used the resources provided by the program in order to conduct a musical project with a professor on his campus. He also attended a workshop on improvisational jazz in Brooklyn, which was funded by his fellowship. Like other interviewees, he learned about the workshop through a contact he made before the summer. Baldwin said he "really connected" with a group of performers when they came to his school earlier that year. "They told me that they do a thing every summer with people from all round the world. So I got my foot in the door there." The Mellon Mays Fellowship was a valuable resource for Baldwin because he said he did not feel pressured to find an internship or summer program because he has the fellowship "to fall back on."

Tracy also conducted research during the summer, which was supported by her school's summer research fund. She described her timid, but ambitious actions to establish the opportunity with one of her professors:

> I actually went to a professor to ask him about his fall class that I was going to take, and I kind of hinted to him that I wanted to do research so he kind of just told me about [the summer funding] and that was it.

Tracy felt the experience had particular value for her potential plans to attend graduate school. "I said if I do go on to grad school, it's pretty much lab intensive so getting some kind of experience now is better than waiting until I got there and was struggling." Tracy and the other students who conducted summer research had an invaluable experience that helped separate them from their peers when they entered the workforce and applied to graduate school. All of the students showed self-motivation and assertiveness, but this did not account for all of their success. They also had resources, mainly financial, that supported their plans.

Other interviewees worked or interned in their respective fields. Alisha worked as a medical assistant and secretary at a doctor's office and also interned at a pharmaceutical company. She learned about the internship through a posting on a campus wide online forum. "They kind of posted it…and I just thought I'd check it out and I did and I applied and I got it." Alisha learned about the job in the doctor's office in a more serendipitous manner. She said the woman she baby-sat for had a sister who owned a doctor's office and was in need of an assistant. "The mom just happened to know that I was pre-med and she was like 'would you be interested'." This example shows the great usefulness of contacts and networks. Both opportunities were the result of networks and contacts that Alisha had available to her. Jamal interned at the Smithsonian Institution where he collected data on the religious experiences of African American's in Washington D.C.'s eighth ward. He was not only a highly qualified applicant for the internship, but his experience as a member of the Institute for Responsible Citizenship (IFRC) helped. The IFRC is a non-profit organization that targets high achieving African American men to help them "achieve career success" as well as develop character (Institute for Responsible Citizenship 2013). Jamal, like so many other students in the NECASL cohort, had an additional network and resources that benefitted them. I argue this engenders a kind of attitude in which students assume high success for themselves because there is an alignment of aspirations and resources to make these aspirations a reality.

Conclusion

Habitus and cultural capital did not only inform NECASL students' college choices. Based on the students' responses in this chapter, it also shaped the decisions they were making about their majors and post-graduation plans. Students were less concerned with choosing majors that had direct job specificity than they were with building a skill set in an area that interested

them. Their choice in college also attests to this desire. The students chose to enroll in liberal arts colleges that specialize in a holistic undergraduate training. The decision to attend a liberal arts college and to major in the humanities is influenced by interest, but also from an expectation that a degree from a prestigious school is more valuable than specific job training. NECASL students expressed changes that are indicative of gains in cultural capital. They were more aggressive in seeking out assistance from professors and they felt more confident and self-possessed when speaking in class. The expectations in this environment was that students could find support to make them their aspirations come true.

Chapter 3: The Effects of Tokenism

As noted in the previous chapter, there are clear benefits to attending an elite liberal arts college. Students have unique learning opportunities that will aid them with their post-graduate plans. They also make gains in cultural capital by becoming more aggressive in seeking these opportunities. Despite these advantages, black students experience difficulties at elite colleges because of their race. Like many black students who attend predominately white colleges, the NECASL students must contend with racism and discrimination. On the one hand, the NECASL cohort was working to attain a degree from some of the best colleges in the country. However, while they are doing so, NECASL students live and learn on college campuses that are not fully inclusive. Their social experiences are influenced by their underrepresentation on a predominately white campus. The numerical dominance of white students, faculty, and staff at elite colleges create a particular context for interaction for black students. It is similar to the kind of context women experience in predominately male spaces which Rosabeth Kanter (2008) explored in corporate America. She investigated what happened to the culture and nature of interactions in a community when a group of people are outnumbered in comparison to another group.

Women represented a small proportion of executives at the corporation Kanter studied which she called Indsco. Kanter described the corporation to as "a nearly a single-sex organization" at the professional and managerial level (2008:206). Women were overrepresented in positions with little authority and opportunity for upward mobility. The few women who held managerial or professional positions were treated as examples of what *all* women can do. In other words, they were treated as tokens because of their "rarity and scarcity" (Kanter 2008:207).

The corporation's culture and terms of interactions are not determined by the tokens, but by the members of the numerically dominant group.

Tokens face what Kanter calls "perceptual tendencies" which are a result of their small proportions. The first tendency is visibility. Ironically, tokens' rarity could be overlooked or forgotten but their rarity often makes them more visible than members of the dominant group. Though Kanter focuses on gender relations, her analysis is generalizable to all kinds of social minorities. It is particularly useful for understanding the experiences of racial minorities. In the case of the NECASL schools, black students could be overlooked in classes and have their opinions and experiences forgotten. In many cases, this is what has happened to racial minorities at predominately white colleges. But black students capture the attention of their white peers because they are so obviously not a part of the dominant group. This high visibility leads to them being targeted in classes when questions of race or African American culture arose. Their high visibility also contributes to the dominant group's exaggeration of differences from tokens. This exaggeration of differences, or "othering" is the second tendency.[4] In the interviews to follow, NECASL students recount moments when they felt ostracized from their non-black peers and made highly aware of their "otherness."

The final perpetual tendency, assimilation, involves the use of stereotypes and generalizations in order to base the dominant groups understanding of tokens. Before college, white and Asian students have the least exposure to people outside of racial their group. Close interactions with people from racial or ethnic groups outside of one's own has been shown to reduce prejudice and anxieties about interracial interactions (Levin, Laar, and Sidanius 2003; Pettigrew and Tropp 2006). Because there is a lack of social interactions with African Americans, the ideas about blacks that whites and Asians hold are based on hackneyed racial

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[4] Kanter (2008) describes this phenomenon of tokens being made aware of their differences from the group as

stereotypes. Blacks are associated with high criminality, violence, poverty. Moreover, black Americans are constantly considered as not a member of American society, regardless of socioeconomic status. For example, President Barack Obama was attacked as un-American both in terms of citizenship status and in beliefs by portions of the country. These pervasive ideas about blackness are coupled with the low representation of black people at elite colleges which limits opportunities for close interactions that subvert these stereotypes. Instead, black students are "not permitted the individuality of their own unique, non-stereotypical characteristics" (Kanter 2008:211). With this framework of tokenism established, let us now look at the range of experiences of the NECASL students.

High Visibility and Othering

As previously stated, one of the perpetual tendencies tokens experience is high visibility. Their visibility is both a consequence of their scarcity and causes the dominant group to treat tokens as "other." NECASL students were particularly aware of their visibility and racial difference in classrooms. Because they attended small liberal arts colleges, their classes were small and typically ranged between 12-20 students. It was not uncommon for there to be only one or two black students in their classes. Their high visibility often made them targets to answer questions about race or African diasporic culture. Baldwin said he was often the only black person in his classes. "Although…it's a reality at [my college] that I've accepted, I would like, I would have felt better if when questions of blackness came up I wasn't the person everyone turned around and looked at, you know." Baldwin said, "I think that most of all has shaped my academic experience. Just that loneliness." Fatima also had to contend with being made the spokesperson for her race in her classes because "professors will still ask me what I think… whenever there's some kind of question about black people or something stupid like that." Alisha had one such experience which she said she would always remember:

> I was in a class and they were talking about urban politics. And I was one of I think three black students in the class. And the professor just looked at me and she said X, you know do you have anything to contribute to this conversation? I'm sure you must have a lot to say.

Alisha did not grow up in an urban area and was "confused" by the professor's question. She said, "I don't know if she thought because most black people live in urban areas that she assumed that I did….that kind of hurt that she made that assumption. Because it's not that she just asked everyone to contribute. She only asked me." Not only was Alisha highly visible but the professor's question emphasized the difference between Alisha and her classmates. Because of her high visibility as racial "other," Alisha was asked to represent an experience that white students could not attest to. The power of this assumption not only reminded the black students that they were black in a sea of white, but that their "otherness" was something that could not be avoided. Their racial difference made them irreconcilably different from their white peers. This was the case for Toni, who discussed what made her feel othered:

> In classrooms…I felt different. Because I think I tend to have really sort of black mannerisms. Which is great when I go home...But back here in a place like [my college] where everyone's kind of on a different page. [W]ill they understand what I'm saying…And how do I say certain things so I also have a little bit of a drawl when I'm not consciously thinking about my drawl. And so I tend to think that I stick out.

Toni' comments emphasize the distinctions in cultural capital between racial groups. The mannerisms, speech, and values of one racial group is not valued in another. The pressure is placed on the minority group to conform to the culture of the dominant group or continue to be othered (Carter 2005).

The NECASL students were aware of the attention they got because of their race. Their rarity and scarcity was also a means for their white peers to distinguish NECASL students from the dominant group. Black students were aware of their visibility and their polarization from the group even when it was not explicit. The fact that their white peers and professors were not

malicious when they made the NECASL students feel othered only exacerbates the insidiousness of these interactions.

Assimilation

Stereotyping is one of the unfortunate realities for black students in predominately white colleges. Stereotypes are damaging, not simply because they are pervasive and difficult to refute when black people represent such a small proportion of the campus. The "privilege" of possessing complex identities and experiences are not afforded to tokens within an environment determined by a dominant group who has little prior experience with people outside of their group. This was the case for women in Kanter's study. Several NECASL students recounted experiences when they were stereotyped that were particularly memorable.

Michelle did not describe her college as racially or ethnically diverse, which made it difficult for her non-black peers to learn who she really was rather than rely on stereotypes:

> They already have [these] prejudice things in their face...I think they know you by either prejudice, what you think about when you think about a black woman in America. And so people a lot of times like are either scared to approach you or like just think they know you, and so they don't want to deal with you.

Toni described a strange encounter she had at a restaurant near her school:

> This guy…[an] older man who came up to us and he was white. And he sort of approached this professor who was also white... he was like "okay well I just wanted to welcome all of you to America." And so we were like -. You know I was born in North Carolina. And my friends were -. Grew up in New York City. And so they were like oh. That was weird. But he just refused to acknowledge that we could speak English. That we could speak for ourselves…this professor just didn't know what to do or how to even respond to such a statement."

Toni was baffled by the exchange but she did not feel the man was intentionally malicious, rather said "he just wasn't necessarily right."

Yalinda described an exchange she had with a classmate who rarely interacted with people of color before college:

> [My classmate's] town I think had one black family…But she never talked to them. Never. So like when she came here she told me, 'I was afraid because I had heard things about black people. I've seen movies.' And that was just stupid because I've seen movies about white people and I don't carry that everywhere I go, you know?

It seems absurd for Alisha to base her knowledge of an entire race of people on how they are portrayed in movies. Alisha's classmate's lack of interaction with people of color is not uncommon considering residential segregation. However, she used her narrow and skewed knowledge to understand the vast, complexities of an entire people. This exchange represents the influence of stereotypes on general impressions about black people. It also demonstrates the absurdity in using these stereotypes in face to face interactions.

Defense against tokenism

To protect themselves against the othering and stereotyping they experienced, NECASL students frequently created supportive communities with other black students. This is not surprising considering that similar findings were made in previous studies (cf. Allen 1992; Aries 2008; Feagin et al. 1996; Torres 2009). Beverly Tatum (2003) found that black high school students in racially mixed settings made friend groups that comprised mainly of other black students in order to gain support in the face of racial tension and stress. A survey of black college students at predominately white institutions reported that being involved in campus organizations for black students as well as having black friends was essential for their personal and social development (Hughes 1987For example, Baldwin felt more comfortable at his school once he was able to create what he called a "support system" made of other African Americans. Christian was one of the only black people in his residence hall and he felt a sense of comfort whenever he would see other black students. "It helps me, it's comfortable for me."

An additional way some NECASL students protected themselves from the effects of tokenism is by strengthening their racial identities. In the fall semester of their junior year, NECASL students were asked the following questions regarding their personal identities: How

do you think of yourself? Has your college experiences affected these identities? NECASL students spent time among peers from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, sexualities, religious affiliations, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Students are changing their professional and academic interests by choosing majors, gaining research experience, as well as jobs, internships and campus obligations. But for some, their racialized experiences had a greater influence on their identities than their other experiences.

The emphasis of boundaries is used by members of a dominant group to preserve the distinction from tokens. Boundaries of who belongs and who does not help to preserve the commonalities of those within the dominant group. It also strengthens the identities of people outside of the group. In the case of black students at the five NECASL colleges, this often meant a strengthening of their racial identities. Patrice's racial identity became more pronounced because of the racial homogeneity of her campus. Patrice felt her status "as a woman of color on a predominately white campus" to be central to her identity. Travis, similarly, became more identified as Afro-Caribbean since going to his college because there was a smaller Afro-Caribbean community compared to his high school.

When asked about how they define themselves, six interviewees considered race or ethnicity to be important. But it was ranked equally among their other attributes. Patrice, who considered her race to be important, also explained how familial obligations were as central to her identity when she described herself as "…the determined, successful older sister for my younger sisters, so they have something to look up to" and the "obedient daughter for my parents, those are the most important." Alisha said being Haitian-American and Christian were "very important" to her identity. In addition, she said "being pre-med, that's shaped me and my decisions." Alisha considered college to greatly affect her racial identity. She felt her peers in college made her race more salient. "Here [in college], just with people's remarks. Or like things

that professors say or that other students say. They make you…keep in mind that you are different." Jasmine experienced a similar feeling of being different and excluded once entering college. She defined herself as bi-racial but did not consider her mixed descent to be important until leaving her home community. When Jasmine entered college, she no longer felt the inclusion she enjoyed at home. "I definitely have not felt particularly like included and kind of like a very warm welcoming from people." Brandi also did not realize the significance of her race to her identity until she went to college:

> I mean, I'm from a predominantly black state, so like my church is all black, and then like all the organizations that I was in was predominantly black….Yeah, it was difficult because I was just used to like every organization being black, and then doing those same rituals that, you know, you do. So I was kind of like 'why don't ya'll do this, why don't ya'll do that.' And I know one thing was hard because I know, where I'm from, it's like you're black and you're white, so when I came up here and it's like, you know, you have Hispanic, you have all this other stuff. It's kind of like, huh, there's little black people.

Brandi's comments reveal once again the tension between different forms of cultural capital. Her cultural styles and values were not shared by the dominant group at her school, thus making her feel out of place.

While some students' racial identities became more pronounced because of their experiences as black students at predominately white schools, other students' race were not as important. Some saw their religious affiliations as most important while others considered their academic and recreational interests as most significant. A few were aware that their responses were not racially based and expressed varying opinions about this. Chad, for example, believed his social, political, and religious beliefs were more central to his identity than his race. Unlike some of his peers, his racial identity did not strengthen because of the racial hostilities he have experienced. "I'm half African American, half Hispanic, but I don't like really identify with that. It like doesn't matter really." Mercades, who saw herself largely as a teammate and Rugby player, did not consider race to be central to her identity either before or college or after her first

year. She attributes this to the fact that she did not have many "colored friends" growing up. Fatima did not believe race had to be a part of her personal identity, but thought her various interests should be. During her time in college, Fatima had the opportunity to explore her interests by joining various cultural clubs. "I do branch out beyond I guess what you would say like stereotypical things people might expect me to do, like even though I'm black or whatever." For Fatima, college experience was a time when she could explore her interests and create her own identity, rather than have it defined by others' expectations.

How is this study different?

The three tendencies of tokenism, high visibility, othering, and assimilation, are common among black college students. Previous studies recounted black students' experiences being stereotyped by their peers and professors or consistently made to feel like they did not belong in certain spaces (Aries 2008; Feagin et al. 1996; Torres 2009). Even after decades of national affirmative action programs, equal opportunity, and diversity initiatives, race remains a salient issue on college campuses across the country. This is not surprising considering the persistence of racial discrimination, residential segregation, and institutional racism.

What is unique about the NECASL study is that students did not describe their campus environments as racially hostile. They enumerated various racialized experiences they had but these were infrequent, though powerful. But students attributed this to individuals not the institution. In fact, NECASL students were also proud of their schools' strengths. Students were asked to discuss strengths and weaknesses of their respective colleges during their final semester of college, since they had four years of experience and were able to reflect back on their college careers. A common issue was the lack of people of both students and faculty of color. This was

particularly troublesome for Gwen when she shared her observations on the diversity within her

school's faculty:

> Most of our faculty are concentrating on African studies, and obviously there are black
> people in the world that are, they are actually present in other subjects, and so it's a little
> disappointing to not have black professors in other areas of study…Also like within the
> classroom…be[ing] the only like minority in the classroom…feeling kind of defensive
> because I'm by myself, so like, not that people necessarily turn to me, like oh, you must
> know about everything, but feeling like I had to speak up and kind of defend my race or
> something like that.

Not all students considered the low representation of students of color on their campuses

an issue. Imani, for example, described her college community as "not too diverse" but this was

something she rarely thought of. Similarly, Dionne said she "did not pay attention" to the lack of

diversity in her classes and that it did not affect her academically.

Despite their critiques, most students remained optimistic about the progress of racial

diversity on their campuses. Students recognized that their campuses needed to make greater

efforts to improve race relations and diversity, but the current progress was not overlooked.

Christian was aware of the progress on his campus and was pleased with the increase in racial

sensitivity. However, he was not satisfied with what he saw as a regression to "old ways." He

offered his own suggestion saying, "So what you have to do is, have sort of a continuous

reminder of importance of race consciousness on this campus. And that's what we're trying to

coordinate right now." Baldwin's words were particularly poignant as he offered his perspectives

on diversity at his college:

> I think that there is a longing for diversity… [And] an attempt for diversity at [X]. I think
> it has a long way to go before we say that [X] is diverse…listening to testimonies of
> other people like who were here and they were like, you could count all the black people
> here on one hand. Thinking about that, you really just have to realize just how far [X] has
> come in a very short time.

NECASL students also saw many strengths in their schools. They thought the academic

resources were plentiful and valuable. Alisha described her school as academically challenging:

"I think it does a great job of preparing you to be competitive outside of [college]. Whether it's

in the workplace or in another academic setting." Toni said she was "so grateful for the quality of education" she received. She said, "I've talked to some friends at other colleges who really don't get that one on one interaction so they [don't] get challenged in the same way." Monica thought her school had a supportive community which helped her and her peers "have confidence" in themselves and in their abilities.

Brandon thought his school's diversity was its greatest strength. He said his school had "people from so many different countries, so many different states and viewpoints." Baldwin eloquently spoke of his schools strengths:

> I think that the great strength of this community is that it cares. It cares about people getting better. And that it's a place in which one can become extraordinary, but I think that that is ultimately the choice of the student. But being here, everything is in place…Everyone cares and everyone is brilliant. And if one can access that brilliance through their own time and energy, then I think they can become so much better.

An additional strength NECASL students saw in their schools was that they were able to consider all of the dimensions of diversity both in and out of the classroom. They considered their classes to be spaces that they could learn more about diverse groups. Baldwin said he began to "recognize that what is truly meaningful about diversity isn't merely different skin colors" after he took several classes with diverse peers. Brandi was one of the several interviewees who thought of diversity mainly in terms of race before college. This changed by her senior year. She considered learning about the intersections of race, class, and gender in a cultural studies course to be particularly influential. Similarly, Brandon's definition of diversity changed since attending college. By his senior year, he believed diversity "encompassed more things than just skin tone. More things than just culture."

Tasha described her time in an English class on gendered autobiographies that shaped her more expansive view of diversity:

> [We] looked at books from…the 20th Century. But, like, the diverse range of books came like from different authors and how they viewed a certain subject. So it was like a

gendered autobiography. So it was different for male and female or gender-queer people as well as like how they define themselves and look at themselves in different light. So that was pretty interesting.

Fatima said she was able to "expand" her view of diversity in order to see "there are so many different populations of people who can come at things with different perspectives." Jasmine thought her school was a "microcosm of diversity" and was "a lot better than what the world can be like."

Conclusion

When we consider the entirety of the college experiences of the NECASL students, the challenges black students face as racial minorities as well as the pleasures they experience become clearer. By no means were the five liberal arts colleges perfect at being more inclusive to black students. Students were highly aware of their status as racial minorities. Their peers and professors relied on stereotypes to understand them rather than not make assumptions about black students' backgrounds. At the same time, the NECASL students were not wholly displeased with their colleges. They did not think the institution itself was hostile or against them. In fact, they were optimistic about the potential for progress. It may be that students were "putting up" with the lack of racial diversity and the racial tokenism they experienced on their campuses. Students chose these schools to achieve specific academic and professional goals. They may have seen racial discrimination as an unfortunate price to pay for an elite education. But, I would also argue that the culture of these schools are not the same as those of previous studies such as Feagin and his colleagues. The fact that these schools are small and have made increasing diversity as one of their goals may contribute to this crucial difference. I will explore the possible opportunities elite colleges have to monopolize on this advantage in the next chapter.

Conclusion: Making Good on Promises

There is a conflicting image of upward mobility in this country. On the one hand, there is the ideal that any American who works hard and is motivated will be able to achieve upward mobility. This is an ideal that African Americans and all historically marginalized groups continue to be deeply invested in. One of the means to this opportunity has been through higher education, particularly, matriculation at elite colleges and universities. However, access to these schools is not equal and is becoming more difficult to access for students from lower socioeconomic classes. Low-income and underrepresented minority students are comprise a small portion of the Consortium on the Financing Higher Education (COFHE) institutions, which include the elite colleges and universities. Only 10% of students from the lower 40% of the income distribution attended these schools in 2005 (Hill, Winston, and Boyd 2005). In 2009, Black students comprised 8% of the student body at COFHE schools (NCES 2010). In other words, the very avenue to greater equality is not being accessed to the students who would benefit from it the most. This is no different within the black student population at elite institutions. Espenshade and Radford (2009) found that 64% of black students who attended ten selective colleges were middle class or higher. Working and lower class blacks comprised only 35% percent of black students. This is the national picture of black students who attend elite institutions.

Like many of the black students who are attending selective colleges and universities, the NECASL students are a privileged group who are best positioned to attend college. The five elite colleges admitted high school students already had access to social, human, and cultural capital. Within the NECASL cohort, their cultural capital is evidenced by their list of schools they

applied to and their orientation, or habitus, to the college selection process. Students credited their parents as assisting them when visiting schools and organizing application materials. Parents can also give their children knowledge such as the value of an education from elite liberal colleges that may not be as popularly known as larger institutions. Few students described not having parental support when they were applying. Even when this was the case, these students still had other resources, or sources of capital, to use during their college search, including online search tools as well as programs designed to decrease racial disparities in higher education. Counselors, who were an additional resource for most students, encouraged their choices in colleges. But what about the black students who show great academic potential yet do not have the social, cultural, or financial capital to get them into elite colleges?

This is an important question because there are material and immaterial benefits to attending an elite college. The black students in the NECASL cohort made gains in human capital in that they were attaining higher education. There is also research that suggests as graduates of an elite institution, they will enjoy higher earnings and career advancement. Graduates of the class of 1982 who attended a highly ranked private institutions had 39% higher annual earnings than graduates of bottom ranked public universities (Brewer et al. 1999). People who graduated from middle ranked private and public colleges made only 10% and 26% more, respectively. Dale and Krueger (2002) did not find that the returns to attending an elite college is not the same for all groups. Students from low-income backgrounds who attended selective colleges experienced greater wage returns than their peers from higher socioeconomic statuses. This is a troubling finding since most of the students who attend these schools come from middle to upper middle classes. Looking at the long term effects of graduating from an elite college, Brand and Halaby (2006) followed a cohort of high school graduates and college attendants from the class of 1960 over four decades. They found that attending an elite college is associated

significantly with pursuing further education, such as a master's and/or doctorate degree. Also, these graduates enjoyed higher wages later in their careers. So the immediate returns to attending an elite college are not as robust as they are later in life.

The benefits of attending an elite college extends beyond the gains in earning potential and career advancement. The NECASL cohort also made gains in cultural capital during their time in college. Bourdieu originally proposed that cultural capital is a "stable set of dispositions that emerge before adulthood" (Dimaggio and Mohr 1985:1254). But, these dispositions are increased during students' time in college. This was seen in several NECASL students who reported that they became more self-motivated, more assertive about seeking assistance from professors, and more comfortable speaking in class over time. These attitudinal changes helped students as they looked for internships, research experiences, and summer jobs that gave them relevant experiences for their plans after graduation.

NECASL students will also benefit from this capital after they graduate. The cultural capital NECASL students have is not only important within micro level interactions. It is also important when students enter the labor market. Bourdieu (1986) argued that cultural capital is not only embodied by the people who possess it, in that they have particular preferences and sensibilities. But it is also institutionalized in the form of academic credentials. A degree from an elite college is a certification that the degree holder possesses the attitudes, preferences, and values of elite status groups. The college officially recognizes that the person belongs in their status group and possesses the sensibilities of that group. The NECASL cohort gained these credentials once they graduated. But, the cohort was a privileged group, who had the support of their schools and families to make their college aspirations a reality. The cohort was not comprised mainly of first generation, low-income students. These students are still not getting the benefits of attending an elite college.

What should elite colleges do to fulfill their promise of becoming more diverse, racially and economically? There are two immediate actions that these schools can take to truly begin to resolve this issue. Elite colleges and universities need to be more proactive at recruiting low income racial minorities. They also need to implement programs and initiatives on their campuses to ensure it is an inclusive community.

Rethinking Recruiting

Elite colleges need to implement more directed efforts to increasing the racial and socioeconomic diversity of their applicants and admitted students. The problem is not that there are not enough highly qualified low income black students to attend these schools. Hill and Winston (2006) found that high ability, low income students (SAT scores above 1420) comprised a larger share of the U.S. population (12.8%) than the student body at selective private colleges (approximately 10%). These high achieving students meet at least one measure of academic ability that is valued in admissions to elite colleges. Yet they are not necessarily the students who are being targeted for recruitment. Recruitment is an important first step to increasing the representation of low income black students because there needs to be a larger pool of students that admissions counselors can choose from. In other words, the problem is not only that low income black students are not being admitted into these schools, but that they are not being recruited by these schools.

Low income students must be recruited early in their high schools careers, because students develop their academic and professional aspirations well before their sophomore or junior years, when students begin to search for colleges. Elite colleges can work more closely with college counselors who provide students and parents with information about the colleges that best fit students' professional aspirations. Furthermore, they can help students and parents understand the value of an elite education. There is ample evidence that shows one of the main

causes of the under enrollment of low income black students is that there is a lack of information about college costs and affordability (Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance 2002; Flint 1993; Hossler et al. 1991; McDonough and Calderone 2006). Elite colleges need to be more proactive at informing low income students about the resources that make an elite education possible without incurring high debt.

Amherst College is an example of an elite college that committed itself in recruiting more lower income and minority students. In 2010, 18% of Amherst students were Pell Grant recipients which was a 1,000% increase since 1973 (Rubin 2011). Part of the school's success in attracting and admitting more low income students can be attributed to their increased consideration of non-academic factors for admissions. Socioeconomic status and race were as important in admissions decision as SAT scores. Amherst also expanded their financial aid in order to ensure all qualified applicants were able to attend (Duffy and Goldberg 1998). Their efforts on attracting more minority students were as aggressive. In the 1980s and 1990s, Amherst visited more predominately minority high schools and worked more extensively with alums of color in order to expand the minority student population (Rubin 2011). Amherst's efforts to recruit and admit more black students resulted in its current student population being made up of 12% black students. Other elite colleges can also make racial and economic diversity its goal by truly committing to doing so, not simply with words, but with actions.

Creating more inclusive communities
Admitting more black students, while important, is only one part of the larger commitment to increasing diversity and equality. Elite colleges also need to ensure that their communities are inclusive. Despite the gains the NECASL students made, they still had to contend with racism and discrimination throughout their time in college. NECASL students recounted

instances in which they were stereotyped or made to feel more aware of the racial identity. For example, several students discussed feeling as if they were asked to represent their race in classes when questions about race or African American culture arose. These events happened infrequently, but their infrequence does not detract from their importance. When white peers, faculty, or other members of their campus communities acted in ways that were offensive, black students looked to other black students for support. This network also assisted them with what they saw as the lack of racial diversity on their campuses.

Despite these challenges, NECASL students were satisfied with their choice in college and saw their time undergraduate experience as an opportunity to gain academic and professional experiences. Most of the NECASL cohort were optimistic about the possibilities of racial progress on their campuses at the beginning of their college career and though their optimism may have been tempered by their experiences later in college, they still did not refer to their campuses as hostile. By their senior year, the students believed their schools needed to make greater efforts to increase the black student population at their schools. The NECASL colleges also needed to ensure all of their students value inclusivity and diversity. The difficulty in ensuring this begins well before students attend college. Because of residential segregation, most white students spend virtually their entire lives before college in nearly all white spaces. In their study of students entering selective colleges and universities, Massey and his colleagues found that from primary education to high school, white students lived in neighborhoods that were at least 85% white. They also lived in solidly middle class neighborhoods in which the median income was $87,000 (Massey et al. 2008). For many, college is the first time they are exposed to much racial or socioeconomic diversity. With this said, it is unwise for educators to assume that these students will be able to interact successfully with their non-white peers. Instead, some students rely on the hackneyed stereotypes to serve the basis of their understanding of their black

peers. Recall the encounter Alisha had with her white classmate who only knew about black people from movies, not through close interactions. Alisha thought this was absurd and would never think to base her understanding of white people on what she saw in movies. But it belies a reality that many elite colleges and universities have not dealt with. Most of their incoming white students have not had the experiences that help dispel stereotypes about blacks. The problem of racial prejudice is not caused by black students' presence but because of the prejudices and biases white students have about black people. Therefore, the problem of persistent discrimination and racial tensions at elite colleges is best solved by ensuring white students are more culturally competent. Though elite colleges have no control over the kinds of experiences their students had before college, these institutions can create campus communities that has diversity, inclusivity, and cultural competence at its core.

One way to increase cultural competence is through course requirements. Many elite colleges and universities have ethnic studies departments, such as Africana Studies or Asian American Studies. They also have created administrative divisions whose sole purpose is to sustain intercultural awareness on their campuses. However, all of these opportunities are not taken advantage of by white students. In their study of students who attended selective colleges and universities, Espenshade and Radford (2009) found that only 32% of white students took one or more classes about African/African American Studies, Latino Studies, or Asian American Studies. Furthermore, only 30% of white students participated in an ethnic activity that celebrated Black History, Latino/Chicano History, or Asian American History month. Overwhelmingly, the students who are participating in multicultural activities and courses, are not white students. Requiring all students to take a course about a race or ethnic group that has been historically marginalized will be beneficial in ensuring these students begin to engage with cultures other than their own.

An additional curricular change the elite colleges and universities can implement is by requiring faculty from all departments, not just ethnic studies, to engage discussions about race in their classes if and when they arise. Race is an issue that effects everyone, not just racial minorities. Proscribing questions about racism and discrimination to ethnic studies courses further perpetuates this misconception. For example, any discussion about the rise of the West that does not include Western nation's involvement in the slave trade and colonialism is both incomplete and does a disservice to all students who are studying the topic. For black students, omissions of this kind deny recognition of their history. For white students, it perpetuates the misunderstanding that racism is not central to American history. Professors should also be trained to be more culturally competent and have resources that will help them with difficult conversations in their classes.

Classes and activities are not the only way students can overcome racial prejudices and anxieties about interacting with people from races different from their own. Close friendships and interactions are also a way in which white students can better learn about their black peers. Consistent interactions with people from different groups reduces prejudices (Pettigrew and Tropp 2006). Students who have more friendships with people outside of their race have fewer racial prejudices than when they began school, even when controlling for their prejudice levels before entering college (Levin et al. 2003). But who are the students who have these interracial friendships? Not white students. At elite colleges and universities, 96% of the white students socialized with other whites and 97% had close friendships with a white person. When they do socialize with or have close friends from other races, it is usually Asian students. Only 32% of white students socialized with a black person and 15% had a close black friend. Black students are also more likely to interact with blacks, but they still socialize and have close friends who are non-black more than whites. Sixty seven percent of black students socialized with whites and

53% had close friends who were white (Espenshade and Radford 2009). These data shows that the cross racial interaction that helps foster cultural awareness and reduces prejudices is being conducted mainly by non-whites. By increasing the proportion of black students at elite colleges, there will be greater opportunities for cross racial interactions both in and out of the classroom. Furthermore, if these efforts are conducted in conjunction with increased programming around racial sensitivity and dialogues about race, elite colleges can work to make their campuses more inclusive. These solutions are by no means exhaustive, and they are not meant to be. The issues of racial and economic diversity are ones that can only be solved creatively and proactively. But the first step elite colleges and universities must take is addressing the issues that face them today, not by congratulating themselves for the progress they made yesterday. Creating more opportunities for black students from all socioeconomic classes is a crucial component to increasing social mobility for all Americans. It is as Anthony Marx, the former president of Amherst College said, "What good is a private college unless it is serving a great national purpose?"

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