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OUTSIDE SECOND-GENERATION, INSIDE FIRST-GENERATION: SHEDDING
LIGHT ON A HIDDEN POPULATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A Dissertation Presented

by

DeMethra LaSha Bradley

to

The Faculty of the Graduate College

of

The University of Vermont

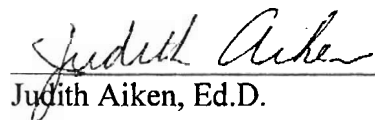
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Specializing in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

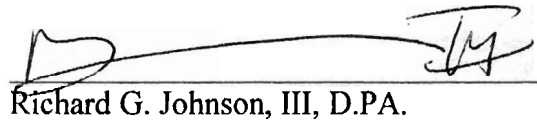
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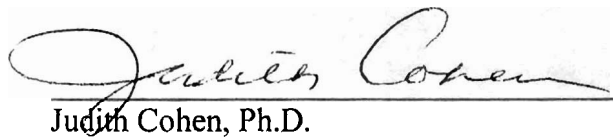
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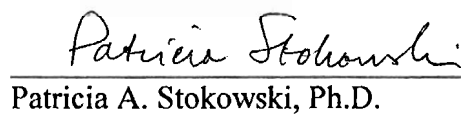
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ABSTRACT

Second-generation college students comprise a large majority of the collegiate population. The research on this population strongly suggests that their knowledge, capitals, and the support received from their parents gives them a “jump start” in higher education in comparison to their first-generation peers. The positive exposure to higher education received by second-generation college students is asserted to be directly linked to their parents’ experiences in higher education. Second-generation college students are assumed to possess the basic knowledge for successful navigation of the college experience.

As a second-generation, African-American college student, I carried a high level of expectation and numerous assumptions about what my experiences would be like in the academy. I assumed that my mother’s college education would have a positive effect on my college journey. As my college experience unfolded, I found myself severely deficient when it came to basic collegiate knowledge and survival skills. The radical changes in higher education that had occurred during the twenty years between the collegiate experiences of my mother and me greatly decreased my mother’s ability to pass on knowledge that was still up-to-date and practical for my experience. My journey through college was nothing like the second-generation student literature suggested. My experiences in higher education closely paralleled those associated with the first-generation student population. The challenges I faced included social, cultural and racial integration, course and major selection, reduced parental involvement and financial strain.

I have since come to view myself as a first-generation college student amid second-generation college student assumptions and expectations. Through the use of Scholarly Personal Narrative methodology, this dissertation seeks to bring into focus a hitherto hidden population in higher education. These are the students, who in spite of having at least one parent or guardian with a college degree, do not know how to navigate the college journey; these are the students who feel like imposters in the academy because it is assumed they are better equipped to navigate the institution. In this dissertation I draw upon numerous studies of first-generation and second-generation college students to create an empirical understanding of the dual and dueling narrative I occupied during my undergraduate experience. I explore concepts of cultural and academic capital as being vital in my ability to master the college environment. I introduce for the first time in the literature a concept I call “values capital.” I also discuss the salience of social class identity in the pursuit of higher education in order to frame a narrative of my own self-empowerment and subsequent integration into higher education. In addition to a number of empirical studies, I will draw upon biographies and my own personal narrative to elucidate the universal themes of self-empowerment, authenticity, insecurity, ambition, and meaning-making—themes that all second-generation-on-the-outside but first-generation-on-the-inside students must confront if they are to be successful in higher education.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The African proverb, “it takes a village to raise a child,” also applies to me as a doctoral student. In my case, it has taken a village of love and support to get me through this academic process. My village has consisted of many individuals, too many to name in this document; however there are some village members whom I must acknowledge for their specific role in my academic journey.

I give thanks to the Universe and God for placing me exactly where I needed to be these past few years. The love and support that Mommy, Dani, and Devon have given me ever since I moved to Vermont in 2003 has kept me going and reaching for the stars. Christian, my partner, we have endured at a very peculiar time in my life. Your love brought me joy on many tired school nights and long writing sprees. I love you. Thank you for teaching me what matters most and embracing me with open arms. Kameron, my first son, your presence in my life has been heaven sent and a mirror of reflection that only God could have conjured up.

To my family in Arkansas, thank you for all of your love and support. My sincere gratitude is extended to my dissertation committee, Dr. Robert J. Nash, Dr. Judith Aiken, Dr. Richard G. Johnson III, and Dr. Judith Cohen. Thank you for believing in the subject matter of this dissertation and volunteering your time for my academic advancement.

Stacey, you have been my bestfriend and big sister for years. I admire your spirit and your ability to love directly from the heart (and not the head). Harriet and the kids, thank you for opening your home to me for so many years. Robert, you have been a father to me, and words could never fully express the gratitude I have for you and our relationship. To my soul sister Dawna, I hope our spirits always stay connected and maybe one day we will write something together.

I want to acknowledge Gary, Catherine, and John for supporting me and allowing me to learn so much from working with all three of you. I truly appreciate the friendships and collegial relationships I have cultivated over the years with many people in the UVM Division of Student and Campus Life, especially in CSES. I can honestly say that I am in Vermont for three reasons, Robert Kelly, Bridget Turner Kelly, and Jackie Gribbons. Each of you was critical in my final decision to come to Vermont and attend UVM. While in Vermont, I have learned a lot of things, but learning to swim (literally) has, by far, been my biggest accomplishment. I want to thank my swim teacher, Pamela Gardner. You will always be my career counselor.

Last, but not least, I want to thank Chris Stanton—my student affairs guardian angel. You believed in my skills and ability when others did not. I hope you are able to see just how much your encouragement has meant to me over the years. Continue resting in peace.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation and my entire academic process to my grandmother, Allie Mae Polite. Grandma, you gave me the greatest contributions to my success by teaching me how to go with my strengths and work on my weaknesses, and encouraging me to see my predicaments and rise above them through acknowledgement and intentional action. Grandma, you taught me how to craft my words and encouraged me to use my voice. You taught me how to make a way out of no way. You will always be my Grandma-Sensei, my greatest teacher.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

*The greatest contribution that I can make to
higher education is in exposing the truth
in my own narrative.*

-Dr. Alvin A. Sturdivant

I have selected to write this dissertation because my gut, and multiple personal communications with others, tells me that my experiences as a second-generation college student will help to make visible the experiences of so many other second-generation college students. I believe the stories and feelings I share are universal to human experiences in general and the human experiences associated with higher education/the academy. I make no claims to be an expert on any of the themes or topics that I broach via this dissertation. I only offer my narratives as potential conversation starters, stories that may have the reader sit back and reflect on their own life, and one of the many examples of how “[expectations] are [met] all the time by big-hearted people who do not have the right background, ability or experience.”¹ I write this scholarly personal narrative (SPN) dissertation with the words of Dr. Alvin A. Sturdivant in mind, “the greatest contribution that I can make to higher education is in exposing the truth in my own narrative.”² And that is exactly what I intend to do in my dissertation.

DEBRAH GAIL POLITE

In 1968, at age 17, Debrah Gail Polite began her undergraduate studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB). She had been selected and academically prepared via her participation in a cohort of “college bound” junior high and high school students. Debrah and the other members of the cohort attended secondary school together for six years and participated in many of the same co-curricular activities. Once enrolled at

UCSB, Debrah excelled in her studies, participated in university life, and held student leadership positions. Her major, political science, was regarded as a stepping stone to her subsequent application to various law schools.

With a Bachelor of Arts degree in hand (and less than two hundred dollars in student loan debt), Debrah was accepted at the University of West Los Angeles School of Law. Not only was she the first in her family to attain a bachelor degree, Debrah also became the first to pursue a professional degree. From September, 1972 to April, 1973, Debrah was enrolled at the University of West Los Angeles School of Law, and then she fell ill due to the stress of the academic environment. She was forced to choose between her health and her aspirations to become a lawyer, and Debrah chose her health. Having married (and divorced), Debrah Polite Bradley went on to become a non-profit organization executive administrator, a mother of three children, a junior high school mathematics teacher, and a foster parent. Debrah is a first-generation college graduate with some experience as a professional degree student. First-generation college students are defined in the literature as students whom neither parent has any university experience whereas the parent or guardian's highest level of education is a high school diploma or less or students whom neither parent attained a college degree, but may have some college experience.³ Due to her membership in the first-generation student population, Debrah's children—DeMethra, Danielle, and Devon—are/will be second-generation college students.

Second-generation college students are said to possess the knowledge, capital, and aspirations that place them in a better position to pursue and attain undergraduate as

well as graduate/professional degrees.⁴ These students can ask their parents for guidance about how to apply to college; they can listen to their parents' collegiate stories and gain insights that will help them navigate their own collegiate experiences; they have a "jump start" in comparison to their first-generation peers; and for those whose parents have experiences in higher education beyond the baccalaureate (e.g., graduate or professional school), they are well aware of the academic opportunities available to college graduates.⁵ These are just a few of the research assertions and everyday assumptions made about second-generation college students.

I am Debrah's oldest child; therefore I am considered a second-generation college student. Thus by research assertions and everyday assumptions, I should have had many if not all of the experiences noted in the preceding paragraph. Simply put, I had some but not as many as I or others would have assumed. My mother, a college graduate and professional degree aspirant, was always supportive and encouraging of my pursuit of higher education. The question in my household was never, "Sha, do you want to go to college?" The question was "Sha, what colleges are you thinking about applying to?" No sentence began with, "If you go to college." When the subject was broached, the sentences began with, "When you go to college" or "At college, be sure to." Attending college and graduating was a significant part of who I was being raised to be.

Throughout my experiences in higher education, starting with the pursuit and attainment of a bachelor of arts degree, a master of education degree, and culminating with the pursuit (and future attainment) of a doctor of education degree, I have thought about my second-generation college student status. I know this status sets me apart from

many of my peers; it also sets me and my sister apart from all but three of my two hundred cousins. I know this status instilled in me a confidence to pursue higher education and it enabled me to see myself as a part of the higher education community. Therefore, I unequivocally state that I fully acknowledge where my status as a second-generation college student has assisted me in overcoming the initial barriers to entering higher education—providing me with aspiration, confidence, and a feeling of belonging.

But I also state that I did not possess much of the knowledge, capital, and academic aspirations associated with second-generation college students based upon their parents' educational attainment. All of what I learned about the college application process was gleaned from conversations with the college counselor at my high school and my participation in the *College Bound* program. It did not come from my mother. My mother was not able to answer any of my college application questions surrounding such issues as the personal essay, financial aid processes, the common application, and the value of taking advanced placement high school courses. And other than law and medical school, I gained no knowledge of post-collegiate academic options from my mother.

OBJECTIVE AND THEMES OF DISSERTATION

My objective in this dissertation is to give voice to a population (second-generation college students) and a narrative (outside second-generation, inside first-generation) that has largely gone unnoticed and underrepresented in the literature. This dissertation is intended to answer the following questions: 1) How have I been advantaged and disadvantaged by my mother's educational attainment?; 2) What effects did generational and cultural differences between my first-generation college student

mother and I (a second-generation child) have on my collegiate experiences?; 3) How can my narrative shed light on a hidden population in higher education?; 4) Why am I second-generation on the outside, but feel first-generation on the inside? These questions are personal and yet scholarly. Each contributes to the development of a new understanding of second-generation college student experiences in higher education.

Through this dissertation I will explore major themes central to my experiences of second-generation college student expectations amid first-generation college student preparation. The following themes are investigated in this dissertation: 1) General characteristics of first-generation and second-generation college students; 2) Academic capital and values capital; 3) Social class; 4) Meeting expectations without proper preparation; and 5) Insecurity in the academy. Within each theme, I have explored my experiences from a broader perspective utilizing research and other writings to shed light on my own narrative. Due to the scarcity of research on second-generation college student experiences, I have drawn upon various biographies, literature, and personal communications in order to universalize my own experience.

My narrative dispels many of the research assertions and everyday assumptions made about second-generation college students. My narrative, I expect, will have many people re-thinking or perhaps attempting for the first time, to identify the invisible populations moving about within higher education. It will shed light on factors (such as academic capital and social class) that are unmistakably central to student success in higher education. It is a complex narrative, which illuminates searching for belonging, self-empowerment, authenticity, ambition, courage, and meaning making. Throughout

this dissertation, I will assert why sharing my narrative is important to the expansion of literature about second-generation college students and how to further serve this invisible population. I will also address possible implications for higher education, as well as provide strategies for students like myself and the professionals who work with this population.

This SPN represents the exploration of belonging amid feelings of isolation, of understanding and embracing the implications of my cultural capital and social class, of learning to “swim” in higher education after being thrown in the “pool.” It will, at times, refute the assumptions associated with second-generation college students; it will also bring into question the roles of culture and generation on second-generation student preparation. This dissertation will expand on the age-old comment, “If I knew then, what I know now...” and further expose the triumphs and tribulations associated with overcoming insecurity in the academy as a member of multiple marginalized groups. I will do my best to keep the element of universalizability central to the sharing of my narrative. I am not sharing my narrative for the sake of sharing; on the contrary, I am sharing my narrative in an effort to bring to light experiences that I purport are shared by many others throughout higher education. Through this dissertation others will have the ability to hear my story and my voice, and perhaps be able to find their voices in my narrative and know that their “invisible” experiences are becoming “visible.”

HOW DID I GET TO COLLEGE?

Over the past fifteen years, I have been asked numerous times the question “How did you get to college?” This question has come from high school students who visited UCSB for

college tours; curious undergraduate classmates (and colleagues) who found out I was sixteen when I enrolled at UCSB; and I remember answering this question in at least six student leadership position interviews. I would describe the answers I provided to aforementioned questioners as a chronological administrative account of my journey to college. My answer was primarily comprised of taking the Scholastic Aptitude Test, turning in college applications, taking advanced placement exams, filling out the FAFSA, and receiving scholarships. Until I began graduate school, my conscious perception of how I came to enroll in college was entirely administrative. I rarely thought about the personal narrative that accompanied each and every administrative task.

During my graduate studies in the Higher Education and Student Affairs Administration program at the University of Vermont, the same question was asked of me again: “How did you get to college?” After being exposed to literature that heightened my awareness of the college admissions process, my own educational privilege, cultural capital, and the struggles my elders endured for educational equality, my answer to the question “How did you get to college?” changed forever. The administrative tasks—once central to my college application narrative—are now on the margins of that narrative. The administrative tasks have been relegated to the fringes of my answer. In the next sections of this chapter, I will share with the reader my current answer to the question, “How did you get to college?” I no longer view how I arrived as a student at UCSB as a series of administrative tasks; I see that journey as a tapestry of experiences that shaped who I am.

Keeping Up With Jennifer Johnson

If I had to choose one experience and one person that set me on my course of pursuing academic excellence, I would say second grade at First Church of God Christian School and Jennifer Johnson, respectively. As I have done thus far and will continue to do in this dissertation, I acknowledge the positive influences my mother and my grandmother have had on my academic performance. Yet I view their influences as fuel to the fire of achievement that has burned inside of me for twenty-four years. This fire—my pursuit of academic achievement—erupted when I was in the second grade at age seven.

In my faith-based elementary school, each classroom had an achievement board. Some boards consisted of the top five students in the class; other boards displayed the assignments that received the highest grades. No matter the format, the achievement boards had two purposes—to showcase the excellent work of students and to push other students to work harder so that their work or their names would be displayed on the board. I was introduced to the achievement board in second grade. I remember seeing the board after a few weeks of school and my name was not on it. As I stared at the names on the board, something inside of me clicked. I wanted my name on that board! I began to take my homework and scripture memorization seriously. I had been told by my mother that I was smart and could do anything I put my mind to; I decided to put her theory to the test. I asked for extra homework so I could further hone my academic skills and I became focused. A few more weeks passed, and the achievement board was updated. My name was on the board but not in the number one spot. There was one name above mine—Jennifer Johnson.

In my seven year old mind, the scenario went something similar to an old western saloon stand-off. Jennifer and I looked at the achievement board, then in what seemed like slow motion, we looked at each other. The unspoken words of our glances were “This achievement board ain’t big enough for the both of us.” For the remainder of our classes together (second and fourth grade), Jennifer and I participated in an intellectual shoot-out with each other. Years later, when we were both teenagers, Jennifer and I ran into each other and reminisced about our academic rivalry. Long gone were the days of the academic shoot-out; we talked with each other, sharing successes and a sincere admiration for each other. There seemed to be a silent acknowledgement of the ways our second and fourth grade academic rivalry shaped each of us into the young women we were then. We parted ways as compatriots not competitors. So, how did I get to college? I got to college because I was ambitious and I wanted to be the top-dog.

Young, Gifted and Black

At age seven I was tested and identified as a gifted child. My academic abilities were always three or more grade levels above the grade I was enrolled in. Being identified as gifted had its advantages in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) specifically I was able to enroll in Audubon Gifted Junior High School and Crenshaw Gifted Magnet High School. Both of these programs were the top programs in the LAUSD school district. The college preparatory counselors always opened their doors for students in these programs.

At times these programs were hard for me socially because all of the other students were one or two years older than me. Having skipped the third grade, I had

become accustomed to being the youngest in my classroom but there were times when my age did not sit well with the other students. Thus I learned to hide my age to fit in. I can only imagine what type of self-confidence issues could erupt for a thirteen year old who was constantly being outshined academically by an eleven year old. The message I received from some of my classmates and even from a few teachers was that being young, gifted, and Black was fine as long as you were not younger than your classmates and as long as you “kept quiet” about just how gifted you really are. This message was totally oxymoronic to being in a gifted program, but it was the message I heard loud and clear.

Navigating and sometimes overcompensating for others’ insecurity or biases towards me due to my age and abilities continues to be a constant war in my academic and professional life. So, how did I get to college? I got to college because I learned to be selective about who really needed to know just how intelligent I really was.

Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway

For as long as I can remember, my mother has worked hard at instilling in me a sense of peace and acceptance about who I am. Similar to what the country music star Patsy Cline told a young rising star Loretta Lynn, “Little girl, you got to live your own life.” My mother has been telling me that for thirty years. There were many times in my life prior to going to college where I felt the fear of trying a new activity or pursuing a goal and I went full force towards that activity or goal anyway. When I reflect back, much of that fear was around rejection due to my age. Of the many experiences in which I felt the fear and did it anyway, two are printed everlastingly in my brain. The first was when I was

eleven years old (in the 7th grade) and I entered an oratory contest in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The second was when I was fourteen years old (during the summer between sophomore and junior years in high school) and I participated in the A Better Chance program.

The Speech

Until recently I would have described myself as a shy child, but truly the more appropriate word is selective. In general, I did not talk to many people and when I did choose to speak to people, it was very intentional. However, in junior high school, I was a “chatterbox” because I wanted to fit in. There was only one way to really get me to be quiet at school, and that was if I sensed that the teacher would call me to the front of the classroom to speak. I, like many other people, did not like to speak in public. Yet, I was an observant child and had an early sense of politics (small “p” politics). I knew that if I wanted to be the top-dog I would have to start speaking in public in formal capacities. When I was in the 7th grade (at age eleven) an opportunity arose for me to enter a speech contest.

Every day leading up to the contest, I was nervous. I knew that the other students I was competing against had no reservations about speaking in public. But here I was—an eleven years old who was scared to speak formally in public, competing with a few thirteen years olds and one fifteen year old who loved to talk. I wrote my own speech, typed it, and memorized the entire two single-spaced typed pages. I practiced my delivery with my mother, sister, and my grandmother. I knew what words I would smile at the audience, I knew what words I would speak louder to make a point, and I

knew what words I would speak softer to pull the audience in. I learned this style of oration from the preachers in my Missionary Baptist Church.

I was ready. I delivered the speech and received a standing ovation. My main competitor, May Lee (a fifteen year old 9th grader) stumbled over her words, never made eye contact and her speech was slightly off topic. After each student delivered their speeches, we all waited while the judges deliberated. When the winners were announced, I placed 2nd for the girls, and May Lee won the contest. Many of the audience members came up to me and my mother afterwards and told us that I should have won. Prior to leaving the event, my mother approached one of the judges. She reassured the judge that she would not make a scene, but she wanted to know why I did not win. The judge confided in her the following: “We had to select a girl and a boy; out of the girls your daughter was the best, but she is eleven and has more years to win this contest, May Lee is fifteen and graduating from junior high in June. We felt it may be a really big blow to May Lee’s self-esteem to be beat by an eleven year old, so we decided to select her.” As promised, mommy did not make a scene.

I held my composure until we made it to the car and out of sight. Then I began to cry. I cried because I knew I should have won and I did not understand why I did not win. After trying to assure me that I could not have done anything better, mommy told me about her conversation with the judge. Upon hearing what the judge had told my mother, I cried even harder because even though I was the best, I did not win because of my age. My mind and spirit received the message that sometimes there is more to winning than simply being the best. The next year I entered the contest again, and I won.

The speech I wrote was not good and I delivered it with only an inkling of the passion I had the year before. I knew I would win because I was “robbed” of my victory the previous year. The judges owed me, so it really did not matter what I said or if my speech was good, I knew they would select me.

Needless to say, my experience with the oratory contest made me bitter. I was now always on guard with people in authority because I felt they were judging what I should or should not do based on my age. Some of the adults in my life (specifically in my secondary education) felt the need to curb my acceleration, trying to hold me back because they thought I was too young to be who I was (gifted). So, how did I get to college? Taking note of the small “p” politics and seeing how the system around me works.

Massachusetts: A Better Chance

During my sophomore year in high school I became involved in the A Better Chance (ABC) program. Through the ABC program I was selected to attend Northfield Mount Herman School (NMH). NMH is a private boarding school in Northfield, Massachusetts. I, along with two other classmates, was selected to attend NMH during the summer of 1992. If we performed well academically each of us would be offered a scholarship to attend NMH for the remainder of our high school years. I was excited about receiving an “ivy league” high school education, but I had never been away from home without my mother or grandmother and I was only fourteen. As usual my mother supported my desire to go NMH and told me that my nervousness was understandable.

Shortly after my 10th grade year ended I packed my bags, shipped my bicycle, and began the six-week intensive college preparatory summer session at NMH.

Needless to say, it was an adjustment to be so far away from family. I had never been that far East in the United States of America. The college preparatory curriculum at NMH was a welcomed challenge. While some students may have shirked at the idea of not being able to pass easily, I was excited by needing to flex my mind to achieve good grades. NMH was the first time I lived on my own, which really only translated to not living with my mother since each residence hall had a house mother and we had curfew. While at NMH I enrolled in a cycling class as my physical education. I enjoyed riding my bicycle but I hardly ever rode it outside of my own backyard. Hence I was extremely excited to take a cycling class.

I remember receiving my bicycle and having to reassemble it myself because I did not have any extra money to pay for the local bike shop to reassemble it. I learned that my frame had been slightly bent during the shipping process, but I was still able to ride it. When I arrived for the first cycling class with my cherry red road bicycle, I immediately noticed that I was the only female in the group. My teachers were male and my other five or six classmates were male. Then I learned that some parts of our class would be on trail riding. This information caused me some alarm because I did not have a mountain bike which is built for trails; I had a road bike which is built for smoother more predictable terrain. I immediately felt like the underdog. Not only did I have the wrong bicycle, but I also felt awkward being the only female.

During the first few classes, I distinctly remember being last in the group, even behind the last teacher. I remember one of the teachers having to come back for me a few times because I was the slowest, especially on the trails. We had cycling class two or three times a week, and during the first week or so, I dreaded going to it. Then I decided that I was not going to be last in the group anymore. I began to cycle everyday in order to build up my strength. When my friends were hanging out during our free time, I was on my bike. I knew that I had some catching up to do in ability and that I would never catch up if I only did what the boys in my class did (which was only ride bikes during class). As the weeks passed, my cycling improved. I was still last but I was keeping up better and the teacher no longer had to come back for me during the rides. I still had to be careful on the trails but I had built up my strength and endurance enough to manage my bike better, even on the rough terrain.

On last day of class we had a race of sorts, and although I did not come in first, I did not come in last. My teacher, the one who seemed frustrated by my slow performance in the beginning, congratulated me on “keeping up with the boys and sticking it out.” I gladly accepted his accolades but I never disclosed that for the past month I had been riding my bike everyday with the goal of not being last in class. So, how did I get to college? I embraced the unknown, I accepted where I needed to improve, and when everyone else was out playing, I was focused on my goal.

A LOOK AT THE CHAPTERS AHEAD

In the subsequent chapters, I will expand on SPN methodology, and explore why this methodology fits appropriately with both the purpose and subject of this dissertation.

Following the methodology chapter, I will discuss first-generation and second-generation college student populations in order to briefly elucidate the experiences associated with these students. Using my own narrative, supported by the scholarship associated with these two populations, I will probe into my feelings of being an “insider” (since the majority of college students are continuing-generation) but feeling like an “outsider” contributed to and continues to be a major theme in my narrative. The insider/outsider narrative is salient throughout this dissertation.

After discussing first-generation and second-generation college student literature, I will utilize foundational writing and my own narrative to define and clarify the concepts of academic and cultural capital. In conjunction with these concepts, I introduce the reader to “values capital” a concept I developed as a result of crafting this dissertation. The discussion of academic, cultural, and values capital will lead the reader into the subject of social class. I assert that social class is the predominate background narrative for my life, and with the use of classical and contemporary literature, I further expand on social class and make a case for lifting the veil of this taboo subject. I will conclude by delving into the possible universalizable implications garnered from this dissertation for faculty and administrators within higher education, and investigate the themes of authenticity and ambition in my higher education journey. Lastly I will provide the reader with a glimpse into how I hope to continue my work as a practitioner and a scholar.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I will introduce you, the reader, to Scholarly Personal Narrative (SPN) methodology. I will explain this methodology by drawing upon its similarities to other methodologies as well as being clear about the unique characteristics of SPN writing. The benefits and contributions of SPN writing will be made clear in order to provide additional understanding of this developing methodology. This chapter will also elucidate my rationale for selecting SPN methodology for this dissertation.

THE POWER OF NARRATIVE

Four score and seven years ago, our fathers brought forth upon this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.⁶

The preceding quote from the Gettysburg Address by President Abraham Lincoln is one of the first narratives I remember learning during my elementary school education. In those thirty words, President Lincoln told a portion of the story associated with the founding of the United States of America. Although the Gettysburg Address went on to speak of other matters pertinent to the times in which the address was given, those first thirty words have become a part of the narrative of the U.S.A and its post-slavery, civil-rights movement, and equality for all eras.

Narrative, and its ability to educate, caution, encourage, and build community, is one of the most powerful tools any culture has in its immediate grasp. For some cultures in the U.S.A, such as Native Americans and African Americans, narrative has often served as the sole medium for continuing traditions and passing along knowledge from

generation to generation. As an African-American living in the United States of America, much of my existence is due to narrative learning. My grandmother and mother shared ancestral stories of triumph and tragedy; they also shared their experiences with Jim Crow laws, the Civil Rights Movement, and many other defining or memorable moments in their lives. My only regret is that I did not have the chance to hear more of my grandmother's stories before her thoughts were overcome with Alzheimer's disease.

It amazes me how often story-telling and narrative are dismissed as viable methods by which knowledge is acquired. After all is not another word for history, narration? After all do we not depend on the narration of others in almost all of our scholarship in the academy? The study may not include the word "I," but there is definitely a person behind the words that we read and often then recite to further our own scholastic endeavors. Narrative has informed us of many of the world's most horrendous acts of discrimination and violence, such as the Holocaust, the Slave Trade, and the internment of Japanese Americans in the USA. I understand that these types of horrendous acts have physical evidence (e.g. the Auschwitz concentration camp, the "Door of No Return" in Ghana, and the Manzanar interment camp) to support them having occurred. However, it is the stories of those who lived during those times that provide the greatest information for what really happened. Some of those narratives are recounted from actual survivors, while others have been passed down from generation to generation. Regardless of the method of communication, those narratives remain a powerful reminder that what has become history was real and still echoes in our current existence.

Narrative has also become essential to understanding the social, emotional, and physical conditions of populations that have been, and some would argue continually are, left out of mainstream research. Take into consideration the recent (last ten to fifteen years) emergence of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered (LGBT) student population in higher education. This population had existed, in silence, for decades on the college campus and until recently this population was seemingly voiceless. Then in what may seem to some as an overnight coming out, LGBT students are now acknowledged on many college campuses. Centers have been created to serve as places of comfort and safety for LGBT students, as well as places of education and continued inclusion for the entire campus community.

I have also witnessed the power of narrative shape many U.S. government bills and policies. For example, the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Actⁱ and the AMBER alertⁱⁱ (named for Amber Hagerman) were both established out of the personal narratives of others. I assert that the power of narrative, especially personal narrative has been essential in moving the United States towards the dreams of “liberty and justice for all.” The next section of this chapter explains SPN writing and methodology. I will examine the parallels that SPN has with other methodologies, followed by a presentation of the unique characteristics of SPN methodology.

ⁱ H.R. 11: Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009 was named after an Alabama woman who was a supervisor at a tire factory for nineteen years. After ending her nineteen year career, Lilly Ledbetter complained that she had been paid less than the men in the same supervisor roles. When her case was brought before the Supreme Court it ruled against her based on an expired statute of limitations. In 2009, Congress approved the legislation that expands workers’ rights to sue in this kind of case, relaxing the statute of limitations.

ⁱⁱ AMBER is the official acronym of America's Missing: Broadcasting Emergency Response system. It was originally named for Amber Hagerman, a nine year old child who was abducted and murdered in 1995.

Scholarly Personal Narrative Writing

A [personal narrative] is a work of sustained narrative prose controlled by an idea of the self under obligation to lift from the raw material of life a tale that will shape experience, transform event, deliver wisdom... What happened to the writer is not what matters; What matters is the large sense that the writer is able to make of what happened.⁷

I was introduced to scholarly personal narrative (SPN) writing during my first semester of graduate coursework at the University of Vermont. My classmates and I were instructed to read the course syllabus (which was in the form of a letter) then write a response back to our instructors. This was the first time I had ever experienced something like this as part of a faculty member's pedagogy. The letter from Dr. Nash and Dr. Kelly addressed all the usual academic requirements of the course (attendance, assignments, readings), yet what struck me most was the inclusion of who they were as people and as professors. It talked about their belief in the information we would be learning and sharing with one another over the course of the next fifteen weeks. Above all else, this letter encouraged me to use my voice during the next fifteen weeks and when inclined it encouraged me to *get personal*.

As SPN was further explained during the course, many thoughts and responses to this way of writing flooded my head. First, and foremost, I felt that it was about damn time that a scholarly genre that values the narratives of the researcher became a part of the methodological landscape. SPN writing felt like second nature to me because it

allowed room for my own knowledge base (developed from my own experiences) to become important in my writing. As expressed in the opening epigraph of this section, SPN allowed me to find my own style of writing, it encouraged the use of unpublished but still poignant narratives, such as the experiences of my grandmother, and it allowed me to interact with my readers on a personal yet intellectual level.

The ability to inform another person's life through my own narrative was liberating and scary all at the same time. In an institutional structure, such as the academy, where being legitimized is the rule of the day, SPN enabled me to grasp on to the legitimacy of my narrative and the narratives of others as contributions to the academy. I have held on tightly to SPN, and my once gingerly grasp is now a firm hold (in the form of this dissertation) on my special sound, style, and voice.

When asked the question, "Exactly what is scholarly personal narrative?" I often find myself at a loss for words because this developing methodology is not easy to explain. Over the course of the past few years, I have come to explain SPN via its similarities to other methodologies and distinctive qualities that make it its own unique methodology. In the subsections that follow I provide you, the reader, with the likenesses SPN has to other methodologies and the unique characteristics inherent to scholarly personal narrative methodology.

Similar in Some Respects, But Definitely Not the Same

As a graduate student, I was introduced to research in two distinct categories—quantitative and qualitative. Quan and qual, academic slang terms sometimes used in replacement of quantitative and qualitative, respectfully, quickly became the defining

terms of my doctoral experiences. During dinner breaks, when the topic of the dissertation was broached, my cohort would often divide by these methodological categories. The reasons for each of our gravitations towards one methodological type over the other ranged from, “I’m not good with numbers” to “qualitative is too personal, I don’t want to be that close to the people I study” to “the only way to hold my attention for a project that big is for me to hear other people’s stories.”

Each category of research houses numerous methodologies, and my graduate studies (master and doctoral level) exposed me to several qualitative methodologies. From the umbrella of qualitative inquiry, I assert that scholarly personal narrative methodology is most akin to narrative research, auto ethnography, and phenomenology. Dr. Robert J. Nash, the architect of SPN writing, draws similar assertions in his text *Liberating Scholarly Writing: The Power of Personal Narrative*, speaking specifically to the award winning research of Professor Ruth Behar who has long encouraged “a ‘vulnerable’ observer’s approach to doing ethnography.”⁸

Narrative Research

Narrative research has its origins in a number of the social and humanities disciplines, including education. In this methodology, a researcher studies one or two individuals, focuses on their stories, reports the data (e.g., themes that emerge from the participants’ narratives), then chronologically orders the meaning of those experiences.⁹ There are a variety of forms found in narrative research, including biographical study, autobiographical study, life history, and oral history. Of the four mentioned here, SPN is most closely akin to autobiographical study and oral history. In autobiographical studies,

the subjects of the study write and record their own experiences; and in oral history studies, the researcher focuses on understanding the causes and effects of events reported via personal reflections from participants being studied.¹⁰

SPN requires that the researcher write and record their own experiences and be central to the narratives discussed in the writing. There is also a clear push for understanding the causes and effects of the experiences shared in SPN writing. This understanding and the ability to convey its universalizable aspects to the reader is key to producing writing that is “meant to primarily benefit the readers, touch readers’ lives by informing their experiences, and...deliver wisdom.”¹¹ In addition to conveying the universalizable aspects of the researchers own narrative, SPN encourages the researcher to “restory” their narratives into a framework that makes sense for readers. Restorying in narrative research is defined as “the process of reorganizing the stories into some general type of framework.”¹² The framework may be around certain themes that emerge from the narratives, or a particular period of time in the researchers’ life. The primary purpose of restorying is to make clear connections to the narratives and the study. According to Creswell “The narrative study tells the story of individuals unfolding in a chronology of their experiences, set within their personal, social, and historical context, and including the important themes in those lived experiences.”¹³ With this description in mind, I assert that narrative research and SPN have a lot in common.

Autoethnography

Ethnographic research focuses on a specific cultural group with the goal of understanding the groups’ values, behaviors, beliefs, and language.¹⁴ Data collection is most often in the

form of extensive participant interviews and by observing the group being studied. The heart of ethnographic research lies in identifying a certain culture-sharing group, determining issues or themes that are present in the group, and creating a cultural portrait of the group that includes their views as well as the views of the researcher.¹⁵

In autoethnography, as the name implies, the researcher is the primary subject of the study. The researcher, as the primary (and only) participant in the study becomes the cultural “group” under study, and the themes or issues identified for the study pertain specifically to the researchers’ experiences.¹⁶ Unlike narrative research, where the themes or issues may evolve from the stories shared, autoethnography identifies these themes or issues via the researchers’ analysis of themselves. SPN writing encourages this analysis of self through free writes, reading old personal journals or reflections, or speaking with trusted confidants to unearth the themes or issues the researcher/subject tackled or continues to face.

Both autoethnography and SPN have the ability to become research that explores social ills, advocates for change, and give voice to previously silenced groups. When this is done in ethnographical studies, it is seen as critical ethnography. In SPN writing, universalizability is once again the key to enabling the type of research outcomes expressed in the preceding sentences. Although the researcher is the central person in the narratives expressed in SPN writing, the ability to draw larger implications for others is essential to scholarly personal narratives’ contribution to various disciplines.

Phenomenology

According to Patton, phenomenology focuses on the “lived experiences” of a group of participants and seeks to describe the meaning of the phenomenon being studied.¹⁷ The phenomenon of interest is generally universal to the group of individuals being studied. For example, grief is a phenomenon that has been studied and written about. A phenomenological study of grief focuses on the “universal essence (a grasp of the very nature of the thing)”¹⁸ of grief, regardless of what or whom participants are grieving.

Creswell discusses two approaches to phenomenology--hermeneutic phenomenology and psychological phenomenology. Psychological phenomenology employs the procedure of bracketing, whereby the researcher sets aside their experiences as much as possible in order to view the phenomenon objectively. Hermeneutic phenomenology, on the contrary, allows for the researcher to maintain a strong connection to the phenomenon of study. Hermeneutic phenomenology is described as follows:

Researchers first turn to a phenomenon, an ‘abiding concern,’ which seriously interests them. In the process, they reflect on essential themes, what constitutes the nature of this lived experience. They write a description of the phenomenon, maintaining a strong relation to the topic of inquiry and balancing the parts of the writing to the whole. Phenomenology is not only a description, but it is also seen as an interpretive process in which the researcher makes an interpretation on the meaning of the lived experiences.¹⁹

SPN writing also starts with an abiding concern that interests the researcher. The researcher creates a framework for the SPN manuscript via themes that they assert are central to the personal narrative being shared. Furthermore, as expressed throughout this chapter, the SPN writer has an obligation to interpret and make meaning of their lived

experiences, not just for themselves but also for their readers. Once again, universalizability is key in SPN writing.

Similar to the outcomes associated with phenomenological studies, SPN writing asserts that an understanding of a phenomenon is important in order to “develop practices or policies, or to develop a deeper understanding about the features of the phenomenon.”²⁰ And perhaps the most overlapping and important similarity between SPN and phenomenology is the desire for the reader to come away from the writing feeling that they better understand what it was like for someone to experience the phenomenon expressed in the writing. This attribute of SPN writing is at the core of the methodology. As Nash asserted, “Scholarly personal narrative writing is meant primarily to benefit readers, touch readers’ lives by informing their experiences, by transforming the meaning of events, and...delivering wisdom.”²¹ Before delving into the question, “Exactly what is SPN?” I want to fully acknowledge that there are additional ways in which scholarly personal narrative writing is similar to other qualitative approaches. The similarities I presented in the above subsections are by no means meant to be exhaustive; they are meant to inform you, the reader, of the common attributes SPN possesses with other qualitative methodologies.

When my cohort would share our methodological preferences, typically qualitative or quantitative, there was one sole person in the group who always proclaimed “I’m writing a SPN!” No, that person was not me, but she is a very close friend of mine. The responses to Stacey’s proclamation of SPN methodology usually went something like this, “Exactly what is SPN?” or “Hell no, that is too personal for me!” or “I heard

you have to bleed all over the pages in order to get that type of dissertation done.” I would silently chuckle at the responses of my cohort because, to an extent, they were right. SPN is personal, but only as personal as the writer wants it to be. Also SPN can feel like you are bleeding all over the pages, but some doctoral students would argue that bleeding over the pages of a dissertation is inevitable regardless of the methodology selected. Thus the only time I felt the need to assist Stacey in her responses to comments regarding SPN was to help answer the question, “Exactly what is SPN?” The sections that follow answer this question.

Exactly What Is Scholarly Personal Narrative (SPN)

*SPN is about giving yourself permission to express your own voice in your own language; your own take on your own story in your own inimitable manner. SPN is your grand opportunity to practice listening to the sound of your own voice. Find your special sound and style, and you will find your story. Lose these, and you will continue to be silenced...Scholarly personal narrative writing is meant primarily to benefit readers, touch readers' lives by informing their experiences, by transforming the meaning of events...*²²

Scholarly personal narrative (SPN) writing is organized by four questions: 1. What is my narrative pertaining to the phenomenon emphasized in my writing?; 2. Why is delving into my narrative and the connected themes important?; 3. What are the universalizable implications for my profession that can be explicated from my narrative?; and 4. Who (other scholars, researchers, and authors) has said what (their findings and assertions)

about my what (my narrative)?ⁱⁱⁱ Questions one and two bring forth the personal narrative, question three connects the personal narrative to the greater profession (in this case higher education/the academy), and question four brings forth the outside scholarship that together form the foundation of scholarly personal narrative writing.

Rewrite, if you dare, the currently dominating scholarship narrative in your profession. Use your best creative imagination in doing this. Remind yourself everyday that you have the power and the right to compose your own scholarly story.²³

First and foremost, SPN writing is composed of the author's distinctive voice. Therefore, the author must hone in on their voice and not be afraid to share it with the reader. In my opinion, it takes a strong focused writer to perform SPN writing primarily because of the need to bring the author's own voice into every page, dare I say every sentence of the writing. Very few of my graduate school classmates and professional colleagues had ever been asked to attempt writing that resonated with their own personal voice, prior to their experiences with SPN. Thus the biggest obstacle to overcome in SPN writing is the systemic academy-induced silencing of the author's voice. This silence is broken through the simple assertion that we all have a narrative to share that could help another person or group of people. We all have experiences that, when given enough thought and framing, possess universalizable attributes and applications for our professions or communities. As Nash stated in the epigraph above, we all have the right

ⁱⁱⁱ These questions were introduced to me by Dr. Robert J. Nash while we were having a discussion about SPN writing. These questions have yet to be published outside of this dissertation.

and the power to compose our own scholarly stories, SPN provides a venue for that right and power to be expressed and shared with others.

Scholarly personal narrative writing is still an emerging methodology, which is being enriched each time a graduate student successfully utilizes it for a thesis or dissertation. SPN is enhanced each time a faculty member allows for its use during course assignments. Its place among methodologies is carved out even deeper each time professional pre-conference workshops about SPN writing are packed to fire code capacity. In 2004, Nash outlined ten tentative guidelines for writing SPN's^{iv}; by 2008 Nash had developed four organizing questions to assist writers in crafting their SPN writing (these questions are stated at the beginning of this section).

Like other academic writing, SPN involves the development of constructs or themes that guide the reader in some orderly fashion through the writing. Constructs or themes are central to the overall intended universalizability of the SPN. Unique to SPN, however, is the explicit use of hooks. A hook is intended to draw the reader into the writers' narrative and serves to keep the readers attention have them keep reading it.²⁴ There is no template for creating a hook; however, it needs to be present in the writing and presented in such a way that the reader remembers it. In addition to constructs/themes and hooks, questions to be explored must also be present in SPN writing. SPN is a methodology, it is a form of inquiry thus it is always rooted in

^{iv} Nash's *Ten Tentative Guidelines for Writing SPNs* are: Establish clear constructs, hooks, and questions; Move from the particular to the general and back again...often; Try to draw larger implications from your personal stories; Draw from your vast store of formal background knowledge; Always try to tell a good story; Show some passion; Tell your story in an open-ended way; Remember that writing is both a craft and an art; Use citations whenever appropriate; Love and respect eloquent (i.e. clear) language. These guidelines are published in *Liberating Scholarly Writing: The Power of Personal Narrative*, pages 57-70.

questions. As Nash stated, “No questions, no positions; no questions, no stories; no questions, no SPN manuscript...”²⁵

Once the questions, constructs, and hook are established in SPN writing the next step is for the author to draw larger implications to their field or profession. As discussed previously in this chapter, what sets SPN apart from personal narrative for narrative sake is the intentional component of drawing larger implications—referred to as universalizability. Universalizable implications must be able to be unearthed and illuminated in SPN writing. Making explicit points of universal implications will indeed aid in readers making “real world” connections to the narratives shared in the SPN. No universalizable implications, no SPN.

Last but not least, SPN draws heavily upon a scholarship base that encourages the writer to assert what they know to be true, to use wisdom garnered from unpublished authorities (e.g., an ancestor), and it invites the writer to cross disciplinary and genre lines. SPN is not intended to be a narcissistic endeavor; on the contrary, it calls for the recirculation of ideas from other researchers and scholars. It allows for scholarship that is not just presented in peer-reviewed journals or refereed papers, but encourages the use of popular press, accessible materials, and a wide variety of publications. This broad amalgamation of scholarship not only helps to broaden the definition of what is considered scholarly; it also aids in the universalizability of the SPN. The more expansive the scholarship base (or outside voices), the more likely the writer is able to attract and hook a variety of readers. In a nutshell, no outside voices, no SPN.

As with any methodology there are caveats associated with scholarly personal narrative. This type of writing is not for everyone (as a writer or a reader), and that is just fine. It is merely another tool that can be added to the “scholar’s toolbox.” SPN takes personal risks and there will inevitably be decisions that the writer has to make regarding the confidentiality of others.

RESEARCH IS “ME”SEARCH

...we believe that, at some level, all writing is autobiographical...²⁶

I’m not trying to glorify my experiences, just shed a little light on them.^v

Personal narrative writing helps us all to understand our histories, shape our destinies...[and] when done in an intellectual and emotionally respectable way, personal narrative writing can result in stunning self-insights.²⁷

In preparation for writing this dissertation, I was asked to brainstorm specific populations in higher education that I had an interest in studying. With a list of about six different populations, I felt most drawn as an aspiring researcher to the first-generation college student population. Although not a member of this population, I felt akin to them for reasons unknown. I wanted to know more about this population and their experiences. As I combed the numerous scholarly articles and other popular press publications about first-generation college students, I found aspects of my own collegiate experiences among the experiences of first-generation college students.

^v This quote has been attributed to Clifford Joseph Harris, Jr. (the hip-hop music artist T.I.). I came across this quote while watching television and believed it was one way to accurately summarize scholarly personal narrative writing.

I also read a few articles pertaining to the continuing-generation (second-generation and beyond) college student population. What struck me about this area of literature was that the *voices* of second-generation students were missing. It was difficult for me to discern any type of second-generation college student narrative because this population's experiences were only presented via numerical outcomes. Even still, the few studies associated with second-generation college students did not match my second-generation college student narrative. I began to develop questions and areas of inquiry for myself, and possibly other second-generation college students. As it turns out, my desire to study an aspect of the first-generation college student population became an exploration of my experiences and narrative as a second-generation college student. With mounting questions surrounding my collegiate experiences constantly reverberating in my head, I elected to pursue the answers via this SPN dissertation.

CHAPTER 3: POPULATION CLASSIFICATION

During a doctoral research course, I was asked to brainstorm specific populations in higher education that I would want to study. Upon reviewing the list of three or four populations I compiled, I felt most drawn as an aspiring researcher to the first-generation college student population. I was not a member of this population and I wanted to learn more about their experiences, the studies performed in order to further address their needs in higher education, and to seek out a specific aspect of this population that would serve as the focus of my dissertation. As I combed the numerous scholarly articles and other publications about first-generation college students, I found aspects of my own college experiences amid the experiences of first-generation college students.

In this chapter, I will clarify the definitions of first-generation college student and second-generation college student being used in this dissertation. This chapter also provides you as the reader with a brief review of the literature related to first-generation and second-generation college students. Upon anchoring the reader in the literature regarding these two populations, I will delve into my personal narrative. Through the lens of existing scholarship and the lens of my experiences, this chapter illuminates how my feelings of being viewed as an “insider” (as a second-generation college student) but feeling like an “outsider” contributed to and continues to be a major theme in my narrative.

FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS

Throughout the past two decades, higher education has seen a remarkable influx of students from racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic statuses not previously a part of the

higher education landscape.²⁸ One of the most prevalent characteristics of these *new* students was that many of them were the first in their families to attend a college or university.²⁹ This population of students became recognized as first-generation college students. Billson and Terry defines this group as students for whom neither parent attended college nor had any university experience.³⁰ However, the U.S Department of Education's TRIO programs (e.g., Upward Bound) defines first-generation college students as those for whom neither parent attained a college degree, although the parent may have attended a college or university.³¹ Much of the literature, outside of TRIO programs' literature, utilizes Billson and Terry's definition. First-generation college students are those whose parents have no more than a high school education.

As I combed the literature related to this population, I continually found portions of my undergraduate narrative represented in the research. I connected with the experiences asserted in first-generation college student studies as well as recognized that I shared numerous characteristics with this population. The following subsection outlines the general experiences and characteristics of first-generation college students.

General Experiences and Characteristics

By 1992, 27% of high school graduates met the definition to be considered first-generation college students. Three years later, 47% of all students beginning higher education were first-generation college students. The first-generation college student population, as a whole, are more likely to be Black or Latino/a, from low-income families, outside of the traditional college student age (eighteen to twenty-two), serve as primary care-givers for their families, and work full-time while attending college.³² Of

course, many first-generation college students do not possess any of these characteristics, and some of our college campuses never see the first-generation students characterized above. However it cannot be denied that higher education continues to witness an increasing number of first-generation college students who do possess the attributes expressed earlier.³³

In addition to the general attributes associated with first-generation college students, research has also shown that this population enrolls in college immediately after high school 30% less than their continuing-generation counterparts. If they do not enter higher education immediately after high school, it is reported that they wait an average of five years before attempting to enter higher education.³⁴ Speaking candidly, an overwhelming majority of first-generation college student literature asserts that this population struggles in higher education and they are in a severe deficit in terms of basic knowledge about higher education, academic preparation, and parental support/involvement. The following sections expand upon the road blocks that many first-generation college students face—preparation in secondary education, upbringing and familial situations, and basic knowledge about higher education.

Road Block #1: Secondary Education

When students attend secondary schools in which teachers and administrators are not invested in students going to college, the college bound atmosphere is never created. I remember when my mother began teaching at McCoy Junior High School, a junior high in a low-income area where the majority of the population was Latino/a or Black. During this time, junior high schools in California consisted of 7th through 9th grades. The lack of

ambition and desire to achieve that my mother witnessed in most of the students at McCoy was saddening. Then watching the 9th graders seemingly throw away any chance they had at college (by hardly attending school or barely doing their work) was crushing for her, as an educator, to watch. Early in her tenure at McCoy she recognized the root of the problem; my mom noticed that the student attitude towards success reflected the overall administration and teacher's attitudes towards student success. Basically, most of the teachers at McCoy just collected their paychecks and were not invested in the students' futures. Consequently, most of the students had no idea about their futures regarding education, and going to college was on no one's radar. My mother, being the woman and teacher that she is, changed all that!

She, along with a few trusted colleagues and community members, established a culture of achievement and pride in the school's predominately low-income, person of color population. In hindsight, my mom was like Joe Clark in the movie *Lean on Me*.^{vi} She exposed those students to the arts, engaged them in leadership conferences, instilled in them the importance of being excellent (not just getting by), and inspired them to be proud of their various cultures. Needless to say, it was a rocky road at times and my mother faced retaliation from some of her colleagues, a few students, and even some parents—just like Joe Clark. However, no one could deny the culture shift that had occurred as a result of my mother's determination to provide those students with a quality education and do her part to set them on a path of excellence. My mother's influence on

^{vi} *Lean on Me* the motion picture released in 1989 was based loosely on the story of Joe Clark, a real life inner city high school principal in Paterson, New Jersey.

McCoy Junior High School is best captured in the following conversation I had with someone I was dating in college:

The first time I went to Corey's house, I saw his junior high school diploma. Our conversation unfolded like this:

DeMethra: I didn't know you went to McCoy.

Cory: Yep! Me and my little brother went there.

DeMethra: Did you know a teacher named Mrs. Bradley?

Cory: Oh my God!!! Yes I knew her....Man, she failed my brother and he had to repeat her class. We all hated Mrs. Bradley. She was tough, she didn't let you slide or nothing. But she was the best teacher there, hands down.

After Cory finished answering my question about Mrs. Bradley, I saw something inside of his head clicked.

Cory: Oh shit!!! Is Mrs. Bradley your mom?

DeMethra: [laughing] Yes, Mrs. Bradley is my mom.

Cory: Oh damn! I didn't mean to say we all hated her.

DeMethra: [still laughing] Yes you did! But that's okay because mommy is tough and she don't let people slide. So if your brother failed her class then he deserved the F.

Cory: Oh yeah...he never did any of his work but he didn't think she would fail him.

DeMethra: Yeah, from what mommy said teachers there would just pass kids sometimes even if they barely showed up to class.

Cory: Yep! That's why my brother was shocked that he got failed. But he knew he deserved it. Damn, I can't believe I didn't make the connection. Bradley is a common last name but damn....your dimple is big like hers!

After a few more words to assure Cory that I was not upset in anyway about what he just said, we went on with our day. On the inside I was beaming because Cory was living proof that my mom made a difference at McCoy Junior High School. The literature and narratives like Corey's assert that first-generation college students need individuals within their secondary institutions (better yet, entire school administrations and faculty) to show them what else is out there in terms of educational attainment, to push them to achieve, and to care about their futures.

Cory could have very well been one of the *Brothers* in Jay MacLeod's ethnographic novel *Ain't No Makin' It: Aspirations and Attainment in a Low-Income Neighborhood*.³⁵ Like the *Brothers*, Cory was unfortunately not use to anyone (except perhaps a parent) caring about his educational needs. Then he encountered my mother. Her passion for excellence was what Cory wanted and he had to learn to navigate what excelling and actually having someone outside the home pushing you to succeed meant to him.

Road Block #2: Upbringing and Family Dynamics

The roadblocks that first-generation college students encounter due to their upbringing and family dynamics are widely discussed in the literature. Many first-generation college students grapple with cultural expectations (e.g., staying close to home or providing financial support to the family) along side the widening gap between their emerging educational path and the educational paths of their families.³⁶ There is a lack of parental support that is documented in a variety of ways; however I focused on lack of parental support for first-generation college students in the areas of pursuing enrollment in college and degree persistence. Although many parents know that when a child pursuing higher education is a positive step towards a bright future, a strain on the family dynamic is also experienced and can become unbearable for the student and the family. Howard B. London's study of the family histories of first-generation college students described the strain that often occurs as heavily composed of separation anxiety.³⁷ London's participants spoke frankly about how being the first in their family to attend college induces a level of anxiety and strain that neither student nor family was prepared for.

Lorena, a first-generation college student of Mexican heritage, spoke of the assistance her father gave her throughout the college application process, and how much support she received from him. Then his support and assistance disappeared when he told her she could not go away to college. The once close relationship with her father began to deteriorate as Lorena was now faced with the choice of pursuing her goal or obeying her father. Unbeknownst to Lorena, her father was experiencing his own separation anxieties. He was also grappling with the void that her absence would undoubtedly create within the family unit. Lorena was not only a daughter, she was her father's trusted confidant and a helper around the house. When her father finally alluded to his feelings, Lorena was saddened and felt even more pressure to succeed in college. She went away to college knowing that she was disturbing the family order, leaving her dad without a confidant and a helper, and going off to be a part of a world than no one in her family could relate to.³⁸

These feelings and many others are central to the strain associated with first generation college student family relationships. For every up, there is a down, and for all the up sides of being a first-generation college student, the familial downsides—strained relationships and learning to “bridge the gap” between the old and the new—resonate with most first-generation college students. Lorena's narrative is a concrete example of the following finding: “First-generation students face all the anxieties, dislocations, and difficulties of any college student, but their experiences often involve cultural as well as social and academic transitions.”³⁹ This statement illuminates the gifts and the curses of being a first-generation college student. The gifts lie in the forging ahead towards higher

education, in beating the odds and pursuing something that until then had not been attained in the family, of knowing that you can help your family more with a college degree, and knowing that your accomplishment is in some way your family's accomplishment too. But the curse, as exhibited in the preceding finding, lies in the pressure of it all. First-generation college students experience all the fretfulness and nervousness that come along with going to college and being a first-year college student. But on top of all that, they experience the stress and downside of their status—either with their family, navigating the college culture, or transitioning to a new academic environment.

In addition to the qualitative and quantitative studies of this population, I would be remiss not to mention the unique body of autobiographical literature that further illustrates the social and cultural transitions this population endures.^{vii} These autobiographies shed light, via personal narratives, on the lives of first-generation college students—their triumphs, tribulations, feelings of limbo, feelings of guilt because they are moving forward, and their struggles to belong in higher education. First-generation college students are not only at risk of never getting to college, once enrolled they remain at-risk in pursuit of their degrees.⁴⁰

Road Block #3: Basic College Knowledge

One of the assertions associated with parental level of education and student success is that parents who have experiences with higher education are able to pass on that knowledge to their children.⁴¹ This knowledge is reported to include, but is not limited to,

^{vii} See Richard Rodriguez, *Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982); Sandra Rodriguez, *Giants Among Us: First-Generation College Graduates Who Lead Activist Lives* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2001).

college campus culture, course and major selection, and what collegiate co-curricular activities to be involved in. With this in mind, first-generation college students are at a greater risk of being misguided because their knowledge base surrounding college is often limited, if not absent all together. First-generation college students tend to experience negative academic effects due to the lack of preparation for the rigor associated with college courses; they are ill prepared for the social integration of the college campus, and are challenged by the financial impact associated with college.⁴²

These challenges frequently result in first-generation college students completing less credit hours, having lower grade point averages than their continuing-generation peers, enrolling in fewer arts and humanities courses, feeling isolated on the college campus, and they tend to work many more hours than their peers.⁴³ First-generation college students tend to play catch-up in every realm of collegiate life—academically, socially, and financially. For some, there is no area of college life where they feel knowledgeable enough to just coast. Each area requires their utmost attention in order to decipher it, learn it, and then hopefully advance in it.

I liken this experience to moving to a new country, starting a new position, in a company that you know very little about, surrounded by colleagues who all seem to have it together. Then you find out that the cost of living is more than you anticipated, yet you have no other form of assistance (no parent or other loved one to help), therefore you find a part-time job to supplement your income. And by the way, everyone in the company and country speaks the same language as you, but their vocabulary is so different that you still do not understand some of the words coming out of their mouths. You only find

solace in your apartment, often exhausted from being alert and discombobulated from the moment you leave your apartment. Now imagine not even being able to find solace in your living situation because you share a space with your “got it all together, using an unfamiliar vocabulary” roommate. Sounds exhausting, does it not? This is an illustration of what many first-generation college students go through for a period of time, if not the entire time, that they are enrolled in college.

For those first-generation college students who persist in higher education, scores overcome these challenges by learning the college culture, how to navigate their campus, and it is reported that co-curricular involvement in clubs, organizations, or student leadership roles have a significantly positive effect on their academic success as well.⁴⁴ Some of these student leadership roles (e.g., resident advisor, campus tour guide, student government) include monetary compensation and lessens the financial impacts of college.

The roadblocks addressed in the preceding sections, are just the tip of the iceberg regarding the challenges faced by first-generation college students. I chose them based upon their frequent acknowledgement in the literature and my own narrative. Specifically, the roadblock I experienced was basic college knowledge/knowledge about higher education. Although I am not, by definition, a member of this population, I surely experienced academic, social, and financial challenges that were beyond the stress level of being in a new environment. These challenges, at times, were debilitating, isolating, and discouraging. Looking back, I was a first-generation college student on the inside, but classified as a second-generation college student on the outside.

SECOND-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS

Second-generation college students are primarily defined as students whom at least one parent has some college experience, but no degree, or students whom at least one parent has attained a degree. The latter definition is specifically used by TRIO programs, where as the former is generally used in non-TRIO programs' literature. Regardless of whose definition is used, I am classified as a second-generation college student.

During my literature review of first-generation college students, I also came across a few articles that included information on the continuing-generation (second-generation and beyond) college student population. All of the studies that included second-generation college students were comparison studies between this population and the first-generation college student population. What struck me about this area of literature was that my collegiate experiences, outside of the aspiration and initial feelings of belonging, did not sound like the experiences of a second-generation college student. My collegiate experiences sounded more closely aligned with the experiences of first-generation college students. Yet, the literature asserts that I, like the majority of students attending college, enjoy a certain level of privilege because someone in my immediate family had attended and graduated from an undergraduate institution.⁴⁵

According to the literature, second-generation college students are typically better prepared for the social aspects of college due to their parents passing on their college knowledge or having access to others in their family that have gone on to college.⁴⁶ This population receives more family support during their college attendance (emotionally and financially). The financial family support is associated with second-

generation college students feeling decreased or no pressure at all to work or find full-time employment while in college. Second-generation students are reported to have greater career aspirations and goals, indicative of their knowledge surrounding “life after college.” Parental support, other than emotional, seems to be essential in the second-generation college student experience. Billson and Terry assert that this population reported receiving family support that included transportation, help with homework, finances, and typing (now considered computer access).⁴⁷

Upon learning the experiences and characteristics associated with second-generation college students, I asked myself, why did I not have those experiences? Why was I not prepared for the social and financial aspects of college? And why did it take me almost getting kicked out of college twice (for bad grades) to figure out a better academic path for myself? I know that my mother having a college degree and our household income disqualified me for TRIO program services, but I needed those services! I had no idea how to advocate for myself for the first few years in college (another trait of first-generation students); therefore I did not know who to tell that I was floundering. Looking back, I was a first-generation college student trapped in a second-generation college student narrative.

The purpose of the preceding sections was to anchor you, the reader, in the literature of the first-generation and second-generation college student population. The information I presented is by no means exhaustive of the research associated with first-generation college students, yet it is my hope that as a reader you can begin to understand the general characteristics and experiences associated with this population. The

characteristics and experiences associated with second-generation college students encompassed most of what I encountered in the literature. The next two sections of this chapter illuminate my narrative as a UCSB student and being a first-generation college student trapped in a second-generation college student narrative.

MY UCSB EXPERIENCE

Receiving my acceptance letter to the University of California at Santa Barbara was an exciting day in my house. I knew I had been accepted because the envelope felt like it had a lot of papers in it and it was the size of a legal sheet of paper. What I had learned from my high school history teacher, a UCLA graduate, was that a big envelope was good and a small envelope was bad. Basically if the envelope felt like it only had one piece of paper in it, then it was most likely a rejection letter. So needless to say when the big UCSB envelope came I was very excited. Months prior to being accepted, I was able to take a field trip to UCSB and I really liked what I saw. There were one or two other students from my high school that had enrolled in UCSB so there was at least one person I would know, and the best part about my UCSB acceptance was that my mother was a UCSB graduate. I was honored to not only continue the legacy of college attendance; I was elated that my mother and I would share an alma mater.

Leading Up to UCSB

Prior to receiving any acceptance letters my college application process was filled with Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) preparation and actually taking the test, the University of

California Subject A examination^{viii}, Advanced Placements tests in subjects I can no longer recall, and applying for financial assistance via the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). I distinctly remember asking my mother for advice about all four of these college application processes. Her limited help consisted of mathematical preparation for the SAT. While much of the SAT was filled with mathematical problems that I already knew, my mother was wonderful at assisting me in reviewing concepts that needed to be refreshed in my mind. Mommy knew nothing about the Subject A exam, had no experiences with advanced placement tests, and the first time I saw the FAFSA was the first time she had ever seen the FAFSA. Sometimes her lack of knowledge about these procedures frustrated me; she was a college graduate and attended law school, how did she not know anything about these tests and paperwork? Mommy was learning right along side me in regards to these aspects of the college application process. I relied heavily on my high school college counselor to answer the questions that mommy could not. Yet my college counselor could only help so much when it came to these issues, especially the FAFSA.

I took the SAT, the AP tests, the subject A exam, and mailed my FAFSA on the day of the deadline. This time in my life was the beginning of me being administratively independent from my mother especially when it came to my academics. Most of these experiences were not on my mother's radar because they were not her college experiences. Thus, I had to keep up with all my paperwork, find ways to pay for or offset

^{viii} The Subject A examination (now known as the Analytical Writing Placement Examination) is administered by the University of California system in order to assess entering students' command of the English language. More information can be found at <http://www.ucop.edu/sas/awpe.index.html>.

the cost of all my exams, and then tell my mother when and where to take me for my various tests. I received loads of emotional support from my family—mommy, my sister, and my grandmother (we all lived together) —but what I would call administrative support was non-existent. Everyone just seemed to wait for me to tell them what I was doing, then they supported it.

I admit that I expected more from mommy. My mother is an extremely intelligent woman; her brilliance has only been eclipsed by the two strokes she endured before the age of forty-six. I expected her to tell me how to do all the items associated with the college application process. As I reflect back on those pre-college days, I had expectations and assertions about being the child of a college graduate. These expectations were only exacerbated by knowing that mommy had also briefly attended law school. Simply put, I thought mommy would be able to assist me much more than she was. Now I can see how I placed an unknowingly unfair expectation on my mother and subsequently on my self in regards to my college process and her educational attainment. Now back to my UCSB acceptance.

In addition to the \$100 intent to enroll fee, the other most important part of being accepted to UCSB was the housing application. It was made extremely clear that the housing deadline was critical to UCSB first-year students. The university had a first-year required campus living policy, and every first-year student who turned their housing contract in on-time was guaranteed housing. After being accepted to UCSB, I had received a few phone calls from an admissions counselor who was assigned to my high school. She called a few times to ask me if I had any questions and to remind me about

pending due dates and fees. The last time Irene called I recollect telling her that I did not have any questions, and passively bragging about my mom being a UCSB alumna. To my lack of questions and expression of my moms' UCSB connection, Irene replied "Oh, well if your mom is an alumna then I know she knows what to do." In actuality, my mom did not know what to do (as evidenced by some experiences in my college application process), but I thought to myself, "What else is there to do but send in the \$100 intent to enroll fee and fill out my housing application by June 1st." This conversation with Irene transpired in mid-to-late March.

Between my last conversation with Irene and my high school graduation, I was pretty busy. Classes, prom dress shopping, hanging out with friends before we all headed off to different colleges, breaking-up with my boyfriend, playing my clarinet four or more hours per day, etc. I was being a typical high school senior and enjoying my last days before going to college. About a week after graduation, I was looking in the desk in our dining room for some paper. I attempted to open a drawer but it was stuck. I assumed some paper had jammed it so I closed it/opened it/closed it/opened it, in an effort to maneuver the paper so I could grab it and fully release the door. After a few more opening/closing actions, I reached in and grabbed the paper; it was thick which was probably why it blocked the draw from initially opening fully. I pulled the paper free, looked at it and panicked—it was my housing application. The deadline was June 1st and although I do not remember the exact date I found it, it was definitely closer to the middle of June. I started crying as the fear that I had thrown away my college dreams because I forgot to send in this application began to flood by mind. When mommy came home, I

told her what happened. She reassured me that I was going to UCSB and that I would have a place to stay, “even if we had to pitch a tent on the beach for the first few weeks.”

One of the many attributes I admire about my mother’s personality is her ability to stay calm under pressure. While I was being hysterical and distraught mommy said, “You should call Irene.” I had not spoken to Irene in months, and I had told her that I had it all under control. So there was a moment of hesitation about calling her and saying I messed up. But I swallowed the pill called pride, and called Irene. She made some calls at UCSB, then instructed me to overnight my housing application to her the immediately. She personally walked it over to the housing office and it was processed. Fifteen years later, I still thank Irene for her help with my housing application. Ironically, I recall the short lived anger I had with my mom over the whole situation. In my mind, she should have remembered to remind me about my housing application. But once again, I had expectations of my mom that were not realistic. When she went to UCSB, housing was taken care of for her, so she had no idea about the process I was going through. Just another example of how my second-generation college student expectations were not being met.

Being at UCSB

Prior to setting foot on the campus, I declared biological sciences as my major because I wanted to be a doctor. My first year of study was difficult because I did not expect the path to being a doctor to be like the one I was on. In hindsight, the curriculum assigned to me was that of someone who wanted to be a researcher not a practitioner. I confided in my mother about my lack of interest in the biological sciences major, and how the pre-

med advisor was never around. I also expressed that I was thinking about changing my major; her suggestion was business administration. So, I asked about the business administration major and was told that no such degree existed at UCSB. If I wanted to go into business, I would have to major in economics. So I continued to shop around for a major.

I stumbled upon anthropology via my general education requirements; I liked it better than biological sciences so I decided to be a physical anthropology major. After reading about careers associated with that degree, I became invested in the forensic anthropologist career path. The science courses I was taking in the anthropology major were only a tad more interesting than those I took in biological sciences, but I was determined to be a forensic anthropologist. During this time, my grades were up and down, mostly down, and I had been placed on academic probation more times than I care to remember, as well as had my financial aid revoked (and then reinstated) twice.

In a weird twist of fate, I was walking across campus sad because a general education course I was trying to get into was full and one of my sorority sisters saw me. I told her my dilemma and she suggested that I enroll in the Black Studies course she was on her way to. I was desperate for a general education course so I enrolled. Early in my years at UCSB I had been warned about black studies classes. Some students called them militant and said there was too much reading and lots of papers to write. At that time in my life, I detested writing papers because I never felt confident in my writing. To my surprise, I loved the course and grew to enjoy the writing. Yet I was hesitant to change my major to Black Studies because I had no idea what a person with a Black Studies

degree could do after college. So, even though I got an A in the black studies course, I continued to struggle with physical anthropology and received C's at best.

My awakening came when I was informed that the only way I was going to be able to graduate as a physical anthropology major was to do the impossible—receive all A's in the remainder of my major courses. Nothing but all A's would get my anthropology G.P.A. high enough to be able to graduate. This information came to me at the beginning of my fifth year at UCSB. Once I realized that there was no way I was going to graduate in five years, I changed my major to Black Studies. If I was going to be in school six years I might as well have a major I enjoy. And through my student leadership positions, I had discovered the field of student affairs, so I knew what type of career I could have after college with a Black Studies degree.

As a Black Studies major I received Dean's honor for 3.8 and higher quarter GPAs I graduated with nearly all A's in my major and I became a writer. To this day, as I reflect on the above personal narrative, I cannot help but say "Damn, I really needed some help in undergrad." An invested academic counselor, someone who checked in on me, or an administrator to just sit me down and tell me straight up, "Change your damn major to something you enjoy." It was too late before I learned that there was more than one way to go to medical school or go into business. I do not regret the course of events that transpired because they ultimately led me to my current career path as an administrator and an educator. However, I do wish that someone, anyone, including myself at times, saw past my second-generation exterior to help the struggling first-generation student I was inside.

Being that the majority of students on college campuses are second-generation or beyond, I should have been an insider, right? Being that my mother graduated from the same undergraduate institution I attended, I should have been an insider, right? Being that my mother even attended law school for a period of time, I should have been an insider, right? Simply declared, I was not an insider. When I applied to colleges and subsequently enrolled at UCSB I thought I should have been an insider and other people (classmates, counselors, administrators) treated me like an insider based on the sole fact that my mother had obtained a college degree.

Becoming further acquainted with first-generation and second-generation college student experiences was liberating for me. I now proclaim that at UCSB I was a first-generation college student trapped in a second-generation college student narrative. In the next section, I will make explicit parallels to my collegiate experiences (categorized as a second-generation college student) and the research associated with first-generation college students. The next section illuminates the experiences of an insider who really was on the outside.

INSIDER/OUTSIDER

It is likely that parent who have experienced the educational process are in[a] much better position to pass information about their college experiences on to their children, whereas parents of first-generation college students simply do not have similarly supportive information to pass on to their children⁴⁸.

The epigraph above is indicative of the expectations I possessed regarding my mother's college knowledge and the reality of that knowledge. As a high school senior I

approached the college application process with some worry and anxiety, but I also knew that I had a mother who was a college graduate and I assumed that she would be able to guide me through the application process. She supported me emotionally and at times financially (if my own wages did not cover something), yet the assistance I assumed would be there based on her educational attainment was non-existent. Mommy was learning right-along side me as we navigated the waters of the college application process. I was at the helm of the U.S.S UCSB and she was my aged apprentice. Much had changed when last she navigated those waters, and after getting over the shock of her not being able to tell me what to do, I set about learning the ship and navigating the waters all at once.

At times, I wished I would have kept my mouth shut about my mother's degree. At times, I longed for a college counselor to say, "You know what? Things have changed a lot since your mom went to school, so you probably need more help than you think you do." But I do not blame anyone for not being aware of my silent narrative. I know far too well what goes on in a concerned student administrator's mind. We want to help everyone, and when one of our students expresses an attribute that represents them being more knowledgeable or needing less help than other students, we "take the out" and focus on the students we believe need us the most. That is what happened to me. As soon as I identified myself as a second-generation student, I was deemed as not needing as much assistance as my first-generation peers. I only received help when I asked for it, and I only asked for it after trying every possible way to understand something on my own. Unsure of how it actually occurred, I had developed a complex—I was a second-

generation college student, I should know this stuff. However in the midst of not knowing, I blamed my mother. I felt embarrassed, and did everything I could to keep up the facade that I was a college insider, when in fact I was an outsider.

Separation Anxiety at Orientation Weekend

UCSB, as do many other college campuses, hosted a series of Orientation weekends. This was a two-day information session for students and parents. Times to be introduced to the campus, select courses, and roam around the surrounding college town. My mother and I attended the last available Orientation weekend, due to my mother's work schedule and the financial cost. Upon arriving we were given separate rooms; I stayed with another student and my mom had her own room. I was so excited to be at Orientation and to be sharing this time with my mother. We never went anywhere alone, over night, and I cherished this time to have my mommy to myself (which really meant not sharing her with my sister or grandmother). We had a meal together in the dining hall then we were to meet up again for an evening student/parent session. My mother retired to her room and I went with my Orientation group.

Later in the evening, I went to my mother's room to attend the parent/student session. She was lying in the bed, reading her book, and smoking a cigarette. She did not look like she was going, but I asked anyway. "Mommy, are you going with me to the session?" "No Sha," she replied. "Why?" I asked. "I don't feel like it," was her only rationale. Feeling the tears welling up in my eyes, I said "o.k." and went to the parent/student session alone. I sat towards the front of the auditorium to avoid seeing all the parent/student pairings. It would have been different if my mother could not have

come at all. But she was there, in the dorm smoking a cigarette and reading her book. The next day was no different; I went to see if mommy was going to eat breakfast with me, she did not. I tried to find her for lunch, she was not around. By the end of Orientation I did not know how to feel about mommy's actions. She seemed excited about going to Orientation until we actually got there. I thought she would want to show me around her old school or walk around the college town of Isla Vista. Another second-generation college student expectation shattered. Only recently did I make sense of what was going on with my mother via a card she wrote me while I was attending the Summer Transition Enrichment Program (STEP) a few weeks prior to my first quarter at UCSB. I received the following card during the summer of 1994, yet it all made sense in 2009:

Here is the \$25. I really cannot afford to rent a car this week. I'll have to rent one to take you back in though. Call me so I'll know if all of your stuff can be packed and brought on the train/bus whatever. Grandma really misses you. I've psyched myself up to you being gone for a while since you will be anyway. Dani says hi and see you soon. Love Mommy.

I remember when I received this card back in 1994; I was irritated and let down. I did not take the bus or the train to the STEP program, so why should I have to take it back. I was praying that \$25 would be enough for a "train/bus whatever" ticket, and there was still this nagging weird feeling that this experience should not be happening to me.

In January 2009, while I was organizing some stuff, also known as avoiding the writing process, I found this card. When I read it, many memories came flashing back, specifically the memories associated with UCSB Orientation in summer 1994. The words "I've psyched myself up to you being gone for a while since you will be any way" stood out like a bright neon sign. It has taken me fifteen years to realize that my mother had to prepare for my departure. Looking back on her actions during Orientation weekend, she

was not ready for me to leave. I was my mother's co-pilot, I went everywhere I could with her, we had a close relationship, I made her laugh, and I took care of her spirit. In my young naiveté, I believed that mommy was ready to see me go off to college; after all we had been talking about college for what seemed like my whole life. In my more aware years, I know that mommy was coping with much more than I allowed her room to deal with.

Earlier in this chapter I discussed the roadblock of upbringing and family dynamics encountered by many first-generation college students. In recounting the narrative of Lorena, a first-generation college student, I expressed how she had no clue that her father's subdued state and momentary forbiddance of her college attendance was rooted in his own separation anxieties and his grappling with the void her absence would create in the family unit. Lorena's father finally expressed his angst to her, and I guess mommy expressed hers too—though far less direct than Lorena's father. I was so busy living in the myth of the second-generation college student, which included thinking that my mother would feel no type of withdrawal or dependency issues upon my departure, I was completely unable to see her pain.

Fifteen years later, I understand what my mother had to “psyche herself up for.” She had to psyche herself up for the loss of her co-pilot/roll dog, her daughter-friend, someone who made her laugh almost on a daily basis, and the person she depended on to take care of her spirit. Even now, I place my hand to my forehead and say, “Sha, you were such an asshole, you didn't even see mommy's pain.” But then I remind myself that I, like so many others, had an expectation of second-generation college students and their

parents. I, like so many others, did not leave room for strong emotional grief such as that experienced by my mother. Mommy was an insider because she had a degree but she too was an outsider—coping with releasing a child, and central figure in the family unit, to higher education.

Making a Dollar Out of Fifteen Cents

There is a tendency for parents of second-generation students to provide a wide range of support. First-generation students perceived their parents to be emotionally supportive. In contrast, second-generation students perceived their parents to be emotionally and financially supportive...⁴⁹

More first generation college students feel pressure to work and hold full-time jobs than do second-generation students. First-generation students feel a conflict between school and work because they ... often do not receive financial support from their families of origin.⁵⁰

The financial aid I received while at UCSB was just enough to cover tuition, room and board, and books. Part of my financial aid package included a work-study grant and I knew I would have to use it because I needed the money. There was no financial support from my mother that I could lean on during my years at UCSB. I was always looking for the best paying work-study position, and I found them as a student custodian and painter. While the rest of my friends were seeking positions as residence hall desk attendants, office assistants, and campus store clerks, I was hoping to be selected as a custodian or painter. Ironically on the college campus the “blue collar work-study jobs” (e.g.,

custodian and painter) paid the most, while the “white collar work-study jobs” (e.g., desk attendant, store clerk, or office assistant) paid the least.

As a custodian I cleaned student rooms, the residence hall common areas, and the bathrooms. On the weekends, I went to work at 5:30am in order to have the bathrooms and common areas clean before most residents woke up on Saturdays and Sundays. It was a dirty job, but somebody had to do it. I worked every chance I could. I believed I developed my “night owl” tendencies because I always wanted to make money and third shift positions (working between the hours of 10pm and 8am) also paid the most money on the college campus. When most other students were asleep, I was working. At times, I hid the extent of how much I worked from my mother because I knew she would feel inadequate for not being able to provide me any financial assistance. In the moments when I did tell her every job I was juggling along with school and studies, her response would be, “I know you got to do what you got to do [deep breath of sadness] cause I can’t help you.” My reply would always be the same, “Mommy I know you would if you could, and that’s all that matters.”

But in actuality it did matter more than I alluded to. Having some money in my pocket so I could take the bus home for holidays, and purchase essential non-food items mattered. And my basic living needs trumped my educational needs. I lived my entire undergraduate life conflicted between school and work. As described in the epigraphs above, there is a certain myth/expectation associated with second-generation students and the support they receive from their parents. Even though I knew my main purpose in going to college was to earn a degree, that purpose was often silenced by earning enough

money to go home when needed, being able to buy toiletries, and pay for clothing items (fyi: my shoe size went from a 5.5 to a 7 while I was in college). I discuss this conflict in greater detail in chapter four, but in this chapter it serves to once again elucidate the struggle of looking like an insider, in this case having a campus job but being an outsider, working as a custodian or painter.

There are countless other narratives from my undergraduate experience that further illuminate my feelings of being viewed as an insider but feeling like an outsider; however, I selected those above because they are closest to the major roadblocks associated with first-generation collegiate success—family dynamics, financial stress, and knowledge about the college process. I have yet to come across a study that indicated these three major roadblocks as being associated with second-generation college students. Yet, here I am, a second-generation college student on the outside, but a first-generation college student on the inside. The next chapter discusses the ways in which I attempted to navigate my educational experiences.

CHAPTER 4: NAVIGATING THE HIGH SEAS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

In this chapter, I introduce you, the reader, to three different capitals (cultural, academic, and values) and I unpack how the conflicting messages I received from these capitals impacted my undergraduate narrative. I begin with the concept of cultural capital and its role in the quest for upward mobility. After discussing cultural capital, I delve specifically into academic capital, and expand on its function within my undergraduate narrative. Then I introduce you to what I call values capital, and explain how it shaped my experiences at UCSB. This chapter investigates what happened to me when my capitals (cultural, academic, and values) came into conflict. It exposes my struggle to understand the connectedness of these capitals as part of the same family of upward mobility/my collegiate success. Or were they really frenemies? Pretending to work together towards the common goal of my collegiate success but silently sabotaging each other. This chapter speaks to where I felt my greatest confusion as a second-generation college student and my struggle to understand how, if at all, my values capital and my cultural and academic capital could ever align with one another. I also explore the idea of self-empowerment and its salience in my narrative.

CAPITAL: CULTURAL, ACADEMIC, AND VALUES

As an on-site Director for the TRIO Upward Bound Summer College program, I was frequently saddened by the lack of encouragement many of the students received from their parents. However I noticed that for some, this lack of encouragement, or in some cases blatant discouragement, fueled their drive to excel. During a meeting with my

Summer College supervisor, she explained that most, if not all, of the high school students we were working with did not have the cultural capital to move into higher education on their own. She went on to explain that part of the Upward Bound program was to help these students develop a level of cultural and academic capital that would aid in their journey towards higher education.

During the six weeks I spent with these students, I took note of how their cultural capital and academic capital greatly increased. For example, our initial weekly meetings consisted more so of reminders about rules and regulations, volunteer schedules, and upcoming activities. There were times during the community meetings when the counselors and I would attempt to engage the students in a conversation around world issues, recent events, or the pop culture hot topic of the moment. The atmosphere during those attempted conversations consisted of silence, blank stares, and the “can this be over” look.

One day, I asked a group of students why they never talked about world events such as September 11, 2001 (9/11), which had transpired less than three years prior. One student, Nartay, answered my question by saying that he and some others did not really know what to talk about. Nartay went on to explain his lack of experience with “those types of conversations.” When I probed deeper, Nartay explained that he and other students were not accustomed to talking with adults in authority about any issues other than school. Unfortunately these students were still recipients of the banking model of education (memorization, recitation, and no conversational discourse). The wheels in my

mind began to turn as a thought about how to give these students an experience of speaking to adults and each other about topics outside of school.

That summer the movie *Fahrenheit 9/11* had been released and with the approval of my supervisor we took all seventeen of our students. After the movie, we convened for a community meeting. The meeting went as usual (rules, regulations, activities, etc.) and just before I was about to ask if anyone wanted to talk about the movie. Nartay raised his hand and said, “I would like to talk about the movie.” Other students affirmed Nartay’s desires to talk and we began a group conversation that lasted well over two hours. Students talked about 9/11, the movie *Fahrenheit 9/11*, and other issues they felt were connected to 9/11 such as the war in Iraq. That group of fifteen and sixteen year olds had just done what some college students have yet to learn how to do. They talked with one another about a serious life-changing world event that had occurred in their life-time. I really wish I could talk to that same group of students now about the recent election of the first African-American President of the United States. I am positive that the conversation would be a good one!

Although I had a relationship with each student in the program, I became close to one student in particular, Isabella. Isabella and I engaged in a variety of conversations which further illuminated my supervisors’ explanation of Upward Bound being a place where our students developed the cultural and academic capital it would take to succeed in higher education. Isabella is the oldest child in a family with a strong Mexican heritage. She was not expected to attend college as she would need to provide financial support for her family. Isabella knew that this was the plan her mother had devised for

her post-high school and she was against it. She knew that going to college was her way out, but she struggled with facing her family when she wanted to leave. College is often used as a form of escapism for a lot of first-generation college students who find that their post-high school fate within their families is to be a caretaker.

Isabella described her mother, as “jealous that I may have a way out of the mess she created.” Each day Isabella came to my room to talk, as usual, and asked me about a different aspect of the journey to higher education. We talked about majors, and my advice to her was major in something you enjoy, visit the career center often, and never forget that I am here to help you (even after Upward Bound). We discussed her mother’s wishes for her to stay local for school. Isabella knew that she would be “doomed” (her words) if she stayed in Vermont for school. “I have seen too many people I know go to UVM and drop-out because their families claimed to need them,” was Isabella’s reply to my gentle questions of why she was so adamant about going out of state. We discussed responsibility and what was expected in the college environment. We chatted about dating, the college social scene, life after college, was college right for her, community colleges versus four-year colleges, public versus private. You name it and I bet Isabella and I talked about it. Towards the end of the summer I learned that each kernel of information I gave her was passed along to her friends who were also curious about college but unable to attend the Upward Bound program.

Over the four years following that summer program I encountered Isabella in downtown Burlington, at least once and sometimes twice each year. Each encounter was brief, initiated with a hug and an inquiry as to what was going on in her life at the time.

Isabella always had something new and exciting to share with me. During our chance meetings she told me about her prom, graduation, applying for college, taking care of her general education requirement at the city college, thinking about her career options and educational path. Each chance interaction I had with Isabella over the course of four years was filled with examples of the cultural and academic capital I believe was instilled during her time in the Upward Bound program. What she had learned in Upward Bound was being exhibited in her attitude and her ability to pursue her education.

I was so proud when I heard Isabella speak of taking her general education courses at the community college; then making plans to transfer to a four-year university for her major course of study. To me that was a sign of academic and cultural capital. Isabella was able to discern the positive aspects of the community college experience but also knew that her higher education did not need to end at that level. She was deliberately pursuing her educational dreams and excited about each step of the way. Since she was still in Vermont her mother was still pressuring her to stay in Vermont. The only time I saw sadness creep into Isabella's eyes was when she discussed the conflict she and her mother constantly had about her next steps after community college. Isabella's membership in a household with strong Mexican roots and values must have caused her great conflict at times because those values did not include her going away to college. I have not seen Isabella in almost two years, and I hope that is because she is somewhere out of state pursuing her undergraduate degree. I think about Isabella a lot when I work with students, and she has crossed my mind many times as I write this dissertation. The next sections of this chapter delve into cultural, academic, and values capital

Cultural Capital

The sociological concept of cultural capital was created by Pierre Bourdieu as part of his social reproduction theory. Bourdieu defined cultural capital as “the general cultural background, knowledge, disposition, and skills that are passed from one generation to the next.”⁵¹ According to Bourdieu, children of upper-class families inherit a different cultural capital than children of middle or lower-class families. The higher the family is on the class scale, the more likely it is that their cultural capital will assist them in maintaining that higher status and perhaps ascending to an ever higher class status, if possible. Much of Bourdieu’s theory is rooted in class structure with some inclusion of parental educational attainment and environment. He asserted that the academic achievement of children is often dictated by the parent’s educational status as opposed to their occupational status. And, as the education of a person increases, class plays less of a role in their attainment of cultural capital.⁵²

Bourdieu also further cultivated cultural capital into three subtypes: embodied, objectified, and institutionalized. Embodied cultural capital revolves around a person’s skill set, learned attitudes, and behaviors of the *prestigious culture*. This subtype of cultural capital can be increased and improved by experiences and learning. Objectified cultural capital is our learned appreciation and the value we place on items that represent the prestigious culture. This type of cultural capital can also be improved upon with exposure to the cultural goods and experiences valued by the prestigious culture (e.g., paintings, museums, or travel). Lastly there is institutionalized cultural capital, which personifies academic achievements such as higher education degrees, certificates, class

rings, or regalia.⁵³ These items represent certain levels of educational attainment and often bestow the use of a new title or honor upon the recipient (e.g., Doctor, Professor, or Dean). Will Barratt asserts that institutionalized cultural capital is a formal recognition of not only academic achievement; it is an acknowledgment of social class attainment.⁵⁴

Based upon Bourdieu's assertions, I have a solid level of cultural capital. My mother is a college graduate and she was a teacher for much of my adolescent life (institutionalized capital). Our Saturday family outings included museums, plays, and concerts (objectified cultural capital). I also acknowledge that my upbringing displayed levels of embodied cultural capital, not typically associated with the community I grew up in. For example, none of my high school friends knew what pulp (the 'fibers' of oranges) was when I told them that I do not like pulp in my orange juice, and most of my relatives still eat with their elbows on the table (an act I was taught not to do). From an early age, my mother passed the embodied capital she had learned from her experiences on to my sister and me. These skills greatly helped me to navigate Northfield Mount Herman School, which was full of students from the prestigious culture.

My mother's educational status, college graduate and law school attendee, secured my outlook on institutionalized cultural capital. And I assert that being a second-generation college student is a form of institutionalized and embodied capital and this population is seen as part of the prestigious culture. So, here I am. A member of the prestigious culture population yet still struggling and having experiences also associated with the non-prestigious culture population. Research states that first-generation students

have less cultural capital than second-generation students due to the lack of conferrable cultural capital their parents have in the college environment.⁵⁵

When I went to college, I knew I was there to earn a degree. After the pre-med experience was not to my liking, I found another major that seemed to have an important career attached to it (forensic anthropology, the name just sounds good, doesn't it?). Then after I stumbled upon the black studies major, I was afraid to pursue it because I had never heard of career options for black studies majors. Luckily, I was introduced to the field of student affairs, and found a career path that suited me. I went to college with a plan to become a doctor; the next eight or more years of my life were mapped out for me based upon my initial career desires. It was a crushing blow to my self-esteem and I began to panic about my future when the biological science major was not working out. I endured biological sciences as a major much longer than I should have, then in my attempts to have another prestigious career I pursued forensic anthropology.

Hopping from major to major, not knowing what was after college sounds like the life of someone from the prestigious culture. Someone who was not accumulating massive amounts of student loan and credit card debts in order to finish college. I, on the other hand, was reluctant to change majors because of the financial implications associated with it. I desperately wanted biological science to work out because I knew that I could not really afford to switch majors, nor could I afford to not have a post-graduation career plan. "Testing the waters" sounds like the narrative of a second-generation student. The mounting stress from the financial strain and uncertain post-graduation plans associated with changing majors seems more akin to the narrative of a

first-generation student. I was hopping from major to major (although reluctantly) and was under enormous stress due to financial implications and an uncertain future. I was once again a second-generation college student on the outside, but a first-generation college student on the inside (an insider/outsider). The next section of this chapter illuminates another concept that unknowingly placed pressure on me as an insider/outsider.

Academic Capital

Academic capital, a concept introduced by Will Barratt, is defined as “the ability to read well, take notes, think critically, write well and speak well.”⁵⁶ According to Barratt, academic capital embodies all the attributes of the successful college student. I imagine any college advisor, faculty member, or student affairs administrator would agree with Barratt. These individuals are known for telling a student that academic success is rooted in comprehension of the material, taking notes, development of critical thinking skills, being able to write, and verbally articulate one’s thoughts. Barratt also emphasizes that academic capital has an affect on a college student’s experience, and the effects for first-generation and second-generation college students are different.⁵⁷ I agree with Barratt’s academic capital concept and its parallels to academic attainment for students. However I would enjoy taking the time to talk with Dr. Barratt about his assertions surrounding second-generation students. I would also like to speak with Dr. Barratt around the realm of influence his features of academic capital dwell in.

As discussed in the preceding paragraphs, it is assumed that second-generation college students have more accumulated academic capital than their first-generation

peers. While I understand that the research available on the second-generation population supports that assertion, as you may guess I do not agree with it. Once again, the pressure mounts for second-generation college students. Although I did not have the words for it then, I felt a tremendous amount of pressure as a second-generation college student to have a huge amount of academic capital. The assumptions made about my knowledge base and skill sets were overwhelming at times. I wanted desperately to say “Look, just because my mom went to college does not mean I know this stuff,” but I never stumbled upon a safe space to say that at UCSB. From my lens, Barratt’s first two features of academic capital, read well and take notes, are very straight forward. The remaining three, think critically, write well and speak well, are subjective in my eyes.

I imagine that when Barratt and others (e.g., faculty) relay those three features of academic capital (college success), they are speaking directly of coursework and classroom behaviors. However, when I see those three, my mind looks outside the classroom first and then inside the classroom. The attributes of critical thinking, writing well, and speaking well, carry not only academic capital implications but cultural capital implications as well. I know that had I not been able to think critically, write well and speak well, I would not have graduated from UCSB. Yet the times when I needed these skills the most were not in the classroom, they were to survive at UCSB. I needed them when I persuaded my direct supervisor and the Assistant Director of Residential Life to work as a resident assistant and have another student leadership position in student health services. I utilized them when I was thinking critically about how to feed myself for weeks during the summers when most of my paycheck went to rent and utilities. I was

well spoken both times I had to articulate my case to have my financial aid reinstated. For me, a second-generation college student, the academic capital that Barratt speaks of, was used more so for survival. I know that I used academic capital in the classroom, and I am sure I learned more of it as my six year college journey unfolded, yet in my mind I did the most critical thinking, my best writing, and articulated my thoughts during the times I mentioned above (outside of the classroom). Perhaps academic capital can be two-fold, inside and outside the classroom. I know I went to college with academic capital. I know I went to college with the knowledge that college was where I was supposed to put all my effort and that my classes and studying were suppose to come first and foremost. However what I knew and what I had to do to survive (e.g., eat during summer session, buy toiletries, and clothes) did not always match up.

I was having a conversation with a close friend of mine about the concepts in this chapter. I was explaining to Stacey that my cultural capital was in conflict when I was an undergraduate. Then I went on to provide examples of the conflict. Stacey then said, “I don’t think what you say is cultural capital is really cultural capital. It’s more like values capital. You had some cultural capital and some academic capital but those came into conflict with your values.” I thought about what Stacey had said, reviewing what I had been calling conflicting cultural capital and came to the conclusion that she was correct. I was placing my values in the same realm as my cultural and academic capital. I have searched high and low, PschInfo, Google Scholar, etc. for someone who has used the term values capital. I found none. Thus, I have decided to create a definition for a term that I have yet to see used in other higher education literature—values capital.

Values Capital

Value means what we think highly of, what we cherish. Personal preferences and tastes that may or may not be consistent with our more idealistic moral/ethical beliefs and behaviors. A value gives our life a sense of direction, meaning, and purpose. No values, no sense of meaning regarding the worth of cultural and academic capital.^{ix}

Based on empirical studies, several scholars have suggested that although it is important to investigate the nature of attitudes and opinions, it is more fundamental to investigate the nature of value since attitudes and opinions can often change based on experience, while value remain relatively stable over time.⁵⁸

The word value comes from the Latin root *valere*, which means to be strong, to be well, and to be of worth. From its Latin root, the term value has come to mean something of relative worth or importance.⁵⁹ The concept of value has been studied in a wide range of disciplines including psychology, sociology, and anthropology; all three of these disciplines have a relationship with the education as part of the social sciences. As a higher education administrator, I have read numerous works specific to student values: the importance of teaching values and values being the “quintessential moral characteristic in education” and the need to assist our college students in identifying their values.⁶⁰ There has been recent discussion urging higher education being “value-neutral” and leaving the teaching of values up to the families, church, and political systems.⁶¹ The counter argument that higher education is a vehicle of values, and we as faculty/staff/administrators pass those values on to our students, has also been a recent hot topic in higher education. In the push to be more efficient and “business like” it has been reported that higher education’s values (e.g., student development) clash with

^{ix} Robert J. Nash shared his definition of values with me through an email correspondence.

efficiency oriented business models.⁶² Values within higher education are like the air we breathe, often taken for granted because it just *is*.

The field of student affairs is infamous for being values oriented. If I were to ask the student affairs master degree students I teach to tell me what value of the student affairs profession they hold dear, the answer would most likely be something to the tune of “the development of our students for global citizenry.” For anyone who enters higher education there seems to be no escaping values. We place value on faculty scholarship in the form of the tenure process, value is inherit in our position classifications (e.g., entry-level, mid-level, senior-level administrator). At the University of Vermont (UVM) *Our Common Ground* (respect, integrity, innovation, openness, justice, and responsibility) are values that UVM espouses and works diligently to keep central to its community. Values are so close to our life and conduct that the idea of teasing them out and unpacking them for understanding has been the subject of many philosophers and scholars for centuries. Inside and outside of higher education, value as a term has been poked, prodded, studied, and some would argue stretched to within an inch of its life.

The study of value theory has included the ways in which values govern behavior, the further understanding of how communities shape values, and determining if in fact values can be changed or altered based on conditions or situations.⁶³ What I find most interesting about values is expressed in the opening epigraph: values do not typically change over time. The experiences a person has may shape the way certain values are expressed or intrinsically called upon but the value itself does not change. With this in mind, I began to look at the values our students bring with them to the college campus as

another form of capital—another accumulation of knowledge that informs their experiences, academically and socially.

Unlike the cultural and academic capital I have discussed thus far in this chapter, values capital (a term I have yet to find used in higher education literature) has limited, if any, room to be further expanded upon by the college experience. On the contrary, since values remain relatively stable, they are often affirmed or invalidated by the college experiences. Values capital is salient in how students navigate the college experience with peers and as well as faculty, staff, and administrators. Values capital represents a fundamental set of understandings, a way to evaluate and make meaning of experiences. It is not acquired once a student sets foot on the college campus; values capital illustrates who our students are and where they have come from when they step foot on the college campus.

Higher education is full of values that we as faculty, staff, and administrators have become connected to in some form or fashion. We value education as a vehicle for empowerment, we value certain disciplines that make up the core of liberal arts studies, and we value critical thinking. We value autonomy, independence, personal and professional growth. We value equality and safety for all of our students. And we value the university as a “market place of ideas.” I am intentionally using the term *we* because it is the current we who espouse the values I have listed above. Previous *we*’s in higher education did not value equality and safety for all students, as seen in the forced desegregation of many flag-ship universities in the southern USA. What I find important about values is that they are shaped by the majority, and when a person moves out of

their values majority environment, the adjustment can be mild or earth-shattering. At this point in my career, I want to understand more about the values our students bring with them to college and how those values shape their college experiences. Specifically, I have become most intrigued by the disconnection some students feel between their values capital and the cultural and academic capital acquired along the educational journey. As the first step to understanding this type of phenomenon, I have elected to explore it within the context of my own undergraduate narrative.

During my conversation with Stacey surrounding my mistakenly labeled conflicting cultural capital, I identified the following four values as having defined much of my undergraduate life: do whatever it takes to survive; finish what you start; and do not complain, just keep trying. My list of values coming into college could have gone on and on, but those three values are pivotal to my college narrative. I believe that every single college student begins their higher education experience with values capital, but not every student finds their values and their cultural and academic capital (if they have any) in conflict. The values I listed above clashed with my cultural and academic capital. As a second-generation college student, I believe I was expected to have my values and my cultural and academic capital in balance. The cultural and academic capital I had accumulated was supposed to keep my values capital under control. Alas, my values capital trumped (outweighed) my cultural and academic capital.

THE CLASH OF THE CAPITALS: CULTURAL AND ACADEMIC VS. VALUES

Is trying to balance values capital and academic and cultural capital the plight of many second-generation college students? Is the assumption made about second-generation

college students an assumption that we have figured out the balance? Do second-generation students know when to let their values capital take the back seat to their cultural and academic capital? Is this ability to balance the capitals the true sign on continuing-generation integration to higher education? While I cannot answer all of these questions in this chapter or dissertation, I do believe that some second-generation students struggle with finding a balance between their values and their cultural and academic capital. They, like me, struggle in silence because of the pressures associated with “knowing what to do,” “having an advantage because your parent went to college,” and simply being too proud at times to admit that they feel just as lost as the student whose parent only has a high school diploma.

Upon exploring my undergraduate narrative I realized I felt my cultural and academic capital clashed with my values capital. As a second-generation college student, I was expected to know that it was not in my best academic interest to work so many hours or so many jobs. Working full-time and attending school part-time is seen as a first-generation student narrative; it could also be a major source of the conflicts many of them feel in pursuit of higher education. I was supposed to “know better” and not have to work so much because I had other resources available to me. The truth is I did know better, yet I had to work because I was my only financial support. I was not the likely student to pursue any job that had me up at 5:30am, nor was I expected to work at the Post Office from 3pm-11pm or 11pm to 8am. The truth is I worked at 5:30am on the weekends, and I am far too familiar with the third shift (10pm-7am) because those positions enabled me to make the most money and still be able to attend class during traditional course times.

In an effort to further illustrate the capital conflict I speak about, I will provide examples of the conflict I felt between my values and my cultural and academic capital. In the next section I present a personal narrative vignette followed by commentary from my cultural and academic capital as well as my values capital. Then I share with you, the reader, how it felt to live with such a conflict as I navigated the waters of higher education.

NAVIGATING ROUGH WATERS IN THE U.S.S. UCSB

In chapter three I spoke about navigating the waters of the college application process. I was the captain of the U.S.S. UCSB and my mother was my aged apprentice. Much has changed since she last navigated the college application process, and much had changed since last she navigated the college attendance process. The U.S.S. UCSB had crossed the sea of college application, admittance, and securing housing. Now my ship was entering into the rougher waters of the college journey—actually striving to be successful on a college campus. Mommy, my aged apprentice in this journey, was still learning and her most useful skill remained her encouraging words and her ability to stay calm under extreme pressure.

During my years at UCSB there were many rough waters I had to navigate. Just when I survived one storm, another seemed to come from behind almost capsizing my vessel. I enrolled at UCSB with a lot of excitement and a healthy curiosity about college life. Although the waters getting there were rough, I made it to UCSB. My financial aid covered my room and board expenses, along with the expenses for books and laboratory fees. It was explained that my work-study allocation was looked at as the source of

income I was supposed to use during my collegiate experience. When my money began to run out mid-way through each quarter, I was confused. While some of my classmates and friends were buying expensive electronics or basically “blowing” their money, I was not extravagant and kept my purchases to the basic necessities. I did not understand why I was running out of money, but I knew I had to figure out what to do about it. I found another job that was not work-study oriented, it was in the “real world” outside of the college campus (I was a postal mail sorter). I weathered the storm of financial struggle and thought it was smooth sailing after that, only to run aground repeatedly regarding my major course of study.

As an administrator and graduate student in higher education, I know that roughly 50% of college students change their major, and some students in that 50% change their majors two or three times. As a student at UCSB I had no idea that it was dare I say *normal*, to change my major. I went to college as a biological science major, aspiring to go to medical school. Those aspirations changed as I discovered that my temperament and that course of study were not compatible. Mommy was supportive of my desires to change majors, and suggested business administration as a major. To my dismay no such major existed at UCSB. Not having taken any other general education courses that sparked my interest, I decided to keep trying with biological sciences. After a few D’s and perhaps even one or two F’s, I diligently sought out another major.

My friend Stephanie majored in anthropology and really enjoyed it, so I took a few of those courses and they suited my temperament slightly better than biological sciences. I elected to pursue physical anthropology because I discovered that a physical

anthropologist could eventually become a forensic anthropologist. That career sounded good and it sounded just as important as being a doctor, thus I changed my major to physical anthropology. I soon discovered that my temperament for academic study was not well suited for the physical anthropology major either. However, I had already switched majors once and felt that I had no choice but to stick with physical anthropology. I was running out of time at UCSB, approaching the end of year number four with no chance of graduating within four years in sight.

With the stress of possibly changing majors again looming over my head, the chance run-in I had with my sorority sister as she was on her way to a black studies course was, in my eyes, Divine intervention. I gravitated to the black studies course and knew that I could do well in the major since I really enjoyed the courses. Alas, I had no clue as to what a black studies major did after college, and the fear of not having a career path as well as changing my course of study again petrified me. I was at the helm of the U.S.S. UCSB looking into the waters ahead, faced with continuing to navigate the rough seas and probably running aground again and again as I continued the physical anthropology major or switching directions and heading towards calmer waters. It was only after I had been told that there was no way I could graduate as a physical anthropology major (unless I did the impossible of getting straight A's in every remaining course) that I decided, reluctantly, to change my major to black studies. Once again the U.S.S. UCSB changed directions, and as the captain I assumed there would be smooth sailing from then on out.

Alas, my ship had been badly worn on the rough seas of higher education, and after four years of being at sea, my ship needed repairs. These repairs were vital for her to make the remaining two year voyage towards graduation. Although black studies as a major matched my temperament, I had run out of some financial assistance due to my years in college and my bad grades. I felt myself no longer being an effective captain because I spent more time working outside of my ship (to meet my financial needs) than I did steering my ship. The U.S.S. UCSB needed fuel (sleep), she needed to pull into a port for just a few days (emotional healing and recuperation), and she needed to have time to chart this new course of travel (study and figure out what next steps after graduation). In order to do that, I turned to credit cards.

For many years I have said that as a US society we are addicted to excess, and many of us obtain that excess by living in debt. Our college campuses have seen this addiction to excess and living in debt with our students. Our students who open credit cards, receive ridiculously high limits on those cards, and have no-where near the income to support such a high limit of spending. Oprah Winfrey has discussed it, and higher education administrators have discussed it; the facts remain that many of our college students not only find themselves in student loan debt, they find themselves in credit card debt.

As asserted earlier in this chapter I was not an excessive spender and I did my best to purchase only the basic necessities. Yet, as my years in college continued, my basic necessities began to cost more. I was living off campus every summer while enrolled in summer school, to increase my grade point average and take my general

education courses. The financial assistance I received paid solely for my course credits. The summer positions I secured (always as a housekeeper or painter and working as a desk attendant on the side) paid for rent and utilities in my subleases. I ate oatmeal for breakfast, peanut butter and jelly sandwiches with pretzels for lunch, and rice for dinner each night. I had no energy (due to lack of sleep and an improper diet) and I was faced with two options: leave school without a degree or press on and finish. The former option was mandated by the UCSB rule regarding students who had accumulated a certain amount of attempted course credit but no degree. For UCSB these students are told that after a certain quarter, my quarter was fall 2000, they would be removed from UCSB. In essence, I would be academically expelled from school. After all those years, leaving without a degree was not an option, so I turned to credit cards as a way to alleviate some of my financial burden (which equated to quitting one job) in order to sleep, recuperate, study, and figure out my post-graduation plans.

During most of my journey at UCSB my academic and cultural capital were at odds with my values capital. Each had its own response and thoughts to the experiences I was having. At times during my years at UCSB it seemed like I carried two “capital consultants” on my shoulders. One was my cultural and academic capital, and the other was my values capital. Both always had something to say when I found myself in a dilemma. In the subsections that follow, I illustrate the different views possessed by my cultural, academic, and values capital.

Cultural and Academic Capital (“School is your #1 priority”)

DeMethra, you know that you are in college to receive an education. You will have plenty of time to work after you graduate. Attending classes and studying hard is your #1 priority and your education should be your “job.” Performing well in college will pay off in the end. Financial aid is all you need, the calculations are accurate so you may need to figure out what you are spending your money on and make adjustments in some areas. Do not worry; you will be fine. Your work-study position should be all you need. Remember school is your #1 priority. As for this debacle with biological sciences, it is quite natural to go to school and find out that what you thought you wanted to do is not what really interests you. Just shop around and find out what interests you. College is about finding what excites you and what you are good at. Do not worry about figuring out a post-graduate career, focus on getting good grades and whatever you want to do after college will be yours. It is okay to change your mind, it happens, it is expected. Just get good grades.

There is a certain temptation that comes from walking up and down vendor row at least once a day—credit cards. You really do not need that mini basketball set or that giant snickers bar. The vendor is telling you to use your financial aid award as your income. You know that you do not have that much money at your disposal. You do not need a credit card. You cannot even afford a credit card. Credit, if not used wisely is, dangerous. Look at how your mother used credit. It is not okay to “borrow from Peter to pay Paul.” There will be plenty of time to have credit when you get out of school. I know

you saw that episode of the Oprah Winfrey show about college students and credit cards. There has got to be another way to finish out school.

Values Capital (“Do Whatever it Takes to Survive”)

DeMethra, you need to see your family, right? Did financial aid account for that? You need shoes that fit, right? Did financial aid take into account that you would literally grow one and a half shoe sizes? You found out the hard way that you are allergic to Dial soap (which is the free soap at UCSB). Toiletries are expensive, especially for someone with sensitive skin like you. You cannot go to class barefoot (even if this is UCSB), you have monthly expenses associated with regular grooming and hygiene, and your financial aid is running out. What are you going to do? See that job, it pays fifteen dollars per hour, take it! No, it is not a work study position but you can catch the bus to and from work. Going to class and studying will not mean anything if you are barefoot and have a rash all the time. DeMethra, you got to do what you got to do!

As for this whole biological sciences debacle, you grew up with the mindset that you finish what you start, and it is no different in this situation. You started as a biological science major, and you should finish as one. It is great that mommy is supportive of whatever changes you make, but you are not a quitter. I see that you have taken an interest in physical anthropology; well that is a good major with a good career path. Changing from pre-med to forensic anthropology sounds really good. I approve. Good grief, physical anthropology is not working out either? DeMethra, you cannot keep changing course here and even though you like black studies, what can you do with that degree? Stick with physical anthropology.

Wait a minute, we are about to get kicked out of school? Quitting is not an option, leaving here with no degree is not an option, black studies seems to be our only way out of here with a degree, so change majors, again. You have a finite amount of time to get this degree; they already told you that they will kick you out after the Fall 2000 quarter, so do what you got to do to finish. The credit cards will mean you can quit one of your jobs, and free up some time for you to study. I have said it to you before and I will say it to you again, DeMethra you got to do whatever it takes to survive. And as the saying goes, “Visa is everywhere you want to be” and you want to be in school so get you a Visa!

The key issue my values capital faced in this personal narrative vignette was survival. While the key issue for my academic and cultural capital was enhancing my future after college. There was an automatic assumption made by my academic and cultural capital that my basic needs were taken care of, therefore they had the luxury of focusing solely on my academic growth and success. To no fault of their own these capitals knew nothing about being barefoot or not being able to afford the necessary hygiene basics like soap and tampons. The cultural and academic capital I had acquired prior to attending college had nothing to do with basic survival. Their assumption was that I would have enough resources to keep me afloat during my college career and that I would never feel inadequate as to my abilities to succeed. The prestigious cultures, which the skills and knowledge sets of academic and cultural capital are based upon, do not think about basic needs or feeling like outsiders. Basic needs are automatically met for

that population and they are considered the insiders, which enables them to focus on education, social, and career advancement.

On the other hand, my values capital is a survivor. In my personal narrative vignette, my values capital made sense of all my situations by focusing in on the deficit associated with my basic needs. The term survival is synonymous with endurance and continued existence. One of the fundamental aspects of my values capital is survival. In the face of adversity I will do whatever it takes to ensure my continued existence. Of course, I have limits and boundaries that I will not cross, based upon my beliefs and self-imposed code of conduct; however, the bottom line is that my values capital will ensure that I live to see another day. There were no assumptions made by my values capital about what I should or should not have had taken care of in college. When it came to figuring out my existence at UCSB, my values capital took to the helm and simply said, “We have got to do what we have got to do!”

It was like having two people on my shoulders, in each ear, trying to tell me what to do. Cultural and academic capitals were so logical and orderly. They saw the bigger picture and believed that everything they said was the best thing to do. They were aware of the college environment and thought their ideas of how to navigate it were ideal. My values capital was raw and survival oriented. She saw the tree, not the forest. She saw the bags under my eyes, and the rash on my stomach from the Dial soap. She cared about my education, but she cared about my survival more. There were times when I wish I had listened more closely to my cultural and academic capital, but it was my values capital that kept me fed and clothed.

One could be so inclined to review the commentaries above and replace cultural and academic capital with second-generation college student and values capital with first-generation college student. I was a second-generation student; however I had yet to learn to balance my cultural and academic capital with my values capital. Each quarter I encountered an ethical dilemma. Nash describes an ethical dilemma as two or more courses of action in which each action could strongly be defended as the “good” one to take.⁶⁴ While at UCSB, I was repeatedly faced with situations in which two courses of action were presented to me, one by my cultural and academic capital, and the other by my values capital. Although each course of action was in conflict with the other, I was able to conceivably defend each one as a “good” course of action to take. I believe the reason I would generally take the course of action presented by my values capital was because it seemed to present the clearest way of getting my basic needs met.

My academic and cultural capital had wonderful ideas but their ideas seemed to still be ignoring the basic fact that I needed to survive. It took me almost six years to evolve to a place where my values, academic, and cultural capital could all coexist together for my good. No one voice trumped the others; they all knew their places and respected their roles in my life. They had reached a place of comradeship instead of conflict; they had become friends (instead of enemies) for my greater collegiate good.

HELPING STUDENTS ON OUR CAMPUSES

As a student affairs administrator, I see many students like the *UCSB DeMethra* in higher education. Students who have some cultural and academic capital (even if it is limited at best), and have strong values capital. For students such as the one I was, when the road

gets tough, it is the values capital that steps up and takes care of them. The outcomes may not always be positive in the eyes of administrators (e.g., a student working a full-time job and going to school full-time), but the student survives and they continue to exist on the college campus. I believe that it is part of the work I do as a student affairs administrator to help these students (students like me) begin the process of finding common ground for their clashing capitals.

As I near a decade of service as a student affairs professional, I must say that my hardest work and greatest rewards have come from helping students who experience clashing capitals. I speak directly to their values capital and share with them the wisdom I learned by trial and error. I help these students begin a process that took me at least four years of college to start, a process of values evolution. I encourage my students to allow their values to evolve by opening up space for the positive contributes that cultural and academic capital can provide. I reassure them that I am not trying to change their values, and that I respect their desires to keep their values intact. However, I urge them to look at how they can carry out their values with increased awareness and an open-mind. The students whom I encounter that remind me of my undergraduate self are survivors, just like me. They want to continue existing in higher education and look towards their survival instinct (rooted in their values capital) to do so.

I appeal to these students on a variety of levels—as an intelligent administrator, as another woman of color, as someone who has succeeded in the face of adversity, or as a person who has experienced first-hand the broken neighborhoods of the inner city. I come to them in whatever way I need to in order to help them see that their evolution is critical

to their survival on the college campus. These students' worlds have changed, what worked in the neighborhoods at home often do not work in higher education. Or better yet they do work but the desired outcome is not really what the student wants. It is my firm belief that only the strong survive, but that they survive by adaptation—by evolving.

Whether through the lens of a residential life professional, fraternity/sorority advisor, or student conduct professional, the crux of my work has been in values evolution. My primary work has been in assisting students with seeing that at times their values need to evolve if they want to be successful (e.g., not be suspended or expelled from school, graduate, or become a student leader) on the college campus. As I write these words I remember my Upward Bound student Isabella, and I hope that wherever Isabella decided to pursue higher education, that she ran into someone like me to help her navigate her capitals and motivate her to allow her values to evolve for a better chance at success in higher education.

Thalia Arawi made the following comment regarding teaching values in education: “Teaching values is a job, a mission so to speak and like any other job, it has a teleological nature to it, an extrinsic value. We are not teaching values for the sake of teaching values. We are teaching values because we want to make our students become better people.”⁶⁵ I look to Arawi's words when it comes to encouraging or guiding my students towards values evolution. I do it because I want to make sure my students know how to navigate higher education in order to reach their ultimate goals. I talk with my students about the transition from surviving to thriving in higher education via values evolution. I share my narratives, I listen to their narratives, and I provide examples of

what it is like to allow ones values to evolve but have the core essence of the value stay intact.

For example, “starting what you finish” is a value many of the students I encounter hold dear. And I know it is a value that can serve a student well for the rest of their lives. My goal is to encourage my students to see the forest (a college education), not just the one tree (a certain major) of what they really want to finish. I truly believe that if someone had done that for me at UCSB, I would have been able to redirect my energy and attention towards a productive and engaging college experience much sooner. As a student affairs professional, my primary passion has been in assisting our students, especially the ones who feel their capitals clashing; the ones who seem to be in conflict over two or more courses of action that all seem to be a “good” idea; or the ones who want to survive in higher education. My own values evolution during my tenure as a UCSB student resulted in a number of positive outcomes, including a renewed sense of belonging, unearthing my passion and ability for writing, a bachelor of arts degree, a career in student affairs, and the courage to move from California to Vermont in order to pursue graduate studies in student affairs and higher education administration. As I reflect on all of these positive outcomes, one word comes to mind—self-empowerment

SELF-EMPOWERMENT DUE TO VALUES EVOLUTION

Empowerment is the process that allows one to gain the knowledge, skill-sets and attitude needed to cope with the changing world and the circumstances in which one lives⁶⁶.

I have searched and searched for a definition of self-empowerment. Curious as to how others define this term, I came across a variety of definitions from the realms of everyday

healthy living to the literature addressing coping with terminal illness to articles about the process of terminating an abusive relationship. The common denominator associated with the definitions of self-empowerment from these varying texts is best described by the epigraph above. When a person is self-empowered, they have begun the process of acquiring what is necessary to cope with a changing world or changing circumstances. The outcome of my own values evolution, which was essentially a reconciliation of the clash between my existing capitals, resulted in my ability to cope much better in the UCSB environment. The skill-sets, knowledge, and attitude that I gained and adopted through self-empowerment made all the difference in my UCSB experience.

A good friend of mine once said “It is not how you start, it is how you finish.” Teasing this aphorism out a bit more, my friend was reminding me that sometimes the important piece of any journey is not that you started the journey, the true impact of the journey and lessons to be learned are only felt and acquired once you finish the journey. I started my UCSB journey on shaky ground. I endured some very rough seas along the way, but my endurance paid off in the end because I finished. And I assert that I finished because I learned to navigate the waters of my college journey using all the tools in my toolbox, not just my values capital or just my academic and cultural capital. I used them all for my own wellbeing. It may have taken me six years of attempting to go to school full-time to finish, but I received my undergraduate degree in December 2000.

I dare not dismiss the narratives associated with my pre-self-empowerment days at UCSB. That narrative has assisted me in so many ways as a person and student affairs professional. There is a certain homage that I will always pay to those beginning but I am

glad that my undergraduate experience ended in the fashion that it did—I found a major I loved, developed a passion for writing, and discovered the field of student affairs. The greatest gift I received from my years at UCSB was self-empowerment. It was a product of my struggles, trials, and tribulations, but I would not have it any other way. I liken the self-empowerment I obtained at UCSB to the dimensions of student empowerment discussed by Patrick J. McQuillan—the academic, political, and social.⁶⁷ McQuillan speaks of each of these dimensions in the realm of student education as directly associated to experiences inside the classroom and educational environment; however, these dimensions of my self-empowerment are directly related to experiences outside of the classroom.

In the realm of academics, my self-empowerment enabled me to seek what was most rewarding academically (black studies major). My self-empowerment also encouraged me to begin thinking “outside of the box” in terms of career aspirations and post-undergraduate plans. Had it not been for my self-empowerment I may have never pursued a career in student affairs. As my sixth year ended at UCSB and graduation approached, I had developed a plan to work for a few years in the field of student affairs as an Assistant Resident Director in hopes of securing a higher position in a few years. It was not until I became a Resident Director that I actually contemplated graduate studies.

Self-empowerment led me to the HESA program at the University of Vermont. My hard work, dedication, and belief in myself found me receiving the top HESA student honor—the Kenneth P. Saurman Award. This award is based on academic performance, acceleration in assistantship and internship experiences, and the ability to make

contributions to the fields of student affairs and higher education. Although I never set out to receive this award, I did. The Saurman award has been my most surprising academic accomplishment to date. When I look back on my HESA experiences, I deserved that award and earned it hook, line, and sinker!

The dimension of politics became a major part of my last year and a half at UCSB because I was able to see a future for myself and part of that future involved being hired on the UCSB campus. I began to truly understand the politics associated with success. It was not enough to only work hard in my major and get good grades (finally). I also had to work hard in other areas of campus life in order to be a competitive candidate for the Assistant Resident Director position I wanted after graduation. Thus I sought the guidance of a few trusted administrators whom I had worked for via work-study positions. From those ad-hoc mentors I learned that I needed to network, volunteer for positions that I felt would enhance my skill base, and market myself. The political arena I found myself navigating is described by Bourdieu's concept of social capital. Social capital is capital stemmed from relationships with people and transfers of resources from one person to another.⁶⁸ Social capital became a part of my values evolution and enabled me to see the true meaning behind the saying, "It's not what you know, but who you know." I never discounted my knowledge base and abilities; however I know that the social capital I acquired through networking and other political activities was invaluable.

As for the social aspect of my self-empowerment, simply put I learned to vocalize my thoughts, feelings, and opinions inside and outside of the classroom. Although I grew up with extremely vocal women, I was shy and quiet. I had yet to find my voice when I

entered the UCSB community and for the first four or more years I felt silenced by my second-generation narrative and my conflicting capitals. A family friend once said, “Ask for what you want, and beg for what you need.” This saying never carried any meaning for me until I began my process of self-empowerment. This quip from a family friend was really about speaking up and speaking out in order to have one’s needs met. As my fifth and sixth years at UCSB took shape, I began the process of speaking up for what I wanted, speaking up for what I needed, sharing my voice inside and outside of class and not fading into the background. Administrators were beginning to know me because I was vocal about my needs and the needs of the Black community at UCSB. I was by no means an activist student, but I was a hard working student who learned to be politically savvy and develop strong connections on the UCSB campus.

The knowledge gained, skill-sets acquired, and the outlook I began to establish as part of my UCSB self-empowerment process is evident in the experiences I have had over the past nine years. I am successful in one of the most political institutions in the US—higher education. The ways in which I have chosen to use my voice have not only been for my own sake but for the advocacy of those who are often voiceless in the various systems of oppressions swirling about in our society. I challenge myself to learn new skills and I place myself in unfamiliar situations in an effort to further enhance those skills. And lastly, I attempt to live each day by the words of Patricia Russell-McCloud, who reminds me that my “attitude will determine my altitude and how high [I] can fly.”⁶⁹ These elements of my way of living are the foundation of my self-empowerment.

It was a four, almost five, year process for me to begin feeling integrated into higher education. My second-generation status had placed a lot of pressure on me to be someone that I did not know how to be. The capital that I was assumed to possess in 1994, when I first enrolled at UCSB, only became a part of my understanding and existence in 1998, going into my fifth year of college. I endured four years of pressure and bearing the weight of insider expectations amid outsider circumstances. In addition to my process of self-empowerment something else occurred during my fifth and sixth years at UCSB, I started seeing myself at a different social class level. I started seeing myself as emitting a swagger that I previously associated with those in a higher social class than mine. My feelings of integration were solidified by my ability to be comfortable in an environment that I had been uncomfortable in for four long years. The next chapter of this dissertation speaks directly to social class and its impact on my narrative as a second-generation college student in the midst of first-generation college student preparation.

CHAPTER 5: MY PREDOMINANT BACKGROUND NARRATIVE

In this chapter I assert that social class is the predominant background story for my life and many others. My social class narrative and the shifts in my social class through higher education are essential to my story of being an insider still on the outside. I explore the idea of social class through classic and contemporary literature and I introduce the reader to the idea of mentalite (worldview) as it pertains to each of us and our social class upbringings. My personal narrative pertaining to the subject of social class will be infused in this section using previously created social class typologies. At the time I created these typologies they were based on narratives I heard from my students and colleagues; however in this chapter, I will use each typology as a way to further illuminate the impact of social class on my journey in higher education.

SOCIAL CLASS: THE UNITED STATES' FORBIDDEN THOUGHT

Class is script, map, and guide. It tells us how to talk, how to dress, how to hold ourselves, how to eat, and how to socialize. It affects whom we marry; where we live; the friends we choose; the jobs we have; the vacations we take; the books we read; the movies we see; the restaurants we pick; how we decide to buy houses carpets, furniture, and car; where our kids are educated; what we tell our children at the dinner table; whether we even have a dinner table or a dinner time.⁷⁰

The first time I heard/encountered the terms social class and socioeconomic status was during my third year at UCSB Although there are academic schools of thought (such as sociology) that see one term as analytical and the other an empirical, most of us think the two terms are interchangeable. In my undergraduate courses these terms were used

interchangeably and I came to understand social class as being rooted in socioeconomic status. The categories of poor, working-poor, working-class, middle-class, upper-class, owning-class, and the list could go on and on, were differentiated by income. From these dividing income lines I began to see my upbringing as a combination of middle-class and working class, from birth to age twelve and twelve to adulthood, respectively. However I was not quite satisfied with such a quantitative definition of my experiences. My experiences were based on more than monetary gains, yet that is how I learned to define social class—by a person or family’s income. Upon beginning my graduate studies the clean and neat definition of class, that I had been introduced to, became more complex. As a graduate student I was exposed to social class in terms of mannerisms, opinions, attitudes, and indicative of a person’s overall mentality in the world. Having the innate sense that there was more to social class than money, I was excited to encounter new information around the subject.

Numerous scholars agree that there is some sort of social hierarchy that exists in the US; however, the ways in which that hierarchy is created or sustained can include, but is not limited, to financial status, education, employment, and social connections.⁷¹ With that said, there has yet to be an agreed upon standard definition of social class that permeates the literature on this subject. Each author or scientist crafts a different definition of social class and as I have researched the subject, pinning down just one standard definition has been impossible. This lack of standardized definition speaks to the pervasiveness of social class in US society; it is so much a part of the air we breathe that developing a standard definition has proven to be impossible?

Another aspect of social class agreed upon by numerous scholars, is its categorization as a taboo topic in the US. The classic book *The Hidden Injuries of Class*⁷² by Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb presented narratives of what was deemed in 1972 as a new form of class conflict in the US—the conflict of the blue collar worker, who measured himself and his values against those who lived as white-collar workers and beyond. Based upon a Ford Foundation project, this groundbreaking book spoke candidly about the difficulty of getting people to discuss class and how it affected their daily existence. In bringing this type of discussion to the forefront, the authors also asserted that there were no victors in the game of “hierarchical respect” and spoke directly to the need for individuals to look beyond the economic triumphs or struggles of a person and see the whole identity of humans and our relationships with one another.

Through a historical lens, informed by participant observation and over one hundred in-depth interviews, Sennett and Cobb shed light on the hidden injuries of class. The injuries that are wrapped up in class values (e.g., children should have a mother to come home to, therefore women should not work), the injuries that are caused by identifying people in certain jobs as mere objects (e.g., “Ricca the janitor”), and the injuries that result in feelings of inadequacies and self-doubt amid a society which espouses that everyone can be successful if they work hard (e.g., being overlooked for the promotion based on education credentials not work performance).

The class divide for many of the interviewees was not limited to experiences from external sources; the class divide was also experienced as an internal struggle for many of the interviewees. Blue-collar workers often aspired to have white collar positions, which

they viewed as a sign of success. These same blue collar workers often regarded those white collar positions as not being “real work” because their narratives defined “real work” as making something. Real work was tangible, not just pushing paper. This timeless piece of literature gave voice to the conflicts present in the working class population and shed light on the injuries endured as a result of the social hierarchy we voluntarily and involuntarily find ourselves a part of.

The taboo outlook on the subject of social class is also addressed in the following literary sound bites from other social class scholars: Michael Zweig states that “class is one of America’s best-kept secrets;”⁷³ Paul Blumberg refers to class as “America’s forbidden thought;”⁷⁴ Alfred Lubrano describes class as “the dark matter in the universe—hard to see but nevertheless omnipresent, a basic part of everything;”⁷⁵ and bell hooks proclaims that “nowadays it is fashionable to talk about race or gender; the uncool subject is class. It’s the subject that makes us all tense, nervous, [and] uncertain about where we stand.”⁷⁶ Having a full understanding of the taboo nature of social class discussions and the inability of scholars to agree upon one standard definition of social class, I set out to find, and if need be create, a definition that fit closely with my personal understanding of social class.

During the course of my literature review I have come to agree most with Alfred Lubrano’s definition of class which serves as the opening epigraph of this section. Simply put, social class, or as Lubrano stated, class, is almost everything about a person. It covertly and overtly dictates what we expect out of life and what we assume our futures to be. As a higher education administrator and a co-instructor, I have had the opportunity

to engage in conversations around social class with my students. The course I co-taught for two semesters was divided up into topics that rarely make their way into larger university-wide conversations. One of these topics was social class. Whenever I began the social class unit, the tense, nervous, uneasy feelings that bell hooks discussed in her book *Where We Stand: Class Matters* were present. However, I was always ready for them and I broke the ice with the simply and equally complex question, “What is social class?”

The initial answers focused on socioeconomic status and access to money, yet as I probed deeper and encouraged my students to look past the easy answer, I was astounded at what came out of their mouths. Each of the cohorts I taught came to similar definitions of social class; they came to see social class as “comprising specific mannerisms, vocabulary, and ability to access and use information.”⁷⁷ They also agreed with Lubrano’s definition. As the semester developed, my students became acutely aware of their social class narratives through their own writing and the writing of others. My students discussed the extreme difficulties they encountered while attempted to tease out their social class from their very existence. For many they realized that their social class was their very existence. Each attribute we explored, such as work ethic, choice of detergent, availability of vegetables, the existence of conversations in the home, to name just a few, were seen as “just how things were” upon first blush. However, as my students delved deeper the social class implications of each of these attributes were brought from the shadows. “Just how things were” changed to varying temperaments towards work, availability of money for detergent, the selection of foods that would last longer or feed

more, and the unspoken rules around communication within households. My students and I both agreed that social class was much more than a technical term used in the social sciences, we believed it to be a world view—what the French call a *mentalite*.

Mentalite is a French term defined as the outlook or set of thought processes, values, and beliefs shared by members of a community.⁷⁸ The term has its origins in the work of Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie and is closely akin to the English term *mentality*. In a recent writing, Robert Nash and I discussed *mentalite* as inclusive of a “cluster of formal and informal learning, attitudes, beliefs, backgrounds, situations, and lifestyles that influence/shape/determine how each of us goes about our daily lives.”⁷⁹ We went on to state candidly that in our opinion, *mentalite* is one of the most powerful determinates of personal/social/cultural/professional identities (we also admitted that our assertion was certainly arguable). However, the understanding and definition of social class that I have found to be most inclusive is most akin to *mentalite* (worldview). Referring back to the opening epigraph by Alfred Lubrano, he is describing a worldview, a way in which we select or gravitate towards almost every experience we have.

So how, if at all, does our worldview ever evolve? How, if at all, do we ever travel up or down the social class ladder? It is my belief that changes in our worldview are shaped by our experiences. Our experiences either broaden our view of the world (as some would assert higher education does) or our experiences further set the view of the world we inherited from our family and communities. I know that my worldview has shifted numerous times in my life, and each shift was brought on by a certain experience, situation, or formal learning. As stated in the opening of this chapter, my social class

narrative, my worldview, is essential to my story of being an insider still on the outside. Considering that I have been a member of the higher education community (student, staff, and instructor) for fifteen years (half of my life thus far) there is no doubt my experiences in higher education are significant to the shifts in my social class narrative. However, before I can delve into the mentalite I honed and shaped within higher education, I must first discuss the mentalite I possessed before entering higher education.

THE AIR I HAVE BREATHED

An atmosphere of beliefs and conceptions has been formed by the labours and struggles of our forefathers, which enables us to breathe amid the various and complex circumstances of our life.
-William Kingdon Clifford

For decades I have been fascinated with the concepts of social class and socioeconomic status (two concepts that are often grouped as one). Growing up I was keenly aware that the experiences afforded to my sister, mother, grandmother, and me were not similar to the experiences of the majority of my extended family. I grew up in a three-bedroom, two bath house, with a separate dining room, kitchen, and living room, on a plot of land that could have fit two homes. My mother has been the owner of this home for over thirty years. I never knew what it meant to rent a home or live in an apartment until I went away to college. I remember watching my aunt Ruby grocery shop in my garage which contained two deep freezers full of meat and other frozen items as well as shelves and shelves of canned food. Aunt Ruby had fallen on hard times and was unable to buy groceries so my mother told her to go in our garage and get whatever she needed.

Upon reading the epigraph above by William Kingdon Clifford, I immediately thought about my understanding and experiences surrounding social class. My mother worked really hard and also incurred a lot of debt to create a certain atmosphere for my sister, grandmother, and me. And since my sister and I knew nothing of my mother's struggles to maintain the lifestyle we had, we were enabled to breathe amid the complex circumstances of upward mobility—the debt and stress that I believe my mother experienced. We breathed easy with expectations and assumptions derived from the life we were living. My sister and I were by no means spoiled, we had to clean the entire house from top to bottom every other Saturday, and feed our dogs, cats, ducks, fish, and whatever other animal we had at the time, on a daily basis. We celebrated the religious aspects of Christian holidays such as Easter and Christmas, while paying little attention to the commercial aspects. This meant we received very few presents on December 25th and rarely any Easter baskets.

I was allowed to work outside of the home when the opportunity presented itself, to pay for my personal non-essential items such as my cheerleading uniform and hair appointments. Having material possessions and engaging in experiences such as going to musicals or the museum were always rewards for hard work in school and at home. I was never quite comfortable with having so much while my extended family had so little. Although my mother helped each and every one of her ten siblings in one way or another, there always seemed to be a small cloud of guilt that hovered over me. Especially when my sister and I had so much, or at least what I thought was a lot, and some of my favorite cousins had so little. It was not until I was much older that I became aware of the terms

social class and socioeconomic status but as soon as these terms were introduced to me, I knew that I had stories to share about them.

As stated in chapter two of this dissertation, I am a firm believer that research is really “me”search. A researcher has some level of personal interest in the topic being studied otherwise they would not study it. The phenomenon of study has captured their interest in some form or fashion and they set about satisfying that curiosity. In the case of social class, my research, my understanding of this topic, and my writing about this topic is an extension of a study of myself. My social class narrative has shaped who I am; it is my predominant background narrative, and I write about social class in an attempt to separate out my social class narrative from the rest of my being. I attempt, through my writing, to place my life in a centrifuge with the hopes of separating out my social class narrative from the other areas of my being. It is hard, and at times it is painful. However what makes it worth while is the responses I have received from colleagues and others within higher education regarding my efforts in bringing social class identity into the mainstream of identity exploration on college campuses.

Going From a “Have” to a “Have-Not”

My interest in social class and socioeconomic status began when I was twelve years old and entering the 8th grade. My mother had recently left her teaching position, underwent surgery on her thyroid, and was unemployed. Each year since I was five my mother took Dani and I school shopping. We would get a new wardrobe and two new pairs of shoes (I always wanted penny loafers and saddle oxfords). Then we would give our old clothes to whichever cousins that could fit them. This particular year I was going to be ahead of the

school shopping ritual. I removed all my old dresses and shoes from my closet, then bagged them up for my cousins. I felt so good about doing something ahead of schedule that I went to find my mother to tell her what I had done. After telling her that I had made room for my new clothes, like we did around this time every year, mommy told me to put everything back in the closet because we were not going shopping that year. I was devastated. The air I had been breathing for basically my entire life was different now. I remember thinking, "I actually have to wear my clothes from last year?" I did not understand what was going on. Mommy had not been working but up until the back-to-school shopping incident, we lived our normal life.

In the present moment, it is hard for me to articulate the pain I felt at twelve years old. Perhaps it is hard for my thirty-one year old self to fully conjure up the feelings of my twelve year old self because I have a different worldview now. I understand what was happening in my household now, but at the age of twelve I felt shocked. Like the life I knew was over, and for all intensive purposes it was. Shortly after the school shopping incident, life in my household changed dramatically. We had much less meat to eat, the deep freezers were no longer in use, there was an increased tension around the house whenever the subject of money was broached and on top of all that, mommy was frequently not feeling well. Although we were by no means poor (by my thirty-one year old definition), my twelve year old mind and heart saw it that way. We went from *having* to *not having*. From being able to give to others freely, to having to say no; from Porterhouse and T-Bone steaks, to no beef at all. When my mother declared bankruptcy, our life changed forever. The atmosphere that my mother created had crumbled and the

air in my house was now filled with worry, lack of understanding, and disappointment. To this day, I cringe at how my twelve year old self reacted to my mother's financial problems. Yet, I had no understanding of what was really going on. My outlook had been created through the lens of having and having plenty. I was only familiar with not having and "having just enough" through my interactions with my extended family. That was their narrative, not mine. It took me at least a year to fully adjust to the new air I had to breathe in my household. The air of bankruptcy, worrying about possibly losing our house, and transitioning to needing to work outside my home in order to help out. To this day I have no idea as to everything my mother had to do in order to keep our home, but I know it was stressful and perhaps exacerbated the illness she was diagnosed with six years later.

My passion around social class and bringing it into the mainstream of higher education dialogues is truly rooted in my own story. I know what it is like to descend and ascend social class statuses. I understand the difficulty in talking about an issue or concept that is truly the air that we each breathe on a daily basis. I have been alienated from both sides (the have's and the have-nots) because I did not quite fit in with either. The social class narratives I share in this chapter further illuminate my experiences of being an insider on the outside. I have floated between classes, made conscious choices not to disclose some of my experiences in order to fit in with certain social classes, and have engaged in very intense conversations around social class that left me feeling guilty and my narrative dismissed. For years I suffered in silence through issues of social class belonging and isolation. I write about social class to liberate my story and the stories of

others around this subject. I am engaged in this phenomenon in an effort to understand what has been and continues to be such a taboo subject in the US and higher education. In the next section I share with you, the reader, a few examples of the literature that I have encountered regarding social class and the thoughts each piece raised in me as a higher education administrator amid my own social class narrative.

SOCIAL CLASS IN THE HEADLINES

Every writer that I know has at least one subject niche, an area of study that they focus on for the better part of their career. In my opinion, a niche is different from being interested in various subjects. A niche is that which excites or calls the writer to write more, to expand on their thinking, and to pull in the thinking of others. Social class is my niche. I can be in the grocery store and have a thought about social class and my next attempt to tease out the subject. I want my writing to be for the masses, for the non-Ph.D. crowd; therefore I look for social class awareness and identification in everyday life, especially everyday life inside of the academy.

Recently I was invited to lead a discussion on social class with the Department of Student Activities at a major land grant university. I was introduced as an “expert” on the subject of social class. I immediately and graciously disassociated myself with the title of “expert” while sharing my passion around the subject and why it is important to talk about it in higher education. I then zoned in on its importance within the field of student affairs, the field that all of the professionals in this department belong. I was asked the question, “Why is social class your subject of interest?” I answered this question by revealing my own social class upbringing and the challenges I have faced during my

social class shifts before and during my experiences in higher education. Then I went to the headlines and the literature that have fuel my fire about this subject. The following subsections are examples of the headlines around social class that have caught my eye and fuel my passion for this subject.

Jeers Taint High School Ball Game

South Burlington student fans could face a scolding for chanting 'welfare, welfare,' and 'food stamps, food stamps' at Burlington fans during a packed varsity boys basketball game.⁸⁰

In the state of Vermont, Burlington and South Burlington were formally one city. Burlington is considered the city and South Burlington is considered the suburbs. Many of the wealthiest Vermont residents reside in South Burlington on Spear Street. Spear Street is lined by some of the largest and most expensive homes in Vermont. The suburban housing developments and other amenities associated with suburban living (e.g., a park that overlooks Lake Champlain) suggest that South Burlington residents are more economically wealthy than Burlington residents.

What disturbed me about the basketball game incident was that those same South Burlington students would not have chanted racial, ethnic, or sexual orientation epithets across the gymnasium floor, but social class epithets were not seen as off limits. These high school students, who will most likely be entering our higher education system, knew that what they were chanting was meant to hurt someone's feelings or cause embarrassment, yet they still did it. Their awareness seemed to be heightened enough to wound but not heightened enough to see their chants as another form of oppressive, alienating speech. Yelling 'welfare and food stamps' was funny, maybe even

seen as clever, although it wounded and embarrassed many people in that gym, both the *haves* and the *have-nots*.

Talking about Social Class on Campus

*First-generation students and millennial students on campus present class issues. Student involvement and student leadership are class issues. Yet access, success, students involvement, and leadership are not discussed as they relate to class issues.*⁸¹

As you may have guessed, I agree fully with the preceding statement by Will Barratt. I discussed this article during the social class conversation I recently facilitated with a Department of Student Activities and it struck a cord with each of them. One student activities professional stated that she had facilitated or participated in a student leadership retreat for six out of the eight weekends of the Spring semester, and each time she could not help but think of the students who could not attend because of their work responsibilities. “Student involvement and student leadership *are* class issues” someone in the group repeated with conviction.

The students who partake in leadership experiences and are active on our campuses have the time and resources to do so, especially those student leadership positions that do not have any monetary compensation attached to them. As a student affairs administrator, I know that when students become involved in their campus communities, they are more likely to succeed.⁸² But what about those students who are unable to be involved in the campus community because they have off-campus jobs, or need to spend all of their non-class time catching up academically in order to stay in school or have such a heightened fear of failure that they would not dare participate in anything that could by chance take their focus away from school.

As a residential life professional, I always thought about what happens when the haves and the have-nots are suddenly in the same room together? What would have happened if those South Burlington High School students were not reprimanded, then they end up in a UVM residence hall room with a Burlington High School student. In his own way Barratt speaks to social class as a mentalite; he says that class is capital, identity, culture, and an experience. And I could not agree more.

Class Struggles

*We working-class kids arrive at college with a repertoire of tried and true success strategies. Unfortunately they are often double-edged. They get us far, but only so far; they get through, but not beyond. Some of us even know that our favorite strategies can be our worst enemy, but we cling to them, for they have helped us get this far, and the journey is not over yet.*⁸³

In this brief article Alves exposed his own social class struggles and how he coped with being a “scholarship kid” at an Ivy League university in the US. Alves touched upon the cultural implications of his college departure, the divide he felt among his extended family based on his decision to attend college away from home, and the looming pressures of coming from working-class roots attending an elite university. When I read this article, the quotation above struck me. It also began my thinking around the concept of “values capital” (introduced in chapter four). Alves spoke to the favorite strategies of the working-class also being their worst enemy in higher education; I imagine those strategies to be similar to the values I spoke of in chapter four, or containing aspects of the personal narrative vignettes I shared in chapter one.

From an administrator’s perspective, I was saddened by Alves’ disclosure that he never took risks at his alma mater. As a higher education administrator himself, he now

sees that part of the educational journey is about risk. However as a “scholarship kid” at an Ivy League institution, he felt he was in no position to take any risks because risks could lead to failure and he had no room to fail. “When you have a lot to prove and no cushion, you tend to sidestep risk...I couldn’t risk failure—I had to vindicate my parents’ faith in me....”⁸⁴ These are the words of so many of our no-collar, blue-collar, and working-class students who matriculate into higher education. They walk a tightrope with no perceived safety net underneath them. I, like Julio Alves, vow to be that safety net while teaching students how to walk the tightrope of higher education with a reduced fear of falling (failure).

Working-Class Students Feel the Pinch

*[The] longstanding aid formula can make it seem that have-nots have more money for college than they really do.*⁸⁵

This article discussed an aspect of financial aid that many higher education administrators, me included, have known and perhaps personally experienced for years. The calculation of the expected family contribution (EFC) is hardly ever realistic for any family that is not in an extremely high income bracket. EFC seems to penalize families that work and actually make ends meet. In my opinion, this article speaks to the outdated formula by which financial aid is determined. The phenomenon this article brought to my attention was how our students are taking care of EFC when their family cannot contribute. The article also exposed the fact that four-year colleges are becoming more and more out of reach for our students who come from family incomes of less than \$50,000. Anyone who has yet to see student access to higher education as a class issue should read this article.

The recent surge of social class articles in higher education has been exciting for me, especially when the narratives of students, faculty, and staff around social class are shared. Every time I read an article about the lack of attention social class identity receives on the college campuses or a writer delves into the more holistic aspects of how social class and mentalite affect our students, staff, and faculty, I am renewed in my scholarship, continued understanding, and writing about issues of social class and higher education.

In recent years, my experiences as an instructor and a leader for diversity trainings in my former department led me to do more thinking about social class as an identity we have yet to fully explore with our students on the college campus. My teaching, administrative responsibilities, and personal thoughts around social class, resulted in the creation of five social class typologies. The next section of this chapter introduces you, the reader, to five social class typologies I published in previous writings. Through the use of these typologies I will explore my social class narrative as a participant in higher education.

SOCIAL CLASS IDENTITY ON CAMPUS

The microdesignations of social class that I have encountered while exploring the literature include lower-class, blue-collar, white-collar, middle class, professional-class, and owning-class, to name a few. Yet I have also found understated stratifications within each of these classes. What is inherent in most of the class microdesignations I have come across in the literature is that there is an economic component attached to each of them. The realm of socioeconomic status seems to be the comfort zone for many of us

when it comes to issues of social class. After all, a person can just check a box that lists their income in comparison to the incomes of others, and *voila* they have a social class status.

It is much more difficult to talk about social class via qualitative measures such as narratives, phenomena, and experiences. Through the typologies I created, I attempted to look at the social class struggles of students I had encountered through a lens that had little to do with economic status and much more to do with the array of life experiences our students encounter in their higher education journeys. My intention in creating these categories was not to box in our students, rather to broaden their perspectives, and the perspectives of administrators like me, on social class identify in higher education. In each subsection that follows, I will start with a descriptive quote from one of my previous writings then delve into my personal narrative related to the represented category.

Embarrassed Students

[These] students believe that their social class background is a cause for them to feel ashamed or guilty, and they are often silent when they are in the minority (regardless of their social class background). Their silence is negatively encouraged or reinforced by the stereotypes that swirl around them regarding people from their neighborhood, type of upbringing, or financial status. These students do not want anyone to know what their social class narrative entails, and some go to great lengths to hide it.⁸⁶

As I expressed earlier in this chapter, I grew up with a small cloud of guilt regarding my social class upbringing. The times I remember identifying with the embarrassed student motif were prior to entering higher education. My embarrassment swelled each time I interacted with my cousins, especially if we were at my house. Although I had no control over the furniture in our room (my sister and I shared a room), or the various outings my mother took us on, I still felt guilty and embarrassed. I remember attempting to blend in

with my cousins, by over-asserting the “normal” Saturday activities that I engaged in. When we discussed our weekend activities, I talked about riding my bicycle or playing outside. Rarely did I disclose that these activities occurred after going to the museum or attending dance class.

No one ever told me to be embarrassed and as I reflect back on those times, I believe it was my desire to fit in with the majority of my family that created a level of angst within me. I did not want to be different, even though being different afforded me experiences like musicals, museums, dance classes, and other activities deemed as cultured. As a youth, the stereotype that negatively reinforced my silence was being called “white-washed” or being told that I “talked like a white girl.” I recall a conversation with my cousin KeKe about an exciting trip that I had taken to the free African-American Museum in Los Angeles; KeKe’s response to me was “I do not like museums, they are boring. Only White people enjoy museums.” I was intentional in telling KeKe the museum had a free admission policy in hopes that she would be interested in going with us sometime and not concerned about any financial burdens, but my plan backfired when KeKe dismissed my activity as a “white girl thing.” One of the worse insults in the Black community, particularly in my family, is to be called “white-washed.” The term is rooted in an expression of someone being perceived as out of touch with their Black culture. I learned to keep my “white-washed” activities to myself and focused on sharing the more acceptable aspects of my life with my cousins.

Upon entering higher education, my embarrassment virtually disappeared for a few key reasons. By the time I arrived at UCSB, the musicals, plays, and museum outings

had long stopped (since my mother was financially struggling and I worked more) and “sounding white” was no longer an insult, it was the status quo. I no longer “sounded white,” I sounded like everyone else in college; I was familiar with and used proper English and I assert my intelligence. However, I was also stuck between two worlds of social class. I was a second-generation student which carried a lot of expectations and stereotypes (as discussed in chapters three and four), yet my financial status and my outlook at UCSB fit better among my first-generation peers.

Straddler Students

These students cope with feelings of abandoning the social class they were raised in, awkwardness in navigating their new social class circle, or proving themselves to their peers in order to be accepted in a social class circle that remains foreign to them.⁸⁷

The Black community at UCSB was very small and as a result everyone literally knew everyone else. Therefore we all knew who identified as a continuing-generation student and who identified as a first-generation student. Due to my mother’s alumnus status, I of course was identified as a second-generation student. The stereotypes about second-generation students were definitely silencing for me. I cringed each time someone asked me what my mother did for a living. At the time I entered UCSB, mommy was not working. There were a few times when I told people that my mother was a junior high school math teacher on leave. This answer seemed to placate people and keep my second-generation narrative in tact. Mommy was a junior high school math teacher but she was not on leave, she had permanently left her teaching position. I desperately wanted her to be on leave and to return to her teaching post because educators garnered respect. Being a

teacher was a fitting occupation for a college graduate and being the daughter of a teacher fit well amid the second-generation college student narrative.

Unlike my extended family, the majority of my college peers were second-generation students, and I wanted to fit in with the majority. Especially now that I was in an environment which placed value on the experiences my cousins categorized as “white-girl stuff” and “white-washed.” However I did not fit in with the second-generation students. They still attended plays, musicals, and movies, they were unconcerned about securing employment while in college, going home almost every weekend was normal, and they just seemed to possess an outlook around school filled with “happy-go-lucky” thoughts. I, on the other hand, was unable to partake in the aforementioned activities or experiences. Had I attended college during what seemed to be mommy’s financial halcyon days (prior to eighth grade) perhaps I would have, but I attended college during the *post-bankruptcy/make-a-way-out-of-no-way* days.

Tired of feeling inadequate and ashamed, I began to gravitate towards the first-generation students. Many of my first-generation peers had been exposed to art, music, and other cultured experiences, however the exposure was not typically because of a parent’s guidance. Their exposure to these experiences was most often rooted in school field-trips or outings with groups such as the Upward Bound program. In my opinion there is a big difference between being exposed to certain activities and experiencing a childhood accompanied by certain activities. The former consists of one-time events or experiences, ad-hoc orientations to a world outside of one’s own. The latter is more so a calculated attempt to create the foundation of one’s world to include certain experiences

deemed *cultured*. My first-generation peers' exposure to activities such as those I listed above was dramatically different from my exposure of those same experiences. The difference between us was primarily rooted in our worldviews. I saw musicals, plays, and the museum as *a part* of my worldview, where as many of my first-generation peers saw those same activities *apart* from their worldview.

With my first-generation peers I omitted the dance lessons and the Museum of Science and Industry summer courses. I learned quickly that students who came from my experiences were stereotyped as snobs, elitist, or buppies (Black yuppies). I did my best to disassociate myself from any of those negative stereotypes. I focused on what seemed to be more acceptable experiences and activities of my pre-college life, and spoke in great detail about my current collegiate experiences of working long hours, supporting myself in college, not going home much (due to school and financial obligations), and struggling. I capitalized on the stereotypes associated with first-generation students (little money, working lots of hours, and struggling), and I avoided answering questions that might unmask me as having been a buppy. I lived in social class disguise for at least one perhaps even two, years of my collegiate experience. The class stereotypes that swirled around my college community about first-generation and second-generation students silently cast me into the shadows. Not quite an insider and not quite an outsider. I was in limbo.

Comfortable Students

*Regardless of what their narrative entails, these students make no apologies for what was or was not available to them on the basis of their social class standing. [They] have very little, if any, angst regarding their social class narratives.*⁸⁸

Straddling or walking the fence is tiring. Even the most expert tightrope walkers never describe their experiences as easy-going and comfortable. On the contrary, each tightrope feat is described as a mixture of concentration, emotion, and an attempt to not look down. That is how I felt for the first few years of my undergraduate career. I was so focused on walking the fence between two social classes, not quite belonging in one or the other, and I developed an emotional response—the fear of falling. I felt that neither side had a safety net for me; if I fell off the fence, I would surely fall into further limbo. Then as I moved into my third year at UCSB, the light of authenticity began to burn inside of me. Interestingly enough, my authenticity was born out of my declared sexual orientation. I did not fit into the heterosexual category, nor was I choosing my make myself fit anymore. Along with my sexual orientation freedom, I developed a social class freedom as well.

I no longer tried to fit into these seemingly whimsical aspects of class floating around the UCSB campus; I focused on being me and authoring my own life. I hung out with the *haves* and the *have-nots*, I was a have and a have-not. I no longer hid one side from the other. If one of my affluent friends requested my presence at a dinner or some other activity that I knew I could not afford, I simply stated that I did not have the money for those things. The statement had very little, if any, angst attached to it at all. When my lower-income friends would negatively stereotype experiences such as museums and

piano lessons, I would gently share my social class narrative and say something like “not everybody’s silver spoon is silver all the way through.”

I stopped looking at my life as a weird turn of events that left me without a social class home. Instead I began to see my experiences as opportunities for me to be a part of multiple worlds and have a worldview that few ever possess. I accepted my mixed social class narrative, and I developed a sense of comfort with who I was and who I was not. There is one undergraduate experience that sticks out in my mind as I capture myself as a *comfortable student*. I was participating in a group interview process for undergraduate resident assistants and the topic of college sororities was broached by my group. Amy, a young woman in my interview group, made the declaration that “all sorority girls do is party, drink, and go on vacations. I would never advise my residents to join a sorority.” The rest of the group nodded in agreement and a few group members started sharing their stories of sorority members that fit the stereotype Amy had just stated. For background information, sorority and fraternity membership is viewed as elitist and full of social class issues at most colleges and universities.

I was faced with a dilemma: would I allow Amy’s dismissal and stereotype of sorority members trigger me to blend in with the majority by agreeing with her (hence stepping back into social class limbo), or would I expose my own sorority affiliation and contradict the stereotype that everyone in the group, except me, agreed with. DeMethra the *straddler* would have selected the former course of action in an effort to be accepted because the non-verbal cues of this group were anti-sorority (which is a class issue on the UCSB campus). However the *comfortable* DeMethra selected the latter action steps. I

expressed my disagreement with Amy's opinion. I told the group that I was in a sorority, and that I did not espouse any of the drinking, partying, or random vacationing that seemed to be associated with sorority members. Initially my group was taken aback by my response because earlier in the group interview process we had to share other aspects of our collegiate experience, and my answers to the previous prompts did not reveal anything about me that would be stereotyped as a sorority girl. In previous prompted discussion with my group I talked about how much I worked at UCSB, that I enjoyed community service when time permitted, and that my summer courses were based around my custodial and painters work schedule.

Nothing about what I had previously shared would have indicated that I was a sorority member. This is one of the tricky parts about social class and perhaps why it is such a taboo subject. One can never fully tell who is from what class background, and in my case as soon as someone believes that they pegged me as one certain social class, I must correct or expand their thoughts of me to include attributes of another social class. In Amy's worldview "sorority girls" partied, drank, and went on random vacations all the time. Her view of the sorority female was limited to those stereotypes that she may have encountered on the news, the *Girls Gone Wild* video commercials, or various college movies like *Animal House* and *Legally Blonde*. However the formation of her worldview occurred, it did not include a sorority woman like me.

I believe that as a comfortable student I unintentionally educated a lot of my peers and even a few administrators and faculty about class assumptions. It took a lot of guts though and at times my feelings were left pretty raw from other's ignorance or narrow

view of the world. As an administrator at UVM, I have spoken with students of color who have been assumed to have attended an inner-city high school in the Bronx, only to have to correct a peer or a faculty member in regards to their affluent upstate New York lifestyle. Likewise I have heard from white students who have been typecast as wealthy or from a family with expendable income, then they were faced with the coming-out process of correcting peers, administrators, or faculty members. The injuries of social class go beyond those in low-income families; the hidden injuries of class have an effect on all of us, in a myriad of forms and fashions. Comfortable students escape those wounds by making no apologies, nor expecting any sympathy, for their upbringings. Many of them use their comfort to become social class chameleons.

Multi-class Lingual Students

These students function well in multiple social class circles. Their mentalite has helped them to navigate differing social class circles with ease. Their familiarity with a wide range of experiences, coupled with their ability to access those different experiences, helps these students to navigate their way through various social class circles.⁸⁹

There is a television show I watch titled *From G's to Gents*^x, which is a reality show based upon transforming young men, who view themselves and gangsters or goons (G's), into gentlemen with the skills and knowledge to move forward in life in a positive direction. All of the G's are self proclaimed ex-convicts, drug dealers, or hustlers of some kind from inner-cities or impoverished towns. Not only does this show provide me with my weekly dose of zoning out in front of the TV, it is also a wonderful example of providing individuals with opportunities to gain social and cultural capital.

^x *From G's to Gents* is produced by Jamie Foxx and airs on the VH-1 Channel.

The G's have a lesson each week that they must learn, then put into practice in order to win a challenge and have the opportunity to continue forward in their quest to be a gentleman. Each week I watch in anticipation of the new lesson. In a recent episode the lesson number three was: a gentleman should be able to communicate properly and effectively in all situations. The instructor for this lesson made the following statement, "A true gentleman can talk with his homeboys in the hood and his colleagues in the boardroom." Through my lens this is what being a multiclass student is about—being able to communicate with everyone effectively and without alienation. As the old saying goes, there is a time and a place for everything and with this in mind multiclass students have so much information in their social class "toolbox" that regardless of the time or the place, they know what to say, how to act, and have countless experiences to pull from that allow them to be at home in numerous social class settings.

Although I definitely identified with the embarrassed, straddler, and comfortable student motifs, I believe that I have always been a *multi-class lingual student* on one level or another during my undergraduate experience. As revealed earlier in this dissertation, most of the jobs I held during my undergraduate years were considered blue-collar positions. I painted apartments and cleaned residence halls. I probably would have mowed lawns but I did not have a driver's license which was needed in order to use the large tractor lawn mowers. Needless to say, my college education meant nothing when I needed to have conversations with my co-workers about everyday life situations. When I was vacuuming and changing bed sheets until the early morning hours with Vickie, my supervisor, we talked about family and dream vacations. Then after I got a few hours of

sleep and went to my class, I talked with peers about Marxism, oppression, and Paulo Friere. I was able to change my communication topics and style to fit the various situations I found myself in. I spoke people's languages, which is a skill that I find quite useful in higher education today.

As a summer program director during my fifth year at UCSB, I worked with a group of 8th grade students from a low-income community in the area. These young students were very excited about being around college students, and they always asked us what seemed like a million questions pertaining to college life. Of course, most of their questions stemmed from the outrageous array of college life movies such as *Animal House*, *Road Trip*, and *The Skulls*; nevertheless we answered their questions and attempted to squelch any stereotypes and misconceptions about college. One day, some of the students were listening to the radio and a popular rap song began to play; I, a music connoisseur of most genres immediately started singing the words along with the radio. The 8th graders looked at me with utter shock, and then started singing along with me. After the song ended they were eager to know how I knew that song. I asked them "Why wouldn't I know that song?" One of them spoke up and said "Because you are an adult in college learning all this college stuff and running this program and you listen to classical music."

My reply consisted of sharing my class narrative, sharing where I grew up, and that in my neighborhood this was the music that most people listened to, yet in my household we listened to everything, especially country music. Thus I was also exposed to other musical interests outside of what my community mainly listened to. In something

as simple as music, these students began to understand that the boxes placed around them were not the boxes they had to exist in forever. Unlike many of them, my box was much larger growing up and it became even larger through hardship and struggle, but it was still a box that I fought to climb out of and not become trapped in.

Multi-class lingual students do not feel trapped; they feel free to come and go through various social classes as they please. They are masters at picking up social cues and learn to speak various class languages quickly. Recently, I had to tap my multiclass lingual self to navigate my existence in a college executive leadership office. I watched, and then mimicked, the mannerisms of others in the office in an effort to learn how to move within the collegiate class of executive leadership. For example, I learned to refer to the college president by first name only with individuals whom I know he has reoccurring contact with, otherwise referring to him as “the President.” Over the course of seven months I have adapted to the executive leadership office, and all the politics that come from working beyond those doors. I admit, I am one way with the President and the Provost, another way with the Vice-Presidents and Deans, a different way with my students, and yet another way with my friends. Each of these four different interactions requires me to communicate effectively and properly, yet in each relationship I am speaking a different social class language. As a multilingual class student and administrator, I rarely consider myself to be fickle or phony. Instead I am proud of my ability to adapt well to the social class environments I encounter.

Still the Elephant in the Room

Although the experiences shared in the preceding subsections are primarily extracted from my pre-college and undergraduate journey, I still, as times, flutter in and out of one or more of these categories as a graduate student and an administrator in higher education. I have been embarrassed to say that as a child I felt like my mother always ate the good steak and we ate the scrap steak. I did not know that a T-bone steak was also a good steak. It had a bone in it and moms' steak was always boneless. It was not until I was thirty years old that someone told me that a T-Bone steak is "the third best steak there is." I immediately acknowledged my meat ignorance and my entire porterhouse and T-bone steak narrative was revised from that day forth. However the person I expressed my "scrap steak" comment to has never let me live it down in my eyes. She still brings it up when I try to express any time of struggle I had in my family life. It is obvious to me that she has some social class wounds, and in my ignorance I may have opened one up. That is one of the messy nuances about class; you can wound someone and have no idea that you are doing it. Perhaps that is why it remains a taboo subject.

In the current tough economic times we are facing in the US, I wonder how many middle-class families have fallen below the poverty line. I question how those children will cope with going from having so much to have little or nothing at all. When I meet those students, hopefully on a college campus, I will wonder if they are straddling or embarrassed. Will they be comfortable or multiclass lingual? I will fully acknowledge that I know what it is like to go from T-bone to no-bone and porterhouse to no house in

an effort to aid these students in being comfortable while existing with multiple class narratives.

The headlines, both inside and outside of higher education, suggest that social class has yet to fully make its way out of the shadows and into the light of mainstream conversation. I believe social class is still the “elephant in the room” of higher education and our society at large. Months ago, a doctoral student approached me to express her agreement with what I had shared with her class around my view of social class. She shared her initial desires to write a dissertation on social class, and her subsequent decision to pursue another topic because, in her words, “social class is *so* big.” While I understood her comment about the seemingly gargantuan size of social class discourse, I was disappointed because one way to encourage more people to talk about social class in higher education is to continue writing about it.

As someone who had studied social class as well as other areas of identity, I know it is no easy feat to explore this complex subject. Nor is it an easy task to tease social class identity out from other identities such as race, religion, sexual orientation, or politics. I understand and agree with the assertions made by numerous scholars on the intersections of class and other identities on our college campuses. However I also believe social class to be an identity deserving of its own unique moment in the sun of collegiate conversations and understanding. This belief is fueled by the numerous conversations I have facilitated with seemingly homogenous office groups, who share the same race, religion, sexual orientation, and political ideologies, yet still breathe stifling air full of misunderstanding, lack of trust, guilt, and shame around social class.

In these groups, social class is the elephant in the room, and the possibility of having a discussion around social class conjures up fear among the group. Dissolving this fear among office colleagues, then perhaps campus colleagues, is the next step of awareness and discussion of social class identity in higher education. I fully acknowledge the need to encourage social class conversations with our students; however, is it appropriate to expect campus administrators to lead our students in social class conversations when they have a hard time talking with one another about the subject? Simply stated, how can we expect our students to engage in conversations that we (faculty, staff, and administrators) avoid out of fear. Mahatma Gandhi said it best, “Be the change you wish to see in the world” and in the case of social class conversations on the college campus, we as administrators, faculty, and staff must engage in the work we so desire of our students. So, where do we start? How do we have these conversations with colleagues? Why is it so difficult to talk with one another as professional peers about social class? The final chapter of this dissertation will attempt to provide answers to the preceding questions, starting with a real-life Department of Student Activities scenario at a public land-grant university.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

In this chapter I present an underlining summary of what I have written thus far in this dissertation. I begin with the real-life scenario of the Department of Students Activities to address the lingering questions I posed at the end of chapter five. Then I delve into the universalizable implications of this dissertation for student affairs and higher education professionals, speaking particularly to the areas of assisting insider/outsider students (like me) and the possible directions social class scholarship/practice in student affairs and academy at large. Following the section on universalizable implications, I share a bit more of my own personal journey in regards to meeting expectations without proper preparation and my bouts with insecurity in the academy, speaking directly to my development of authenticity and ambition. I will end this chapter by answering the following question asked of me by one of my committee members: “DeMethra, what will you do with this piece of writing after it is finished? How, if at all, will you expand upon it or use it as a stepping stone for the future?”

LINGERING QUESTIONS ABOUT SOCIAL CLASS

I was contacted by a member of the Department of Student Activities (DSA) to facilitate a conversation about social class. I met with Larry, a professional staff member in the department, to discuss what his hopes were for the session and what, if any, information the group would be exposed to prior to my arrival. DSA staff members had participated in two extensive workshops with nationally recognized social class facilitators and seemed to be well versed in the definition of classism. Larry requested that I “bring the group to a place where we feel comfortable talking about this stuff with each other, not

just our students.” Larry continued to say, “There has been a lot of fear expressed about this subject and not wanting to unknowingly offend someone or hurt feelings, our fear enables our silence around social class discussions.” Larry’s comment pertaining to the enabling nature of fear was a powerful statement, and it served as the basis of my two-hour session with his department. The following questions guided the conversations I facilitated with the DSA staff:

1. What are our fears around engaging in conversations about social class in student affairs?
2. Why is there a tendency to accept certain social classes over others in our field? How are attitudes and assumptions towards certain social classes created and/or accepted in our field?
3. What are the implications of social class for us as individuals and practitioners?

I asked the first question, then waited about three minutes before anyone spoke. This long pause was not surprising considering that Larry already told me the group had a lot of fear around the subject. Thus while asking them to articulate that fear was critical to my work with them, I knew it would be hard to get the conversation going. True to form, the initial responses were directed towards fears about interactions with students around social class. The responses included: making false assumptions about a student based on their accessories (e.g., ipod, computer, and cell phone); unintentionally offending a student; not wanting to burn bridges with students who are financially struggling but

striving to keep up with the affluent students; and being viewed as a hypocrite. DSA staff members shared their student encounters around social class and how hard it is to decipher social class status when “everyone looks so similar,” as one staff member stated. When I asked her to describe the similarities she noticed, her description included gadgets, clothing, and other visual aids that enabled her to believe a student had money. As soon as she expressed this point of view, another staff members commented that social class is more than money. Everyone in the group agreed with that statement.

“I agree that social class is more than money, but what else is it?” I asked the group. Again silence filled the room until Larry said, “It is who you are and why you are who you are.” Larry’s comment presented the perfect opportunity for me to introduce the concept of *mentalite*, which the group took to immediately. Then there was a breakthrough moment: Jill disclosed that the definition Larry shared is the exact reason it is so hard for her to talk about social class. “Social class *is* who you are and why you are who you are, and I do not want to offend a student’s very existence by misspeaking about it.” Heads nodded with agreement. With Jill’s comment as a catalyst I asked the group, “Are the same fears you shared regarding conversations with students the same fears you have regarding conversations with each other?” A resounded “Yes!” filled the room followed by a few, “It is even harder to talk with my colleagues about this stuff.” What I heard next was amazing, sad, and indicative of so many peoples’ fears around social class conversations.

“The very nature of our office is classist,” said Molly. “We have student leaders who go on weekend retreats; and we have student community service volunteers who can

afford not to work during academic breaks so they can go help the less fortunate.” Molly pointed out the very same phenomenon that Will Barratt discussed in his article *Talking about Social Class on Campus*, being a student leader and participating in student activities is a class issue. By the end of our first hour together the group had found their bite size way of talking about social class. The group’s focus switched from their students to themselves, and they began to address the social class dynamics present in their office. The dynamics exposed included the expectations that some staff members had to be at work by 8am while others were able to leisurely come in around 10am; the level of flexibility given to certain professionals in the office while others felt restricted; the lack of senior-level leadership engagement around this particular conversation; and the ever present dynamic of financial strain for some staff members while others enjoyed financial freedom.

At the start of the second hour, Tammy said, “I am in a lot of debt, and while I enjoy the snacks we have at our staff meetings and birthday celebrations, I cannot always afford them. I always hope that my designated snack date is around payday so I know I will have the money.” I looked around the room after this disclosure was expressed. The highest earners in the department put their heads down, while the lower earners in the department nodded with understanding eyes. I witnessed what happens in many other places when social class is talked about—someone feels bad and someone feels bad. There are no winners or losers, no victims or villains, everyone is able to feel good or feel bad, and in most cases everyone just ends up feeling bad when issues of social class get swept under the rug. Jerry, a high-income earner in the group spoke up and

acknowledged that Tammy's comment is the very reason she feels guilty and does not engage in these conversations. Jerry, as a senior-level leader in the department, knows exactly how much money Tammy makes and how much money everyone else makes too. Although salary information is available to the public, Jerry knows because she hired Tammy and almost everyone else in the office. Jerry's angst around social class is rooted in the power she is perceived to have as a department leader and the fact that everyone knows she is a top salary earner.

The most personal disclosure of the session was made by Tony, the director of fraternity/sorority affairs. I mention Tony's role in the office because he works with one of, if not the most, privileged and affluent class group on this campus. He works with students who are members of various fraternities and sororities with wealth at their fingertips and a historical reputation in higher education of being wealthy, elitist and separatist. Although not every sorority or fraternity member Tony works with is affluent, the majority of them are. Earlier during the session Tony spoke about attempting to talk to students who were incurring debt in order to "keep up with the Jones."^{xi} He would employ those students to see the damage they were doing to themselves by chasing a lifestyle or experiences that were out of their financial reach. Tony was very adamant about not burning bridges with these types of students, yet being unable to sit in silence as many of them spent their loan checks on the latest cell phone only to not be able to

^{xi} "Keeping up with the Jones" is a catchphrase used by many people in the US. It indicates a person's desires to keep up with the affluent individuals in their community and society at large. On the college campus many of our students try to "keep up with the Jones" by purchasing status symbols such as ipods, expensive electronics, Ugg boots, and Lands' End winter coats.

afford food later in the semester. Unfortunately, Tony sees his fair share of *Embarrassed* and *Straddler* students in his line of work.

With about fifteen minutes remaining Tony shared the inner turmoil he feels as the administrative representative of such a stereotypically affluent group. He disclosed the knot in his stomach when he reads the articles about the “rich sorority brats” or when he hears a colleague categorize his student population as out of touch or elitist. Then Tony blurted out the following, “. . .and it is bad enough that I get it from the world outside of our office but I get it from inside of our office too. I get the looks of pity that I work with such a snobbish privileged bunch of students.” Tony went on to express that he never felt safe to disclose to the group that the inner turmoil he feels while working with this student population stems from his own social class background. Tony shared that he knew the life of a single-parent home and welfare all too well. He disclosed that he knew exactly how food stamps worked because his family used them. As the tears streamed down Tony’s cheeks, others began to tear up, and the elephant in the room was finally visible.

In the previous section I posed the following questions: Where do we start in our conversations around social class? How do we have these social class conversations with colleagues? Why is it so difficult to talk with one another as professional peers about social class? The concluding narrative in this chapter involving the Department of Student Activities speaks to each of these questions.

Where do we start in our conversations around social class?

For the DSA staff, they started by desiring to know more about social class. Then they went about acquiring that knowledge through planned training sessions with national leaders. They also recognized the need to have more personal and less political discussions around this topic, yet they never seemed to get there on their own. Larry, who was responsible for the social class sessions, contacted me because I have expressed a sound belief in the import understanding of identity topics as they pertain to our individual selves before we move forward in engaging our students in these topics. DSA staff started where they felt comfortable, by looking at their interactions with students. Then I gently pushed them to turn inward to their own staff. This group felt the fear and engaged in the conversation anyway. The group discussed social class through the lens of opportunities afforded to certain people based on certain financial situations. They also vowed to continue their conversations around social class when they entered their religious pluralism sessions. I am pleased that everyone in this group of seventeen, including graduate students, office managers, mid-level leaders, and senior level leaders, contributed their voice to this conversation.

How do we have these social class conversations with colleagues?

My suggestion would be to invite one person who is not a member of the group to guide the conversations. This worked well for the DSA staff because it enabled everyone to be fully present in the conversation, which is hard to do when you are a participant and a presenter. I also suggest starting small and growing tall with these types of conversations. As a child I learned new concepts with the adage, “inch by inch is a cinch, yard by yard

makes it hard” present in my mind. As a conversational guide I assisted the group with sticking to the “inches” (their department, their group, students they had contact with) and I reminded them to steer clear of the “yards” (e.g., the entire Division of Student Life, the university community, and the world).

Why is it so difficult to talk with one another as professional peers about social class?

Fear. Inner turmoil. Hurt. Guilt. These were the most used words of the two-hours I spent with the DSA group. They are an office that believes in, encourages, and manages the student leadership activities of the campus community. However, many of the staff members strongly believe in the links between student leadership, community service and social class. Their office promotes activities that they know some students cannot participate in due to financial obligations, time constraints, or educational priorities (all of these are class issues). Members of the group felt guilty for growing up as a *have* and not understanding the experiences of a *have-not*. Another member felt torn in his role of representing an affluent group of students while still dissecting his own social class narrative.

As the session went into its final minutes, Larry shared a revealing story of his own and the following self-observation: “It is easier for me to be the oppressed than it is to be the oppressor.” As professionals within higher education, we are a part of a system with its own narrative around social class, and many of us agree that the narrative is not one of inclusion but rather one of exclusion. Perhaps it is so hard to talk about social class

with professional peers because we want to turn a blind eye to the ways in which we support or feed a system that promotes hierarchy.

Once again, I ask the questions, where do we start? How do we have these conversations with colleagues? And why is it so difficult to talk with one another as professional peers about social class? Although the answers will vary in content from department to department, campus to campus, perhaps even state to state, the nucleus of these answers will continue to be the same until faculty, staff, and administrators begin their own work, followed by the work to be done with our students to lift the veil social class ignorance, shame, and dare I say tyranny. In the next section I delve into the universalizable implications of this dissertation.

UNIVERSALIZABLES: FROM THE PERSONAL TO THE PROFESSIONAL

What sets SPN apart from personal narrative for narrative sake is the intentional component of drawing larger implications—referred to as universalizability. Universalizable implications must be able to be unearthed and illuminated in SPN writing. Making explicit points of universal implications will indeed aid in readers making “real world” connections to the narratives shared in the SPN. No universalizable implications, no SPN.

The epigraph above is a direct quote from chapter two of this dissertation regarding the essential use of universalizability in SPN writing. Throughout this dissertation I have kept the element of universalizability front and center. In this section I will draw your attention to the larger “real world” (inside and outside of the academy) implications of this dissertation.

You Cannot Judge a Book by Its Cover

The saying “you cannot judge a book by its cover” is used in a variety of settings and is often the lesson learned through life’s experiences. Although I attribute the best motives, it is disheartening that student affairs and higher education professionals, still judge books (our students) by their covers (e.g., parental education, and possession). I know we (student affairs and higher education professionals), are busy, and often stretched thin on our college campuses. When we perceive a student or even a colleague to need less help than another, we place that person towards the bottom, or totally remove them from our long list of those needing assistance. Part of my narrative as an insider/outsider is that I was judged unfairly by my mother’s educational attainment. This unfair judgment, however, unintentional it may have been, created an environment of loneliness and confusion for me.

My book was assumed to be well written because the cover looked nice and had at least one wonderful endorsement (my mother’s college degree). In reality, my book was missing pages, still in its “shitty” first draft, and waiting for proper editing and polishing. I fully believe that judgment, or placing experiences into certain boxes, is a large part of how we function in our daily lives. If we were to mentally dissect every single person, place, or thing we encountered, the chances of us getting out of the bed, performing daily tasks, and working would be slim to none. Unfortunately it seems that the level of judge placed upon our students is amplified when judging our professional peers.

In the academy, we make assumptions about our colleagues everyday that can at any point turn from virtues into vices. I have been on the receiving end of numerous judgments by my colleagues based upon the most arbitrary and uninvestigated assumptions. When we judge, we place our perceived expectations and ability levels or lack of expectations and ability upon other people. This seemingly automatic way of moving in the world has created some environments in universities around the US that make me ashamed. Environments where students of color are placed on the defensive because faculty and administrators automatically assume they are from inner-city high schools and impoverished neighborhoods; secular college campuses where Christian crosses openly hang over administrative building archways and faculty unofficially observe Christian religious holidays yet hold classes and exams on other non-Christian religions holidays; countless campuses where students, like me, get shoved aside based on a leading misconception that second-generation college students are prepared for our college campuses.

My examples could go on and on; however my point is that in an environment such as higher education, the temptation to judge or mislabel our students and colleagues as better prepared or well-adjusted is always going to be present. It will take a concentrated effort to discontinue relying on the covers of our students and colleagues as the way in which we determine how well, or if, their book is written.

Silent but Damaging

Regardless of the environment or the group (e.g., students, staff, faculty, grocery store clerk, or presidential cabinet), issues surrounding social class are insidious. Becky, from

the Department of Student Activities, provided an example of this *silent killer* when she talked about her fear of offending a student based upon her perception of their social class narrative (e.g., cell phone, computer, ipod, and other gadgets). As stated in chapter five, fear is silencing. Therefore as long as we fear the topic of social class, we will always be silent about it and our silence is damaging in numerous ways. An example of that damaging silence was revealed in Tony's narrative within DSA. Yet Tony is not the only higher education professional who suffers in silence around social class issues. Many of our affluent colleagues suffer in silence because their social class narrative is openly devalued among student affairs professionals. Our working-class faculty members are silently alienated from their colleagues by the resounding assumption that faculty members come from high levels of wealth, education, social, and cultural capital.

I have witnessed fifteen university Move-In Days and each year the silent branding of the *haves* and the *have-nots* has become more and more visible. When I was an undergraduate, the *haves* could afford cable in their rooms. As a residential life professional, the *haves* had cell phones and computers (cable was now included with room fees). In the last three years, the *haves* now come to college in large sport utility vehicles (SUVs) with U-Haul mini-trailers attached. From these U-Haul's and SUVs emerge flat screen plasma TVs, expensive audio equipment, and the purchase number for the pre-ordered computer that awaits them at the campus computer depot. Of course, some of our students who come with these items associated with "having" are actually trying to "keep up with the Jones." But at first blush we do not know that; we see what we see and make judgments. Then we cast those students into the bucket of *haves* only to

forget about them when it is time to ask students if they would like to work at the front desk, only to dismiss the idea that these students actually “need” us just as much as the students who literally come with one suitcase and a used bus ticket.

In full disclosure, I have damaged some of my students by silently assuming their social class status by what their cover presented to me. I would bet my entire collection of shot glasses from all around the world that each of us has inflicted a silent but damaging wound on students or colleagues around social class. I would then bet my entire collection of music that each of us has been wounded by a social class insensitive comment made around us or directly to us. I am generally not a betting person, except for the occasional jelly bean during a friendly game of Poker, yet I feel so strongly about the hidden injuries of social class that I would bet two of my most treasured collections.

I implore you, the reader, to think about what other silent but damaging issues swirl around your daily lives, inside and outside of your work environment. Due to the current mortgage crisis, I cannot help but think about the hundreds of US citizens who were employed a year ago and now live in on the streets. Street living in the US has been solidly associated with bad life decisions, drug use, and alcohol abuse. Yet now there is a group of people who are homeless but not ailing from the addictions mentioned above. I would be remiss not to believe that long held views of the homeless population in the US have not affected this new homeless population. How have we damaged people who were unfortunate enough to lose their homes by no fault of their own, via our stereotypes of the homeless? Our fear is damaging, our stereotypes are damaging, our silence is damaging.

As a SPN writer I know that identifying the universal elements of my narratives are key to the methodology. However, I also strive to articulate my own narratives by supporting the scholarship of others so that you, the reader, can develop universalizable ideas for your life. With this in mind, I invite my readers, through lingering questions and inquisitive prompts, to think right along with me in order to create universalizables for themselves and others. I also encourage my readers to remember that in SPN writing *the universe* can consist of one or more persons outside of the author with endless fields, disciplines, and occupations. Therefore universalizable implications have endless boundaries and can cross borders of scholarship, pedagogy, and pedigree.

In the next section, I switch gears. I go from the universalizable to the personal. I summarize the implications of my social class *mentelite* on my own journey through higher education. Within the narratives that follow I look into the universal themes of authenticity and ambition. I must be sure to express that these narratives are not being shared merely for personal narrative sake; on the contrary, I share them with you as a way to bring you up to date in my higher education journey and explore two themes that many people inside and outside of the academy can relate too—authenticity and ambition.

AUTHENTICITY: CREATING THE SELF I CAN LIVE WITH

Ever since I came across the aphorism “Create the kind of self that you will be happy you live with all your life,” by Golda Meir, I have been on a journey. A journey to understand myself and make decisions that were aligned with the self I knew I would be happy with my whole life. This was and still is a process of developing authenticity. Authenticity is

defined as being “true to one’s own personality, spirit, or character.”⁹⁰ What I find most intriguing about this definition is that it makes an assumption that a person actually knows what their true personality, spirit, or character consists of. I like to think of authenticity as the feeling that occurs when my actions and experiences allow me to sleep well at night. Regardless of the outcome, if I can sleep well after an experience or after making a certain decision, I know that I have been true to myself and remained authentic. Although I still falter, each day brings me to a better understanding of myself. Make no mistake that this is hard work, and there are some days that I would rather not face my own demons and issues. On those days I simply exist, I do not live. I navigate my day like an airplane on automatic pilot, and hope that I do not enter into any unexpected weather patterns that may cause me to lose course or crash.

Another aphorism that has shaped my journey in higher education is, “If you always do, what you have always done, you will always be, who you have always been.” I distinctly remember hearing this aphorism for the first time in July 2002 during the opening session of a sorority conference. One of my sorority’s past presidents was speaking about leadership, service, and blazing new trails. Simply put, my soror (sorority sister) encouraged those of us in the audience to try new things, to engage in new activities and to branch out beyond our comfort zones. In my mind, she was asserting that no one can become more, do better, and create change by doing the same things the same way all the time.

When Soror Grays uttered the aphorism above, I was drawn to it because in my opinion it summed up my definition of ambition. According to the Merriam-Webster

Online Dictionary, ambition is defined as “an ardent desire for rank, fame, or power; [a] desire to achieve a particular end.”⁹¹ I agree with this definition and can identify many times in my life where I sought to achieve a certain end (e.g., rank, degrees, awards, and being the first person in my immediate and extended family to have a doctorate). And upon further thinking, I believe the way I would choose to achieve those certain ends is best illustrated in the aphorism stated by Soror Grays.

Throughout my life I have always been an ambitious person, who sought to achieve new heights by engaging in activities or experiences that I felt would further expand my thinking and view of the world. The personal narrative vignettes I share in chapter one are prime examples of my ambition. Each vignette provided you, the reader, with a glimpse into my inner ambition and drive prior to my entrance into higher education. In the subsections that follow, I share with you two narratives that further elucidate my authenticity and ambition during my journey in higher education.

MEETING EXPECTATIONS WITH OUT PROPER PREPARATION

I am compelled to share that I was born to a fourteen-year old mother and a fifteen-year old father. In the womb I was nourished by daily intakes of peanuts, Dr. Pepper soda, and hot chips. My fourteen-year old biological mother ate some healthy foods, but she distinctly remembers her daily intakes of peanuts, caffeine, and chips. I was an earthly accident, and a heavenly plan, as my adopted mother Debrah once told me. Based on the numerous articles I have read in health magazines and information gleaned from episodes of *Oprah*, I was not suppose to make in into this world from a biological perspective. There were many concerns about how I would arrive in this world based on the fact that I

was being housed in Kaye's thirteen-year old womb. Kaye did not receive pre-natal health care, and although she ate some healthy foods, her intake of unhealthy foods was far greater. I arrived totally healthy and beautiful. I met every expectation of a healthy newborn baby without the proper preparation of pre-natal care, a healthy diet, and a more developed womb. I was an ambitious fetus, determined to make it under such dire conditions.

In higher education, I became acutely aware of my shortcomings surrounding navigating the college environment. I thought I was prepared based upon the assumptions I made regarding my second-generation college student status; however I found out the hard way that being a second-generation college student on the outside is not the same as being one on the inside. Through the trials and tribulations that I encountered at UCSB, one thing was clear—I wanted a college degree. And in order to get my college degree I realized that I had to begin doing things I had never done in order to get something that I really wanted. Specifically I had to learn to navigate my personal values and the values of the academy (see chapter four).

As I reflect on the various social class narratives of my higher education journey, I have come to see those experiences as a wonderful training ground for honing my own opinions and developing authenticity. A sub-narrative within each of the social class narratives I shared was the journey of finding my own voice and actually using it. Through my social class journey I was taking note of the actions or experiences that made me feel like someone else, and not me. I also began to seek out experiences that brought me closer to my true self. As I moved from being an *embarrassed* student to

being a *straddler*, my authentic voice and way of being in the world was struggling to surface. Creating the kind of self that I could be happy with my whole life was impossible for me amid narratives of shame, guilt, and isolation.

My transcendence into being a *comfortable* student was truly my transcendence to into becoming comfortable with myself. As stated in chapter five, this is when I declared my sexual orientation and seemingly declared my social class freedom all at the same time. I was comfortable with telling anyone who would listen that the silver spoon I had in my mouth growing up was not silver all the way through. Life changed for me at the age of twelve and it has never been the same. Exercising my *multi-class lingual* skills has been one of the best tools in my “higher education toolbox.” My ability to adapt well to change, and quickly pick up social graces and political queues, has enabled me to move about in the world of higher education in ways that professionals twice my age still dream of. This movement was fueled by understanding my gifts as a scholar and a practitioner as well as being ambitious. I had moved to a place of comfort and began to understand the meaning behind Marianne Williamson’s words, “Your playing small does not serve the world. There’s nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won’t feel insecure around you. We are born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us.”

In much the same way I entered the speech contest during 7th grade (see chapter one), I have felt the fear of pursuing graduate studies, I have felt the fear associated with opportunities presented to me in higher education, I have felt the fear of being nominated for national awards, and I have felt the fear of attempting to write this dissertation. Yet I

looked those fears dead in the eyes each time, and I went forward with manifesting the skills and talents I knew I had inside of me. Now, by no means am I professing to be Super Woman, although she is my favorite comic book heroine, and asserting that I have it all figured out. I have also had plenty of experiences in my journey in higher education where it was quite the opposite. For every moment that my authentic self shined and I exuded comfort, drive, and ambition, I have had moments of insecurity and feelings of inadequacy in the academy.

INSECURITY IN THE ACADEMY: MY 2.66 UNDERGRADUATE GPA

The air of ambition I have breathed throughout my life has been tested numerous times in my higher education journey. There are times when I lost my breath completely, only to regain it in the most unlikely of places and circumstances. When I lose my breath I also lose sight of my feelings of security and belonging in the academy. In the following subsection I share one particular narrative that sticks out in my mind as the best way for me to explain at least one of my bouts with insecurity in the academy.

As indicated in the narratives surrounding my collegiate experiences at UCSB (see chapter three and four), I was not the best student according to my transcript. Struggling to navigate the rough waters of higher education left my GPA in a less than desirable place. My major GPA was above a 3.50; however my overall GPA was a 2.66 upon graduation. The number “2.66” defined my application process to master of education degree programs. Most programs’ literature spoke of a preferred undergraduate GPA of 3.00 or above, with few exceptions. Students that were accepted who possessed undergraduate GPA’s lower than 3.00 would be placed on academic probation upon

entering the program until they proved themselves by receiving a 3.00 GPA or better by the end of the first semester. “2.66” echoed in my head and the number flashed inside my brain like a neon sign.

Although I had been out of school for three years, that number still seemed to determine my fate for pursuing graduate studies. I applied to five programs with the following results: flat out rejection from one, with no responses to my repeated phone calls and emails about understanding what I could have done differently to make myself a more desirable candidate; flat out acceptances to two programs; a probationary acceptance to another; and a painful rejection from another.

The painful rejection is where I briefly lost my feelings of security in the academy. The program at Adirondacks University was one of the most sought after programs in the entire field of student affairs; I applied at the suggestion of a colleague of mine who was an alumnus of the program. I was invited to have a phone interview in order to determine if I would be accepted and invited to campus for an assistantship search process. The person I interviewed with was rude and relentless about my undergraduate GPA, even after I expressed that I had numerous life situations that had occurred (including a sick mother and murdered cousin) during my undergraduate years. Even though I articulated that I understood the cause for her concern, the person represented in that transcript has grown tremendously and would be a much different student if given the chance. And even though I was currently employed in a position that is considered one of the must-have entry-level jobs in student affairs, this person still harped on my undergraduate GPA.

She explained that if I was accepted I would be placed on academic probation through the first semester, with the requirement of receiving a 3.0 or higher by semester's end. She then requested that I send her another writing sample and two additional letters of recommendations from my former faculty members. After ending the interview, I felt small. I felt like I did not belong in graduate school. I had yet to receive any acceptance letters, thus armed with the one rejection letter and this less than affirming interview I felt like I would never get the chance to be the student I knew I could be.

Shortly after I had sent all of the documents requested of me to Adirondack University, I received information from the University of Vermont HESA program that I had been offered an on-campus interview. I was initially happy, but then I flashed back to my recent interview with Adirondack University and decided that I would not waste my time at UVM if they were going to hassle me about a number, 2.66, that I cannot change. Thank goodness the helplessness and insecurity that resulted from my conversation with Adirondack University had dissipated. What remained were my voice and the desire to attend a program where I felt comfortable and where my three years of service in the field of student affairs spoke louder than a number on an old transcript. Upon renewing my breath of ambition, I contacted Dr. Miller, recruitment administrator for the UVM HESA program.

I told Dr. Miller about my unpleasant experience with Adirondack University, and I vividly remember saying, "Before I purchase this plane ticket to come to Vermont for an interview, just tell me now if my application is going to be tossed on the floor because of my undergraduate GPA. I cannot change that number." Dr. Miller replied, "DeMethra,

we already know what your undergraduate GPA is, we saw it on your transcripts. If it was a problem we would not have invited you. The fact is, you have been a student affairs professional for three years now, so you obviously know what it takes to be successful in this field and we want to meet you. If you do not get accepted it will not be because of your undergraduate GPA.” Those last fifteen words were music to my ears; I wanted to be critiqued based on who I was in that current moment, not who I was three years ago. I went to Vermont, I was accepted to the program, and as the saying goes “the rest is history.”

There are many of us in the academy who move about our lives believing that we are working hard and doing our part to create wonderful institutions of higher learning. We may stumble or even fall during our individual journeys, however there comes a time where we finally feel grounded and headed in the right direction. Then, one day, we are approached by a well meaning (and sometimes not well meaning) colleague who directly (or indirectly) shakes our sense of security and belonging. From what I have heard, tenure-track faculty sometimes have these types of encounters with tenured faculty who have lost touch with what it is really like to rigorously publish, teach courses, and serve the campus community. All of sudden, tenure-track faculty members are made to feel inadequate based on out of touch standards and a general lack of compassion. Student affairs professionals get our confidence rattled each time we see positions in which we possess the skills and experiences to perform the job duties well, yet lack the alleged *necessary* degree required. Our students experience insecurity each time they come to a collegiate crossroads in which they feel, for various reasons, they should have been better

prepared to face. Insecurity is always lurking in the academy, ready to strike when the moment is right.

In the narrative I shared above, insecurity lurked for three years in the form of my undergraduate GPA. I wish I had done better in school and for a while I carried around a lot of disappointment in myself. Insecurity feeds off of disappointment. Once I conquered my feelings of disappointment, insecurity patiently waited for its next meal. The moment was right when the Adirondacks University faculty member was rude and relentless in her lack of understanding about my undergraduate GPA. Fortunately for me, I was able to sustain the blow, and keep moving towards my goal of going to graduate school. Keeping my eye on the prize has definitely paid off. I will be the first person in my immediate and extended families (biological and adopted) to attain a doctorate.

As I pondered how to bring this dissertation to a close, I remember a question asked of me at my dissertation proposal defense. One of my committee members posed the following question, “DeMethra, what will you do with this piece of writing after it is finished? How, if at all, will you expand upon it or use it as a stepping stone for the future?” The final section of this chapter will attempt to provide answers to the preceding question.

WHAT WILL I DO NEXT?

The committee member who asked me to think about what, if anything, I would want to do next with this piece of writing is a well respected published author. He is always preparing something for publication, and takes his tenure-track faculty journey very seriously. When he asked me what I wanted to do next with this dissertation, I was a little

taken aback because I had not even written the document, yet he was asking me what I wanted to do next. Initially, I shared with him and the rest of my committee that I was excited and nervous about embarking on this piece of writing. I also expressed that I definitely wanted to continue publishing. Although I have published before, it has always been in a co-author format. This dissertation represents my first attempt at writing a lengthy single authored document. I have since pondered my committee member's question many times, and I believe I finally have an answer.

The Words of Others

I can honestly say that I have read hundreds of pages in preparation for writing this dissertation. The literature I encountered at various points of my writing process answered some of my questions but not all of them. It was imperative for me to read the first-generation college student literature because it really served as the basis for the idea of this dissertation. Had I not explored the reported experiences of this student population, I would not have known that my narrative and their general narrative overlapped in so many areas. For almost fifteen years I believed that what I experienced as a second-generation college student was unique, or perhaps I just encountered a string of bad luck in my undergraduate years.

The information I garnered from scholars such as Janet M. Billson and Margaret B. Terry (first-generation attrition experts); Khanh Van T. Bui and Howard B. London (first-generation student background characteristics and experiences experts); and Ernest T. Pascarella (first-generation student experiences and outcomes) served not only as vital

to the inclusion of scholarship with this dissertation, but also to ending the fifteen-year old mystery about my collegiate experiences.

The literature pertaining to second-generation college students served as the fuel to the fire of this dissertation. In those studies, I was unable to find my voice as a second-generation college student. I believe the information I learned from noted researchers, Dollean C. York-Anderson, Sharon L. Bowman, Many M. Lohfink, and Michael B. Paulsen was key to the development of my central dissertation theme, insider/outsider. At first glance, I expected to be able to relate to the information discussed in these articles about second-generation students, yet upon finishing each article I felt left out. In some ways, I felt as if I had missed out on something in college. That "something" was a general second-generation college student narrative. Determined to understand why I did not find myself in this body of literature, I set about writing this dissertation, anxious to see what I would discover.

My journey of discovery led me to further investigate the affects of academic and cultural capital on my collegiate journey. The timeless works of Pierre Bourdieu along side the recent writings of Will Barratt were essential in my ability to tease out those experiences created by my academic and cultural capital. Then, with the help of a dear friend, I recognized and set out to develop a concept I call "values capital." I admit that I have some feelings of anxiety and fear around this new concept. I anxiously wait for the response from my committee members surrounding the concept and I fear ridicule from the academy. Yet, as I have done so many times during my life, I am feeling the fear of introducing this new concept, but introducing it anyway.

Unbeknownst to me at the time, crafting chapter four (Navigating the High Seas of Higher Education) was the perfect entry point into my exploration of social class in chapter five. Accompanied by classic and contemporary scholars such as Richard Sennett, Jonathan Cobb, bell hooks, Michael Zweig, and Alfred Lubrano, I set about explaining social class and the effects it has on our daily existences. These scholars, along with my own students, guided me to develop social class typologies based more on *mentalite* than economic status. Although these typologies had been created with the narratives of my students in mind, the experience of finding me in each of them was eye-opening and further solidified their existence among the college student population. And the session that I had with the Department of Student Activities allowed me to provide concrete examples of the dire need to discuss and dissect social class with our professional peers, not just with our students.

What I have read thus far for this dissertation has provided me with a priceless wealth of knowledge that I plan to take with me for as long as I can within my career in higher education. Reading the research, opinions, and narratives of others definitely exposed me to what is currently floating around about the various subject matters; I also automatically began to create a list of the holes in the literature that have yet to be filled. In the next subsection, I speak briefly about a few of these holes and which ones I want to fill with my own writing.

Discovering the Potholes

As a driver, I hate potholes! They often sneak up on you, rattle your whole vehicle, then leave you wondering why you did not see it before and when will the City fix it. This is

how I felt when I discovered some gaps in the literature around second-generation college students, the discussion of college student values, and social class conversations on campus. One of the interesting observations pertaining to potholes is that they seem to appear overnight, without warning, on an otherwise well groomed street. What seems like an overnight occurrence was probably months or years in the making. Over time the weather changes, the road deteriorates, or begins to handle much more traffic than it had in the past. Of course the hole could have literally sunk in overnight; however it is more likely that it developed over time.

The gaps in the literature around second-generation college students, the discussion of college student values, and social class conversations on campus did not occur overnight. In my opinion these gaps occurred as a result of the expansion of student's experiences, the changes in family dynamics, the unfortunate silencing of some campus voices, the driving phenomenon known as "autopilot," and fear sometimes associated with talking about a subject that no one talks about (i.e., social class). In other words, the gaps in the literature may have developed over time as the weather, traffic, and structures of higher education have changed dramatically.

While I cannot fill all the gaps listed above, I have chosen to ardently attempt to add some filling in the form of writing to two gaps: shedding more light on second-generation college student struggles and continuing my undertaking of bringing social class identity discourse out of the shadows of higher education. Both of these subject matters are personal to me, yet I am mentally stimulated by the thought of dissecting them on some level. What I hope to use this dissertation for in the future is two-fold. I

want to edit a volume of writing by higher education professionals on the hidden injuries of social class on our campuses. This book would include student narratives as vignettes to further elucidate the concepts around social class that each author will capture in their chapter. I would also like to write a piece for the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, perhaps in their *Observer* section, about my insider/outsider narrative as a second-generation college student. Based on one or more of the questions I asked myself in chapter one, I will attempt to craft an article similar to *Class Struggles* by Julio Alves. Alves in essence crafted a mini-SPN; he discussed scholarship, made explicit universalizable applications for higher education, and shared his own personal narrative.

I imagine pursuing these post-dissertation activities will serve as the mini-climaxes that will provide me with the adrenalin and excitement that I will need in order to continue to grow and prosper as a scholar and a practitioner. Along the way I will do my best to be courageous within the academy, remain myself, not shrink from my own ambitious nature, and find the joy in doing all of it. I want to leave you, my reader, with a few of the aphorisms and quotes that have served as my co-pilot during this writing process. I am intentionally not going to explain their meanings in terms of my narrative. On the contrary, I invite you to ponder their possible meaning for your narrative. Be well.

If you compare yourself with others, you may become vain and bitter: for always there will be greater or lesser persons than yourself.

-Max Ehrmann—excerpt from the poem, Desiderata

I hated every minute of the training, but I said, "Don't quit. Suffer now and live the rest of your life as a champion."

-Muhammad Ali, Former Heavy Weight Champion of the World

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