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Frustration and Inspiration: a Model for Working Class Identity Development

Travis Arment
Bucknell University, twa004@bucknell.edu

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FRUSTRATION AND INSPIRATION: A MODEL FOR WORKING CLASS

IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

by

Travis Arment

A Thesis

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Contents

Abstract

Social identity development, the process by which people come to understand their social identities, has been written about extensively in regards to diverse populations. Currently, theories revolve around ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation, and other aspects of the human experience. There is, however, an obvious gap in theoretical work involving social class identity development. Specifically, this thesis will examine working class identity development. The goal is to provide a foundation for studying the ways in which members of the working class both understand and come to terms with their position in society. Building on crucial identity development theory, data will be examined under the modified lens of William Cross, Jr. and Peony Fhagen-Smith's model of Black identity development, which elaborates on the ways in which individuals experience successive processes of encounter, immersion-emersion, and internalization. It is hoped that this thesis will inform future studies of identity development across various social classes.

Keywords: identity development, field theory, social capital, social identity theory

Chapter 1

Introduction

There is a focus on social identity development within the field of higher education, and theories pertaining to such identity exist for diverse populations. Such models attempt to identify, describe, explain, and predict the behavior of students transitioning from adolescence to emerging adulthood (Jones, 2013). These include William Cross, Jr. & Peony Fhagen-Smith's (1989; 1991) model of Black identity development, Ruthellen Josselson's (1998) theory of women's identity development, Janet Helms's (1990) white identity development model, and Anthony D'Augelli's (1998) model of lesbian, gay, and bisexual development. Each looks at the way different people come to understand themselves in a social world. Noticeably missing, however, is a model for socioeconomic class identity development.

Informed by Abraham Maslow's influential hierarchy of needs, Gratton (1980) argued that working-class status frustrates the human ability to address some of the most basic needs, such as those related to nutrition, sleep, security, shelter, and health. If an individual is not able to meet these sustaining needs, they will likely not be able to meet their growth needs. This is to say that, if education is seen as a cognitive and aesthetic need that leads to self-actualization and transcendence, students from low socioeconomic backgrounds will have greater difficulty persisting. Additionally, US schools are funded by property taxes. The less collective wealth a school district has, the less funding its schools will receive. As institutions struggle to meet basic financial needs, they will find greater hardship when attempting to meet students' educational needs. It has been demonstrated that a student's academic achievement is affected by the average socioeconomic status of students attending a particular school (Reardon, 2016).

If socioeconomic status affects an individual's ability to secure basic needs, which school district that individual attends, and the resultant educational outcomes, it is important to create a model of class identity development, in order to establish a lens for studying the impact of individual wealth on personal growth. This thesis presents a model of working-class identity development, which may later be incorporated into a more comprehensive model of class identity development.

Cross and Fhagen-Smith's (Cross, 1989; 1991) model of Black identity development served as a foundation for the current model. While their theory was explicitly intended to examine Black identity development, it provides a straight-forward model for identity formation, elements of which align with analogous constructs embedded in theories of social identity development across other populations (Cass, 1979; Helms, 1990; Phinney, 1993). The process begins when an individual encounters an experience that causes them to reflect more deeply on a specific aspect of their identity, which can in turn lead them to revise their understanding of its salience within the broader context of their identity. In Cross and Fhagen Smith's (Cross, 1989; 1991) model, identity achievement manifests itself in an enduring Black nationalist, multicultural, or bicultural identity.

For the purpose of the current model, Cross and Fhagen Smith's (Cross, 1989; 1991) internalization outcomes (i.e., nationalism, multiculturalism, and biculturalism) will be expressed in terms of class. Their respective analogs will be (1) *isolationist,* an identity manifested in those who consider working class to be their most salient identity and tend to maintain relationships with those who share their class identity, (2) *bootstrapper,* characterized by infusing their working-class identity and their American identity, creating within them a focus on achieving goals beyond their socioeconomic positioning, and (3) *warrior,* evidenced by those who

understand that there exists a wide range of identities to explore and push for social justice. This is meant to provide scaffolding for a model of working class identity development.

This thesis will demonstrate a model of identity development for working-class students at elite private schools in the following chapters. The second chapter will examine literature relevant to the study and discuss it through a modified version of an existing identity development model (Cross, 1989; 1991). In the third chapter, the methodological design of my study of working-class students at an elite private college will be detailed. This includes an explanation of phenomenology, the qualitative research method informing the study. After the methodological framework is established, the fourth chapter will present findings. Statements from the participants formed a narrative that was used to create a model for working-class psychosocial identity development. Finally, the fifth chapter contains a discussion of the data, considers implications the results have for educational practice, and reflects on limitations of the study.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

In this chapter, I will review literature related to the identity development of working-class individuals. I will begin by outlining selection criteria for this review. Following this, I will provide an overview of the relevant theory and how it connects to studies of working-class individuals. Next, I will analyze the literature as it relates to a modified version of the model of identity development put forward by Cross (1989; 1991). Finally, there will be a discussion of the limitations of the framework provided by this literature review.

Selection Criteria

The first criterion for selection when building a literature base for this thesis was scholarly review. The main database used was that of Bertrand Library, Bucknell University's campus library. This process was simplified by the online database's ability to filter results by peer review status. With it, I was able to collect nearly every article essential to this literature review.

For articles found but not available through Bertrand Library, Google Scholar was used. To ensure accuracy, abstracts and summaries were checked against the information available about the articles through Bucknell's database. Two articles necessitated contacting other universities' libraries for access.

Additionally, there were thematic criteria for the works presented in this literature review. It was required that each study had a focus on the way in which working-class identities intersected with individuals' social positioning or education; this was imperative in maintaining the scope of the literature review, as the goal was to lay the groundwork for other levels of socioeconomic status to be examined.

In the initial stages of compilation, the intention was to focus on graduate students. However, due to a gap in research on working-class identity development, it was necessary to open the search up to both children and adults, rather than focusing on emerging adults. The same was true of timeliness; an initial criterion was a publication date within the last decade, but there was not enough supporting research conducted within this timeframe. Removal of this stipulation ultimately allowed for the inclusion of several seminal investigations of working-class identity.

The resultant literature review includes three main components: (1) a thematic overview of the full body of research, organized according to its theoretical moorings; (2) an analysis of findings related to working-class students' experiences of encounter, immersion, and integration en route to class-conscious identity formation; and (3) a summary of conclusions drawn from the current body of literature, along with discussion of its limitations and omissions. The chapter closes with a statement of the purpose of my own study and its anticipated contribution to the relevant research literature.

Theoretical Overview

In order to lay the foundation for a model of working-class identity development, this literature review was built around theoretical frameworks. It was intended to inform questions devised for semi-structured interviews and to provide a lens for subsequent analysis of the resultant interview content. The studies included in this review were informed by social reproduction theory, social identity theory, and feminist theory, among others. Although one author resisted alignment with established theoretical frameworks, their analysis of ethnographic interview data serves as a solid examination of an individual's experiences with class identity in the context of education.

Building on Bourdieu

The majority of the studies presented in this literature review are founded on the works of Pierre Bourdieu. To better understand the function of class boundaries, it is important to understand taste and distinction, as conceived by Bourdieu:

Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed. (Bourdieu & Nice, 1984, p. 6)

The practice of distinction establishes status groups, or individuals distinguished by socially constructed boundaries at different locations of the class structure, and capital provides a way to move between these boundaries. Bourdieu (2018) posited that there are three kinds of capital: economic, cultural, and social. They are based on material wealth, accumulated knowledge, and social networking, respectively.

Jane A. Van Galen (2010) writes, "class boundaries are now understood to be constructed and maintained not only in occupational hierarchies but also in the dailiness of social life" (p. 257). Material wealth is not the only factor in determining social class; access, relationships, and practices that affect social mobility are also factors of social class (Sayer, 2005). Succinctly, sociologists have moved beyond emphasizing economic capital, giving greater consideration to both cultural and social capital.

After studying working class students participating in an experimental curriculum, Galen (2010) concluded that little was understood about the relationship between class mobility and education. Underscoring the complexity of the problem itself, she summarized the challenges facing critical theorists thusly:

Critical theories of reproduction will never account for the complex and contradictory ways in which our students have navigated school. These narratives suggest that there may, in fact, be a great deal to learn from exploring the ''cracks'' in the system that enable success against the odds (Galen, 2010, p. 265).

While her students were socioeconomically disadvantaged, awareness of this fact may have provided a form of cultural capital that helped them find a way to maneuver through the social hierarchy.

Wolfgang Lehmann (2009a) found that working class university students were well aware of what he described as *capital disadvantages*, or class-based social-structural disadvantages. One of Lehmann's interviewees mentioned that they wished their parents had the means to financially support them during their higher education, as their work schedule was affecting their studies. This student felt they were disadvantaged concerning their economic capital. As Galen (2010) highlighted, social and cultural capital have been a greater focus in the field than hierarchies of occupations and wealth, and Lehmann's students also felt social and cultural disadvantages. Some worried their jobs would affect their campus engagement, while others felt anxieties related to technical issues such as course registration (Lehmann, 2009a).

To cope with these deficiencies in capital, Lehmann (2009a) found that the students constructed "moral advantages." Elaborating on this point, he explained that, "in important ways, participants' accounts of the advantages of maturity, responsibility, independence, and a work ethic [had] to be earned through employment, preferably in working-class jobs" (p. 640). In *The Dignity of Working Men*, Michèle Lamont (2001) found that policing class boundaries through morality continued beyond emerging adulthood. Working class Black and White adults found their identities through caring and self-discipline, respectively. This moral capital replaced

financial capital as a signifier of success and strengthened the boundary between the working and wealthy classes.

      A study by Tamara Thiele, Daniel Pope, Alexander Singleton, Darlene Snape, and Debbi Stanistreet (2016) aligns with those of Lehmann (2009a) and Lamont (2001). Specifically, working class students in their study had a motivation to "prove others wrong and succeed" (Thiele et al., 2016, p. 62). These students used moral advantages, such as work ethic and independence, to drive their studies and demonstrate a perceived equality with individuals of a higher social class. Some of the students, however, struggled against social reproduction. In presenting their findings, Thiele et al. (2016) offered the following caveat: "it is important to note that two participants described not knowing about university until year 12 and that many of the students described having limited or no career guidance in their decision-making processes" (p. 62). Bourdieu (2018) described social reproduction as the process by which culture is reproduced between generations through socialization, including that performed by institutions. Academically achieving and socially disadvantaged students are less aware of the way higher education works because their schools are not providing the proper guidance.

      Of social reproduction, Bourdieu (2018) says that, "[the] object becomes the production of the habitus, that system of dispositions which acts as a mediation between structures and practice" (p. 258). The habitus imparted on individuals affects the way they maneuver in fields, or theoretical arenas where people struggle for resources (Bourdieu, 1984). Educational research has also been framed within Bourdieu's field theory.

      Garth Stahl (2013) found that, in working class boys in UK schools, the habitus was "divided against itself" (p. 3). Observing this population, he noted, "[working-class boys were] forced to balance between the 'tough boy' on the street and the hard-working, compliant learner,

and the balanced identity" (p. 8). In other words, it was necessary for them to keep their social identities intact, while attempting to leverage a more respectable position within the field. As Bourdieu (1999) noted, "[this duality is in] constant negotiation with itself and with its ambivalence, and therefore doomed to a kind of duplication, to a double perception of self, to successive allegiances and multiple identities" (p. 511). This tension has since been found to play a significant role in working-class boys' academic disengagement (Stahl, 2013). Given the other literature related to Bourdieu that has been presented here, it is likely that social reproduction will continue to make it difficult for working-class boys to succeed in postsecondary education.

In further research on working-class students in the UK, Diane Reay, Gill Crozier, and John Clayton (2010) utilized Bourdieu's concept of habitus directly. They found that a class habitus caused difficulties for these college students: "while standing out as 'sad' and 'nerdy' is clearly uncomfortable, fitting in can also be problematic, especially if it means academic complacency and a lack of challenge" (p. 120). Just like the UK working-class boys that Stahl (2013) studied, Reay et al.'s (2010) interviewees found themselves with a habitus divided against itself.

Lehmann (2009b) suggested that Bourdieu's theory may not be as clear cut as it seems: "we can neither assume that working-class students have a single habitus, nor should we insist on a hegemonic middle-class culture at university and the unavoidable alienation of working-class students in it" (p. 146). Nevertheless, he did find that working-class students' habitus affected their views of higher education. He said,

> Conditions in their social environment lead working-class students to approach university
> with an ethos of vocational education: the relatively high and uncertain investment in
> their university education makes these students more likely to insist on learning useful

skills, becoming credentialed, gaining an advantage in the labor market, and getting their

money's worth. (p. 146)

A working-class identity caused these students to consider university attendance through a cost-benefit analysis rather than as a class-based rite of passage.

In a previous study, Reay, Crozier, and Clayton (2009) synthesized Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field, and capital. In describing their research participants, they noted, "these nine working-class students [had] developed almost superhuman levels of motivation, resilience and determination, sometimes at the cost of peer group approval" (p. 1115). The authors posited that other students within the same university were seen as "good learners" (p. 1115), informing their habitus and providing them with a motivation to forgo social capital in favor of cultural capital. This aligns with Lehmann's (2009b) suggestion that working-class students may have a reflexive habitus.

The sociological work of Bourdieu is crucial to the field of educational research. While compiling literature, his impact was obvious. Introductions would summarize his foundational models, and his influence was pervasive throughout the studies. However, other theories have also had a major impact within educational research.

Social Identity Theory

Henri Tajfel's (Tajfel, Turner, Austin, & Worchel, 1979) social identity theory is important to a diverse set of identity development models within education. He posited that social groups provide a sense of pride and self-esteem, fostering a sense of social identity. Ultimately, this gives people a feeling that they belong. Tajfel claimed that categorization is a natural process, and that people will divide themselves into "us" and "them." In short, the social group becomes part of the self.

In a study by Elizabeth Aries and Maynard Seider (2007), they found that lower income students at public universities and *Little Ivy* schools, defined as "highly selective liberal arts college" (p. 141), were more likely to downplay class as an important part of their identity. Depending on the educational context, some students were more likely than others to explore their class identity:

> By contrast, and consistent with their lower ratings of the importance of social class to identity, almost three quarters of State College [defined as "state liberal arts College" (p. 141)] students indicated no exploration or questioning of the domain of social class and instead showed the highest level of diffusion in this domain. However, of particular interest is the finding that social class was an area of identity exploration for three quarters of the lower income Little Ivy students. (p. 151).

Both sets of students were just as likely to verbally articulate low class-salience, suggesting that social class may become an important area of identity exploration upon encountering someone from a different identity group, essentially when an "us" meets a "them." In a previous study, Aries and Seider (2005) attributed the low class-salience of the *State College* students to the homogeneity of the campus population.

Virginia Thomas and Margarita Azmitia (2014) believe that social identity theory may not provide the perfect lens for viewing social class. According to the authors, "the relative fluidity and invisibility of class make it a slippery problem for social identity theory, which assumes stable category membership" (p. 196). They found that awareness of group membership varied, and students were most cognizant of their working-class identity during encounters that caused them to compare their class with that of their peers. Unlike Aries and Seider (2005; 2007), Thomas and Azmitia (2014) found that their sample ranked social class as more important

than gender or ethnicity, with some working-class students feeling "anger and pride" (p. 196) related to their class identity.

The gap in literature regarding working-class identity development is obvious when searching for case studies involving social identity theory. There has been little such research to date, and while the paucity of findings provides opportunities for significant breakthroughs, discrepancies in the literature reduce clarity of vision in charting a path forward. While Tajfel's (1979) theory should not be disregarded, fitting working-class identity into this framework may be difficult.

Gender and Working-class Identity Development

The intersectionality of class and other identities, including gender, generates different experiences (Crenshaw, 1991). While compiling literature, multiple studies involving working-class identity development for women surfaced. They are presented here to lay the groundwork for future research involving the intersection between social class and other identities and the ways in which these intersections influence identity development.

Phyllis Wentworth and Bill Peterson (2001) conducted case studies of non-traditionally aged women from working-class backgrounds at a private liberal arts college. They found that women interviewed were not motivated by a desire for higher income, but rather an opportunity to expand their sense of self; they wanted to "read Jane Austen and Milton" and learn about "worldly" views (p. 18). Similar to the findings of Thomas and Azmitia (2014), Wentworth and Peterson (2001) found that interviewees made an association between class and education when having social encounters. As Tajfel (1979) claimed, one's own identity is strengthened when compared to that of someone with an opposing identity.

Bourdieu's work was the basis for a study by Sarah Evans (2009), which examined the higher education aspirations of working-class girls. Drawing upon field theory, she described the habitus of her research participants as characterized by "an acceptance of a framework of social ties which might involve care work" (p. 351). The participants also expressed the importance they placed on finding a partner with regular employment. Due to their habitus, these women did not feel any sense of entitlement to higher education, and their decisions about higher education were based on the future possibility of care work.

Research to date on gender and social class identity development has been limited, but holds implications for further studies. Reflecting on the practical significance of her findings, Evans (2009) offered the following observation:

> In terms of policy, there has been a failure to recognize that, for large groups of potential HE students, decisions about education and future employment are made with respect to present families and expectations of motherhood in ways that can limit the accrual of particular forms of cultural capital (p. 352).

Policies that could possibly help working-class women acquire the capital necessary to break through class boundaries must be examined. Additionally, it is necessary to gain a greater understanding of the way in which working class identity intersects with other identities, such as those based on race, ethnicity, or ability.

A Unique Perspective

One study did not fit neatly into the framework of either Bourdieu or Tajfel. About her study, Sandra Jones (1998) stated, "there are no comparable theories of how we develop a sense of ourselves as classed and members of distinctive social class groups" (p. 145). She attributed the absence of such theories to a gap in the current research on social class identity development.

To build such a model, she recommended that class consciousness be viewed as both a psychological construct and a political construct. Jones made two significant discoveries: (1) students may become more aware of class structure through Marxist readings in higher education, and (2) a working-class upbringing may remain salient even to those who move through class boundaries into the middle class. It is important to review Jones's study, as it also provides a foundation for building a model of working-class identity development.

Analysis

As articulated in the introduction to this chapter, the basis for analysis of the selected literature is a modified version of William Cross, Jr. & Peony Fhagen-Smith's (1989; 1991) model of Black identity development. The goal of this analysis is to provide a framework for creating a model of working-class identity development, informed by the lived experiences of working-class college students. Toward this end, the aforementioned research findings will be examined here, within the context of four stages corresponding to those articulated by Cross and Fhagen-Smith: (1) *pre-encounter*, (2) *encounter*, (3) *immersion/emersion*, and (4) *internalization*.

Within this modified framework, an encounter is understood as a situation that causes an individual to critically evaluate their class position. Individuals in the immersion/emersion stage would, thus, explore the salience of different aspects of their identity as members of the working class, focusing more on some and shedding others. An individual in this stage may staunchly identify with their working-class identity or reexamine it with a balanced and critical lens. This process may be motivated by frustration or inspiration found during the encounter stage. Finally, those who have internalized their identity may become *warriors*, characterized by participation in working-class activism as a living example with an understanding of systemic power

structures. Those who are empowered to wield capital by an encounter with an individual above their own socioeconomic position may be categorized as *bootstrappers* . Finally, those who maintain a strict alignment with their working-class identity, some even working to police class boundaries, would be said to manifest an *isolationist* identity.

Pre-encounter

The working-class boys in the UK that participated in Stahl's (2013) study exemplified a pre-encounter working-class identity. These students had not yet experienced an encounter that allowed them to compare themselves to a wealthy peer in the context of a social interaction; instead, they were focused on balancing their masculine and student identities. The absence of such an encounter was further evidenced by the fact that only one-quarter of the boys even identified themselves as working-class. In fact, with no "them" to compare themselves to, most identified as middle-class.

In Evans's (2009) study of working-class girls, participants viewed education as a means to provide for their future families, rather than as a way to break through class boundaries. Additionally, they were interested in relationships with a partner that had regular employment, but they did not express the need for the partner to be of a higher socioeconomic status. In some cases, the participants felt as though it was too great a risk to attend college, as it would potentially interrupt care work (Evans, 2009). The participants understood that higher education could provide them some leverage against institutional power structures, but did not seem to experience a catalyzing moment that encouraged working-class identity exploration..

Encounter

The student participants in Thomas and Azmitia's (2014) investigation found themselves in the encounter stage. According to the authors, "as predicted, awareness of social class

occurred primarily during social comparison encounters with peers" (p. 196). In Galen's (2010) study, one student expressed concern that they might have to withdraw from a teacher education program due to financial difficulties. This student received funding in order to teach working class students, providing them with an experience that caused them to consider their own social position. For the student in Jones's (1998) study, the catalyst for such introspection was Marxist readings, which helped her gain a better understanding of structural power differences and her own position within them.

Immersion/emersion

Lehmann's (2009a) study showed working-class college students in the process of immersion/emersion. As he noted, "in important ways, participants' accounts of the advantages of maturity, responsibility, independence, and a work ethic have to be earned through employment, preferably in working-class jobs" (p. 640). Students were deciding which parts of their identity were salient, using these personal traits to gain leverage within the university setting. Thiele et al. (2016) similarly found that some students were constructing moral advantages. Comparable evidence can be seen in the work of Reay, Crozier, and Clayton (2009), as well as in further studies by Lehmann (2009b).

Aries and Seider (2007) found that lower income students at both public and elite private colleges tended to understate the role their socioeconomic status had in the formation of their own identities. The authors noted, "the lower income students were more likely to downplay class in their conception of their own identities than were the affluent students" (p. 151). This was particularly true of students attending state colleges, as the homogeneity of the campus population obfuscated class differences (Aries & Seder, 2005). The participants in these studies

expressed an interest in exploring their class identity, which demonstrates the early stages of immersion/emersion, although some students may remain in the pre-encounter stage.

Internalization

    Working-class students reach internalization after the immersion/emersion process. According to the American Psychological Association's dictionary, internalization is defined as such: "the nonconscious mental process by which the characteristics, beliefs, feelings, or attitudes of other individuals or groups are assimilated into the self and adopted as one's own" (APA Dictionary). To categorize outcomes of internalization, studies presented in this literature review were compared with an analysis of interviews with working-class students at Bucknell. This synthesis resulted in three categories of post-encounter identity status: *warriors*, *bootstrappers*, and *isolationists*. The following is an examination of the present literature in the context of these categorizations.

    Warriors. The upwardly mobile teacher education students in Galen's (2010) study appeared to have been in the early stages of becoming working-class warriors. In teaching a socially conscious curriculum that highlighted unequal power dynamics in the US to working-class students, the participants engaged in class-based activism. Education is not inherently activist work, but in this instance, Galen (2010) provided the teachers-in-training with a curriculum that not only aided them in reflecting on their own socioeconomic position, but encouraged their students, in turn, to narrate their own experiences with their class identity. In the implementation of the curriculum, the teachers-in-training examined their working-class identity with a critical and balanced lens, becoming living examples of the working class through internalization.

Jones's (1998) ethnographic case study research provided similar evidence of warrior status. Specifically, she said, "in and through [academia], Pam provide[d] a cultural heritage for herself and her working-class students, act[ed] as a resource for working-class students, and incorporate[d] her working-class and professional identities into her construction of self" (p.160). The participant indicated that class remained important to her, even beyond her initial experience in learning about it during her postsecondary education, and that she infused working-class culture into a literature course that she subsequently taught (Jones, 1998). Warriors understand that there is a wide range of identities to explore, and they present themselves as living examples of the working class in order to advance social justice.

Bootstrappers. It is possible to conceive of the students studied by Thiele et al. (2016) as bootstrappers. Subjects found motivation in their encounter and wielded it in their education in order to ascend beyond working-class status. Although they constructed moral advantages, such as a strong work ethic and indepence, these students felt a need to prove themselves to their peers with higher socioeconomic positioning. In an interview, one student told the researchers, "Whereas they didn't care, I wanted to get a good grade (…) then because of that they called, (…) they nicknamed me, some of my friends they called me "Extra". Because I would do extra work" (Thiele et al., 2016, p. 55). Other subjects shared this sentiment.

The bootstrapper identity is considered an amalgamation of working-class and American identities, although Thiele et al. (2016) studied students in the UK. This is based on the concept of the American Dream, as described in an informal word summary by Dictionary (2019): "The American Dream is the aspirational belief in the US that all individuals are entitled to the opportunity for success and upward social mobility through hard work.". The identity archetype

is named for the idea that upward mobility is attainable by pulling oneself up by the bootstraps, or working hard to ascend through class boundaries.

      Isolationists. Participants in Lehmann's (2009a) study demonstrated isolationist identity. Like the working-class men in Lamont's (2001) book, these students constructed moral criteria in order to achieve a sense of superiority and maintain class boundaries (Lehmann, 2009a). Although the resultant sense of moral superiority provided what the students perceived to be an advantage, the focus of this construct was on individualistic traits. Thus, they were not making conscious connections to other members of their working-class group, but were instead choosing to police class boundaries through individual moral positions. Similar evidence of this phenomenon can be found in some of Thiele et al.'s (2016) subjects. Isolationists consider working class to be their most salient identity, and they commit themselves to maintain relationships with those in similar socioeconomic positions.

Discussion

      It is important to note some limitations within this review. The literature presented contains only studies done in the US and UK. It is possible that the conclusions reached are not generalizable to other locations around the world. Additionally, the participants who may have reached *warrior* status in the studies by Galen (2010) and Jones (1998) would have done so during graduate education. It is worth investigating the ways in which higher education, particularly graduate and beyond, mediates the internalization of class identity. Finally, operational definitions of the working class varied across the studies presented here, and were based on many different measures.

      Together, the studies suggested that it is possible to fit working-class identity development into a modified version of Cross and Fhagen-Smith's (1989; 1991) model of Black

identity development. The goal of my own research was to build upon the model proposed in this chapter. Toward this end, I conducted semi-structured interviews with working-class students attending an elite private university. This population was selected based on the perceived likelihood of their having experienced an encounter with differences in social class, which could have led to experiences of immersion/emersion and internalization. I anticipated that my findings would align with the evidence presented in this chapter, and would thus provide a solid foundation for a model of working-class identity development. Further details of my research methodology will be presented in the following chapter.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This thesis reports on a study of working-class students and their identity development at a highly-selective private liberal arts university. As explained in the introductory chapter, there is a need for research on this topic, as adult identity development models exist for a wide range of identities, but there is a conspicuous gap in literature regarding identity development in relation to socioeconomic status. In the last chapter, I reviewed the prior literature that informed the design of this study, which was largely grounded in the theoretical works of Bourdieu and Tajfel. In this chapter, I present details of the design of my study, beginning with a statement of positionality. An overview of the branch of research methodology in which the study was situated will be provided, followed by more specific information on the characteristics of the participants, the process through which they were selected, the form that the research data took, and the methods through which it was collected and analyzed.

Positionality Statement

A researcher's background and positions have an effect on who they investigate, how they approach an investigation, which methods they use, and how they apply them. I believe it is important to engage in some reflexivity, as I do not think that it is possible to avoid bias entirely. It is my hope that I am able to situate myself within the research in a way that positively informs it.

Based upon my educational history, I believe the best way to view working-class identity development is through a Marxist lens, specifically one based on the frameworks laid out by Bourdieu. I currently attend a highly-selective private liberal arts university, working towards a Master of Science in Education degree. Classes I have chosen contextualize higher education

through critical theory. My undergraduate degree is in political science and media studies, a field that examines popular media in the context of critical theory, especially that of the Frankfurt School.

The path I took to this institution was not traditional; I transferred to the university as a junior through a community college pipeline program. I grew up in a working-class family and attended a public school in a rural farm community, and this left me unprepared to navigate postsecondary education and unaware of the opportunities available to me. Low-skill retail jobs and living in a mobile home community allowed me to fund my pursuit of an associate's degree.

I have personally experienced life in the working class, and my education has provided me with the tools necessary to make sense of it. This model for understanding working-class identity development I propose is inspired by my personal history. I hope that this insider knowledge helps further develop the ideas presented here.

Qualitative Research Framework

The study this thesis is based upon was grounded in the phenomenological research tradition, a branch of qualitative inquiry that is concerned with describing the meaning made by a small number of individuals who have experienced a phenomenon or phenomena (Creswell, 1998). *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* defines phenomena as such: "appearances of things, or things as they appear in our experience, or the ways we experience things, thus the meanings things have in our experience" (Smith, 2018). Regarding phenomenology, Heidegger (1927) believed we are always "in the world" (p. 33), and that we interpret our activities through contextual relations in our environment. People are constantly negotiating their identities through relationships with worldly experiences.

The phenomenon explored here is that of the encounter, or an experience that causes a working-class individual to engage in socioeconomic comparison and to explore their class identity. Prior research has suggested the significance of the encounter in the formation of the social identity across multiple identity groups (Cass, 1979; Cross, 1989; Phinney, 1993). The encounter is a contextual relationship; these students examine their working-class identity experience in their own context, Bucknell University, a highly-selective private liberal arts college. This research setting was chosen for the ubiquity of the encounter that it posed to working class students, who were continuously challenged to negotiate their working-class identity in an environment that was dominated by members of the middle, upper-middle, and wealthier classes.

Selection of Participants

To understand the ways in which working class identity affects psychosocial development, semi-structured interviews were conducted. Five participants were selected from the Bucknell Community College Scholars Program (BCCSP), a competitively-based scholarship program for recent graduates from participating community colleges. Students involved in this program were selected to participate in this study in order to operationalize the working class. To qualify for BCCSP, students must be of low to moderate income. Bucknell's website defines low to moderate income as such: "Adjusted Gross Income below $60,000 for families, $45,000 for married couples or below $30,000 for independent students" ("Bucknell Community College"). Most participants are eligible for needs-based financial aid; for instance, the Federal Pell Grant awards grants to students with a family income of less than $50,000 (Scholarships.com). Selection within the BCCSP community was intentional, focusing on diverse identities in order to isolate class status as a factor of psychosocial development and highlight the ways in which it

intersects with other identities. Participants were of varying races, ethnicities, genders, sexualities, and geographic origins.

Prior to the research related to the study presented in this thesis, each participant was contacted by Bucknell while attending community college and extended the opportunity to compete for one of about 25 slots in the BCCSP scholarship program. BCCSP focuses on high-achieving, low-income students, offering free six-week summer courses at the university. Scholars live on campus during this time and are encouraged to build a close-knit community. They then return to their respective community colleges at the conclusion of the six-week program. After obtaining their associate's degrees, those selected receive a full-tuition scholarship for Bucknell. As articulated above, participants were intentionally selected for this study in order to understand the ways in which working-class status interacts with an array of other identities. Thus, it is important to understand more about the individuals. What follows is a set of brief descriptions of the participants, which includes information about aspects of their identities outside of working-class status.

Jeremy

Jeremy, a white male in his 20s, grew up in Central Pennsylvania. He is one of five siblings, and attending Bucknell was the first time he left his childhood home. His father worked on firetrucks, and his mother stayed at home to tend to the house and children until he was a teenager. Family is important to Jeremy; he spent most of his time before college with his parents, siblings, and cousins.

Megan

Megan is a white female in her late 20s. She grew up in Pennsylvania's Lehigh Valley, residing in a low income urban area until she was eight years old. Her family then moved to a

suburban area of the same city. Both of Megan's parents finished high school, and her father is a college graduate. She is non-heterosexual, and she described her family as supportive, loving, and open. She said that, despite some struggle, she had a good childhood.

Miguel

A Peruvian immigrant, Miguel is a male in his mid-20s. He immigrated to the US when he was 20. When Miguel was nine years old, his father moved to the US in order to better provide for his family. They reunited ten years later. Miguel said that his father's actions helped his family maintain a middle-class status in their home country. He has a strong work ethic and a desire to learn, and these are values he believes were imparted on him by his family. Specifically, he mentioned the guidance of his grandfather and sister, as well as mentorship from a friend.

Sophie

Sophie, a white female in her mid-20s, spent the first 14 years of her life in Chicago. She grew up in a single parent household. She moved to a suburb of Philadelphia just before high school due to the passing of her mother. Financial hardship often weighed on Sophie during her childhood, as there was only one income in the household. She feels a sense of security being able to go home to her grandparents; her grandmother is retired, and her grandfather is a government contractor. She said she does not feel well-off, but has found some comfort in Pennsylvania.

Yasmin

For four years, Yasmin, a female Syrian immigrant, has lived in a small city in the Lehigh Valley of Pennsylvania. She is in her early 20s, moving to the US in her later teenage years. She worked a retail job before attending Bucknell, and she enjoyed the diversity of the

area she immigrated to. Yasmin's work ethic is strong, and she enjoys being around people. This empowered her both at her job and during her time in college.

Data Collection

Each of the five subjects participated in a semi-structured interview about their lived experiences on campus at Bucknell. Before each interview, the participants signed a form acknowledging their informed consent. In order to examine the generalizability of the encounter, immersion/emersion, and internalization stages as understood by Cross (1989), three questions were generated based on his model. They are as follows: "Can you tell me about an experience you have had at Bucknell that made you conscious of your socioeconomic status?," "How did you feel after that experience?," and "How has that affected your subsequent experiences at Bucknell University?" In order to ascertain contextual details, students were also asked, "Can you tell me about where you grew up?" Each interview was captured on a digital recording device with the permission of the interviewees.

Explicitation of the Data

Data were analyzed based on John W. Creswell's (1998) method of qualitative inquiry and research design as it relates to phenomenology. First, all descriptions were read in their entirety. After extensive reexamination to develop a gestalt, significant statements were extracted (Halloway, 1997; Hycner, 1999). Next, meaning was made of these statements, and they were clustered into themes based on the proposed model to create units of significance (Sadala & Adorno, 2001). Finally, these themes were integrated into a narrative description in order to translate participants' everyday expressions and generate a model of working-class identity development (Sadala & Adorno, 2001).

Understanding my position relative to my study and using Creswell's (1998) phenomenological design for qualitative inquiry equipped me with the skills necessary to pursue my research. To do so, I created questions based on Cross's (1989; 1991) model for identity development and conducted semi-structured interviews with working-class Bucknell students. BCCSP students were chosen as the population in order to operationalize the working class, and a diverse group of participants was sampled to isolate class as a mediating factor in this model of identity development. The next chapter provides statements from the interviewees, building a narrative through explication that demonstrates working-class identity development and its outcomes.

Chapter 4

Findings

Following the methodology recounted in the previous chapter, it was possible to analyze

resultant data on the identity development of working-class individuals at an elite college. This

chapter provides an examination of interviews conducted with students who transferred from a

community college to Bucknell University using a modified version of Cross's (1989; 1991)

model of Black identity development. Specifically, participants' experiences of the phenomenon

of encounter will be examined in relation to the processes of immersion/emersion and

internalization and the resultant statuses of *warrior*, *bootstrapper*, and *isolationist*.

Encounter

Consistent with the findings of Aries and Seider (2007) and Thomas and Azmitia (2014),

the working class students in my study experienced the phenomenon of an encounter, meaning

an event caused them to compare themselves socioeconomically to others and catalyzed their

exploration of working-class identity. Each student expressed that they became more conscious

of their socioeconomic status when discovering that traditional students engaged with what they

considered to be luxuries. Four of the five participants highlighted an encounter where they

heard traditional students discussing vacations, and one participant shared an encounter about

witnessing traditional students with designer goods.

Encounters were not necessarily the product of direct conversation, instead taking place

internally. For instance, Sophie spoke about experiences she had in campus common areas:

> [...]Sometimes overhearing when you are just walking by people, you'd hear things on
>
> this campus where it's like shit, you have a vacation home? You have boogie boards and
>
> jet skis? I've never even been on vacation, man.

Jeremy shared a similar story:

> Students in my Arabic class [were talking] about what people were doing over break and stuff…. And someone else was like, "I'm going to," I forget, it was Cabo or I forget what.... I can't ever imagine just being able to go somewhere like that for a week.

Like Sophie and Jeremy, both Yasmin and Miguel talked about hearing traditional Bucknell students traveling for vacation as comparative experiences. Megan's encounters were based on witnessing students with luxury goods. She directly compared her status to traditional students through transportation:

> Because I like to longboard and the kids here on longboards have motors on their longboards. And I remember explaining it to my friends. I was like, "Yo, the kids here are so rich and lazy that they don't even push their own longboards."

She also mentioned designer apparel as a visible distinction between members of different socioeconomic classes on campus. Each student was able to point to an experience or experiences that caused them to critically evaluate their class position in comparison to traditional Bucknell students. This is the first step in adult working-class identity development.

Immersion/emersion

While the participants' encounters were similar, they diverged as they began to develop their working-class identities. This is the immersion/emersion process; here, working-class individuals immerse, adopting a staunch pro-working-class mentality motivated by frustration, or emerse, a balanced reexamination of working-class identity motivated by inspiration. Neither should be seen as "good" or "bad" methods of identity realization, but rather different paths toward internalization.

Sophie's vexation during this stage mirrors immersion. When asked about how she felt after her encounter, she offered a blunt answer: "Frustrated. Slightly pissed." She elaborated:

I've been staying up until two, three, four in the morning, just working every single night because I need to fricking graduate from this place. I need that degree so bad. Are [traditional Bucknell students] doing the exact same thing? [Doing] the same amount of work that I'm doing? Some are probably not. They're probably partying at Super [Bucknell student slang for all-day Saturday parties].

She cited campus culture as a reason for her frustration, saying "I feel like the university favors people... who are able to afford things on campus." Sophie's experiences with campus culture caused her to strongly identify with her working-class status. Similar to the blue collar workers Lamont (2001) studied, this strong identification creates distinct social boundaries in Sophie's life. She said this of traditional Bucknell students:

They're kind of snobbish. That's what they come off to me as, and it's [as though] they've never really touched true... [What] do I call this? Real life.

Through this distinction, Sophie feels closer to other members of the working class on campus. She expressed a particular affinity for BCCSP students, saying:

Like, BCCSP, I'm with them all the freaking time. Seventh Street [a popular cafe on campus], that's literally, if you ever want to see any of us, that's where we're at. I know if I'd want to be around people that I know, that I trust, that I can just vent to, I hang out with them.

Analogous to the Black nationalist or pro-Black identity felt by individuals in the process of immersion under Cross and Fhagen-Smith's model of Black identity development (Cross, 1989;

1991), Sophie expressed a strong identification with fellow members of the working class that affected her relationship with traditional Bucknell students.

Similarly, Megan found herself frustrated after her encounter, also reflecting the immersion process. This frustration is evident in her anecdote regarding longboards. Like Sophie, she described her own experiences as "real life," differentiating herself from traditional Bucknell students. Describing her encounter, she said, "[Socioeconomic differences are] apparent because I've never seen Balenciaga's in real life, and I've seen them here." This language creates a boundary between working-class and more typical Bucknell students by creating a distinction between experiences that are considered "real" and those that implicitly are not. These distinctions created difficulty for Megan as she transitioned from a community college to a private liberal arts college. Discussing her first semester at Bucknell, she said:

> The first semester was hard for sure just because it felt like I couldn't really connect with these people at all. In a social sense, yeah, I felt it was isolating, I guess, just because it was hard to find some common ground.

This initial frustration prompted a need to "adapt," causing her to maintain closer relationships with other transfer students that included both her BCCSP peers and previous program cohorts. Akin to the individuals in the studies by Lehmann (2009a, 2009b), Thiele et al. (2016), and Reay, Crozier, and Clayton (2009), Sophie and Megan critically evaluated their socioeconomic position, deciding which aspects of their identities were most salient and wielding a strong working-class identification in order to establish moral advantages.

Miguel's post-encounter discussion resembles the emersion process. He used his life in Peru to comparatively process his experiences at Bucknell. He described his living situation in

Peru as "middle-class," and relative to his socioeconomic position in the US, he believed he grew up with "a lot of privilege." Upon further reflection, he said:

> Maybe [other immigrants are] doing well in their countries, but at what price? Right. That most of the time the dads or even the moms are like killing themselves [through labor] in the United States or Europe or whatever other country they are.

The experiences of immigrants Miguel described are his own. He said:

> But it's more like an illusion, if you think about it, because we have a nice place in a good area of Peru. But... my dad wasn't home. I didn't grow with my dad for 10 years. So, I don't know. I don't know if it's really worth of an exchange.

He used his experiences as a lens to critically analyze his socioeconomic position at Bucknell, and the resultant interpretation inspired his strong work ethic. Illustrating this process, he used an anecdote a friend told him about soccer player Cristiano Ronaldo using booing and slurs from opposing fans as motivation. Miguel said:

> And that's like, just like also a personal philosophy, I guess, that I developed after all this stuff that happens. If life is telling me that I can't, I would be more motivated to try. Because it's like, I feel like it's just like a personal story, like I'm using the negative forces. [Ronaldo] might have, like as people say, [turned] negative to positive.

Reflecting on experiences prior to his immigration, Miguel was able to find balance while analyzing his working-class status.

Yasmin similarly used a balanced lens to critically evaluate her socioeconomic position at Bucknell. However, she used the experiences typical students shared with her to examine her working-class status. Describing the time prior to her emigration, she said, "It was an experience, I guess, because Syria [is] in a war right now." When asked about how she felt after her

encounter, overhearing students talk about travel, she said "Oh, I feel like I want to be like this."

With her newfound inspiration, she was able to find motivation to achieve her aspirations.

Regarding her positivity, she said:

> So first semester, for everyone, it's academically challenging because it's [a] different
> workload that you're dealing with. So I think it motivated me [to] do better. Although
> some of the classes I just, I didn't like. Like statistics, I hated going to that class.... But
> [thinking about my encounter] helped me do good on them because I was approaching it
> in a positive way. Because I really wanted to achieve my goal. So in order to achieve my
> goal I had to do good in these classes and therefore I did good.

Yasmin's balanced critical evaluation of her socioeconomic positioning helped her maintain a

positive outlook despite academic difficulties.

Jeremy, born in the US, used experiences living in Haiti and Morocco to create a

balanced lens to understand his working-class identity, describing it as "just a matter of

perspective." Like Sophie and Megan, he created a distinction between his background and that

of traditional Bucknell students by using an analogy, replacing "real life" with the otherworldly.

He said:

> So I guess when I hear someone else is like, they have even more and I don't even know
> if they realize it. It makes me think twice about people's opinions when they talk about
> different stuff. It's like, "Do you even really know what's going on outside of your own
> world?"

However, he believes his time overseas offered inspiration. Reflecting on his travel and his time

at Bucknell, he said:

I think my past experiences with those in Haiti have really just given me a humility to why I'm doing what I'm doing. I think even for me coming to school, even starting at [community college] and now being here, it's like I am going to school because I recognize the opportunity that I have to actually get an education and then be able to bless other people with the skills that I [have learned].

Like Miguel and Yasmin, Jeremy utilized experiences outside of the US socioeconomic system to critically examine his working class status at a private liberal arts institution.

Internalization

After experiencing the phenomenon of the socioeconomic comparative encounter, the working-class students entered the immersion/emersion stage, where they nonconsciously processed the beliefs, feelings, or attitudes of the traditional Bucknell students, ultimately assimilating these characteristics into the self. The end result of this process was internalization, and the participants in this study could be organized into three groups based on the outcome of this stage: *warriors*, *bootstrappers*, and *isolationists.* The following sections will examine statements from the interviewees within the context of these categorizations.

Warrior

Based on the proposed model, it is possible to classify Megan as an emerging warrior. Although initially frustrated with the socioeconomic disparity at Bucknell, she chose to be a living example of the working class. About her transition into Bucknell campus life, she said, "Once I started changing my own perspective on it too, [I went from] being like, "How could you, how dare you?" [to saying], 'Okay, [Megan], well, maybe this is your opportunity to like help them [and] teach them.'" She described her first-semester struggles and encounter as "empowering," saying, "I can use it as a teaching moment, and I don't know, [help] people to

learn and understand other perspectives." This attitude created opportunities for social involvement. She said, "once I started getting involved with [an] environmental activist group on campus, that gave me another group that I could fit in with." Despite describing some early Bucknell experiences as "isolating," identity examination enabled Megan to use her working-class status as a foundation for activism.

Jeremy uses the inspiration he found in his encounter and travels to find comfort at Bucknell. Regarding his typical student peers, he said:

> I don't hold it against them, because I also recognize all the stuff that I've been given that someone else doesn't have that they wish they could have. So even just the opportunity to even go to HACC and then even more so the opportunity to come here and stuff, it's way out of... I'm lucky enough to have that.

In turn, he uses these experiences to become a living example of the working class. He said:

> I think with other students, I try to share those, my experiences, my opportunities. I mean, you understand that you're... I'm six years older than most of the kids that I'm going to take class with and it's like I get to have some... I have some experience that I can share with people that don't understand, that haven't really lived out life outside of their parents' home or college.

Although he found inspiration in his encounter instead of frustration, the outcome of Jeremy's identity development was similar to that of Megan.

Bootstrapper

Miguel exemplifies the bootstrapper archetype. About bringing his childhood experiences to Bucknell, he said:

So, when I was growing up, looking at all these factors, I was always thinking like, "Oh, I want to be like the people with money. I want to become better, I guess, because I just want to." It's just like you used to having that desire. And then when I get to Bucknell, I was still thinking the same way. I see these kids doing all this great stuff, and I'm like, "Yeah, I want that for myself." That's why I'm in school. I'm trying to get a good job, and I would like that for my kids.

His desire for a more leveraged socioeconomic positioning is not self-centered, however. He elaborated:

I feel like that's also another thing that I realized that if I am able to become wealthy or whatever, my kids are going to be like that in terms of they going to inherit more privilege than I have, but at least I going to be able to, I guess that's my belief, to educate them better because they came from a more humble origin.

Miguel believes that, with specific skills, it is possible to ascend through socioeconomic boundaries. He said, "I notice that a lot of people who came like from a more humble origins, they tend to blame the system a lot." While expanding on this, he implied that system-blaming may be more common among US-born students. He said, "Because you go and talk with any DACA [Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals], it's like all of them understand the system or almost all of them," and he connected their stories to his own:

I was able to see that because there's a system, there's also loopholes in the system. So, you can also use those loopholes to like start building social capital and social mobility so you can actually get that chance to get out of poverty or try to pursue better career options.

By pointing to his own experiences, as well as anecdotes about his friends in the DACA program, and discussing the inspiration he found in traditional Bucknell students, Miguel illustrated how he believes it is possible to pull oneself up by one's bootstraps.

Yasmin's drive to achieve a socioeconomic position similar to that of traditional Bucknell students made her a prime example of a bootstrapper. She said that she had "big dreams." Elaborating, she said:

> [W]e have [events] in the engineering department where people talk about how they built their own company. I'm so interested in going and listening to them and just seeing these people experience. I feel like I can live my experience through hearing them. And I feel it gives you more, it makes you more ambitious. Wanting to work more. Like, "Oh, some people did already do it." Maybe they got more help but I'm getting some help with my scholarship in here. So I feel it motivates me to do more.

By using departmental discussions as a lens to examine her encounter, Yasmin found inspiration to leverage social capital in order to ascend class boundaries. She put it succinctly, saying, "If some people [gain social mobility] that means I can do it. And if some people can achieve having their own company, running their own business or doing all this other stuff, that means that I can do it too." Like Miguel, Yasmin believed social mobility was possible through hard work.

Isolationist

Among the subjects interviewed, Sophie stood out as an isolationist. She mentioned that there were financial barriers that prevented her from participating in Bucknell campus culture, saying:

> Whereas, I'm probably in the lower percentile that can't afford most things. I can't just go into events where you have to pay for stuff. Entry fee or something like that, or

sometimes going to even the movie theater. I'm a film major so six bucks even going to

the movie theater, like Campus Theatre, it's [affordable] in theory, but at the same time

that money could be used for other things.

When discussing how her encounter experiences affected her subsequent time at the university,

she provided greater perspective on her social habits. Talking about traditional Bucknell student

party culture, she said:

I don't even know the lingo on campus really. I deliberately detach myself from that

because I don't want to associate myself with people who I just can't relate to. Again,

going back to [bragging about partying more than working] thing, I just don't like people

who are like that, basically.

Her frustration continued beyond her encounter and through the immersion/emersion stage. As

Sophie continues the internalization process and develops her identity, she continues to compare

her experiences with those of higher socioeconomic positioning. She said,

If you had the background that I do, growing up not having much, having to just ... I grew

up being aware of money, basically, even though that's probably not on most kids' minds,

I grew up like that. Being around people who don't have that firsthand knowledge of that

... It's still to this day, it's shocking to me...

Social barriers are maintained as she finds comfort with her scholarship program cohort. She

reflected, saying, "That's why I hang out with BCCSP people because they know what it's like."

As an isolationist, Sophie's perspective is unique among the participants in this study, but she

maintains her work ethic as she works towards graduation.

Analysis

Like individuals examined in the studies presented in the literature review, this study demonstrated that working-class students who attended Bucknell could be sorted by internalization outcome into three categories: *warrior*, *bootstrapper*, and *isolationist.* This means that it is possible to adapt Cross's (1989; 1991) model of Black identity development in order to investigate the phenomenon of the encounter relevant to working-class students at an elite private college, but there are caveats. The following chapter will offer further discussion of the present study, suggest its implications for postsecondary education practices, and examine its limitations.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to establish a model for working-class identity

development at an elite private liberal arts college. This was accomplished by examining

literature regarding the identity development of working-class people, using a phenomenological

lens to understand encounters experienced by working-class students at Bucknell University, and

ultimately modifying an existing model of identity development (Cross, 1989; 1991). Overall, it

was found that working-class students at an elite college could be placed into three categories:

warriors, *bootstrappers*, and *isolationists*. The rest of this chapter will offer a discussion of the

findings, will present the implications of this study for educational practices, and will conclude

by elaborating on limitations of the study and their implications for future research.

Discussion

The working-class students attending Bucknell, a highly-selective private liberal arts

college, were motivated in their socioeconomic comparison encounter by frustration or

inspiration. It is notable, however, that the motivating factor during the immersion/emersion

process did not predict the outcome for identity development and internalization. Megan and

Jeremy both developed into warriors, the former finding frustration in their encounter while the

latter found inspiration.

Strikingly, both participants who developed a bootstrapper identity immigrated to the US.

Both found motivational inspiration in their respective encounters, using their experiences in

their respective home countries as a point of comparison and creating a balanced lens to examine

their working-class identity during the immersion/emersion stage. As a living example of the

working class, Jeremy fit the warrior archetype. However, he found inspiration during his

encounter and resembled a bootstrapper. He had lived outside of the US, and used that as a comparison point during his encounter, gaining a greater appreciation for his attendance at Bucknell. Conversely, Megan and Sophie were both born in the US, had not spent a significant time living outside the US, and ultimately processed their encounters with frustration.

Sophie experienced an encounter and evaluated her working-class identity, and her maintenance of class boundaries reflected that of the participants in studies by Lamont (2001) and Lehmann (2009a). Due to this pattern of adjustment, she was classified as an isolationist. However, it is possible that she was in fact still in the immersion/emersion stage. Her strong identification with her working-class status was not unlike a corresponding pattern of response found in Black nationalists during the immersion/emersion stage of Cross and Fhagen-Smith's (1989; 1991) model of Black identity development. While evidence of this archetype can be found in working-class adults elsewhere (Bettencourt, 2020; Lamont, 2001; Lehmann, 2009a), the model may need adjustments as further research is conducted.

Implications

It is hoped that future research into how socioeconomic class intersects with other aspects of social identity development can help educators better serve an increasingly diverse population. A model of working-class identity development must be incorporated into the literary canon of student development that informs professional preparation of student affairs personnel, especially in light of a growing commitment to equity and access in higher education. The Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U, 2019) has established the "Making Excellence Inclusive" project, guided by a set of principles related to access, student success, and high-quality learning. The initiative is meant to help colleges integrate efforts to promote diversity, equity, and educational quality into their missions and operations. In the development

of "equity-minded practitioners" (AAC&U, 2019), those ready to engage in the transformational change of student learning, it is necessary to acknowledge class as an aspect of diversity that bears directly upon working-class student achievement.

The data resulting from this study also has implications for teacher education. Social class impacts access to opportunities, and efforts to be equitable in higher education must take into account the significance of social class and social identity in building a solid foundation for equity during primary and secondary education. Absent such a foundation, efforts to promote equity in secondary education are left to languish in a vacuum. Galen (2010) demonstrated that a class-conscious curriculum provided to teachers in training can help both the educators and students critically evaluate and reflect on their socioeconomic position and its effect on social mobility. If social class is not addressed within the context of pre-college education and inclusive excellence (AAC&U, 2019), working-class and first-generation students will continue to be segregated at regional public colleges, as the intensity of admission competition increases at private institutions (Sacks, 2007).

Limitations

While I believe this study has made important contributions to scholarly discourse on social identity development, it is necessary to acknowledge its limitations. For instance, the entire scope of Cross's (1989; 1991) model was not applied to the working-class students at Bucknell. This includes the pre-encounter stage; Cross (1989; 1991) posited that, before experiencing the phenomenon of encounter, Black individuals varied across three race salience categories: (1) low race salience, (2) high race salience, and (3) internalized racism. Whereas Sophie's assertion that she was involved in family finances distinguished her from other participants in this study, it is possible that there exists similar variation in class salience among

working-class individuals during the pre-encounter stage. However, this study did not investigate the possibility of low class salience, high class salience, and internalized classism, and such information may provide insight regarding the internalization process. Similarly, Cross (1989; 1991) discussed possible negative outcomes of the immersion/emersion process, including regression, continuation/fixation, and dropping out. It was not possible to extrapolate such consequences concerning the immersion/emersion stage from the interviews with working-class Bucknell students. It is important to note that entering this model into the psychosocial identity development discourse is not intended to conflate race/ethnicity and class, and similar modifications of Cross's (1989; 1991) model have occurred elsewhere (Cass, 1979; Helms, 1990; Phinney, 1993).

Limitations are not exclusive to the compatibility of Cross's (1989; 1991) model with working-class identity development. A larger sample is necessary in order to determine how motivating factors affect the identity development process. Participants in this study found themselves frustrated or inspired by the social comparison encounter they experienced. The research conducted for this thesis involved five students; it is possible that examining a larger sample may demonstrate a connection between motivation and identity internalization outcomes.

Motivation may be affected by immigrating to or spending time living outside of the US, as evidenced by the fact that Miguel and Yasmin, US immigrants, and Jeremy, who spent substantial time living in Haiti and Morocco, found inspiration in their encounters with cultures beyond their national borders. Diverse samples are necessary in further research to gain a greater understanding of the way significant experiences outside of the US affect working-class identity development.

Likewise, further research into working-class identity development taking place beyond postsecondary education is needed. To better understand the internalization process, studying students who have graduated may offer some clarity about how an encounter affected subsequent experiences beyond academic life. Doing so could provide a structure for an adult or middle-age model, as this study focused solely on those in emerging adulthood.

This study was limited by its sample. Although a diverse set of participants was chosen, only five were selected from Bucknell's BCCSP. Additionally, due to Bucknell's status as a *Little Ivy*, the results of this study may not be generalizable to other college settings. Possible evidence of this is present in a 2020 study by Genia M. Bettencourt, as it was found that, "[...] as students moved from an externally to an internally based definition of their social class, they challenged deficit labels and emphasized their work ethic and resilience" (p. 154). This description resembles the immersion/emersion process presented here, and it could mean that there is a difference in the internalization process among working-class individuals who attend a *Little Ivy* and those who attend a *State College*. A diverse sample that includes working-class students at a variety of institutions could provide insight into the way their identity develops.

While the working class was operationalized in this study by selecting BCCSP students as participants, there is not a consensus within the field of education regarding the operationalization of class. In order to ensure comparability and generalizability, it is imperative to create a standard for identifying working-class status.

This study is meant to act as a foundation for further research into the ways in which socioeconomic class affects social identity development, and it is limited to working-class identities. This model is not meant to be generalizable to individuals of other socioeconomic

statuses. Simply put, a theory of class identity development may best be generated through an

amalgamation of models constructed for different socioeconomic positions.

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