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Class, Race, Gender and the Elite University: A Noncognitive Assessment of Academic Adjustment

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The university application process, particularly for selective schools, is rigorous and aims to separate out non-committed and/or non-prepared applicants (Stevens 2007). Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that all students will excel academically at highly selective universities. Elite schools' acceptance rates are currently at record lows and certainly elite schools reject many qualified applicants; those they accept are carefully selected to ensure success for both the students and the university.

Despite this high-stakes selection process, there is a long-line of social reproduction literature that predicts that less advantaged students may have a harder time performing well academically compared to more advantaged students. Socio-economically disadvantaged students may be recruited to satisfy university diversity requirements. These students may have been the top performers in their high schools, however, if the schools they attended had remarkably different resources and thus, were not as effective as the schools of their peers, they will be comparatively disadvantaged (McDonough 1997). Research shows that working class students experience different, and often less academically rigorous schooling, compared to their middle and upper class peers (Massey, Charles, Lundy and Fischer 2003; Stevens 2007; Bowles and Gintis 1976; Anyon 1980). Bowles and Gintis (1976) argue that the educational system reproduces a divide between dominant and subordinate classes-that schooling processes perpetuate the class divisions of socio-economic society. If left unchecked, these differences in background preparation are guaranteed to influence a student's academic adjustment to university.

Elite universities recognize this possible deficit and in order to counter these differences in academic background and preparation, elite universities offer many amenities to lower-income students. To offset the financial burdens of an elite education, many highly selective universities offer need-blind admissions procedures, so that, regardless of financial need, students can attend the school that is right for them. Increasingly, these schools are offering students whose families qualify at a set income bracket a tuition-free college experience. To meet the less tangible needs of students from diverse backgrounds, many highly selective schools have programs, often targeted at minorities, to help the students build confidence and skills needed for such a swift inundation into a completely different culture, such as that found at an elite university, where many of the students and faculty engage in an upper-middle class lifestyle.

Social Reproduction

Beginning in Elementary school, students are prepared for their future work lives. Unfortunately, classrooms across the country vary in quality so that often the preparation of working class students is vastly different and inadequate compared to the preparation of upper class students (Bowles and Gintis 1976). In working-class classrooms, students are prepared for subordinate positions as white-collar workers, where their job performance will be reviewed based on getting the task done correctly. These students are more likely to be given mechanical and routine tasks than tasks that require creativity or independence. Children at affluent schools are given tasks that develop a high degree of autonomy, which will allow them to negotiate the various terrains of industrial society, and the confidence that will be necessary for their future as leaders (Anyon 1980). Kozol (1991) has documented that vast inequalities exist between schools from wealthier and

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poorer neighborhoods, sometimes even when the schools are in the same district, throughout the nation. This class segregation based on neighborhood ensures that students receive completely different experiences of educational preparation prior to university.

In secondary education, tracking within schools works with tracking between schools to further uphold the status quo. In this system, students are tracked into classes that prepare them to enter the economic work force in various rankings. This system is based ostensibly on student's prior academic achievement, but often these divisions overlap with racial and class differences among students (Valenzuela 1999; Conchas 2006; Ogbu 2003). While the set-up appears to be one in which students have more autonomy to choose their classes, researchers have noted the lack of power many students have in these choices. Often, students and parents do not understand the tracking system at their own school. Students and their parents in the lower tracks may be unaware that their track is not the top track for university preparation (Valenzuela 1999; Conchas 2006; Ogbu 2003; McDonough 1997).

National data on college-bound seniors support the social reproduction literature. Once students have overcome the obstacles experienced in elementary and secondary education, high achieving students come head to head with the stiff university selections process, which caters to well-prepared students, i.e. students from upper class school systems. College-bound seniors of high socio-economic status are more likely than college-bound seniors of either middle or low SES to meet the criteria for admission to highly selective universities such as GPA, standardized test scores, or prerequisite courses. As expected the trends are linear. Students of middle SES are better prepared when compared to students of low SES (Owings, McMillen, Burkett and Pinkerton 1995). These completely different academic streams are tangible and produce completely different skill sets or human capital (Massey et. al 2003; Becker 1993). From a human capital and social reproduction standpoint we expect low-income students to perform poorly compared to their peers. As I detail below, intense scaffolding at SVU works to alleviate these burdens for lower-income students so they can succeed at SVU.

Cultural Capital

Unfortunately, sociologists have long documented that it is not that easy. The problem is that structural and relatively easy to measure tangible differences in a student's educational background such as resources and quality of schooling are coupled with less tangible and exceedingly difficult to measure differences. These less perceptible, yet just as real differences are largely referred to as cultural capital, or the know-how that goes with any structural position (Bourdieu 1984). Students not only learn Math in school, they also learn how to behave in society. School is major source of cultural capital development. Classroom social norms imbue attitudes of what constitutes normal as well as confidence levels in various roles amongst students, which can translate into future orientations to various realms of society, and into successes and/or failures in these domains.

The combined impact of these two processes make it so that working class students are often less prepared academically for college, both in terms of sheer knowledge, and also in terms of situational knowledge (Massey et al. 2003). Fortunately, these disadvantages are officially recognized. As previously mentioned, SVU has several

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programs to support the transition for low-income and minority students. These programs share similarities and offer their students some assortment of the following: outreach seminars/week-long or weekend immersions to familiarize students with the university, celebrations on campus where students are introduced to faculty, administrators, guest speakers, alumni and other students and given a glimpse of what they can expect at SVU. Some are invited to live on campus for a time period, such as a summer. Students are fed on several occasions, attend mock lectures, shadow other students, take weeklong specialized courses, and are invited to faculty and/or community leader luncheons. These schooling programs begin as early as middle school where students attend Saturday school at SVU. During their attendance at SVU they are monitored by support services, given academic, social and financial assistance, including one-on-one coaching and monitoring, such as tracking for graduate school, and counseling and invitations to sponsored social events, including regular faculty luncheons. Some are given an official welcome by a university official. Financially, opportunities are available for students to receive monies for professional memberships, conferences, graduate school applications, test preparations, and textbooks. Other services, such as non-interest temporary loans may also be available to students and internships with corporations, and extra lab time for science and math students may also be available. Students are also given seminars to improve their financial and economic literacy and are exposed to cultural events and programs not usually available to disadvantaged populations.

   At an elite university, the consequences of this system are heightened not only because the potential cultural capital mismatch is so large, i.e. the cultural field is so entirely different from that to which they are accustomed, but also because they are the outliers. The majority of students in this setting are not experiencing a cultural shock. For instance, students who attended private and/or affluent public high schools may not only have better Math skills, greater familiarity with the format of a freshman seminar, greater ease speaking up in class, greater preparation for writing essays or doing lab work, or familiarity with the formation of study groups, they may also feel as though they belong. In sum, working class students may not be familiar with important rules of the academic game.

Main Argument

   Narratives and ideas are attached to both structural location and cultural capital. Although hard to decouple from cultural capital, social science researchers have succeeded in showing that human feelings and experiences are processed through ideas. In particular, Swidler (1986) has detailed how narratives drive action and influence a person's orientation to a situation. These narratives explain how life is interpreted differently based on one's structural position and allow insight into how class comes to matter beyond human capital and cultural capital at university.

   I expect class narratives to predict students' academic orientation in the following ways. For upper-middle/upper class students, life at a highly selective university will be an extension of their prior life. Their direct reference group consists of their immediate family and friends, who have achieved similarly. Although they may have been stressed about getting into an elite school, they have arrived. They have achieved what was expected of them: what their parents expected them to achieve and what society expects

them to achieve. They are not worried about downward mobility because they do not have immediate examples and/or stressors in their daily experience that would make this possibility warrant their concern. Though they may likely experience normal college duress related to socialization, they will be less burdened by these concerns because their human capital, cultural capital and attached narratives will all align with their existence at this university and thus, their mental narrative regarding academics will be solid. They have received the appropriate repertoire for achievement at an elite university. As a consequence, they will feel prepared and report the highest levels of academic efficacy.

In contrast, low-income students, similar to the bronze medalists in Medvec, Madey and Gilovich's (1995) study, whose reference group was the Olympians who did not place, are well aware that by attending an elite university they have achieved beyond expectations of themselves, their family or society, which gives them a confidence in their abilities. They have consistently overachieved and overcome harsh obstacles so far, so why wouldn't they expect that to continue? Although lower-income students are generally less prepared academically by a lack of human and cultural capital, at university these deficiencies will be softened by the scaffolding of university programs. Minorities and first generation students are overrepresented in this income group and are more likely to receive academic assistance through institutionalized programs compared to middle-income students. Although I expect them to report less academic confidence compared to their upper-middle/upper-income peers, I expect these differences to be subtler when compared to their middle-income counterparts.

I expect middle-income students at an elite university to aspire to achieve the success of those in the upper class echelons; additionally, they will be motivated to avoid downward mobility. Even though their admittance to a highly selective university signals success, they know that attendance alone is not enough. Compared to their upper-class counterparts, they will be have less human capital and will be less secure culturally. They have not been prepared socio-culturally in the same way as upper/upper-middle students and thus are less likely to naturally feel comfortable at this university. Compared to their lower-income counterparts, their success will imbue less confidence, namely because attending college was expected. Similar to the silver medalists in Medvec et al.'s study, who were less satisfied with their silver because they were so close to achieving the gold, these students will feel the burden of achieving at the level of these upper-income students, or as it were, of the parents of the upper-income students, and thus will demonstrate lower levels of academic efficacy compared to upper-middle/upper-income students. Finally, the precariousness of their position may cause them stress, which will further inhibit their academic self-efficacy. Thus, I expect them to experience less satisfaction and less confidence compared to their upper-income peers.

The site of this project has at least four academic scaffolding programs. These programs all target different student populations. For example, the *Academic Seekers* program recruits high-achieving community college students from nearby areas. Another program targets low-income, community-minded students first-generation students, particularly those from poorer neighborhoods in proximity to campus. The federally funded *Bridge* program targets low-income and first-generation middle and high school minority students. There are five branches of this federal program operating on campus. Finally, this campus participates in the federally funded *McNair Scholars Program*, which provides opportunities and graduate school preparation to a select group of first

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generation/low-income and underrepresented ethnic minority college students (Southern Valley University 2010a). These services are provided because university officials expect lower-income and minority students to be less prepared than the average freshman and they expect increased success for those students who take part in these programs. These programs act as band-aids, to fix-up students so that once students are accepted and enter university, they can achieve equal to their comparatively better-prepared peers.

DATA AND METHODS

Of the many, many colleges in the United States only a handful are considered highly selective. Highly selective schools attract more elite applicant pools compared to less selective schools. The annual income of the applicants' parents is larger and the parent's educational levels are greater (Espenshade and Radford 2009). *Southern Valley University[1]* (SVU) is one of these schools. Most American colleges and universities accept at least 80 percent of their applicants; SVU accepts less than 25 percent (Menand 2003; Espenshade and Radford 2009; SVU 2010)[2]. Most incoming students were in the top-ten percent of their high school class and nearly 10 percent of the students of the 2010 incoming class at SVU were valedictorians (SVU 2010).

SVU is located on the West Coast, in a racially and ethnically diverse area. The campus is also racially and ethnically diverse; less than 45% of the student body identifies as Caucasian. Asian and Asian American students are the next largest racial/ethnic category represented, making up nearly one quarter of the student body. Twelve percent of the incoming class identify as Hispanic/Latino and 7% as African-American. Slightly over one-tenth of the 2010 incoming class was first-generation college students. SVU is typical in that it has slightly more females than males.

In the winter of 2009, I began interviewing students and I completed my interviews in the fall of 2010, though I remain in contact with several of the students. I recruited students in a variety of ways. I attended undergraduate courses and spoke to the classrooms about my project and asked them to participate. I visited four classrooms and recruited approximately three students from each session. I also emailed the heads of campus organizations and asked them to send out mass emails to students. I recruited some of my most interesting interviewees through these organizations. I also met students through personal connections. Finally, I canvassed the campus and pitched my research to approachable students. Canvassing the campus allowed me to spend active time on campus, as opposed to the passive observer. Several times I was able to get an interview on the spot and other times I was able to set up an interview for a later time.

All but one of the forty-three interviews were conducted on or within 1 mile of SVU's campus. The aberration was one of the alumni who preferred to be interviewed at her office. The interviews lasted

[1] This pseudonym will be used throughout this paper so as to maintain the confidentiality of the school.

[2] This and similar statistics were gathered directly from SVU publications and thus will not be specifically cited so as to maintain the confidentiality of the school.

approximately one hour, although some of the interviewees were less talkative and a few of the interviewees were extremely talkative. My most terse interview was under 30 minutes and the most talkative was nearly 2 and a three hours long. The interviewees were overwhelmingly candid about their lives. Students opened up about drugs and alcohol. They discussed problems with their friends, their family and school. We talked about family members passing away from both natural and unnatural causes. We discussed their hopes, dreams and fears.

I took copious notes during the interviews, noting what the students were wearing and/or mannerisms that were particular to each. In addition these notes served as a supplemental timeline for the audio-recordings. After the interview, within the next 24 hours I took analytical notes on the interview. I answered questions about the interviewees: What is this person's main activity at SVU? Is the person well adjusted? Is the person having any difficulties? In addition, I described the context of the interview, where did we meet? What was the weather like? What events were occurring on campus? These notes were immensely helpful for the final write-up. The other key process that helped me to articulate the main story of SVU was transcribing the interviews. I completed the transcribing at the end of December 2009. Transcribing the interviews was incredible in that it brought the interview back to life. When I listen to the student's voices I am reminded of who they are, what their energy was like that day, if they were in a hurry, or nervous, aiming to please or slightly disinterested. Combined, my field notes, along with the theoretical notes I took while transcribing gave me a set of themes that occurred throughout the interview, this open coding led to the next step in the coding process (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw 1995). I line-by-line coded the transcribed interviews, using over forty coding categories (Lofland, Snow, Anderson and Lofland 2006). Once this process was finished in early winter 2010, I had a robust dataset that I could use to group the data by themes. I arranged the data to look at subjects related to academia by class background of students. This inductive analysis allowed me to understand commonalities both among students in the same class categories as well as among all the students in my sample and to flesh out what exactly was happening at SVU.

NonCognitive Assessment

To assess students' academic adjustment I constructed tools of noncognitive assessment. These quantitative measures use qualitative assessors to investigate academic adjustment. Noncognitive factors, such as a positive outlook towards academics and a realistic self-appraisal and a personal link to a field are positively related to student success (Sedlacek and Sheu 2004; Sedlacek 2004; Ramsey 2008). I developed a scale based on four realms concerning academia and based on the work of Sedlacek (2004). I code the interviews on four measures: 1) either having or not having a positive outlook

towards their academic life, 2) as either having or not having a work plan or strategies of achieving, such as consistent study habits and being able to get help academically if they need it, 3) whether or not they demonstrate connection to their major and finally 4) whether or not they have specific academic or career plans that relate to their field of study. I measure how many of these noncognitive factors students exhibit in their description of their academic world.

The four measures in greater detail are:

1) Does the student demonstrate a positive outlook towards him/herself in relation to his/her academics, i.e. does the student feel academically prepared?[3] For this measure, students were either coded as either yes or no, based on their demonstration of a positive or negative outlook towards their academics and/or academic preparation. If the students demonstrated both negative and positive feelings, I coded them as a "no" for this measure.

2) Does the student have strategies to achieve academically, such as consistent study habits, study groups, or regularly attending office hours? For this measure, students were coded as either having strategies if they had specific tactics for academic achievement, or as not having strategies for success if they relayed that they never attended office hours, did not reserve time during the week specifically for studying and did not use study groups.

3) Does the student feel connected to his/her major? For this measure, students were coded as a 1 on this measure if they demonstrated a feeling of connectedness to their major, participated in clubs sponsored by their major, for example, the two students in my sample who were majoring in video-game development and were members of the student team of video gamers on campus. Students were coded as not feeling connected to their major if they were undeclared or if they describing an aversion towards their major or the people in it.

4) Does the student have specific plans regarding his/her field of study? For this measure, students were coded as having specific long-term academic and/or career plans if they had had or were planning on getting an internship in their field, if they worked in their field, or if they had other specific career plans that matched their academic major. Students were coded negatively in this category if they met none of the first two criteria and if they described either many different ideas for their future, or, if they described only vague future plans.

FINDINGS

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[3] This measure would have different outcomes if I asked "does the student demonstrate a positive outlook towards the academics at UC?" as several students felt positively about their preparation, but felt that the academics at UC were sub par.

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In analyzing the findings on the links between academic adjustment and class background, I find that the differences in the level of academic orientation are subtle, but significant. Overall, students feel prepared and demonstrate that academically they are well adjusted. However, while that is the general trend there are subtle differences that can be found when one takes a closer look at the major cleavages, particularly class and gender.

Class

Class	Feels academically prepared	Has strategies to achieve academically	Feels connected to major	Has strategic academic/career plans
Upper/Upper-Middle	94%	100%	94%	88%
Middle	75%	100%	75%	44%
Lower	80%	90%	90%	70%

Figure 1. Relationship between Class Background and Academic Preparation

By examining these non-cognitive assessors in detail, we see class differences in academic orientation. For example, Ted, is representative of the prototypical upper-class student at SVU. To contextualize, Ted attended a private high school and was not receiving any financial aid, in the form of scholarships, loans or grants, from SVU. He received a 4/4 on the measures. He feels prepared academically, he gives his high school credit for preparing him well, he has specific plans for academic success, including organized study sessions, he loves his major and communicates frequently via email with several professors. Finally, he has a summer internship lined up in Madrid. Like Ted, fourteen of the seventeen upper-middle/upper class students, received a positive code on all four of these measures. The one upper-middle/upper class student who received a positive code on only 2 measures was Amy. Amy does not like the people in her business major and also does not have any specific future career-oriented plans. Amy is an outlier in her class group in other ways as well. She is counter-cultural to the upper class lifestyle that dominates SVU, preferring to shop at thrift stores and forego a car, even though other options are available. Her mother encourages her to go shopping for more designer styles. She is one of the few upper/upper-middle class students who self-selects out of the stereotypical SVU student image.

Moving from the upper-middle/upper-class students to the middle-income students, we see that many of the students located in the middle-class group did not receive 4/4 on the measures. Reid, who attended both private and public schools, received a negative code on the first measure. Another middle-income male student, Damien, also received a negative code on this measure. Both young men articulated that they felt less prepared academically compared to their peers. However, all other measures for these male students were positive.

The lower-income group of students fares better on most measures compared to the middle-income students. However, there are minor inconsistencies of achievement among these students. While many in this group received 4's on all of the measures, several of them did not. Louis and Lynda, both low-income and minority students felt academically unprepared for their classes.

Thiele, Megan: mthiele@uci.edu   University of California, Irvine

These findings are mirrored in the interviews. Students across classes stated that the curriculum was manageable, however compared to upper-middle and upper class students, middle income and lower-income students were more likely to describe difficulty when discussing their academics. In particular, middle-income students were most likely to describe ambivalence towards academics: sometimes describing ease and other times describing difficulty. Lower-income students were most likely to describe difficulty and the need to adjust their study habits.

Middle-class students were fraught with ambivalent logic. For example, Damien, a middle-class student, describes his academics:

> Damien: I did really well academically last semester. I got about a 3.75. This semester I'm taking more GE's, I dropped my major so now I am undeclared however, I think I want to go into occupational therapy and see how that is going, so I'm taking one of my classes right now is human functional anatomy for the occupational therapist, and taking writing 140 as well as Spanish two and social diversity and racial conflict, so those are my classes this year, but everything is going pretty well now.

Here Damien demonstrates ambivalence regarding his academics at SVU. He recently dropped his major and is currently undecided. He seems pleased with his GPA of 3.75 and conveys to me that academically he is doing well. Later in the interview, back on the topic of academics, he describes his situation as follows:

> Me: Are there times when you feel academically unprepared here?
> Damien: Yes, all the time.

Further, he describes the burden of managing his work responsibilities and fulfilling his academic responsibilities:

> Damien: It really stinks when you know that a paper is due, you can't enjoy a moment that you're having, like let's say if there's a party on Saturday, but my paper is due Monday and I've been working Thursday and Friday, which happens all the time, I work right after I get out of school, maybe I, after I get out of my classes for the day I have a quick meal and I go immediately to work from 6-11 or something like that, get out, I'm exhausted, oh wait, I have homework, I'll do it tomorrow, it's Thursday, Friday it's the same exact thing, that or dance practice, then after that Saturday night there's a party going on and I have a paper that's due and it's my first free time, I can either go to the party or do the paper however, because of the stress that I'm experiencing I break out and I'm like oh, will now no female is going to find me physically attractive, and not only that, but also if I do go to the party anyway, I'm going to have that in the back of my mind, I'm going to be thinking, I have a paper due, I have a paper due, I have a paper due why am I here? I'm not going to enjoy the moment so those are the things that cause me stress primarily.

The ambivalence displayed by Damien was common with my middle-income students. These are the respondents that are not great for survey research, because depending on what kind of question you ask, or what time you ask it, you would receive an entirely different answer. From the whole interview, I was able to pick up on these inconsistencies and also establish they are most frequent among middle-class members.

There were some examples of this ambivalence demonstrated by middle-class students among lower-income students. The dominant theme, however, demonstrated by lower-income students, was describing their classes as difficult. This excerpt is from

Louis, a lower-income, first-generation Mexican-American student who attended a private high school, where the majority of students were Hispanic.

> Me: Were there times when you felt academically unprepared for your studies here?
> Louis: Yes, yes, right off the bat…the first class I had was writing and I felt like my high school education did not prepare me to write papers, and everything was just more intense, studying was different, I felt like I was expected to do a lot more than I was in high school, which, obviously it's college, but I did little to nothing in high school and got straight A's and all of a sudden I came in as a freshman and the work that I was putting in in high school was getting me D's so I needed to change it up and study hard...
> It took me awhile, the first year I didn't really figure it out and I didn't do so well in class, but I had to just kind of force myself, I had to discipline myself, do the reading, do the homework, study and just do extra studying, what I thought was extra studying was actually just necessary studying, …reviewing notes was something I should have been doing every day, I just didn't have the right study habits, I guess and so I had to learn new study habits, just kind of sitting down, every day, taking time out every day to do review and to work and to read, as opposed to my freshman year when I just, kind of went out every day with friends and hung out and thought that just by kind of going over my notes once before class that I'd be fine and it didn't really work out that way.

Like Louis, other low-income students described the need to step-up their game from high school. Luis was the only student in the low-income group who attended a private high school. Typically, high socio-economic status and attendance at a private high school are positively correlated, and my sample at SVU was not an exception to this rule.

Public vs. Private

Schooling Type	Feels Academically Prepared	Has strategies to achieve academically	Feels connected to major	Has strategic academic/career plans
Private	85%	100%	85%	70%
Public	83%	96%	83%	65%

Figure 2. Relationship between High School Type and Academic Preparation

Students would loquaciously discuss matters of private and public schooling. Those who attended private schools were quick to mention that the reason they were so prepared was because they had attended such a rigorous private school. Students who had attended public schools complained that they felt disadvantaged compared to students who they knew had attended private schools. However, it is important to note that most of those who had this complaint, also felt they were academically prepared for their studies at SVU. Students' complaints regarding private school vs. public school were not always related to their academic prowess, sometimes students complained about other aspects of the schooling process that they felt were inadequate at their public school: that they hadn't found out how to test out of certain classes or had not received adequate help through the application process. For example, take Ken, an upper-class student who is on full academic scholarship at SVU:

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> Ken: I always felt when I was first applying to schools I felt disadvantaged, like I wasn't getting, the college staff, the people that were there to send out my transcripts were dealing with so much other stuff as opposed to helping me get into college, a lot of my forms weren't sent out on time, stuff like that and I felt really disadvantaged at the beginning of my application process, it turned out to work out for me, but in terms of applying to school I felt like I didn't get barely any guidance. The school was really, if you were going to college they expected you to go to the state school, stay in state so I thought my college office was a lot less prone to helping me out.

Even though Ken has this complaint and research documents that it is common for students at public schools to receive less support in the academic application process (McDonough 1997), compared to students at private schools, Ken was accepted into a top three school. He chose to come to SVU because the people seemed "friendlier." Ken received 4/4 on the non-cognitive assessors.

Both the public school and private school attendees were most likely to describe their schools as excellent. Further, many students attributed their success to their previous schooling. For example, take Selena. Selena is a low-income, first-generation Mexican-American who grew up in the poor neighborhoods surrounding SVU. Selena shows up to meet me at a coffee shop on campus decked out in full SVU gear. Her shirt is bright with the bold colors of SVU and her bag is matching. Otherwise, her dress is conservative, with blue jeans and sandals. Her face is dotted with acne and her build is not overweight, but curvy compared to the typical SVU student. Overall, Selena is very happy at SVU, although she feels that many of the students at SVU are naïve when it comes to race, ethnicity and immigration. The path Selena took to SVU is not typical of most SVU students. Selena was cultivated by an organization to prepare for SVU and to become a SVU student (Lareau 2003). She spent an incredible amount of her time since 7th grade preparing for SVU. The organization is called Neighborhood Cultivation of Education (NCE). Selena learned about NCE from her middle school English teacher. She and eight of her friends participated in the program. From 7th grade through 12th grade she attended Saturday school each week and from 9th through 12th grade she and her friends came to the SVU campus every morning during the week also to be tutored. If she met all the requirements for this program and was then accepted to SVU, she received full tuition including food expenses from NCE and SVU. Although eight of her friends originally joined, one moved away and three others were not accepted by SVU, although they did receive grants from the program and are all attending four-year universities. She lives close to all four of her friends and has many other acquaintances from the NCE program, some of whom are in her same grade, and attended NCE during high school. She is also in contact with NCE graduates from previous years. In addition to NCE during high school, Selena attended a 7-week summer program before her freshman year at SVU, the aim of which was to prepare her for living away from home. During this time, she lived on campus and took two classes. The program was for minority students only. These students attended educational and trust-building activities and the organization focused on establishing a sense of belonging among the students. Although Selena complains about the amount of reading at SVU, she says that the after-school program really prepared her for SVU.

> Me: Okay. Have you felt academically prepared for your studies here?
> Selena: Yeah, NCE really prepared us, I can say that.

Similarly, a middle-income student said that the International Baccalaureate, or IB, program at his high school was what had prepared him for SVU, from Gary, a first-generation student:

> Gary: Classes have been good, I've really enjoyed my classes so far, sociology is one of my favorite classes actually, that class, and one of the things that I thought was kind of interesting, or at least struck me kind of, in a different way was I did the international baccalaureate program in my high school and so upon arriving at SVU and just seeing what was required of people to do, I was just really surprised that people don't have to go through such a program, because without the program I just thought, wow, it's just asking a lot of the person and I thought I was really prepared with, are more prepared than I would be without the IB program.

This demonstration of attributing their success to their previous schooling was demonstrated across class backgrounds, some upper class students who attended private schools said their elite schooling allowed them to do well. From Ted, an upper class student, heavily involved in the Greek system, who describes his high school as a really tough private school in Northern California, which he feels completely prepared him for USC. He thinks that if he went to a public school he would have a lot harder time balancing all his activities:

> Me: Do you think your high school prepared you well?
> Ted: Yes, definitely. I definitely think that if I went to one of the public schools around me USC would have been a huge shock about the work load and just everything, about how school works, I think it would have been a total shock, I definitely don't think I would have done nearly as well
> Me: So do you think it helped you learn how to manage your time?
> Ted: Yeah, that's the biggest thing because I was the captain of the soccer team in high school, I was a Boy Scout, and I was getting my Eagle Scout. I was working, you know, really hard in school trying to get good enough grades to come to USC or a good college and so all that combined, I was just working, constantly just doing something, constantly, so I was really prepared because, so I had to manage my time and compartmentalize and figure out where, what time is spent on wide and how much and end that really helped, you know, figure out how to manage my time when I got to USC. Pledging takes all of your time and then you have to balance out with school and I was able to do that fine. I have one of my highest GPAs at USC when I was pledging because I was used to doing the whole, like, don't have time for anything, work really hard, be focused and that kind of thing so.

Only one student, Louis, who attended a private school felt that his high school preparation was sub par. Louis, a first-generation Mexican-American student, attended a private high school where majority of students were Hispanic. He was also one of the students who described difficulties in keeping up academically, demonstrating that a private school background does not necessarily guarantee student preparation.

The public/private sector divide is less compelling than looking at the data through class background. As you can see from the table, although directionally, indicators show that a background in public education for these students may incur disadvantage, the differences are slight. These findings indicate that there may be more variation within the private and public schools than between the two sectors. Further research would do well to investigate the differences in preparation along these lines in order to inform the public/private school debate.

Sex/Gender

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Sex/Gender	Feels academically prepared	Has strategies to achieve academically	Feels connected to major	Has strategic academic/career plans
Female	85%	96%	81%	58%
Male	82%	100%	88%	82%

Figure 3. Relationship between Sex and Academic Preparation

Since the early 2000s men have accounted for approximately 43 percent of overall college enrollment and earn 43 percent of bachelor's degrees (The Associated Press 2010; Coontz 2005). And, women are achieving at higher levels academically than their male counterparts on some measures, for example, for the first time ever among those age 44 and younger, more women than men have some form of a college degree (Ludden 2010; Fry and Cohn 2009) and increasingly, women are more likely to marry husbands who have both lower education levels and lower income levels than they do (Fry and Cohn 2009).

However, many argue that women are still disadvantaged academically. It's important not just that you get a degree, but what you are able to do with that degree. For example, men still lead in both the number of PhDs and MD degrees awarded and women remain underrepresented in traditionally male fields like engineering and computer science (Sax and Astin 2008). Additionally, women earn 77 cents on the dollar compared to men in similar positions (Coontz 2005). Thébaud (2010) finds that women, compared to men, are significantly less likely to perceive themselves as having the ability to be an entrepreneur. Furthermore, she finds that this lack of self-efficacy in women explains a significant portion of the gender gap in entrepreneurial work. Other important questions include: What types of education are men and women getting, for example, by subject? And, what are their experiences in the educational system? The table above shows the differences in academic success predictors by sex category. If having specific plans relates to achieving those plans, and we would expect this relationship, these findings are startling.

Although most of the gender differences in academic orientation found by looking at non-cognitive variables were subtle, some were not as subtle. In the final measure, *specific future plans*, females were considerably more likely to receive a negative coding compared to males. In particular, during the interviews I noticed gender differences when discussing a. specific future plans relating to their degree, such as an internship over the summer, or b. specific future plans in general. I found that the male students in my study were more likely to have specific plans for the future, compared to the female students.

Jill's response to my questioning her future career plans was typical of females in my study by the broad array of options she sees in their future:

Jill: Yeah I am mostly excited about the summer job. I want to, activism is another thing I'm very interested in so I'm going to see how much I like this job and they offer jobs to college graduates so maybe I could consider that at least, I need some kind of job to support me while I'm going on auditions and doing all of that, but I definitely want to pursue acting. I'm not only interested in acting though, I'd definitely be interested in directing or writing. So possibly continuing my education. I like to keep my options open. Psychology is another thing I'm really interested in so I'm looking at taking enough classes and making my minor a little bit bigger…so that I would be a candidate for grad school. You know, taking a research class and mabe, they recommend, or you

have to take statistics before you take a research class so that would make my minor a little bit bigger and then they recommend taking this mathematics course before you do that, so I don't know, I would hate that, but I might.

Jill's main interests include activism, acting, directing, writing and psychology. Although throughout the interview Jill mainly focuses on her pursuit of acting, she is pursuing a summer internship in environmental organizing. Alternatively, take Ken, who has a very busy summer planned. Notice, how well his summer internships relate to his desired future line of work:

> Ken: I am interning at several places. I am interning for an economics consulting firm because I'm an economics major, I'm interning for a venture capitalist firm and also for the city of Denver, their environmental Board and then I also have an internship with a start up, a kind of the social networking community online that starting up here.

Ken is a business major and has planned his summer to include an array of business specific internships. Males were much more likely to describe specific plans, either for a future career or for a career-specific internship, whereas females were less likely to do so. If as social psychologists have shown that current plans have an affect on future outcomes, it is disturbing the men and women are so varied in their university thoughts and actions on career plans.

Race/Ethnicity

Race	Feels academically prepared	Has strategies to achieve academically	Feels connected to major	Has strategic academic/career plans
White	88%	100%	88%	60%
Non-White	78%	94%	72%	72%
Asian-American	71%	100%	71%	86%
Hispanic	67%	100%	83%	83%

Figure 4. Relationship between Race/Ethnicity and Academic Preparation

Students brought up race when discussing academics. For example, David feels that sometimes it is not individual people who are working hard *and* playing hard, but that some people work hard and others play hard. Specifically, he and other interviewees feel that most white people play, and Asian Indian and Chinese students work hard. He feels that it is because of this population that SVU is able to maintain such a high GPA. Alex, who works for the Campus Transportation Services describes a similar situation:

> Alex: I don't see people working very hard here, actually that is not true, the category that I would differentiate would be the Indians and the Chinese students who are from India and China, I pick those kids up on like a Friday night at two in the morning, I will be taking them to the library at two in the morning, they are just starting their studying, I'm like its two in the morning on Friday, I don't think I have ever taken a white kid or any American kid to the library that late, I'm never really picking up the American kids at the library, I think for a good portion of the group definitely

> on the row it's all play, I don't see those kids working here, I don't see how they would…I think
> for people that are here for financial, who have gotten scholarships and need to maintain those
> scholarships, those kids work hard, I think a lot of these kids, it's just like a joke because they
> know that they will just get passed along to the next nice institution, it's good for them.

Based on these anecdotes, one might suspect that white students would achieve at lesser rates compared to non-white students. White fare as well or better on all the measures, compared to each other racial/ethnic category, except for on the last measure: *Student has Strategic Academic/Career Plans*. However, when looking at individual level data on this measure, I find that 9 of the 10 students who received a no on this measure were female. For this analysis, it seems that gender is a better predictor than race. Students all do well on the second measure *Student has Strategies to Achieve Academically*. On the first and third measures, *Student feels Academically Prepared* and *Student feels Connected to Major,* white students report more positive scores compared to both Asians, Hispanics and Non-whites. This direction is predicted and overlaps with class.

Intersection of Class, Race and Gender

My research reproduces the expected predictors of success. According to my findings, being of the upper-middle/upper class, white and male is highly associated with non-cognitive assessors of success. Thus, being non-upper-middle/upper class, non-white and female are associated with low levels of this non-cognitive assessment. There are many programs at SVU that target low-income and minority students. These programs have made a big difference in the lives of many students. From this data I would recommend similar programs to support other students that may also be disadvantaged, for example, middle-income and female students.

CONCLUSION

The modern-day university is a fundamental sorting mechanism of social stratification. University attendance demarcates students as appropriate upwardly mobile material and the hierarchical system of stratification among and between universities contributes to the reproduction of social class. The complex university application process, particularly for selective schools, discourages less committed and unprepared applicants (Stevens 2007).   The hard work of the admissions department pays off: overall, students at SVU do well academically. SVU has a high retention rate- 88% of their students graduate on time or in five years, compared to the average graduation rate of four-year schools of 60% for students graduating within 6 years (SVU 2010; Hess, Schneider, Carey and Kelly 2009). This academic success is not surprising given both the strong applicant pool and also that SVU is a large school (Hurtado, Carter and Spuler 1996). I want to reiterate that the overall feel of academics from the group of students I interviewed was that although at times the reading load felt like more than necessary, academically SVU was easy, at times below par. Maybe it's not that working class students are doing so remarkably well. Maybe it's that elite schools, such as SVU have watered down the curriculum, as in the curriculum is not in line with what a student recently from a private school would expect. These schools are inserting curriculum that

allows students free time to do other things besides academics. How class matters for a student's social scene at SVU will be discussed more in-depth in the following chapter.

By using the non-cognitive scale to assess academic preparation, I found that as far as academic preparation, the class divide was not located between the lower-income compared to middle-income and upper/upper-middle students, but rather that the subtleties in academic preparation can best be described by comparing the lower- and middle-class students to the upper-middle/upper class students. Each of the cleavages between the lower and middle and middle and upper-middle/upper classes tell an important story. Upper-middle and upper income students find academics the least challenging and score the highest on the non-cognitive assessors of academic potential. In comparison, the lower and middle-class students demonstrate both more problems academically and score lower on the non-cognitive academic assessors compared to these upper-middle/upper-income students. Finally, the problems experienced by the middle-income students in my sample outweigh the problems described by the lower-income students. Are middle-class students being left behind in the quest for equality in education for all?

Clearly upper/upper-middle class students are advantaged when it comes to academic efficacy compared to both middle and lower-income students. The long-term effects of these sources of difference are impossible to determine within the scope of this study, however, we know from other data sources that socio-economic status does relate to earnings later in life (Conley 1999). This research has given us a glimpse at a possible major mechanism of this process. Students from the middle and lower-income classes demonstrate less positive measures than students from upper/upper-middle income classes towards their academic lives and career outcomes. Furthermore, on two measures, feels connected to major and has strategic academic/career plans, the differences between middle-class and lower-class students are striking and directionally unexpected. Lower-income students actually demonstrate more academic potential on these measures compared to middle income students. Although these findings are not generalizable to the population at SVU at large, they are indicative that further research is needed to fully understand the academic cultural capital of university students.

Finally, the gendered patterns are worrisome, particularly considering research that has shown that women experience difficulty in developing ideas of themselves as future careerists and many do not expect to be primary breadwinners in the future. And research has found that women in particular are more likely than men to achieve less in terms of academics than expected (Holland and Eisenhart 1990). That women are less likely to identify with a career bodes negatively for their academic achievement.

These findings have both research and policy implications. Many social scientists are interested in inequality, both normatively and from a value-free perspective. Much of the work concerning socio-economic disadvantage has focused on the obvious burdens associated with a low-income background. My research suggests that lower-income students at an elite university are as well equipped, if not more equipped academically, compared to middle-income students. Part of the explanation for these disparities is surely due to the scaffolding performed by various organizations that are designed to increase the academic outcomes of low-income students. Their measures of academic potential are sometimes better than the class category directly above them. However, noticeable differences in academic potential occur when moving up the class hierarchy

toward students from the most advantaged backgrounds. Upper-middle/upper-income students are still by far the most advantaged student population at SVU.

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