Abstract

This study examines how minority students from an enrichment program based in New York City negotiate race and conceptualize social class at elite private schools. Eleven students who have graduated from the program were extensively interviewed about their experiences in high school and college. The major finding of this study is that students who appear to be assimilated into white mainstream middle class culture tended to emphasize the “social construction” and cultural constituents of class more than students who straddled both white and minority cultures, as they emphasized the income element in class. Their interviews reveal that the “mainstreamers” tended to describe the development of their individuality at school, whereas the straddlers were more prone to focus on social structures of inequality, especially in relation to interpersonal racial conflicts at their elite school. This trend was not apparent in the two mainstreamers who expressed socialist or socialist-leaning viewpoints, as they focused on social structures of inequality, much like the straddlers. The single student in this study who chooses not to embrace or perform white mainstream culture in virtually any setting expressed a strongly developed race consciousness while reflecting little or no class consciousness.
Acknowledgments

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Chapter 1  Introduction

Hope Scholars\(^1\) is a leadership training program that recruits “gifted” elementary and middle-
school-aged minority students in the New York area, and prepares them to attend and perform well at
prestigious private high schools and colleges across the nation. Hope Scholars is one of the most
successful enrichment programs in the nation, and claims to furnish proof that students of any ethnicity
and socioeconomic status can attain academic and professional success. Of the 2,275 Hope Scholars
alums who have graduated from college, 852 (37%) graduated from ivy league colleges, 1076 (47%)
graduated from the “Most Competitive” colleges (according to Barron’s 2013 Profiles of American
Colleges), 155 graduated from “Highly Competitive” colleges, and 192 graduated from “Very
Competitive and Other” colleges.\(^2\) Hope Scholars devotes its resources to “gifted” students, but it
assumes as an institution that all minority students are capable of success. Hope Scholars does not
claim that it, and organizations like it, is a solution to racial and economic disparities in access to
education in the United States, but the organization does claim that its program is a step in the right
direction.

Hope Scholars students often have to adjust to a social milieu much different from home when
they attend elite educational institutions in which the majority or plurality of students are white and
well-off. This study aims to categorize the socially conditioned, but individualized ways Hope Scholars
current college students and recent graduates negotiate ethnicity and race at elite high schools and
colleges. This study further seeks to establish whether or not there is a relationship between strategies
for negotiating race and ethnicity and conceptualizations of class.

Background

Many Americans see educational institutions as a primary venue through which social

\(^1\) This is a pseudonym.
\(^2\) Information on Hope Scholars was obtained from its website and annual report. The site is not cited here in order to
 protect the identity of the organization and the student participants of this study.
transformation and individual goals can be achieved. The American Dream, the belief that with hard work one can attain social advancement, is facilitated largely through education, or belief in the efficacy of education. A recent New York Times article exposed how the U.S. has less social mobility than other advanced nations (DeParle, 2012). In addition, African Americans in particular have limited social mobility (Bowser, 2007). Yet the American Dream, or achievement ideology, remains a fixture in American culture. Achievement ideology complicates and even potentially obviates perception of class differences because it promotes a vision of the fluidity of wealth and status, and the contingency of wealth on individual talent and determination, as opposed to social and economic structures.

Hope alums can be said to be embodiments of the American Dream. All are minority students, and many come from modest backgrounds. Harvard University is one of the two most common college destinations of Hope alums, and among the alums are Fulbright Scholars, Truman Scholars and at least one Rhodes Scholar. Many Hope alums go into finance; American Express, Goldman Sachs and J.P. Morgan are among the nine leading employers of alums. However, the New York City Department of Education is also among the leading employers. Hope Scholars provides opportunities for its students in an attempt to show how much minority students can achieve given equal access to education. Given how many alums become educators, Hope seems to instill, or attract students who already have instilled within them, belief in the transformative power and, perhaps, the intrinsic value of education. Perhaps Hope Scholars alums who become educators instill belief in the transformative power of education in their classrooms by exemplifying realization of the American Dream.

Hope Scholars does not operate with the naïve assumption that education is a level playing field on which students of all kinds compete for entry into personally rewarding or high status jobs and social positions, but Hope Scholars suggests, as an institution, that given a level playing field, minority students can be successful. Thus, Hope Scholars promotes the American Dream with a contingency: efforts must be made to account for racial disparities in order to truly level the playing field for all to
succeed.

The path to success for Hope alums typically involves some exploration or negotiation of ethnic identity within mostly white elite private schools. For minority students, achieving success can involve a balancing act of celebrating their cultural heritage while attaining some fluency in the cultural behaviors that enable social mobility. This study aims to explore the ways several Hope Scholars students make sense of identity, success and the educational institutions they attend.
Chapter 2  Literature Review

The difference between the test scores and educational attainment of black and Latino students compared to white and Asian students is often called the achievement gap, and is a major topic within the field of education. Within the sociology of education, there are two major theoretical perspectives on social inequality. Structural functionalists argue that society tends toward order, and education serves to rank people, granting access to high paying and high status jobs to those of high achievement. However, students of high socioeconomic status are significantly more likely than those of low socioeconomic status to complete college, a fact that challenges the notion of educational meritocracy (Gamoran, 2001). Another theoretical perspective on inequality is conflict or reproduction theory, which holds that education serves to reproduce class inequality. For the purpose of explaining unequal educational attainments among various social groups, reproduction theory is more powerful than functionalist theory because of the many ways education in the U.S. falls short of being a meritocracy.

The ideological framework of this study is the reproduction theory associated with Bourdieu (1973), as well as Bowles and Gintis (1976). I will take the class structure of U.S. society, and its need to reproduce itself, for granted. Although there is not a perfect correlation between educational attainment and class, there is a positive one (Kershaw, 1992). Reproduction theory is hence a useful framework because of its focus on class.

While early reproduction theorists were accused of being deterministic, later reproduction theorists developed sophisticated analyses of how the cultures of specific peer groups cause students to be complicit in denying themselves social mobility. Several reproduction theorists have thus pointed out the role of culture in social reproduction. This study will hence focus on the role of culture in reproduction by studying the relationship between methods of negotiating race and ethnicity at elite schools, and class conception. This study is somewhat unique in that it will use reproduction theory to examine students who are socially mobile, however, the assumption of reproduction theory is not that
no one is socially mobile, but, rather, that class inequality is reproduced. I will examine the class conceptions of socially mobile minorities, and conjecture about the role such conceptions play in social reproduction. Following is a review of some of the literature on reproduction theory as well as literature on education and minorities.

In *Schooling in Capitalist America*, Marxist economists Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis argued that educational institutions prepare students to assume roles in a class-structured society. They argued that the discipline enforced by school, such as punishing tardy students, instills the self-discipline needed at the work-place. Bowles and Gintis further argued that the relative freedom of college is only earned after students internalize the discipline and respect for authority taught in elementary and high school. Hence, college students who are on track for managerial and middle class jobs do not pose a threat to the unequal structures of society. Students who do not "make it," and perform relatively poorly in school, and hence tend to filter into working class positions, according to Bowles and Gintis, do not challenge capitalism due to their absorption of achievement ideology. They individualize their defeats. They interpret their position in society to be commensurate to their talent and performance in school. Grading, hence, is one of the tools education uses to justify inequality and mystify the reproduction of class society (Bowles & Gintis, 1976).

Unlike Bowles and Gintis, sociologist Pierre Bourdieu emphasized the role of culture in the reproduction of society (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu theorized that school rewards behaviors that are socialized within middle class families. Teachers positively assess the speech patterns and interactional behaviors of middle class students, while negatively assessing the cultural patterns of the working class and other marginalized groups. Poor students could do well in school and rise to the middle class so long as they acquired middle class culture. Bourdieu posited a theory of cultural capital to explain the reproduction of society. Cultural capital is non-economic capital that is exchangeable in some measure with economic capital. An example of such an exchange is a student demonstrates his or her cultural
capital through speech patterns and knowledge of how to interact with adults, and this cultural capital is
exchanged for a degree from a prestigious college institution (institutionalized capital), which is then
exchanged for economic capital via a well-paying job. Whereas Bowles and Gintis mainly explored
class structure, and education's role in reproducing it, Bourdieu explored the complex role of culture in
the reproduction of class structure.

It is not just the culture of elites that is important in social reproduction, but also the cultures of
non-dominant groups. Several theorists have explored the role of peer group cultures in social
reproduction. In 1977, Paul Willis published *Learning to Labour*, an ethnography of a group of
nonconformist, working class British students called the lads, who formed identities based on rejecting
and negating the values of school. Willis, though writing from a Marxist perspective, was critical of
what he took to be the economic determinism of Bowles and Gintis. Willis argued against the cultural
homogeneity implicit in Bowles and Gintis’ analysis of education by pointing out that some students
develop oppositional cultures that reject achievement ideology. Willis's emphasis on the role of culture
as a medium through which social reproduction occurs was evident in his method of study: the
ethnography. By interviewing the lads, Willis explored the agency of students in creating and ascribing
cultural meanings to school and to the labor market. By constructing identities based on rejecting
school, and opting out of the race towards middle class jobs, Willis argued that the lads “partially
penetrated” the reproduction of capitalist society. However, the lads' machismo, their conception of
white-collar jobs as feminine and blue collar jobs as masculine, prevented the boys from developing
their partial penetration of capitalism into a transformative political ideology. By opting out of the race
to middle class status and glorifying blue collar work as manly, Willis argued that the boys facilitated
the reproduction of their working class status. Willis hence subscribed to reproduction theory, but he
argued that the cultural meanings people make out of economic conditions are not necessarily directly
dependent on the economy. Nor are those cultural meanings homogenous. Not everyone subscribes to
the dominant ideology (which is achievement ideology in the realm of education). Willis' argument was that culture matters.

In *Ain't No Makin' It*, originally published in 1987, but subsequently heavily updated, Jay MacLeod built on and somewhat critiqued the work of Paul Willis (among other reproduction theorists) by pursuing an ethnographic study of two peer groups in the housing projects of Clarendon Heights. The Hallway Hangers were mostly white, rejected school, and pursued drugs and sex and dominance in arenas unsanctioned by polite society. The Brothers, on the other hand, were black and bought into achievement ideology. MacLeod, like Willis, was interested in how culture mediated and complicated social reproduction. MacLeod's Hallway Hangers, like Willis' lads, understood to some extent how job markets necessitate the reproduction of the working class and facilitated their own stasis within the underclass by rejecting education outright. Whereas Willis identified sexism as the main obstruction that prevented the lads from developing their oppositional culture into a political platform, MacLeod argued that racism served the same purpose for the hallway hangers. Racism prevented the Hallway Hangers from fully developing class identities and recognizing poor blacks as dealing with similar conditions. Willis and MacLeod both discussed sexism and racism, but Willis emphasized the former and MacLeod the latter.

MacLeod's critique of Willis was that he did not elucidate the structural forces that limited the options of the lads, and hence overemphasized culture. By contrast, MacLeod devoted some of his ethnography to pointing out the limited employment opportunities of the subjects of his ethnography, and also the tracking systems that put the Hallway Hangers into vocational classes.

After conducting interviews over the course of two decades, MacLeod discovered that the outcomes for the subjects of his study were even starker than he predicted. MacLeod assumed that the Brothers might be able to slip into the middle class. However, both the Hallway Hangers and the Brothers largely remained within the social class into which they were born. The Brothers, who
subscribed to achievement ideology as students, and who earned average grades in school, fared no better than the academically underachieving Hallway Hangers, and in some cases worse. The Hallway Hangers had access to working class jobs through social networks whereas the Brothers often did not. In addition, the Brothers faced racism both from employers and the police. One of the central questions of MacLeod's study was why did the Brothers subscribe to achievement ideology given that their situation was arguably worse than that of the Hallway Hangers due to their race? MacLeod's answer is that in order for poor white working and underclass students to embrace achievement ideology, they have to interpret their parents' lack of wealth and status as due to laziness and/or incompetence. However, black students can have the conception that earlier generations had it much harder than them. They interpret the Civil Rights Movement as extending opportunity to them that their parents never had. For MacLeod's Brothers, a conception of historical change enables achievement ideology, even in housing projects (MacLeod, 2009, 142 - 143). In Ain't No Makin' It, MacLeod subscribes to both reproduction theory and the importance of culture, and sustains analysis from cultural, economic and historical frameworks.

Both Willis and MacLeod, to varying degrees, accused Bowles and Gintis of being reductionist, meaning that Bowles and Gintis reduced social phenomena to being determined by economic relations, ignoring the role of the cultural values of peer groups. Marxists, who typically use class and broad economic conditions to explain social phenomenon, are often accused of being reductionist or determinist. In this instance, Willis and MacLeod, who engaged in Marxist analyses within their works, explicitly distinguished themselves from Bowles and Gintis in order to avoid the accusation of economic determinism. I think that close readings of Bowles and Gintis reveal that they are not as determinist as many reviewers of their work claim them to be because they discuss how educational institutions can be used as sites of protest and rebellion in addition to sites of legitimation of class inequality. Willis and MacLeod's studies are important in that they build on the foundation set by
Bowles and Gintis by focusing on the complex realm of culture. I am also interested in studying the relationship of culture to conceptions of class.

Most of the studies of minorities and education fall outside of the discipline of reproduction theory, but are still valuable regardless of their theoretical frameworks. For decades many believed the lower academic achievement of blacks compared to whites indicated a culture of deprivation or a jaded oppositional culture. Daniel Solorzano was one of the pioneers whose research helped challenge this notion by pointing out that blacks believed in the benefits of education at least as much as whites did (Solorzano, 1992). A. A. Akom's study of black female Nation of Islam students contributed the nuance that one could oppose the dominant ideology and culture of school while valuing academic achievement. The girls in his study rejected white society but still pursued education as a means of black uplift (Akom, 2003).

Prudence Carter's *Keepin' It Real*, a study of low-income black and Latino Yonkers residents, argued that many cultural factors beyond religious institutions can influence the varied ways minority students adopt, rework and contest achievement ideology. Carter argued that whereas most black and Latino students believe in the benefits of education, they engage in education differently according to how they manage ethnic identities within schools that privilege white culture (white culture tends to dominate regardless of the racial makeup of the student body or faculty). Carter identified three ideal types: cultural mainstreamer, cultural straddler and noncompliant believer. Cultural mainstreamers and cultural straddlers both engage in school and tend to perform well. The cultural mainstreamers are aware of their ethnic identity, but do not interpret the speech, music and clothing of middle class whites to be limited to whites. They adopt "mainstream" culture without interpreting this as contradicting their ethnic identity. Cultural straddlers, by contrast, perform the school's cultural rules within school, but also navigate between different cultures given different social contexts. Lastly, the noncompliant believers, despite believing that education is a primary means of attaining success, reject school
because they interpret school culture as devaluing their own ethnic identity and culture.\(^3\)

I believe that Carter’s categories, cultural mainstreamer, cultural straddler and noncompliant believer, are applicable outside of her study participants and outside of Yonkers because many minorities in the U.S. must contend with white culture in school settings since schooling nationwide tends to reward performance of white culture and devalue other cultures. I also believe that Hope Scholars alums contend with white culture in an immediate and intensified manner because they attend schools composed mostly of elite whites. Hence, I believe it is viable to apply Carter’s categories to Hope alums.

Carter’s work is heavily dependent on the notion of ethnicity and so it is important here to define the term. Sociologists differentiate between race and ethnicity. Sociologists treat race as a socially constructed label that links physical characteristics to mental and social inferiority or superiority. After the discovery of genes and the laws of heredity, race has been and is often linked to genetics. Partially due to various social movements as well as the discrediting of pseudoscientific attempts to find a genetic basis for race, sociologists developed various concepts of ethnicity. Ethnic groups are socially constructed based upon a common cultural heritage and often an origin story, real or imagined. Race is thus conceived as biological whereas ethnicity is conceived of as cultural. Despite the tenuous theoretical basis for race, race continues to be an important concept in the U.S. that facilitates material inequalities. Because race is linked to inequality, emphasis on ethnicity and not race can elide mentioning disparities (Andersen, 1999). Since I focus on both cultural phenomena and inequality, I use both terms throughout this paper.

There are many models for ethnicity and the one pertinent to this study is the multidimensional

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\(^3\) Several sociologists have argued that Bourdieu's theories of cultural and social capital are ethnocentric and must be revised when applying them to countries as diverse as the United States. Research has shown that middle class blacks expose their children to African American fine art, distinguishing black cultural capital from white cultural capital (Banks, 2012). In addition, success in non-mainstream economies can be dependent on displaying cultural identifiers that are non-white (Jankowski, 1991). Furthermore, Carter argued that non-dominant cultural capital, the cultural capital of lower status groups, facilitates acquisition of symbolic forms of recognition within lower status communities (Carter, 2003). Because the students in this study had to adjust to elite majority-white private schools, this study will refer exclusively to white mainstream cultural capital.
model of racial identity, created by Sellers, et al. Sellers used the term “racial identity” because he did not want to deny the importance of the concept of race for African Americans, but, for all intents and purposes, he meant ethnic identity, as he explains in his article (Sellers, 1998). Sellers’ model poses four different dimensions of “racial identity,” and the one most important for this study, as well as for Carter's (Carter referred to Seller's model in Keepin’ It Real) is ideology. Ideology, as defined by Sellers, is a person's ideas about how people within their ethnic group should live and behave in society. Carter delineated ideology into the categories cultural mainstreamer, cultural straddler and noncompliant believer.

**Additional Concepts: Class and Social Constructs**

There are several additional concepts relevant to this study. Theoretical concepts of class are important because this is a study of the class conceptions of several minority students. In addition, the notion of “social construction” is also important because it was mentioned in several interviews.

Max Weber (1864 – 1920) was one of the founders of sociological theory, and he argued that there are three elements of social inequality: class, status, and party. The first two, class and status, are relevant to this thesis. For Weber, class is determined by one's “market situation,” or income. Status, on the other hand, is determined by honor and prestige, and may or may not be independent of income.

Weber's concept of class is very different from Marx's. Marx conceived of a proletariat – workers who do not own the “means of production” (i.e. factories) and must sell their “labour power” for a wage – and a bourgeoisie that owns the means of production. Marx argued that notions such as status are often straightforward or complex reflections of antagonistic relations between the classes.

Weber's and Marx's conceptualizations of class are not mutually exclusive. For example, Weber argued that during periods of economic stability, status is often determined by possession resources, i.e. by class. However, while Marx argued that economic relations are the primary determinants of inequality, Weber did not. In fact, Weber argued that status can sometimes lead to economic power, and
this argument is somewhat of a precursor of Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital.

Weber's conceptualization of class and status is useful when discussing particular situations in which the relationship between class and status is nuanced. However, Marx's conceptualization is more useful when emphasizing the antagonistic nature of class divisions.

The final concept relevant to this study is that of social construction. To say that something is socially constructed is to say that it is dependent on and determined by social arrangements. In other words, much of the phenomena that people perceive as reality is not objective phenomena, but constructed by social arrangements (Potter, 12). For example, Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* discussed the social construction of gender (although it was published before the notion of social construction was popularized), and countless works have discussed the social construction of race.

**Concluding Remarks on the Literature**

The ethnographies and studies of Willis, MacLeod and Carter demonstrate that the way in which students engage in school is mediated by culture, ethnicity, location and historical period. The theoretical frameworks of Willis and MacLeod fall within reproduction theory. Carter's *Keepin' It Real*, on the other hand, falls outside of reproduction theory. Carter draws heavily on Bourdieu, and Bourdieu in turn drew heavily from Marx, but Carter's usage and critique of Bourdieu is absent of Marxism and reproduction theory, at least within *Keepin' It Real*. Carter suggests that teachers and educational institutions should start valuing and incorporating non-dominant cultural capital into their schools in order to improve the rates at which minorities feel attached to school. Carter appears to believe, at least to some extent, that improving schooling can improve the lives of low-income minorities. By contrast, Willis and MacLeod would contend that structural barriers limit the degree to which education can transform the lives of low-income students collectively. I am not sure that Carter would contest the last statement, but overall Carter demonstrates more of an orientation towards school reform, and Willis and MacLeod demonstrate more of an orientation towards broad structural change.
Evaluating the ideological frameworks of case studies helps make sense of the literature on class, race and education, and the normative claims and policy suggestions social scientists make. I think it is important to be clear about one's ideological framework. I use the framework of reproductive theory. However, I view culture as an important mediator between infrastructure and social outcomes, which is why I would like to conduct interviews – a tool inherently focused on culture. Macleod's examination of cultural habits through the framework of social reproduction theory demonstrates the robustness of reproduction theory; it can incorporate the complexities of culture, and hence incorporate works like that of Carter.

Different social milieus engender different ways of negotiating school with ethnicity and adopting and practicing achievement ideology. For this reason, interview-based qualitative research serves the function of documenting how different cultures operate within and assess the role of educational institutions. I conducted a study of Hope Scholars college students and recent grads to assess the degree to which the ideologies of the students conform to or deviate from the ideologies of the students of Willis', MacLeod's and Carter's ethnographies.

I used Carter's categories (cultural mainstreamers, cultural straddlers, noncompliant believers) to group my students. Since the categories are ideal types, few of the students fully fit within one category or the other, but rather mostly exhibited the characteristics of one category, while also showing some tendencies of a different category. In a way similar to Willis and Macleod, I ultimately aimed to show whether or not strategies for negotiating race and ethnicity are related to greater or lesser degrees of perception of the role of education in the reproduction of class. Carter focused more so on race and ethnicity than on class in her study, and my study contributes class analysis to her work.
Chapter 3  Methodology

I conducted eleven interviews. I directly contacted five friends or acquaintances who I thought would provide interesting stories. Otherwise, Hope Scholars agreed to facilitate this project, and to send out an email to Hope alums, calling for volunteers to be interviewed. Thus, some of the interviewees were people I already knew, and some were not.

Of the five Hope alums I contacted, two are friends whose opinions of private schools and whose politics I was largely but not entirely familiar with prior to conducting this study. They are also familiar with my own opinions. I do not believe this familiarity was a hindrance, but an enhancement of the interviews, if anything. Of the other three acquaintances, I sought out one specifically because he is openly gay and I had no other openly gay interviewee. It turned out that he is also socialist-leaning\(^4\), and this was relevant to the data I collected from his interview. In addition to the five students I contacted to participate in this study, it turned out that one of the six volunteers is also someone I met prior to interviewing him.

Other than the two friends mentioned above, my fellow Hope acquaintances are generally not familiar with my opinions and politics. Those who know me at all typically know me as a quiet studious student. That is not to say that I served as some sort of objective interviewer who is more or less a non-presence, extracting raw, unfiltered data. After each interview, I wrote down my feelings about the interview, in part to assess how I thought my presence affected the kinds of answers the interviewee gave. None of these notes was incorporated into the analysis portion of my thesis, but I think reflection is generally a good practice after an interview.

The sample size of eleven college students cannot be said to be fully representative of Hope Scholars, especially since there are over two thousand Hope alums. In addition, students who volunteer

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\(^4\) Socialists criticize private ownership of property under capitalism and contend for some form of collective ownership of property. I call one of the interviewee’s “socialist-leaning” because his beliefs are basically socialist, but he stated in his interview that he rejects the label because of the stigma attached to it. The socialist-leaning participant’s interview responses were very similar to those of another student who identifies as socialist.
to be interviewed may be more likely to have certain attitudes toward schooling.

Students' orientations towards educational institutions are individuated, despite being socially conditioned. Thus I expected every interviewee to have a somewhat unique point of view. While I looked for patterns, I aimed to investigate how culture, ethnicity, and class are filtered and interpreted by the individual's experiences. My analysis thus started from the individual, cultural level, but I anticipated either making broad claims, or suggesting further research that can be done to enable broad claims. The sample size of eleven, I think, is large enough to make claims as long as there is no claim of being fully representative of Hope Scholars.

The interviews were semistructured. They began with open ended questions and then proceeded to pointed questions towards the end (should certain topics have not come up already). The reason for the open ended questions is I wanted to limit, as much as possible, how my questions forced certain answers. I wanted students to present their own ideologies and opinions without necessarily adapting to my own ideology and terminology. For example, I wanted students to express what ethnicity means to them, rather than define ethnicity for them. This is not because I contend that “ethnic identity” is constructed solely on the individual level, but this study looked at conceptions of “ethnic identity” on the individual level.

Another reason for the partially open ended approach is I believed students may manage ethnicity and school in ways undocumented by Carter and unanticipated by me. Allowing interviewees to answer broader questions helped me identify the complex and individualized ideologies of interviewees.

The open ended interview questions fit into five different categories: one of which attempts to determine how central a student feels her/his community is to her/his identity, another of which attempts to determine belief in the American Dream, and three of which attempt to determine whether the student exhibits qualities of cultural mainstreamers, cultural straddlers and noncompliant believers.
I asked questions about how participants spoke in and outside of the classroom, their music and clothing tastes, and questions about how students expect others within their ethnic group to act in order to determine which of Carter's categories the students fell into. The interviews concluded with more pointed questions, again according to each of the five categories, should the interviewee not have addressed certain topics when prompted earlier by the open ended questions. An additional set of questions within the directed questions portion seeks to determine how students perceive class. This section is relevant because I initially believed perceptions of class are intertwined with culture and conceptions of the American Dream.

After the interviews, I decided to classify students as cultural mainstreamers, cultural straddlers and noncompliant believers based on how they stated they use white middle class English and other forms of English in informal and formal settings, because this was the clearest criterion by which to categorize students. This is different from how Carter classified her study participants. Carter classified students based on “ideology,” or how students expect members of their ethnic group to behave, and ideology in Carter’s study is directly related to how students assimilate or do not assimilate to white mainstream culture. However, the participants in my study were sometimes reluctant to suggest that members of their ethnic group should behave in certain ways. Hence, I classified participants based on their own linguistic assimilation to white culture.

**Implications and Significance**

Willis and MacLeod demonstrated in their ethnographies how analysis of culture complicates and reinvigorates reproduction theory. I would like to continue in that tradition, this time investigating an enrichment program. Enrichment programs like Hope Scholars consciously seek to begin the process of or set a model for social change. Hope Scholars aims to promote equal access to education for minorities. A purely cynical reproductive theoretical analysis of Hope Scholars would contend that a program that facilitates the mobility of a few minority students into the middle and upper classes does
not engender social change, but rather stymies it by appearing to partially resolve some prevalent social inequities. Such an argument would further contend that Hope Scholars is used as a diversity recruitment tool by private high schools (and to a lesser extent by private colleges) in order for such institutions to appear to offer equal access. Furthermore, many of the biggest donors to Hope Scholars are white and wealthy and include bankers, lawyers and other people whose professions can be implicated in exploiting poor, minority communities, and thus reproducing inequality. By donating to charity, such people vindicate themselves, and similarly society vindicates itself through the existence of Hope Scholars and other organizations like it, staving off deeper social change. Such an analysis may be valid on some level, but it leaves out the voices of Hope Scholars students themselves, who would presumably disagree with such a dismissal of Hope Scholars. Many Hope alums become teachers, even though alums could presumably attain higher paying and higher status positions, and the reasons may be cultural or ideological. However, a possible downside to Hope alums becoming teachers is that they may promote a somewhat illusory vision of achievement ideology by presenting themselves as successes.

Peoples' cultures and ideologies often have complex relationships with social conditions and material reality, and hence culture and ideology are worth examining. In addition, education is a contested space that does not merely reproduce society exactly as it always has been. Otherwise, society would be static. Hope Scholars is one organization that seeks to interfere in the process of the reproduction of inequality. Nonetheless, Hope Scholars has the role within the reproduction of society of facilitating the social mobility of a few minorities, and thus vindicating structures of inequality that trap most underprivileged minorities.

I am most interested in studying the cultures and politics of Hope alums, and the relationship of culture to reproduction. Like MacLeod and Willis, I would like to examine the cultures of interviewees. I would like to use Carter's categories in conjunction with reproduction theory.
A study of an enrichment program would be a unique complement to the literature on reproduction theory. Conversely, reproduction theory can contribute to the discussion of enrichment programs, and such discourse has broad implications for initiatives and policies that enable educational achievement and social mobility for minorities, like affirmative action. A major limitation of this study, as mentioned in the methodology section, is the small sample size, but still, by examining the experiences of several Hope Scholars students, I hope to ultimately make claims as to whether enrichment programs are worthwhile, or to make suggestions for future research on the subject.
Chapter 4   Results/Discussion

Carter’s categories are applicable to the participants of this study, however I used a different method of classifying students than Carter. Of my eleven interviewees, seven are cultural mainstreamers, three are cultural straddlers and one is a noncompliant believer. The primary criterion I used to determine whether students are mainstreamers, straddlers or noncompliant believers was their description of speech patterns within and outside of academic and professional settings. Their descriptions of clothing and music preferences were occasionally useful, but too variable and individualized to be consistent indicators of mainstreaming or straddling. As stated in the methodology section, Carter used “ideology,” or beliefs about how members of an ethnic or racial group should behave, to classify students. However, in my study, some students were reluctant to prescribe behavior for members of their ethnic and racial groups. Hence I classified all of the study participants based on the settings in which they use white middle class English.5

Profiles of Study Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Cultural Mainstreamer (CM), Cultural Straddler (CS), Noncompliant Believer (NB)</th>
<th>Immigration Status</th>
<th>Undergraduate University</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arianna</td>
<td>CM</td>
<td>2nd generation</td>
<td>Davidson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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5 Many students did answer the two direct questions about ethnic “ideology” that are in my protocol, and if I were to classify them based on ideology, this would match the way I would classify them based on usage of standard white middle class English. However, several students did not give detailed answers to the questions about ideology, so I did not use ideology as the criterion for classification as a straddler, mainstreamer or noncompliant believer. In addition, I carried out the interviews prior to talking to Prudence Carter and fully grasping her methodology. Hence I did not dwell on the questions about ideology when conducting the interviews. I do not think this had a significant effect on my results since ideology is heavily related to assimilation and usage of standard middle class English.
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It was not surprising that most of the interviewees are cultural mainstreamers, given that in Carter's study the mainstreamers outperformed the straddlers, and both the straddlers and mainstreamers outperformed the noncompliant believers. However, I was surprised to find that one of my interviewees, Clinton, is a noncompliant believer. I personally sought his participation after the cultural straddler, Sade told me that he would provide similar answers as she did, “only angrier.” It turned out that Clinton is an academically successful noncompliant believer. He resisted assimilating to his boarding school’s culture, which he interpreted as racist, but still managed to be academically competitive.

Of the eleven interviewees, nine happen to be the children of immigrants. Since I did not anticipate this, none of the questions in the interview protocol ask about immigration. Carter developed the terms cultural mainstreamer, cultural straddler and noncompliant believer from a study of non-immigrant African Americans and second generation Latinos. By contrast, the parents of many of the black students in this study come from the Caribbean. This may be relevant because one cultural mainstreamer described in his interview how his Jamaican parents did not allow him to freely engage in hip hop and African American culture as child, and that this was in part a strategy to foster his academic success. Another second generation Jamaican student described how she identified more with African immigrants at school than with African Americans.

African Americans and West Indians potentially have different orientations to both education and the job market. Research has shown that first generation West Indian immigrants have different attitudes about work than African Americans, and that employers value this, giving working class West
Indians an edge over African Americans in the job market (Waters, 1999). Furthermore, working and middle class immigrants may come to the U.S. with credentials and social networks in place that ease the process of finding employment (Waters). As for the immigrant vs. non-immigrant education, John Ogbu argued that “involuntary minorities” (such as African Americans) tend to resent the dominant group in their society, to “blame the system” for their marginalization, and do not distinguish, as immigrants do, between what is needed to succeed in school from the culture of the dominant group. “Involuntary minorities” hence develop an oppositional culture that may inhibit academic success (Gibson and Ogbu, 1991).

My results/discussion chapter will not discuss immigration status at length because I did not consistently ask interviewees about this. However, it is worth investigating in future research how many minority students in academically competitive enrichment programs are first or second generation immigrants. In addition, further research can clarify if, and the nuances of how Carter's categories – cultural mainstreamer, cultural straddler, and noncompliant believer – apply to immigrants.

The three following sections of the results/discussion chapter will discuss the topics the interview protocol was designed to explore: conceptions of the American Dream among the Hope Scholars\textsuperscript{6} interviewees, conceptions of class, and methods of negotiating racial conflict at school.

I. American Dream

The eleven interviewees can be said to embody the American Dream. However, of the eleven, six stated that they do not believe in the American Dream and five stated that they believe the Dream is possible some of the time. There was no discernible pattern of either believing or not believing in the Dream among the cultural straddlers and the cultural mainstreamers. In \textit{Keepin’ it Real}, Carter similarly found there to be no pattern of believing and not believing in the Dream among the mainstreamers, straddlers

\textsuperscript{6}Hope Scholars is a pseudonym. I am not discussing the real HOPE scholarship.
and noncompliant believers.

In light of that finding, this section is not organized according to straddling and mainstreaming, but believing or not believing in the Dream. The believers and the nonbelievers both typically argued that success is contingent on several factors besides hard work, including family connections and wealth. However, the believers in the Dream reconciled these limitations by making one or several of the following arguments: the Dream becomes a reality for some people, hard work has some correlation to success and one can at least control how hard one works, the American Dream and attainment of success is a matter of perception and mentality. Another trend is three of the five believers in the Dream stated that the social change they would like to see is a closer correlation of hard work to success, thus a more perfect meritocracy. A final trend, that will be elaborated later, is that the believers were more likely to personalize their definitions of the American Dream, whereas the non-believers used a standard definition of the Dream.

Believers

Social Connections, Wealth, and Discrimination Temper the Dream

Trisha is a believer in the Dream who understands herself to be a model for how the Dream can be realized:

I do feel success in knowing that I came from a developing country, from a public school in Brooklyn. And now I’m an Ivy League graduate and I have a full-time job six months out of my career at Dartmouth.

Trisha sees herself as exemplifying the immigrant narrative of attaining social mobility through talent, hard work, and the right opportunities.

While Trisha offered her own story as an example of the Dream's validity, like many of the interviewees, Trisha also argued that social connections sometimes allow people to attain success that is unearned:

Seeing hard work being correlated with success; going back to my whole example about sororities and fraternities with the social capital thing, part of the social capital is also outside of
who you’re going to party with.

Trisha was critical of institutions and social conditions that allow people to succeed without hard work, and she was particularly critical of how fraternities and sororities provide social networks that enable students to attain positions due to who they know, not how hard they work:

Some companies, they care about which sorority you’re in. And certain big sororities or fraternities in my school, they’ll have connections... During corporate recruiting where you see a bunch of guys who you know are not the brightest ones in the class who are going to get all their investment banking jobs at this certain company because of that social capital of being in that fraternity.

In addition to criticizing Greek life as tempering the Dream, in another part of her interview, Trisha related an anecdote about someone in her high school who was expelled for drinking and who nonetheless was accepted to Harvard because of family connections. Like several of the interviewees, Trisha is familiar with the term social capital, and mentioned the term unprompted. She argued that certain forms of social capital unfairly guarantee the success of some. However, for Trisha, the American Dream is still valid. Trisha argued that success does correlate to hard work, and that the social change that is needed is a stronger correlation.

For all her reservations about the Dream, Trisha still stated, “but the American Dream doesn’t mean that it has to happen for everybody. It just means that you -- that it can happen and it can.” In her interview, Trisha gave several counterexamples of the Dream, but also described herself and Oprah (in different segments of the interview) as embodiments of the Dream. Even if unearned social capital accounts for the success of some, it does not account for the success of all. It seems that part of Trisha's proof that the Dream “can” happen is that it did happen for her.

Tiffany is another believer in the Dream, although less of a believer than Trisha. Tiffany argued that there are “prior determinations” outside of a person's control, such as race and gender, which limit how successful he or she can be:

I personally think that a lot of [the determinants of success are systematic. It's probably because I just did a sociology course... A lot of what we talked about in my sociology class is prior
determinations. So you being born into situations, like being a black male or black female. There are certain things that you cannot control before you enter the world. The fact that as a woman I may not have equal pay or as a black person someone might discriminate against me... I really think that there is only so much you can do to reverse social constraints in one lifetime. I think that it is a mix of someone's actions and the resources they have but I think it's mostly what resources they start out with that determine someone's success or failure.

Despite believing that success is determined more by factors outside of a person's control than by personal actions, Tiffany stated that she believes in the American Dream to a certain extent because hard work is essential to success. When I asked, “Do you think that success correlates to how hard a person works,” Tiffany responded:

I think in most situations yes. I forget where I was reading this... The person who wrote it argued someone can be talented but you need to work hard and you need the opportunity. You can work hard and you can have an opportunity, but if you're not talented, you're not going to achieve success. So if you have a talent and an opportunity but you don't work hard that's incomprehensible. But I thought the person's argument about talent and opportunity without hard work was the strongest argument because, like I said, I think... if you're not constantly working at something, I don't see how you can be successful.

Even though Tiffany believes hard work does not always compensate for limitations beyond a person's control, she believes that without hard work success is virtually unattainable, and this is the basis for here partial belief in the American Dream.

**The Ideal of Perfect Meritocracy**

According to both Tiffany and Trisha, hard work has some correlation to success, and in the future, should the right changes happen, could have a stronger correlation. Rounding off her criticism of fraternities, Trisha stated: “the social change that I’d like to see is where hard work is correlated with success.” Despite her criticism of fraternities, Trisha believed that schools could facilitate a truer meritocracy. Similarly, Tiffany stated:

In my sociology class [we] talked about education as an equalizer versus education as an institution. And I think that right now education can be an equalizer but more often that not is much more of an institution. But I think the goal of education – it should be an equalizer. It should be something that you can use to change your situation if you want to.

Tiffany argued that because of such unequal conditions within schooling such as differences in funding
of public schools across different communities, educational institutions currently perpetuate inequality. However, like Trisha, Tiffany believes that education should be an “equalizer” because, in theory, anyone can get good grades in school and achieve success should they work hard enough and have access to the right resources. According to Tiffany, measures need to be undertaken in order to ensure a more perfect meritocracy.

Cassandra is another partial believer in the Dream, although she thinks that more often than not, the dream of social mobility through hard work is unrealized by underprivileged folks. Her ideal meritocracy is somewhat different from Trisha’s and Tiffany’s. Cassandra’s notion of the Dream requires that one should be able to achieve success through public schools, and therefore she stated that her attendance of a private school and an Ivy League university somewhat disqualified her from being an exemplar of the Dream:

...the American Dream is such a heroic kind of idea because, at least the way I think of it, you can make something of yourself depending solely on what everyone else has access to, which would mean if I went a private school that would be somehow less American... I think it's a great ideal and it happens, but I think the amount of times that it fails overwhelms the (incomprehensible). As much as I would love to believe it as a rule, I definitely think it's more of an exception.

Cassandra went on to say that given her attendance of elite schools, “there's not as much struggle involved as there should be” in order for her to exemplify realizing the Dream. Both Cassandra and Trisha are the children of immigrants. Cassandra described her family as “lower middle class” and Trisha described her family as “low-low class.” Trisha recently graduated from an Ivy and Cassandra currently attends one, but whereas Trisha views herself as a “poster child” of the American Dream, Cassandra does not fully conceive herself as such due to her attendance of private educational institutions. What they have in common is a belief that there is something compelling about the American Dream, and that ideally education should facilitate a perfect meritocracy (or approximate a perfect meritocracy). Cassandra seems to believe that the rewards of hard work should be accorded after one is educated, and that unequal education mars the meritocratic ideal. It is unclear whether
Trisha entirely disagrees with this, but she views her acceptance into and attendance of elite private schools as part of her American Dream narrative. Belief in meritocracy is not a renunciation of privilege, but a belief that privileges should come with hard work and talent. Cassandra and Trisha demonstrate how proponents of meritocracy may differ in when and how they believe those privileges should be accorded. Both also illuminate the complexity of the meritocratic ideal: equality of opportunity but unequal outcomes, and the equal opportunities are supposed to be independent of and unaffected by the unequal outcomes.

**Personalized Conceptions of the Dream**

The believers in the Dream defined the Dream in multiple ways in the course of one interview, as either overcoming adversity, or owning a house and a car, or achieving success as one conceives it. Most of the believers in the Dream, unlike the nonbelievers, discussed the Dream as personalized and relative and provided their own conceptions of their Dream and of what personal success is.

Instead of stating the different versions of the Dream each believer held, this chapter section explores the nuances of how one believer personalized the Dream, and how one believer depersonalized it when it was convenient.

One believer, Arianna described her American Dream thus: “coming from my mom who immigrated to the United States... I can achieve whatever my standard of success is.” She later described her standard of success as being able to take care of a family with financial security. She went on to say, however, that some people are able to conceive of the Dream and some are not. She explained the difference between her perception of the Dream and that of those who attend state schools:

I don’t think it’s realizable by everyone. I think those who have the privilege and opportunity to receive higher levels of education, that becomes a lot more real. So I think other people might just feel – I don’t know how other people might just feel... But I would think, and this probably stems from my pretentiousness and my arrogance, but they're trapped.

For Arianna, the Dream is a matter of perception to some degree, and she is able to perceive the Dream
due to her elite education. She continued:

I recognize that SUNY [State University of New York] schools for example... The level of expectation for what they can achieve and what they can obtain can be completely different from mine, regardless of how different our personalities are. And if they [state school students] do see it [the American Dream], I don’t think the standard is as open as what I might be privileged to see it at. The American Dream for me has been very open and very flexible. I can make it, that’s how I see it as. I don’t know if other people can see it as they can make it.

Arianna discussed the American Dream as a mentality. She specifically mentioned how that mentality can be grounded in objective conditions such as how elite one's college is, but, for Arianna, the Dream is a mentality nonetheless. Arianna did not argue that people should just adjust their attitudes in order to achieve, since she stated the Dream is “not realizable by everyone,” but she did state that mentality is important when she discussed the pitfalls of “victim mentality”:

Every single opportunity, every single grant, anything, I took advantage of. And I was someone who again, once I broke out of that mentality of being a victim, I said, OK, this is my experience, what do I learn from it or how do I combat it, or how do I change the situation or how do I change the perspective allowed me to really love Davidson [her college] even more.

Arianna contrasted her transcendence of the “mentality of being a victim” and her proactivity in taking advantage of opportunities with the laziness and mental blocks of other minorities:

And I think people are still so caught up in being a victim. And that pisses me off because if you think you’re a victim, what can you do? What do you think you can do? Because there’s so many resources at Davidson that you can use that people just aren’t using... sometimes people are just lazy. And not to say everyone because some people are legit just lost. I think that really separates me: mentality. I'm very driven.

Arianna is aware that some people face barriers to success but she argued that one's mentality can help work around those barriers. She also suggested that minorities who have the privilege to attend private colleges have less of an excuse than those who do not to complain about being a victim. Arianna's emphasis on mentality is one method to reconcile partial belief in the Dream with the reality that many do not attain it. For Arianna, although mentality is conditioned to some degree by objective conditions, one could and should break out of victim mentality in order to believe in and increase one's chances of realizing the American Dream.
Trisha, like Arianna and the other believers, usually discussed the Dream as dependent on one's own definition of success; however, there was one moment in her interview when she adopted a standard definition of the Dream, mainly as a defensive maneuver. Unlike every other interviewee, Trisha stated that the American Dream, if defined appropriately, is realizable by most people. When asked whether her cynicism regarding people becoming successful due to social connections contradicts her belief in the Dream, Trisha responded:

> It's just what is your definition of success in the American Dream? Probably, if you go to a college, you can get a job decent enough to end up owning your own apartment. It's how far to the extreme is your American Dream, is your definition of success. And then what are the healthy expectations of that happening. But two kids, a car, a house – that can happen for a lot of people.

So for Trisha, the Dream needs to be realistic to be attainable, and given that it is realistic, she argued that most Americans can attain a middle class lifestyle. Her standardization of the Dream, however, only occurred in the above quote, and she applied a standard definition of the Dream in order to defend the Dream's validity, and argue that it is attainable. For most of her interview, Trisha, like the other believers, tended to emphasize that the Dream shifts with the person.

**Nonbelievers**

**Standard Definitions of the Dream**

The non-believers in the American Dream were more uniform in their definition, typically defining the Dream as “pulling yourself up by your own bootstraps.” They denied that such a feat is possible for most people. Sade, a poet, offered one of the most eloquent denials of the dream:

> I think it's an American daydream. That's what I think. And I think a dream is much too pertinent. You have a dream when you sleep and you could have a dream that lasts several hours in your head, the turn of events occur over several hours, over several days. But in reality they're very quick. So I think the American Dream, I call it the American daydream. Your mind wanders off to believe it is true when you're on the train and then you come back to it when you reach your stop, and you have to focus and get off.

Sade's use of language, such as calling the Dream a daydream, is nuanced, but the general concept of the Dream that she critiqued is a standard one, as indicated in her words:
I think everyone has to give it up at some point and that's one of the issues that I have with this country. You have to give that up because things are not made easily for you at all. Yes, sure, hard work can take you anywhere. And I do believe that people in America can pull themselves up from the bootstraps, but the probability of that and the opportunity – how easy are people allowed to do that? You have to pull yourself up from the bootstraps, but before that you have to pull yourself out of the mud. And that's also work. I just don't think this country makes it easy for you to do any of those things. There are so many things you have to worry about.

For Sade, as for the nonbelievers in general, the American Dream is the belief that with hard work you can rise in class and achieve success. For nonbelievers such as Sade, the masses that do not attain the Dream disprove its reality.

**Hard Work Does Not Correlate to Success**

The non-believers in the Dream argued that hard work does not correlate to success, as exemplified by Sade's quote in the previous section. Similarly, when asked why he was academically successful, Terrance, a socialist, mentioned hard work, but when later asked whether hard work generally correlates to success, Terrance revised his answer:

> Well it [hard work] definitely doesn't [correlate to success]. It depends on the context and the person... There are many people who work themselves to death their entire lives and never even accomplish any success by their own standards.

After stating what he took to be “obviously” true, that hard work does not generally correlate to success, Terrance contextualized his own personal success:

> It's funny. I was kind of thinking about when I first answered that question about what led to your own academic success and I said hard work... It's a little bit of definitely working hard, but I think a lot of it was having the great luck of being able to learn and engage with things that are actually interesting to me. And a lot of people just don't get that out of school. I know it's very difficult for them. And I can imagine why. I have a hard time imagining how to get through any of it if I was not genuinely interested. So I don't think hard work correlates.

While stating that hard work may have had something to do with his personal success, Terrance rejected the social implication of saying that hard work generally correlates to success. He proceeded to contextualize his success in private schools, schools where he could be engaged in the course material, and such engagement is a privilege many students do not have.

John, a nonbeliever in the Dream who does not identify as a socialist but sympathizes with
socialism, when asked if he believes in the Dream, stated:

Absolutely not. It really frustrates me that it’s such a dominant narrative because [of] the thing I said earlier about hard work not being the key to having a materially successful life. It’s really mostly determined by things like structures of some sort that are out of our control... but I think it [the American Dream] largely serves to blind people...

Whereas the believer Arianna stated that some people are blind to the Dream, both John and Sade argued that the Dream is an illusion. John elaborated on how the Dream blinds people:

The American Dream ignores the fact that there are people that are guaranteed to fail in our society based on the necessities of capitalism. And the state is implicated in the success of capitalism, so it creates a false consciousness that I’m completely in control of my life and it’s just a matter of me working hard to succeed; there are no structural boundaries or impediments or even cages around me. I just have to work hard and everybody who is not succeeding is failing because they’re not working hard enough.

John gave a very socialist/Marxist rebuttal of the Dream. His use of the term “false consciousness” indicates that he thinks the Dream prevents accurate perception of reality, and specifically prevents the understanding that the U.S. is a class-based society. Believers in the Dream, like Tiffany, did not neglect to mention structural impediments to success for certain groups of people, but whereas believers in the Dream suggested that perfect meritocracy could better allocate privilege, John argued that the existence and necessity of inequality and privilege under a capitalist system invalidates the Dream.

**Critique of Capitalism**

Among the nonbelievers, *capitalism* was not just a buzzword for the socialist and the socialist-sympathizer. Carl, who does not identify as a socialist, argued that capitalism limits how many can realize the Dream:

I think that, again, the American Dream can be achieved at the individual level but this is capitalism and not everyone can achieve it. I guess anyone can make their own dream but there are just certain things that people are not going to have access to because of the fact that – I mean the achievement gap says it. The statistics prove it.

Carl argued that the Dream is not attainable by most people. He acknowledged that the Dream is somewhat relative and perceptual (“anyone can make their own dream”), but he couched his rejection
of the Dream in the objective reality ("statistics") of many people's lack of "access" to opportunities and resources.

The two socialist-leaning students have some familiarity with reproduction theory, as discussed in the literature review. When asked about the role of education, Terrance joked that education's purpose is the "social reproduction of our class system," but then more seriously stated that education has "different functions," such as teaching technical skills and creating thoughtful citizens. John, on the other hand, more straightforwardly assessed education through the lens of reproduction theory: "Right now, I guess the role of education is to help influence who gets the shitty end of the stick and who gets access to wealth and power."

Clinton, who is not a socialist, also discussed the role of education in a manner reminiscent of reproduction theory, although Clinton discussed reproduction of racial inequality as opposed to class inequality: "In our society, I see education as being a fundamental tool to keeping society separate as it is... minorities are not receiving same education as their white counterparts or Asian counterparts."

Whereas the believers in the American Dream hoped that education does or could serve as an equalizer, the nonbelievers tended to state that education stratifies society. The two socialists were not outliers with regard to the American Dream. Their answers were more or less in line with those of the other four nonbelievers of the Dream. For my subjects, critiquing the Dream often involved a partial critique of capitalism.

**Outliers**

There were no true outliers on the subject of the American Dream, but one respondent gave a more complicated and nuanced interpretation of the Dream than everyone else. Anthony cannot be said to simply believe or not believe or partially believe in the American Dream. Rather, he argued that the Dream is evolving, and he is attracted to one of the directions the Dream can go in.

I think the previous definition – based upon having property, having a certain level of income, a certain status – is eroding and I think that's a good thing. Now what it erodes into is scary
because it can go into a higher pitched, rugged individual, we can do it on our own [mentality], which has horrible implications for social welfare programs, for basically anyone who doesn’t have privilege. Or it can go in a wonderful way where the American Dream isn't one dream, it's a multiplicity of things; you doing what you want that makes you happy that hurts the least amount of people... Do I think the American Dream played a role? It played a huge role between the 1800s up until about the 1970s and 80s, in being the driving force as to why the U.S. became a prominent economic power. Do I think that the Dream has a place in the 21st century? No.

Unlike the other interviewees, Anthony described how he perceived the American Dream changing from a single standard to a “multiplicity of things.” His historicization of the Dream, and his statement that if, instead of becoming multiform, the Dream just becomes a more extreme version of the “rugged individual” ideal that would have “horrible implications for social welfare programs,” both indicate that Anthony thinks structurally about the American Dream (a trait more characteristic of non-believers than believers). However, his endorsement of a personalized multiform version of the Dream locates him closer in thought to the believers in the Dream. For Anthony and for several of the believers, the Dream is a matter of mentality. The implication of such an outlook is that success, as you personally define it, is more realizable if you have the right mentality.

II Class

Commonalities in Class Conceptions among the Cultural Mainstreamers and Cultural Straddlers

Interviewees conceived of class in a fairly uniform Weberian way. Most conceived of an upper class, a middle class, and a lower class. Interviewees stated that these classes are differentiated by income, but also stated that cultural identifiers are associated with each class, and that sometimes the cultural identifiers do not correlate exactly to income. Some differentiated between “social class” and “economic class,” and those categories correspond to what Weber termed class and status, respectively.

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7 See the Literature Review for a discussion of Weber’s distinction between class and status.
Other students used the term “socioeconomic class,” a term that suggests a correlation between income and status.

There is a subtle difference between the class conceptions of the three cultural straddlers and the five cultural mainstreamers who are not socialist-leaning (the socialists will be discussed in the outliers section). Both groups discussed class as being determined by income and culture, but the cultural mainstreamers put more emphasis on the “social construction” of class.

Before elaborating on the difference between the straddlers and mainstreamers, it is worthwhile to emphasize that both groups are well aware of the cultural performance of class. For example, when discussing class aspirations, representatives of both categories differentiated between the wealth they wanted to attain and the kind of culture they wished to partake in. For example, Anthony, a cultural mainstreamer (CM) stated:

I would like to be able to go to a coffee shop, enjoy the opera if I want to, because I like those things, but not because going to the opera is an upper middle class thing. I just want to be able to do it. So whatever that requires economically.

Anthony argued that he did not aspire to a certain income, but a certain lifestyle that included going to the opera (although the difference between aspiring to a certain income and a certain lifestyle is debatable). Anthony's statement is comparable to that of Sade, a cultural straddler (CS):

I aspire to be rich. But, I don't think my cultural behavior will ever be that of someone who's as wealthy as I hope to be. I think I aspire to always be a little bit closer to what is for the reality of most people. I essentially want to have a really nice house that isn't too extravagant on the outside, nor on the inside, and to keep most of my money in that bank account. That's the kind of rich I want to be.

I then asked Sade why she wanted to be rich without adapting to culture of the rich, and she responded:

I don't need to be surrounded with luxury to be reminded that I have a lot of money. I want to feel like I've put all my good money to use. I don't feel like that's good use. I'd rather put it in the bank, invest it and go on vacations to the most remote expensive places. That's what I'd rather do with my money.

Sade wants to be rich but does not plan on acquiring ostentatious displays of wealth. Whereas Sade aspires to a class, Anthony aspires to the cultural habits associated with class, but both differentiate
between income and culture, a distinction which all of the interviewees made.

**Cultural Straddlers and the Primacy of Income**

The straddlers and mainstreamers in this study both had an understanding of the economic and cultural components of class, but there were differences in their conceptualizations of class. When asked if social classes exist, Shanelle (CS) stated:

I would say there are economic classes. There are social strata and I think there is a good amount of overlap, but if your two parents are college educated, starving artists then you probably have more culturally in common with the son of banker than you do with the son of a cab driver, even if your parents don't make a lot of money. So there is a lot of cultural knowledge and common experiences that coalesce into these sort of vague social classes, and they strongly associate with income, but not perfectly.

Shanelle thus argued that culture partially determines class, and that “cultural knowledge” vaguely corresponds to income bracket. Similarly, Sade (CS) responded to the same question about the existence of class as follows:

I'm not well versed on these terms, but I do think that social class does exist. If I were to distinguish social class from economic class I would say that it is stratification based on one's household income and one's expenses. But social class incorporates the kind of culture norms that goes along with those economic strata, for how each income strata behaves and so forth.

So again, the straddlers described class as determined mainly by relative income, and also stated that there are cultural indicators of class.

**Cultural Mainstreamers and Social Constructs**

Anthony (CM) gave a slightly different answer than the straddlers when asked about class that is indicative of a trend that distinguished the mainstreamers. When asked if social class exists, he answered:

They exist. They are constructed by the different perspectives people have from their experiences within society. These experiences are mostly mediated through economic terms, similar histories, and similar experiences. And that's what social class (incomprehensible). And they exist as constructs.

I then asked if social classes, as “constructs,” are material, and he responded: “They can be manifested through material means, but they are entirely constructed. They can change, flux, mean different things
at different periods of time with different people.” Like the straddlers, Anthony stated that class is “mostly mediated through economic terms,” and like them he stated that there are other constituents of class besides “economic terms.” However, whereas the straddlers tended to describe culture as an imperfect indicator of class, Anthony stated that class “can be manifested through material means,” and that class is a “construct.” It is probably the case that the straddlers also conceive of class as a “construct.” Shanelle (CS), for example, in the quote above, described the “cultural knowledge and common experiences that coalesce into these sort of vague social classes,” but her point seems to be that income is a straightforward meter of class, but culture complicates identifying a person's class. For Anthony, the essential aspect of class is that it is a social construct that can be “manifested through material means,” which is different from saying social class is primarily determined by income and occupation, and that cultural norms indicate class, albeit imperfectly. While these concepts of class are different, they are not mutually exclusive. The cultural straddlers and cultural mainstreamers both, arguably, conceive of the social construction of class. Class is a social construction by virtue of the fact that classes only exist within societies. However, the mainstreamers emphasized the social construction of class, and several of them were the only ones to actually use the term.

Tiffany is another cultural mainstreamer who discussed the “construction” of class. When asked if social classes exist, she responded:

I think it does exist and my understanding of social class is it's another divisive social category for people based on the amount of wealth and resources they have, although I do think you can imitate social classes, so people may not know (incomprehensible). I definitely think it does exist. And I think you learn that (incomprehensible) moment at boarding school when you see the kind of world that is there versus the world that everybody else lives in.

I asked what Tiffany meant by saying that social class is divisive and she responded, “It's another way of organizing people or putting into different groups.” I then asked if social class is more of a concept or more of a reality and she responded:

This is another thing we talked about in sociology class. How things may not be concrete but they have real consequences, meaning if you think that social class is constructed, or think that
race is constructed, but a person's future or outcome was affected by that construction. So I definitely think it's a concept but it does have real consequences.

Tiffany's definition of social class is similar to the definitions of the straddlers in so far as Tiffany argues that class is based on wealth, but can be “imitated.” But like Anthony, she mentioned that class is “constructed,” and while it may not be “concrete,” it has material “consequences.”

Arianna is a cultural mainstreamer who did not use the term “construct” to describe class, but her depictions of class at her boarding school and college suggest that class structure is conditional on location and on value systems (reminiscent of Anthony's statement that class “can change, flux, mean different things at different periods of time with different people”). Arianna stated, “the more marginalized you are, the lower your social class,” and she described feelings of marginalization as dependent on location. She described class, or perception of class, as very different at her boarding school versus her college. She explained that in high school, the rich, predominantly white kids were blatant about their wealth, whereas at college, she made friends without being aware of their wealth:

Just being in that more mature setting [college] where I [not Arianna, but a hypothetical student] have a lot of money but I’m more than that money.... That was something that I really noticed at Davidson, where there are so many of my friends who I did not have any clue were part of this really high socioeconomic status because of how they carry themselves, the topics of conversation they chose.

Arianna's description of class at her college corresponds to some degree with what Weber termed status, however, Arianna did not differentiate between class and status, but discussed the two simultaneously, using the word I provided: class. Later on in the interview, Arianna explained that in college she was able to feel she was at the top of the social hierarchy because “class” is less dependent on race and wealth in her college than in her high school.

[At] high school, [class] was definitely a lot more obvious because there were all the rich white kids and then the minorities who oftentimes were not rich, most of them from Hope Scholars... whereas at Davidson it’s a lot more of a blur. And I think at Davison it’s less about those superficial kinds of characteristics … For me, I’d like to believe I’m at the top part of my social group... I think how I define social group in the context of Davidson is completely different than [in high school]... it is less about whiteness I think. Although I do think whiteness plays a lot into it, and I do think economic status plays a lot into it, but it’s not as a apparent for me.
Maybe Davidson has great institutional oppression. Maybe that’s probably the issue. You move into a different ball game, you have a different oppressor; you have different types of aggressions and micro-aggressions that attack. But at [boarding school] I felt like I was nothing. I felt like I was at the bottom for sure. I think in my mind I was high within my minority group. That’s because I was an athlete, I was an honor roll student. I did have white friends even though I didn’t really like them; faculty and staff knew me. I got awards for shit. But now [at college], it’s not even being at the top of the minority group, it’s being on top of the entire system. That’s how I feel... People, faculty staff, students know who I am even if I don’t know them. I feel like people have heard my name for good reasons.

Social class for Arianna is related to the degree to which people feel they are marginalized, and she does not feel particularly marginalized due to race or wealth in her college. Her statement that when you move “into a different ball game” you have a “different oppressor,” describes class as relative to specific societies (in this case, campuses), and dependent on the values of specific societies, i.e. class is socially constructed.

In her interview Arianna said the reasons her college's social hierarchy or social classes are not as based on race and wealth as at her boarding school may be that her college attracts a certain kind of applicant, and her college encourages an honor code and certain community values. According to Arianna, her college has certain value systems that enable minority and lower income students to potentially feel they are at the top of the college's social hierarchy (or at least enables her to feel she is at the top). Arianna's conception of class is the most unique amongst all the interviewees because of the degree to which she conceives of class as interactional, or based on whether people feel marginalized or empowered in social situations. Nonetheless, Arianna's conception of social class follows the trend of the mainstreamers emphasizing the constructed nature of class.

Cassandra (CM), who attends an Ivy, also stated that her college community is more “equalized” than that of her private high school, but her explanation was based on different living arrangements. Cassandra stated that the mostly white wealthy students at her private day school lived close to the school, and the generally poorer minority students commuted together on the train. College was different, however.
For Cassandra, living at a dorm in college versus living at home when attending day school changed her perception of class differences. Since everyone lives in a dorm on campus, students are more “equalized.”

None of the straddler interviewees happened to mention social classes in college being more equalized than in high school, but Sade (CS) commented on the different cliques of white students in her high school, and her statement is comparable to those of Cassandra and Arianna. The context, however, is not a relatively egalitarian college campus, but an elitist boarding school:

Sade: There were the wealthy kids, who dressed like they weren't wealthy. That was also a clique. You know what I mean, dressed like they weren't wealthy, right?
Interviewer: I have an idea, but why don't you say it, for the record.
Sade: Oh, because they were wealthy too. I mean, I'm just trying to show that there was some kind of differentiation amongst the white students.
Interviewer: Was it very easy to tell who was wealthy and who was not even though some dressed like they were not wealthy?
Sade: Yes, yes. Speech. Yeah, oh very easily. The ones who dressed like they weren't wealthy, they had holes in their shoes and (incomprehensible) and holes in shirts. They (incomprehensible) a kind of complete disregard for aesthetics whereas the white kids who were not wealthy, they dressed modestly, but still kept. So they did not have holes in their shirts, they did not tape their shoes. If their shoes broke, they threw it out and bought a new pair. A new, cheap pair, but a new pair nonetheless.
Interviewer: So the wealthy kids, who did not dress like they were wealthy, they had a kind of privilege to ignore how they looked?
Sade: Yes. Or they were in a complete kind of counterculture. So what? What's the point? Why does anything matter? A rebellion, so to speak.

The difference between how Sade (CS) discussed the wealthy white students at her high school who dressed down, and how Arianna (CM) and Cassandra (CM) discussed the partial erasure of race and wealth-based hierarchies at their colleges is that Sade depicted performance of class, whereas Arianna and Cassandra suggested that differing performances of class change the nature of social class in different social environments. Sade described a clique of white students, whereas Arianna and

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8 There was unfortunately a lot of background noise in the recording of Cassandra's interview, making much of it incomprehensible.
Cassandra described a campus wide set of attitudes and conditions, and this may be why their depictions of class were different. Nonetheless, a trend in the interviews is that while both the cultural mainstreamers and cultural straddlers described the performance of class as a major aspect of class, the (non-socialist) mainstreamers depicted the performance of class as more constituent of class than did the straddlers. The mainstreamers emphasized how class can be constructed on value systems as opposed to wealth.

**Investment Bankers and Consultants**

Thus far this section has focused on the difference between the class conceptions of cultural mainstreamers and cultural straddlers, however, there was one topic raised by both mainstreamers and straddlers. Several interviewees criticized specific occupations. Five of the interviewees (including straddlers and mainstreamers) stated that the cultures of their colleges encourage many graduates to become consultants or investment bankers. Several interviewees suggested that Hope Scholars encourages that career path as well through the internships it helps its alums attain, while one student argued that many Hope Scholars alums work for nonprofits and that Hope Scholars encourages this. Regardless, the biggest trend is that four of the five interviewees who mentioned finance and consulting were uniform in stating that the student bodies on their campuses largely filter into finance and consulting positions, and that this state of affairs is somewhat troubling.

Trisha (CS) stated that many graduates of her college become investment bankers, that this job is often unfulfilling, and that people should consider getting jobs that do not make the world a worse place. Interestingly, Trisha currently works for JP Morgan, doing something within the field of finance, although apparently not investment banking. Her plan is to go to law school in a few years. When asked about success, she stated:

Success isn’t about money. I think there are a lot of people who do things that make them a lot of money but they burn out... Investment banking, a lot of people do that for a couple of years. And they’re like, “I’m going to business school to learn something different so I can move on from this.” So I think [success] is about something more than money because people who have
a lot of money still aren’t very happy... some of the people who feel most successful are the ones who aren’t making a lot of money. And they’re working at a non-profit where they feel like they’re making the world a better place. So I don’t think it has to be as extreme as you have to work in a non-profit to be successful, but you have to be doing something that you feel isn’t making the world worse than it already is.

Trisha suggested that people choose to become investment bankers in order to make a lot of money, and dichotomized the choice to be an investment banker and the choice to work for a nonprofit. For Trisha, working for a non-profit has a potentially positive impact on the world, whereas investment banking does not. She does not necessarily intend on working for a non-profit, but wants to ensure her job does not make “the world worse.” Several other interviewees also dichotomized nonprofit work and investment banking.

The two socialist-leaning cultural mainstreamers, Terrance and John, both addressed the issue of investment bankers, and specifically the issue of minorities becoming investment bankers. Like Trisha, Terrance feels that his college, also an Ivy, encourages students to become consultants or investment bankers:

When I first got to college, something like fifty percent of the students that graduated that first year or the year before went on to jobs in either investment banking or consulting. Fifty percent! And for the men, I think it was something much higher than that. It's almost like seventy five percent of them... A lot of people go on to work in non-profits or whatever. But I think, to a certain extent, not doing that [becoming an investment banker or consultant], I'm sure plenty of people disagree with me, but I think for a lot of people that itself felt like a choice.

Terrance is critical of the culture of his college that encourages and even pressures students to go into consulting and investment banking, and he specifically criticized black male aspirational investment bankers:

There was always the BMF, the black men's forum. And they wore ties which is fine because I like wearing ties, but their whole thing, half of the purpose, the reason for joining it for a lot of people was so that they can get investment banking jobs. And I only went to a few meetings and at one meeting I actually got into an argument with almost the entire group about supporting a union campaign. At that point, so many of them had particular class allegiances [that] just infuriated me.

Terrance has a measure of contempt for aspirational investment bankers, but his attitude is more honed
than Trisha's contention that investment bankers make the world worse. Terrance finds their “class allegiance” with the rich and their opposition to working class struggles off-putting. As for his criticism of the Black Men's Forum, Terrance clarified that it was not because its members were black that he was upset by their aspirations, but because the organization was particularly aggressive in pursuing employment in investment banking.

I think it bothered me a little bit that they seemed to pursue it even more than the rest of the student body... the Black Men's Forum would get together and everyone would do their resumes together, and they would have this database of all their resumes, and basically people would get jobs from that organization and that wasn't the case for most other ethnic or cultural organizations. So I think the fact that it seemed to be such a central part of the organization (incomprehensible) did bother me.

Terrance stated that the race of the black men who vigorously pursued investment banking jobs was not the basis of his critique, but Terrance did suggest that ethnic organizations should not, ideally, encourage formations of allegiance with the ruling class.

The other socialist-leaning interviewee, John, felt a bit more positively about minority investment bankers. John stated in his interview that he would prefer minority Hope Scholars alums become investment bankers over the typical student at his university:

If we’re talking about Stanford students going into those fields [consulting, investment banking], I would say by large yes, it’s a bad thing because, for the most part, Stanford students aren’t coming from backgrounds where they’re aware of inequality or issues of power. But for Hope Scholars kids, my hope is that most of us remember that were it not for testing well on a good day, or just somehow managing to get into and get through the program, we’d be in very different places, and so that it’s our job to, as I said, make the way a little easier for those who come after us.

John went on to say that he advocates for structural change, but that he is not against the “micro scale” change of some underprivileged minorities moving into finance. Thus, in contrast to Terrance, John suggested that Hope Scholars investment bankers might retain some allegiance to the classes they come from and hence embody and help further propagate marginal changes to race and class inequality.

Outliers

The outliers on the subject of class are the socialist cultural mainstreamers, because they had
specific concerns about the relationship between their own social mobility and their ideology, and the non-compliant believer, because he was the only interviewee who expressed an interest in a career in consulting, and because he is very race-conscious and expressed little class-consciousness.

**The Socialists**

When asked what class he aspires to, Terrance stated that he did not aspire to be of a certain class, but that he might pursue a middle class lifestyle in the future were he to have a family. For Terrance, becoming an investment banker would violate his socialist values, but pursuing a middle class income would not necessarily do so:

I'm not necessarily aspiring to be of a certain class. The thing is these things are complicated. What if one day I have kids or something? That doesn't mean then I'll have every excuse to say fuck it all and become an investment banker or something, not that that could happen in any way.

The necessity to provide for family somewhat validates pursuing some degree of wealth for Terrance. He continued:

When I was a kid, finances (incomprehensible) money was always a source of conflict between my parents. And having seen that... not having money screwed up a lot of my family's relationships. It's made (incomprehensible) dysfunctional. So for that reason, I would want to have some degree of material comfort because, at the very least, it prevents me from having some of those problems. So maybe in the grand scheme of things I am aspiring towards some level of middle class comfort, but it's not like I'm doing it consciously every day or something.

Several of the interviewees did not state they aspired to a certain class, and Terrance's reluctance to do so seems to be because, as a socialist, he is allied (in his interview he used the term “class allegiance”) to the working class, even though he considers his potential earnings after graduating from an Ivy League college and the graphics design grad school he currently attends as outside the range of working class earnings. Terrance's immediate family was working class when he was a child, and his experience of dysfunction under the stress of insufficient money caused him to state that if he has a family in the future, he may want middle class comfort. As an upwardly mobile socialist, Terrance must

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9 As stated in the background section, many alums become consultants and investment bankers, however, only one of my interviewees wants to be a consultant of some sort.
contend with his allegiance to the working class and his own class, and his method for the moment in grad school seems to be to not “consciously” pursue upward mobility.

John faces a similar dilemma. John, who is not a socialist, but socialist-leaning, plans on becoming a journalist as a means to provide people working on issues of justice around the world a platform to “communicate to the larger world.” He does not necessarily envision making much money, but he knows that some of the friends he has made at high school and college will have access to power and wealth, and could potentially provide him such access should he need it for some public service enterprise. I did not ask John to address the potential conflict between advocating structural change and potentially relying on elites in the process.

When asked what social class he aspires to be a part of, John stated:

I really don’t know what that [upward mobility] means or where I’d like to see myself because it could be that making a lot of money would enable me to do more that ultimately furthers my cause... but [it] can also be that being in that social class or strata would either alienate me from the group that I was trying to work with, or I would somehow lose sight of the values and beliefs that I have now.

John sees a conflict between his values and earning a lot of money, even if money could further his causes.

Both Terrance and John discussed the limitations of the terms working class and middle class. Terrance argued that even though professors have “cushy” positions, their jobs are somewhat precarious and so even they cannot fully disassociate from the working class. John also described the “fuzzy” nature of the term middle class by discussing his family's resources in relation to those of wealthier students at his university. He stated that he was confused about wealthy students calling themselves middle class since he considers himself middle class, although far less wealthy than others:10

But as far as I come from a middle class background and a professional middle class background at that, I understand that I have a relative degree of comfort in the US. But when

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10 Unfortunately, I accidentally did not record all of John's discussion of class, but I recorded most of it, and took notes from memory on what was unrecorded shortly after the interview.
I’m comparing myself and my family to peers around me who can afford to pay full tuition, or just families that have more wealth – I guess my point here is that I’m aware that I am very comfortable and more privileged, but when looking at the vast number of people around me who have way more than my family does, my conception of class becomes really cloudy.

When asked about whether social or economic class exists, John provided two conceptualizations of class, the Marxist dichotomy of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, and the “fuzzier,” more typical and more Weberian categories of lower class and middle class. He stated that he typically uses and thinks in terms of the latter definition:

I don’t really use both [the Marxist definition of class, and the terms lower and middle class]. I merely really use the fuzzier one that I have. I know it’s not that useful but I can’t get it out of my own experiences in the sense that – so one example is that my father drives a Mercedes and I’m aware that most people don’t have the means that could afford a car like that, but on the opposite end of things, a very frequent experience of mine in high school was either not having a full fridge or having an empty fridge or my father not being able to pay tuition bills.

Based on John's statement “I can't get it out of my own experiences,” it seems that John grew up with the notion of what the middle class is and that he is a part of it, given that his father is a lawyer. However, going to elite schools with wealthier students who also considered themselves middle class led him to question the usefulness of the term. Even so, he still uses it, and has not opted for the Marxist terms proletariat and bourgeoisie, which are themselves limited and also not popularly used.

John's point about the middle class is that conceptions of what incomes are middle class incomes can shift according to social milieu. To further develop the points that John and Terrance made, I would argue that the middle class is valorized in American society, and the working or lower class is often shamed and largely left out of political discussions. As John pointed out, middle class folks may have widely different experiences than the poor, but as Terrance pointed out, middle class status is not always secure. If the difference between the lower class and middle class is income bracket (and establishing such income brackets is itself a dubious task) then the distinction between the two leaves out the role of exploitation. One reason for the distinction, however, is that the middle class is not, or at least does not feel as exploited as the poor might. Furthermore, conceptions of the distinction
between the lower and middle class can potentially obviate unity against the class of people who are neither lower nor middle class and who control finance and industry. Marxist definitions of class emphasize the role of exploitation whereas conceptions of the lower, middle and upper classes do not. John seems to have considered the relative usefulness of the differing conceptions of class, and currently uses the more widely used lower, middle and upper class categories.

A final way that John distinguished himself amongst the interviewees is that his discussion of class included a discussion of the role of Hope Scholars in social reproduction. John did not explicitly use the term “reproduction” in his interview, but he seems to be at least familiar with general notions of reproduction. While he feels positively about Hope Scholars, as shown by his earlier quoted discussion of how he would prefer Hope alums become investment bankers over typical Stanford students, he considers Hope a “band-aid.” He stated that the organization cannot address fundamental structures of inequality:

Hope Scholars is an example of a band-aid to me. It takes students who come from marginalized or disadvantaged backgrounds and that might otherwise fail in the scheme of education, and it prepares them and gives them access to really elite and wealthy and well-resourced educational institutions, both for middle school and high school, and it helps with getting into college. And then it helps find employment opportunities and usually directed at the financial sector... so Hope Scholars helps some students become leaders or successful in the conventional sense of the term. And through that success, some students give back to Hope Scholars... I guess my goal is to make the necessity for Hope Scholars disappear. So we’d have a world where every student could have access to a quality education and good resources, but, as I mentioned, I think the program’s largely a band-aid because it can’t do anything to address the larger and systematic issues of inequality in New York City, inequality in the educational system.

John is aware that Hope Scholars is limited to enabling entry into high status and high paying positions for a small amount of students. John is also aware that “band-aid,” like Hope Scholars, have symbolic value that may well foster reproduction of inequality:

On a philosophical level, I’m never sure whether it’s better to have the band-aids or not because it’s possible that without any band-aids circumstances would get so bad that everybody would recognize what was going on and just shake things up until they changed. So it’s possible that the band-aids are just prolonging structural inequality and oppression and suffering. I don’t know whether they are or whether they aren’t, but I would say Hope Scholars is necessary.
So, for John, even if Hope Scholars is implicated in the perpetuation of inequality by fostering the false hope that underprivileged minorities can attain social mobility by working hard in school, he views the organization as necessary. For John, the marginal change of some minorities accessing power and wealth is worth the price of Hope perpetuating notions of the American Dream.

The Noncompliant Believer

Almost none of the interviewees expressed an interest in finance or consulting. Their lack of interest in those fields, perhaps combined with the global recession, which has been blamed to some degree on investment bankers in media, might be the reason several interviewees described investment bankers and consultants pejoratively. The noncompliant believer, Clinton is the only interviewee who expressed an interest in a career that could be broadly described as consulting. He wants to be an actuary, or an advisor to insurance companies.

Clinton answered the question about his class aspirations thus:

**Interviewer:** And what social class do you aspire to be a part of and why?
**Clinton:** I don’t care.
**Interviewer:** Why don’t you care?
**Clinton:** Because I’ve learned that social class doesn’t say anything about you. It’s just a ridiculous way of classifying individuals which really doesn’t mean much.

Later Clinton elaborated:

It [social class] clearly matters in the sense that the classification exists but it shouldn’t matter. If somebody asked me to explain myself, I’m not going to my socioeconomic classification to explain myself.

Despite his reluctance to state he aspired to a specific class, like several other interviewees, when asked to describe the lifestyle he aspired to, Clinton responded “comfortable.” He did not discuss his aspirational career as an actuary when asked to describe his class aspirations (he mentioned his desire to become an actuary long before I asked about his class aspiration).

At several points in the interview, Clinton expressed how race is either more of a prevalent issue than class for him, or, in some cases, constitutes social class. When asked to describe the social classes
at his high school and college, Clinton responded, “Social classes seem more racially based to me.”
Later in the interview, when asked, “Do you tend not to think about social class?” Clinton responded, “No I don’t. I think more in terms of race than anything else.”

Clinton’s greater attention to race and lesser attention to class influenced how he addressed the protocol’s question about gentrification. He was one of only two students who did not immediately recognize the term, and so I gave him two definitions, one mainly based on race and one mainly based on class. Clinton then expressed familiarity with the process of increasing housing prices driving blacks out of certain neighborhoods: “Well that’s [gentrification] what’s happening in Brooklyn right now and it’s very obvious… I’ll pass by in my neighborhood ten years ago I never saw that.” I followed up by asking what he thought of gentrification, and he responded.

I think without even raising the cost of living to push out a certain people, I definitely see a problem with that regardless of who those people are, but ultimately everything revolves around money, but I do see that it’s definitely happening. In general there are a lot of black people moving back towards the south, which is actually quite inexpensive, comparably, to live.

When asked if he would live in a gentrified neighborhood, Clinton stated that he would not, but that he would own property in a gentrified neighborhood. His reasoning was as follows:

Well simply because it [property] would be more valuable in such a neighborhood because the whole (incomprehensible) basis is the price is being pushed up. So it would be a great return on my investment.

Throughout his interview, Clinton expressed resistance to the oppression of racial minorities. But perhaps he viewed resistance to the process of gentrification as futile since “ultimately everything revolves around money.” In fact, most of the interviewees expressed some displeasure over, but resignation to the inevitability to gentrification. Clinton went one step further and expressed a willingness to profit over the process of gentrification. This is perhaps because he is business savvy, and though resistant to the oppression of racial minorities, he is not particularly attentive to class. Clinton seems to have been cognizant of the racial ramifications of gentrification, but perhaps because Clinton does not typically think in terms of class, the act of profiting from gentrification – an act that
more directly affects and is more determined by class relations than race relations – does not appear to be problematic to him.

Clinton's race consciousness seems to exist to the exclusion of being conscious of class, the oppression of certain groups, and other social issues. For example, during his interview, when asked in what ways he thought blacks had to assimilate at his boarding school, he stated that he believes many of the black students came from households that did not condone homosexual acts, but they assimilated to the school's culture that encourages homosexual acts.

It’s [homosexuality is] wrong in a sense. Though you’re not supposed to judge the person, it’s the act. And I feel like a lot of minorities follow such a theory in a sense. Most of our parents teach us this, at least so it seemed to me. The school definitely does not tolerate – they’ll throw the homophobic label on you as quick as possible. And like I said, I’m not trying to judge the person… but that is something that I disagree with. It doesn’t mean that we can’t be courteous people. It is what it is.

There is probably an argument to be made about elite institutions never or rarely transgressing centrist or mainstream politics, and acceptance of homosexuality is increasingly common in liberal circles. However, Clinton's boarding school's acceptance of homosexuality by no means erases the oppressed status of LGBT communities in the U.S. Clinton was both defiant of authority in his boarding school (as he interpreted many of the authorities to be racist), and raised in a Christian household that opposes homosexual acts, and so he was opposed to blacks assimilating to the culture of his boarding school, and he envisioned accepting homosexual acts as one form of assimilation (in addition to assimilating to white culture by adjusting one's speech, clothing, interests, etc.).

Within Clinton's explanation of his distaste for assimilation, he proceeded from his comments on homosexuality to briefly discuss his school's zealous attitude on recycling: “they made you a bad guy if you don't recycle.” Whereas Clinton's refusal to assimilate to his school's gay-friendly atmosphere has a basis in his religious upbringing, it is unclear whether or not his critique of his school's recycling is based on upbringing as well, or conditioned by his general resistance to his boarding school's culture and authority figures.
In *Learning to Labour*, Paul Willis pointed out that the homophobia of the “lads,” their rejection of white-collar work as feminized work, and their valorization of blue-collar work as masculine, prevented full development of class consciousness. For Clinton, despite being very attune to racial conflict, defiance of his high school's culture, which he saw as racist, was also linked to defiance of his school's acceptance of homosexuality, and its encouragement of recycling. Clinton's race consciousness also seems linked to a lack of class consciousness. Race consciousness combined with a lack of attentiveness to other forms of oppression may have conditioned Clinton to think that if race is the primary and even exclusive source of social inequality, then he does not have to reconcile his desire to join a profession that emerged as one of the big villains in this study, consulting for an insurance company, with his desire for social equality.

By no means does race consciousness typically obviate class consciousness. Terrance, the socialist, exemplifies this. He stated in his interview that affirmative action was a common topic of contention between him and his white schoolmates, and by having heated discussions on race, and by reading about black power, he started to develop the political perspective he currently has on class:

> A lot of my shift in direction first came through my experience with race actually. That's where I started developing a political perspective on class and other larger kinds of social structures. So that was really formative for me. (incomprehensible) affirmative action one day finding a copy of black power in my dorm... and then [adding] the term institutional racism in my arsenal.

Both Terrance and Clinton were defiant of racism that they encountered in their boarding schools, but Terrance seems to have thought about racism more institutionally. That is not to say that Clinton does not think about institutional racism, because he did a study of how minority students are punished more severely than white students at school for committing the same infractions. Clinton is very much aware and critical of institutional racism. However, Clinton individualizes his experiences with racism more so than Terrance. During high school, Clinton believed all whites were racist, and he currently believes that not all, but most whites are racist. It is unclear whether Terrance feels the same about whites, but it seems that Terrance contextualized his high school encounters with racism within institutional racism.
And by thinking about racism structurally, Terrance began thinking about other social structures such as class. Clinton, on the other hand, focuses almost exclusively on racial inequality.

III Racial Identity and Racial Conflict

Hope Scholars alums attend high schools and colleges in which they must daily interact with white elites, and sometimes such interactions lead to misunderstandings, tense conversations and uncomfortable classroom dynamics. In addition to enabling social mobility, being a mainstreaker or a straddler is a method of protecting oneself from feeling racially marginalized. The latter function of straddling and mainstreaming is particularly important for my interviewees because of the racial composition of the schools they attend and attended. Some patterns emerged from the interviewees' anecdotes about racial conflicts: the straddlers dealt with conflict by maintaining pride in their culture, the mainstreamers emphasized how their individuality made them more than a racial stereotype, and the two socialist/socialist-leaning mainstreamers contextualized their conflicts within a system of structural inequality. The straddlers and socialist mainstreamers told anecdotes about race relations at elite schools that were typically more severe than those told by the nonsocialist mainstreamers. In addition, the straddlers and the socialist mainstreamers tended to make broad statements about unequal race relations, whereas the mainstreamers tended to discuss their search for personal identity. As for the noncompliant believer, his racial conflicts, which were the most bitter, are briefly described in a subsection below, but the outliers subsection of the section on race contains a more thorough description of his race and class conceptions.

Cultural Straddlers

In her interview, Sade told several anecdotes about how whites at her boarding school used stereotypes as a reference when interacting with the black kids. For example, she recalled how wealthy white kids ironically asked her for “bling” to wear to a “bling dance.” “Have you seen what I wear to
class?” Sade laughingly commented. Students were, however, not the only ones guilty of stereotyping minorities. So too were faculty:

This didn't happen to me, this happened to a friend of mine. One teacher calling a student “ghetto.” When, if you know this girl, she's not what I would call “ghetto.” She's actually from a suburb in New Jersey. She's from Orange, New Jersey. But she got called “ghetto” for making some comment in English class when they were reading Shakespeare. Another student, her name is Victoria, and her teacher insisted on calling her "Viquayquay"... I mean, how much more anglo can you get than the name Victoria?

Regardless of the characteristics of particular minorities at Sade's boarding school, white students and faculty had certain predominant conceptions of minorities that were often belittling. Still, Sade adjusted her behavior to limit the degree to which others would interpret her according to stereotypes. For example, she trained herself out of her self-described “Caribbean” instinct of displaying certain emotions on her face, so as not to be interpreted as an “angry black girl”:

Part of Caribbean culture is whatever you're feeling, you feel in your face. You feel disgusted, which you very well may feel – it's not a rare feeling – you make up that face. And I did that a lot in boarding school. Sometime during my freshman year I realized, "Sade, every time you're pissed off or annoyed, you think someone said something stupid, you can't show it on your face." Because that person's not going to want to talk to you ever again... That was a huge adjustment for me. I didn't want to be the angry black girl. I mean, none of us do want to be the angry black girl.

Straddling is a means for Sade not to alienate whites, but she remains attached to black culture, and critical of white culture. She stated that she found the humor of whites in high school to be much less funny than the more “crude” and “adult” humor of black teenagers. She also remains critical of the way she thinks upper middle class white girls speak. Because she self-reportedly picks up accents easily, Sade stated that she had to be conscientious about not speaking the way girls at her boarding school spoke. She described their speech patterns thus:

And it's not all white [girls]. It's a very upper middle-class white girl from the suburbs [way of talking]. And it is the sharp inflection at the end of every sentence, as if it is a question. That, combined with heavy usage of the word “like.” And this kind of speaking indecisively as if to never offend with your argument, with your words, it doesn't feel confident. It feels rather loose and light and just foolish in my eyes.

Sade's critique of the submissive, non-confrontational way she perceives upper-middle class suburban
white girls present themselves contrasts with the stereotype of the “angry black girl” she tried to some extent to distance herself from. Sade did not make the argument that black girls are more combative or confrontational than white girls, but she did state that black girls are perceived as such, and that white girls tended to present themselves in an agreeable, inoffensive manner. Sade’s classroom speech is middle class standard English, but she is careful not to embrace specific speech patterns of upper middle class suburban white girls.

Like Sade, Trisha confronted the “angry black girl” stereotype in high school. In her freshman and senior years her class voted her as “most intimidating,” despite, according to her account, doing nothing to earn the title.

Both Sade and Trisha also remarked on how black girls barely dated in high school. Sade conducted a study that consisted of every junior and senior student ranking the attractiveness of various subjects of photographs, and the result was that regardless of hairstyle or facial characteristics, black girls were consistently ranked as least attractive. Sade presented her results to the school, was received well by the headmaster and poorly by the Dean of Students. In the end, she was disappointed that the discussion of race and beauty did not go further at her high school.

Trisha, on the other hand, connected limited dating options of black girls at elite boarding schools to the “angry black girl” stereotype: “white guys find black girls combative.... But black guys don’t have that same situation as black girls.” Trisha made clear that black girls in particular, and not black guys, had limited dating lives at boarding school. Trisha suggested that there might be some basis for the “angry black girl” stereotype: “It’s harder for women in general and it’s harder for black women right?” She suggested that black women may have more “defenses” than white women because of their more marginalized status, but Trisha also back-pedaled from this argument later:

So if you see us as combative, that’s not really our problem. That’s the problem with the social interactions at the school. And I think they [white girls] have a problem voicing their opinion, but it’s probably just the reactions that they get to what they say [that are] different from what we [black girls] get. So I don’t think that for me to be voted – I don’t find myself to be an
intimidating person.... You do have some control over how people view you, but it’s not always all in your control.

According to Trisha, the “angry black girl” stereotype is determined mainly by how whites perceive black women, not the behavior of black girls. Still, Trisha suggested, with some reservation, that maybe some aspect of black culture or black responses to marginalization provide some basis for this stereotype, but Trisha also positively regarded whatever it is in black culture that may encourage black women to be strong: “You'd think you'd want a strong girlfriend.”

The third cultural straddler, Shanelle, voiced criticisms of her university's culture that were specific to the university. She criticized the startup-obsessed, Silicon Valley, homogenous culture of Stanford. She pointed out the lack of racial diversity at Stanford (the small numbers of blacks in particular, and the high percentage of black jocks among black males), but focused on the lack of cultural diversity at Stanford more so than racial diversity. The two were related though, in her discussion. She argued that despite attending college in California, “Stanford kids are less liberal than you would think,” and that they are “very ambitious at the expense of everything else.” According to Shanelle, Stanford students are ultimately concerned with how to “monetize” their ventures, how to “turn this [academic and nonacademic pursuits] into a job.” Shanelle stated that she does public service without first considering how it would look on her resume, but that Stanford students often do not. Furthermore, she argued, “Even in the social change-focused circles that I'm in, people feel like charities should be run like a business.” After prioritizing how to make themselves as employable as possible, Shanelle argued that students then want to attain jobs at “the same five or six industries^{11} every year,” and that if you want to “be in an NGO or do something that's off of the beaten track, you get second glances.”

When asked if there is a racial component to Stanford's culture, Shanelle said it is “something

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^{11} Shanelle probably meant companies, not “industries.” The eleven most common employers of Stanford graduates include technology companies and two consulting firms. They are: Google, Teach for America, Apple, Bain, McKinsey & Co., Intel, Oracle, Lockheed Martin, Facebook, Microsoft, Palantir Technology.
more strongly associated with white kids.” Shanelle also argued that Stanford's method of acquiring a racially diverse student body was designed so as to minimally impact Stanford's homogenous culture. She stated:

When they want diversity, they want it to be as similar to the typical Stanford kid, so they're going to get a biracial kid from Portola Valley and say we got all this diversity when really culturally, ethnically, socially it's marginally different from the million other kids they already have here.

Shanelle argued that it was “obvious” that biracial kids would be more assimilated to white culture than minorities who are not biracial. Later in the interview, Shanelle clarified that she did not have anything against biracial students. She stated, “I don't know why I singled them out. But it's just a symptom of the wider thing.” In other words, the large ratio of biracial students among the minorities at Stanford is a symptom of the lack of cultural diversity on campus. According to Shanelle, Stanford's superficial attempts to establish racial diversity leave the entrepreneurial, startup, careerist culture of Stanford intact.

The straddlers are all aware of the cultures of their universities and high schools, and adjusted the ways they presented themselves in order to accommodate. When asked about how she explored and negotiated racial identity at high school, Shanelle gave a succinct summary of the function of straddling at a mostly white elite school:

I guess what I learned was just how not to make race be a liability. I don't know that I particularly learned anything about me being black, but just how to present yourself in a certain way so that people don't judge you the wrong way. How to talk to people who were hostile for what you think are racially motivated reasons. It was more damage control than actual image creation.

All three straddlers are attached to their cultural backgrounds and not particularly fond of white mainstream culture, but present themselves in a white middle class way in certain contexts as a means of “damage control,” or limiting the negative reactions their blackness might arouse.

Because of their attachment to black culture, the straddlers put more emphasis than the mainstreamers on race relations as the source of their conflicts private school. By contrast, the
mainstreamers personalized their conflicts a lot more.

**Cultural Mainstreamers and the Individual**

Three of the five (non-socialist) cultural mainstreamers described a part of their high school experience as being self-discovery. Although they all strongly identified with being black and Latino, they explored ways of expressing themselves that they interpreted as corresponding to their individual personalities.

At first, when entering boarding school, Arianna sought to dress and talk the way the white students did so as not to appear stupid or feel marginalized:

I think one of the biggest reasons why I started code switching was because I was always afraid that people were going to think a lot less of me because I was an ethnic minority... I didn’t want people to think I was stupid, which is interesting that I would associate my culture or my otherness with being stupid.

Arianna used the term “code switching” throughout her interview, which is a term one might more readily associate with cultural straddlers. However, both mainstreamers and straddlers “code switch.” Cultural mainstreamer and cultural straddler are archetypes, and Arianna is much more of a mainstreamer than a straddler.

When she began to mainstream her self-presentation at high school, it was very much a strategy to attain social mobility:

I became very pretentious during my time at [boarding school] because I think the public school system can oftentimes be very systematic in how it oppresses ethnically marginalized students.... I never liked being called white or people saying, “oh you’re whiter.” I never liked that because I’m very connected to my heritage. I’m very connected with my ethnic identity of being Latina and Asian. That means a lot to me. But I like the fact that I was becoming better. [That's not] what people would have expected from growing up in this really shitty neighborhood...

Arianna was conscious of the necessity of adjusting the way she spoke and dressed in order rise in social class, even if it came at the cost of being perceived as “whiter” by minorities.

Arianna stated that while “code switching” is something that she probably still does to some extent, currently, in college, she is more “consistent” in how she presents herself in various social...
contexts. While acknowledging her former efforts to mainstream her speech, she stated that she hopes her current self-presentation pertains to her personality:

I’m not defined by my ethnicity. I’m shaped by it and I embrace that. And so there are certain things that probably stem from my mother not being able to speak English fully, or barely speak English, or that come from me code switching, or that come from me going to a predominantly white boarding school and having that mentality of us versus them. But I would like to believe that these are just different aspects of me, and not just that Latino side of me coming out, or that Filipino side coming out. That’s just what Arianna is right now. That’s who I am. That’s a part of me.

Being a cultural mainstreamer was at first a way for Arianna to avoid marginalization at boarding school, but it has evolved into a way of expressing her own individual personality, “shaped” but not “determined” by ethnicity. I would imagine that white Americans similarly do not believe they need to embrace white culture. Since it is the dominant culture in the U.S., they may see it as simply “normal” or “mainstream.” I would imagine many whites seek to assert their own individual personality more so than explore their racial identity.

Both Carl and Anthony are also emphatic about being shaped by, but not limited to their ethnic cultures. Carl's mainstreaming followed an interesting trajectory. As a young kid he was a mainstreamer, largely due to the way his immigrant parents raised him. When he attended a private high school, in order to fit in with minority students, he became a straddler: he wore baggy jeans, he “spoke more ebonically.” In college, he became a mainstreamer again. He described himself as losing touch of his identity in high school, but now he seeks expression of his personality, not so much his ethnicity. He stated that: “I just think that for a lot of people I don’t fit neatly in their categorization process.” He described himself as being perceived as “too black to be white, too white to be black,” meaning that he does not embrace cultural signifiers of blackness, hence he is “too white to be black,” but his skin color prevents him from being perceived as white, regardless of how he talks or dresses, hence he is “too black to be white.” Defying efforts to categorize him, he seeks to express the ways he is unique.
A third mainstreamer, Anthony argued that being secure in his Hispanic identity was not dependent on bonding with Hispanic students at his boarding school:

They [Hispanic students at boarding school] would try and do the Hispanic bonding. We had completely different experiences of what it is like to be Spanish. And the things they cared about I don't care about.... I've been very secure in my identity. I am a Hispanic male of not the best economic background. That's fine and therefore I felt no need to have to protect or reify my Hispanicness. I always was very secure in that.

Anthony is more interested in pursuing his individual interests than “reifying” his Hispanic identity:

“There are multiple ways you can act that really has nothing to do with the color of your skin.” He takes his ethnicity as a given, and seeks expression and exploration of much more than that.

Individualizing behavior, for the mainstreamers, entailed minimizing cultural identifiers that might lead whites to marginalize them, and also seeking expression of aspects of their personality that are not determined by ethnicity.

There is a difference between individualizing one's own behavior, and individualizing interpretations of social phenomena. The latter is a method of analysis employed by conservatives, and was employed by the most conservative mainstreamer in this study, Cassandra.

Cassandra minimized her perception of racial conflict at her high school and in society by attributing incidents to the attitudes of individuals rather than to systems of oppression. More so than any other interviewee, she described racist incidents abstractly as being due to the “ignorance” of individuals. She also believed that black students at her high school were sometimes too quick to perceive incidents as racist, and “blame the white man” rather than seek other explanations. She recalled how she was involved in planning an annual dance organized by the black club at her high school, and her club missed a deadline, causing administrators to cancel the dance. While many black students interpreted that decision of school administrators to be racist, Cassandra believed they simply missed a deadline:

Some of the people in the group were overly hostile to the administration. They assume that because we didn't have the dance (incomprehensible) that there was some kind of racist
(incomprehensible) behind it that I just don't think was there. Sometimes there's a tendency to overemphasize race in our school, which was admittedly kind of a conservative school, but I don't think the circumstances called for that kind of reaction.

Whether or not Cassandra is right about this particular issue is beside the point. It is significant that Cassandra mentioned this anecdote when asked if there are ways that blacks acted at her high school that are problematic. While Cassandra is cognizant of discrimination, she views some blacks as overly sensitive and too quick to racialize incidents.

In her interview, Cassandra critiqued a feminist theory class she took in college that, while not about race per se, further exemplifies her tendency to individualize phenomena rather than interpret them according to social structure:

A lot of it seemed not applicable to the real world. It seems very abstract somehow, the way they [feminist theorists] would talk about sexuality.... I always had the sense that the writers we were reading had taken it too far.... I remember we had a reading about pornography and what it says about our culture, and a lot of it was about how the market allows men to have a certain dominance. And I guess that's true to some extent, but I don't think of the pornography industry as being a vehicle of oppression. I think it's just people enjoy watching it. It's a way to make money.

When interpreting phenomena that potentially have racial or gendered implications, Cassandra has a tendency to de-emphasize social structure, and emphasize the individual. The individual may or may not be racist. The individual enjoys pornography, and is not necessarily complicit in the subjugation of women. Again, Cassandra's conservatism¹² is not representative of the mainstreamers in this study.

The mainstreamers were generally emphatic about expressing their individuality. Cassandra was unique in this study in the degree to which she individualized social phenomena. I chose not to put her in an outliers section, however, because of the common thread of the role of the individual in hers and the other mainstreamers' discussions of racial conflict.

The Socialists

The socialists employed the opposite method of Cassandra: they dealt with racial conflict by

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¹² By conservative, I do not mean republican. It is possible that Cassandra is a Democrat.
emphasizing how social structures conditioned the way people behaved around them.

Terrance explained that because the wealthy students at his boarding school were college bound, they felt affronted by affirmative action, and Terrance had to be constantly prepared to debate the topic. Sometimes white students made particularly outlandish arguments against affirmative action:

It was interesting how important racial identity was for me in high school in a way it never was before, and it actually hasn't quite felt as pressing [lately]. I think a lot of it was because of the kinds of conflicts that I found myself coming up against. Here's one funny example. I remember having this argument with this guy about affirmative action. And he made some comment about, in all earnestness too, the guy wasn't even trying to say something to provoke me. He was very earnest when he said this: "Why should I be punished for this. My great great grandfather was very kind to his slaves."

Terrance does not currently view affirmative action as the most pressing racial issue, but in boarding school it was, due to the kinds of conversations he would have with privileged whites who were sometimes oblivious about their privilege.

Terrance progressed from racialized interpersonal conflicts to developing his current politics by analyzing race and other aspects of society structurally. He pinpointed one incident, a meeting of his school's Political Union in which he felt politically alienated, as the closest thing to a turning point in his political development:

The breaking point was probably when I went to a Political Union meeting after having read Black Power and basically quoted from the text and pissed everyone off and realized that most of the people had a centrist and actually, when I think about it, they all seem right wing in retrospect. But for the first time I found myself much farther to the left or away from the other people at the table. Not just feeling isolated in that moment but actually feeling really emboldened. That came out of the background of that experience I was mentioning to you earlier about all these arguments and conflicts about the issue of affirmative action. I felt like I kind of moved from this very personal experience to the kind of politics I later have.

Racial conflicts in high school facilitated Terrance's critique of systems of inequality and critique of capitalism (although it seems that he may not have fully identified as a socialist until college).

Arguments over affirmative action led him to explore ideas about institutional racism, among other structural social inequities like class.

13 See the outliers portion of the section on class for more details on the progression of Terrance's structural thinking.
Terrance seems to have been a mainstreamer long before entering boarding school, however, at boarding school he encountered students who corrected the few grammatical mistakes he made in speech, leading him to speak even more correctly:

I made as many grammatical errors in my speech as anyone else did. I was not an exceptional case at all. There was nothing wrong with me. But I remember I was called out a lot. One of my peers telling me this is why white people think black people are stupid. And then I remember a really distinct experience where I corrected a white person. They said, “me and jimmy went,” something like that, and I said “jimmy and I”... And I remember correcting someone else and being told I was a snob for it or I was an asshole for it. I got all uppity and they got pissed off. I remember it for a while, being berated for it. It was something that I remember very consciously trying to adjust while I was there.

While Terrance stated that he did wish to improve his rhetoric for its own merit, further mainstreaming already mainstream speech patterns was also a means of avoiding confrontations about his few instances incorrect grammar that were “inflected with racism.” Also, Terrance's corrections of white students' incorrect grammar were probably not undertaken in order to please whites, but appears to me to be somewhat confrontational, although Terrance claimed it was more of an “adjustment” than “fighting back.”

John (who again is not socialist exactly, but socialist-leaning), like Terrance, dealt with racial conflict by applying structural analysis to his interpersonal relationships. John is the only openly gay interviewee, and described the gay community at his college and at large as being racist. He said that the gay community does not regard blacks as attractive, at least blacks who are not “thuggish” or “masculine”:

I formerly internalized racism largely [based] on my experiences within the gay community. So after a while, I began to see rejections from people both on campus and online as largely because of my race and the fact that I didn’t fit into other idealized types within the gay community.... No matter how much other people told me that this was more of a societal issue than individual issue, it was really hard for me to still not feel bad about what I was experiencing.

Acknowledging that his rejections were a “societal” rather than “individual” issue was only part of John's healing process. After suffering a mental breakdown, the music of R&B artist Erykah Badu was
instrumental in helping him not internalize racism:

Erykah Badu’s music informed how I think in ways that I would say are pretty significant. And it helped me to internalize racism much, much less than I used to, to the point where I wouldn’t consider internalized racism the problem. And it’s also helped me to get more angry about the social position of blackness in the Western world.

Like the two cultural straddlers who argued that society conditioned black women to be perceived as unattractive, John interpreted the gay community to be racist in order to deal with rejection. Music helped him do this.

The Noncompliant Believer

I would like, again, to refer readers to the outliers subsection of the section on class for a detailed discussion of Clinton, the noncompliant believer's race and class conceptions, but what follows here is a brief description of his racial conflicts at boarding school. His conflicts were the most extreme of any of the interviewees, and his attitude towards his boarding school's white elite culture was the most oppositional.

Clinton felt constantly affronted with racism in high school. White students made fun of his slang and imitated it when talking to him, and when he told them not to address him in that manner, which he apparently did frequently, their responses were generally negative. Clinton did not see any appeal in his school's white elitist culture, and was particularly baffled by white humor. In the dining hall, he sat almost exclusively with black kids, and he did not feel sitting at the black table was oppositional, but rather he felt pushed there. Clinton interpreted black kids at his high school who hung out with and adopted the interests of the white students as “acting white,” but he now no longer uses the term “acting white” because he does not view race as “monolithic.” However, he remains resistant to “assimilation.”

Clinton's relationships with the faculty and administrators were no better than his relationships with white students. He believes the faculty was generally racist. John developed a noncompliant or oppositional attitude toward the faculty and tended not to back down in arguments with teachers and
administrators. This caused him face disciplinary action several times. One argument resulted in his suspension from prom. Several arguments led faculty and administrators to curse him out, and one such administrator, the assistant dean, had to later apologize to Clinton for using strong language. Clinton believes that this assistant dean was a racist, which was apparent in part because the dean was upset his daughter was dating a Hope Scholars student at the time.

In high school, Clinton felt all white people are racist, but he has subsequently come to believe that some whites are not racist, but most are.

It is important to note that there are different forms and different degrees of noncompliance. Clinton still performed well academically in school despite rejecting his school's culture and being resistant to school administrators. In addition, although a noncompliant believer, Clinton is savvy enough to tone down his slang in professional settings, but does not do so “just because white people are around” in nonprofessional settings.
Chapter 5  Conclusion

Of the eleven interviewees, seven can be classified as cultural mainstreamers, three as cultural straddlers and one as a noncompliant believer. While my sample may not be representative of Hope Scholars, the large number of mainstreamers corroborates Carter's finding that her mainstreamers earned the highest self-reported grades, outperforming the straddlers. It may be the case that mainstreamers tend to be the most academically competitive.

The major finding of this study is that there is a difference between how the cultural mainstreamers and cultural straddlers dealt with feelings of racial marginalization at elite private schools, and there is a difference in the class conceptions of the mainstreamers and straddlers. These differences can be summed up as follows.

1) The mainstreamers overcame racial conflict at elite private schools by expressing themselves in ways that transcend race\(^{14}\) by focusing on their own individual merits, while the cultural straddlers dealt with racial conflict by acknowledging that they stem from societal disparities and by maintaining pride in their cultural background.

2) The mainstreamers described class as a “social construct,” explicitly or implicitly, whereas the cultural straddlers emphasized income as the primary determinant of class. The term “social construct” has broad applications, but for the mainstreamers in this study, emphasizing the constructed nature of class meant a greater emphasis on the cultural and non-monetary constituents of class and a de-emphasis of income.

Both of these points require unpacking. Regarding the first point, both the mainstreamers and straddlers stressed that their racial and ethnic identities are important to them, which is also true of Carter’s mainstreamers and straddlers. Part of the difference between the two groups is they described different kinds of conflicts. Students of both categories described conversations with white elites who were

\(^{14}\) The mainstreamers identified strongly with their ethnic and racial groups, but they tended to be emphatic about the aspects of themselves that are not determined by their race or ethnicity.
oblivious about their privilege and sometimes even malicious and racist. However, the straddlers almost exclusively described such encounters when asked about racial conflicts. Several of the mainstreamers, by contrast, described their racialized experiences in high school and college as a search for individuality, or expressions of self that are not determined by racial identity. For example, one mainstreamer, Anthony, stated that he knew he was a Latino, and did not have to join a Latino club on campus in order to express that part of himself. Instead, he spent his high school years exploring a wide variety of musical and literary interests. I would contend that the search for ways of individualizing oneself is something that white Americans are more likely to pursue than minorities, because minorities may seek identification with their race or ethnicity as a means of dealing with marginal status. While the cultural mainstreamers did identify with their racial and ethnic groups, most of them emphasized their search for individual identity.

The second main finding also requires unpacking. This finding is much more subtle than the first. It should be stressed that the cultural mainstreamers and the cultural straddlers had very similar social class conceptions of a lower, middle and upper class distinguished by income, and both groups stated that culture signifies class. However, whereas the straddlers described culture as an imperfect signifier of income, the mainstreamers emphasized the “social construction” and the cultural constituents of class. Thus, for the mainstreamers, class is less quantifiable. A couple of the mainstreamers described their college campuses as having more equalized social classes than their high schools because students lived in the same dorms rather than commuting from outer boroughs, or wealthy students dressed down and thereby hid their wealth on campus. It seems to me that these mainstreamers blurred status with class, but emphasizing the “social construction” of class can mean emphasizing performance of class rather than some strict material basis for class.

The second of the two major findings answers my research question about how negotiating race at elite private schools is related to class conceptions. The contribution this study offers to Carter’s
work is class analysis, and it turned out that mainstreaming and straddling may be related to class conceptions, at least among the participants in my study. This finding is also the more tenuous of the two because it is less straightforward. I would like to stress once again that my small sample size limits the generalizability of my findings to all Hope Scholars alums. However, both findings are worth analyzing, at least to provide some starting point for future research.

The two major findings are evident in the data, but the data itself does not answer the question of whether or not the findings are interrelated. Nevertheless, I would like to propose a theory as to how the major findings are indeed related. The first main finding is that the mainstreamers generally subscribe to the white American valorization of the individual. The second main finding suggests that the mainstreamers have a more malleable conception of class than the straddlers, and, for the mainstreamers, culture (among other things, such as location) contributes to that malleability. The implication of this malleable conception of class is that one's social mobility is at least partially dependent on personal attitudes, belief systems, and cultural identifiers. The mainstreamers also see cultural identifiers as somewhat negotiable, given that they themselves opted out of fully subscribing to the cultural identifiers of their racial and ethnic groups. Thus, the mainstreamers see culture and class as negotiable, the former facilitating negotiability of the latter. This is not to say that the mainstreamers do not conceive of structural inequality. All of the mainstreamers discussed structural inequality, and, in fact, one of the cultural mainstreamers who subscribed to the notion of the “social construction” of class was one of the most forthcoming about structural inequalities among all eleven interviewees. However, in general, the straddlers discussed structural inequality more frequently and at greater length than the mainstreamers. The mainstreamers' focus on the individual led to occasionally interesting and nuanced discussions of class, but weaker notions of class barriers. The implication of this is the mainstreamers’ assimilation to white mainstream culture may entail to some degree adopting the notion that social mobility is possible for everyone, including the poor.
Thus far in the conclusion, I have used the term cultural mainstreamer to apply only to the five non-socialist cultural mainstreamers. This is because the socialist mainstreamer and the socialist-leaning mainstreamer both provided responses in their interviews that were very different from those of the other mainstreamers. While it was the case that the straddlers were generally more prone to structural analysis than the non-socialist mainstreamers, the socialist cultural mainstreamers provided the most sophisticated structural analyses of their interpersonal conflicts at high school and college. While it may be the case that being a cultural mainstreamer is related to subscribing to the dominant notion of the importance of the individual as well as using individual choices as an explanatory mechanism for personal and social outcomes, the ideologies of the socialist cultural mainstreamers entailed that they did not explain social phenomena with individual choice. Thus socialist ideology, and presumably any kind of ideology that emphasizes structural analysis, can perhaps counteract the trend of the valorization of the individual within cultural mainstreamers.

There were several other important findings of this study. One of my research questions was whether or not the way students negotiate race or ethnicity is related to perception of the role of education in social reproduction. One can argue that in order to perceive reproduction, one must at least perceive of class barriers, and hence the mainstreamers, with their more malleable class conceptions, are less equipped to perceive of reproduction. However, very few students described education in terms of reproduction. Only the socialists mentioned education as reproducing class inequality, either in passing or at length. In addition, the noncompliant believer described how education reproduces racial inequality. Otherwise, none of the students mentioned reproduction.

Another finding is that there was no pattern among the mainstreamers and straddlers of believing or not believing in the American Dream. Carter found the same to be true in her study of low-income minority students in Yonkers.

The most unexpected finding is one of my interviewees, Clinton, is an academically successful
noncompliant believer. His case raises questions about the conditions under which noncompliant believers can succeed in school. He seems to have maintained an oppositional attitude to his boarding school's racism throughout his experience there, but still graduated from high school and subsequently from a competitive college. He described his experience in college far more positively than his experience in his boarding school because in college, professors were not trying to “raise” him. Given Clinton's desire to be an actuary, I wonder if he will continue to maintain in his professional life a more or less consistent presentation of himself that does not accommodate to whites by hiding his black culture, his urban black speech patterns in particular, to the degree that the straddlers consciously accommodate. His account of his high school experiences demonstrates that he is a remarkably resilient individual.

Clinton's oppositional attitude towards his boarding school's elitist white culture had several parallels to the oppositional attitude of the lads in Paul Willis' ethnography. Clinton's raceconsciousness seems to obviate class consciousness, since he views race as the primary source of inequality in society. He is also homophobic and views that as an element of black culture. Similarly, sexism and homophobia prevented Willis' lads from fully conceiving of school's role in social reproduction. Clinton's oppositional attitude towards racism in school makes him very aware of the reproduction of racial inequality, but less concerned with class.

Clinton's oppositional attitude operates differently than that of the lads. Although he resisted his boarding school's cultural norms, he still performed well academically. He is probably middle class bound, and it seems that his lack of class consciousness makes him less compelled than many of the other interviewees to reconcile his pursuit of wealth with his conception of social inequalities. The best illustration of this is he declared his distaste for gentrification, as I defined it for him in the interview, and his unwillingness to live in a gentrified neighborhood, but he asserted his willingness to profit from owning property in a gentrified neighborhood because it is a “good investment.” In an interesting
reversal, it seems that Clinton's oppositional attitude, unlike the oppositional attitude of the lads, may facilitate his social mobility by neglecting to more fully acknowledge class inequality.

The mainstreamers and straddlers are all at least middle class bound, and most of them reconciled this with their conceptions of the need for social justice with varying degrees of urgency. The socialists were the most concerned about reconciling pursuing wealth with their ideologies, and John indicated that he might make the decision not to pursue wealth at all, and rather just pursue social justice. The non-socialists were far less concerned with reconciling pursuit of wealth with pursuit of social justice. For example, Trisha wants to get a job that does not make the “world a worse place.” Adrianna wants to be upper middle class, as opposed to rich, so that she is not “pretentious.” Sade wants to be rich, but does not wish embrace the obscene displays of wealth the rich partake in. Non-socialist interviewees, both straddlers and mainstreamers, seem more concerned with not acting out superiority upon attainment of social mobility than with the possibility that social mobility may blunt allegiance with the lower class.

Conceiving of a lower, middle and upper class can prevent perception or emphasis of the role of exploitation in capitalist society. If one views the middle class as distinct from the lower class, and views the primary distinction as income level, then one is more likely to view marginal changes like charity as the primary means of social change. All of the students in this study subscribe to a conception of a lower, middle and upper class, and the socialist and socialist-leaning interviewees were the only ones to critique this kind of conception, John more so than Terrance.

Some of the interviewees expressed a measure of aversion to consultants and investment bankers. This may indicate a partial conception of class exploitation, but it is unclear if students' critiques of investment bankers and consultants is due to the relation of investment bankers to capital and the class allegiances of consultants, or due to the interviewees' choices not to accumulate a lot of wealth by entering those two professions that many of their peers at elite universities enter. The former
seems to be the case for the socialists. Several students, including one of the socialists, dichotomized investment banking and working for a non-profit. I would contend that non-profit organizations vary in their institutional critique of capitalism and in their role in contestation or facilitation of social reproduction. In other words, there is no necessary contradiction between being an investment banker and supporting a non-profit of some kind.

Overall, with the exception of the socialists, the students in this study have class conceptions that do not emphasize exploitation, have partial critiques of capitalism that seem to be refined by sociological concepts they learned in school, and, with the exception of the noncompliant believer, generally have the desire to enter professions that are not heavily implicated in the reproduction of racial and class inequalities. The mainstreamers generally had conceptions of class that were less materially based than those of the straddlers, and hence, the mainstreamers more fluid class conceptions could potentially obviate class consciousness. The socialist mainstreamers, however, employed the most sustained structural analysis of their experiences in schools.

In this study, I explored the class conceptions of Hope Scholars alums in order to make conclusions about the role of enrichment programs in the reproduction of social inequality. It seems that all of the students in this study are critical of social inequality, and their interactions with white elites in many cases sharpened their critiques of privilege. They all want to “give back” in some way, and I imagine that, as minorities, they all are more critical of inequality than the typical student at their respective universities.

One function of enrichment programs in social reproduction is fostering the hope that with hard work some minorities can succeed, which potentially weakens the class consciousness of both alums of enrichment programs and society at large. However, the term “reproduction,” as pointed out by Paul Willis, is somewhat misleading because society is never reproduced exactly as it once was. Schools are institutions that play an important role in social reproduction and disguising the process of social
reproduction through dubious meritocracy, but schools are sites of contestation as well. While Hope Scholars enables only marginal intervention in social reproduction by promoting the social mobility of some minorities, the institution, like many institutions, functions to simultaneously contest and reproduce social class. Many of the participants in this study are critical of race and class privilege, and for two of my participants, attending elite schools seems to have played a role in polarizing their leftist politics.

Suggestions for Further Research

The biggest limitation of this study was the sample size. Further research with larger sample sizes could test my findings about the differing class conceptions of the mainstreamers and the straddlers. In addition, since most of the interviewees turned out to be second generation immigrants, further research could test the applicability of the terms cultural mainstreamer, cultural straddler and noncompliant believer to West Indians and other immigrant communities. Additionally, this study did not contain many Hope alums that aspire to be consultants or investment bankers, despite that many alums enter those professions. Future research should document the beliefs of such alums.

One topic that came up in several of the interviews, but was not in the protocol, is the agency of students in choosing to be cultural mainstreamers, cultural straddlers, and noncompliant believers. One student took the interesting trajectory of being a cultural mainstreamer as a child, a straddler in high school, and a mainstreamer in college. This is because his Jamaican immigrant parents did not want him to engage in African American and hip hop culture when he was young, but he wanted to fit in with the black kids once he enrolled in his private high school. Another mainstreamer's English was not perfect prior to entering high school because neither of her immigrant parents are native speakers of English, and so she intentionally mastered standard white middle class verbal patterns at boarding school, as well as started wearing the popular brands at her boarding school. Immigration status may play a significant role in the choice to be a straddler or a mainstreamer.
Other students seem to have been straddlers and mainstreamers before entering elite private schools and did not change much, so the question of agency is a complicated one. However, the experience of Hope alums is unique in that their decisions about how to present themselves have immediate consequences within their school environments beyond affecting their grades: their behaviors affect the kinds of confrontations and interactions they have with the elite students and faculty that surround them. Such environments intensify the choice to be a cultural mainstreamer, cultural straddler or noncompliant believer. Thus, I would argue that Clinton, the solitary noncompliant believer in this study, had much agency in his decision to resist assimilation to his boarding school. The question of agency is one that future studies can explore.

Lastly, research has shown that the income achievement gap has grown in the past thirty years, and that whereas fifty years ago the black-white achievement gap was one and a half to two times as large as the income gap, the income achievement gap is now almost twice as large as the black-white achievement gap. Thus, the income gap is increasing and the black-white achievement gap is decreasing (Reardon, 2011). In light of this, further research could be conducted on the role of class-based enrichment programs as opposed to race-based enrichment programs. It would be of particular interest to see how reproduction theorists make sense of class-based enrichment programs.
Appendix

Interview Protocol

i. Warm-Ups

i. What are you studying in college?

ii. Where are you from? Describe your neighborhood as you would to someone who knows nothing about it.

iii. Tell me about your experience in Hope Scholars.

iv. Tell me about your college as if to someone who knows nothing about it.

ii. Open Ended Questions

i. General Questions

i. What do/did you study in college?

ii. What do you plan on doing after graduating?

iii. Tell me about your high school as if to someone who knows nothing about it.

iv. What kinds of clubs were you involved in in high school?

v. What kinds of clubs are you involved in in college?

ii. Race and Ethnic Centrality

i. Describe yourself as if to someone who does not know anything about you?

ii. What would you say are the most important aspects of your identity?

iii. How are they important?

iv. Were you a minority at your high school or college? If so, did that affect your experiences at high school and college?

iii. Centrality of Community

i. What do you see yourself doing in five years? In twenty years?

   i. Note: This question helps assess whether or not the interviewee wishes to stay in her
or his community or move away. Within the directed questions section is a more blatant follow-up about where they plan on living. It is useful to record whether or not the interviewee brought up her or his future residential neighborhood without prompting in order to help assess attachment to community.

iv. American Dream

i. What is the role of education?

ii. What has and will education do for you?

iii. What do you think education does for society, if anything?

iv. What does success mean to you?

v. Why are some people successful and some unsuccessful?

vi. Can you give me an example of an experience from your own life (either something that occurred to you or something you observed) that caused you to come to this understanding of success?

vii. What do you want to do with your life?

v. Cultural Mainstreamer

i. What kind of music do you listen to?

ii. How would you describe your style of clothing?

iii. What were the different social groups at your high school?

iv. Who did you tend to hang out with in high school?

v. Did the kinds of people you hang out with change from high school to college?

vi. What is the most recent book that you read for fun?

vii. What is your favorite book?

vii. What is your favorite movie (you saw last year)?

vi. Cultural Straddler
i. What public figure or celebrity is a role model for you and why?
   
i. Carter discusses in Keepin’ It Real how minority students looked up to celebrity musicians because of their ability to keep it real, i.e. succeed without relinquishing their cultural identities.

ii. Did you have to make any personal adjustments when you went to high school? If so, what were some of the major ones?

iii. (For former boarding school students only) During your high school years, what were the various transitions like, as you travelled to and back from home during school vacations?

iv. Did you go home for this Christmas break? How was that transition?
   
i. Did you see old friends?
   
ii. (For all but college freshmen) How did going home for Christmas this time compare to other times of going home?

v. Was there a lot of diversity or cultural exchange at your high school or college?

vii. Noncompliant Believers
   
i. What were class discussions like in high school? Did you tend to be vocal?

ii. What were class discussions like in college?

iii. In high school, what kinds of interactions did you have with instructors and school administrators?

iv. In college, “ ”

v. Did you ever feel disengaged from you high school or college? If so, why?
   
i. Follow-up: Did your disengagement consist of being academically disengaged, socially disengaged, a combination of the two, or some other form of disengagement?
vi. Did you ever get in trouble with high school or college administrators? If you don't mind sharing, what were the circumstances?

viii. American Dream

i. Do you think education has intrinsic value?

ii. What are the biggest factors that led to your own academic success?

iii. Does success correlate to how hard a person works?

iii. Directed Questions

i. General

i. What kinds of social change would you like to see happen?

ii. What is the best way to affect social change. Work within the system or challenge the system from outside?

i. Note: Prudence Carter noted in Keepin' It Real that cultural mainstreamers could be activists, but tended to prefer to work within the system.

iii. Do you think discrimination will impede your success after graduating from college?

i. Note: In Carter's study, cultural straddlers and mainstreamers were less pessimistic than noncompliant believers about discrimination impeding them.

iv. How did the way you grew up affect your worldview?

v. Did your experience in Hope Scholars or high school or college alter your worldview?

ii. Centrality of Community

i. Where do you envision living 5 years from now?

ii. What does the phrase “give back to your community” mean to you, if anything?

iii. Cultural Mainstreamer

i. Are/were most of your friends in high school and college of a specific race, class, gender, or any other identity group? Was this important?
ii. Are the cultures of your high school and college different from the culture of your own community, and if so, do you see any conflict between these cultures?

iii. How do you feel about affirmative action?
   
i. *One mainstreamer Carter profiles in her book rejected affirmative action and preferred to believe in a system that equitably rewards effort.*

iv. What do you think of gentrification?

iv. Cultural Straddlers
   
i. Are there ways that you think people preform ethnic identities?
   
ii. Do you adjust your speech patterns and behaviors according to who you are around?
   
i. In what ways do you act differently at home than when at school?

v. Noncompliant Believers
   
i. Do you think the educational institutions you attended valued and respected your cultural background?

vi. American Dream
   
i. Do you believe in the American Dream?

vii. Class Consciousness
   
i. Do you believe that social classes exist, and if so can you explain your understanding of social class?
   
i. *Note: MacLeod seems to have inferred from high school tracking and employment histories how class operated in the lives of the Hallway Hangers and Brothers.*

   *Given that I conducted interviews, not an ethnography, I assessed perceptions of class rather than inferred instantiations of class barriers. Also, I chose to ask about class explicitly because Hope Scholars alums are highly educated and so I anticipated that most have encountered the notion of class within their studies,* and
that they would immediately see through any disguised question about class.

ii. How would you describe the social classes present at your high school? At your college?

iii. If you don't mind sharing, what social class do you belong to?

iv. What social class do you aspire to be a part of, and why?
References


