

Always molding:
A case study of low income, blue collar students in business school

by

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B.S., Kansas State University, 2005
M.P.A, Kansas State University, 2010

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Special Education, Counseling, and Student Affairs
College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the ways in which low income, blue collar business students in a Midwestern university navigated the culture of a white collar learning environment and training for future employment. This qualitative case study, informed by symbolic interactionism, was conducted with purposeful and criterion-based sampling. To qualify, participants needed to be business majors, self-identify as low income, blue collar, and have been in the business school for at least 2 years. The methods of data collection included a guided creative arts bag portrait activity, elicited interviews, observations, and document analysis.

Findings indicate participants occupied a space between two worlds—the affluent, white collar world of business school and the low income, blue collar world at home. Each world had different social class contexts that reflected and fostered divergent norms, expectations, and understandings of what it meant to belong in those worlds. Participants' interdependent cultural ways of being and low income, blue collar identity were not perceived to be welcomed in the independent, affluent, white collar culture of business school. Without a sense of belongingness, participants engaged in “class work” to fit in and protect themselves from classism. Strategies of class work included performativity to camouflage their stigmatized identity or resistance of engaging altogether. The labor of class work and experience of not fitting in created barriers to participants' full engagement in business school and career development training. Findings elaborate the process of how business school culture and training create distinct disadvantages for low income, blue collar students.

The study raises implications about the importance of business schools to foster belongingness among low income, blue collar students. Additionally, programs geared for career

development must also integrate options that are responsive to interdependent cultural ways of navigating family, community, and career. Such possibilities can be enacted via professional development of business school educators to become responsive and inclusive in their curriculum and instruction to mitigate the isolation felt by low income, blue collar students. Higher education, broadly, can have campus-wide support systems specifically geared for low income, blue collar students.

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Dedication

For Tatum. With a focus on work that feeds your soul plus hard work, commitment, and an openness to ask for help, you will get closer and closer to achieving your dreams.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

“When I got into the working world, though, my blue collar roots started to show, and I felt uneasy among the middle class born. The sense that I comprise two people who aren’t always compatible never left me.” (Lubrano, 2010, p. 1)

Lubrano (2010) wrote about his experiences and those of others. They were known as “Straddlers,” people from poor, blue collar families who now have white collar jobs and are middle class. They straddle two worlds, in many cases, not feeling as though they properly fit into either one. In business school, low income, blue collar students often feel as if they too do not quite fit in (Jury et al., 2017). The time in college is often fraught with social class culture shock, misunderstandings, questioning, and learning (Soria, 2005). The business school context is a middle class, white collar culture, which sets expectations for behavior and interactions (Hess, 2007). For example, there is the expectation to engage in extracurricular activities, to be independent, to advocate for oneself and to dress, speak, and engage in a particular way (Fryberg & Markus, 2007; Markus & Kitayama, 2003; Plaut & Markus, 2005). Moreover, business schools strategically teach white collar, middle class expectations of professionalism, teamwork, communication, and other soft skills (Anthony & Garner, 2016; De Villiers, 2010; Jones et al., 2017; Lavy & Yadin, 2013). Low income, blue collar students must learn the class rules and adapt to middle class, white collar cultural expectations to be successful (Rowntree, 1981). Success itself is often defined as obtaining a professional white collar job and joining the middle class (Longwell-Grice, 2003). This study focuses on understanding the experiences of low income, blue collar students in business school as they learn what is required in middle class, white collar workplaces. This work fits into the broader conversation on higher education to

reduce bias and create equal opportunity for socially marginalized groups (Hoffman & Mitchell, 2016; Rhoads, 2016).

Background and Context

In this section, I provide background and context for the study. I review changes in the U.S. workplace, the jobs available, and the skills necessary to be successful. Prior to this, a note on social class is relevant.

There is no consistent definition of social class. In fact, one publication identified 400 different ways in which class has been discussed (Liu et al., 2004). Depending on the study, occupation, education level, and/or income level may define the categories of poor, working class, middle class, and upper class. For example, the Pew Research Center defined middle class as those earning 67-200% of a state's median income (Henderson, 2015). In contrast, the White House Task Force on the Middle Class classified the middle economic tier based on aspirations rather than income level (Biden, 2010). In the report, middle class families aspired to home-ownership, a car, college education for their children, health and retirement security, and occasional family vacations. In other studies, middle class is defined only by being college educated (Stuber, 2006a).

Occupation often influences how people identify their own and other's social class (e.g., Hodges, 2016; Lubrano, 2004; Soria, 2015). In terms of occupation, blue collar and white collar jobs or careers are the most common classifications. The term blue collar refers to skilled tradespeople, factory workers, farmers, and other physically laborious occupations that pay hourly rather than according to a fixed salary, and which usually occupy a stagnant position in the hierarchy of the organization (Gibson & Papa, 2000; Halle, 1984). In contrast, white collar

occupations involve cognitive work with the core task as thinking rather than physically completing a task (Cappelli, 2008)

It is significant to note there are important class variations within occupational classifications of blue collar and white collar. In some cases, someone who is blue collar will be considered low income because of their occupation and salary level. On the other hand, an individual might have a blue collar job and by salary be considered middle class. Generally, white collar professions are associated with being middle or upper class (Cappelli, 2008). The distinctions of economic capital (income and wealth), however, are important. For instance, one could consider themselves blue collar by occupation (e.g., a manager for a construction company) and consider themselves middle class by salary. They may engage in many activities that are usually considered middle class such as taking vacations, golfing, and owning their home, a car, and perhaps even a boat.

In summary, there are many ways in which social class is defined. The inconsistent definitions of social class can create challenges when reviewing the literature. Furthermore, the varying ways in which class can be defined make this topic seem more complex than first considered.

Given the lack of consensus on social class definitions, I defined social class in this study as a worldview (Liu, 2001). From that perspective, the concept of social class focuses on the experiences of individuals and how they self-identify within a particular context, rather than on an implied worldview of the individual based on classification into a defined social class group. This study, for example, targets business students who self-identify as blue collar and low income. I did not define what blue collar or low income meant for the students. If they self-identified in these ways, then their experiences were of interest. In some cases, the literature

describes students in this population as poor or working class (Lubrano, 2004; Rubin et al., 2014; Warnock & Hurst, 2016); therefore, research using these related but different terms is reviewed also.

Having described how social class will be defined and viewed, I situated this study by providing background and context around the changes in the U.S. workplace. First, I described the influence of technological advances and globalization. Then, I described the skills necessary to be successful in today's white collar workplace and the efforts by business schools to teach the skills valued by employers.

Changes due to technological improvements and globalization have resulted in greater numbers of white collar occupations compared to blue collar occupations (Kapstein, 2000). Following World War II, vocational education was highly respected, and well-paying, blue collar jobs were abundant (Newman & Winston, 2016). Firms use new technology to digitize work and outsource it to employees in areas of the world where labor costs are lower (Oshri et al., 2015). Further, automation in manufacturing means workers now sit at computers or monitor robots that do the actual physical work that previously was performed by people (Chui et al., 2017). The post-industrial, technological society of today employs more white collar workers who create and transform information rather than manipulate materials.

Today's increasingly white collar workplace, fueled by technological changes and increased competition globally, has shifted the skills needed in the workplace (Bailey, 2014; Capelli, 1993; De Villiers, 2010; Karoly & Panis, 2004). More and more, employers are emphasizing soft skills when hiring business graduates (Jones et al., 2017; Lavy & Yadin, 2013). Soft skills include preferences for how to communicate, behave, and interact. With jobs that once dominated the workplace being automated, jobs now require expertise in human interaction and

the ability to work in unpredictable environments. According to a report by the McKinsey Global Institute (2017), the workplace environment today requires “social and emotional skills and more advanced cognitive abilities, such as high-level logical reasoning” (p. 15). More specifically, the National Association of Colleges and Employers (2016) noted that employers rate the top four career readiness competencies to be critical thinking/problem solving, professionalism/work ethic, teamwork, and oral/written communication.

Given the importance of soft skills to employers (Deloitte, 2018), business schools have been integrating soft skill training into their curriculum (Anthony & Garner, 2016). For instance, Kermis and Kermis (2010) describe a mandatory soft skill training experience for accounting students that teaches presentation skills, professionalism, and communication etiquette, among others. In another example, Portland State Business School overhauled its MBA program to expand soft skill training (Earnshaw, 2004). Efforts by business schools to teach soft skills are on the rise (Marques, 2013).

While soft skills are important to white collar employers, and business schools seek to meet employer needs, research suggests the preference for soft skills may be based on social class preferences. For instance, job candidates are often described as being polished and professional, based on social class expectations in the middle and upper class (Khan, 2010a, 2010b; Ostrander, 1993). Furthermore, personnel managers tend to rate potential employees who appear to be from affluent backgrounds as more competent and qualified for the job than those from lower-class backgrounds (Greenwald & Pettigrew, 2014; Rivera, 2012). If there is an influence of social class on soft skills, then the experiences of low income, blue collar students in learning soft skills would be important to understand. Their experiences, including their

resistance to (or accommodation of) skills valued in a white collar workplace, would make a difference in how effective programs are at closing the skills gap.

Rationale for the Study

It is important to explore the experiences of low income, blue collar students in business school because most universities, including business schools, do not address class diversity (Walpole, 2003). In the words of bell hooks (1994), “nowhere is there a more intense silence about the realities of class differences than in educational settings” (p. 177). If class differences are not acknowledged or addressed, then the experiences of students who are at the margins go unnoticed and unsupported (Soria & Bultmann, 2014).

Students who come from low income, blue collar backgrounds often experience class culture shock in business school. Most business schools are white collar, middle class learning environments with specific norms, values, and perspectives (Banks, 2009; Pearce et al., 2008; Stuber, 2011). Students who come from backgrounds with fewer resources and less exposure to white collar, middle class expectations often experience a sense of anxiety, of not fitting in, and of not knowing the rules of conduct in college (Klose, 2011; Locke & Trolan, 2018; Soria, 2015). This social class culture shock influences the overall college experience (Rubin et al., 2014; Soria et al., 2013; Warnock & Hurst, 2016; Warnock et al., 2018) as well as their ability to persist to graduation and perform well in class (Martinez et al., 2009).

Teaching soft skills in business school to meet employability needs (Maxwell et al., 2009) adds another layer to the cross-class experiences of low income, blue collar students. Warhurst et al. (2017) outline how valued workplace skills today are socially constructed by gender, race, ethnicity, and class. Specific to class identity, soft skills, such as communicating well and being professional, are variations of employer-demanded “middle class sociability”

(Hochschild, 1983, p. 97). So if being middle class means having the right ‘soft skills,’ then how class socialization occurs could help explain the perceived soft skills gap. Furthermore, for those who are not middle class, learning to *pass* as middle class with the “right stuff” for white collar employment is a big part of the business-school experience. Exploring how these cross-class cultural experiences are navigated, resisted, or accommodated will help understand the experiences of low income, blue collar students in business school.

Research Purpose and Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore the ways in which low income, blue collar business students in a Midwestern university navigated the culture of a white collar learning environment and training for future employment.

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do participants describe negotiating a white collar learning environment from their cultural and social class perspectives?
2. In what ways do participants resist and/or accommodate the training they receive for future employment possibilities?

Theoretical Frameworks

This study is guided by constructionism (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969), and the class work model (Gray & Kish-Gephart, 2013). These theoretical frameworks are the lenses through which this study was conducted. Constructionism is the macro-level perspective for how truth is approached in this study. Symbolic interactionism (SI) is a mid-level theory that frames how individual meaning-making or experiences are understood. The class work model is the micro-level substantive theory through which social class identity is interpreted.

Constructionism is the epistemological approach grounding this study. It is an approach that challenges positivist methods that maintain there are single objective truths to be discovered (Gergen, 1985). Rather, constructionism refers to the belief that human beings construct understandings of the world around them (Crotty, 1998) and therefore multiple truths exist (Gergen, 1999). Since individuals lead different lives within varying cultures, experiences, and contexts, interpretations vary reasonably (Burr, 1995). To illustrate, matters such as beauty were once believed to be determined by fixed truths (Weinberg, 2014). Today, however, it is recognized that beauty is culturally and historically influenced. In particular, groups and individuals with power in society establish the standards with which legitimacy is measured (Gramsci, 1971). Truth is therefore situated within the social contexts with which individuals live and through which observations are made. With this constructionist approach, I recognize that the perspectives of each participant as well as my own are influenced through interaction with others. In other words, as one engages with the world, meaning is developed and understood. Because the social contexts in which we live vary, so does meaning-making. In this study, I sought to understand the experiences and perspectives of the participants to shed light on classed experiences in business school. The intent was not to state one truth about low income, blue collar students in business school, but rather to promote understanding and generativity on a phenomenon (Barone & Eisner, 2012).

The methodological framework for this study is symbolic interactionism (SI). Blumer (1969) described the three basic premises of SI. First, human behavior towards things is based on the meaning those things have for them. To illustrate, shoes for one person may be functional and prevent injury while working with a chainsaw while for someone else shoes are primarily a status and fashion symbol. Second, meanings are derived through social interactions. That is,

when a guest wears work boots in a social setting where they are not typically worn, the looks from those around them may indicate negative judgment. And third, meaning is modified through an interpretive process between people interacting with one another. Following the interaction, the utilitarian approach to footwear may be modified and fashionable shoes worn in such contexts. Alternatively, perhaps no change to footwear is made but an internal interpretive process occurs and one decides to resist the social expectations for a particular type of appearance.

Using SI, this study frames the experiences of participants in social contexts. Past experiences inform meaning-making, interpretations, and behavior in current situations – in this case, the business school. SI is used to understand how the participants’ learned to act in an expected way. The symbol in this study was the participants’ perceived class status and their understanding of their place within the class status in business school. This approach is appropriate because it takes into account the ways in which students perform – specifically, how low income, blue collar business students perform in business school, a white collar, middle class learning environment.

The class work model (Gray & Kish-Gephart, 2013) is the substantive framework for this study. It explains how organizational culture creates social class advantages and disadvantages through shaping interactions between people within a system. All organizations have a social class culture for which expectations for norms, values, and behaviors are framed (Schein, 1990). These expectations shape member behavior for what is perceived as appropriate and inappropriate.

The class work model explains that within an organizational system, class work dynamics influence intrapersonal and interpersonal class work (Gray & Kish-Gephart, 2013). Intrapersonal

class work are the internal considerations made by individuals as they negotiate social interactions. For instance, how one thinks and feels in a situation with respect to whether their social class identity is accepted or marginalized. Interpersonal class work is the resulting performative acts with others. For instance, when a low income, blue collar individual makes strategic decisions to hide or camouflage their background among more affluent and white collar peers. Or, when a white collar, affluent individual dismisses an individual whom they perceive to be low income and blue collar from advancing in a job interview process because they are not the “right fit” (Rivera, 2016). The class work model describes how social class is experienced in organizations by individual members and how classism is perpetuated by organizational culture.

The theoretical frameworks of constructionism, symbolic interactionism, and the class work model briefly described here ground the perspective with which this study was conducted. In Chapter 2, I describe each in detail. With these lenses the methodology and methods were selected, data analyzed, research questions answered, and results interpreted and presented.

Methodology and Methods

This study is conducted via interpretive qualitative inquiry. Interpretive approaches in qualitative inquiry foregrounds a need to understand how people interpret experiences and make meaning of their world (Marriam & Tisdell, 2015). Such approaches are appropriate when researchers seek deep understanding and are cautious of quantifying the complex human experience (Richards, 2005). While quantitative approaches to this topic can offer broad trends and relationships between isolated variables, an inquiry into social class experiences, especially where negotiating new cultural protocols are significant, requires an in-depth and nuanced investigation. In such an investigation, the inclusion of context, daily experiences, affect,

interactions, and reactions are critical. Therefore, I have chosen an interpretive qualitative approach because it provides a deep, rich understanding of the student experience.

To explore the ways in which low income, blue collar students navigate business school, this study uses a case-study approach. Case study is valuable for understanding complex social phenomena through empirical inquiry that explores real-life situations (Yin, 2017). It is useful when the environmental context has important influences on social processes (Cassell & Symon, 2004). Accordingly, this study examines the environment of business school and the dynamics of social class.

The unit of analysis, or case, is specifically what the researcher is seeking to understand (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The case may be a person, persons, program, organization, policy, or any phenomenon in which the researcher is interested (Merriam, 1998). A researcher may investigate a case either because of its distinctiveness or its specificity. For this study, the specific case or unit of analysis is each individual participant.

Yin (2011) asserts that a case study inquiry requires multiple sources of data that are collected with prior consideration of theoretical propositions. In this way, useful questions are asked and observations are made that are central to the social phenomena of interest. Specifically, data collection for this case study took place over 6 weeks. I used purposeful sampling to recruit four low income, blue collar business students to participate. Data collection included interviews, observation, self-portrait creation, and document analysis. Following this, data analysis and representation took about 3 months. In Chapter 3, I describe the methodology and methods of data collection, analysis, and representation in detail.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is two-fold. First, by exploring the experiences of low income, blue collar students, business schools can become more informed when considering how to teach and support this demographic of students for employment. Second, by exploring social class differences in business school, the study aims to make social class part of the diversity conversation such that classism can be addressed alongside other types of stereotyping on college campuses. This section will explain these contributions of the study.

This study contributes to the literature regarding the experiences of low income, blue collar students in business school. Particularly with respect to learning the normative white collar, middle class expectations for employment, this study elucidates the experiences of cross-class interactions and thereby may assist students, business schools, and employers to reach their goals. Business students have goals for employment in white collar jobs (Longwell-Grice, 2003), business schools have goals to improve the employability of graduates in white collar workplaces (Rao, 2010), and employers want to hire students who can successfully navigate their white collar, middle class work environment (Lavy & Yadin, 2013; Meeks, 2017).

Further, this study adds to the literature about the normative class culture in business school. The more attention this area is given, perhaps the more likely business schools will examine their class culture and its influence on teaching and learning. Potentially, considerations could be made to include in programming that the cultural norms and expectations of business school and white collar employers are not any better than other class cultures, just appropriate in particular settings.

This work is important because low income, blue collar students often experience classism in business school (Jensen, 2012; Soria, 2015). The absence of class discourse on

campus (Borrego, 2008; hooks, 1994) further perpetuates classism by accepting it as appropriate and normal. Ignoring classism means low income, blue collar students often do not have a name for their discomfort and may suffer in silence. Real support means being brutally honest about class struggle (McCoy, 2015).

Limitations of the Study

This case study has several limitations. First, my ability to develop rapport with participants influenced how willing participants were to share information relevant to the study. And as a novice researcher, I was limited in my ability to ask probing questions at appropriate times. Also, social class can influence if one feels pride or shame and how one thinks they will be treated and thought of by others (Sayer, 2005); therefore, participants may have experienced trepidation in describing their social class experiences. For this study, participants' comfort level to share their experiences with me was influenced by my ability to develop a connection, show empathy, and create trust.

My approach to research and working with participants was to learn together about social class experiences. Self-disclosure of my experiences was natural for me and has been noted to be important for researcher-participant relationships (Hesse-Biber, 2007). After all, shared meaning-making is the result of data collection and data analysis. Researchers cannot remove themselves from the research. However, through interrogating my subjectivities, engaging in peer debriefing, and member checking, I intended to honor the experiences of my participants. This study's rigor was based on my ability to create a safe space to allow for participants' candor in sharing their experiences.

Second, participants were full-time students, and all worked at least one job. There were some challenges scheduling interviews; however, I accommodated participants and met when

convenient for them. I provided a small honorarium in recognition of the burden of time and trouble for those who participated as well as to show the value and importance of their contribution (Russell et al., 2000).

Operationalization of Constructs

In this section, I define key terms used throughout the study to provide for shared understanding. Terms without a citation were composed by me.

1. Blue collar - Skilled tradespeople, factory workers, farmers, and other physical laborers that generally are paid hourly rather than receiving a fixed salary, and who usually occupy a stagnant position in the hierarchy of the organization (Gibson & Papa, 2000; Halle, 1984).
2. Pink-collar - Occupations that are traditionally “women’s” jobs such as secretary, bank teller, teacher, child care provider, and nurse. These are characterized by low hourly pay compared to blue collar workers, and there are minimal job advancement opportunities (Glasscock, 2009).
3. White collar - Occupations that involve mental work rather than physical work and generally offer opportunities for advancement (Cappelli, 2008). Sometimes described as a knowledge worker (Wright et al., 2018).
4. Social Class - A social construct of perceived prestige in educational, occupational, cultural, social, and academic capital (Barratt, 2005).
5. Felt Social Class – The social class in which a person currently categorizes themselves (Barratt, 2012b). Changes dynamically based on the context, social interactions, and internal interpretations.
6. Attributed Social Class – One’s social class as perceived by others (Barratt, 2012b).

7. Social Class of Origin – The social class in which one categorizes their background (Barratt, 2012b).
8. Social Class Contrast - Social class contrast exists when one's current felt social class is different from the social class culture of the organization or group of people one is with (Barratt, 2012b).
9. Economic Culture – The context or environment in which human, social, and cultural capital are valued, sought, and used (Liu et al., 2004). Different economic cultures may value different types of capital. Economic culture is sometimes called social class culture.
10. Social Capital – The perception of, access to, and use of specific relationships to define and maintain an individual's social class (Lai et al., 1998; Lee & Croninger, 2001).
11. Human Capital – “The perceived value derived from education, occupations, interpersonal skills, and /or innate physical attributes (e.g., beauty or physical ability) that are valued in a community” (Liu et al., 2004, p. 101). These skills and attributes vary by community. Having these skills or attributes contributes to one's sense of self-efficacy within that environment (Liu et al., 2004).
12. Cultural Capital – One's perception of his or her tastes and aesthetics and how they are used in a particular context to display respected social class behaviors or values (Bourdieu, 1986; Liu et al., 2004).
13. Soft Skills - Intra- and inter-personal skills that are subjective in nature (Wilkinson & Orth, 1986). May include effective communication skills, self-awareness, critical thinking, attitude, teamwork, adaptability, and professionalism.

14. Hard Skills - Technical skills such as techniques to work with data, software, marketing, and strategic models, to name a few (Laker & Powell, 2011).
15. Knowledge Worker - Workers whose job is to “think for a living” (Davenport, 2005, p. 20) as opposed to manual labor. The work requires non-routine problem-solving and advanced education, and workers are allowed to exercise autonomy and discretion (Pyöriä, 2005). Sometimes referred to as a white collar worker.
16. Career Development Activities - Activities, coaching, and/or mentoring designed to prepare students to be successful in the white collar workplace.
17. Working class - An ambiguous word, though it is used in common language. It may include people who are not college-educated, whose income falls in the lower half of the geographic location, and/or whose work involves manual labor or low-skilled service work (Lehmann, 2014). Working class may be referred to as blue collar by some people.
18. Middle class – An ambiguous word, though it is used in common language. It may refer to those who are college-educated and/or whose income falls in the median of the geographic location (Gilbert & Kahl, 1982). The type of work varies. For example, a plumber making \$100,000 may be considered middle class by wealth and working class by occupation. Work involving ‘thinking for a living’ is generally considered middle class. Sometimes they may be referred to as white collar.
19. Upper class – An ambiguous word, though it is used in common language. It may include people who are college-educated, whose income falls in the top half of the geographic location, and whose lifestyle is experienced through spending money without much concern (Flemmen, Toft, Anderson, et al., 2017).

Chapter Summary

An understanding of how low income, blue collar students experience business school and training for future white collar employment is lacking. This study sheds light on how this demographic of student negotiates the business school environment. This chapter provided background and context for the study. It also included the study's rationale, research purpose, and questions. An introduction to the study's theoretical frameworks was briefly covered. Finally, I considered the significance and limitations of the study and provided descriptions of key terms used throughout this research. The following literature review provides a greater context and framework for the study.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to review existing literature related to this study. The concept of social class is known by people in one way or another (Taylor & Lobel, 1989). Most intuit who is higher-class and who is lower-class based on symbols of wealth, behaviors, and language use (Kraus et al., 2017). People can recognize differences between blue- and white collar jobs and work environments. While there is a common awareness of a system of social classes, sociologists including Marx and Engels (1848), Weber (1978), and Bourdieu (1986) added to the understanding of class through the introduction of various theoretical frameworks. This review describes these foundational social class theories. There will follow a discussion of theoretical frameworks used in this study: constructionism, symbolic interactionism, and the class work model. Next, the influence of social class on hiring decisions, business school culture, and how people of diverse class backgrounds experience business school differently is presented. This chapter ends with a review of the lack of discourse on campus related to social class.

Foundations of Social Class

The first Industrial Revolution from 1760 to 1830 was a time of transition from hand production to machine manufacturing (Ashton, 1997). For instance, the cotton gin mechanized the separation of cotton seeds from cotton (Lakwete, 2005); the Spinning Jenny, a type of sewing machine, allowed for a laborer to work 8 times as quickly (Allen, 2009); and the invention of the steam engine eventually led to steam-powered production in the cotton industry as well as railway steam locomotives and steamboats to transport materials more quickly and efficiently (Dickinson, 2011).

These inventions changed the way people worked. Industrialization meant a change from a primary agriculture economy to one based on industry and commerce (Hopit & Wrigley,

1994). During this time, factories grew, trade expanded, and the standard of living for many increased dramatically (Hopkins, 2000). With organizations spanning geographic areas and many hundreds, sometimes thousands of employees being hired, an organized system of modern management developed (Cummings et al., 2017; Samson & Daft, 2012).

Not everyone viewed the emerging industrial capitalist society with keenness. In the Communist Manifesto, Marx and Engels (1848) described the bourgeois (owners of the means of production) exploiting the proletariat (working class) by paying them just enough to live on while withholding opportunities to gain power. As the bourgeois gained more capital, they retained even greater power over the poor. This struggle for control over the means of production created class conflict (Levine, 1998). Marx predicted the working class would unite in a revolution against their common mistreatment by the bourgeois and capture the means of production for themselves. A form of this uprising can be seen in the establishment of labor unions (La Botz, 2013). Marx envisioned a society that would eventually transform itself into a classless utopia in which everyone possesses equal wealth.

While Marx saw control over the means of production as creating two competing social classes, the German sociologist Max Weber believed social class to be more complicated. Weber (1978) viewed social class as groups of people with similar life chances. He asserted one's resources, such as property, skills, and other assets with market value, influence one's position in life (Breen, 2001).

The power to influence others is often viewed as affecting one's chances in life. For instance, a local mayor or district attorney may not own the most expensive house in town, but their ability to influence others could be substantial. Weber called this ability to close off opportunities to others as "social closure" (Jarness, 2015). Social closure is the process where

one group closes off opportunities of another group they see as inferior (Murphy, 1988). For instance, certain professions and industries are closed off from individuals from low income backgrounds. Specifically, personnel managers in elite firms tend to rate potential employees who appear to be from affluent backgrounds as more competent and qualified for the job than those from low income, blue collar backgrounds (Greenwald & Pettigrew, 2014; Rivera, 2012).

Bourdieu (1986) expanded on the theories of Marx and Weber by describing how the accumulation of capital influences social class and power in society (see Figure 2.1). Bourdieu employed the terms habitus and field. Habitus can be thought of as a “socialized subjectivity,” or one’s approach to the world and one’s preferences based on personal social experiences (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), and a field is the space in which social interactions occur (Bourdieu, 1988). Each field has specific rules of functioning. The rules of one field may not extend to others. For example, the field of university values critical skepticism, and this rule may not apply to the field of a church. A field of a social organization may value athleticism and certain clothing brands, while another may value time spent volunteering to help the organization. The elites in a particular field interpret and make legitimate particular practices, forming norms. Those who best embody the norms gain capital and become elites with the ability to influence norms (Hilgers & Mangez, 2014).

In business school, there are norms for expected behavior (Collier & Morgan, 2008) and norms for style of dress (Sebastian & Bristow, 2008). Participating in class discussions, being organized, and sporting an appearance that is impressively put together (Lubrano, 2010) are also valued assets. Business faculty instill in students the desired behaviors of the organizations they aspire to work for (Ehrensall, 2002). Students who at least appear to understand the rules of functioning within business school gain capital. In this case, capital may include support from

faculty, prestige among peers, or election to special opportunities such as meetings with business professionals. For example, in my experience, it is common for faculty to be asked to nominate a select few students who would be good for department board members to meet with. These board members are typically executives at successful companies and alumni of the university. The students who, upon faculty consideration, are nominated are typically those who are impressive in the classroom because they fit the mold of business school expectations. Thus, students who know and follow the rules are rewarded with social connections. Those who do not are not.

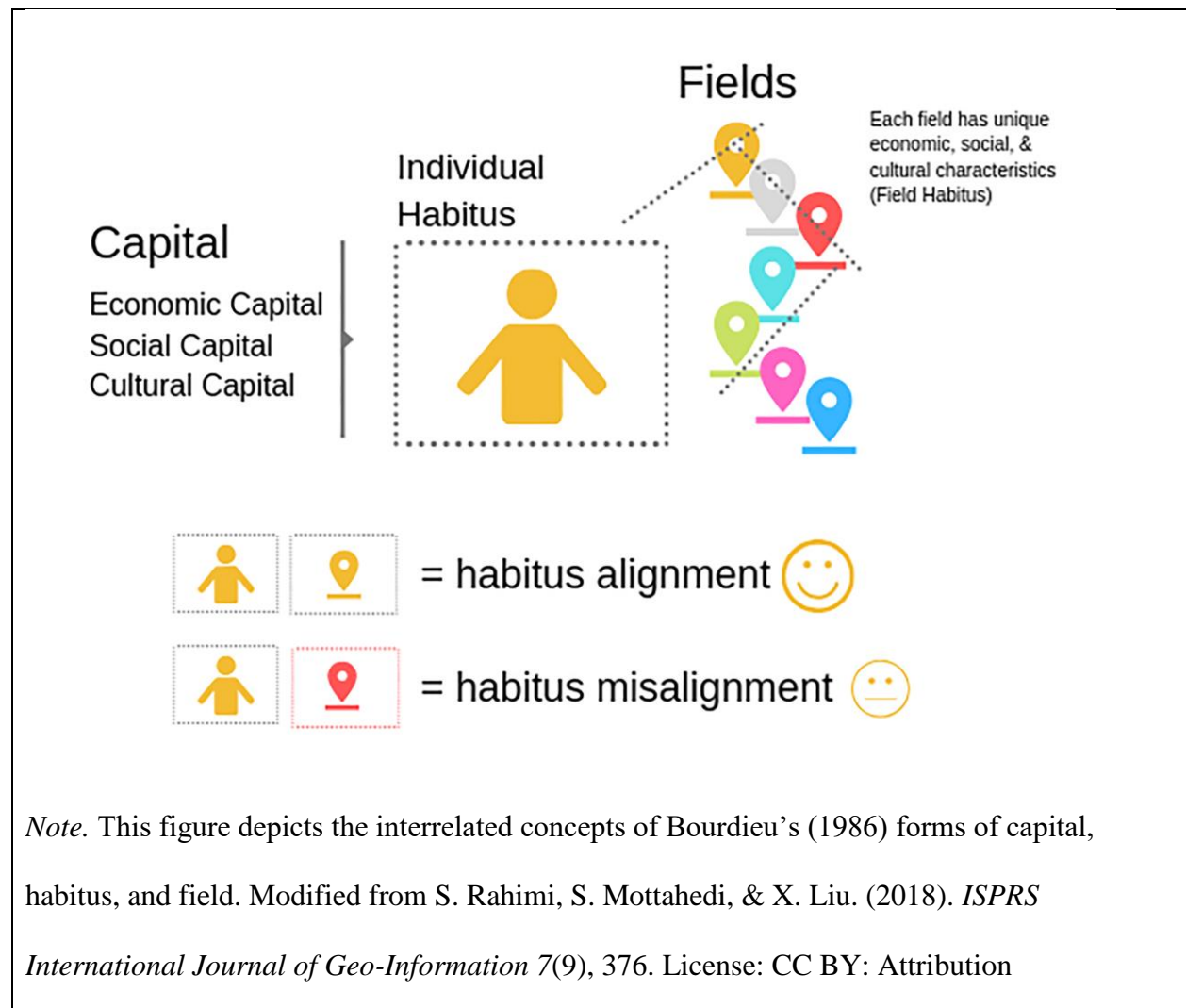
Individuals can shuttle between fields. However, as they do so, their habitus is altered and individuals are forced to adapt to new experiences. For example, when an individual's habitus encounters a new unfamiliar field, there is a "dialectical confrontation" (Bourdieu, 2002, p. 31). This experience is the feeling of uncertainty or shame an individual feels when they do not meet the expectations of the dominant group (Flisbäck, 2014).

Habitus misalignment occurs when an individual's habitus differs from the habitus of their field, often resulting in feelings of unease (Abrahams & Ingram, 2013). For example, a working class student's habitus can feel out of place in the middle class field of higher education. As a student gains capital and takes on the habitus behavior of the middle class, they may feel out of sorts returning home to their family where the habitus is working class (Lubrano, 2004). Individuals may feel as if they have a foot in two worlds, and must constantly negotiate between them. Bourdieu (1999) described this phenomenon as a "double perception of the self" or "multiple identities" (p. 511). This experience can sometimes cause internal anxiety and resistance to act differently based on social context. In one study, working class students in a program designed to increase their aspirations to go to university for a professional career resisted, claiming they wanted to "be themselves" and refused to be "two-faced" (Stahl, 2016, p.

672). For this group of working class students, there was a sense of being loyal to oneself and one's roots. Working class students who were successful at an elite university, on the other hand, had the ability and desire to switch between working class and middle class contexts (Reay et al., 2010). This privileging of those who know the rules and display the right behavior is common in higher education (Soria, 2015). Therefore, college can be difficult for working class students because the rules of the game are "not explicit and codified" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 98).

Figure 2.1.

Bourdieu's Theory of Capital, Habitus, and Fields



Each social space, or field, is distinct based on economic, social, and cultural characteristics (Anheier et al., 1995). Individuals can gain capital in each of these three categories to help them succeed (Bourdieu, 1986). Economic capital is measured by income and accumulation of wealth. Within each field, wealth can be used to gain other types of valued capital. For instance, economic capital can influence the quality of education a student receives while growing up (Lee & Burkam, 2002). Such wealth can expand their exposure to opportunities that broaden their awareness of the world (Duncan & Murnane, 2011) and affect decisions to university enrollment (Rowan-Kenyon, 2007).

While economic capital can be measured using income or accumulation of wealth, it should be noted that cultural and social capital exist in a more abstract, symbolic manifestation. Cultural capital consists of valued elements of the dominant culture in society (Sullivan, 2002). When someone has accumulated cultural capital, they embody the symbolic elements of the class in which they live. For example, cultural capital valued in middle class circles includes certain behavioral manners, skills, and language. Applying cultural capital as language to the university setting, a student who grew up in a United States middle class setting has likely learned the expected language of American middle class culture. Thus, they may have an easier time communicating in the classroom with an American middle class professor than a student who grew up in poverty. Professional speech, aesthetic preferences, credentials, and information about institutions are other examples of cultural capital in a university (Swartz, 1997). Therefore, like economic capital, cultural capital can contribute to inequality. The students who have cultural capital valued by a particular field such as a university, tend to have an easier time fitting in and being successful.

Social capital is the ongoing use of social networks or relationships for personal advantage to “secure material or symbolic profits” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 249). In university, social capital includes forming relationships with professors, advisors, and peers in order to be successful in college. Students who experience habitus misalignment in college are unlikely to develop much social capital due to resistance and anxiety, both on the part of the individual and others, including peers and institutional professionals (Soria, 2015). Furthermore, individuals may not understand how establishing social connections can be helpful. Understanding the power of networks to advance personal goals is a hidden and systemic challenge of social class on campus.

In addition to economic, social, and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), Barratt (1986) proposed academic capital as a distinct type of capital missing from the original theory. Academic capital includes skills and knowledge to be successful in school, including how to take notes and study, understanding which classes to take and when, as well as the expected ways to write and verbally communicate. It takes time to accumulate academic capital. A student unfamiliar with a university environment may be told how to enroll, how to study, how to plan ahead, and so forth. This amount of information can be overwhelming to take in all at once. Rather than internalizing all of these skills right away, it may take months or even years to accumulate enough academic capital to feel comfortable and successful in higher education.

Hess (2007) asserted that Bourdieu’s theory overlooks the possibility of those in the lower classes of dominant society resisting the urge to accumulate what dominant society deems valuable. People do not passively work to accumulate valued capital. In fact, people can and do disagree with what dominant society may *value* as capital. For instance, those who minimize material possessions or who prefer to work blue collar instead of white collar jobs.

The theories of Bourdieu, Marx, and Weber posit social class as a phenomenon that can be recognized through measurement; for instance, by how much valued capital one has, whether they are owners, or how much market value can be exchanged for one's skills. In the United States, polling suggests income level is a powerful determinant of how people categorize social classes (Bird & Newport, 2017). For instance, those with a \$40,000 annual income are likely to self-identify as middle class and less likely to label themselves working class. At \$75,000-\$99,000, the middle class is the dominant social class identifier. And at the \$500,000 marker, half of respondents claim upper class status while the rest identify as upper middle class.

While money does influence class, it is not the only marker. This money-oriented measure of class seems to simplify the complexity of the phenomenon. People make subjective determinations about social class based on judgment (Festinger, 1954), including that based on speech style (Ryan & Sebastian, 1980), clothing (Piacentini & Mailer, 2004), thinness of body in women (Garner et al., 1980), and leisure activities (Shinew et al., 1995). Class is “a script, map, and guide. It tells us how to talk, how to dress, how to hold ourselves, how to eat, and how to socialize . . . in short, class is nearly everything about you” (Lubrano, 2004, p. 5). Class is experienced as an identity that strongly influences our behavior and feelings. As such, it is extremely personal (Barratt, 2012b). As we interact with the world, our experiences of class may be positive – or they could be disconcerting. These are the complex experiences of low income, blue collar students that this study seeks to understand.

Theoretical Frameworks

The theoretical frameworks guiding this study are constructionism (Crotty, 1998), symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969), and the class work model (Gray & Kish-Gephart, 2013). Each offers topical and methodological guidance for this study with its varied scope.

Constructionism provides a broad, macrolevel perspective for how truth, reality, and meaning making are approached in this study. Symbolic interactionism provides a closer, mid-level perspective on interactions and meaning making by participants based on their understanding of their class-based identity. And the class work model provides a micro-level framework for a focused understanding of the social class experiences of participants in business school.

Constructionism

Constructionism is the macro-level framework or epistemological approach grounding this study. Epistemology is the philosophy of knowledge or an approach to how one comes to know (Trochim, 2000). According to Crotty (1998), “What constructionism claims is that meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting” (p. 43). In other words, each individual interprets the world based on their experiences, identities, and context. Therefore, rather than just one truth to be known, there are instead multiple interpretations. Further, an individual’s interpretation and understanding of experience is constructed within a social context.

The constructionist grounding of this study approaches “truth” as a concept, as not universal. In this way, I recognize that each person’s perspective and experiences influence their perception. For instance, I live in a rural area and our well is our main source of water. When there is a dry spell, my family conserves water by taking quick showers, doing only one load of laundry per day, and we never water the yard. We collect and store rain water for the animals to drink from and to water the garden. Water is a precious resource for us. In contrast, someone who lives in an urban area with abundant water probably would not approach the concept of water like us. Water is often taken for granted when it reliably comes out of the tap (Clarke,

2013). In this way, water as a concept has different meanings for different people depending on their experiences.

Constructionism, when applied to this study, means that I acknowledge that each individual has their own unique interpretation of the world, constructed through experiences, interactions, and meaning-making. This perception of the world is influenced by their social class experiences, backgrounds, and the social context in which they find themselves. It is through this lens that I approach the design, analysis, and representation of this study.

Symbolic Interactionism

The mid-level, methodological framework for this study is symbolic interactionism (SI). SI views society and individuals as inseparable entities. Society cannot be understood without examining the many individuals within it; alternatively, individuals cannot be understood without examining society. This section will begin by establishing the three tenets of SI. Next, I describe the origins of SI, including the works of Charles Horton Cooley, William Isaac Thomas, and in particular, George Herbert Mead. Connections between these scholars and the major tenets will be made. Finally, I will describe interpretations of Mead (1934) and how his work has developed into three major schools of thought: the Chicago School (Blumer, 1969), the Iowa School (Hickman & Kuhn, 1956), and the dramaturgical approach (Goffman, 1959).

The three major premises of symbolic interactionism are: (a) humans interact with things based on meanings ascribed to those things; (b) the ascribed meaning of things comes from our interactions with others and society; and (c) the meanings of things are interpreted by a person when dealing with things in specific circumstances (Blumer, 1969). In other words, people do not simply react to behavior when interacting in social situations. Rather, there is an interpretation of each other's actions, based on our unique socialized experiences. A person's

response is not simply a reply to an action. It is based on the meaning derived from the interpretation of actions. SI recognizes the ever-changing dynamics of the societal influence on individual behavior, internal interpretations of meaning, and human agency.

The origins of SI, though not yet named at the time, can be traced to Charles Horton Cooley (1864-1929), an early North American sociologist and the first to describe symbolic interactionism (Plummer, 1996). He asserted, “the imaginations which people have of one another are the solid facts of society” (Cooley, 1956, p. 87). In other words, the thoughts and values of individuals are shaped by society. But Cooley also believed individuals, in turn, shape society. His view was that through the minds of individuals who make up society, expectations are collectively created (Meltzer et al., 1975). Cooley (1918) further emphasized society is constantly changing and that one’s interpretation of events depends on their place in society. These dynamics explain why individuals can have entirely different experiences and interpretations of the same event. This is the central idea of SI.

Cooley established the process of “sympathetic introspection” (Reynolds, 1993). To understand an individual’s point of view or experience, Cooley (1909) asserted that it takes more than just observing behavior. First, one must consider the primary group of the individual. Forming one’s primary group are those individuals who have had a significant influence on forming an individual’s perceptions. Family, friends, and community members during childhood are significant influencers. Thus, an individual’s upbringing plays a large part in forming their perspective. This makes up the underlying theme of symbolic interactionism.

The second consideration of sympathetic introspection is the study of the “looking-glass self” (Cooley, 1902). This concept explains how people see themselves and decide how to behave. Components of the looking-glass self are: (a) how one imagines they appear to others,

(b) how one imagines others may judge them, and (c) the resulting self-feelings as products of how one imagines others view them (Reynolds, 2003). In symbolic interactionism the importance of relationships and culture is central. One constantly monitors how they are being assessed by others to decide how to behave.

While studying interaction, particularly adult motivation, William Isaac Thomas's (1863-1947) made his greatest contribution to symbolic interactionism with ideas involving the internal interpretation of a situation. According to Thomas, individuals deliberately consider the consequences of choosing one behavior over another (Meltzer et al., 1975); therefore, individuals do not react to a situation itself. Instead, there is an internal consideration that informs one's reactions. It is the individual interpretation that explains why witnesses will vehemently disagree on what happened in a situation (Thomas & Thomas, 1928). Ideally, interviewing individuals will help the researcher understand how a situation is interpreted and thus help explain society. When interviewing someone is not possible, or more information is needed, techniques such as analyzing personal documents, life histories, letters, and case studies can be used to seek an understanding of how an individual defined a particular situation (Thomas & Znaniecki, 1918)

Contributing to the influence that society has on the individual, John Dewey (1859-1952) asserted there is no pure thought or pure reason (Dewey, 1910). Social values are part of the environment in which individuals live, and those values influence their logic (Fisch, 1950). Here again, the influence of society cannot be extricated from the individual's mind.

Influenced by Dewey and Thomas, George Herbert Mead (1863-1931) became one of the primary founders of the SI school of thought (Stryker, 2008). Mead argued understanding an individual was impossible without understanding society. He asserted there is a process where one considers the future intentions of others in society and an intentional decision is made on

how to respond or behave based on those perceived intentions (Mead, 1982). Fitting in socially and meeting others' expectations of behavior is considered of utmost importance. Therefore, the capacity to take the role of others and see what they might see or judge is critical (Reynolds, 2003).

Herbert Blumer, a student of Mead at the University of Chicago, synthesized his teacher's notes and writings, including *Mind, Self, and Society* (Mead, 1934), to form the three basic premises of symbolic interactionism. These three tenets are common among the four main origins of symbolic interactionism: (a) the Chicago School, (b) the Iowa School, (c) the Dramaturgical Approach, and (d) the Ethnomethodological Approach (Meltzer et al., 1975). Overall, they view human beings as constructing their realities through a process of interaction with other human beings in society. What differs among these divisions are substantive and methodological matters. The next section describes and contrasts the four orientations.

The Chicago School is a symbolic interactionist orientation consistent with Mead, Blumer, and other students of Mead. It is not a school in the sense of an institution that teaches or studies in a particular manner. The orientation is merely named for the University of Chicago because it was where Mead was on faculty and where Blumer studied. The Chicago School uses sympathetic introspection to get inside the head of individuals and see what they see to understand society (Blumer, 1969). The process is intuitive and may include interviews, participant observations, and the examination of documents such as diaries and letters. Followers of the Chicago School rejected the operationalization of any concepts because definitions suggest what a participant may see. Rather, researchers must start from a blank slate and carefully and intuitively see the world as participants see it.

Rejecting that last approach of the Chicago School, the Iowa School does operationalize key ideas of symbolic interactionism. The primary scholar shaping the Iowa School orientation was Manford H. Kuhn (1911-1963). Kuhn's positivist approach called for the "usual scientific criteria" (Hickman & Kuhn, 1956, p. 224). Using the 'Who am I Test?' (Kuhn & McPartland, 1954), self-attributes of individuals are obtained through content analysis of participant responses. Those of the Chicago School criticized the Iowa School as being detached and missing the internal considerations of an individual's mind in which meanings are formed and behavioral response is considered (Meltzer et al., 1975).

Another difference between the Chicago and Iowa Schools concerned the predictive nature of behavior. The Chicago School asserts there are two selves: (a) The "I", which refers to spontaneous behavior such as fight-or-flight responses, whereas (b) the subjective "Me", influenced by societal attitudes and expectations for behavior (Mead, 1934). This view takes into account the individualized nature of response and the internal mediation of behavior based on societal influences.

On the other hand, the Iowa School considers all actions to be socially determined. There is no human impulse or self-determination of behavior. For Kuhn, behavior is socially determined if a researcher knows an individual's reference groups, self-attitudes and their behavior can be predicted (Kuhn & McPartland, 1954). The Iowa School assumes there is no internal mediation of behavior and that individuals behave as their social reference groups expect.

The Chicago and Iowa Schools' orientations have inspired subsequent scholars of symbolic interactionism (Flaherty, 1988), with one of the most influential variations being Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical approach, involving "the study of how human beings

accomplish meaning in their lives” (Brissett & Edgley, 2006, p. 2). This meaning evolves from an agreement about the behavior between two or more human beings. Meaning is (a) the result of what people do, a behavioral outcome, and (b) it is a “social act” (Mead, 1934, p. 78); therefore, meaning is continuously negotiated.

Dramaturgy uses theatre to illustrate how people interpret encounters with others, guide the impression they make, and attempt to influence the interaction in a way they prefer. Using the metaphor of theatre and actors, Goffman (1959) demonstrates how social situations develop, including how people often act in life for the purpose of impression management. For each situation an individual encounters, one manages the impressions made. Like putting on a show, there is a front stage and a back stage to an individual’s life. The front stage is what people see, including costuming, dialect, behavior, where one stands in relation to others, and who talks to whom. These are the components of daily social interactions (Barratt, 2012b). The backstage includes the thoughts and feelings that occur internally before, during, and after the social interaction.

The following demonstrates an example of impression management used by Farah. Farah is defending her dissertation in April and is hoping to land a job before she graduates. She has located the room in which she will present her research to the College of Education’s faculty. She has thoughtfully prepared her costume. She has chosen something that would project signs of professionalism and accessibility while showcasing her personal preference for a Bohemian style of appearance. As she uses the computer to bring up her research presentation, her hand trembles. She takes a deep breath and tells herself to relax and feel confident. As faculty members start filing into the room, she tells herself the show is starting. She thus smiles warmly, shakes people’s hands, and gives them her best. Inside, however, she feels like an imposter.

Thoughts go through her head. . . . “Why would they hire me? I have not even defended yet. I am just figuring out my research as I go. Do not embarrass yourself, Farah. Dr. KayBe believes in me. Let’s do this!”

In this example, Farah is aware of her behavior, appearance, as well as verbal and nonverbal behavior. This dramaturgical awareness, or how we communicate awareness with other people, may differ depending on the situation. According to Zicklin (1968), there are four categories of awareness: (a) one does not care how they are seen by others, (b) one creates an impression unintentionally, (c) one purposefully communicates meaning to others and oneself, and (d) one consciously attempts to make the other perceive only those things one has chosen to show or emphasize. When people intentionally behave in a way to create a particular impression, this impression management may be to some degree manipulative, but it may be intentionally authentic, honest, and caring (Brissett & Edgley, 2006). It makes no difference whether an individual wishes to be deceitful or honest, or is dramaturgically aware or unaware, meaning is always made when two people interact.

In social settings, individuals constantly negotiate their place in the organization. As one “learns the ropes,” they learn the organization’s culture, valued behaviors, skills, knowledge, and policies regarding what to do and not do (Geer et al., 1970). Dramaturgy can be used to understand how individuals navigate these social challenges in the workplace. For example, how individuals manage emotions to act appropriately in a situation (Hochschild, 1979), how to teach newly hired business consultants expected behavior (Poulter & Land, 2008), or how to teach unemployed individuals to interview effectively (Miller, 1986).

As the preceding examples demonstrate, dramaturgy is used to understand how one learns to act in the expected way. This learning is often constructivist in nature and can also be

seen through the symbolic interactionist lens based on what one considers a symbol and the interactions around/with the symbol. No matter the social situation – business school, the workplace, or wherever – learning does not occur as if the individual is a sponge (Shaffir & Pawluch, 2003); rather, the acquisition is active with the individual considering their self-presentation and the reactions of others (Becker et al., 1961). Dramaturgy views socialization as a performance where individuals learn to “play” their role while “convincing outsiders of their competence and trustworthiness” (Haas & Shaffir, 1982, p. 6). Farah, for instance, played the role of potential professor, hoping to convince the education faculty to approve her being offered a position. Germane to this study, working class individuals must often play a white collar role, convincing white collar peers they belong. Exploring this experience, Lubrano (2004, 2010) described the struggle one individual had with her difficult boss. She explained that she knows she is supposed to try to get along with her boss in a middle class, white collar workplace (perform front stage); however, the stories told by her working class father of standing up to the “rotten foreman” and not “taking bull” were always in the back of her mind (backstage; Lubrano, 2004). Joining what one cognitively knows is deemed appropriate in middle class, white collar culture, with the teachings from one’s working class cultural background, can be challenging. This internal struggle influences how one decides to perform in various social contexts and how they feel in those situations.

To understand the experiences of low income, blue collar business students, a dramaturgical approach (Goffman, 1959) to symbolic interactionism guides the theoretical framework of this study. The symbol in this case indicates the individuals’ perceived class status and their understanding of their place within the class status in business school. This approach is appropriate because it takes into account the ways in which students perform – specifically, how

low income, blue collar business students perform in business school, a white collar, middle class learning environment. The substantive framework, described next, uses dramaturgy to model cross-class encounters.

Class Work Model

The microlevel, substantive framework for this study is the “class work” model (Gray & Kish-Gephart, 2013). It is a cyclical model explaining how organizational culture creates social class advantages and disadvantages, maintained by the interactions between people of different classes. It models the interactions between individuals of different social classes, the influence of the organization’s social class culture on those interactions, and how cross-class interactions perpetuate the organization’s class culture. Thus, it is a practical lens through which to understand the experiences of this study’s low income, blue collar participants in business school, a middle class, white collar environment.

Bourdieu (2002), offers a model to explain that habitus misalignment occurs when an individual’s habitus is different from the habitus of the field. In other words, the social class norms of the individual, what they are used to, and accustomed to, are different from the social class norms of their environment. Looking at relationships in this context, routine comparison takes place to gauge how we view others and how we think others view us (Cooley, 1956; Scheff, 2005).

The class work model suggests these comparisons are “heightened and made salient” during cross-class encounters (Gray & Kish-Gephart, 2013, 674). Scholarship suggests this idea is accurate in business school, given incidents of classism experienced by low income, blue collar students (Lubrano, 2004; Soria & Stebleton, 2013). When an encounter occurs and there is a perceived social class difference, individuals make a status attribution, characterizing

themselves differently from the other person (Gray & Kish-Gephart, 2013). These differences are often described, even if they are not named, as a function of class (Lindquist, 2002; Proweller, 1998). Stuber (2006b), for example, found the speech of upper-middle class students used subtle discursive cues such as “we,” “us,” “they,” and “them” related to social class differences, creating a status hierarchy. Affluent students recognized their privilege with descriptions such as being “blessed” to attend a private school (Stuber, 2006, p. 71), yet also created a moral high ground by indicating that their family valued education as if those of less means do not.

Social class cues are used to perceive differences (Ridgeway & Fisk, 2012). These cues are based on the norms and expectations of different social classes (Grossmann & Varnum, 2011; Jensen, 2004, 2012; Liu et al., 2007). They may include appearance (McLaren & Kuh, 2004), speech (Ryan & Sebastian, 1980), or hobbies (Tomlinson, 2003), to name a few.

When class distinctions are perceived and a status attribution is made, cross-class anxiety occurs (Gray & Kish-Gephart, 2013) because the idea of class is perceived as an “embarrassing and unsettling topic” (Sayer, 2005, 1). This often results during a meeting between members of a privileged group and those of a marginalized group (Crocker et al., 1998). For example, a professor demands a student explain why they did not attend a required networking event. When the student apologetically replies that they had no suit to wear, both individuals likely experience some cross-class anxiety.

Applying dramaturgy to reduce anxiety, people often engage in thoughts and behaviors that create a more positive situation (Goffman, 1987). They develop anticipatory behavior for particular situations to minimize the likelihood they will experience anxiety (Kish-Gephart et al., 2009). This anxiety reducing behavior is labeled individual level class work in the model. This work may be intrapersonal (within the individual) or interpersonal (between individuals), and is

influenced by the organization's social class culture (collective class work). To understand these dynamics, I will explain collective class work followed by how intrapersonal and interpersonal individual class work occurs.

Collective class work describes how the social class culture of an organization influences interactions within an organization (Gray & Kish-Gephart, 2013). Organizations have certain norms, values, and expectations of members (Schein, 1990). These norms are then used to make judgments about whether individuals are skilled, experienced, or professional (O'Reilly, 1989). These judgments of worth are fueled by the myth of meritocracy. Meritocracy is the myth that individuals get jobs and advance based strictly on merit (Kaplan & Donovan, 2016). While people hesitate to admit it happens (Kayes, 2006), subjective evaluations influence hiring decisions and how people are treated in the workplace (Graves & Powell, 1995). It is the idea that people are a good fit or have the right stuff (talent, the right attitude, strong work ethic; McNamee & Miller, 2009). Specifically, employers prefer people who are culturally similar by social class to themselves, specifically, by evaluating leisure activity, experiences, and self-presentation style (Harrison, 1992; Rivera, 2012). Employers gravitate toward applicants who are similar to themselves both unintentionally (Lamont, 2009) and intentionally by assessing soft skills, hard skills, interests, and appearance, with the expectations of the organization as a model of merit (Rivera, 2012). The repeated engagement of preference through this individual class work perpetuates the organization's practices, making it collective class work.

Examining individual class work dynamics more closely, intrapersonal work occurs back stage (Goffman, 1959) and involves cognitions learned as the result of one's experience (Gray & Kish-Gephart, 2013). In other words, what happens in an individual's back stage are reactions, thoughts, and feelings about the ways in which they would naturally perform based on their lived

experience. Individuals then must negotiate how they should look to make the right impression. This is considered the front stage, or what people see. An example of how intrapersonal class work may occur for an upper class individual is to emphasize how hard they have worked, and if they can do it, anyone can do it if they try hard enough (Reynolds & Xian, 2014). Thinking in this way is a way to deal with class privilege. Upper class individuals may also compare themselves to others who have more wealth to deemphasize their own privilege (Stuber, 2010).

Interpersonal class work is the resulting performative acts with others. For instance, individuals identifying with a lower class may engage in intrapersonal rebranding when they experience social class threat and anxiety. This class work may occur during a cross-class encounter in college when, for instance, they may be worried about being judged or not meeting normative expectations. The interpersonal class work may involve making strategic decisions about how to engage and pass as middle or upper class to conceal a stigmatized, lower class identity (Clair et al., 2005; Ellemers & Barreto, 2006). For instance, a low income, blue collar student described withholding information concerning how his parents earned a living so that listeners would not guess his blue collar background (Granfield, 1991). Similarly, upper class individuals may sometimes declass themselves to appear plain (McNamee & Miller, 2009) so that they appear more favorable or normal. The strategy of reaching down is another interpersonal class work strategy engaged in by members of the upper class. (McNamee & Miller, 2009). Reaching down involves making small talk with lower class colleagues or conversing with custodial staff to create a perception of equality on the playing field (Gray & Kish-Gephart, 2013). By reaching down, cross-class anxiety for upper class members is minimized, at least for the short term.

In summary, the class work model describes how social class is experienced in organizations and how anxieties based on class difference are perpetuated by the organization's culture. It demonstrates how social class is not solely an objective, personal trait, but is instead a socially constructed and experienced identity. This model is appropriate to this study as it can be a framework through which to understand the social class culture of the business school, how it influences cross-class interactions, and how those interactions are experienced by low income, blue collar students.

Social Class and Hiring Decisions

White collar employers (hereafter, employers) aim to hire college graduates who they believe can be successful. When making hiring decisions, employers assess hard skills and soft skills. Hard skills are technical skills, such as techniques to work with data, software, marketing, and strategic models, to name a few (Laker & Powell, 2011). Soft skills include communication skills, emotional intelligence, etiquette, professionalism, a strong work ethic, and other interpersonal skills that fit corporate expectations (Robles, 2012; Wilhelm et al., 2002). For a review of how and why employers have come to value soft skills, see Chapter 1.

The human resources literature is flush with research on how to make the most accurate assessment on who to hire (e.g., Breaugh, 2008; Brody, 2010; Randall & Randall, 2001), yet also acknowledges the subjective judgments that take place (Highhouse, 2008; Schoorman, 1988). The harder the skills are required to do the job, the easier and more accurate the assessment. As Stinchcombe (1990) asserts, those with established work histories applying to high hard-skill jobs can be more objectively assessed. On the other hand, with new college graduates who have little work experience, there is less evidence on which to base hiring judgment.

Given the importance of soft skills, (Bailey, 2014; Jarvis, 2005; Rao, 2010; Robles, 2012), how are they assessed? Soft skills are subjective in nature (Matteson et al., 2016; Moss & Tilly, 1996; Zamudio & Lichter, 2008). For instance, job candidate ratings depend on the evaluator who is paired with the applicant and the types of skills that the interviewer personally values (Rivera, 2016). There is also evidence that employers make subjective assessments of soft skills based on race and ethnicity (Lim, 2002; Shan, 2013), gender (Pierce, 1996; Taylor & Tyler, 2000), and occupation (Grugulis & Vincent, 2009), which results in subtle disadvantages at a minimum and discrimination in the worst cases.

When hiring new college graduates, research indicates that employers primarily use indicators of soft skills common to those in their own social class (Rivera, 2011, 2012, 2016). For instance, Rivera's (2016) study of the hiring process into entry-level jobs at elite firms revealed that an assessment of who has polish came up in all discussions about candidates at all firms. Candidates who made it through the process were skilled in being formal enough to be credible but also not too stiff so as to seem unapproachable. They needed to be poised, make others feel comfortable, take an active role in conversations, display excitement (but not too much), and express just enough confidence so that they did not come off as "cocky". These types of standards for polish are based on social class expectations in the middle and upper classes (Khan, 2010a, 2010b; Ostrander, 1993); therefore, those in lower classes are disadvantaged (Huber, 2015).

Research indicates that employers prefer candidates who are similar in social class to themselves (Khan, 2010a; Rivera, 2011, 2012, 2016). This similarity is important because if low income, blue collar business students aim to obtain white collar jobs, they may need to pass as middle or upper class. Business schools, in fact, take their role seriously in teaching students

skills that make them employable (Maxwell et al., 2009; Rao, 2010). Exposure and learning about white collar, middle class culture occurs in business school through attendance and experiencing the organization's norms (Stuber, 2011). Business schools also explicitly teach the career expectations of white collar employers (Anthony & Garner, 2016). The next section describes the social class culture of business school and how students are taught the skills valued by employers.

The Social Class Culture of Business School

Like all organizations, business schools maintain a social class culture, with rules for access to and use of relationships (social capital), certain value for skills and education (human capital), specific types of aesthetics, tastes, behaviors, values that are important (cultural capital), and skills and knowledge to be successful in school (academic capital; Barratt, 2011; Bourdieu, 1986). These norms and expectations are familiar to white collar, middle class students (Soria et al., 2013) and unfamiliar and anxiety inducing for lower income, blue collar students (Lubrano, 2010). This section describes the culture of business school and its alignment and misalignment with the habitus of students.

The culture of business school includes a hidden curriculum (Margolis, 2001). While the formal curriculum is anything explicitly stated in student learning outcomes and assessed in some way, hidden curricula are “all the beliefs and values and understandings that are passed on to students . . . unconsciously, through what the institution implicitly demands of the student” (Rowntree, 1981, p. 115). In other words, they are those lessons used to socialize students to have certain skills, values, and behaviors (Caza & Brower, 2015).

The hidden curriculum of the academe is informed by middle to upper class, white collar culture (Hess, 2007). For white collar, middle class, and upper class individuals, the cultural

values, norms, and perspectives of university seem normal and comfortable (Soria, 2015). In contrast, lower class students “must learn to adopt and represent middle class culture as one’s own” to be successful in college (Jensen, 2012, p. 156). These social class experiences contribute to feelings of fitting in or standing out from peers (Reay et al., 2010). Those who do not fit cultural norms may experience feelings of intimidation, deficiency, shame, and powerlessness (Aries & Seider, 2005; Loveday, 2016). At elite or Ivy League colleges, this experience is pronounced, but even at state colleges, lower class, blue collar students experience classism and feelings of inadequacy (Hess, 2007; Preece, 2015; Soria & Bultmann, 2014).

An important norm in business school is the expectation for exhibiting independence (Stephens et al., 2012). Specifically, a good student is independently motivated and makes decisions based on personal motives, goals, and preferences. Business students show how they are separate or distinct from others, and they exhibit influence through speaking up or taking charge (Fryberg & Markus, 2007; Markus & Kitayama, 2003; Plaut & Markus, 2005). There are also expectations for students to communicate thoroughly, to be accountable, resourceful, and to independently accept responsibility (Plavin, 2017). In fact, business school websites provide evidence of the value of independence. The Wisconsin School of Business webpage, for example, includes the following statement: “Your Wisconsin School of Business experience is shaped by the many ways you choose to engage academically and socially” (Wisconsin School of Business, 2019). In this way, the business school emphasizes their perspective that it is the responsibility of the student to make independent decisions to engage.

The white collar, middle class culture that expects independent behavior is comfortable and normal for white collar, middle class students. Middle and upper class students report feelings of belonging in college at significantly greater rates than their lower class peers

(Soria & Stebleton, 2013). These students feel more comfortable networking in college with peers, staff, and faculty to assist in their success (Collier & Morgan, 2008). Furthermore, middle class students tend to engage in extracurricular activities more than lower class students (Soria, 2015). These activities include such venues as student government, clubs, and competition teams in order to build their network and meet resume expectations (Stuber, 2009).

The culture of business schools feels more comfortable for middle class, white collar students because the social class norms they were socialized to value and understand while growing up match those of the business school (Stephens et al., 2007). With material resources and ranking in society, students have been raised in an environment with choice and a sense of control. For instance, when there is money to pay for activities, children can be given the opportunity to choose what they prefer to engage in. For low income, blue collar students, however, their experience with limited material resources means interdependence is taught and valued with goals that include being part of a community and to put the needs of others first (Stephens et al., 2011; Stephens et al., 2009).

The soft skills and etiquette knowledge that employers tend to prefer in applicants provide a match with what white collar, middle class families seem to teach. For instance, Lareau (2011) describes white collar families, both black and white, teaching their children professional etiquette. She observed white collar parents encouraging their young children to shake hands with adults, to make good eye contact, and to carry on conversations. In addition, family mealtimes were occasions for children to internalize certain ways of socializing over food – the rules, customs, and symbols practiced by a certain class culture – when to start eating, which fork to eat with, and how to indicate that they are finished (Ochs & Shohet, 2006; Post et al., 1999). On the other hand, many working class students reported feeling intimidated while

speaking up in class because of their social background (Granfield, 1991), unsure of appropriate etiquette and how to make connections with employers (Tate et al., 2015).

To meet the needs of employers, business schools include soft skill development in the curriculum (Beard et al., 2008; Business & Education, 2000; Cellante & Graham, 2012). The goal is to help prepare students for success in the workplace (Clarke, 2016; Ellis et al., 2014) based on employer emphasis on the need for soft skills (NACE, 2016). There is no consensus among employers on how to define soft skills, but they prefer college graduates who have communication skills, emotional intelligence, etiquette, professionalism, a strong work ethic, and other interpersonal skills that fit corporate expectations (Robles, 2012; Wilhelm et al., 2002). By integrating soft skill development into the curriculum, business schools prepare students for workplace success – a goal students, their families, and universities would agree is a positive objective, and which many argue is the business school’s responsibility (Cellante & Graham, 2012).

Just as students from middle class, white collar backgrounds tend to feel more comfortable in business school, they are also more aware of soft skill expectations of white collar employers. Lareau (2011) states, “middle class children were trained in the rules of the game that govern interactions with institutional representatives” (p. 6). In other words, the skills taught to middle class, white collar children are the skills valued by institutions of the same social class.

In summary, the culture of business school and the soft skills taught align with the same social class culture of middle class, white collar students (Stephens et al., 2007). This alignment puts low income, blue collar students at a disadvantage in the business school environment. With business schools increasingly integrating soft skills into the curriculum, skills that align closely with middle class, white collar students’ experiences, the question of how other students perceive

this part of the curriculum is posed in this study. How do low income, blue collar students negotiate this environment? Do they resist or accommodate training for future employment possibilities?

Social Class Discourse on Campus

One of the barriers to improving the experiences of low income, blue collar students, is the lack of recognition of social class as an identity. University discussions and programming on diversity rarely include social class diversity (Walpole, 2003). When social class is discussed, it is often confounded with race or first-generation status (Harper & Quaye, 2009; Jury et al., 2017), yet each identity is unique and the intersections distinctive (Kim & Sax, 2009). Furthermore, classist microaggressions occur with frequency on campus (Smith & Redington, 2010). This section describes each of these phenomena beginning with the myth of meritocracy as an encourager of social class silence.

The hesitancy to acknowledge class is influenced by the assumption of meritocracy, a social system in which individuals earn rewards and promotion directly in proportion to the amount of effort they invest and their individual abilities (McNamee & Miller, 2009). Meritocracy, when coupled with the ideal of the American dream, dictates that despite how a person identifies, they can improve their class standing and attain success if they work hard. Understandably, people would prefer to believe that society, indeed, is meritocratic. Most human beings perhaps need to believe that the world is fair and just and that individuals, in the end, always achieve their goals (Lerner, 1980).

Unfortunately, there is substantial proof that the U.S. is not meritocratic and that social mobility in the United States is remarkably limited (Butler et al., 2008). One barrier is discrimination and the stereotyping of different identities whether based on gender, sexual

preference, race – or class. For example, men described as working class are less likely to receive a (hypothetical) job offer for a higher class position when compared to middle class men (Rivera & Tilcsik, 2016). In addition, despite being half the workforce, women make up only 4.8% of CEO positions in S&P 500 companies (Catalyst, 2019). Furthermore, people with disabilities are less likely to be invited to interview for a position when their disability is disclosed and they are otherwise qualified (Ameri et al., 2018). Finally, those with white sounding names get 50% more calls for interviews than African American sounding names on identical resumes (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004). Because class status is intersectionally connected to race and abilities, studies demonstrated there are additional challenges for students who are multiply marginalized. If meritocracy existed, people would receive interviews, job offers, and promotions based on merit, and there would be no differences in opportunity based on socialized or racialized identities.

Despite evidence the United States is not meritocratic, the myth prevails. Messages such as “America: The land of opportunity!” celebrate a false narrative that one can achieve their dream if they simply work hard. This belief in meritocracy is evidenced by Americans’ overwhelming belief in upward social mobility (Kraus & Tan, 2015). Two-thirds of Americans agree with the statement, “People are rewarded for intelligence and skill,” whereas only one-fifth of Americans believe “coming from a wealthy family is essential or important to getting ahead” (Isaacs, 2008, p. 1). This gap between how people think systems work, and how they actually work is substantial. Resources, including wealth and income, are not distributed based on the merit of individuals (McNamee & Miller, 2009). Those who invest significantly long hours into heavy labor are often paid the least, and those who are wealthy actually earn it through

ownership which requires no effort, physical or mental. Thus, working hard is not always the sole precursor to achieving one's dream in the United States.

Interrogating the role of higher education with regard to the notion of meritocracy, Liu (2011) pinpoints the assumption that opportunity exists for every student who wants to pursue a valued college degree. The problem is that there are inequitable opportunities for access (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Hamrick & Stage, 2004; Walpole, 2003). For wealthy students, the question tends not to be if they will go to college, but which college will they attend (McDonough, 1997). Parents of middle and upper class students tend to be highly involved in their child's choice of institution, helping them apply, funding tours of universities, and having discussions as to the pros and cons of different schools (Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008). For working class and poor students, many barriers exist, from less academic preparation to less ability to pay tuition (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Family support also differs. While families of lower class students are just as supportive of higher education as middle class families, the capital to assist their children's admission into college is comparably less. Middle class students more often have a parent or family member who has attended college and can help them navigate the process (Logan, 2007). Because of this personal experience, they know the process and what to look for. Lower class students, however, are less likely to have a parent who went to college (Logan, 2007; Terenzini et al., 1996). Therefore, they have no one with the academic capital to show them the ropes.

The faulty assumption that every student has equal access to a degree is based in large part on the institutionalized discrimination that permeates the education system (Margolis, 2001). Class difference is not eliminated. It is reinforced daily within the university and beyond (Carnevale & Rose, 2004). The result of social class disparity in college has a powerful effect on college completion. Those from lower economic classes are much less likely to graduate than

those of higher social class standing (Rumberger, 2010; Sirin, 2005). These studies underscore that the United States is not a meritocracy and that achieving the American Dream is not as simple as working hard.

Having established the myth of meritocracy as pervasive, improving discourse around social class on campus is important and necessary to create greater equity for students from varying class backgrounds. Taking a broad, institutional view, Soria (2015) explains how institutional policies, practices, and cultures significantly affect the success of working class students. Similarly, the class work model used in this study explains how organizational expectations influence relationships and individual experiences. Improving discourse regarding social class can develop a better understanding of marginalized experiences and facilitate more supportive programs. Social class is often confounded with other identities, which can perpetuate stereotypes (Hawkesworth, 1997). In particular, social class is often associated with first-generation status and race. This can lead to assumptions of class when only race or generation status is known. It can also lead to dismissing classed experiences when a student is *not* a first-generation student or racial minority.

A meta-analysis of 20 years of research sought to describe the experiences of low-SES students and the psychological barriers faced in higher education (Jury et al., 2017). The author's discussion of the barriers low-SES students faced included a significant number of studies whose participants were defined as first-generation students (i.e., not low-SES). While many first-generation students are from low income backgrounds, there is a population of non-first-generation students who are low income. It is also possible for a first-generation student to come from a middle class background.

In other examples of confounding identities, scholars have cited first-generation student experiences to describe the experiences of low income students. For example, Jury et al. (2017) state that “low SES students regularly report feeling like they do not belong in the college context” (p. 26), citing evidence by (Harackiewicz et al., 2014). Harackiewicz et al. (2014) however, was an experimental study with participants comprised of first-generation and continuing-generation students and did not consider the SES of either group. Jury et al. (2017) is not an exception. Harper and Quaye’s (2009), in their student affairs textbook, *Student Engagement in Higher Education*, applies socioeconomic status research to engaging first-generation students in general and race/ethnic minority first-generation students in community college. The assumption is that all first-generation and racial minority students identify within the same socioeconomic status. Finally, in *Blue collar Scholars?: Mediators and Moderators of University Attrition in First-Generation College Students* (Martinez et al., 2009), variables assessed among participants included first-generation status, enrollment, ACT score, if the student was working during college, heavy alcohol use, and drug use. No measure of blue collar status was assessed and students were not asked to self-identify. Yet, the title of the work uses the term “blue collar” in its title.

While it is likely that first-generation students come from a poor or working class background, the identities are not equal (PNPI, 2018). For example, a second-generation student can also identify as coming from a low income background. If financial resources or other support are only considered necessary for first-generation students, other low income students will be left out. When identities are confounded, student experiences cannot be clearly understood nor are students adequately supported.

Race and class are intricately linked in the United States. Black and Hispanic children are twice as likely to come from a low income background than a White child (Child Trends Databank, 2019). Furthermore, the persistence of poverty from generation to generation affects racialized and minoritized groups more significantly than Whites (Elliott, 2016). The social stereotypes resulting from the link between race and class create experiences of raceclassist microaggressions (Sarcedo et al., 2015). For example, in one study with Black middle class fathers and sons, assumptions were made about social class based on their race (Allen, 2013). The same study explores how middle class Black fathers use their class privilege to try to avoid racial microaggressions from being directed at their sons in school.

Multiple identities interact to shape the many dimensions of one's lived experience (Crenshaw, 1990). While social class intersects with race, generation status, sexuality, gender, and so on, they are not equal. By acknowledging social class as an identity in itself, not always tied to a particular race or generational status, business schools can more clearly understand how classism manifests itself and influences student experiences. To understand social class inequalities one must examine class on its own as a valid identity that influences student experience (Barratt, 2012b). Just as scholars interrogate the race, ethnicity, generation status, sexual orientation, immigrant status, etc. of the student experience in college, the may be done for social class identity.

It is not my intention to ignore or minimize the importance of race, ethnicity, gender, and other flashpoints of injustice. For the purpose of this study, however, I am focusing on how social class can contribute to and creates different experiences in business school (Soria et al., 2013). Acknowledging social class as an identity in itself moves us beyond the notion that poverty is "an affliction from which low income families are expected to recover and that social

programs, grants, and financial aid are the only necessary solution” (Fiske & Markus, 2012, p. 16). The acknowledgment of the generally silenced class struggle can support the efforts of those who experience classist forms of discrimination and stereotyping (McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2001).

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I reviewed literature related to how class affects the progress of business school student performance. I began on a macro-level, examining the traditional perspectives of Marx, Weber, or Bourdieu. On a micro-level, social class provides a unique experience through the class work model (Gray & Kish-Gephart, 2013). In business school, classism exists and regularly influences the experiences of working class students (Soria et al., 2013). Yet, discourse around this component of diversity is minimal (hooks, 1994) and is typically confounded with other identities, rather than explored as a valid identity in itself or at the intersections of multiple identities (Barratt, 2012b).

There are several compelling reasons for seeking a deeper understanding of class experiences in the business school context. First, business school is seen as a ticket to upward class mobility from the perspective of the business school and stakeholders, such as students and their parents (Pfeffer & Fong, 2004). Second, business school has a white collar, middle class culture; therefore, students who identify as low income and blue collar experience habitus misalignment (Lubrano, 2010). Furthermore, firms seeking to hire business students influence the type of skills taught to match their white collar workplace expectations (Bailey, 2014; Jarvis, 2005). This guidance manifests in such lessons as professional development, etiquette, and appropriate dress and behavior in business school (Clark, 2005) – skills that are more familiar to middle class, white collar students. Finally, society is not meritocratic. It takes more than just

hard work to receive rewards. For instance, there is evidence that employers make hiring decisions based on class preference for middle and upper class membership (Rivera, 2016). Given the habitus misalignment of working class students and the climate of recruitment and preparation for work in the business school, this study seeks to understand the experiences of low income, blue collar students in business school. The intent is to support working class students in ways that acknowledge and support their social class diversity and growing skill set in navigating class differences.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

This chapter provides the rationale for using qualitative inquiry. I also describe the design of the study, the methods of data collection, and analysis. Finally, I discuss decisions related to representation of the findings. Recall that the purpose of this study was to explore the ways in which low income, blue collar business students in a Midwestern university navigated the culture of a white collar learning environment and training for future employment.

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do participants describe negotiating a white collar learning environment from their cultural and social class perspectives?
2. In what ways do participants resist and/or accommodate the training they receive for future employment possibilities?

Qualitative Inquiry

Qualitative research methods seek to understand how people interpret experiences and make meaning of their world (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). These methods are appropriate when researchers seek deep understanding and are cautious of quantifying the complex human experience (Richards, 2005). This section describes the history of qualitative methods and situates the current study in the environment of today.

The history of qualitative methods traces the development of ideas over time, which Denzin and Lincoln (2000) describe as eight moments. Historical experiences are not frozen in time. They continue to influence research in the current moment and as the field advances. The future may not resemble the past, but it is influenced by what has come before.

The traditional period from 1900-1950 was positivist in nature whereby one truth was sought, much in the way quantitative research is conducted (Park, Konge, & Artino, 2020). Field

studies were concerned with validity, reliability, and objective understanding with participants being othered as strange foreigners. Rosaldo (1993) describes the imperialist “Lone Ethnographer” entering the field to objectively study a “native” people who were much less developed who then writes a true account of their “culture” (p. 30). These classical ethnographies were written in a manner where the researcher sought one truth, viewed oneself as an objective observer of an unchanging culture, and did not recognize subjectivity or multiple meanings.

The modernist, second moment, was from 1950-1970. Qualitative researchers advanced the field with the development of new theories such as ethnography, phenomenology, and feminist theory (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The prevalent epistemology was post positivism, as many researchers sought to give voice to the poor and working class. Proving causal interaction or that a finding was true with statistics remained an emphasis for many qualitative researchers (Becker, 1958)

The blurred genres moment (1970-1978), began and ended with texts by Clifford Geertz. Geertz (1973, 2008) argued that epistemologically, positivism is not appropriate for qualitative research, and that instead, an interpretive perspective is required. He challenged researchers to write with thick descriptions so enough context and narrative are provided for individuality to be maintained and so a reader outside of that culture can make meaning of the behavior. Today, thick description is considered necessary for rigorous research. Additionally, Geertz (1980) observed that researchers borrowed from other disciplines for theory, collection, interpretation, and representation of data; thus, the blurred genres moment.

Out of the blurred genres moment, when researchers were learning and borrowing from other disciplines, comes the stage of a crisis of representation (1986-1990) (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Interdisciplinary research had become common, yet researchers struggled to situate

inquiry into a particular area. Next, the postmodern moment (1990-1995), saw the growth of ethnography and a changing focus with the influence of globalized culture (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Ethnography continued to evolve into the sixth, post-experimental moment (1995-2000), led by Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner (1996) in *Composing Ethnography: Alternative Forms of Qualitative Writing*. This first text of the series creatively explored stories through poetry, photography, and other art forms for the first time.

During the methodologically contested period (2000-2004), researchers sought to use their work to give voice to groups typically ignored by the academy and society (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). In doing so, they endeavored to advance social justice (Denzin, 2001). And, finally, in the fractured future (2005-2020), Lincoln and Denzin (2005) predicted a “great divide” between quantitative and qualitative educational research (p. 1123). In the United States, the evidence-based social movement has been influenced by No Child Left Behind legislation (Denzin, 2009) and continues today in the Trump Administration. A White House memo detailing science budget priorities for the fiscal year 2019, states “quantitative metrics to evaluate R&D outcomes should be developed and utilized” (Mulvaney & Kratsios, 2017, p. 3). As in the past, qualitative researchers continue to fight to defend their research as legitimate.

The history of qualitative moments does not occur in isolation. These moments continue to influence scholarship today. This research is situated in a moment where qualitative scholars are focused on social justice issues and they continue to defend their work as legitimate. It is not a new struggle, but one which has been emphasized by politics. Denzin (2014) attempts to unify the many different people and approaches to qualitative research by showing that the common commitment of all educators, anthropologists, queer theorists, etc., is social justice. Calls to action encourage researchers to be inspired by justice and to “turn life inside up and upside

down” (Bochner, 2017, p. 359) as well as to use more accessible approaches to writing qualitative research (Badley, 2016). Demonstrating frank discourse and reflecting my classed experience, Saldaña (2014) expressed his frustration with the traditional privileged academic discourse through legitimizing blue collar voices (Bhattacharya, 2018). While Saldaña’s (2014) writing style, with its informal slang and profanity, may be shocking to some, it opens up the possibility for other ways of qualitative writing and engaging in research (Hein, 2017).

Research Design

This case study of four self-identified low income, blue collar business students was conducted using arts based inquiry, interviews, observation, and document analysis. This section describes in detail the appropriateness of each means of data collection and how the research was conducted. The research design is grounded in the frameworks of constructionism, symbolic interactionism, and the class work model, as detailed previously.

Case Study

Case study research is the investigation and analysis of a case to capture the complexity of the object of study (Stake, 1995). The method seeks to answer questions about a specific topic, issue, program, or persons over a short period of time (Hays, 2004). A case study is useful when the environmental context has important influences on social processes (Cassell & Symon, 2004). For this study, I inquired into the white collar, middle class learning environment of business school as experienced by blue collar, low income students. This section described the many types of case study research before reviewing how this particular case study was conducted.

Case study research investigates a current phenomenon within a specific context. The unit of analysis or case is specifically what the case is seeking to understand (Baxter & Jack,

2008). The case may be a person, persons, program, organization, policy, or any phenomenon in which the researcher is interested (Merriam, 1998). For instance, Street Corner Society (Whyte, 1943) is a case study of small groups. It described the culture and careers of groups of low income boys. Zippay (1995), on the other hand, defines a mentor program as the case, exploring the outcomes of low income teen mothers paired with a professionally employed mentor.

Depending on the research, a single case study or a multiple case study may be appropriate. A single case study analyzes one case while a multiple case study examines several contexts to allow for comparison across cases (Baxter & Jack, 2008). For example, a single case study may explore the experiences of working class students at one elite university. In contrast, a multiple case study may explore the experiences of working class, middle class, and upper class students at an elite university to allow for comparison across classes.

Some case studies involve seeking particular results from an intervention. These are considered explanatory case studies (Yin, 2003). For example, a researcher may introduce a program to working class students to see if the intervention results in improved experiences at university. In contrast, exploratory case studies examine contexts in which no specific outcome is defined (Pan & Scarbrough, 1999). An example might involve a case study seeking a deeper understanding of the experiences of rural poor students. In exploratory case studies, looking into the context of experiences is the intent rather than introducing an intervention.

When interest in the case is not for broader application of understanding to a wider population but instead seeks to understand more deeply the specific case itself, it is called an intrinsic case study (Stake, 1995). In contrast, instrumental cases provide insight into a broader phenomenon (Stake, 1995). An example of an intrinsic case study would be an inquiry into first responders in the September 11, 2001, attacks on the twin towers in New York City. When

exploring deeply such a unique case, the intent is not to generalize because the likelihood of a similar case occurring is remote. Rather, understanding that specific case itself is the question. In contrast, an instrumental case might explore the interactions of health care providers with patients of differing social classes.

From a single case to multiple cases, interventions, to case studies of unique phenomenon, there are many types of case studies. This particular research was a multiple case study. The unit of analysis, or case, was each of the four individual participants. Finally, since there is a broader intent of understanding the experiences of low income, blue collar students than the case itself, this was an instrumental case study.

Since case studies can have such variety, breadth, and depth, it is important to delineate what a case will and will not be about by setting boundaries (Yin, 2017). Boundaries frame the research and determine what the focus of the study will be based on relevant literature and available resources (Patton, 2002). The bounded system may be limited by time, location, activity, or definition of participants.

For this study, the defined boundaries were the following.

1. Time: The case study took place over six weeks in the fall of 2019.
2. Activity: Participants were undergraduates majoring in business.
3. Location: A business school at a four-year university in the Midwest of the United States.
4. Definition: Participants self-identified as low income, blue collar students.

Since a case study aims to gain a deep understanding of a phenomenon as it unfolds naturally, multiple sources of data are necessary. By gathering relevant data from different perspectives or dimensions of the same phenomenon, rich understanding and description are

possible (Hyett et al., 2014). The data collection methods used for this study included arts-based inquiry, interviews, observations, and document analysis. The details of these methods are described in the following sections along with how I collected, analyzed, and organized the data. First, I describe how I gained access to conduct the study.

Gaining Access

Access is gaining permission to undertake research and building relationships to gain access to people, documents, or other data sources (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). The process and ability to gain access is critical in a case study. Without access, research cannot be conducted. Furthermore, the process of getting in and staying in influences the data collected (Feldman et al., 2003). The relationships with participants require negotiation at initial contact, through the rapport-building stage, and exit (Johl & Renganathan, 2010).

Gaining access to participants is an ongoing process that begins with how participants are recruited and selected, and is continued through rapport building throughout the study. Here, I addressed the importance of gaining trust and acceptance from participants for them to choose to participate and feel comfortable revealing information (Wasserman, 2007). The specific steps I took to recruit and select participants are described in the next section.

It is important to build rapport with participants for several reasons. Mallozzi (2009) explains that rapport is important for participants to feel comfortable to disclose information during the interview. Just like all relationships the more one trusts a companion, the more comfortable one is to reveal experiences. Rapport building requires showing authentic empathy to build a connection between the researcher and participant (Duncomb & Jessop, 2002; Partington, 2001; Prior, 2018). By building and maintaining rapport, a less threatening

environment is created. This can improve the likelihood of participants opening up to answer interview questions (Gesch-Karamanlidis, 2015).

The first step to gain access for this research was to gain Institutional Review Board approval. Approval was given on September 4, 2019, proposal number 9812 (see Appendix A). Following IRB approval, I began to recruit participants as described in the next section.

Within one day, students began to contact me about their interest in the study. As each student made contact, I invited them to chat about the study over coffee. This type of informal meeting starts to build rapport with participants (Bhattacharya, 2017). This meeting was conversational. I already knew some of the students, so we caught up on life since I had last seen them. Once data collection began, I continued to build rapport with participants by creating a comfortable, safe space in each of the planned encounters. For instance, as discussed in the methods section, participants engaged in a guided creative arts bag portrait activity. This provided an opportunity for participants to reflect on their experiences in business school and create a depiction of their sense of self they reveal to the world and what they may hide. To help build rapport, I shared my own arts bag portrait and explained what it means for me. I entered into this research with respect for the vulnerability participants had to disclose their experiences. They were willing to create a close relationship (Hatch, 2002) and I, therefore, reciprocated by sharing my experiences with them.

Participant Selection

Determining how participants are selected in a study creates an opportunity for some and erases chances for others. Selection choices made by the researcher are influenced by their subjectivity and assumptions. Reibold et al. (2013) asserted:

[R]esults of a study are not so much *found* as they are constructed *through* researcher choice and interpretation. Researchers, then, should examine and reveal the complexity of their selection process in order to satisfy their readers’—and their own—trust in qualitative research methods (p. 713, emphasis in original).

In other words, *who* I include in the study will influence *what* is learned from the study. The next section will describe how the participants were selected. Overall the process went as anticipated with just a few deviations of note.

Participant selection in qualitative research is purposeful. It involves identifying and selecting participants who have experienced a phenomenon of interest, and are available and willing to communicate those experiences to the researcher (Bernard, 2017; Creswell & Clark, 2017; Spradley, 2016). This type of sampling provides information-rich data relevant to a study (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Patton, 2002). There are several different types of purposeful sampling – from extreme or deviant case sampling, which investigates the unusual, to opportunistic or emergent sampling, which takes advantage of circumstances to collect relevant data as they arise (Palinkas et al., 2015).

The type of purposeful sampling that was appropriate for this case study was criterion sampling, which involves selecting predetermined conditions into which a participant must fall in order to qualify for the study (Patton, 2002). This allowed for the selection of participants from whom I would learn the most. Participants identifying as being part of particular groups helped to ensure data about the topic being studied could be collected.

The criteria to be a participant in the study were (a) a business major, (b) a student who has spent at least two years in the business school (in other words, not a transfer student or newly declared business major), and (c) one who self-identifies as low income and blue collar. The first

two criteria could be objectively determined. The last criterion, to self-identify as low income and blue collar, was subjective. While there are quantitative measures of social class, definitions vary. In addition to the challenge of ambiguity, there have been calls for subjective self-definition of social class in higher education (Rubin et al., 2014). Subjective measures are helpful because they relate to the lived experiences of the student rather than the characteristics of the students' parents. This is important because social class and socioeconomic status are often conflated, when in fact they are different constructs (Ostrove & Cole, 2003). Similar to self-identifying one's gender, race, or sexual orientation, the subjective identification of social class is a socially defined group individuals can self-identify with.

To send the opportunity to students who may meet the criteria of the study, I explored options of contacting students who receive or have received a Pell Grant and are business majors. A Pell Grant is financial support to pay for college that does not need to be paid back by the student (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). To qualify, students must have a certain level of financial need. Therefore, students who receive Pell Grants may self-identify as low income. However, the Office of Financial Aid was prohibited from sharing the data with me due to federal policy. They also were unable to send the email on my behalf because the Department of Education stipulates correspondence with Pell Grant recipients must only pertain to aid (Weir, personal communication, August 2, 2019).

Since I was unable to recruit participants as planned, I broadened the pool of students who would be notified of the research opportunity. My contact at the business school site informed me they send a weekly email to business students. I was told, generally, the email includes notices about professional development lectures, employment opportunities, and reminders about academic deadlines. The business school was happy to include my research

opportunity in the weekly email (see Appendix B). The email described the study and invited students to contact me if they were interested in learning more. Faculty and staff in the business school were also notified of the opportunity and asked to share it with their students or classes. Interested students were asked to contact me directly if interested. This direction was emphasized so that the interested student did not reveal their identity to the faculty member.

Upon contact from an interested student, I met with them in a mutually convenient and private space. This meeting was conversational. If I knew the student, we caught up on life since we had last seen each other. If I did not know the student we chatted about their major and other interests. Next, I followed the recruiting script (see Appendix C), also in a conversational manner, which reviewed the purpose of the study, activities involved, and questions to evaluate whether the student met the criteria required for participation. Students were encouraged to ask questions so I could clarify any concerns. If the student was interested in participating, they were asked to read the informed consent form (see Appendix D), again ask any questions, and sign if they would like to participate. Once confirmed as a participant, we scheduled times to meet for the creative arts bag portrait activity, interview, and member check meeting.

The goal was to confirm three participants for the study. Soon after sending notice of the research opportunity I had five students contact me. After meeting with each of them, four met the criteria for participation and all four decided to participate.

Methods of Data Collection

Using several methods of data collection increases the rigor of a qualitative study (Denzin, 1970). In particular, case study data should come from multiple sources to provide the opportunity to understand the case from multiple perspectives (Knafl & Breitmayer, 1991). This study, therefore, used several data collection methods including a guided creative arts bag

portrait activity, interviews, observation, and document analysis. Table 1 provides the number of pages of data collected per source. Subsequent sections describe the appropriateness of each method and the process of collecting the data over a period of 6 weeks.

Table 3.1.

Data Inventory

Data source	Number of images/pages	Total resources
4 – Bag portraits	3 images per participant bag	4 x 3 = 12 images
3 – 50-minute observations	4 pages per observation	3 x 4 = 12 pages
8 – 60-minute interviews	20-24 pages per one hour of transcription	164 pages
Document analysis	5 website pages 15 pages of other documents	20 pages
Journal reflections	2-3 pages per week for 6 weeks	16 pages
4 – 45-minute member check sessions	6-10 pages per session	31 pages
Total		255 raw data pages

Note. Data were collected using data collection methods of a guided creative arts bag portrait, interviews, observation, and document analysis. Data collection took place during Fall 2019.

Guided Creative Arts Bag Portrait

Creating art during a research project is part of a genre of inquiry called arts-based research (ABR). The process of making art, such as poetry, story, theatre, visual image, music, and so on, is one method to understand the experiences of participants (McNiff, 2008). This section will describe the unique value and benefit of ABR as a method of data collection, its appropriateness for this case study, and how it was used in this study.

Qualitative researchers have increasingly sought ways to more adequately reflect complex human behavior (Butler-Kisber, 2002). Arts-based research is one means for “enhancement of perspectives” (Barone & Eisner, 1997, p. 96). Art provides a window into an individual’s experience because art as a medium whether linguistic (e.g., story, poem, or theatre)

or nonlinguistic (e.g., painting, photography, or dance), communicates feelings, thoughts, and images in a way that traditional research methods cannot. To illustrate, consider for example, that someone is interested in the experiences of people with language-based learning disabilities. One perspective is obtained through a survey of students with a learning disability. Cawthorn and Cole (2010) found 21% of students have difficulty obtaining accommodations for their disabilities in college. Another perspective is provided by observing group therapy of individuals with a learning disability. Jones and Bonnar (1996) found the most frequent emotions expressed were loss, separation, sadness, abandonment, rejection, anger, and ambivalence. An arts-based perspective provides yet another viewpoint on the experiences of people with learning disabilities. In Crawford's (2017) study, participants were asked to express the image they show to the world and an image of themselves they hide, through making art on a paper bag. This process encouraged participants to think about their disability and uniquely represent their experiences. Figures 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3 depict participant Declan's effort to present to the world he is "super calm," "serene," and the way "everything is supposed to look" as depicted by a beautiful landscape (Crawford, 2017, pp. 104–105). The back of the bag hides the parts of himself he tries to keep together internally. Under the fold of the bag, he depicts himself trying to hold cracked boards together with nails. This part of the image is black and white, he says, to "portray a bleak and cold hidden side of myself" (Crawford, 2017, p. 107).

Figure 3.1.

Front Image of Arts Bag Portrait



Note. Front image of arts bag portrait. Photo by N. Day (2017) *Front of the bag: Serene Landscape.* [photograph] Copyright 2017. Reprinted with permission. (Crawford, 2017, p. 105)

Figure 3.2.

Back Image of Arts Bag Portrait



Note. Back image of arts bag portrait. Photo by N. Day (2017) *The Hidden Back of the Bag*. [photograph] Copyright 2017. Reprinted with permission. (Crawford, 2017, p. 105)

Figure 3.3.

Back Image of Arts Bag Portrait Opened



Note. Back image of arts bag portrait opened. Photo by N. Day (2017) *Revealing the Hidden Backstage*. [photograph] Copyright 2017. Reprinted with permission. (Crawford, 2017, p. 108)

As shown in Figure 3.4, the images created by participants in Crawford's (2017) study provide a different layer of understanding than what statistics and survey data offer.

Figure 3.4.

Comparing Data Methods

21% of students have difficulty obtaining accommodations for their disability (Cawthorn & Cole, 2010)

Feelings of loss, separation, sadness, abandonment, rejection, anger, and ambivalence
Jones and Bonnar (1996)



Figure 3.4 Comparing data methods. Photos by N. Day (2017) Copyright 2017. Reprinted with permission. (Crawford, 2017, p. 108)

Not only does art communicate thoughts and emotions, but the process of art creation can help participants tap into deeper understandings of themselves. In this way, art is a method of inquiry. As Barry (1996) explained, “Participants end up conveying their world in ways they may have purposefully avoided or never thought to do . . . art-as-inquiry *does* [emphasis in original] things” (p. 412). Creating art to express one’s experience is different from talking about that experience. Describing the artwork, including its meaning and how it felt creating it, can open windows into ourselves we had not been aware of before.

As a graduate student in a qualitative methods course, I completed a creative arts bag portrait similar to the one in Crawford (2017). My experience demonstrates the power of art as

inquiry and as an authentic aesthetic experience (Dewey, 2008). I was unfamiliar with ABR and questioned the utility of the process of creating an artistic image. My skepticism came from an ignorance of the method and my insecurities as someone who does not consider herself to be artistic. What the process revealed to me, however, was enlightening. I was in a job with which I was dissatisfied, but I could not identify why. Through creating art to depict the image I showed the world at work and the image I hid at work (see Figure 3.5), I saw the misalignment between my social class norms and values and the class expectations of my job. This influenced the career decisions I have made thereafter, changing the trajectory of my professional career. I have tried to move into opportunities that bring alignment so I have to hide less of myself at work. The result has been mentally and physically freeing. For me, meaning was created not only from the art itself but from the *experience* of creating art (Sullivan, 2006). Only through art as inquiry was I able to understand these parts of myself (Kraehe & Brown, 2011).

Figure 3.5.

Misaligned Social Class Norms and Values



Note. Misaligned social class norms and values. (Law-DelRosso, 2014)

Arts-based inquiry has been used in case study research. For instance, Lorenzo (2010) used arts-based methods of drawings, clay work, writing songs, and writing poems as “data triggers” to understand the experiences of disabled women living in poverty in Cape Town, South Africa. In a case study with marginalized, native women in Israel, Huss (2009) used artwork to seek understanding of how the women negotiated cultural identity, poverty, dilemmas, conflicts, and solutions.

The power of arts-based inquiry is increasingly being recognized in business schools and corporate circles (Nissley, 2002). Since this case study takes place in a business school, I briefly review the literature using arts-based methods in business. Like education

researchers, business educators and practitioners increasingly seek alternatives to traditional realist, analytical, positivist practices (Sutherland, 2012). For the business community, the impetus for arts-based inquiry is for leadership development (Wicks & Rippin, 2010) and facilitating reflection (Beirne & Knight, 2007). Managers and leaders operate in dynamic environments and must constantly make decisions. In most cases, managers do not have all the data they need or wish they had, and they must suffice, making a decision based on the information available and their own judgment (March, 1994). Through reflection via art, managers can interrogate their perspectives and feelings about a decision (Schwarz, 2000). The process of art-making can illuminate reasoning, perception, and improve communication skills (Beckwith, 2003). For these reasons, scholars argue tapping into why and how a manager makes decisions should be part of business school education (Cunliffe, 2002; Gray, 2007; Raber Hedberg, 2009).

Several examples demonstrate how arts-based methods in business can facilitate learning. For instance, at Babson College, MBA students take art classes to enhance their creativity (Pinard & Allio, 2005). In a corporate setting, LEGO bricks were used to help leaders develop strategy and problem-solving skills (Grienitz & Schmidt, 2012; Hadida, 2013). Copenhagen Business School has even opened the first Center for Art and Leadership. Finally, Harvard professor, Robert Austin, and theater director, Lee Devin, collaborated to write *Artful Making: What Managers Need to Know About How Artists Work* (Austin & Devin, 2003). Nissley (2008) asserts the intersection of art and management will continue to flourish in ways that facilitate management education and business success.

Having established the utility of ABR in educational research and business development, the purpose of art-making in this study was to have participants “revisit the world from a

different direction” and deepen the understanding of their experiences (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 16). The act of art-making seemed to help facilitate perception of the participants’ experiences, thoughts, and behaviors. Perhaps this insight came about because low income, blue collar students often do not have a name for the cultural differences they experience (Sayer, 2005) and therefore may not be aware of the impression management they are using to mediate their behavior as they learn cultural expectations (Geer et al., 1970).

As described previously in the methodological framework section, dramaturgy can be used to understand how people navigate different sociocultural spheres (Haas & Shaffir, 1982). Individuals have a front stage role that strives to embody the expectations of their environment and a back stage role that is their “real self” that is less concerned with appearances (Goffman, 1959). The guided creative arts bag portrait creation process was designed to help participants reflect on what their back stage looks like and how they learned to exhibit particular front stage behavior. Combined with the other methods of data collection (interviews, observation, and document analysis), this study gathered rich data from multiple perspectives, on the same phenomenon (Denzin, 1970).

Each participant attended a guided creative arts bag portrait activity led by me. To ensure confidentiality, each participant went through the activity individually. During the activity, I guided participants in creating art to express their experiences as low income, blue collar students in business school. Participants were reminded before the activity that everything would be provided for them and they did not need to consider themselves artistic.

In preparation for the activity, I gathered the following:

1. One large, blank, brown paper bag for each participant

2. Art supplies including multicolored construction paper, lined paper, paint brushes, paint, glue, markers, crayons, pens, and scissors
3. A laptop in which participants could select and download photos to be printed to a color printer.

The room was set up with a single large blank paper bag at the table with art-making materials next to it. There was plenty of space for the participant to work. Next to the participant's table and chair my paper bag portrait was on display along with a printed copy of Figures 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3.

As the participants arrived, music was playing and they were welcomed to the room. Since most participants had expressed anxiety about this part of the study, I reassured them that I would be giving them step-by-step instructions and not to worry. The following instructions guided the activity, influenced by Bhattacharya (2016) and Crawford (2017):

- We all display a version of ourselves depending on the context or situation in which we are in. We often try to fit in and meet the expectations of the people around us. For example, my performative self in business school is one that tries to meet the expectations of my colleagues and the way business instructors should “look.” This means wearing clothing that is not always comfortable and sometimes omitting parts of my personal life from conversation, even when others are sharing about their home life. My home life is different from theirs and sharing it will change their perception of me.
- The process that I will walk you through today, I experienced myself a few years back. *Show bag*. This is the bag-portrait that I made. At the time I was directing a career development program and was helping students in a similar way to the class

- you are in. The front represents how I projected myself in my professional role and on the back is who I “really am” and includes many things that I kept hidden.
- In another example of what we will do today, here are photos from another study. In this study, the participant identified as having a learning disability. On the front of the bag is the image they project to the world. The back is how they really feel. In this example, participant “Declan” said he made this drawing to show how he tries to present to the world he is “super calm,” “serene,” and the way “everything is supposed to look.” On the back, you can see he has placed under the fold of the bag a representation of him trying to hold cracked boards together with nails. The back is black and white. He stated he is trying to “portray a bleak and cold hidden side of himself. *Show excerpts from Crawford (2017) figure 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3. Allow for viewing, questions, and discussion.* - Art making is used in business schools and corporations frequently to help managers and leaders understand their own perceptions more deeply, to spur creativity and innovation, and to create new and different connections. For example, at Babson College, MBA students take art classes to enhance their creativity, LEGO bricks have been used by leaders in corporations to depict corporate strategy, and photographs have been used to facilitate discussion about people’s different perspectives on complex business practices.
 - Today, you will be creating a similar self-portrait to the one I showed you. On one side of the bag, you will create a reflection of yourself that you project to the world in business school. On the other side will be a reflection of yourself that you may keep hidden from the world in business school. How you create the bag is up to you. It can

be anything you deem relevant that connects you to who you are, inspires you, or informs your values, beliefs, and experiences. We will discuss your bag-portrait in our one-on-one interviews.

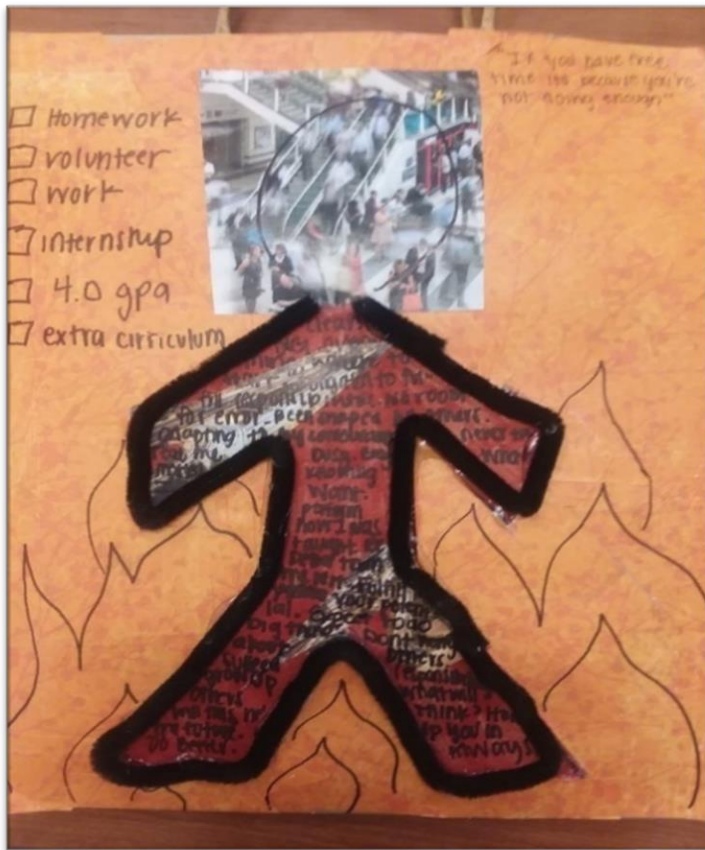
- First, select construction paper or lined paper and something to write with. You are going to free-write your responses to a couple of questions. Do not worry about grammar or spelling. Just write as things come to your mind.
- For each prompt I allowed the participant to write for three minutes or until they appeared to have finished their thought.
 - Think about your first impressions of business school. Write about those first impressions. What was it like, what did you think?
 - Describe the culture of business school, in other words, what it feels like to be here, the expectations for how people should look, behave and talk.
 - How do people learn the expectations for how they should look, behave, and talk?
 - Describe your culture growing up. What did it feel like to be in that community, what were the expectations for how people should look, behave, and talk?
 - How is your culture growing up different from the culture here in business school? How is it the same?
 - How do you perform in business school?
 - What parts of you do you perhaps keep hidden from the world in business school?

- (researcher instruction) Next, I brought out a laptop that displayed the website www.unsplash.com. Images were preset to download to a private folder to be printed when ready.
- (read) Please explore this website and select one or more photos that speak to you as a low income, blue collar student. Perhaps a photo reminds you of your childhood. Or perhaps a photo reminds you of how you feel in business school. Click download and the photo will be saved to a private folder. Let me know when you're ready and I'll print the photos for you to use on your bag if you'd like to.
- Now, I invite you to decorate your paper bag however you would like. Remember, the front of the bag is the "you" you show the world in business school. The back of the bag is the "you often kept hidden."

Participants worked on the bag for up to 90 minutes. Then, they were welcomed to continue working on their bag at home. They were asked to bring it with them for the interview. Figures 3.6 – 3.15 are images or portions of images from the participants' bag portraits. Following each bag-portrait activity, I journaled about observations, thoughts, dilemmas, or other issues that came up.

Figure 3.6.

Always Molding and On Fire



Note. This is the front of one Engaging Emily participant's bag portrait.

Figure 3.7.

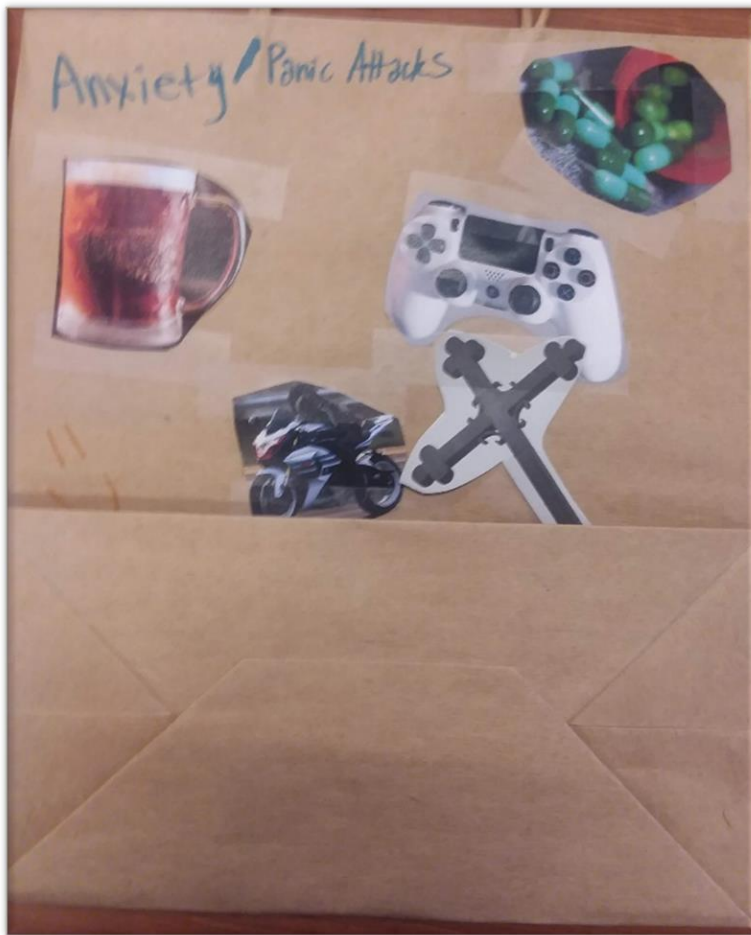
It's Really Quite Simple



Note. This is the back of one Engaging Emily participant's bag portrait.

Figure 3.8.

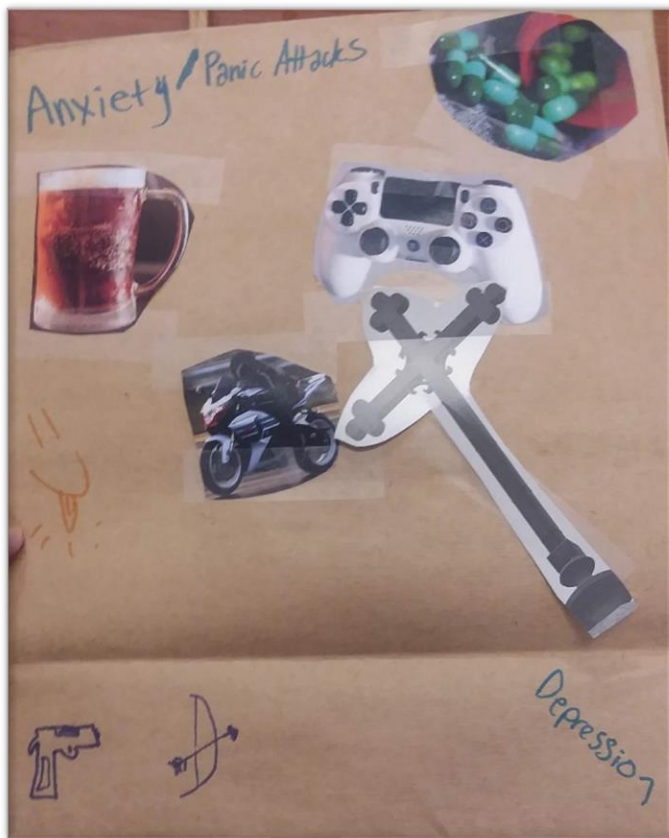
Hidden Reality



Note. This is the back of one Engaging Emily's bag portrait with the flap turned up

Figure 3.9.

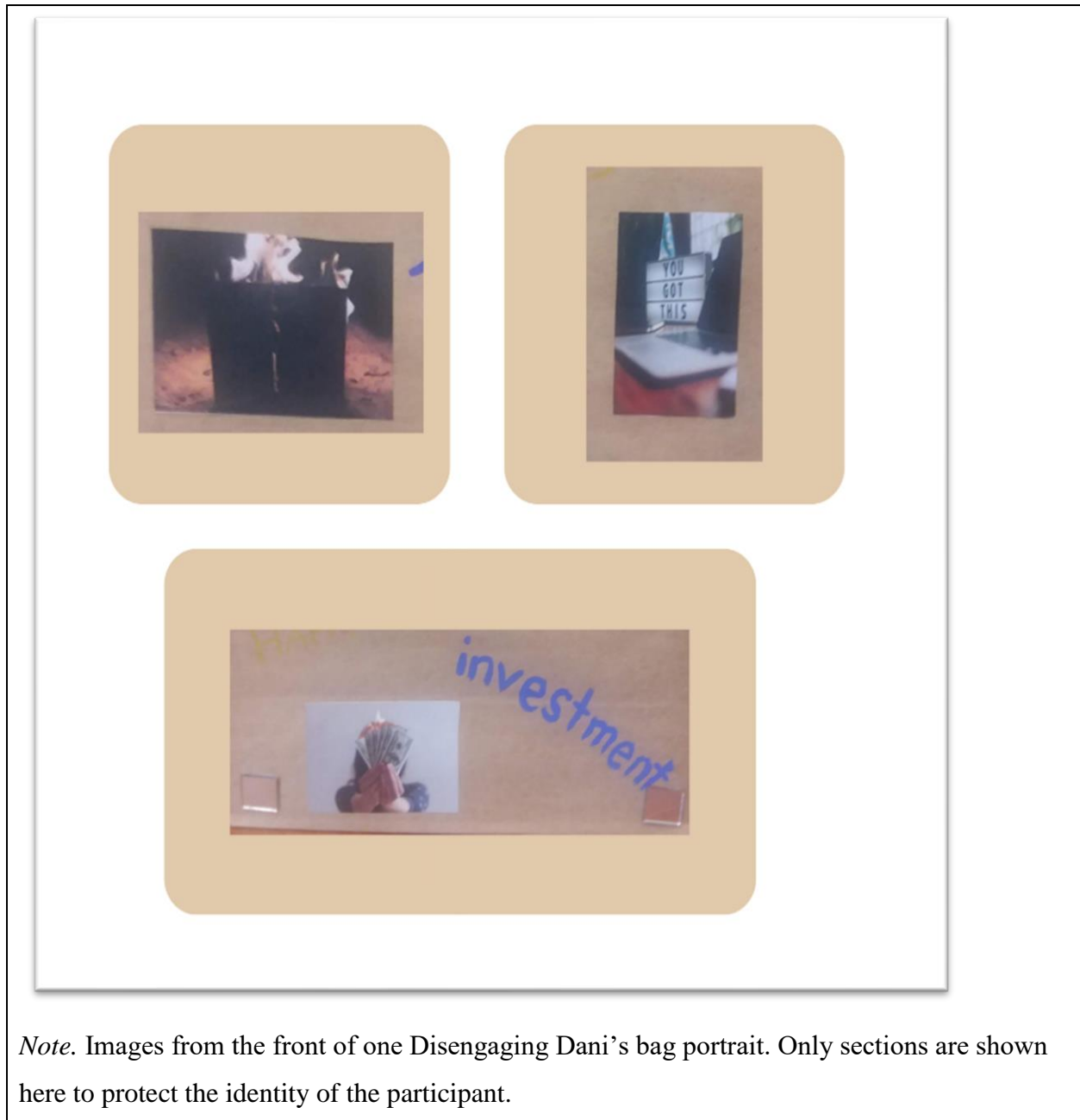
Deeper Hidden Reality



Note. This is the back of one Engaging Emily's bag portrait with the flap turned down to reveal deeper hidden hobbies and experiences

Figure 3.10.

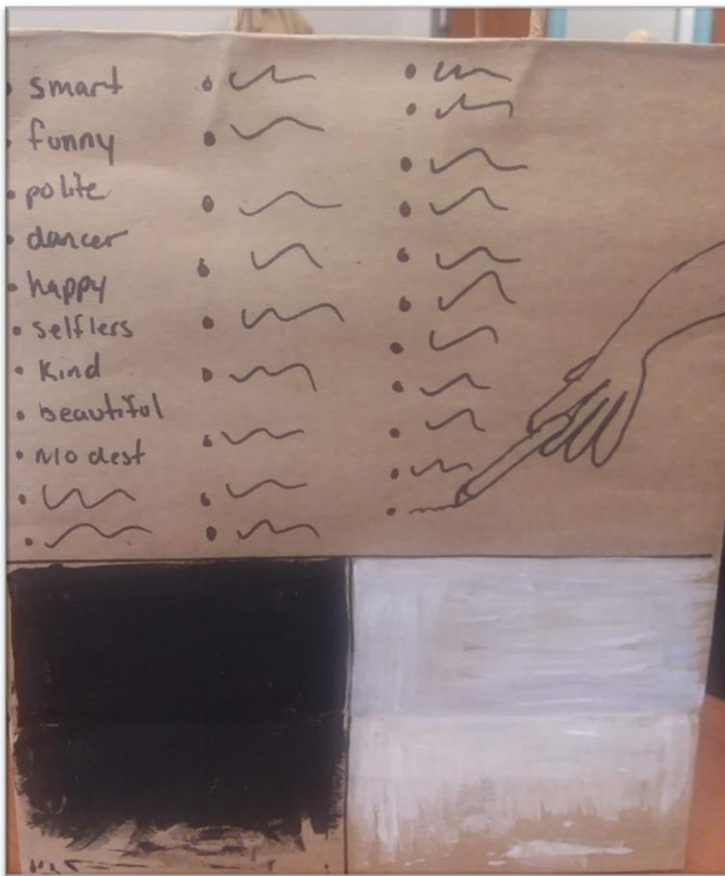
Financial Stress



Note. Images from the front of one Disengaging Dani's bag portrait. Only sections are shown here to protect the identity of the participant.

Figure 3.11.

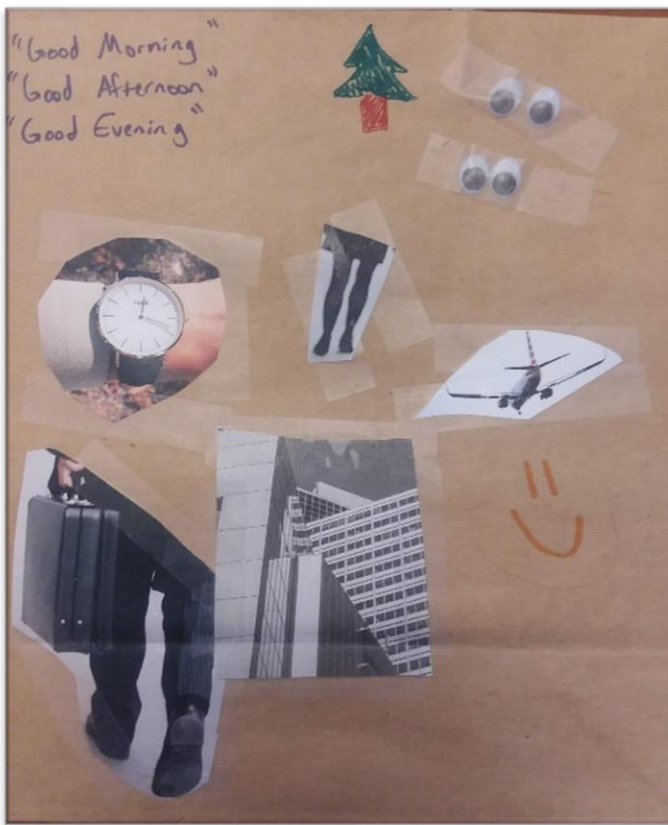
THEY Write My Story



Note. This is the back of one Disengaging Dani's bag portrait.

Figure 3.12.

Always Watching



Note. The front of one Engaging Emily's bag portrait

Figure 3.13.

The Real Me



Figure 3.14.

Protected by Disengaging



Note. This is an image from the front of one Disengaging Dani's bag portrait.

Figure 3.15.

Pride and Shame



Note. These are images from the back of one Disengaging Dani's bag portrait.

Elicited Interview

Qualitative research often involves interviews to gain insight into participant experiences (deMarrais, 2004). Interviews entail asking questions about those characteristics that cannot be observed such as feelings, thoughts, intentions, and behaviors that occurred in the past or those that are otherwise inaccessible without talking with participants (Patton, 2002). In this section, I describe the major types of interviews, followed by a description of the style used in this study, a semi-structured elicited interview.

Brinkmann (2014) describes three broad structural forms of interviews: structured, unstructured, and semi-structured. Structured interviews are essentially surveys asked in oral form (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). Each participant is asked the same questions, word for word,

in the same order. Researchers do not ask any unique follow-up questions based on how participants respond. Unstructured interviews, on the other hand, have few predefined questions (Punch, 2013). They are conversational with the researcher following the lead of the participant, allowing them to talk and asking relevant, open-ended, follow-up questions (Patton, 2002). Semi-structured interviews involve preparing questions to ask the participant ahead of the interview, with follow-up questions identified to garner deeper information (Bhattacharya, 2017). The purpose of preparing questions ahead of time is to be consistent in the questions asked of participants to compare their responses. While the questions are prepared ahead of time, the researcher and interviewee can have a conversation in such a way to create comfort through the sharing of experiences (Ramos, 1989). Often the researcher communicates personal information about themselves relevant to the topic (Thompson, 1995). This helps to create a safe space, builds trust in the relationship, and facilitates richer data to be collected (Corbin & Morse, 2003). A semi-structured interview is a middle ground between the strict adherence to interview questions of structured interviews and the openness of unstructured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are often used in case studies because they provide the interviewer with a general guide while allowing for unique or unanticipated discussions that could add important insight to the study (Drever, 1995).

A type of semi-structured interview is the elicited interview. Elicited interviews use objects, photographs, or other data sources to provoke responses in people (Harper, 2002). The benefit of elicited interviews is the opportunity for participants to show aspects of their identity that they otherwise may not share. The process also creates an opening for the participant to lead the conversation (Collier & Collier, 1986), for example, by explaining what a photograph is and what it means to them. This process is quite familiar. We often describe objects and photos to

others and reminisce. This conversation can reduce the strangeness of the interview (Zartler, 2014).

Elicited interviews may be prompted by various things such as photographs (Olliffe & Bottorff, 2007), drawings (Koch, 2019), and familiar objects (Iltanen & Topo, 2015). When participants create the art form used in elicitation, this provides the opportunity to explore not only what an object means to a participant but why they created it in the way they did, what the experience felt like, and what they thought about. The use of art as an inquiry method, as described previously, has the potential to tap into thoughts and feelings the participant would not otherwise be conscious of (Collier & Collier, 1986).

Using the bag portrait participants created as part of this study, I followed a semi-structured elicited interview approach. The bag portrait served as a conduit for describing their experiences. In this section are the interview questions and follow-up probes used during the interview. These are grounded in the class work model, the substantive framework for this study. Each interview took place in a private, mutually agreed upon space, was voice recorded, and took approximately 1.5 hours.

1. Please describe your bag portrait.
2. Tell me about why you decided to create it in the way that you did.
3. Tell me about how you felt making the bag portrait.
4. Tell me about any specific experiences that are connected to your bag portrait.
5. What else would you like to share about your bag portrait?

After each interview, the recording was promptly transcribed. I also journaled about the interaction, making note of anything pertinent that was not captured by the recording device such

as visual cues. I also wrote about what feelings were elicited for me during the interaction to examine my subjectivities.

Observation

Observation was the third method of data collection. It involves interacting with people in the social setting being researched while collecting information to examine human behavior (Jorgensen, 2015). It provides the opportunity to collect data that reflects a “social reality” different from those described in interviews (Thorpe & Holt, 2008, p. 144). It allows the researcher to observe participants in context and collect data individuals may not recall, notice, decide to report, or decide is relevant in interviews (Mays & Pope, 1995; Mulhall, 2003).

Observation was initially used mostly in anthropology and sociology for ethnographic research to understand human culture (Hume & Mulcock, 2004) but is now prevalent in many types of research. While researching the field of finance, Silva (2004) examined venture capitalist decision-making in a case study using participant observation. And while studying working class culture in London’s East End, Hobbs (1998) used participant observation to examine normalized tough masculine behavior, traditional deviant identity, and the entrepreneurial ability of community members. There was also a case study using participant observation to understand student experiences while studying abroad (Laubscher, 1994). These are just a few examples of research that have used observation as a method of inquiry. It is an important tool, and it is increasingly being used across the academy (Guest et al., 2012).

When researchers are conducting observations in a study, they must decide the nature of their relationships with their participants (Graveling, 2009). Should a researcher tell participants they are being observed? Should the participants remain oblivious to the observation? Each degree of self-revelation influences the type of data that is collected and involves important

ethical matters and issues of confidentiality. Gold (1958b) distinguishes between types of roles. As a “complete observer,” the researcher is unobtrusive and passive and does not interact with or participate in what is going on in the environment (Gold, 1958a). Babchuk (1962) described this as “systematic eavesdropping” (p. 225). In other words, like being a fly on the wall. In cases where a researcher does interact with participants yet does not reveal to them they are conducting research, this is called a ‘complete participant’ role (Preissle & Grant, 2004). In both the “complete observer” and “complete participant” roles, participants are unaware they are being observed which creates significant ethical concerns related to expectations of privacy (Homan, 1991) for an in-depth review. As a “participant-as-observer,” the researcher has a defined role in the environment, such as a classroom teacher (Gold, 1958a). Participants are aware that the individual they are interacting with has two roles – a routine or normal role within the social context and another as a researcher who is making observations. As an “observer-as-participant,” the researcher interviews people one time in a social situation (Gold, 1958a). It involves no participation or informal observation. Finally, nonparticipant observation offers a distinct alternative to Gold’s roles. Nonparticipant researchers collect data by observing behavior while having little to no interaction with participants (Allen, 2017). Unlike being a complete observer, the researcher’s role is known and participants give informed consent (Cooper et al., 2004).

The decision to reveal or not reveal one’s role as a researcher has ethical implications and affects the data that are collected. Some scholars argue the deception of participants should never occur (Bulmer, 1982). Others maintain that some degree of deception is acceptable because certain data could not be collected if people know they were being studied (Lauder, 2003). For instance, Erhenrich (2001) conducted a participant observation study on the experiences of low-wage workers which resulted in a popular book titled *Nickel and Dimed*, provoking

conversations about social class in the United States. Some of the workers knew Erhenrich was conducting research and others did not. Those who were deceived may not have chosen to participate had they have known they were part of a research project. On the other hand, the authentic experiences of low-wage workers would likely have not been observed had they all known Erhenrich's agenda. Each researcher must carefully consider the ethical issues involved in a particular study and follow the guiding principles of their discipline (Jorgensen, 2015; Smith, 1978).

Observations in this case study were selected based on soft skill-based training and key programmatic professional experiences for employment. These included observing several meetings of the business school's career preparation class and employer booths in the business school. In the class, informed consent was gathered from the instructor and members of the class (see Appendix E). For the employer-booth observations in the public space of the business school, I took on a complete observer role. To protect the individuals observed no identifying information was used in the analysis or the representation of the observations.

Three classroom observations and one employer-booth observation were conducted. As a model for the observations, I used recommendations from Guest et al. (2013) and Johnson (2016). They cite certain characteristics concerning, for example, verbal behavior or interactions involving who speaks to who, who initiates the interaction, vernacular, physical behavior, and so forth. Also, there includes a description of the setting such as the layout, signage, and other materials. In addition to the things I saw and heard during observations, I recorded my thoughts and feelings about what transpired.

To record my observations, I took notes on a laptop whenever possible. In some cases, I was interacting with someone live and therefore could not take notes. As soon as possible after

the interaction, I jotted down everything I could recall, as recommended by Thorpe and Holt (2008). Following the observations, I expanded my notes by filling in the gaps of what I observed but did not write down and what I thought about what was observed (Guest et al., 2013).

Document Analysis

The fourth method of data collection used in this study was document analysis, the practice of analyzing and interpreting data that originates in studying documents relevant to the study (Flick, 2013). Documents, such as paper and electronic files, are unique because they have been “actively produced” through the “decisions, by multiple people, about what to write, in what style, for what audience, and for what purpose” (Miller & Alvarado, 2005, p. 349). Documents therefore can provide a unique perspective into an organization or program’s intentions.

Bowen (2009) describes five functions documents can provide for a research study. In case studies, document analysis can be a source of data that gives context to the environment in which participants operate (Bowen, 2009). Prior (2003) maintained that since documents are “produced in social settings,” they are “always to be regarded as collective (social) products” (p. 26). How documents are used in that setting is important to the environment and experience of participants. Masland (1985) believed documents are an excellent tool for understanding the culture of higher education settings, such as certain portions of a curriculum and why they are necessary, or the function and purpose of committees and the work they perform, or how administrators respond to events via social media. Documents may be printed handouts or electronic material.

In addition to providing evidence to the cultural setting of the environment, a review of documents may suggest questions to be asked during interviews (Bowen, 2009). For example, in an ethnographic, longitudinal study of families in poor, urban communities, documents were used to generate new interview questions (Goldstein & Reiboldt, 2004). And, like this study, observations allowed for the gathering of documents.

Third, documents provide research data that provides insight into other sources of data (Bowen, 2009). For example, when researching technology teachers in training, Hansen (1995) analyzed notes written by the teacher in addition to interviewing them. Notes can provide data as to what stood out to participants during an observation, therefore providing data the researcher would not otherwise have access to.

Fourth, Bowen (2009) explained if a researcher has access to documents over time, they can analyze how a program, institution, or individual has changed. For instance, examining a business school's strategic plan over the years will provide data related to changing priorities.

Finally, documents are a means of creating triangulation (Bowen, 2009). Triangulation is an important concept in qualitative research and involves gathering multiple types of data to study the same phenomenon (Denzin, 1970). Analyzing documents can corroborate findings from other sources, such as interviews. When contradictory evidence is found, new interview questions should be generated (Goldstein et al., 1997).

In summary, documents are an important data source for conducting qualitative research, especially case studies. Documents can provide insight into the culture of an organization, supplemental data to other sources, changes over time, and may also provide a means for triangulation (Silverman, 2015).

For this study, business program and curriculum documents were obtained from the school and career development course instructor. The website of the business school was also analyzed. The purpose of analyzing these documents was to more deeply understand the context of the business school including what the school intends for students to learn and experience.

Data Management

Data management is the way in which I organized and managed the collected data. This includes how data were stored, processed, and organized. This facilitates confidentiality and the retrieval of data for analysis and representation.

I created an electronic case-study database to organize the data for easy retrieval in a private, password-protected DropBox folder. For security, I stored physical materials such as handwritten field notes, creative arts bag portraits, and paper documents in a locked drawer in my locked office. I organized all physical and electronic files by data collection method, participant pseudonym, and date. Below I describe the management of each data collection method.

Following interviews with each participant, I transcribed our discussion. I included any observations I made and anything not captured in the recording. The participant's speech in the transcripts was labeled with their pseudonym, and files were saved by pseudonym and date. Notes taken during interviews were also stored in this manner.

As documents were collected, I cataloged them and assigned a unique code to each. I also recorded where the document was collected from, the date, and any other significant information (Miles & Huberman, 1994). An annotated bibliography served as an index to facilitate retrieval.

I recorded my observation annotations in a word document on my laptop. If I had any handwritten field notes I formally typed them after each observation. For security and easy retrieval, I stored all files by date electronically in a password-protected Dropbox folder.

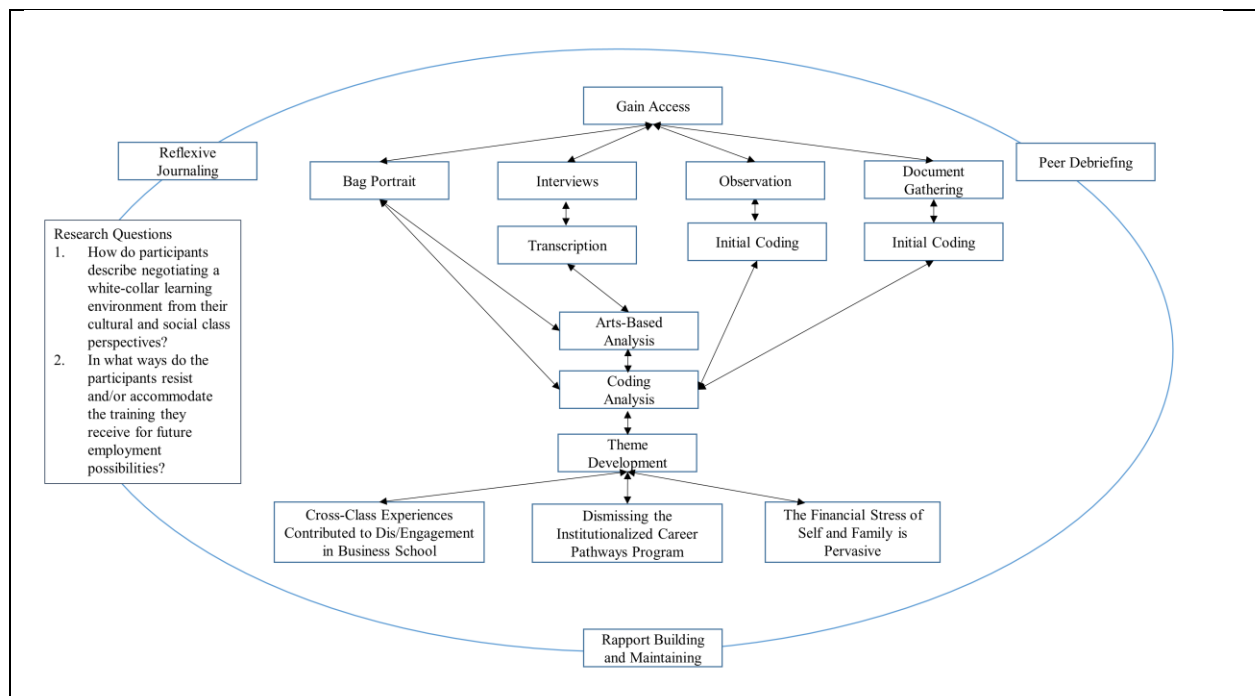
Finally, I kept researcher journals to record my thoughts throughout the research process. They were stored by date in InVivo. This timestamp facilitated matching the journal notes with the data collection method performed that day.

Data Analysis

I used a combination of emergent arts-based analysis (LeBlanc et al., 2015) and systematic coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994) to analyze the data. This combination provided me space and cerebral capacity to be more aware of the deeper meanings and connections in the data (Bhattacharya, 2012). This section describes the analysis of data. Figure 3.16 is a visual representation of the process.

Figure 3.16.

Visual Representation of the Data Analysis



Barone and Eisner (2012) explained the usefulness of arts-based research in its ability to “address complex often subtle interactions and that it provides an image of those interactions in a way that makes them noticeable” (p. 3). I led with arts-based data analysis because for me, the emotional, reflective, creative process allowed for mental connection with the data. As I conducted the analysis, I had the participant’s bag portrait in front of me and a printed copy of interview transcripts. Instructions from Bhattacharya (2016), as cited in Crawford (2017), guided the arts-based data analysis:

1. Read the transcript closely. Connect to the transcript, not for identifying codes, categories, or themes, but to become deeply empathic about what the participant states in the conversation. Feel the words in your mouth; read them slowly as you become aware of how your body and mind are reacting to these words.
2. Select passages from the transcript that stand out after a close reading.
3. Draw visual icons, in any form that you like, on the passages that stand out to you. These icons do not have to be high in aesthetic quality but they have to connect your thoughts, emotions, and insights to the selected passage.
4. Cut out your selected portions of transcripts and glue them on the canvas in any orientation you like
5. Turn your canvas around in another orientation so you can have a different perspective.
6. Use any form of art and mark-making instrument to connect the excerpts of transcripts you have on the canvas.
7. Turn your canvas around in another orientation so you can have a different perspective.

8. On a separate piece of paper write about the experiences, emotions, and thoughts that arise for you in response to seeing your symbols and your connections.
9. Create at least three to four circular spirals on your canvas
10. Now read your writing. Select words or phrases that stand out to you and either write them in your spirals or cut and paste those words into your spirals.
11. Use a viewfinder – a cardstock paper with a hole in the middle – to view your canvas. Pause at the spots that draw you in and reflect on why you are drawn to those spots.
12. When you feel that you are intensely drawn to a spot, frame the specific spot by drawing some kind of boundary around the region to highlight this “hot spot.”
13. The space within your hot spot region is the positive space and the space outside is your negative space.
14. Look at the space outside your hot spots and consider the nature of the space, and what is going on with that space. Based on your understandings, reconciliations, and negotiations of the narratives in your outside space, decide how you should cover up the space—either translucently or with opaque colors.
15. If you are inspired to do so, feel free to make connections between the hot spots on your canvas; alternatively, you can leave it as is.
16. Look at your artwork on the canvas and free-write in response to the following prompt: The narratives that arise for me in this artwork in this moment are . . .
17. Reflect on the following questions – 15 minutes
 - What did you discover/understand/sharpen/deepen/better through this activity?

- What insights about yourself did you discover as you worked with the narratives the participant shared with you?
- How did covering, uncovering, writing, and drawing allow you to gain insight into this qualitative study?

Following this process, I considered what insights about the data were understood, what emotions and critical incidents were salient, and what subjectivities as a researcher influenced the process of covering, uncovering, and drawing. This arts-based process is an effective way to process the data deeply before taking a more systematic approach to coding. Figures 3.17 and 3.18 are the finished work of this process for one participant.

Figure 3.17.

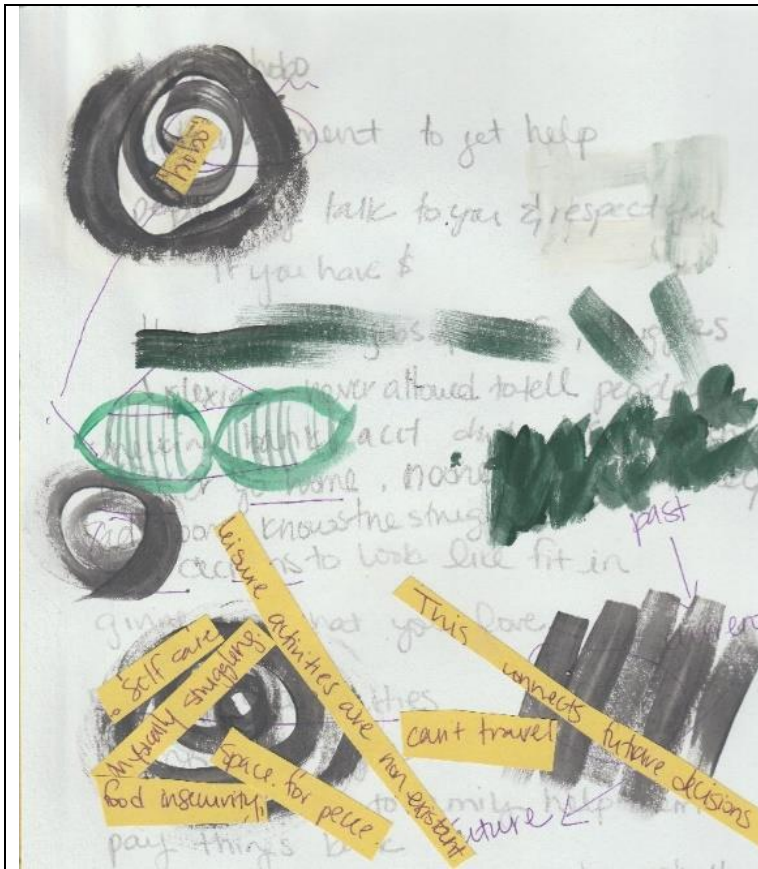
Finished Work Engaging Emily



Note. This is the finished mixed media artwork created during the arts-based data analysis process for one Engaging Emily participant

Figure 3.18.

Underneath Finished Work Engaging Emily



Note. This is the underneath of the finished arts-based analysis work for one Engaging Emily participant

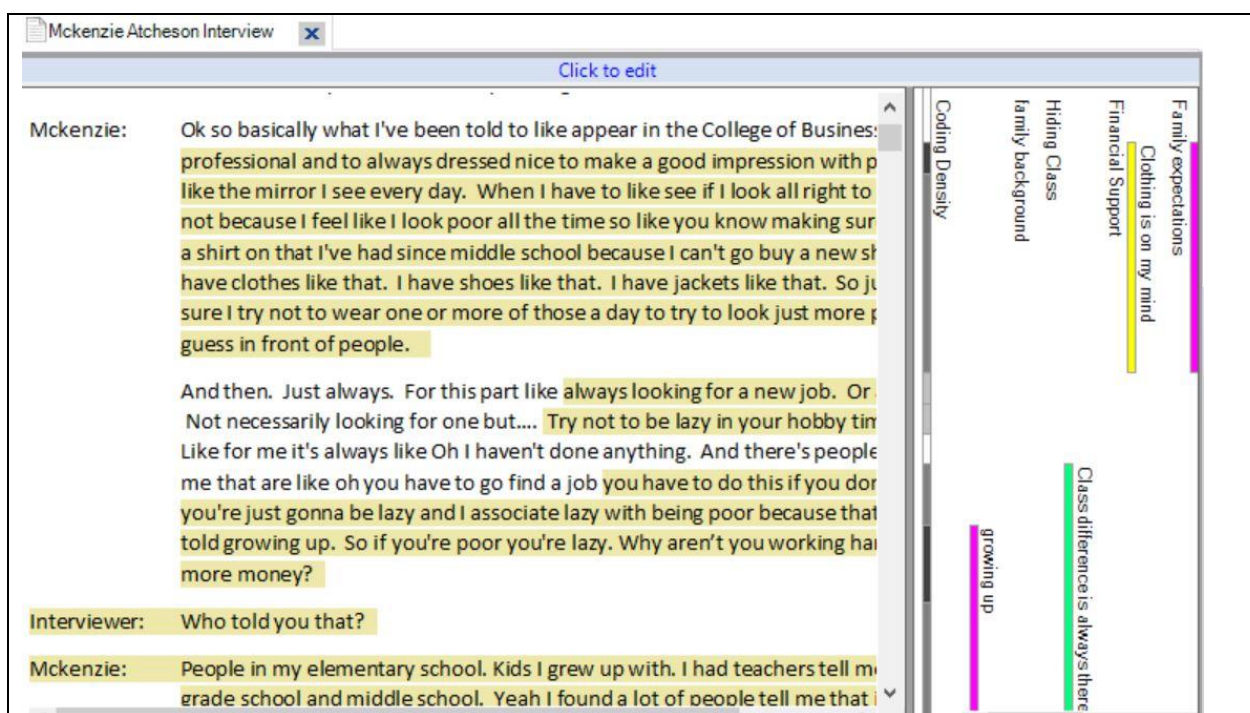
After the arts-based analysis, I coded the data. Coding is often used in case studies to identify underlying themes (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). The analysis process I chose to use is called in vivo coding. I chose this method over others because it honored the voices of participants and authors of documents. When sociocultural dynamics are important, preserving language is critical (Manning & Kunkel, 2014).

The software I used to code the data is called NVivo software (not to be confused with the in vivo process of data analysis). First, all interview transcripts, photos of the participant's

bag portraits, observation notes, documents, and researcher journal notes were uploaded to NVivo. I then commenced with the first cycle of coding, as described in Saldaña (2013), by highlighting portions of the data (see Figure 3.19). These codes were unique parts of a document or transcription, such as words, phrases, or illustrations (Love, 2003). They were inductively determined but kept in mind the research questions and class work model that guided the study.

Figure 3.19.

Coding Sample



Note. This is a sample of initial coding of an interview with an Engaging Emily participant

Next, I looked through the initial codes and formed themes and subthemes. Some codes went into a miscellaneous theme because they seemed to be only marginally relevant. I did not discard any themes at this point knowing they could be useful in writing up the data or for providing background information. Next, I refined the themes by considering which did not have

enough data to support them and which needed to be combined or re-worded to encompass the entirety of the phenomena (Nowell et al., 2017).

Once themes were identified, I met with each participant to describe and discuss the findings. I then asked for any reflections they had. This member checking aided in the credibility and trustworthiness of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The member check interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded. This added additional depth and understanding to the final themes indicated by the data analysis.

Document and observation analysis informed my understanding of the environment in which participants experienced. I scanned and uploaded documents provided by the business school, obtained in the career class, and found on the business school website. These documents along with my observation notes were then coded using the same process as listed previously for the interview transcripts. This data informed my understanding of the participant's experiences and shaped interview questions. For example, the documents and observations provided an understanding of the Career Pathways program, the college's 4-year guide for business student academic and career success. I could then inquire in the interviews about the participant's experiences with the program.

Throughout the data analysis process, I engaged in weekly peer-debriefing meetings to discuss and examine my thoughts and ideas about the data. I also kept reflexive journals in NVivo to track my thought process (Morse & Richards, 2002). These notes and meetings support the trustworthiness and rigor of this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Data Representation

Data representation is the way in which the researcher communicates the findings of the study. The constructivist view from which I approached this study acknowledges multiple

realities; therefore, I present the data from my interpretation of each participant's perspectives. Case study research often uses themes and narratives because it provides thick description and aids cross-case comparison (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011). Because of this, I present the data in themes with interspersed narratives that maintain participants' voices. This representation is aligned with the methodology of the study because it allows for thick descriptions of the meaning-making and presentations of self that participants used in business school.

In this section are the broad themes identified as a result of the data analysis. Underneath each theme are the categories of data that support each theme. For example, Dismissing Path Guidance and Rejecting Corporate Careers to Which the Path Seems to Lead are both categories of data that support the broad theme of Dismissing the Institutionalized Career Pathways Program.

- Cross-Class Experiences Contributed to Dis/Engagement in Business School
 - Positive Cross-Class Experiences and Camouflaging Behavior
 - Negative Cross-Class Experiences and Avoiding Behavior
- Dismissing the Institutionalized Career Pathways Program
 - Dismissing Path Guidance
 - Rejecting Corporate Careers to Which the Path Seems to Lead
- The Financial Stress of Self and Family Is Pervasive
 - Anxiety Related to Day-To-Day Purchases and Class
 - Concern for Family Financial Well-Being
 - Interdependent Cultural Expectations to Support Family

Reflecting on the theme Cross-Class Experiences Contributed to Dis/Engagement in Business School, I realized participants' experiences and ways they navigated the white collar

environment of business school were fitting into two profiles with common characteristics. I wrote a composite vignette for each profile that reflected the characteristics common among participants. For example, the Engaging Emily vignette represented participants who had positive cross-class experiences growing up and exhibited camouflaging, engaging behavior in business school. The composite vignette served as a way to further protect participants' identities. Especially for participants who did not engage in institutionally expected ways, this anonymity was crucial. Figure 3.20 is an example of a composite vignette for Disengaging Dani, who represented the Negative Cross-Class Experiences and Avoiding Behavior profile.

Figure 3.20.

Example of Composite Vignette

While living at Aunt Lynn's meant that the family was saving money and had a roof over their head, it was not a happy time. Describing Aunt Lynn, Dani said she made them feel bad for living with her. She would make comments about how much she was helping them and how much it was costing her. Dani said Aunt Lynn tried to teach her to be "professional . . . or, I guess, I don't want to say it but . . . uppity." Aunt Lynn was a successful realtor and she said it was extremely important to always look your best; to wear expensive looking clothes, always do your makeup, and act with decorum. Dani could never live up to Aunt Lynn's standards. First, she did not have the right clothes and, she was too shy and nervous to act in the way Aunt Lynn wanted her too – polite yet confident . . . uppity.

Note. This is an example of the representation of participants through a composite character, from the theme "Cross-Class Experiences Contributed to Dis/Engagement in Business School"

The themes Dismissing the Institutionalized Career Pathways Program and The Financial Stress of Self and Family Is Pervasive are presented in a traditional thematic manner. Short

quotes and longer block quotes are included to support the themes. The composite participant vignettes continue throughout these themes.

Researcher Subjectivity

Researchers, like anyone, have their own individual perspective through which they view the world (Crotty, 1998). This lens influences how researchers, for example, approach a study, how they conduct interviews, and how they analyze and represent data (Peshkin, 1988). A subjectivity statement is included in qualitative research as a way to make known their perspective and situate how the study is informed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

My experiences and identities bring me to this research on social class. I am an immigrant, Kiwi-American (Kiwi is the term used for those from New Zealand), mother, wife, instructor, and doctoral student. I am also a person who is conscious of navigating different social class contexts. My social class identity is often much more salient than my other identities, especially in the context of the workplace. This section will describe my experiences and social class identities that intertwine to bring me to this research.

Social class is often the most salient identity I experience. Professionally, I have a white collar job as a management instructor at a major 4-year university. Previously, I had several staff positions at the same university as well as positions as a personal banker and concierge travel agent. My parents are also both white collar professionals, though my mother also worked some pink-collar jobs for extra income. The challenge for my class identity is that my partner's job is blue collar and his referent group of origin is working class. This means our relationship navigates two occupational environments, which neither of us fully understand.

My husband is the hardest working person I know. The physical effort he puts in working 7 days a week, 10 hours a day is exhausting for me to consider. Furthermore, there are

psychological challenges for him having a working class job with little autonomy compared to working in academia.

My husband and I have had misunderstandings in appreciating each other's classed occupations: I, not appreciating the physical toll it takes to work in the elements day in and day out; or him, not understanding the mental challenge of completing a dissertation while teaching a 4-4 load (4 classes in spring and 4 in fall). We often self-censor ourselves at home with respect to our occupations to avoid offending the other person. Respect for physical labor and mental labor should be equal and we challenge each other to empathize, even if we do not really understand how different our careers are.

Further challenging my ability to behave appropriately in differently normed environments (Demby, 2013) is the contrast between my rural home life and teaching in business school. In each, my peer-referent group is different. At home, my referent-group consists of mainly farmers and stay-at-home mothers who live a rural lifestyle. At work, my referent group includes my colleagues in a 50-million dollar business school, many who live in what I perceive to be an urban and country-club lifestyle. For example, on nice days, colleagues will leave early and meet on the golf course.

At one time, I experienced unidentified discomfort both at work and around my rural neighbors. I had a nagging sense of unease and feeling of not fitting in. However, after reading *Limbo* (Lubrano, 2010), I learned that cross-class relationships (family, friendship, and romantic) are often quite challenging. Learning that referent groups significantly guide and mediate social class behaviors, I become more conscious of my intentionally different style of dress, behavior, and speech patterns depending on the economic context.

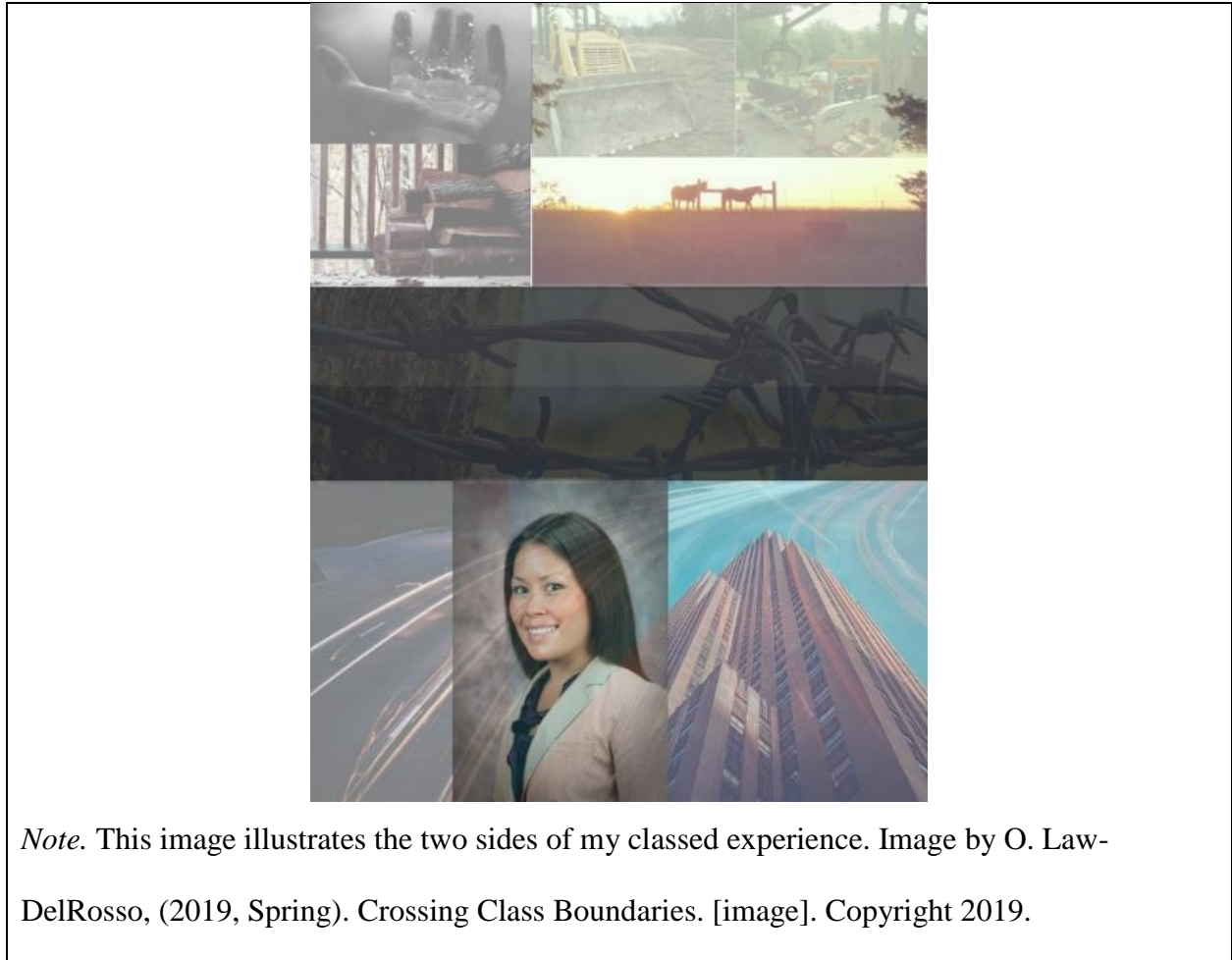
Having the benefit of a cross-class life, I pay close attention to the cultural differences and have become an expert at understanding the expectations of business professionals.

Realizing that employers viewed business students at my institution as having insufficient soft skills and were viewed as less professional compared to students at universities in more affluent areas, I established a career development program for business students. The goal was to help students understand the unspoken expectations of white collar business professionals. Lessons included what to wear and how to behave at a networking event, experiences students should pursue and how they should talk about them, and how to write an impressive resume and interview well.

In some ways, understanding social class expectations are similar to learning how to play a game. One first must learn the rules, and then practice enough to pass as an insider expert, in this case, a white collar professional. At the time, I did not think about the experiences of students crossing class boundaries in business school and the career development program. I viewed the program as helping students understand how to be respected business professionals and build leverage to pursue the career in which they were interested. Only now, with time and space from the career development program, have I developed a concern for the social class experiences of blue collar students in business school. Knowing I once did not have words to describe my unease and discomfort, I want to support blue collar students in business school and in transitioning to the workplace. I once made a career of teaching students how to play the social class game and now want to understand what it is like learning the rules.

Figure 3.21.

Crossing Class Boundaries



Qualitative Quality

Quality of research is important for many reasons including protecting participants and maintaining academic standards for advancing scholarship. In qualitative research, one must contend with the skepticism from quantitative, positivist researchers who question the usefulness of research that is not statistically generalizable (Cannella & Lincoln, 2004). In aspiring to author a quality qualitative study, I look to the American Educational Research Association (AERA), Tracy (2010), and Barone and Eisner (2012) for guidance in creating rigor and trustworthiness in

qualitative research. Here I briefly describe each recommendation for quality followed by how I applied the guidance in this study.

AERA is an international organization that sets professional standards for educational research. This entity's guidance is appropriate for this case study set in a business school. Their criteria cover the topics of significance, methods, conceptualization, substantiation, coherence, quality of communication, and ethics.

The article, *Qualitative Quality: Eight "Big Tent" Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research* (Tracy, 2010) provides a highly regarded eight-criteria model for excellent qualitative research. It includes having a worthy topic, rigor, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significance of contribution, ethics, and meaningful coherence.

Finally, Barone and Eisner (2012) are disciplinary leaders in the area of arts-based research in education. Their criteria for evaluating arts-based research include incisiveness, concision, coherence, generativity, social significance, and evocation and illumination.

Crawford's (2017) study analyzes the qualitative quality recommendations from the AERA (2006), Tracy (2010), and Barone and Eisner (2012) to determine where they overlap and which recommendations were unique to the entity or individual's discipline. Since this is a qualitative study in an educational setting – and one that uses arts-based inquiry as a means for data collection – it makes sense to address the recommendations where they intersect. The common recommendations included: significant contribution, worthy topic, social significance and problem formulation, sincerity generativity, sources of evidence, and generalization. In addition, I addressed reciprocity and ethics. By considering these established protocols, I communicated my interpretation of the quality of this research. Readers may have reasonable, different opinions or interpretations.

Significant Contribution

A significant study is timely, addresses a topic that is under-researched, is intrinsically interesting, fills a gap in knowledge, or raises significant questions (American Educational Research Association, 2009). As described previously, this study fills a gap in the literature on low income, blue collar business student experiences in the business school. This demographic of student is of particular interest for several reasons. First, they have goals for white collar employment (Longwell-Grice, 2003), yet may encounter challenges because employers make subjective assessments of soft skills based on social class (Rivera, 2012, 2016). To close this gap, business schools are increasingly providing soft skill employability training (Beard et al., 2008; Business & Education, 2000; Cellante & Graham, 2012). There is scant research on how students who identify as lower social class react to training to fit in with higher social classes (for one study, see Stahl, 2016).

A second significant contribution of this study is to create more discourse about social class diversity in business school. Social class as a diverse identity is often overlooked (Borrego, 2008; hooks, 1994) and therefore more studies bringing diverse social class experiences to light is beneficial. With more low income students attending college than ever before (Smith, 2019), colleges may benefit from more consideration of social class issues on campus.

Worthy Topic, Social Significance, and Problem Formulation

Topics worthy of research are interesting, timely, relevant, significant, or evocative (Tracy, 2010). According to Barone and Eisner (2012), worthy topics should be socially significant and need attention. Useful studies seek to move the field forward, shed light on alternative ways of knowing, or should raise awareness.

This study sheds light on classed experiences in business school. Dialogue on the diversity of student social class experiences is stark in higher education (Borrego, 2008; hooks, 1994); yet, research indicates social class culture shock is experienced by low income, blue collar students in university (Soria, 2015). In business school, class rules may be even more significant given the expectations of employers (Carnevale et al., 1990; Karoly & Panis, 2004), and pressure on business schools to deliver what companies are seeking in employees (AACSB, 2006; Corley & Gioia, 2000; Pfeffer & Fong, 2004). While human resource professionals hesitate to admit that it happens, subjective evaluations of applicants influence hiring (Graves & Powell, 1995). Employers seek to hire candidates who are culturally similar in social class to themselves (Harrison, 1992; Rivera, 2012). With business schools seeking to educate students on these class expectations, one wonders what this instruction is like for working class students. Teaching students the skills valued by potential employers is important. However, the learning experience may be more complex than schools recognize, particularly given the class culture shock (Barratt, 2012a; Lareau, 2011; Lubrano, 2004; Navarrette, 1993) and lack of recognition and support related to social class diversity in business schools (hooks, 1994; Lubrano, 2010). This study provides important insight into how this widely offered curriculum is experienced.

The last criterion in this section, problem formation, is addressed when the purpose and scope of the study are clearly stated and contribute to the applicable body of knowledge (American Educational Research Association, 2009). This research meets these criteria through a thorough review of the literature in Chapter 2 related to social class theory, the impact of social class on hiring decisions, and social class in business school. Additionally, there is a clearly stated purpose, research questions, and methodology in Chapter 3.

Sincerity, Generativity, Sources of Evidence, and Generalization

An additional area of overlap in the recommendations of qualitative scholars include the criteria of sincerity, generativity, sources of evidence, and generalization (Crawford, 2017). First, Tracy (2010) describes sincerity as practicing reflexivity, interrogating one's subjectivity, and being transparent about methods and challenges throughout the study. In the subjectivity statement of Chapter 3, I described the lens through which I approached this study and my connection to the research. I provided this statement as honestly and openly as possible. Furthermore, throughout this study, I journaled, engaged in peer debriefing, and member-checked to interrogate my positionality. Finally, in this chapter, I provided the process I used in the study and showed how it aligned with the literature reviewed.

Generativity is described by Barone and Eisner (2012) as occurring when a case study with a small number of participants can be acted upon in a wider sense by shedding light on a phenomenon. Generativity is created when the work invites people into the experience, such as when one reads a book of fiction and they feel as if they are part of the story. Or, when a moving poem generates feelings or images of one's past. The work in this study is intended to shed light on the experiences of low income, blue collar- students in business school. Through participant and researcher art forms and the representation of the data, I intended to create generativity to make the findings relevant and evocative for the reader. However, readers will vary in what they find relevant and evocative so there may not be agreement that this study has generativity.

The third criterion in this section refers to the sources of evidence as cited by the American Educational Research Association (2009). The guidelines state that sources of evidence be described thoroughly and the judgments through which they are selected outlined rationally. To address these recommendations, I described earlier in this chapter how participants

and documents were selected. I also provided detailed protocols for how the arts bag portrait activity was guided, interviews conducted, and observations accomplished.

The final criterion in this section, generalization, is described as when a study has implications beyond the study (American Educational Research Association, 2009). The intent is for this research to be applicable to understanding the experiences of low income, blue collar students in business school. This demographic is an understudied population and social class diversity is not often addressed in universities (Borrego, 2008; hooks, 1994). Throughout the design of this study, I made the argument that this study could be analogous to other situations in which business schools enroll this demographic of students. However, others may reasonably harbor a different opinion as to the generalizability of this research.

Ethics and Reciprocity

The university Institutional Review Board (IRB) was the official reviewer of ethical conduct for this study. IRB forms were completed stating the purpose of the proposed study, risk and benefits to participants, method of study, and research questions. This was presented to the governing body at Kansas State University and approved (see Appendix A).

Previously addressed in this chapter is the informed-consent protocol. Paper consent forms and any other tangible documents were stored in a locked drawer. Interview files, transcripts, and any other electronic documents were saved in a password-protected file. Participant pseudonyms were used in all documents. Results of the research may be shared with the community through presentation and publication but no identifying information will be provided.

Field notes, interview transcripts, art, and other products created during the research process were stored in a password-protected electronic location and a locked drawer. Data did not identify the participants' real names but instead used their selected pseudonyms.

IRB approval and adherence to the university's ethical codes of conduct are, in my consideration, the minimal duty of a researcher. Qualitative research examines participants' lives, and sometimes participants feel comfortable enough with researchers to share experiences they may not typically discuss with others. My intent with the design of this study was to be careful and considerate of the participants' lives while being genuine in the purpose of this research.

Reciprocity in qualitative research aims to provide benefit not only to the researcher but to participants of the study (Maiter et al., 2008). It is especially important in qualitative research since participants are vulnerable with their disclosure and "invest themselves in close relationships with researchers" (Hatch, 2002, p. 66). Participants give their time, share stories, and welcome researchers into their lives. Giving back, or reciprocating in some way, is important for upholding ethical and moral justifications for the research. In this study, I viewed my research as being conducted "with" participants, rather than "on," which would be a distasteful objectification that ignores their humanity. Beginning with data collection, participants created a representation of self through their creative arts bag portrait. This was then used to guide and inspire the subsequent interview questions. In this way, participants were invited to engage with the research study rather than respond as passive subjects (Heron & Reason, 2006). I also engaged in member checking and discussion as a cooperative way of data analysis and representation. I gave some of my own vulnerability through the give-and-take of the semi-structured interview as well as through sharing my own creative arts bag portrait with

participants. Finally, while only a small amount and not the main focus of reciprocity, participants were compensated for their time. This was a small way to acknowledge the time and energy participants gave to this study that they could have spent otherwise working, studying, or engaging in some other activity.

Chapter Summary

This third chapter reviewed the design of this qualitative study. I described the appropriateness of this case study for understanding the experiences of low income, blue collar students in the context of the white collar, middle class learning environment of business school. Next, I described participant selection as purposeful, based on three qualifications. Participants were business majors, self-identified as low income, blue collar students, and had been in the business school for at least 2 years. I also described how I gained access to participants initially and throughout the study by building trust and rapport.

The methods of data collection for this case study involved a guided creative arts bag portrait activity, elicited interviews, observations, and document analyses. The different types of data collection provided unique perspectives in which to understand the cases.

Next, I described how I managed the data securely and with respect for participant confidentiality. To analyze the data, I used emergent arts-based analysis (LeBlanc et al., 2015) and systematic coding of the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I represent the data in themes and composite narratives in Chapter 4.

I offered my subjectivity as a researcher. While subjectivity is inevitable and natural, it exerts influence on inquiry. Therefore, by identifying the lens through which I approached this research, I intend to create greater sincerity and trustworthiness for this work.

Finally, I described how qualitative quality will be demonstrated in the proposed study. I followed guidance from established leaders in the fields of qualitative education research and arts-based research in education.

Chapter 4 - Findings and Interpretations

This chapter provides the findings of the study as indicated by the data. First, a description of the site is offered. Next, the themes are described in detail and the findings are discussed.

Site Description

In this section, I describe the Din School of Business. The environment in which participants learned and the way the business school approached courses, career development, and business education, in general, provides context to the environment that participants experienced. In my description, I integrated quotes from participants in italics to demonstrate their impressions of the white collar environment of business school.

The Din School of Business is part of a 4-year university in a picturesque college town. Driving up to the building I saw a digital stock ticker display through the enormous windows. The stock ticker was a reminder of the financial emphasis in business and an indicator that the school must have significant funds to afford such a display. Compared to the other buildings on campus, the building was shiny and new, having been constructed very recently. The architecture was modern, yet it was designed to fit in with the historic limestone buildings that appeared to be built when the university was established nearly 150 years ago.

As visitors walk into the building, they are greeted by an enormous atrium. The aforementioned stock ticker winds around the third floor, shining so brightly it can be seen from inside and outside the building. I learned that the companies listed on the ticker were those affiliated with the business school through donations, sponsorship, or research. Additionally, they hired some of the school's graduates, also.

I was reminded of being in an airport. There were high-top tables and chairs with plug-ins to charge devices. There were pods of comfortable chairs and coffee tables throughout, bench seating along the walls, and a coffee shop to satisfy the hunger and caffeine needs of hard-working college students. Large TV screens throughout the building shared upcoming events and reminders. There were no posters hung on the walls, and the building was clean and tidy.

Centrally located monitors welcomed prominent people and companies to the building and provided details of their itinerary. Sometimes, these were company representatives who were involved in case competitions, lectures, conferences, and board meetings. More often, though, they were there to interview and recruit. Individual companies set up their own kiosks, from which representatives smiled and greeted business students and prospective employees. Their displays included tall banners with the company name and motto. The kiosks were stacked with brochures about jobs and internships the company was hiring for as well as “swag” or company branded products such as water bottles, pizza cutters, and notebooks. Most recruiters also offered pizza or donuts to entice students to stop by and talk to them. A helpful placard listed the academic majors the company would hire, signaling students who met those criteria to chat with them.

Usually, the recruiters were dressed in suits. The women wore pant or skirt suits, heels, and a blouse. The men were clad in conservative dark suits and neutral button-down shirts. Rarely did the recruiters resort to business casual attire such as slacks and polos. Never did I observe recruiters in jeans, T-shirts, or other casual attire. With a different company in the building daily, the opportunities seemed endless and, perhaps, overwhelming.

I observed students stopping to talk to recruiters between classes. Some interchanges lasted for long periods, and it seemed the students had real intentions of working for that

company. Other students quickly said hello and grabbed a snack. A number of students purposefully avoid eye contact with recruiters. They rushed by, hugging the walls, trying not to be noticed. This interpretation of the visual cultural cues in the business building was common among all participants and set the stage for their experiences in the business school.

Visitors to the building could not miss the names of donors that support the school. Nearly every room was named after a family or company. If I were a student, seeing their names would send a message that I, too, have the potential to be successful enough to make donations to give back to the school, or that one day I could work for Microsoft, Google, or another well-known company that hires graduates and sponsors entire wings of business schools.

Walking the halls of the building among the faculty offices and classrooms, there was a sense of professionalism, purposefulness, and friendliness. People greeted each other cheerfully and then sat down to work alone or in groups. There was not much goofing around as one might observe in the student union or dormitories. People were there to study and collaborate on school work. Unlike the other buildings on campus, the floors still shone and did not creak as I walked around. Each wing of ten offices had a small alcove with comfortable couches and a kitchen nook. Students were everywhere, and all chairs were occupied by someone studying or chatting. The occasional sleeping student made me wonder how long they had been there cramming or if they were out late with friends the night before—they *were* in college after all.

For the business professionals and faculty in the building, the environment is probably nothing new. The space is likely similar in style to what they are used to in their work or personal life. The attire they see in the building and how they are expected to dress is what they are accustomed to. Culturally, the business school appears familiar. For this study's participants,

their experiences were markedly different. One first-generation, rural participant described her first impressions:

The business building is HUGE. I remember thinking there's a bunch of old people dressing professionally. How often do I have to dress like that?. . Never . . . I don't have any professional clothes. How will I fit in? How am I going to learn all this stuff and everything I need to know in just 4 years? Business professors look serious all the time. I didn't know how to act or treat people at all times.

A second-generation participant shared how the atmosphere of the business school influenced her sense of self and confidence:

I was so intimidated when I first got here. I didn't feel smart enough or hard-working enough to make it to graduation and I almost changed my major out of business. I was scared and almost embarrassed.

This participant, like many low income, blue collar students felt intimidated. Environmental design and visual cues of culture make a difference. Those who are culturally accustomed to a white collar work environment may interpret the business building as beautiful and functional. For those who are not, such as participants in this study, their interpretations are much different.

The Din School of Business had significant resources to support business students. There was a team of professional advisors to guide students academically and a team of career counselors whose role was to direct students in their career development. Both programs had grown their number of staff in the last few years to improve staff-to-student ratios and provide more personalized attention. There were students employed to provide peer mentoring, advising, and tutoring. As business students themselves, they helped new students make a smooth transition to the business school, locate resources, and get involved in recommended activities.

The school recognized that students are not always familiar with academic terminology, the roles people play, or what they should do to be successful. To help students understand the hidden curriculum (Smith, 2013), a program called Career Pathways was provided. The roadmap started in one's freshman year and went through to senior year, outlining the activities students should engage in. Included were academic-related activities such as exploring majors and outlining a 4-year plan for the courses they need to take, fiscal-related responsibilities such as paying for college and living expenses, and career-related opportunities such as joining a career profession-relevant club, attending business school events, considering study abroad, participating in a job shadow, attending networking events and career fairs, and consulting with a career counselor and executive mentor. When students met with their academic advisor to enroll each year, they talked about the Career Pathways program and how the student was progressing. Notices of Career Pathways events and activities were sent to students weekly.

Acknowledging that activities in the Career Pathways program required guidance, the business school embedded instruction into the sophomore-student curriculum. While not graded for academic credit, students were exposed to lessons such as how to write a resume, interview, and network with employers. Observing classroom instruction, I was impressed with the interactive nature of the career-related curriculum. The lessons included guided worksheets so that students could follow along and personalize the lessons to their interests. For example, students wrote an elevator pitch tailored to their experiences and interests. They were given an example of what a student might say and were provided space to write their own. This example is similar to what the students received (Carnegie Mellon University).¹

¹ This pitch example was found on another university website to protect the confidentiality of the case study location.

Hi, my name is Jon Ling and I will be starting my junior year in the social and decision science major in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences with an interest in consumer research and product development. I am also the president of the undergraduate Entrepreneurship Association. I'm interested in gaining experience in product development with a firm such as P&G, which continues to set the industry standard for analyzing consumer behavior and developing cutting-edge products. I'd like to learn more about internship opportunities within your organization.

The intention was positive, but I wondered if students knew what career they were interested in to even begin to write an elevator pitch. As sophomores, do they even have any relevant work experience? Thinking back, I certainly did not know what I wanted to do with my degree, even as a senior. I figured it out along the way, faking confidence and interest until I slowly found a career about which I was passionate. Participants seemed to feel similarly. One explained:

You don't know, you don't really know where to start. It's overwhelming and there's no room for error. You have to always feel busy. You have to fulfill your potential and expect to do big things. Somehow you have to figure it out because it seems like everyone else is already on their way.

The business school seemed to have recognized this struggle to some degree and provided several resources to aid students in exploring career possibilities through the Career Pathway program. Peer mentors were available to share their own experiences navigating career choice. Students could take a career assessment and talk through their results with a career counselor. Finally, students could work with an executive mentor to gain an understanding of their career path.

Despite the significant efforts of the business school, participants did not engage in the Career Pathways program enthusiastically. As described in the participant narratives and themes in the following section, there were significant barriers to their participation. The data reveal how the environment of the business school – intended to be supportive, welcoming, and motivating – was often experienced as stressful for participants.

Participant Composite Narratives

In this section, I present two composite vignettes from participants' narratives to demonstrate the role of cross-class experiences on how participants engaged in business school. The purpose of this presentation style is to protect identifiable details of participants' lives. Throughout this dissertation, I conceal their identities using these profiles. Each vignette was created using the combined experiences of participants. Especially vulnerable are those who did not engage in the manner the business school endorses. I have an ethical obligation to mask their identities and yet offer rich, thick, descriptive narratives of their collective experiences. After presenting the vignettes, I describe the themes indicated by the data. The composite narratives of Engaging Emily and Disengaging Dani are continued through the theme descriptions to indicate how they experienced business school.

The Story of Engaging Emily

The composite of Engaging Emily includes two key experiences. First, Emily had positive cross-class experiences with middle and upper class white collar extended family members while growing up. Through these experiences, she was introduced to cultural class differences, and she was able to practice engaging in middle class, white collar culture. She was encouraged during those cross-class interactions, and this gave her not only some experience to draw from but also the confidence to engage in cross-class interactions in business school.

Second, in business school, she continued to have relatively positive cross-class experiences as she engaged with faculty and employers recruiting from the business school. Although Emily reported always being nervous before and during cross-class interactions in business school, she was more prone to engage in interactions than to avoid them.

Engaging Emily is a first-generation business student. She identified as coming from a low income, blue collar, and rural background. Her father is a plumber and her mother works in the school cafeteria. During her childhood, she knew they did not have a lot of money but it was not something she worried about. Her family always had a place to live and food on the table. In hindsight, however, she admits she did play a “comparison game” with her peers. She described her house as the smallest of all her friends. Although her mom tried to make sure she had the “right” clothes, it was hard to keep up with the popular girls in school. Emily described hoping with all her might that the Goodwill (second-hand store) would have the name-brand shoes she needed or that her rich cousins from Dallas would send her their hand-me-downs.

Emily had some direct family exposure to a middle/upper class and white collar lifestyle when visiting her cousins in Dallas each summer. She remembers the trips fondly. As a young child, she recalls playing with her cousins in their house. With so much room, all the kids could frolic in the basement while the adults were upstairs. No one was atop the other. They also swam in the backyard pool and visited her aunt’s office in downtown Dallas. Emily had never been to such a large city before or seen such towering buildings. Emily’s aunt was an architect who worked in one of the tallest buildings downtown. Emily described it as “so cool” to see everyone dressed up, looking so nice and working in such a fancy building. As Emily got older, the family continued to visit Dallas. In her sophomore, junior, and senior high-school years, Emily job-shadowed her aunt during her summer visits. Emily says this experience “probably helped her

feel more comfortable in business school.” Having to dress up, shake people’s hands, and assist in an office environment felt intimidating for a teenager, but her aunt helped. Being just a high school kid, Emily said, “It was ok that I didn’t know what was going on.” It is positive cross-class experiences such as this between Emily and her aunt that are characteristic of the Engaging Emily participants.

Around junior year, Emily and her friends started to think about what they would do after high-school graduation. Continuing her education was something Emily and her parents had always discussed. Sharing this part of her story, Emily revealed that there were those who thought that “people like me come from families that don’t care about education, but we do. We know how important education is . . . it’s just harder for us. . . . Making rent is hard enough, let alone figuring out how to pay for college.” Emily added that her parents had high expectations for grades, and she was expected to engage in activities that would be helpful for her in the future – like being in school clubs and volunteering.

Emily’s high school organized trips for students to go on college visits. Initially, Emily thought she would go to community college, so she looked at a couple of options nearby. A friend encouraged Emily to check out the Din School of Business with her. When they arrived on campus Emily was amazed. She recalled:

Everything seemed so clean and, like, new. Even outside there was really nice landscaping, like with the colors of the school in the flowers. The buildings, especially the business school, are so nice. They reminded me of, like, the office my aunt works in.

Everything seemed really professional and like people were really going places.

Once Emily started business school, she continued to try to meet the expectations of her parents, professors, and academic advisor. When asked what those expectations were, Emily responded:

[They were] to, of course, get good grades, but also talk in class and participate to make a good impression. I have a lot of anxiety, so I always over prepare so I know I'll have something to say. Also, you have to be involved with a club. Basically, always be busy doing something. If you're not studying, you should be. If you're not in a club, you should be. You need to be thinking about where you're going to get an internship and where you will work. And how you will make sure you're someone people want to hire. Emily said these expectations came from her parents initially, but she also learned them in business school. Professors taught her participation was important by making it part of the grade in the class. Her academic advisor shed light on the importance of thinking about her long-term career goals and what she should do in college to prepare. A class in career preparation further enhanced her understanding of white collar careers. Her resume was reviewed, and she practiced networking and performed in a mock interview. She describes the networking part as "a little bit nerve-wracking" but "really helpful." To prepare, the teacher told students what they should wear. Emily had some money in savings so she bought a nice shirt and skirt from a discount store. Her mom helped her buy a new pair of shoes. While Emily was happy with the outfit, it was her only professional clothing option. There were 4 class days in a row when students in her class were asked to dress up. Emily had to wear the same outfit. She described the situation as "so embarrassing, but 'ya know, what was I supposed to do? I actually ended up bringing a change of clothes in my backpack so I didn't have to wear that outfit all day long 4 days in a row."

To know what to discuss during the networking event, the instructor coached them on how to introduce themselves and gave them samples of questions to ask. According to Emily, "I

remember they told us that the employers were once college students like us and they just want to get to know us and be helpful,” She further explained:

We got a paper with a list of questions we could ask like, “What was your major in school?” or “Why did you decide to go to work for your company?” These questions were helpful. But I didn’t really talk at the networking event . . . I went and I liked it, but I just kinda listened and observed. . . . The other students seemed to actually know about the companies or the jobs the employers were doing. I don’t know that kind of stuff, but I think I’ll learn it over time.

I asked Emily what else she does in college too, as she put it, “do the right things.” She told me she joined a club, which is what everyone seemed to recommend. For her, it is difficult to attend all the meetings because of her job, but she does her best. She said:

I tell my boss the days and times I’m able to work, but she schedules me incorrectly all the time. I need this job, so I sometimes have to skip class or skip club meetings to work. It’s frustrating because then I fall behind in class or I miss out on hearing club speakers. But, what am I gonna do, not pay my bills?

I can hear the frustration in her voice. Emily feels torn in many directions. It feels to her that the work she has to do to live and survive gets in the way of the things she is “supposed” to do to be a “good business student.” She went on to describe the unsympathetic attitude of her professors and her advisor toward the interference of her work schedule. She added:

Of course I know I shouldn’t skip class and of course I know I should be where I’ve committed to be, but it’s not that simple. We are treated like shit at work. They know we need the job and so they think we will come work whenever they need us. And I guess I do that. I do go in whenever they need me. But it’s because I can’t not pay my bills.

Those are like immediate needs while with school I feel like I might have a chance to catch up if I can get notes from a friend or someone.

Emily describes trying to keep up with all the expectations like a “fire” in her. She can never relax. She is constantly busy, studying for class, going to class, attending club meetings, and working her job.

Leaning into these expectations is what makes Engaging Emily “engaged” in cross-class interactions. Engaging Emily did not just learn about career preparation strategies to pass a quiz or assignment in the class. Engaging Emily took the recommendations to heart and tries to make them part of her life as much as she can.

Figure 4.1.

Always Molding and On Fire



Note. This is the front image of an Engaging Emily participant's bag portrait.

Even though Emily engages in some cross-class interactions, she's not completely comfortable with them. They bring her anxiety. She prepares and shows up for school but feels like she can't compare with the engagement of her wealthier, white collar peers. They seem to be comfortable. They look the part. They shake hands with confidence. And they seem to have conversations with ease.

I don't really know if they are comfortable. Maybe they are anxious too . . . but they seem to fit in while I'm just trying to play a part that isn't really me. It's like I'm pretending.

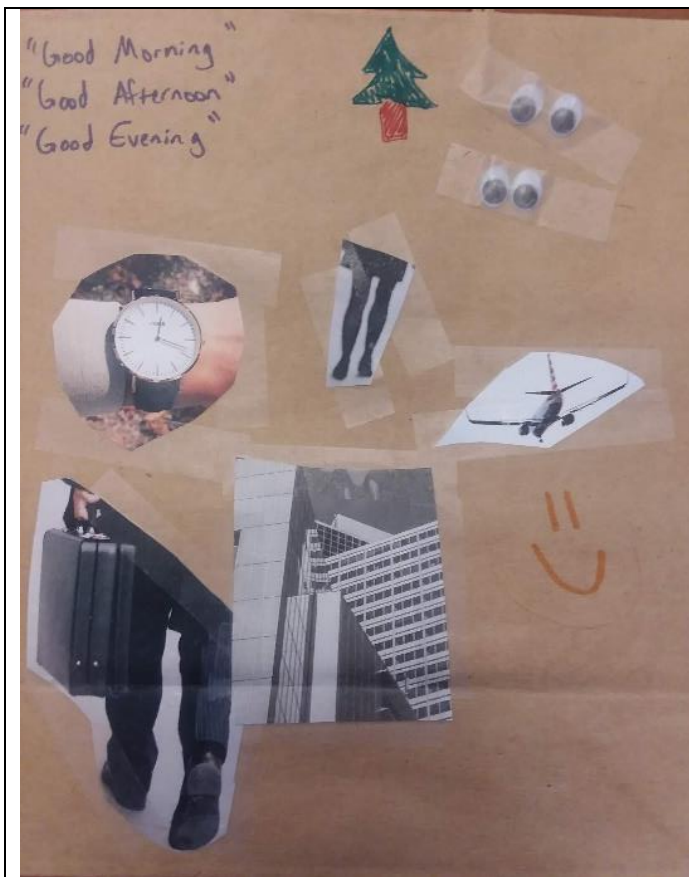
Um. I'm doing ok at pretending I think. I don't think people know the background I come

from when they meet me. They probably don't think I'm like the sorority girls who come from rich families, but I don't come off as totally poor or clueless either. I work really hard to um be like, professional.

This sense of playing the game and doing it reasonably well is what enables Emily to continue engaging in these cross-class interactions in business school.

Figure 4.2.

Front Image of an Engaging Emily Participant's Bag Portrait



Note. Front image of an Engaging Emily Participant's Bag Portrait.

Engaging Emily gained some of her self-efficacy earlier when she had spent time with her well-to-do aunt at her architecture firm. She was exposed to a white collar setting in a positive manner. She was taught white collar cultural norms through observation and

encouragement. Her confidence increased as she learned what was expected in business school and she had success communicating with cross-class others. While Engaging Emily did her best to play the game in business school, she experienced many challenges. As a low income, blue collar student she was challenged to balance work, school, and club activities, prepare sufficiently for cross-class interactions, hide her background, and dispel feelings of imposter syndrome.

The Story of Disengaging Dani

Growing up, Dani had salient negative cross-class experiences with middle/upper class white collar family members. Through these experiences, she was introduced to cultural class differences in ways that made her feel as though she did not belong. Perhaps due to her experiences growing up, Dani shies away from cross-class experiences in business school. This includes those in the classroom and those recommended for career success. When Dani did engage in cross-class interactions, they often did not go well, and they made her feel marginalized, further influencing her tendency to isolate herself.

Disengaging Dani is a second-generation business student. She comes from a low income and blue collar background. Her mother works in a call center, and her father is a security guard at a local high school. While growing up, Dani noticed that money was always on the family's minds, even hers. Her mother had a college degree in Information Technology but had stayed home with the kids until Dani was 7. It was then that her father was laid off from a car manufacturing plant. Times were tough. It was the Great Recession of 2008. It took nearly a year for him to find steady employment. In the meantime, her mom started to look for work. Since she had been out of work for so long, her technology skills were far behind what companies were

looking for. Because her father's unemployment payments were not enough to pay the rent, they moved in with Dani's aunt.

Aunt Lynn had plenty of room. She lived in a 4-bedroom house in a quiet neighborhood cul-de-sac with tall trees. The house and the landscaping were neat and tidy. Looking back, Dani says that it must have been a neighborhood with a Home Owner's Association. She says, "You know how rich people have standards. You need to do things a certain way or else it's not good enough." The houses were picture-perfect, establishing the expectation that everyone was perfect, or at least should strive to be.

Although living at Aunt Lynn's meant the family was saving money and had a roof over their heads, it was not a happy time. Describing Aunt Lynn, Dani said she made them feel guilty for living with her. She made comments about how much she was helping them and how much it was costing her. Dani said Aunt Lynn tried to teach her to be "professional . . . or, I guess, I don't want to say it but . . . uppity." Aunt Lynn was a successful realtor, and she said it was extremely important to always look your best – to wear expensive-looking clothes, to always wear makeup properly, and act with decorum. Dani could never live up to Aunt Lynn's standards. First, she did not have the right clothes. But she was also too shy and nervous to act in the way Aunt Lynn wanted her to – polite yet confident, or "uppity."

Dani was thrilled when both her parents found jobs and the family moved out of Aunt Lynn's house. Since then, they have not seen much of Aunt Lynn. Dani said it seemed they were not good enough for her, so her aunt did not want them around.

Going to college was never a part of Dani's plans. She had been working through high school, mowing lawns to help pay the bills at home, and she figured to keep working at the landscaping company after high school. Working full time, she could earn a decent wage and

help the family pay bills. Her parents, however, had different plans. They encouraged her to go to college. Obtaining a degree and a good job would ensure her a secure future. Dani's mother had once enrolled in college; but after having kids and being out of work for so long, it was difficult for her to get back into the job market. Her mom taught her how important it was to take care of herself. She told Dani to "never rely on anyone else financially." Her mother had struggled and wanted Dani to be set up for social mobility and professional success.

Dani ended up at Midwestern University since it was somewhat close to home. Unfortunately, it was not near enough to live at home. So Dani lived in the dormitory. Thus, she would not need a car. She walked to classes and ate meals in the residence hall cafeteria. She also found a job on campus cleaning several science laboratories.

Dani selected a business degree, thinking it would be the most direct path to a good-paying job and a secure career. Her first impressions of the business school were a mixture of awe and anxiety. She said:

When I first visited the business building, I was really impressed. It's HUGE and beautiful and so impressive. But, this also worried me. It sorta amped up the expectations for me as a student and I already didn't feel like I should be here. On the daily, I would literally examine my outfits to make sure I didn't look too poor to be here. I have stuff that is well . . . embarrassing . . . but I don't have much else or any money for clothes, so I try to only wear one piece of clothing at a time that is old. I don't look like I fit in in the business building like the sorority girls in their Lululemon leggings and Greek shirts, but I don't think I stick out either. I think I blend in. That's what I try to do.

When asked about her experience with the Career Pathways program and interactions in business school, Dani frowns. She doesn't recall any specific Career Pathways program. When pressed,

she recalls going to some career-related activities as part of a class early on in business school, but she only did it for points in the class. She said the events were awkward for her.

I mean, like on the regular, we were asked to dress up in either business-casual or business-professional clothing. I don't have much in the way of professional clothing.

Even just going to class each day, I analyzed what I was wearing. There's this place where you can get free business clothes. I did go in there but . . . you know . . . as a big girl not that much fit me and it was extra embarrassing. I'll never do that again.

Going to career events Dani was not only nervous about the clothes she was wearing, she did not know what to say to employers. Dani recalled:

they all seemed nice enough, but what do you talk about with someone so different from you? I think the teacher coached us beforehand, but I'm not fake. I'm just me. I can't act like someone else, like uppity, so I just stay quiet.

After class ended, Dani "pretty much forgot about it (career events)." Although the business school sent notices of career events weekly to all business students, Dani did not remember seeing them. She commented, "Maybe I got those emails, but honestly that kind of event just isn't on my radar. I don't have time to go to stuff like that with my work and school schedule."

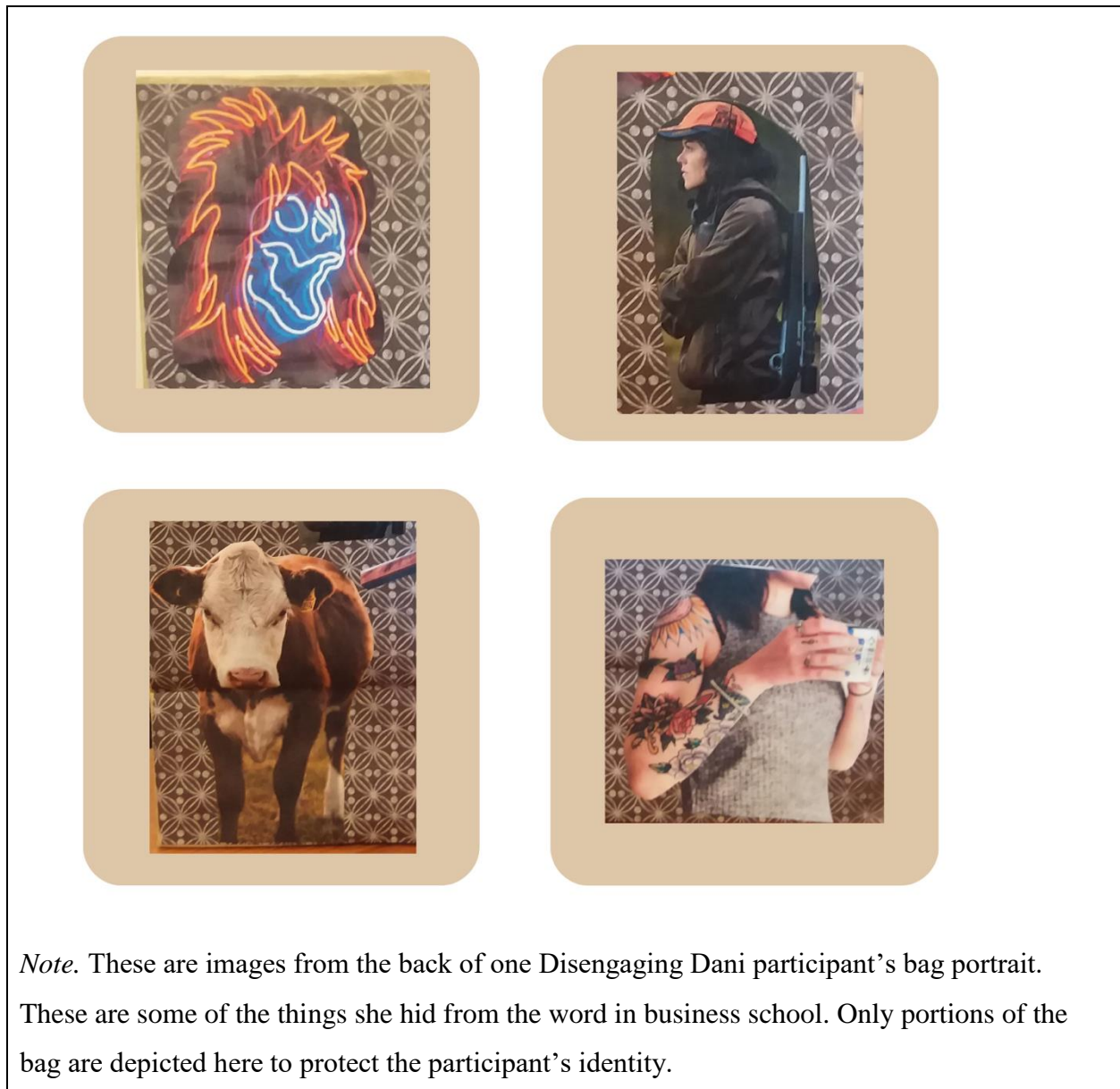
Balancing work and school was difficult for Dani. She worked 30 hours a week while attending school full time, usually taking about 15 credit hours. The recommended hours for students to hold down a job and still be successful in college is 10 to 19 hours (Dundes & Marx, 2006), so Dani was significantly overworked.

Not only does Dani shy away from recommended activities for career development, but she also feels disengaged from most faculty and staff in the business school. She thought it was "really hard to relate to them." She continued, "They (faculty) don't seem to have any clue of the

life I've lived." In class, there are discussions involving experiences she never enjoyed, such as vacations or traveling abroad. "I mean, I've never even left the county, let alone gone abroad," Dani said. "That doesn't make me a bad person . . . or like not good enough, but sometimes I feel like, kinda lost in class. Like, how am I even going to use all this information?" Dani has an easier time getting to know professors in her minor, Art. She describes her professors as "her people," easy to talk to, open, and "chill."

Figure 4.3.

The Real Me



Note. These are images from the back of one Disengaging Dani participant's bag portrait. These are some of the things she hid from the word in business school. Only portions of the bag are depicted here to protect the participant's identity.

Also significantly salient to Dani is the participation requirement in business classes. I can see her anxiety as she describes being called on in class to talk. She described being incredibly self-conscious and feared that she would not sound smart and that people would judge her harshly. She is a hard worker and gets good grades, but participating in class interchanges is

completely outside of her comfort level. I asked Dani if there are classes outside of the business school where she feels more comfortable. Dani smiled:

Absolutely. I love the art department. Everyone there is so chill. The teachers really care about you and make you feel comfortable. In my art classes, if I have a question I just ask. I would never do that in my business classes – people would think I was stupid.

I decided to dig a little deeper as I ask Dani what it is about the school's business professors that make them appear less open or less caring. Dani replied:

That's easy, they (business professors) are usually so professional and uptight. They seem to have such high standards that saying anything wrong is not ok. When I look at a lot of my business professors they just aren't my people. Most are nice and all and probably do want to help, but they, I dunno, just don't seem approachable.

This tendency to disengage from interactions with business faculty and career-related events with employers is a key experience of Disengaging Dani. Her discomfort in business school is starkly different from where she has found community on campus – in the art department.

Dani grew up feeling judged by family members who had more money than her family. This stuck with her and seemed to influence her lack of confidence in business school. When encountering cross-class interactions with faculty, staff, and employers in the business school, Dani tended to disengage, shying away from activities that would involve such exchanges. Dani is not an introvert by nature. She engages in communities where she feels comfortable. It's clear that in the business school her experience as a low income, blue collar student is not one of belonging and inclusion. Instead, she feels like an outsider trying to blend in and finish school without drawing attention to herself.

Thematic Findings

In this section, I present the thematic findings from the analysis of the data. The composite narratives of Engaging Emily and Disengaging Dani are continued throughout to demonstrate participants' collective experiences. Recall, of interest in this study, is defined as how participants described negotiating a white collar learning environment from their cultural and social class perspectives and in what ways they resisted and/or accommodated the training they received for future employment possibilities. The analysis of data resulted in three themes:

- Cross-Class Experiences Contributed to Dis/Engagement in Business School
- Dismissing the Institutionalized Career Pathways Program
- The Financial Stress of Self and Family Is Pervasive

Cross-class experiences were strong contributors to how participants engaged in business school. Those who made up the Engaging Emily composite had nurturing and supportive relationships with people from higher classes growing up. Consequently, they were relatively confident adapting to the business school culture when they needed to, although it was exhausting. Participants who were part of the Disengaging Dani composite, on the other hand, had experienced ridicule and exclusion from higher-class family members and peers growing up. This caused them to become cautious and distant in business school. Common among all participants was their purposeful identity work to fit in. They could not be themselves. They either performed to match the business school's cultural expectations or they tried to shrink into the background to be unnoticed.

Dismissing the institutionalized recommended program titled Career Pathways was a common trend among all participants. No one completed the entire program; they felt uncomfortable thinking about future corporate careers. Participants spoke of dismissing

program-related activities as irrelevant or inaccessible to them. Since they did not yet have a clear career direction, they were cautiously resistant toward most Career Pathways activities. Their impression was they should know what they wanted to do after graduation and should follow the Career Pathway activities in line with that goal. For instance, when attending a networking event, they believed the expectation was they should be able to communicate their career goal and make connections that would support that objective. With no career goal in mind, however, their engagement in Career Pathways felt futile. Furthermore, the purposeful identity work to fit in at such events was a deterrent to full engagement.

The financial stress of participants and their families was pervasive. Paying for daily living expenses such as food, gas, and school supplies created hardships that were not only a distraction but a barrier to full participation in business school. Also, family financial stress seemed to influence participants' future career decisions and engagement in business school.

Cross-Class Experiences Contributed to Dis/Engagement in Business School

At the heart of this study are the cross-class interactions participants experienced in business school, how they navigated them, and their decisions on how to behave and react. Clear patterns of cross-class experiences were indicated by the data. These experiences seemed to contribute to how participants engaged in business school.

Participants within the Engaging Emily composite tried to match their behavior with the expectations of cross-class others in business school. They had learned what those expectations were through nurturing cross-class interactions growing up. In business school, they also had generally positive interactions because they knew what to expect and how to fit in. Although some situations produced anxiety, they still tried to perform as expected. They did so, feeling as

if the performance was personally advantageous. They saw value in the capital they could build by developing relationships with those of a higher class.

Disengaging Dani participants, on the other hand, shied away from the prospect of cross-class interactions; instead, they chose to withdraw, trying not to bring attention to their social class difference. Disengaging Dani participants had been exposed to class differences while growing up, and the cross-class interactions had left them stigmatized. They had been made to feel inferior by family members and peers who they identified as higher class. These experiences left a mark on their sensibilities before they entered business school, where they learned to guard themselves against associating with people of various class backgrounds. In business school, as a result, they avoided participation in classes, the Career Pathways program, and all other similar activities with employers and faculty. When they did engage in cross-class interactions, it did not go well. Their fear of interacting was thus confirmed, resulting in further disengagement.

Both Engaging Emily and Disengaging Dani participants, therefore, entered into identity shuffling in business school. They could not fully be themselves for fear of being judged. Engaging Emily participants sought to camouflage their identity and worked hard to appear to fit in while Disengaging Dani participants kept their defenses up and sought to not be noticed. To not be oneself requires significant thought and performance. I use Gray and Kish-Gephart's (2013) term "class work" to describe the social class identity shuffling in which participants engaged. Next, I elaborate on these patterns of participants' experiences.

Engaging Emily participants remember their cross-class experiences growing up as relatively positive. For instance, one participant described receiving a scholarship to attend a Catholic private school for elementary and middle school. At this school, the majority of her peers were middle or upper class. It was overall a positive experience. She stated:

I didn't really feel out of place, maybe because I was a kid at the time, so I didn't know I was only there because of a scholarship. Also, my parents always made sure I had the right shoes and socks. Like Sperry's and Nike socks were the thing. The uniform we could get discounted so for the most part I never really felt out of place because of my (parent's) income level.

With some probing, the participant remembered some challenges, but she claimed they were not significant in her experience at the private school. She stated, "Kids made like jokes or something like that I didn't really understand at the time. It wasn't direct bullying but just low-key bullying." She knew people noticed she was different, but she did not take their mistreatment as a threat to her identity. With the perspective of time, this Engaging Emily participant said that "she learned what to say and what not to say at private school." She credited her private school experience growing up with how she adapted to business school.

I learned what the kids would look at me weird for saying or doing as a kid and what I should do. I learned to be observant of my surroundings and mold into them. That's helped me be more successful in the business school, I think.

In other words, prior experience of molding into a version of themselves that did not reveal their class status allowed participants in this category to have easier navigational experiences in business school. Being able to maneuver cross-class interactions with some confidence meant these participants were more comfortable engaging and participating in various programs and activities. Thus, they were successful in camouflaging their cultural orientation based on their class status to remain undetected in cross-class cultural settings.

Another Engaging Emily participant also had positive cross-class experiences growing up with extended family members. The participant described her experience as "blue collar" where

“children should be seen and not heard” and no one, not even teachers, “used proper greetings or even inquired how others were.” Her aunt, though, was vice president for one of the largest public accounting firms in the country. When in high school, the participant would sometimes visit her aunt’s office, job shadowing at the company. She described the office as “a really nice building” where everybody was always dressed professionally. She said she purposefully dressed “much nicer than normal.” When asked about the differences between blue collar and white collar culture, this Engaging Emily participant described the “overall rules as different.” In white collar workplaces, “people are treated like human beings . . . there is mutual respect. . . . When you treat people with respect, now it is returned. Dress and image are way more important. And people speak about things that matter.” She described this understanding of white collar culture as based on her experiences with her aunt and also what she observed and learned in business school. In other words, to fit in at home and in business school required class work (shifting her behavior) to fit the cultural expectations. Her behavior and ways of talking at her aunt’s office, for example, would not be appropriate at home. She knew the reverse also to be true.

In contrast, Disengaging Dani participants had salient negative cross-class memories from their childhood. These ranged from family interactions to experiences in school. With family, Disengaging Dani participants experienced judgment and criticism because of their social class. They were made to feel they were not good enough. One Disengaging Dani participant recalled a major shift in her extended family's interest in talking to and seeing her family when they began to have financial difficulties. She described her family as middle class when she was born. But when her mother was laid off and struggled to find another job, meeting their basic needs was a challenge. A significant health scare put her mother in the hospital. She recovered, but the family nearly went bankrupt because of the medical bills. The participant stated that it

would take a lifetime to pay them completely. During this time, her extended family “dropped them.” She began to get the impression they thought her family was lazy. In a roundabout way, they seemed to ask, “Why aren’t you working harder to make more money?” Further, the participant described her peers and teachers propagating negative stereotypes about low income people. She described kids and teachers indicating, “If you’re poor, you’re lazy.” Not only was the participant judged by family, but she also felt marginalized at school. She learned to protect herself from harm by putting her guard up. And, rather than seeking to fit the middle class, white collar expectations of some around her, she instead focused on the pride she felt with her hard-working, blue collar family who had to overcome so much hardship.

Another Disengaging Dani participant described extended family as assisting hers while they were homeless, but later feeling that they were “kind of like stabbing them in the back” at the same time. This Disengaging Dani participant lived with her mother and sister in a large metropolitan area. Her mother had a well-paying job at a local casino. However, it was at night, so she did not see the participant and her sister frequently. The mother would leave for work at 7 p.m., asking a neighbor in the apartment next door to keep an ear out lest the kids need anything. She would arrive home at 4 a.m., get a few hours of sleep, and then wake up so she could get the children ready for school. The job paid well, and the family was comfortable, but the participant described her mother as “torn” over not being there for her kids. She said her mom “gave up the money to be there physically and emotionally for us. She sacrificed a lot for us.” At first, moving to day-time shifts worked. They had to live on less, but they “were more like a normal family.” The participant stated, “Mom could help us with homework and we could actually do things together.” During the Great Recession, however, her mom was laid off. The casino did not have the same number of customers as before. It was a struggle to find another job that paid as well.

When the family could not pay the rent and were evicted, they reached out to other family members for help. An aunt volunteered to take them in. While they now had a stable living situation, the participant described living with her aunt as “awful.” She made them feel guilty for no longer being self-reliant. The participant said, “It was like she wanted a trophy every fucking day for helpin’ us out. Isn’t that what family is just supposed to do?” The aunt criticized the ways the family behaved and tried to teach them “the right way to act.” The participant said her aunt taught them:

...to look like you got money by always dressing nice before you leave the house. And she would always correct how we talked. It was so annoying. I never felt good enough . . . she would be like hey you need new clothes and I’d be like no because I don’t want you to spend money on that and feel like I owe you. So for a long time, I always felt like I owed my aunt for like everything and I was like at a point out where I was like I can’t, I can’t have that on my shoulders and be thinking about it 24/7.

In other words, the participant never felt she could meet her aunt’s white collar standards. Her class work attempts to accommodate her benefactor were not good enough. She was ostracized for being herself and shamed into feeling guilt for her living situation. She was just a kid trying to find her place in the world. When her mom finally obtained a job, they would move out which would provide the participant with a sense of relief at having things “back to normal.” Soon though, her mother would again lose her job, and they would go back to her aunt’s home to live. This back-and-forth existence occurred for most of this participant’s childhood. It was no wonder she felt so defensive in business school – protecting herself from being judged or mistreated for her class status.

The stark contrast between Engaging Emily and Disengaging Dani participant cross-class experiences contributed to their differences in perceiving and responding to cross-class interactions in business school. Neither could be themselves. They had to engage in class work constantly. Engaging Emily participants camouflaged themselves to fit into what was expected of them. They could adapt because they had been encouraged and rewarded for it in the past. They felt confident in hiding their class background and cultural ways of being. This was not without anxiety though because they knew if they were unsuccessful when adapting, they would experience the same stigmatization as Disengaging Dani participants. In contrast to Engaging Emily participants, Disengaging Dani participants avoided cross-class interactions where their social class might be discovered. Their experiences with affluent others taught them that they would be treated as inferior or lazy. Therefore, protecting themselves from such interactions seemed a reasonable defense mechanism. Neither Engaging Emily nor Disengaging Dani participants could fully be themselves in business school. Their ways of navigating were informed by their experiences growing up.

In business school, participants were taught explicitly and implicitly that certain behaviors and actions were valued. Guidelines came from the Career Pathways program, classroom expectations, and social interactions including visual cues. For instance, students were strongly encouraged to network with employers, join student organizations related to their career interests, and participate frequently in class. Standards of professional dress were explicitly described and demonstrated through the attire of business faculty and professional visitors. These expectations made an impression on all participants. Engaging Emily participants spoke of wanting to engage in as many of the recommended events and behaviors as possible. For instance, Engaging Emily participants were involved in career-related student organizations such

as the Management Student Association (MSA), Future Latina Leaders Organization (FLLO), and the Finance Student Association (FSA). One Engaging Emily participant said she learned from the Career Pathways class that she should take advantage of club networking opportunities and she would seek out conversations with the employer guest-speakers. She recalled it was “nerve-racking,” but she felt it was an important scholastic duty. She remembered learning in the Career Pathways class that if she interacted with employers, she would be more likely to find an internship and job after graduation. Another Engaging Emily participant described joining a student organization for travel experiences. She hoped she could obtain a scholarship to embark on the FSA trip to visit the New York Stock Exchange. Despite her fear of flying, she described the opportunity as “awesome” and something she “never thought she would have the chance to do.” In other words, participants saw the cross-class interactions with employers as opportunities. They felt compelled to meet those expectations, although it was not a comfortable experience because they struggled to camouflage their identity and perform to meet expectations.

In one instance, an Engaging Emily participant recalled going to a networking event as part of the Career Pathways class. Describing the event, she said that pairs of students stood at high-top cocktail tables and talked with employers. After a few minutes, the students were told to rotate and talk to someone new. I asked her how it felt to be at the event. She said:

The other students seemed to know a lot about the different companies that were there. I don’t have experience with companies, so I didn’t have much to say or to ask about. It was not a bad experience. It was good because I got to see what it was like to go to a networking event. I just tried to blend or mold in, but I didn’t say much.

Here, the participant acknowledged her background was different from her middle class peers, and this influenced their different behavior. She knew she was “molding” to fit their

expectations, although not at the level where she seamlessly felt comfortable. While the participant described herself as an outsider compared to some of her peers who seemed to behave more comfortably, her mindset was positive. She saw herself as “an observer.” She went and she enjoyed it, even though she recognized she did not know what to discuss with employers.

Another Engaging Emily participant described attending a few business school-sponsored events for extra credit. She described it “as helpful to hear from people out there working in the field” and she seemed to take their advice to heart. She said:

They really emphasized having good public speaking skills, using PowerPoint, and all that. I hate public speaking so that really stuck with me. Now I know it’s an important skill to have. I mean, I speak up in class but I will try a bit harder when I have a presentation. Because I know I need to get used to it.

In other words, the participant recognized the skills she needed to be successful in her future profession. This required her to step out of her comfort zone and engage in some risk-taking. She may have felt uncomfortable speaking up in cross-class situations, but the presenter stressed that comfort with such situations would be necessary for her success. Like the other Engaging Emily participant, she described the event as a positive and helpful experience. When asked if she did any networking at the event or if she talked with employers on other occasions, she said, “No, I don’t talk to them. It’s weird . . . um . . . what would I say?” followed by laughter. So, while this participant did value the learning she could gain from employer presenters, she preferred to maintain her passivity. She felt it was awkward to network with employers at an event or a table unless there was a purpose, such as looking for an internship or a full-time job. She had already decided not to apply for an internship in college because she held a part-time job working for a local firm helping small businesses with their marketing plans. She recalled that professors

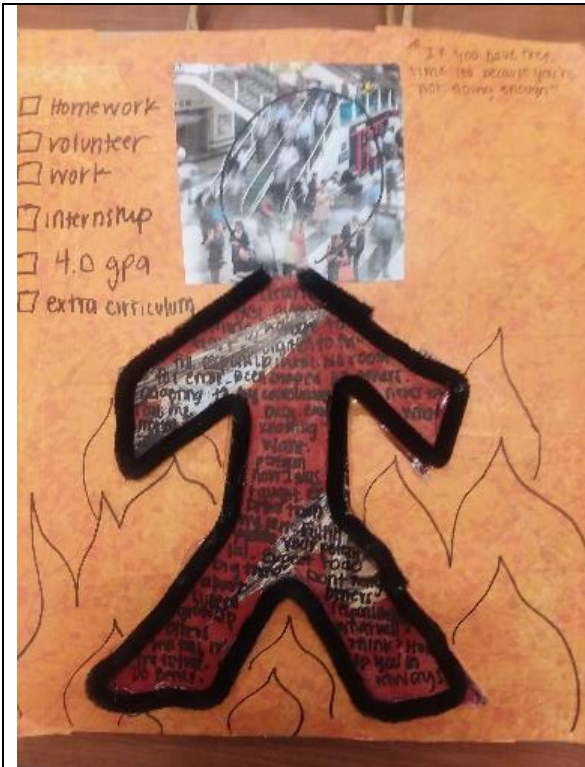
encouraged her to acquire an internship because it would give her more exposure, but she said she “didn’t really see the point.” She explained, “A part-time job doing the same work shows longevity and commitment to an organization.” This, perhaps, is a value developed from her blue collar, low income background. While exposure to many different opportunities with different well-known companies is valued in business school, this participant remained committed to one firm. For many in her community, having financial security was a “pipe dream.” But one way to secure stability was to show commitment to one company in the hope that the company would return the obligation. Also, many in her community were in professions with unions, where they were rewarded for longevity with bonus pay. So, although this Engaging Emily participant did not participate in all the ways the business school recommended, she did engage to some degree with positive purpose and result. She approached the cross-class interactions with interest and generally saw value in them.

In business classes, the Engaging Emily participants strived to meet professors’ expectations like contributing to class discussions, asking and answering questions. They described their rationale in meeting those expectations – a good grade and a professor pleased with their progress. Even when experiencing immense anxiety, they were always prepared to answer professor queries. One participant felt encouraged and rewarded socially in addition to receiving class-participation points. However, she also observed that her “peers and people around (her) speak so intelligently.” She felt that her verbal delivery, by contrast, was deficient. She knew the class material through and through, but she was rarely happy with the way she expressed herself. This only served to increase her anxiety when participating in class.

Another Engaging Emily participant described attempts to meet expectations in business school. On the front of her bag portrait, she crafted a person out of pipe cleaners to show how her body and mind were always consumed with performing for the professors (see Figure 4.4).

Figure 4.4.

Molding and On Fire



Note. This is the front of an Engaging Emily participant's bag portrait

Describing her bag, she commented, "It's like it's a mold. I've always tried to really mold into my surroundings, into whatever people really want me to be, based on like my surroundings. So like around my friends back home I would be different than I was in school." In other words, this Engaging Emily participant was mindful of her performance to meet social expectations. Inside the pipe cleaner figure, she wrote some of the phrases that came to her during the guided bag portrait creation session. Phrases such as "it's overwhelming," "you don't really know where to start," "no room for error," "shaped by others, adapt to your surroundings," "you're never really

you,” “always feel busy,” “fulfill your potential . . . fulfill their potential,” and “always do better.” These phrases illustrate the participant’s experience trying to fit the expectations of business school. She describes constant pressure to do all the right things, even before figuring out just what those expectations are. She also experiences a sense of danger – that if she does not adapt, she will be denigrated, put down, and marginalized for who she really is. The commitment she and her family have made to college and their hopes for her future depends on her ability to do all the right things. This constant work to camouflage and conform created what she described as a “fire” or “heat” within her. In other words, constant, burning anxiety.

I asked participants what they hide from the world as low income, blue collar students. In other words, when they are “playing the game,” what are they hiding? All participants described hiding their backgrounds except with people they felt close to. For instance, one Engaging Emily participant from a large city would let people assume she was from a wealthier part of town rather than what she describes as “the ghetto.” Another participant described her teachers and classmates as not knowing who she *really* was. She said:

People don’t know who I really am. They don’t know my hobbies. They would probably judge me for them, maybe even think badly of me. . . . I like to shoot guns. I’m actually really, really good at it. But with the climate today, especially on campus, you can’t let professors know that’s something you’re into. It’s normal back home. In fact, it would be weird if you didn’t know how to shoot a gun where I’m from. But, here, you have to hide it.

In this quote, the participant is describing how she hides important parts of her identity from people she met in business school. If she reveals the activities she enjoys, she fears this could lead to danger. It is frustrating for her because shooting guns is culturally a common hobby

where she was, raised and she is skilled and proud of her marksmanship. It is challenging for students like her to build close relationships in business school when they are worried they will be negatively judged for their hobbies. Unlike people from higher-class backgrounds who are more likely to value similar cultural activities, participants could not talk about their own. In fact, finding common ground with local interests such as the university football and basketball team were suggested in the Career Pathways materials. Participants, though, feel this suggestion is only helpful for students who share similar interests with visiting employers and other professionals.

The Engaging Emily participants seemed to view the idea of concealing their backgrounds as necessary. Thus, they did not feel comfortable interacting in class or attending career events. Yet they did so anyway, camouflaging themselves and putting on a positive facade. The Engaging Emily participants seemed to find personal value in cross-class interactions. Their experiences hiding their background, camouflaging, and interacting in business school have been mostly positive thus far. They seem to be managing well.

But the Disengaging Dani participants described a different experience in business school. They reported having primarily negative associations with business school -- its classes, faculty, and Career Pathway-associated programs and activities. Their *entire* college experience may not have been negative, but their associations with the business school were.

One Disengaging Dani participant explained that from her perspective, there was a difference in behavior between the faculty in the business school and that of other faculty on campus who were more “like her.” In her art classes, for example, her professors were “real, laid back . . . you can tell them when you don’t understand.” They (art teachers) did not make it a “big deal” and they seemed to “actually want to help.” In other words, this participant felt

connected with the art faculty. She felt safe, able to make mistakes, and admit when she needed help. She described her art teachers as “sorta more like lower class because they didn’t have to wear suits and talk all professional.” The more casual attire and informal teaching style of the art faculty seemed to facilitate an open and affirming atmosphere for the participant. In contrast, her experience in business school was illustrated by her phrase, “no one cares.” She did not feel a sense of belonging or support. She described business school professors as “real, I don’t wanna say it, but, uppity. More uptight and professional. And you really aren’t supposed to get things wrong.” This perception echoed her well-to-do aunt’s messaging. Being perfect and precise was important and this participant did not feel she could measure up. The use of words like “uptight” and “professional” indicated there was little acceptance for those who did not meet expectations. The participant went on to explain that there was an expectation for business students to participate in class and she “never, ever, does that.” She stated, “I’m the type of person where if I have a question I’ll let you know. Otherwise, I want to just sit here and be me.” In other words, she was aware participation was highly valued, but she was not going to meet that expectation. It was outside of her character and she felt frustrated that being herself was not acceptable. She emphasized that not participating in class was not about not knowing the answers. She just did not want to be forced into participating. With visible anger, she described one business school professor who would constantly call on her:

I’m not a person who likes to talk like I just . . . especially in a classroom full of people I’d just rather listen to you. I’ll write some stuff down . . . give me the test and I’ll let you know if I’ve got it or not. And he was like . . . he likes to pick on people. And so he would pick on me a lot to try to make me talk and I’m just like, No! Just leave me alone. If I didn’t talk last time why the hell would I talk now?

In this recollection, the participant felt singled out by the professor. The method of calling on students to encourage participation had the opposite effect on her. It contributed to her attempts to protect herself from ridicule. Whereas she felt comfortable in art classes, asking questions and participating in discussions, in business classes she was reminded of past experiences resulting in shame and embarrassment. She, therefore, protected herself by disengaging. Like white collar organizations, the business school culture valued individual participation. This was not something Disengaging Dani felt comfortable with in the business school context. She did not try to meet these expectations but instead disentangled herself from such interactions. This created frustration and further anxiety because Disengaging Dani cared about her grades. She studied and prepared for class, but experienced enormous anxiety at the prospect of speaking up. She preferred to stay quiet and struggled with knowing this would be a detriment to her grade.

Anxiety over class discussions manifested itself for another Disengaging Dani participant who worried she would be judged for her voice. She expressed apprehension that she would sound dumb or pronounce a word incorrectly. She stated:

I feel like I analyze what I'm going to say and the words I'm going to use. I feel stupid and like people will judge me. The other students sound so smart with the words they use.

So, I hardly ever talk in class. I just want to be the girl in the back who gets by.

It would take this Disengaging Dani participant time to motivate herself and prepare to speak by carefully selecting the words she wanted to use. If she did speak, she felt self-conscious and judged. This fear was similar to one of the Engaging Emily participants, the difference being her decision to close off communication and distance herself from interactions where she would need to hide her background. In contrast, the Engaging Emily participant who described similar

word-choice anxiety masked her fear through a different strategy. Instead, she participated and camouflaged her anxiety by forcing herself to perform in the way she was expected.

While Engaging Emily participants interacted to some degree with employers in business school by attending career events, Disengaging Dani participants did not. When asked about this, Disengaging Dani participants described not networking with employers or alumni and not attending career development events. Initially, they had no clear reason. They recalled being told in class they should network with employers, acquire a mentor, and engage in other career-related activities, but they just “didn’t do it.” With further discussion, participants explained they worked a lot. They struggled to pay bills, buy food, and send money home to help family members. One Disengaging Dani participant said, “Extra things like those employer events just aren’t a priority. Anyway, what would I talk about? What would I wear?” In other words, the “extra” Career Pathways activities promoted by the business school were perceived as superfluous. In addition to not valuing Career Pathways activities, engagement and appearance were barriers. The participant dismissed activities where she would have to put herself in cross-class situations by choice.

The participant went on to describe how she analyzed her appearance every morning if she was coming to business school. Pointing to mirrors on the front of her bag portrait she said:

This is like the mirror I see every day. When I have to like see if I look all right to go to school because I feel like I look poor all the time. So like, you know, I make sure I don't have a shirt on that I've had since middle school that looks super worn out. Like a hobo. And I do have clothes like that. I have shoes like that. I have jackets like that. So just making sure I try not to wear more than one of those a day to try to look just more presentable in front of people.

This example illustrates the anxiety many participants experienced over their appearance in business school. She was conscious that her attire was unlike that of her peers, and she was fearful of their judgment. To alleviate some of her apprehension, she carefully selected her clothing. When I asked about attending an employer event where the attire was business-casual or business-professional, she paused and said, “It’s embarrassing, you know, I don’t even feel comfortable going to class. I definitely don’t have clothes to wear to something like that. Anyway, those events, they just really aren’t my thing.” In other words, the cultural expectations for attire were one barrier of engagement for this participant. Just the thought of attending an event where more formal attire was expected reminded the participant she did not fit in. To attend and feel uncomfortable in her body would be distressing, not to mention her apprehension at talking to people she perceived as from a higher class.

For Disengaging Dani participants, interest in attending Career Pathways activities and business school classroom discussions were lower compared to Engaging Emily participants. These activities were not on their radar. It was assumed nothing would result in anything positive or helpful to them. For them, business school was synonymous with classism – a place to minimize attention to themselves, and a space to avoid experiencing class-based macroaggressions.

Disengaging Dani participants described their struggles to find a job after graduation. They were both seniors at the time of this study and anxious about not yet having acquired employment. Many of their peers had secured a job already. While the business school Career Pathways program recommends meeting with a career coach early on in college, Disengaging Dani participants did not do so until the final semester of their senior year. Both described the interaction as not just unhelpful, but it made them even more anxious about their job search. One

participant recalled the coach “not getting her situation.” She desired to live close to family which meant she would be disregarding higher-paid opportunities in larger cities. She interpreted the coach as viewing this as a “bad choice.” In other words, the participant felt judged for her desire to prioritize family over career opportunities. This may not have been the intent of the career coach, but it was perceived in this way. Another Disengaging Dani participant left her career-coaching meeting more anxious than before. She said, “[The coach] tore up my resume . . . and she told me to apply for 50 jobs by next week.” She felt defeated, overwhelmed, and without direction on how to move forward. She did not know what type of work she wanted to do, let alone how to find and apply for 50 job postings. The Career Pathways program is designed to guide students through job preparation and the search process so that their last semester before graduation goes smoothly. Those students who faced the same problems as the participant, however, do not feel welcome or able to participate, leaving them struggling at the culmination of their degree program and uncertain of the future.

In summary, Disengaging Dani participants’ previous experiences with negative cross-class experiences informed their lack of engagement in business school. Thus, they expected to be stereotyped or judged for their class status, just as they had been while growing up. Disengaging Dani participants tended to withdraw from cross-class interactions in business school. Their avoidance did not seem intentional. It was just that Career Pathways activities came across as irrelevant. Moreover, interactions with faculty and staff in business school were not positive. Teachers seemed uncaring and overly pushy. For those reasons, it was hard for Disengaging Dani participants to relate to business school faculty – and they were ever-conscious of hiding their social class.

The participants' perceived harm might befall them within the cross-class culture of the school and therefore they responded accordingly. Self-preservation for Engaging Emily participants involved camouflaging their background and trying to be what was expected of all business students. This meant trying to take on the white collar, middle class cultural ways of being. On the other hand, Disengaging Dani participants protected themselves through the avoidance of cross-class interactions including class participation. Both Engaging Emily and Disengaging Dani participants knew that if they did not engage in identity shuffling to hide their true selves, they would be considered lazy and inferior.

Dismissing the Institutionalized Career Pathways Program

The business school provided a four-year guide to facilitate student success in college and their future careers. It was called the Career Pathways program. Its purpose was to familiarize students with the process of exploring careers, gaining relevant experience and advice, and applying for jobs. There was a list of recommended activities to complete such as engaging with student organizations, working with an executive mentor, job shadowing, interning, and attending networking events. When asked if participants engaged in the program, all dismissed the guidance at some level and the corporate careers to which the path inevitably led. Participants were aware of the different career-related activities as something they were "supposed to do." However, such participation was tentative and non-consistent. Engaging Emily participants attended a few events, but only because they received class credit for going. Disengaging Dani participants attended only one activity and that was at the end of their academic career. Participants did not intentionally reject the program. To them, it was not something with which they anticipated success. Besides, all such events would require significant identity shuffling to prepare and perform in ways unfamiliar and uncomfortable for

participants. This class work (Gray & Kish-Gephart, 2013) is, actually *identity work* to fit into the middle class, white collar business school culture from the lower class, blue collar culture to which participants were accustomed. The necessity of engaging in class work at Career Pathways events was a barrier for participants. Furthermore, they were not interested in corporate careers, which seemed to be the primary emphasis of the program. Participants anticipated having to engage in significant class work if they worked for a large corporation. This class work was viewed with apprehension by Engaging Emily participants who had succumbed to corporate careers as their only career option and were dreading the significant identity changes to come. Disengaging Dani participants, though, rejected corporate careers altogether and were unsure of what the alternatives were.

Participants described a vague awareness of the activities in the Career Pathways program. This was despite evidence from the business school that all students, including participants, received weekly invitations to engage in Career Pathways events. In addition, academic advisors described discussing the program with business students during their annual enrollment meeting to remind students of the career-related activities they should be attending that year. When I showed participants the Career Pathways program handout from the business school, there were varying degrees of familiarity ranging from “completely unaware” to “aware but not interested.” One Engaging Emily participant said, “I guess that’s a thing” and another commented, “Um . . . yeah some of these things look familiar but I didn’t know there was a whole, like, list.” A Disengaging Dani participant said, “I’ve never seen this before” and another stated, “Yeah, I did the things like meet with my advisor, so I could enroll in classes.” It was surprising that a program that seemed to be so integral to the experience of business students would be something of which they were hardly aware. Exploring the issue more deeply, I began

to understand that while participants may not have known about the Career Pathways program as an entire guide, they *were* acquainted with most of the recommended activities and events. As I went through the list with each participant, they signaled a familiarity with the line items, including executive mentors, networking events, mock interviews, and internships. They acknowledged these types of events were activities they were expected to engage in. One participant described the list as “those things all business students are supposed to do.” Another said, “We’re all supposed to do internship, but I didn’t do that.” Participants were aware of the expectations that they *should* engage in the different activities in the Career Pathways program; yet, they seemed to consistently avoid such responsibilities.

There seemed to be barriers to participation in the Career Pathways program activities including class work performance and lack of relevance. As described in the first theme, participants engaged in different types of class work in business school. Engaging Emily participants worked to camouflage their true identity by engaging in ways they knew were expected of them. The effort to change one’s identity can be exhausting, but the Engaging Emily participants saw value in doing so. One participant joined two clubs and attended a networking event for class credit. Another attended to two career-related lectures for extra credit. With roughly four career-related activities recommended each year, this level of engagement in the program seems quite low. Disengaging Dani participants, on the other hand, shied away from nearly all Career Pathways program activities. Only in the last semester of their senior year did each Disengaging Dani participant engage in one recommended activity – a career coaching session. No participants followed the Career Pathways program through its entirety. Here, it should be noted that this study does not seek to compare participants’ engagement with that of other business students. Rather, it intends to examine ways in which participants navigated

business school, including their participation in signature programs. It is unknown how many students engage in the entire Career Pathways program; this was not the purpose. Instead, this study concerns itself with *how* participants experienced business school from their social class lens. It is evident from the data that the study's participants were not drawn to the program. They were neither excited about it, nor were they motivated to pursue it fully.

Participants perceived the Career Pathway program activities as irrelevant because they did not know what they wanted to do after graduation. None had a job, career, or company in mind. To illustrate, one Engaging Emily participant described why she did not go to networking events or talk to employers at their information kiosks in the building:

No, I don't talk to them. It's weird . . . um . . . what would I say?. . . Um, I guess it's just awkward because I don't have a purpose for talking to them. I'm not looking for a job or internship right now. I don't even know what type of job I even *want* to get.

This uncertain career direction was common among all participants and influenced their lack of participation in the Career Pathways program and associated activities. Participants were under the impression they should have a specific career plan in mind, and because they did not, they were wary of being judged negatively. Ironically, the Career Pathways program is designed to help students identify careers and jobs in which they are interested. Participants though described being "clueless" and "just kind of going along." If one step of the program was missed, participants feared they would be criticized by others for "not doing the right things." For instance, one participant stated:

I feel like because I didn't do an internship with one of the big companies I'm behind everyone else. I've worked in the same office all through college and juggled work with

school, which I think shows my work ethic, but it feels like it's not as valued as interning with a big name company. You know, interning is just what you're supposed to do.

This illustrates the judgment participants feared for not engaging in the activities planned by the business school. They were already highly aware of not fitting the cultural expectations in business school and shifted their identity to protect themselves from criticism. The impression that their middle class, white collar peers had their career plans all mapped out made participants self-conscious by comparison. Furthermore, participants' awareness that they were not doing "all the right things" made them uncomfortable. They sensed that they had no career direction and had not been following the recommended guidelines for career success. One participant, for example, described anxiety in going in for a resume review. She was embarrassed about her blue collar job as a janitor and, before that, a dishwasher. She knew she was "supposed to" get a part-time job related to her career interest in college but had not been able to do so. The fear that they would be judged for not participating in "the right things" seemed to push participants away from Career Pathways activities.

Besides, their work schedules prevented much engagement with the Career Pathways program and activities. Nearly all participants worked 30 or more hours per week in addition to attending classes and studying outside of class. One Disengaging Dani participant said, "If I'm not in class, I'm at work; and if I'm not at work or class, I'm sleeping. There's no time for anything extra." Another participant described having to skip classes and club meetings for work. Putting one more thing on their plate, even if it was supposed to be helpful to their careers, just was not feasible. Participants, therefore, missed out on many enriching activities that students who do not need to work have access to. One participant was in the first cohort of business students who were required to enroll in a career class where she learned many of the

skills taught in the Career Pathways program. She therefore was exposed to more training than other students. Still, she had not engaged in Career Pathways recommended activities outside of class requirements.

Where the Career Pathways program seemed to lead, however, was also a deterrent to participation. Since big corporations have the budget to actively recruit at universities and the people to send to events, they were the most prominent opportunities for employment from a student perspective. Large corporations sponsored the Career Pathways events and were present at networking events. The presence of large corporations on campus negatively influenced participant interest in the program. Engaging Emily participants thought they would end up working corporate even though they anticipated hating it. Disengaging Dani participants rejected corporate positions outright, but they were extremely anxious about what jobs they *could* work.

Engaging Emily participants anticipated that they would end up with a corporate job after college. Although they predicted they would dislike such a future, they thought getting the “big name” job would be deemed a success from the perspective of the business school. A corporate job seemed the most accessible because “they” were always at school promoting jobs, sponsoring events, and speaking to classes. One Engaging Emily participant described having no choice but to work in a corporate setting. She explained:

Those like big companies that they push you know I feel like that’s the stable choice to pick. And we sometimes have to think stability over what we want. A big company is kind of like the stable thing to do and like the smartest choice you can make. Rather than focusing on what you like and don't like or something . . . after graduation I kind of have to go big. Get that experience and then like maybe 10 years later I can get a job that I actually want.

For this Engaging Emily participant, there seemed to be little choice in working for a large corporation. Her personal interests were unimportant. Perhaps economically, working for a large corporation made sense. Such businesses offer more opportunities and salaries are higher. Therefore, her real interest – working closer to her community for a nonprofit organization – had to be set aside.

Such trepidation toward corporate careers seemed to come from a strong discomfort with performative expectations. For instance, one Engaging Emily participant scoffed at the types of clothing she would have to wear and the environment she would have to work in. She anticipated having to change nearly everything about her appearance. Comfort and practicality were important to this participant, perhaps influenced by her military experience and her family's law enforcement background. She said:

I prefer pants and I suck at walking in heels also cause I just don't do that ever. So that's something else I'm going to have to like get used to doing. What if there's an emergency and I have to run and I can't like . . . I dunno I can't like run in a skirt or heels. Like I need to be mobile. It's weird but it's something I think about. Especially with shoes.

The participant believed she would be expected to wear jewelry, carry a purse, and give up riding her motorcycle. These changes seemed to be finite. A given. She would have to change to fit in with the corporate persona. This might be fine with students who grew up with white collar parents and who likely saw their parents in clothing similar to what is expected in the corporate world. Such expectations are not likely to give them pause. For the participants, however, their customary attire had little in common with white collar workplaces. Changing everything about one's appearance is not something to look forward to doing.

While Engaging Emily participants planned to seek out a corporate career despite their disinterest, Disengaging Dani participants rejected the corporate path. Both Disengaging Dani participants were not interested in working for a large company. Neither knew what they wanted to do, but both were clear that a corporate career was nothing to consider. Anxious to find a job they would like, both Disengaging Dani participants sought help from a business school career coach in their last semester of college. This was the only Career Pathways activity for either one. Unfortunately, the experience was not positive. One Disengaging Dani participant described being overwhelmed by the feedback from the career coach.

She tore up my resume. It was covered in red marks. I had worked really hard to prepare my resume and it was terrible. . . . And she told me to find 50 jobs by next week. How the hell am I supposed to do that? I wouldn't even know where to start. . . . Plus I need to stay close to my mom and sister to help them out. And I don't even know what type of job I want. . . . I only know that I don't want to do sales.

The interaction with the career coach for this participant was demotivating and made her feel even more lost. Because she had not had any formal guidance up to this point, she was caught off guard by the feedback on her resume and the prospect of finding and applying for jobs. What she needed was help to identify what type of career would be a good fit for her. Another Disengaging Dani participant felt frustrated with her interaction with a career coach. She said she was told that if she was unwilling to move away from home, then the possibilities for finding a job in her field of interest would be significantly low. She felt pressured to expand her geographic search area and consider corporate opportunities despite her top priority – family.

Rejecting the Career Pathways program relates to a difference in what career success looks like. From participants' perspectives, a corporate career was the most highly promoted

destination at the end of their business-school journey. Participants, however, were not interested in corporate careers; the performative expectations made them uncomfortable. Engaging Emily participants were planning to seek out a corporate career not because they wanted to but because they felt there was no choice. They would just have to make themselves over, and they accepted this as inevitable. In contrast, Disengaging Dani participants dismissed corporate careers from their futures but were lost as to what types of positions they could seek.

In summary, ignoring the institutionalized Career Pathways program was a trend for all participants. This rejection included little to no participation in the program. Participants acknowledged they were “supposed to” attend Career Pathways activities but the class work performance they would have to engage in at the events proved an exhaustive barrier. Participants feared harsh judgment could be passed down from faculty for their lack of consistent engagement in expected activities. Finally, the corporate careers promoted in the business school were unappealing to participants due to the performative expectations required in corporate culture. Besides, participants desired to stay close to their families. Disengaging Dani participants were not interested in corporate opportunities at all, but Engaging Emily participants saw themselves in corporate jobs despite dreading the identity shuffling they knew would be necessary for success.

The Financial Stress of Self and Family is Pervasive

For participants, the financial stress of their own situations as well as those of their family was pervasive. Experiencing challenges from paying tuition to the daily struggles of buying food and gas, making rent, and purchasing class-related materials created psychological pressure for participants. Furthermore, the financial situation of family members was constantly on participants’ minds. Concern for their family’s well-being and the impact the cost of their college

education was having on their parents was stressful. This stress served to intensify pressure to succeed academically and to land a lucrative job after graduation so as not to waste the money their family was now contributing to help them through college—money their family did not have to begin with. In short, the participant's financial situation and that of their family influenced how they navigated business school and the career decisions they made.

Most institutions make available scholarships and grants to help low income students pay tuition. There is often an assumption that all low income students get their tuition paid for in this way, but this was only the case for two of the four participants. One Engaging Emily participant had a tuition waiver through the GI Bill for military veterans. Another Engaging Emily participant had a Pell grant and several scholarships that covered her tuition and about half of her living expenses. Both Disengaging Dani participants had neither scholarships nor grants. They both took out financial loans to pay for college. When student financial aid did not cover all of the tuition bills, their parents helped by taking out Parent Plus Loans.

For Disengaging Dani participants, the financial pressure created immense stress. They knew their families were already struggling to pay bills. The way the participants saw it, they were merely piling on more financial hardship for their parents to worry about. One Disengaging Dani participant's bag portrait included pictures of money burning (see Figure 4.5). It represented the fear that she would disappoint her family by not making the most of her college education, and the money they spent to help her out would be wasted. This participant had attended a private college for 2 years until her financial aid ran out. The tuition was nearly \$40,000 per year. After she dropped out she worked and lived with a family member for about 1 year until her mother talked her into finishing her degree at a more affordable university. The

business school tuition at the public university was just one quarter the cost of the private college, at about \$10,000 per year. Relatively speaking, this was a bargain.

Figure 4.5 Burning Money

Burning Money



After paying tuition, the financial struggles did not stop. There were basic daily needs participants struggled to pay for. One Disengaging Dani participant would check her bank account daily to see if she could buy food. “I literally live paycheck to paycheck. When I’m getting to the end of the week I hit up the dollar menu at McDonald’s. It’s not healthy but it gets me by.” For low income students, paying for basic life necessities not to mention school-related supplies, puts them under constant stress. Sometimes they have to prioritize school-related purchases over taking care of their personal needs. Describing this challenge, a participant explained:

I mean getting books is for one. I’m not saying that I didn’t have the money to get them but I’m saying sometimes it was hard for me to get books. Or it would be my last dime and I’d have to get a book and like well I can’t buy anything else now. No gas, or food, or maybe a bill would have to be late.

Making these financial trade-offs of everyday essentials was stressful. Not only were participants working significant hours balancing school with work, but their pay was not enough to make ends meet. From all participants' perspectives, it did not seem as if professors understood or acknowledged the financial challenges they faced. From books costing nearly \$300 to requirements to dress up for class presentations, participants felt their financial struggle was overlooked. All participants were required to dress in business professional clothing for class presentations and some class required events. If they did not, they would lose points. No participants had business casual or business professional clothing prior to business school and all reported acquiring such at the last minute. One Disengaging Dani participant said, "Like when they ask you to dress up sometimes like I'm just now getting more business type of wear. I don't have that much whereas you know the rich kids can just go buy whatever they need." It was lonely to feel as if they were the only ones struggling to meet attire requirements. When asked if participants ever used the free professional clothing closet on campus for business attire, none did. One Disengaging Dani participant said, "I could never ask for something like that. Like a free handout. I don't think I could even walk in there." It felt shameful to be perceived as low income for this participant. Growing up, she had heard messaging: "If you're poor, you're lazy," Thus, while in school, she would protect herself from further such accusations. For another example, an Engaging Emily participant described being embarrassed she had to wear the same business professional outfit four times in a row because it was all she had. She felt self-conscious that her peers noticed she did not have a variety to wear and were perhaps judging her. To try to hide her situation from as many people as possible she brought her business professional outfit each day and changed in the bathroom. Then right after class, she quickly changed back.

Daily attire was stressful for Disengaging Dani participants. They had been taught growing up that appearances were meaningful and they would be judged negatively if they did not meet middle class expectations. Having experienced such chastisement before, participants had their guard up. Describing how she wanted to make a good impression and pointing to tiny mirrors on the front of her bag portrait, one participant observed:

This is like the mirror I see every day. When I have to like see if I look all right to go to school because I feel like I look poor all the time. So like, you know, I make sure I don't have a shirt on that I've had since middle school that looks super worn out. Like a hobo. And I do have clothes like that. I have shoes like that. I have jackets like that. So just making sure I try not to wear more than one of those a day to try to look just more presentable in front of people.

The criticism this participant had endured served as a daily reminder. Before arriving for class, she prepared against expected ridicule. Participants had learned early on their self-presentations would be judged according to social class expectations. Participants knew that we communicate who we are with how we look, and others immediately judge whether our appearance is aligned with cultural expectations. Without the resources to meet the expectations of their wealthier peers, participants were self-conscious as if in preparation for ridicule.

In addition to personal financial challenges, there was worry about how their family was getting by. Participants with families from the lowest economic situation were trying to support themselves in school while sending money home to aid their families. For example, an Engaging Emily participant would get a call from her mother every few months asking to borrow money for food. The family would be down to eating peanut butter sandwiches every day. If she could, this participant would send money home. A Disengaging Dani participant worried whether her

mother was homeless because, in the past, she had often struggled just to hold on to a job and had endured a pattern of housing insecurity. The participant was often preoccupied with worry for her mother, not knowing where she was staying or how to reach her. Another Disengaging Dani participant worried about her family's financial situation. Her father was in poor health and sometimes would not fill prescriptions because of the expense. She felt guilty that her parents had taken out Parent Plus loans to help her with college and this could potentially have an impact on her father's health. These concerns for family relating to food insecurity, housing insecurity, and health care created stress for participants with which their wealthier counterparts did not have to contend. With a constant reminder their family was struggling, perhaps in part due to their being in college, participants experienced guilt. This no doubt influenced how they navigated their learning in college.

Participants' financial situations also seemed to influence career decisions. I expected participants to be interested in seeking employment anywhere they could get a well-paying job considering how much they discussed financial struggles. Most, however, said they wanted to stay relatively close to home. One Engaging Emily participant from a large Midwest City felt she would have enough employment options there. While she had been strongly encouraged by some large companies to apply for internships with them, hinting she was a "shoo-in," she did not follow up on their suggestions. And besides, she had no way to travel to the corporate headquarters in Boston and Dallas for interviews. She did not realize companies typically pay the interviewee's travel expenses. She was not sure that would have made a difference anyway. Similarly, transportation challenges came up for two other participants. One said that despite being a senior she had not applied for many jobs. She had no car, so interviews seemed impossible. She was too embarrassed to mention this to a recruiter and ask for a phone interview.

Another participant shared a car with her cousin since she didn't have one of her own. Thus, interviewing out of town "would be too complicated." The inability to travel is something wealthier counterparts may never struggle with, and recruiters may not recognize as a barrier. The social class stigma of being low income dissuaded participants from bringing up their travel concerns. Furthermore, they had little exposure to white collar careers and did not fully participate in the Career Pathways program, so their knowledge of the job-search process was incomplete.

For Disengaging Dani participants, living near family was important to ensure they were successfully managing. One participant's mother was experiencing housing insecurity as she was in and out of employment. The participant felt she needed to be in close proximity to her mother to help her if needed. Her goal was to get a good-paying job so she could help pay the tuition loans her mother had taken out and to help her mother become more financially stable. The other Disengaging Dani participant also wanted to stay near family. When we talked about jobs elsewhere potentially paying twice as much as she would earn in her small home town, she cited her parents' health reasons for staying close. She wanted to make sure her parents were taking care of themselves.

All participants experienced pervasive financial stress in business school. Not only did they have to make financial tradeoffs between essential living expenses for business school (books and professional clothing), participants experienced guilt over parents taking out loans to help pay their tuition. Furthermore, as participants considered job prospects after graduation, they explored fewer opportunities because of their lack of transportation. Most participants did not have a car or shared a car with a family member. Therefore, traveling out of town for a job interview was challenging. Opportunities that would require flying were also disregarded

because participants assumed they would be responsible for the travel expense. They did not realize companies typically pay for it. Finally, their family's financial insecurity contributed to participants staying close to home after graduation. This limited the types of opportunities available to them depending on the location of their family.

Discussion

This section is a discussion of the findings. I provide my interpretation of the findings as a researcher. Responses to the research questions, contributions to the literature, and implications are provided in Chapter 5.

Participants embodied a space between two worlds—the affluent, white collar world of business school and the low income, blue collar world at home. Each world had different social class contexts that reflected and fostered different norms, expectations, and understandings of what it meant to be accepted. Class work, or behaving appropriately within each social class context, is the condition of straddling between these two worlds. This section discusses participants' experiences, challenges, coping strategies, and what was lost and gained engaging in class work.

The affluent, white collar world of business school was unfamiliar and unwelcoming to participants. As low income, blue collar students, they doubted they belonged in business school. This was clear from the moment they walked on campus. The environment was unlike anything familiar, and they knew from experience they could not be entirely themselves. All participants, whether in the Disengaging Dani or Engaging Emily category, used a strategy to fit in. Disengaging Dani participants sought to hide from view. They avoided injecting themselves into situations requiring them to draw attention for fear their true class identity would be revealed. Engaging Emily participants, on the other hand, used a different strategy. They camouflaged

their social class identity and performed in ways unnatural to them; this was necessary in order to fit in.

Not only were participants' experiences in business school challenging, but their families' expectations for academic and financial success created significant pressure on them to succeed and get a well-paying job. There was an understanding that after graduation participants would support their families by helping them out of their difficult financial situations. Some participants were sending money home already. Furthermore, some parents had taken out loans they could not afford to help their child pay for college. Participants were committed to paying back those loans for their parents. Participants perceived that, unlike their more affluent peers, they needed to achieve academically and obtain a well-paying job, not just to take care of themselves but also to take care of their families. If they failed, they would not just be failing themselves but also their families.

Like many college students, participants had traditionally relied on parents for advice and support. Participants' families, however, did not understand the class-based challenges they were experiencing in college. They had little knowledge of what it was like navigating between two different social class contexts. Therefore, participants' support systems were unable to empathize and provide guidance. The condition of navigating this unfamiliar environment combined with the pressure to make the expense worthwhile financially to pay back the loans and support their family was like a pressure cooker. Significant worry, diagnosed anxiety, and feeling like there was "a fire" beneath them were ways in which participants expressed the combination of needing to succeed in business school and the commitment they had to support their family afterward.

The space between these worlds – the affluent, white collar business school and their low income, blue collar home life – was where participants existed. Planning a strategy to navigate

business school was a process where participants could have used some guidance. Participants knew it was hostile territory, where they would be judged negatively if their identity was revealed. The trusted advisors participants normally would have relied upon did not understand the world they were trying to navigate. Furthermore, participants hesitated to indicate to their families they were struggling because there was such significant pressure for them to succeed. To suggest such troubles to their families would worry them, and the advice they did receive when they shared their anxieties was not helpful.

Most college students are challenged by the new culture and living situation away from home. Business schools, like universities in general, have norms and discourses different from high school. Adjusting to the environment is something students must confront – understanding new terminology, learning study skills, managing time, and learning to function more independently than ever before.

Participants were further tested by the navigation through social class cultural differences that business school would demand. Like many low income people, participants embodied a social class norm of interdependence, adjusting to others' needs, and making choices based on group or community goals. For instance, participants used phrases such as "I'm doing this for my family," "I want to give back to my community," and "I need to be there for my family now and in the future." A value for interdependence develops in part when one grows up powerless in an environment with scarce resources and little status. There is, therefore, a need for individuals to adjust to their environment, develop an awareness of their social position, and rely on each other consistently. Participants spoke of their more affluent peers as independent in their decision making. For instance, when choosing where to work, their peers' decisions seemed to be based on individual desires. Participants, on the other hand, prioritized their family situation when

making career decisions. Their peers followed an independent narrative that involved forging one's path and valuing autonomy. This independent cultural norm often comes from the financial privilege to pursue one's desires, not needing to rely on others to achieve goals. Participants believed that their interdependent cultural ways of being were not understood by their peers or business career coaches. Participants felt they were expected by the school to make individualized decisions in line with independent cultural norms. This was unfamiliar, given their interdependent cultural norms.

Participants interpreted business school culture as different from their way of relating to others. Their ways of fitting in and understanding the world no longer applied while in a business model. Participants' primary value system of interdependence and the business school's primary cultural value of independence created misaligned cultural norms. While participants did not explicitly recognize this, they described frustration and anxiety with many of the business school elements that were grounded in value for independence. They wanted to adapt to school and be looked upon as a good student, but they were unprepared to act in the expected independent way. For instance, the business school's independent cultural norms valued influencing others, expressing one's personal viewpoint, and advocating for one's personal interests. One key challenge was how business educators structured their courses to allocate a key grading component as the verbal expression in class of one's thoughts and ideas – i.e., participating in class discussions or public dialogues with the lecturer. The social desirability to meet the expectations of business faculty created anxiety among participants. To cope, Engaging Emily participants over-prepared through taking copious notes, anticipating what might be asked, and rehearsing their response and how they would say it. This preparation was intended to help participants pass as "individualistic." Although they spent a lot of time studying, participants

interpreted their performance to be less desirable than that of their more affluent peers. Participants spoke of “sounding dumb,” “unintelligent,” and “tripping over their words.” The Engaging Emily participants’ efforts to meet participation expectations thus never felt successful. By contrast, Disengaging Dani participants ignored the individualistic norms of the business school. Their prior experiences had taught them they would fail to meet the standards of affluence. For instance, one Disengaging Dani participant spoke of her “uppity” aunt trying to “get her to act right” and never being able to meet her expectations. As a result, Disengaging Dani participants protected themselves by stepping back from the fray. They resisted the social desirability to fit into the cultural norms of the school’s environment. In other words, Disengaging Dani participants cognitively knew what was expected, but they resisted changing their behavior to meet individualistic cultural norms. The participants were frustrated that by “being themselves,” they would receive a lower grade in class. But they were determined not to “fake it.” With the academic pressure to succeed, surrendering a portion of their grade was anxiety-inducing. In sum, participants, whether Engaging Emily or Disengaging Dani, were challenged by this expectation for an independent model of self.

Additionally, there were the business school materials that promoted the idea students can and should pave their own path. Business schools generally have become well-resourced and organized in providing opportunities for students to explore careers, build skills helpful for finding a job, and network with companies to determine what might be a good fit for their personal goals and interests. Still, students must choose to engage. Students were expected to reflect on and follow their interests. Participants believed their peers participated in the career preparatory programming and found it helpful. Participants, however, interpreted the programming as not accommodating their positions as low income, blue collar students with

interdependent models of self. In other words, participants did not perceive that the programming took into consideration their diversity or that the activities would be spaces where they would belong. Some participants indicated they did not attend career preparatory events because they lacked the attire to attend and could not afford to purchase expensive new clothing anyway. Even the clothing participants wore to class in business school was carefully selected each morning to reduce embarrassment. Participants were unsure of what they would say or do at the career preparatory activities. They had no experience that would provide them context as to what would happen at such events. Furthermore, participants did not perceive there would be “people like them” – business educators or professionals who came from similar backgrounds to their own. So while there were ample resources to aid business students in their career success, they were not constructed in a manner inclusive of participants’ interdependent cultural norms.

Participants’ experiences up until university had been in a culture in which interdependence helped them survive. One participant spoke of situations where family members traded skills to get by. Her father would fix their uncle's car and the uncle would reciprocate by trimming trees at her house. Growing up, participants did not have choices to make for themselves. Regardless of their interests, there was no money to pay for sports uniforms, travel to games, or musical instruments. Instead, spending time with friends and family in less organized ways was typical. What participants found was that through their cultural ways of being, they had learned to be useful growing up and were no longer helpful in an environment that valued independence. In other words, interdependent norms and independent norms are neither good nor bad; rather, they are socially desirable in different situations.

In the individualistic culture of business school, decisions are expected to be made from a personal perspective. The business school website, pamphlets, and other materials sent the

message that students should shape their education and careers. In the interdependent culture common to participants, decisions were made not solely out of personal choice, but with the situation of key family members in mind. In other words, interdependent cultural norms place a priority on group goals. For instance, participants made employment choices based on their family's situation. They primarily sought to work near their family so they could assist them personally and financially. One Disengaging Dani participant said, "I need to live near mom and dad. They need me." Another said, "I want to be able to make sure she (mom) is doing ok. If she doesn't have a place to stay I want to have a place for her." The influence of family on participants' job selection decisions seemed to be misunderstood by business educators. When participants shared their interdependent thought process as to where they would work based on their cultural ways of being, they felt judged rather than supported by career coaches.

Participants did not suspect bad intent from their career coach. It was more likely that the coach did not understand their situation. Participants expressed frustration and bewilderment when they were encouraged to follow personal interests. For instance, one Disengaging Dani participant said, "I've never made a decision that was solely just about me. I don't even know how to do that." In other words, participants' felt that to advance in their careers and be socially desirable, they should align with an individualistic perspective on life. However, this was incongruent to their ways of being because being far from family implies the added expense of back-and-forth travel – and then there is the question of how quickly they can respond should they be needed by their family in an emergency. However, according to business-school training, privileging such familial interconnectivity to individual career goals seemed to have less social desirability.

Following one's dream can be individualistic; yet, one's dreams may also be connected to family life. However, career dreams connected to family life were not seen as desirable to the central

focus of business career decisions. But for participants, the reason they went to business school was to improve the condition of their families and communities.

When a program or organization is inclusive there is safety, trust, and respect for people as individuals. This fosters a sense of belonging where people feel comfortable asking questions and are confident the answers will be useful. There is trust that guidance comes with positive intent and success. Unfortunately, participants did not feel a sense of belonging in business school, and this influenced how they behaved. For example, when participants were challenged to expand their understanding beyond their prior experiences and engage in goals defined by the business school such as participating in class or networking with employers, they were unable to do so from a space that was responsive to their cultural sensibilities. Therefore, engaging in business school was a performance meant to protect themselves from ridicule rather than a move that signaled belongingness and understanding that they fit into the culture. In doing so, whether Engaging Emily or Disengaging Dani, participants compartmentalized their sense of self that they knew would not help them reach business school goals. They did so knowing their identity would not be welcomed in the context of business culture. Their performativity approximated the goals of business school enough to keep them safe.

In this space of performativity, the participants recognized what was needed to be socially desirable in business school. Through observation and interactions, they saw some ways of being were preferred over others – in appearance, linguistic style, and career decisions. However, Disengaging Dani and Engaging Emily participants dealt with social expectations differently. Engaging Emily participants described being driven to fit in and “do all the things they were supposed to do as business students.” For instance, they forced themselves to engage in class and attended some career development programming. Despite their efforts, however,

Engaging Emily participants interpreted their ability to perform in these spaces as flawed compared to their more affluent peers. They perceived their peers to be comfortable in business class and career events. It seemed to participants that their peers were meant to be there.

Engaging Emily participants were trying hard to be perceived in the same manner. There was a point of perceived danger, however, that prevented Engaging Emily from fully partaking in the career preparatory program. Ongoing training from a career coach, for instance, could expose their lower-class identity. They could then be open to criticism for the background they worked so hard to hide. It seemed the longer participants went without being involved, the more challenging it became to participate. There was risk because there was more participants had not done that might need to be explained. This was a complicated intersection because engaging with a career coach could increase social desirability and lead to lucrative career choices; yet, the fear was there that being vulnerable with a career coach could expose participants and reduce their social desirability.

Along with Engaging Emily participants, Disengaging Dani participants recognized the expectations of business school. Their experience growing up, however, had taught them that trying to meet the expectations of those more affluent was unattainable. Disengaging Dani participants recalled criticism directed toward them from their affluent family members and peers related to their financial situation and awkwardness trying to fit in. Disengaging Dani participants knew their lack of engagement compromised their social desirability. They felt that not engaging was safer. One Disengaging Dani participant stated that she had been told she “looked poor” and needed to “step it up” at a job interview. Another felt that when they tried speaking up in class at the beginning of business school, their comments were received with less approval than that of their peers. Recall that experiences such as these were not new to

Disengaging Dani participants; they had occurred time and again growing up. Thus, Disengaging Dani participants shut off verbal communication, despite a clear understanding that such action was socially undesirable. This created significant conflict and anxiety. They were attending business school to improve their family situation and recognized they were intentionally evading certain expectations such as relationship building, networking, and receiving coaching for their careers ahead. They knew their avoidance to engage had immediate consequences. However, the consequences of staying quiet were less severe than engaging. Disengaging Dani participants did not want to work in spaces that were not inclusive of their identities. Thus, they were less concerned about not being a desirable candidate for many of the firms recruiting in the business school. Instead, they hoped to find a job where they could be themselves and feel a true sense of belonging.

Influencing participants' experiences in business school was the cultural distance between them and the educators. Disengaging Dani participants described avoiding their business professors whereas they spoke of enjoying interactions with educators in other disciplines. Those with whom they developed relationships were perceived to be accepting of their individuality. For instance, one participant described their art professor as "more chill . . . easy to be around, and not judgy." She went on to say asking questions in class and admitting where she was struggling was easy to do compared to in her business classes.

Engaging Emily participants, on the other hand, were more likely to participate in their business classes, but it was not a genuine or natural interaction. It was carefully planned and prepared to avoid any embarrassment. Because of the cultural distance, safe and trusted relationships between participants and business educators seemed to be limited. Therefore, there were few opportunities for professional development. Help-seeking behavior including asking

for academic and career advice came with risks and limitations. Participants feared business educators and career coaches would not understand the position from which they were asking for help. There was concern their challenges would not be believed, their experience would be minimized, or it could be misunderstood. Overwhelmingly, participants indicated they did not have a relationship with a business educator or career coach who understood their identity and background.

As much as participants' lives were shaped by their low income, blue collar identity, they had not examined their experiences in business school from a social class perspective. Their identity and the environment were two separate constructs that overlapped in physical space but which had not been considered from an experience perspective. Describing themselves, participants identified their experiences as a minority by race, gender, sexual orientation, and ability within a majority White, male, hetero, cisgender, and ability-centric world. They, however, did not seem to have considered the intersectionality of social class with their other marginalized identities. While each of the aforementioned identities has its own history of oppression, the infrequent consideration of social class meant participants often did not have the words to identify and describe their experiences. As they told their stories during interviews, they came to recognize their minority experiences were often different from that of their female, LGBT, or person of color peers, because of their social class. Reflecting on this seemed to provide some value to participants. However, while the economic inequalities were quite obvious to them, the cultural norm differences were not as clear. Participants recognized their inability to purchase clothing and other forms of material items already owned by their more affluent peers. But the more subtle cultural differences such as how decisions are made from an individualistic versus interdependent perspective were unclear. Participants did not seem to have identified that

there were deep interdependent cultural norms that were different from those of the individualistic-centered business school. These differences manifested themselves in frustration at feeling misunderstood and unable to fit expectations yet not being able to pinpoint exactly what was causing the conflict.

While participants experienced challenges in the business school, they were influenced and changed by their interactions in the affluent, white collar environment. The metamorphosis that takes place in college is supposed to be positive and exciting. What often goes unacknowledged, however, is what may be lost in the movement to becoming one with this new world. As the business school environment widened and participants gained new knowledge and skills, fitting in at home became a challenge. Participants described the issues talked about in business school as hardly ever discussed at home. Staying connected and feeling a sense of belonging to the world at home became continuously challenging. One Engaging Emily participant spoke of the realization that her family was not at all familiar with what she was learning in school. What ideas she had internalized in college would be sometimes misunderstood or even anger-inducing if she shared them at home. From avoiding discussions on the psychology of economic decisions to learning about anti-racism, she felt challenged by how she could remain connected to her family. Simultaneously, the fear of being unmasked as a social-identity fraud in business school existed for participants. Constantly hiding, camouflaging, censoring, and pretending to fit in was exhausting. Estimating whether one did a good job of fitting in and what one could do better next time to be deemed a “good student” meant participants' low income, blue collar identities had to be played down, minimized, sanitized, and buried. Retrieving this identity when at home was challenging. Participants felt there was evidence their identity could never be resurrected, that they were forever changed, and this could

feel shameful. One Engaging Emily participant spoke of “hanging out with her old family and friends as no longer as easy as it used to be.” She had to work to censor what she talked about when she deemed a topic would not be received well. Participants were proud of their families and spoke of the hard work, perseverance, and sacrifice they had made. To hide a part of themselves in business school felt disloyal, but they had no choice if they wished to survive a business education.

It is not common to find an organization in business school where low income, blue collar students can find community. There may be a first-generation organization, but not all low income, blue collar students identify as the first in their family to attend college. There may be Black, Indigenous, Person of Color (BIPOC) organizations but not all low income, blue collar students are BIPOC. And, not all BIPOC students are low income and blue collar. In US society, social class is a legitimate category of difference that is not marked as strongly as other categories of difference. Classism is entangled with other forms of oppression such as racism, xenophobia, homophobia, academic elitism, and so on. Recognizing how classism shows up within and across experiences can be unsettling to some. For instance, if the examination of classism feels as if it is taking away from social justice work to break down other systems of oppression. However, ensuring one part of a group’s experience is acknowledged and addressed does not have to occur at the expense of other forms of social justice work. The intersection of classism with other community experienced oppression could be one way to create solidarity and shared community understanding.

In summary, there are three primary topics examined in this discussion. The conflict between interdependent and independent cultural norms, social desirability, and the under-examination of classism and intersectionality with participants’ experiences. There was a

complicated relationship between participants' cultural familiarity with interdependence and the business school culture of independence and individualism. This created challenges for participants and their level of engagement and relationship-building with their peers, business educators, and career coaches. Participants recognized their ability to fit in and meet the expectations of the business school was more challenging than their affluent peers. This understanding of social desirability as a currency to maintain was taken up in complicated and contradictory ways by participants. On one hand, Disengaging Dani participants refused to align with the discourse of social desirability even if it compromised their academic and later professional careers. Engaging Emily participants, on the other hand, understood and aspired to cultivate social desirability. But, they too had a line they drew that they would not cross. This occurred when the aspiration to be socially desirable conflicted with revealing aspects of themselves that might not be deemed socially desirable by others. Finally, the experience of classism is an issue rooted in social oppression. It is not often acknowledged and therefore participants had trouble identifying their classed experiences compared to their other marginalized identities. While classism intersects with other issues of social justice, it can be studied on its own to understand the implications of its intersectionality.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I provided the findings of the study as indicated by the data. First, a description of the site was offered. The environment in which participants learned and the way the business school approached courses, career development, and business education, in general, gave context to the environment participants experienced. Next, I presented representative vignettes to illustrate participants' different experiences and ways of navigating business school. Then, I described the three themes from the data using the vignette characters. The theme Cross-

Class Experiences Contributed to Dis/Engagement in Business School described how participants perceived potential harm from the cross-class business culture and how they responded accordingly. The theme Dismissing the Institutionalized Career Pathways program described how and why participants did not participate in the program. Finally, the theme Financial Stress of Self and Family Is Pervasive described how participants' financial reality influenced their day-to-day experiences in business school and their career decisions. I concluded the chapter with a discussion of the insights gained from the themes.

Chapter 5 - Conclusions and Implications

As illustrated in the literature review for this study, the influence of social class in higher education has been explored in various ways. Few researchers, however, have considered the experiences of low income, blue collar students in business school, a largely affluent and white collar environment. My own positionality as a business school educator with a blue collar partner has significantly informed this study. This chapter responds to this study's research purpose and questions; it also illustrates the study's contribution to the field of inquiry into education and social class. This portion of the study also presents implications for future research by other scholars.

Orientation to the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore ways in which low income, blue collar business students in a Midwestern university navigated the culture of a white collar learning environment and education for future employment. As I recruited participants for this inquiry, I asked whether they identified as low income and blue collar. Self-identifying in this way was a requirement to participate. Within two weeks of extending invitations to consider participation in the study, there were five participants interested in learning more about the opportunity. Several of them were enthusiastic and eager to tell their stories because no one had asked them before. Their low income and blue collar backgrounds were central to their identities and daily experiences. They were proud of the challenges they had overcome and saw opportunities for other students' experiences to be aided through greater awareness of what they would likely encounter in business school. In the end, four of the initial five participants were included in the final study.

In Chapter 4, I presented two composite vignettes from participants' narratives to demonstrate the role of cross-class experiences during their experiences attending business school. The purpose of these archetypes was to protect participants' identities as they offered rich, thick descriptions of their experiences. Each archetype was created using participants' combined experiences. Briefly, the participant-group labeled Engaging Emily had experienced nurturing relationships with their more affluent, white collar family members. They were exposed to middle and upper class norms through part-time work and job shadowing. Class difference was not described as polarizing with one socio-economic tier characterized as better or worse than the other. Rather, Engaging Emily participants viewed class difference as a means toward a positive mentoring relationship. However, the Disengaging Dani vignette consisted of participants who had salient negative cross-class experiences with their more affluent white collar family members. Thus, they were introduced to cultural class differences in a way that made them feel as if they did not belong. They experienced classism, marginalization, and criticism. The Engaging Emily and Disengaging Dani archetypes will be used throughout the next section in response to the research purpose and questions. If an observation, theme, or experience was shared by all participants, I used the collective notation, "all participants" or simply, "participants."

To provide further background for this section, a summary of the Din School of Business will offer context for which the participants experienced education. Chapter 4 provides an in-depth site description of the context of this study. The business school's white collar environment was intended to prepare students for white collar work – specifically, occupations that involve primarily mental rather than physical work. A white collar environment generally reflects middle or upper class norms, which assume certain values, expectations for behavior,

and ways of thinking. The affluent, white collar environment of business school valued appearance reflective of having financial resources and independent cultural norms such as advocating for oneself, making personal decisions based on one's own motives, and showing how one is separate or distinct from others. These cultural norms shaped the expectations of students in the classroom. The business school training for future employment was called Career Pathways. The program included a course that some participants were required to participate and others were not. Following the course, optional activities and events were offered to provide additional training for white collar careers. The Career Pathways program was, for the most part, noncompulsory, but there was an implicit expectation that students would engage in the program all the way to graduation. In the next section of this chapter, participants' classed experiences in business school are described through thematic responses to the research questions. Implications and areas of future research will then follow.

Responding to Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore ways in which low income, blue collar business students in a Midwestern university navigated the culture of a white collar learning environment while in training for future employment.

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do participants describe negotiating a white collar learning environment from their cultural and social class perspectives?
2. In what ways do participants resist and/or accommodate the training they receive for future employment possibilities?

The answers to these questions overlap and are the result of a rich, deep case study of the participants' experiences. Responding to each question individually would limit the

understanding of the participants' complex experiences. As is typical in qualitative research, such responses overlap with those of another. Thus, a synthesized, comprehensive response to all research questions eliminates duplication and is an accepted practice in qualitative research. I respond comprehensively to the research questions by discussing the following topics: pride and shame in social class identity, performative class work strategies, and the encountering of independent cultural norms. Table 5.1 briefly describes these topics from the perspective of both Disengaging Dani and Engaging Emily participants. It also offers insight into the research the topic provided.

Table 5.1.*Topics Responding to Research Questions*

	Disengaging Dani Participants	Engaging Emily Participants	Research Insight
Pride and shame in social class identity	Proud of the lessons gained through overcoming challenges growing up. Experienced shame for their social class in interactions with affluent, white collar family members. Feared social class shame in business school.	Proud of the lessons gained through overcoming challenges growing up. Experienced nurturing relationships with affluent, white collar family members. Feared social class shame in business school.	In the absence of cross- class judgment, participants were proud of their social class. Social class identity shame was imposed by others.
Performative class work strategies	Engaged in class work in business school primarily through guarding their identity and avoiding cross- class interactions when at all possible.	Engaged in class work in business school in a of couple ways. Sometimes through performative behavior to camouflage their identity and meet the perceived expectations of the environment. When they could not effectively hide their identity through performative camouflaging, they avoided cross-class interactions, similar to Disengaging Dani.	Participants could not be themselves in business school. They were always engaged in class work strategies to avoid their social class identity being discovered. Having to engage in class work created barriers to learning.
Encountering independent cultural norms	Identified with interdependent cultural norms. Experienced aversion and frustration with independent norms in business school and avoided interactions. Did not recognize that the norms were related to social class.	Identified with interdependent cultural norms. Expressed frustration with independent norms. Tried to meet the expectations. Did not recognize that the norms were related to social class.	Participants were not aware of their own interdependent norms and values or that of the business school as being related to social class. The norms were not explicit and made participants uncomfortable and frustrated.

The next section will elaborate further on Table 5.1, offering brief summaries of the three topics used to respond to the study's research questions.

Pride and Shame in Social Class Identity

Through the interviews, participants' low income circumstances and financial challenges were salient in their stories about growing up. They saw their experiences as providing them toughness and strength. They described themselves as being able to persevere through difficulties and overcome hardships. This, they asserted, distinguished them from their more affluent peers, who seemed not to have endured the same struggles associated with a lack of financial resources. Participants maintained a sense of pride in how their family unit worked together. As children, participants were made aware of the financial pressure faced by their adult family members. They recalled making sacrifices for the good of the collective – i.e., the family. As a result, the very possibilities of participating in sports, travel, and other activities were not considered. Yet, such circumstances enabled them to experience pride. When compared to their elite peers, participants described themselves as more responsible, mature, and hard-working. They boasted of a strong work ethic and an ability to overcome challenges.

While participants were proud of their low income, blue collar roots, they also experienced shame when they felt others perceived them as “failures.” The concept of shame, therefore, is inextricably linked to interactions with others. Shame takes place when one becomes concerned that they might be disobeying prevailing norms or exposing their own inadequacies when compared with others. Participants described hiding their low income, blue collar identities in business school, lest they be perceived negatively – and would therefore experience further shame. They understood that social stratification assumes a hierarchy of good and bad. Participants were cautious not to insert themselves into situations where they might feel debased.

Pride and shame associated with social class influenced how participants negotiated the white collar environment of business school. Pride in their identity seemed to bolster

participants' resilience in college. They spoke of challenges they had overcome in their youth and how it developed their work ethic. This, participants stated, distinguished them from their affluent peers who, they concluded, did not share their social background or their drive toward success. For instance, one Disengaging Dani participant had grown up homeless. Persevering such misfortune with her mother brought them closer together. This participant was proud of how she was able to contribute financially and emotionally to her family unit during those difficult times. Moreover, an Engaging Emily participant described pride in her parents' professions, the kind of occupations that require significant skill and physical stamina. Yet jobs such as theirs did not garner social capital in white collar culture; nevertheless, her parents were well-respected within their own circle of acquaintances. Pride in class identity was also evident in participants' eagerness to take part in this study. Despite this, however, they never acknowledged such identity in a positive manner outside of their community. Also, they felt challenged in business school because of that identity. Being able to share their experiences for this study was an opportunity for them to potentially benefit the academy as well as students similar to themselves.

Shame, rooted in class identity, surfaced throughout interviews with the participants. On a daily basis, they described being aware of their own social class in relation to others. Participants were constantly monitoring and managing their own behavior to either "fit in" or to not be so obviously "out of place." For example, in one instance, an Engaging Emily participant described her careful preparation and resulting performance in business class. Like a stage show, this participant rehearsed what she would say during class, preparing the wording of her arguments, and how to voice them, paying special attention to what vocabulary to use. Word choice was important; she wanted to "sound smart and not dumb." She observed that her

affluent, white collar peers seemed to have ways of speaking that were different from hers. When the morning of class arrived, she would carefully select what to wear, knowing others would judge her appearance. And when class finally commenced, she delivered her prepared statement carefully in what she hoped would be perceived as a confident and assured tone. This illustrates the typical Engaging Emily participant performance in business classes. They carefully prepared, performed, and idealized their behavior to fit the norms of the business school. Engaging Emily participants felt able to succeed with these performances in classes; it all seemed a relatively predictable stage once they got to know the expectations of their professors. However, Engaging Emily participants avoided situations where their performances demanded spontaneity and where careful rehearsal beforehand was not possible. For instance, there were informal networking events, where participants could not anticipate the conversations that would take place. Yet when it came to class, they were confident in their ability to perform – much unlike their Disengaging Dani counterparts, who tended to hide during business classes. For instance, one Disengaging Dani participant described getting dressed before class. She carefully selected what to wear so as “not to look poor.” In class, she did her best not to be noticed or called on. This performative disengagement was influenced by the potential for shame. Disengaging Dani participants felt that if their low income, blue collar identity was made obvious, their more affluent classmates would judge them negatively.

This threat of shame influenced participants’ resistance and accommodation of training for future employment possibilities. Engaging Emily participants accommodated some Career Pathways training while Disengaging Dani participants resisted attending. Engaging Emily participants nurturing cross-class relationships growing up which had helped them learn to pass as middle class. This gave them the self-efficacy to accommodate *some* career training in

business school. Their performativity took significant preparation in appearance and vocalization. However, they also feared they would not meet class expectations. At such times, there was a perception of not feeling safe while participating. Further, there was a danger of their true identity being unmasked, leading to more shame. Disengaging Dani participants, alternatively, resisted most Career Pathways training. Despite recognizing that such activities were expected of them, they did not feel their cultural ways of speaking or acting would be welcomed. They had salient past experiences trying to meet the expectations of their affluent family members and had been made to feel ridiculous and ashamed. To them, therefore, it was safer to avoid Career Pathways activities altogether.

Thus, as illustrated above, participants experienced both pride and shame in relation to their social class identity. They were proud of their background and described it as providing them with inner qualities of resilience and strength. When cross-class judgment was a perceived threat, participants were aware of the potential for identity shame imposed by others. However, in the absence of classism or, the *potential* for classism, participants were proud of their identities.

Performative “Class Work” Strategies

When participants did not feel they belonged in business school, they created and acted out a role-identity apart from who they truly were. In other words, they felt they could not be themselves. They were constantly engaged in “class work” strategies to conceal their social class origins. In addition, there were the daily social class signals observed in business school, an awareness of class difference, along with an assumed safety zone derived from their own masquerade. This section will describe each of these contributing elements and participants' class work strategies concerning the research questions guiding this study.

Daily social class signals influenced participants' experiences of belonging. They described business school as unlike anyplace they had experienced in school before. It went beyond their educational expectations of what school should be like. There were physical signs of affluence – the expansive building featuring a stock ticker that displayed the names of prestigious companies that recruited the institution's students, corporate logos atop classroom entrances, and inscriptions on the walls of wise, pithy quotes from wealthy donors. Moreover, participants described business educators and employers in the school as more formal and professional than anyone heretofore experienced. Seeing impressive people in their expensive suits throughout the building conjured feelings of inadequacy for participants. Describing peers in business school, participants readily identified various signs of students' social class (those who were "like them") and those who were more affluent. Appearance and speech were the primary indicators of class identification. Specifically, their peers' physical appearance, including clothing and fitness level, linguistic patterns, word choice, and leisure activities were salient indicators of class. These signals served as reminders of the participants' social class. It compounded their perception that they "did not belong."

Participants' awareness of class difference informed their desire for psychological safety in business school. They expressed a need to "fit in," not just with their peers but also in relation to white collar business educators, career coaches, and employers. However, through social comparison, participants estimated their ability to attain social desirability as less likely than that of their more affluent peers. Behaving and sounding culturally appropriate were cognitively demanding. They described preparing what to say in social interactions, how to say it, consciously avoiding topics they perceived as less socially desirable. For instance, their hobby of hunting or job as a dishwasher. Furthermore, participants' ability to modify their appearance was

threatened by financial constraints. They simply did not have the resources to dress in a way that was reflective of business school norms. Rather, participants described analyzing their appearances daily before coming to school. They made an effort to assure themselves that they “didn’t look too poor.” Participants’ detailed descriptions suggested an awareness of class on a daily basis; and this influenced participants to be self-conscious and protective of themselves. They learned it was necessary to shield themselves in cross-class interactions from past experiences. All participants had shared examples from their past of having to endure denigration by people perceived as more affluent.

Participants protected themselves by minimizing the number of social situations in which they would feel uncomfortable while attempting to manage their appearance and style of speech in the situations they could not avoid. Gray and Kish-Gephart (2013) called this management of social class anxiety “class work.” The necessity of participants’ class work to ensure their personal safety contributed to how they interpreted and considered business school, including how they behaved in the classroom and their choices in whether to resist or accommodate Career Pathways training.

Participants viewed school through their social class lens, wondering if they could succeed. They were aware of the business school expectations for classroom behavior and participation in the Career Pathways program. They expressed a desire to follow the recommendations of the business school. Such expectations were explicit, and ignoring them would lead to marginalization. However, the cultural norms of the business school were not interpreted by participants as matching their own ways of being. Thus, participants realized they would have to perform class work to fit in. They could not simply be themselves.

Participants' behavior varied in strategies, mostly relating to their previous cross-class interactions while growing up. Engaging Emily participants who had experienced nurturing cross-class interactions as children tried to match their behavior to meet the expectations of others in business school. They had learned of those expectations through mentorship. In business school classes, Engaging Emily participants generally assessed their ability to "fit in" as adequate; they believed it would gain them greater advantage than not "performing" at all. Through preparation and studying before class, they participated in classroom discussions and as a result gained valuable social capital. One Engaging Emily participant observed that although she did not feel confident participating, she thought the professor appreciated her effort. But in other situations, such as Career Pathways events involving spontaneous, unpredictable social interaction, Engaging Emily participants did not feel confident that their ability to participate would meet expectations. Thus, there was a significant demarcation between the two environments and how they either perceived safety or found it absent. Thus, they tended to attend some events while avoiding others. In this case, knowing it was socially desirable to engage in Career Pathways events was not influential enough to motivate Engaging Emily participants to thrust themselves into situations where they might feel alienated. This meant, of course, that they missed out on opportunities to gain social capital. But from their point of view, they were protecting themselves from marginalization.

Like Engaging Emily participants, Disengaging Dani participants engaged in class work strategies throughout business school. But, theirs differed. Disengaging Dani participants rarely performed in ways designed to meet expectations of the white collar business school culture. Rather, they rejected the performative pressure. Recall that these participants had experienced social class rejection in the past after trying to meet the norms of affluent, white collar family

members. Such experiences seemed to make them more protective and resistant to interactions that would cause their stigmatization to stand out. Disengaging Dani participants, therefore, tended to avoid class discussions and Career Pathways events and training altogether. This withdrawal was a defense mechanism geared toward maintaining their psychological and physical well-being. Notably, Disengaging Dani participants' avoidance of cross-class interactions evolved from pride in their social class roots. One participant said she would not "pretend to be uppity and fake," opting instead to "only be herself." In other words, Disengaging Dani participants chose not to assimilate; additionally, they tended to denigrate higher-class individuals. Shifting the stigmatization from themselves to those more affluent appeared as a defensive strategy in response to their own feelings of marginalization.

For the most part, participants could not "be themselves" in business school. They were always engaged in class work strategies to conceal their social class identity. Participants varied in their strategies. Engaging Emily participants sometimes used a performative strategy to camouflage themselves and meet the school expectations. In other cases, they deemed situations too risky. They feared their social class performativity would not be effective in hiding their identities. In these cases, they avoided cross-class interactions. Similarly, Disengaging Dani participants used the class work strategy of eschewing all cross-class interactions if possible. They were never able to be themselves in business school. They were constantly on guard, evaluating situations, performing, or hiding. Unfortunately, this created barriers to learning. It prevented full engagement in some situations and obstacles to accessibility in others.

Encountering Independent Cultural Norms

Norms exist in all spaces. They are the expectations that guide behavior and values. While often unspoken, norms offer social standards for appropriate and inappropriate behavior.

Those who understand the norms can act in appropriate ways and succeed within the social space. Those who do not understand the norms or whose behavior does not meet cultural expectations are disadvantaged in their drive to succeed.

The business school's affluent white collar learning environment assumes particular cultural norms. Specifically, the business school's culture values independence. Independent cultures value advocating for oneself, making personal decisions based on one's own motives, and showing how one is separate or distinct from others. The business school's cultural norms, based on a philosophy of independent self-reliance, are evident in participants' interviews, documents reviewed, and observations conducted by the researcher. The business school's emphasis on personal independence appears incongruent with participants' interdependent cultural norms. Interdependent cultures value adjusting to others' needs and making choices based on group or community goals.

During interviews, the way in which participants described their values, thought processes, and goals were indicative of an interdependent cultural way of being. Participants' interdependent model of self in an environment that valued independence created a cultural dissonance. Participants' interdependent culture had taught them to behave, act, and think in a particular manner. The underlying values and assumptions for this interdependent way of being, however, were not congruent with the independent culture of business school.

The business school's cultural norm of independence was distinct, but not made explicit in business school. Participants, therefore, learned the expectations for an independent model of self as they journeyed through the curriculum. While encountering cultural expectations and values that did not align with their interdependent model, a sense of discomfort was experienced by participants. They knew they were not performing in a socially desirable way, but it was

unclear why. For instance, when meeting with business educators and career coaches, participants described being asked what their personal goals were. When they responded from their interdependent cultural frame that included family goals or parental recommendations, this appeared to be negatively received. The independent culture of the business educators placed value on the pursuit of individual goals. The encouragement of participants to make decisions independently was assumed by business educators to be in the participants' best interests. However, participants' cultural ways of being did not solely take into account one's personal goals. Rather, one's goals were always interconnected with one's family unit.

The cultural mismatch of the independent business school culture and participants' interdependent ways of being created frustration for participants. They did not perceive that they "fit in." Their thought processes, answers, and behaviors did not seem to be socially desirable in business school. But, identifying *why*, was not obvious to them. A focus on financial resource barriers was the primary method used by participants in examining themselves within the more affluent environment. The surface-level difference of material wealth was obvious while deeper differences in cultural values, norms, assumptions, and thought processes were not apparent at all. These implicit cultural elements were internalized as participants journeyed through business school. Classes, interactions, and observations taught them what was expected and what was socially desirable behavior. Participants did not identify the behavior as connected to cultural norms different from their own. They did not feel comfortable with or understand such expectations. For instance, participants identified frustration with the expectation to speak up in class. This requirement was made explicit by professors through allocating points to the quality of a student's verbal contribution in class. This expectation was based on an independent cultural value for influencing others and the environment. Participants felt discomfort with the

expectation for class discussion but they could not pinpoint the reason. It was not obvious to them that cultural norms were in conflict. From participants' interdependent cultural backgrounds, classroom discussion that promoted a cooperative learning community may have been more aligned with their ways of being—in other words, one that honors the interconnectedness of perspectives. In the independent culture of business school, speaking up, providing one's unique perspective, and convincing others of one's point was encouraged. Participants did not feel comfortable engaging in this manner and either did so through prepared performance that created much anxiety (as in the case of Engaging Emily participants), or, did not participate at all (as with Disengaging Dani participants). The cultural mismatch of the independent business school and interdependent culture of the participants seemed to explain much of their frustrations. Again, this difference in cultural norms was not apparent to them. Social class cultural differences at the level of thought process and values had never been introduced to participants or, for that matter, ever discussed in business school.

This cultural mismatch along with the daily signs of social class contributed to participants' feelings of marginalization in business school. A “sense of belonging” refers to feeling safe enough to be oneself without fear of judgment or shame based on one's identity. Belonging indicates a sense of connectedness and safety. Participants' experience with social class while growing up had taught them they could experience mistreatment because of their social class. These fears surfaced in business school when in the presence of others perceived to be more affluent. The independent business school cultural norms also contributed to participants' lack of belonging. From their interdependent cultural framework, the independent norms were foreign and uncomfortable. The business school classes and Career Pathways training were individualistically oriented. Participants, however, were interdependently oriented.

Thus, the absence of a sense of belonging in business school or the Career Pathways program stood as barriers to participants' full engagement.

While engaging in class work to manage daily cross-class interactions, participants also endured anxiety from the pressure to succeed in business school. The interdependent cultural expectations of participants and their families meant that their successes or failures influenced the success or failures of their families. Participants' families were relying on them to succeed and provide support. So not only were participants experiencing anxiety navigating a culture different from their own, they were also compelled to discover the root of that anxiety. Succeeding in business school, getting good grades, and obtaining a well-paying job were imperative goals. Participants needed to be successful to help support their families.

The independent norms of business school contributed to how participants resisted and accommodated the training they received for future employment possibilities. Participants were aware of the Career Pathways program activities and recognized there were expectations to participate. Furthermore, participants' drive to succeed in business school in order to support their families was strong. However, their interdependent ways of being made engagement in the Career Pathways program a significant challenge. Disengaging Dani participants resisted Career Pathways activities. Their strategy for coping with the incongruence of their cultural norms in relation to those of the business school was to avoid interactions that could potentially cause them scholastic as well as psychological harm. Disengaging Dani participants had experienced classism and shame related to self-identity and therefore avoided interactions that could endanger them. Engaging Emily participants, though, accommodated some Career Pathways training – but only to a point. They attended minimal Career Pathways activities and those they engaged in did not require much social interaction. This meant their performativity could be minimized.

Engaging Emily participants only attended those gatherings where all they were required to do was listen or where the interaction was predictable. Career Pathways activities involving social interaction with affluent, white collar individuals, for the most part, were avoided—for example, the Executive Mentor program that paired business students with industry professionals for one-on-one guidance and employer networking events where participants would be expected to interact.

In summary, participants negotiated the white collar learning environment of business school from their low income, blue collar perspective. This influenced their experience in the classroom and how they responded to training for future employment possibilities. Participants were proud of their identity and believed it gave them strength. But they protected themselves from being discovered, knowing their identity was likely to be perceived negatively. Participants believed if their class identity was exposed, it could lead to judgment including but not limited to being perceived as inferior, uneducated, or lazy. This fear was understandable, given their past experiences of marginalization. Participants saw strength in their identity but recognized others may not. Potentially this could lead to mistreatment and victimization.

Negotiating the environment required participants to engage in daily “class work.” This was the strategic action participants took to protect themselves within an environment not inclusive of their identity and where they did not feel a sense of belonging. Engaging Emily participants camouflaged their identity, trying to match their behavior to meet the expectations of cross-class others in business school. Preparation for this performance took significant time and created anxiety for the participants. When they perceived that they could not “fit in,” they avoided interaction. Disengaging Dani participants, on the other hand, dispensed with cross-class interactions altogether. They withdrew, trying not to bring attention to their difference in social

class. All participants experienced anxiety related to the pressure to succeed. Trying to navigate the culture of business school was a tough challenge. Participants molded themselves over to either fit in through performativity or to melt into the background. The necessity to succeed in order to support their families amplified the personal stakes.

Contributions to the Literature

Recall from Chapter 2 the review of research into low income, blue collar students in business school focused on the lack of discourse on social class in universities, social class culture in business school, and classism in hiring decisions. In that discussion, I cited instances of disparity in belongingness felt among students from low income, blue collar backgrounds in college (Soria et al., 2013). Additionally, classist microaggressions occurring frequently on campus (Smith & Redington, 2010) as well as the rarity of discourse involving classism in higher education (Walpole, 2003). And on those few occasions when class was addressed, it was often in association with other forms of identities such as race or first-generation status (Harper & Quaye, 2009; Jury et al., 2017), rather than explored as a valid identity in itself or as having intersectionality with other forms of identity. With business schools preparing students for white collar workplaces, the classism that exists in hiring decisions is also relevant (Rivera, 2016). I set forth the argument that a greater understanding of how low income, blue collar students experience business school and training for future employment possibilities would ultimately improve awareness of social class in business school and provide valuable insights in supporting this demographic of students. In the following paragraphs, I will elaborate on how this study's findings contribute to current scholarship.

Universities have been described as lacking class neutrality (Phillips et al., 2020). University norms tend to match what middle and upper class students learned while growing up

and what those from lower-class backgrounds did not (Fryberg & Marcus, 2007; Stevens et al., 2012). Furthermore, the cost of college, including tuition, housing, and extracurricular activities is prohibitive for economically disadvantaged students (King & Bannon, 2002; Lillis & Tian; 2008). This study contributes to the understanding of how universities, and in particular, business schools, are classed and how this is disadvantageous for students from different social class backgrounds.

The primary way in which participants characterized their classed experiences was through the daily signals that reminded them of their social class identity. For instance, there were the material signs of social class and unfamiliar topics of conversation during cross-class gatherings. There were also frustrations experienced in the classroom as well as strained interactions with business educators and career coaches relating to social class norms. The independent norms of business school were unfamiliar to participants who instead saw the world through an interdependent lens. The independent culture encouraged by the business school and the interdependent worldview of participants created a cultural mismatch. This shaped participants' experiences in business school and contributed to their lack of belonging. Ostrove and Long (2007) maintained that social class background influences college outcomes (GPA) via a sense of belonging. This study extends knowledge in this area by suggesting the particular behaviors a lack of belonging influences – namely, class participation behaviors, interactions with business school educators, and avoidance of career development training.

The influence of social class identity on belongingness is often researched within elite institutions because the universities themselves are a cultural marker of class (Bathmaker et al., 2016; Trawalter et al., 2020). However, faculty and administrators at more mainstream universities may reasonably conclude that because an institution is more accessible compared to

elite institutions, social class is not a significant factor in a student's experience. This study contributes to the understanding of the prevalence of classism in such mainstream venues and its influence on belongingness in a land-grant institution business school known for being affordable. This suggests social class belonging influences the student experience in a variety of types of institutions.

This case study explored the experiences of participants within a business school and its career development program. Research has indicated business schools take their role seriously in teaching students employability skills (Maxwell et al., 2009; Rao, 2010). Their goal is to help prepare students for success in the workplace (Clarke, 2016; Ellis et al., 2014) based on employer emphasis on the need for soft skills (NACE, 2016). Existing research in business school includes not only the necessity for teaching those soft skills (Robles, 2012) but also the congruence between skills taught and skills desired by employers (Ellis et al., 2014), as well as recommendations on how to teach soft skills (Russel et al., 2005; Wilhelm et al., 2002; Winstead et al., 2009). What is missing from the literature involving soft-skill career development is an appreciation of how students from diverse backgrounds experience the training. Only through an examination of such training – made accessible and inclusive of diverse cultural ways of being – will this type of business education become available to all students. Since research has indicated that social class matters in the hiring of recent business school graduates – wherein students from affluent backgrounds have an advantage over those who do not (Friedman & Laurison, 2020; Rivera, 2015; Thomas, 2018), this study sought to understand how social class figures significantly in employability training. Findings indicated that social class influenced how business students from low income, blue collar backgrounds interpret career development training and their decisions to engage in the curriculum. Participants felt that their class identity

was unwelcome in business school and the Career Pathways program. Because they did not feel a sense of belonging, participants were guarded in their involvement in business school academic and professional development activities. Participants attended only those few Career Pathways events where the expectation for social interaction was minimal. Low income, blue collar participants anticipated that at such events, social interaction would be with those who were affluent and white collar. Participants anticipated needing to engage in class work to hide their social class at such gatherings and therefore, they were often avoided. Thus, it was much easier to not attend or to attend but not engage with others.

The results of this study suggest that teaching employability skills is not a straightforward process. It is not simply a matter of informing students of what to do and what not to do. It requires understanding and acknowledging students' diverse cultural ways of being. Participants did not perceive their identity would be welcomed in the Career Pathways program, and this created a barrier to their engagement. Participants wanted to engage in socially desirable ways; however, they lacked the dominant cultural currency to fit in within an affluent, white collar business school environment. Thus, the analysis presented here suggests teaching skills for employability is not only a process of skill development but also intercultural development. In other words, students from low income, blue collar backgrounds must become culturally competent in the norms of affluent, white collar culture. Furthermore, educators must be interculturally competent to communicate effectively with students from diverse social class backgrounds.

The substantive framework for this study is the class work model (Gray & Kish-Gephart, 2013) which explains how organizational culture creates social class advantages and disadvantages and is maintained by the interactions between people of different classes. It

models the interactions between individuals of different social classes, the influence of the organization's social class culture on those interactions, and how cross-class interactions perpetuate the organization's class culture. The class work model was generated within the context of workplace interactions. This study extended its application to the business school context. The results of this study support the model through findings that the business school culture influenced cross-class social interactions and contributed to social class disadvantage for the low income, blue collar participants. For instance, the business school instilled "class rules" as a mechanism to teach which social class norms were expected and which were discouraged (Gray & Kish-Gephart, 2013). Through explicit class rules in syllabi and other materials, the business school defined professional standards to adhere to a particular way. These rules were written by those who had learned them through simply living. The hidden rules of class are the unspoken norms, behaviors, and habits of a group that arise from social relationships. Such rules reflect what is needed to survive within that social class and to be considered respectable. When institutions participate in instilling rules based on only one set of class norms, they are participating in classism. The implicit or hidden class rules of business school are taught through the day-to-day interactions within the environment. White collar, middle and upper class business educators, peers, and employers know the hidden expectations of business school because they have learned it over time. Perhaps they were born into it, or perhaps they have experienced upward class mobility and internalized the hidden rules. Nevertheless, their expectations for particular nuanced behavior, thought processes, language, consideration for future planning, and so on are influenced by their social class. The rules that this study's participants were accustomed to, on the other hand, were different because they occupied a different environment growing up. In sum, the institutional expectations shaped the class rules of

business school, explicitly and implicitly. Furthermore, the interactions between members of the institution and those new to the environment benefitted those who already embodied the class norms and disadvantaged those who did not.

The act of encountering class rules can be examined from a symbolic interactionism (SI) lens. Recall that SI was discussed in depth in Chapter 2 and was the methodological framework for this study. SI models how people interpret each other's behavior in social interactions. That interpretation is based on one's unique socialized experiences. Furthermore, a person's response is not simply a reply to an action but is based on the meaning derived from the interpretation of actions. Participants' back-and-forth reactions within the symbolic understandings of class identity inform their behavioral interpretation of business school. The response to the research questions presented earlier in this chapter was informed by SI. In that response, I demonstrated participants not only interpreted the actions of others in business school during one-on-one exchanges, but they also anticipated those interactions well ahead of time. As they prepared to enter the business school environment each morning they carefully considered what to wear, what to say, and how to behave. I discussed how participants' past social class interactions informed their understanding of what to expect in business school. Engaging Emily participants had experienced salient nurturing cross-class relationships with family. These experiences informed how they interpreted how those of more affluence may respond to them in business school. Disengaging Dani participants, on the other hand, had salient disparaging cross-class relationships with family while growing up. This informed their interpretation of class in business school and influenced their guarded behavior in cross-class interactions.

This study contributes to the extensive literature and research conducted by symbolic interactionists (Carter & Fuller, 2016). Aligned with SI's epistemological assumptions that there

are multiple truths, Denzin (2004) described the contemporary approach to SI as narrative. A narrative approach provides deep, rich understanding of how people interpret, understand, and make meaning of their world. This study used not only narratives garnered from participant interviews but integrated an arts-based bag portrait as a medium for participants to explore and consider their experiences. Arts-based pedagogies, such as the bag portrait activity, are a powerful means to understand oneself, the self in relation to others, and social structures that advantage and disadvantage members of socially constructed groups (Bhattacharya & Cochrane, 2017). Using a SI lens, this study provides further insight into experiencing classism in business school. In doing so, it provides a rationale behind individual internal interpretations of cross-class interactions, while uncovering the disadvantages for participants within a classed environment.

Implications and Future Directions for Research

The analysis and findings presented throughout this dissertation represent an initial examination of social class in business school career development. This study provides valuable insight for several stakeholder groups, including business schools and business educators, career counselors, higher education leaders, and policymakers. This section describes how each of these interest groups benefits from this study's findings. All studies are limited by scope, but there are ample additional directions for research to build on. As I indicate where particular stakeholders benefit from this research, I also provide recommendations for future study.

The findings of this study may help inform business schools and business educators as they seek greater inclusivity of diverse student identities. Business schools prepare students for white collar professions. With more low income students attending college than ever before (Smith, 2019) - more precisely, students who are likely to identify with blue collar culture –

business schools must intentionally create a culture of belonging for this demographic. The findings of this study suggest low income, blue collar students experience classism in business school, resulting in a lack of belonging which influences their avoidance of cross-class interactions. Namely, the career development programming that would assist in preparation for the white collar careers they expect to gain after graduation. Most research on career development in business school focuses on programming useful for teaching soft skills that white collar employers seek (e.g., Russel et al., 2005; Winstead et al., 2009). The results of this study begin to address how low income, blue collar students experience this training. College is a critical gateway institution to upward mobility and becoming culturally competent in navigating different social class cultures is critical for low income, blue collar students. The cultural norms of business school seem to complicate the educational opportunity to learn the expectations of a white collar workplace. Future inquiry might be made into the application of social class sensitive pedagogy to career development educational programming (Jones & Vagle, 2013). It may also prove of interest to consider interventions such as social class workshops or working class student organizations (e.g., National Working Class Student Union, 2012) that clarify the social class norms of business schools.

This study's results highlight the inequity and exclusion experienced by low income, blue collar participants. Business school faculty and staff should seek greater understanding of their own social class and examine how their perspective shapes expectations for student behavior academically, in career development sessions, or in meetings with students. Parallel and intersectional to the work that university employees are engaging in to uncover their unconscious bias related to race, ethnicity, or gender, intentional intercultural competency development should occur along the lines of social class. To consider social class specifically, considerations

for issues such as scholarship requirements, textbook costs, and other expenses associated with business school must be taken into account. Additionally, elements of the hidden curriculum of the business school must be examined. Those components would include such items as unstated expectations of appearances in the classroom, cultural behavioral norms, and situated examples for concepts taught in business school, and so forth.

This study informs the understanding of organizational culture in business school. Three decades ago, Schein's (1985) seminal work linked organizational culture with organizational strategy. If business schools want to advance social equity, diversity, and inclusion within programs, they must examine and discover whether the business school culture supports this work. The findings of this study support the assertion that the culture of business school is inclusive for students from affluent, white collar backgrounds and excludes students who come from low income, blue collar backgrounds (Banks, 2009; Locke & Trolan, 2018; Stuber, 2011). This study indicates that culture change that succeeds in creating belonging for students from low income, blue collar backgrounds will help this demographic of students become more successful in the classroom as well as in preparatory training for employment possibilities. Future research should examine the intersection of social class culture and organizational culture change. For instance, a case study applying Schein's (2010) culture change theory to social class inclusion would be interesting. The complexity of culture change, where norms of different groups are brought into closer alignment (Bertram, 2007), is complex and challenging.

Policymakers should reflect on their own class standing and how it influences their perception and decision making. When considering "gaps" in educational outcomes, policymakers should be aware of their own social class norms and how that perspective shapes their understanding of the student experience and expectations generally. If policymakers'

language includes deficit discourse, this is an indicator of diverting attention from structural issues and advancing classism in education (Bertrand et al., 2015). This study suggests financial barriers are just one challenge for low income, blue collar students. Policies that advance greater inclusion and belonging for students from diverse economic backgrounds are necessary to support student success.

I chose to limit this study to social class experiences in business school. However, students have multiple identities with which they frame their understanding of the world. At the same time, those identities are framed by the world they observe. Future research could examine social class intersectionality with other identities such as race, gender, or sexual orientation. It would be insightful to explore how students with multiple marginalized identities experience business school and employability training and the strategies they use to survive and persist.

This study supports existing findings that low income, blue collar students struggle more with belonging than their more affluent peers (Ostrove & Long, 2007; Soria & Stebleton, 2013). Thus, classism contributed to participants struggling with belonging and created barriers to full engagement in business school and career training. Future research should explore the conditions that nurture belonging and inclusion for low income, blue collar students. For instance, there is evidence that hearing stories from peer mentors about their transition to college that includes their social class background enables students from similar backgrounds to feel a sense of belonging (Jury et al., 2017). Perhaps hearing stories from white collar mentors with blue collar backgrounds would aid in a sense of belonging for blue collar students in career development programs. Belongingness is a basic human desire (Maslow, 1962) and it contributes to academic success (Strayhorn, 2019). It is crucial to continue exploring how to build a sense of inclusion for low income, blue collar students.

After data collection was completed for this study, there came the 2020 coronavirus pandemic that caused significant economic upheaval and record unemployment. With millions of people out of work for the first time, there may be a greater collective social understanding of the challenges of experiencing a low income, social class identity. Future research could examine whether the experience of downward mobility decreases classist judgments. Greater experience of economic uncertainty could exert a positive influence on business school education and career development training. Hypothetically, having experienced economic hardship could assist educators, students, and employers to become more open to diverse social class backgrounds.

Conclusion

Recall the purpose of the study was to explore the ways in which low income, blue collar business students in a Midwestern university navigated the culture of a white collar learning environment and training for future employment. This study found that participants navigated the environment from their familial, familiar, and cultural understanding of their social class status. This navigation included performative engagement and outright disengagement based on participants' dispositions and prior experiences. Through the practices experienced as part of their business school education, participants grappled with multiple barriers that challenged their social class identities and worldviews. They negotiated these challenges by either camouflaging their difficulties or by abandoning participation in certain professional development activities altogether.

For participants, the challenge of business school and the Career Pathways program was more than the actual curriculum. It was the hidden curriculum that created the most unsettling experiences that challenged their understanding of their social class identity. The business school curriculum encouraged the development of soft skills, which perhaps was part of the agenda to

make known the hidden curriculum. However, such initiatives ignored the underlying norms and values of diverse social class identities that might prove incompatible with the values promoted by the business school's training. Soft skills training is not neutral and divorced from class identity. In fact, most of the professional development and soft skill training initiatives included molding the students into the norm of white collar, high-income social class identity. It is no surprise then that participants had to individually navigate their way to either complete the program without their class identity being unmasked or risk being exposed from resisting performing outside of their worldviews.

This dissertation was completed during the COVID-19 global pandemic. While data were collected prior to the pandemic, data analysis and subsequent writing of the dissertation happened during the pandemic. Recently, poor families have become poorer, and many middle class and upper-middle class families have suffered great financial loss due to the global pandemic. It becomes imperative, therefore, that business schools – and more generally, higher education – consider building bridges between various social class identities instead of promoting a specific class identity and assuming universal acceptance.

Chapter Summary

This chapter began with a brief summary of the study's purpose. Next, I reviewed the two composite vignettes culled from participants' narratives in the context of business school. Next, I responded to the study's research questions comprehensively by discussing the following topics: pride and shame in social class identity, performative practices in class work, and the encountering of independent cultural norms. Additionally, I discussed how the findings contributed to existing literature, offered implications from this study for key stakeholders, and proposed future directions for research.

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Appendix A - IRB Approval



University Research Compliance Office

TO: Dr. Kakali Bhattacharya
Adult Learning and Leadership
318 Bluemont Hall

Proposal Number: 9812

FROM: Rick Scheidt, Chair 
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: 09/04/2019

RE: Approval of Proposal Entitled, "“CLASS WORK” IN BUSINESS SCHOOL:
A CASE STUDY OF LOW-INCOME, BLUE-COLLAR STUDENTS.”

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects has reviewed your proposal and has granted full approval. This proposal is **approved for three years from the date of this correspondence.**

APPROVAL DATE: 09/04/2019

EXPIRATION DATE: 09/04/2022

In giving its approval, the Committee has determined that:

- ☒ There is no more than minimal risk to the subjects.
☐ There is greater than minimal risk to the subjects.

This approval applies only to the proposal currently on file as written. Any change or modification affecting human subjects must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation. All approved proposals are subject to continuing review, which may include the examination of records connected with the project. Announced post-approval monitoring may be performed during the course of this approval period by URCO staff. Injuries, unanticipated problems or adverse events involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the IRB and / or the URCO.

Appendix B - Email Solicitation

Subject: Request for Participation in Research Study

Greetings!

My name is Olivia Law-DelRosso, and I am pursuing a Doctorate in Education through Kansas State University. I would like to invite you to consider being a participant in a research study I am conducting as part of my program. The purpose of the study is to explore how three students who do not identify as white collar describe their experiences in business school including training for future employment. Findings from this study will enhance the understanding of social class diversity in business school. My hope is that this research will bring greater attention to this important aspect of identity in student lives. This study has received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, Approval (#) for the use of human subjects.

Participation is completely voluntary and you can decide to stop participating in the study at any time. To participate you must:

- 1) be a business major
- 2) have spent at least 2 years in the business school (in other words, not a be transfer student or a newly declared business major)
- 3) answer three or more of these questions with a “yes”
 - a. Do you consider your parents or guardians you were raised with to be blue collar? Definitions of blue collar vary, but usually this type of work includes skilled tradespeople, factory workers, farmers, and other types of careers that involve physical work.
 - b. Thinking about your classmates in business school, do you consider your family income growing up to be less than your classmates?
 - c. Thinking about the culture of business school (the environment, what it feels like to be here, how people behave, and how they talk) does it feel uncomfortable?
 - d. Thinking about the culture of business school (the environment, what it feels like to be here, how people behave, and how they talk), does it feel different from how you grew up?
 - e. Thinking about your experiences in business school, does social class seem to be a critical difference that makes a difference for you?

If you feel you would qualify for this study and you are interested in participating, please contact me. We will meet to discuss the study, you can ask questions, and if you want to participate, you will complete an informed consent form. You will be given the opportunity to select a pseudonym (alternate name) to protect your identity. If you do not select an alternative name, one will be assigned. Your identity will remain anonymous at all times.

As a participant, the following activities will occur. All one-on-one interviews will be audio

recorded and take place in a private, mutually agreed upon location and time.

- 1) Guided Bag-Portrait Creation Activity. This is a reflective, arts-based guided activity. You do not need to consider yourself artistic, I'll guide you through what to do, and all supplies will be provided. This activity will take about 90 minutes and be audio recorded.
- 2) Interview. This interview will be about 90 minutes in length and audio recorded.
- 3) Member Check Meeting. 30 minutes in length. During this meeting I will share the findings of the research study with you, ask for your input, and any additional information you would like to provide. This meeting will be audio recorded.

Given the amount of time you will spend participating in this study, that you could have used in some other way such as working or studying, you will be compensated \$8 per hour.

If you would like to participate, please email me at xxxxx@ksu.edu or call my cell at (XXX) XXX-XXXX. We will find a convenient time to discuss the study and you will have the chance to ask questions. Thank you for your consideration!

Sincerely,

Olivia Law-DelRosso
Doctoral Candidate, College of Education
Kansas State University
xxxxx@ksu.edu
(XXX) XXX-XXXX

Appendix C - Recruiting Script

Thank you for considering participating in this research. This is an advocacy study that seeks to better understand the experiences of low income, blue collar students in business school. There are many ways in which people are diverse and not a lot of attention or importance is placed on social class diversity. For some people, social class is an important part of their identity and one that influences their experiences in business school. Findings from this study will enhance the understanding of social class diversity in business school. If you choose to participate, several activities will occur:

- First, there will be a Guided Creative Arts Bag Portrait Creation Activity. It will be approximately 90 minutes in length. I will walk you through an activity where you will create a depiction of your personal experiences. You do not need to consider yourself an artist or be familiar with the process whatsoever.
- Second, you will also be interviewed by me. This interview will be about 90 minutes in length. We will find a time and location that works for both of us.
- Finally, after I have analyzed the data, I will have a member check meeting with you which should last about 30 minutes. During this meeting I will share the findings of the research study with you, ask for your input, and any additional information you would like to provide.
- All one-on-one interviews and the guided activity will be audio recorded and take place in a private, mutually agreed upon location and time.
- Your identity will be kept completely anonymous.
- So, in total, you will need to be able to commit to three meetings with me. Two will take about an hour and a half and the third about half an hour.
- Do you have any questions?
- After addressing any student questions:
I want to emphasize that participation in this study is completely voluntary. If at any point you decide to stop participating in the study, you can. And you do not need to give me any explanation. Does that make sense?
- Alright, so are you interested in participating? If the participant says yes, ask the following questions:
 1. What is your major? (need to be a business major to qualify)
Answer: _____
Have you been a business major in this business school for at least two years? (need to respond “yes” to qualify)
Answer: _____
 2. Ask the following questions (need to answer 3 or more of these questions with a “yes”)
 - a) Do you consider your parents or guardians you were raised with to be blue collar? Definitions of blue collar vary, but usually this type of work includes skilled tradespeople, factory workers, farmers, and other types of careers that involve physical work.
Answer: _____

- b) Thinking about your classmates in business school, do you consider your family income growing up to be less than your classmates?
Answer: _____
- c) Thinking about the culture of business school (the environment, what it feels like to be here, how people behave, and how they talk) does it feel uncomfortable?
Answer: _____
- d) Thinking about the culture of business school (the environment, what it feels like to be here, how people behave, and how they talk), does it feel different from how you grew up?
Answer: _____
- e) Thinking about your experiences in business school, does social class seem to be a critical difference that makes a difference for you?
Answer: _____

- If the student qualifies for the study:
You do qualify for this study. Given the amount of time you will spend participating in this study, that you could have used in some other way such as working or studying, you will be compensated \$8 per hour if you choose to participate. Would you like to participate?

Please review this informed consent form and let me know if you have any questions.

- Thank you for your commitment to this study. I want to remind you that your name will remain anonymous at all times. Is there a particular pseudonym, or fake name, you would like to be known by in my write up?
Pseudonym: _____
- Let's find some times that will work for your schedule for us to meet.
Guided Creative Arts Bag Portrait Date and Time: _____
Interview Date & Time: _____
Member Check Date & Time: _____
- What is the best way for me to reach you? Email/cell phone/other _____
- Do you have Venmo? Use for payment.
- Do you have any remaining questions?

Appendix D - Informed Consent for Research Participants

PROJECT TITLE:

"Class Work" in Business School: A Case Study of Low-Income, Blue-Collar Students

PROJECT
APPROVAL
DATE:

PROJECT
EXPIRATION
DATE:

LENGTH OF
STUDY:

6
weeks

PRINCIPAL
INVESTIGATOR:

Dr. Kakali Bhattacharya

CO-INVESTIGATOR(S):

Olivia Law-DelRosso

CONTACT DETAILS FOR
PROBLEMS/QUESTIONS:

Dr. Kakali Bhattacharya, 785-532-5535,
kakalibh@ksu.edu
Olivia Law-DelRosso, 785-532-6986,
olivia@ksu.edu

IRB CHAIR CONTACT
INFORMATION:

Dr. Rick Scheidt, Committee Chair for Research
Involving Human Subjects, rscheidt@ksu.edu
Dr. Cheryl Doerr, Associate Vice President for
Research Compliance, cdoerr@ksu.edu

PROJECT SPONSOR:

N/A

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH:

The purpose of this case study is to explore how 3 students who identify as low-income and blue-collar describe their experiences in business school including training for future employment.

PROCEDURES OR METHODS TO BE USED:

As a participant in this study the following activities will take place. All one-on-one interviews will be audio recorded and take place in a private, mutually agreed upon location and time.

- 1) Guided Bag-Portrait Creation Activity. This is a reflective, arts-based guided activity. You do not need to consider yourself artistic and all supplies will be provided. This activity will be about 90 minutes in length.
- 2) Interview. This interview will be about 90 minutes in length.
- 3) Member Check Meeting. About 30 minutes in length. During this meeting I will share the findings of the research study with you, ask for your input, and any additional information you would like to provide.

4) I'll also for you to share any documents relevant to your experiences in business school with me.

RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS ANTICIPATED:

There are no anticipated risks or discomforts for participating in this research.

BENEFITS ANTICIPATED:

You will have the opportunity to reflect on your experiences in business school. The information collected will contribute to the body of research on social class diversity in business school. You'll also receive \$8 per hour engaged in this study.

EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY:

In this study, the following measures will be taken to ensure your confidentiality:

1. A pseudonym will be used to protect your identity
2. Electronic files will be stored on a password protected device in a password protected folder
3. Hard copy files will be stored in a locked drawer in a locked office
4. Only the I will have access to the electronic and hard copy files
5. Any identifiable details shared in the course of the study will be fictionalized
6. Three years after the conclusion of the study audio recordings will be destroyed

Data may be shared with the dissertation major professors and committee members with the same standards of confidentiality.

Terms of participation: I understand this project is research, and that my participation is voluntary. I also understand that if I decide to participate in this study, I may withdraw my consent at any time, and stop participating at any time without explanation, penalty, or loss of benefits, or academic standing to which I may otherwise be entitled.

I verify that my signature below indicates that I have read and understand this consent form, and willingly agree to participate in this study under the terms described, and that my signature acknowledges that I have received a signed and dated copy of this consent form.

(Remember that it is a requirement for the P.I. to maintain a signed and dated copy of the same consent form signed and kept by the participant).

PARTICIPANT NAME:

**PARTICIPANT
SIGNATURE:**

**WITNESS TO
SIGNATURE:
(PROJECT STAFF)**

DATE:

DATE:

Appendix E - Informed Consent for Students and Instructors in the Career Pathways Class

PROJECT TITLE:

"Class Work" in Business School: A Case Study of Low-Income, Blue-Collar Students

**PROJECT
APPROVAL
DATE:**

9/4/2019

**PROJECT
EXPIRATION
DATE:**

9/4/2022

**LENGTH
OF STUDY:**

6
weeks

**PRINCIPAL
INVESTIGATOR:**

Dr. Kakali Bhattacharya

CO-INVESTIGATOR(S):

Olivia Law-DelRosso

**CONTACT DETAILS FOR
PROBLEMS/QUESTIONS:**

Olivia Law-DelRosso, 785-532-6986,
olivia@ksu.edu
Dr. Kakali Bhattacharya, 785-532-5535,
kakalibh@ksu.edu

**IRB CHAIR CONTACT
INFORMATION:**

Dr. Rick Scheidt, Committee Chair for Research
Involving Human Subjects, rscheidt@ksu.edu
Dr. Cheryl Doerr, Associate Vice President for
Research Compliance, cdoerr@ksu.edu

PROJECT SPONSOR:

N/A

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH:

The purpose of observing this career development course is to understand the ways in which the business school teaches employability skills, such as soft skills. Observations will also help the researcher understand more deeply the environment students experience in business school.

PROCEDURES OR METHODS TO BE USED:

I (the researcher) will be observing your class on several occasions. I may audio-record the class and will take notes. No identifying information about those present will be recorded.

RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS ANTICIPATED:

There are no anticipated risks or discomforts to you as a student or participant in the course.

BENEFITS ANTICIPATED:

Through allowing the researcher to observe the career development class, the instructor of the course and the students present during the observation(s) will be contributing the body of knowledge related to the environment of business school.

EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY:

In this study, the following measures will be taken to ensure confidentiality:

1. Any identifying information about people in the course, including the instructor and students will be fictionalized
2. Pseudonyms will be assigned
3. Electronic files will be stored on a password protected device in a password protected folder
4. Hard copy files will be stored in a locked drawer in a locked office
5. Only the researcher will have access to the electronic and hard copy files
6. Three years after the conclusion of the study audio recordings will be destroyed by being deleted and hard copy files will be shredded
7. Anyone in the course who does not consent to participate in the observation will be omitted from notes and analysis

Data may be shared with the dissertation major professors and committee members with the same standards of confidentiality.

Terms of participation: I understand this project is research, and that my participation is voluntary. I also understand that if I decide to participate in this study, I may withdraw my consent at any time, and stop participating at any time without explanation, penalty, or loss of benefits, or academic standing to which I may otherwise be entitled.

I verify that my signature below indicates that I have read and understand this consent form, and willingly agree to participate in this study under the terms described, and that my signature acknowledges that I have received a signed and dated copy of this consent form.

(Remember that it is a requirement for the P.I. to maintain a signed and dated copy of the same consent form signed and kept by the participant).

PARTICIPANT NAME:**PARTICIPANT
SIGNATURE:****WITNESS TO
SIGNATURE:
(PROJECT STAFF)****DATE:****DATE:**

Appendix F - Guided Creative Arts Bag Portrait

Participants will meet with the researcher one on one in a private, agreed upon space such as an office. The researcher will guide participants through a creative arts bag portrait activity to express their experiences in business school. The meeting will be audio recorded.

Participants will be asked to bring with them two objects. One that represents their identity they project to the world in business school. And one that they perhaps keep hidden.

In preparation for the activity the researcher will prepare the following:

1. Purchase three large, blank, brown paper bags
2. Print a variety of color photos from [unsplash.com](https://unsplash.com/collections) collections
<https://unsplash.com/collections>
3. Obtain art supplies including multicolored construction paper, lined paper, paint brushes, paint, glue, markers, crayons, pens, and scissors

The room will be set up with color photos printed and scattered facing up on a side table.

A single large paper bag will be placed on the table with plenty of room for the participant to work. Art making materials will be both at the table and extra will be on a side table. The following instructions will guide the activity, influenced by Bhattacharya (2016) and Crawford (2017)

- We all display a version of ourselves depending on the context or situation in which we are in. We often try to fit in and meet the expectations of the people around us. For example, my performative self in business school is one that tries to meet the expectations of my colleagues and the way business instructors should “look.” This means wearing clothing that is not always comfortable and sometimes omitting parts of my personal life from conversation, even when others are sharing about their home life. My home life is different from theirs and sharing it will change their perception of me.
- The process that I will walk you through today, I experienced myself a few years back. *Show bag*. This is the bag-portrait that I made. The front represents how I projected myself in my professional role and on the back is who I “really am” and includes many things that I kept hidden.
- In another example of what we will do today, here are photos from another study. In this study the participant identified as having a learning disability. On the front of the bag is the image they project to the world. The back is how they really feel. In this example, participant “Declan” said he made this drawing to show how he tries to present to the world that he is “super calm,” “serene,” and the way “everything is supposed to look.” On the back, you can see he has placed under the fold of the bag a representation of him trying to hold cracked boards together with nails. The back is black and white. He stated he is trying to “portray a bleak and cold hidden side of himself. *Show excerpts from Crawford (2017). Allow for viewing, questions, and discussion.*

- Art making is used in business schools and corporations frequently to help managers and leaders understand their own perceptions more deeply, to spur creativity and innovation, and to create new and different connections. For example, at Babson College, MBA students take art classes to enhance their creativity, LEGO bricks have been used by leaders in corporations to depict corporate strategy, and photographs have been used to facilitate discussion about people's different perspectives on complex business practices.
- Today, you will be creating a similar self-portrait to the one I showed you. On one side of the bag you will create a reflection of yourself that you project to the world in business school. On the other side will be a reflection of yourself that you may keep hidden from the world in business school. How you create the bag is up to you. It can be anything you deem relevant that connects you to who you are, inspires you, or informs your values, beliefs, and experiences. We will discuss your bag-portrait in our one-on-one interviews.
- First, select construction paper or lined paper and something to write with. You are going to free-write responses to a couple questions. Do not worry about grammar or spelling. Just write as things come to your mind. They can be full sentences or just words that come to mind.
 - Think about your first impressions of business school. Write about those first impressions. What was it like, what did you think? *Write for 2 minutes*
 - Describe the culture of business school, in other words, what it feels like to be here, the expectations for how people should look, behave, and talk. *Write for 2 minutes*
 - How do people learn those expectations?
 - Describe your culture growing up. In other words, what did it feel like to be in that community, what were the expectations for how people should look, behave, and talk?
 - How is your culture growing up different from the culture here in business school? How is it the same?
 - How do you perform in business school?
 - What parts of you do you perhaps keep hidden from the world?
- Now, please go to the laptop and select one or more photos that speak to you. Olivia will print them for you.
- Now, I invite you to decorate your paper bag however you would like. Remember, the front of the bag is the "you" you show the world in business school. The back of the bag is the "you" you may keep hidden.

Participants will work on their bag. As questions come up the researcher will address them. Participants will be invited to continue working on it at home, if they would like to. They will be asked to bring the bag with them for the interview.

Electronic audio files will be stored on a password protected device in a password protected folder. Hard copy files, including the bag portrait, will be stored in a locked drawer in a locked office.

Appendix G - Elicited, Semi-Structured Interview

There will be one elicited interview with each participant in a private, agreed upon space. The interview will be about 90 minutes in length and audio-recorded. Audio recordings will be stored on a password protected device in a password protected folder. Only pseudonym's will be used in the transcription of the audio file.

The interview will be elicited with the participant's creative arts bag portrait they have already created. The structure of the interview will be conversational in nature with questions about the participant's bag portrait guiding the conversation. Depending on how the participant answers, the researcher will ask follow-up questions to further explore their experiences more deeply. Questions and follow-up questions will be informed by the following questions.

1. Walk me through what you have on your bag.
2. How does what your bag look like relate to your experiences in business school?
3. Describe to me what it felt like making the different parts of this bag
4. Tell me about any specific experiences that are connected to your bag.
5. What were your first impressions of business school?
6. How would you describe the culture of business school, in other words, what it feels like to be here, the expectations for how people should look, behave, and talk?
 - a. How do people learn those expectations?
7. Can you describe your culture growing up? In other words, what did it feel like to be in that community, what were the expectations for how people should look, behave, and talk?
 - a. How does your culture growing up compare with the culture here in business school?
8. How do you feel as if you are performing in business school?
9. What parts of you do you perhaps keep hidden from the world?
10. Is there anything else you would like to share about your bag?
11. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences in business school?

Appendix H - Debriefing Statement

Thank you for participating in this study. The creative arts bag portrait, interviews, and the documents you shared provided data to increase knowledge in the area of classed experiences in business school. The goal of the research was to better understand how students who do not identify as white collar, experience business school including training for employment. I also conducted observations in the business school and analyzed pertinent documents. Through the information gathered, themes were identified including: _____.

Final results will be available from the researcher, Olivia Law-DelRosso by _____.

Please contact me at xxxxx@ksu.edu to receive an email copy of the final report.

If you would like to speak with someone other than the researcher, please contact my professor, Dr. Kakali Bhattacharya at kakalibh@ksu.edu. You may also contact the Kansas State University Institutional Review Board: Dr. Rick Scheidt, Committee Chair for Research Involving Human Subjects, rscheidt@ksu.edu or Dr. Cheryl Doerr, Associate Vice President for Research Compliance, cdoerr@ksu.edu. The University Research Compliance Office is located in 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University. The office can be reached at 785-532-3224 and comply@ksu.edu.

The researcher does not know the community participants live in yet. Once participants have been selected, a list of therapists, mental health facilities, or other similar resources will be compiled. This list can be used by participants if they decide they need to.

Appendix I - Copyright Permission

Betsy Crawford <betsy.crawford@mail.fhsu.edu>

Sat 5/18/2019 3:03 PM

To:

Olivia Law-Delrosso <olivia@ksu.edu>

This is exciting. You can use my work. Just give us credit!

Let me know how it goes.

--

Betsy Crawford Ed.D. NCSP
Pronouns: she, her, hers
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