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# First-generation college students and class consciousness : exploring how social class influences college adjustment

Rachel L. Redd

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Rachel Redd  
First-Generation College Students  
and Class Consciousness:  
Exploring How Social Class  
Influences Adjustment to College

Abstract

First-generation college students (FGCS), defined as students whose parents have not obtained a bachelor's degree, is a new identity constructed primarily over the past decade. Utilizing the umbrella term of FGCS is problematic as it places a heavy concentration on parental education and lack of cultural capital, ignoring how current class experiences in the context of other identities, such as race and gender, shape adjustment to college. The purpose of this quantitative study was twofold: (a) to examine whether class consciousness affects first-generation students' adjustment to elite, non-profit private undergraduate institutions, and (b) to examine how the intersectionality of race, class and gender moderate this relationship. The sample included 46 FGCS (68.3% female, 45% students of color, 48.3% low SES) who were completing their degrees at elite private colleges and universities. Findings include a positive correlation between the class consciousness scales for class performativity and access and opportunities with both institutional attachment and social adjustment and a hierarchical regression illustrating that class performativity is a better predictor of adjustment to college than prior access and opportunities to accrue dominant cultural capital. Unfortunately, a large enough sample size was not able to be collected to assess for the main effects of race, class, and gender. These findings challenge the importance institutions have placed on generational status for these students and suggest that further concentration should be placed on class identity development and current class experiences for FGCS at elite private undergraduate institutions.

Running head: FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS AND CLASS  
CONSCIOUSNESS

**FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS AND CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS:  
EXPLORING HOW SOCIAL CLASS INFLUENCES COLLEGE ADJUSTMENT**

A project based upon an independent investigation,  
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
For the degree of Master of Social Work

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2016

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## Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iii
LIST OF TABLES.....	iv
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	4
III. METHODOLOGY.....	18
IV. FINDINGS.....	30
V. DISCUSSION.....	42
REFERENCES.....	50
APPENDICES	
Appendix A: Social Media Recruitment.....	56
Appendix B: Recruitment Email to Student Organizations.....	57
Appendix C: Recruitment Email to Educational Institutions.....	58
Appendix D: Student Recruitment Email.....	59
Appendix E: Human Subjects Review Approval.....	60
Appendix F: Human Subjects Review Revision.....	61
Appendix G: Informed Consent.....	62
Appendix H: Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire Terms and Agreement.....	64
Appendix I: Demographic Questions.....	66
Appendix J: Perceptions and Beliefs Scale.....	69
Appendix K: Class Performativity Scale.....	70
Appendix L: Access and Opportunities Scale.....	71
Appendix M: Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire.....	73
Appendix N: Permission to Use Access and Opportunities Scale.....	75
Appendix O: Student Adaptation to College Rights and Permission .....	76

Appendix P: Class Consciousness and Adjustment Scale Means by Race and Income.....	77
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### **List of Tables**

#### Table

1. Racial Distribution of Sample.....	30
2. Descriptive Statistics of Scales.....	33
3. Correlations Table.....	35
4. Hierarchical Regression for Variables Predicting Social Adjustment.....	36
5. Hierarchical Regression for Variables Predicting Institutional Attachment.....	36
6. Descriptive Statistics for Class Performativity Scale by Race and Income.....	38
7. Descriptive Statistics for Access and Opportunities Scale by Race and Income.....	39

## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

Over the past ten years, the term first-generation college students (FGCS) has been a heavily researched and socially constructed identity (Wildhagen, 2015). For the purposes of this study, FGCS is defined as a four-year college student whose parents, or primary guardian(s), do not have a bachelor's degree (Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012). However, this term only acknowledges generational status, ignoring that many of these students come from poor and working-class backgrounds and are students of color (Choy, 2001). Utilizing the umbrella term FGCS is problematic unless concentration is placed on experiences of social class in combination with other intersecting identities, including race and gender, and how these experiences relate to social adjustment and institutional attachment, both of which are predictors of attrition and student wellbeing (Baker & Siryk, 1999).

First-generation college students accounted for 22% of students entering higher education institutions from 1992-2000 (Chen, 2005). Yet, social class issues on college campuses are almost entirely invisible, with a lack of dialogue and resources for working- and lower-class students (Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson, & Covarrubias, 2012). The term class is more than socioeconomic standing, which is most often measured by income, education, and occupation (Lott, 2012). Lott (2012) suggests that class denotes “status, expectations, location, and power” (p. 650) and can be correlated with one's life experiences (p. 650). Class influences “what a person is likely to learn, believe, anticipate, and seek after” (Lott, 2012, p. 650).

For many FGCS, entering a private college setting means being exposed to larger proportions of upper- and middle-class students (Aries & Seider, 2005). This exposure to other social classes can affect not only the way in which the students perceive their own class

backgrounds, but also the way in which they perform class (Aries & Seider, 2005). Throughout this study, class is considered an identity (Bettie, 2003). Identity is “formed by one’s existence and interaction within a communal context” (Martin, 2015, p. 472). Martin (2015) attempted to explore class consciousness and salience of class identity among working- and lower-class FGCS and found that most students did not report a connection to their class background, which is interpreted within this study to imply that these students did not have salient class identities. Martin (2015) did find that while class was not a salient identity for these students, they reported that their social class was an important factor for how they navigated relationships within the college environment. This finding suggests that investigating class consciousness may be an insightful tool when understanding FGCS class identity. Prior research has questioned whether the FGCS identity actually decreases class consciousness, as some institutions encourage class assimilation and hold it as a measure of success within the college environment (Wildhagen, 2015).

Previous studies suggest that being the first in one’s family to attend college can negatively impact mental health and life satisfaction, deteriorate one’s ability to complete a degree and affect career choice (Davis, 2010; Jenkins, Belanger, Connally, Boals & Durón, 2013; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004; Rubin, 2012; Ward et al., 2012). A smaller portion of studies have found positive implications of FGCS status, including greater pride in independence and hard work (Aries & Seider, 2005; Martin 2015; Wildhagen, 2015). With many more studies suggesting negative attributes of this socially constructed label, institutions are at risk of assuming these students are inadequate, or in need of special services (Pascarella et al., 2004; Ward et al., 2012; Wildhagen, 2015). More importantly, however, there is little exploration into what *causes* FGCS to struggle in the college environment.



The purpose of this quantitative study was twofold: (a) to examine whether class consciousness influences FGCS adjustment to elite private undergraduate institutions, and (b) to examine how race, income and gender moderate this relationship. Class consciousness, defined as perceptions, beliefs, and preferences based on class, was conceptualized with three class measures: (1) an access and opportunities scale (Ostrove & Long, 2007) that measured pre-college access to dominant cultural capital, (2) a class performativity scale, developed for this study, that captured participants' perceptions of and preferences for clothing brands, mannerisms, etiquette, and material goods, and (3) a perceptions and beliefs measure, developed for this study, that attempted to capture participants' beliefs about their current social class and how this was impacted by their class background. Adjustment to college was operationalized utilizing two subscales of the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ; Baker & Siryk, 1999), the social adjustment scale and the institutional attachment scale. The sample consisted of FGCS at elite private undergraduate institutions, which students self-identified as attending by their response to the question: Do you attend a highly selective private undergraduate institution?

It is the intent of this study to explore the ways in which class consciousness, including class performativity, impacts FGCS adjustment to college. Gaining further knowledge about these students' current experiences of class could: (1) assist college counselors in identifying early narratives pertaining to social class that would indicate a higher risk for poor adjustment, (2) provide ideas for how to examine class identity or broach social class topics in therapy, and (3) assist educational institutions in identifying ways in which performance of class and beliefs about social class decrease student attachment to one another and to the institution.

## CHAPTER II

### Literature Review

In order to examine how class consciousness relates to adjustment to college for first-generation college students (FGCS), first, I will review the concept of cultural capital, as this is felt to be a primary limitation to success for this student population (Pascarella et al., 2004; Ward et al., 2012). I will then define class consciousness and explore how this concept will be applied for the purposes of this study. Next, I will explore previous literature on FGCS and the importance of including the examination of the intersecting identities of race, class and gender. After this section, class performativity is introduced and defined. Finally, I will review the concept of adjustment to college before summarizing the present study.

#### Cultural Capital

Cultural capital, in the form of embodied personality traits and mannerisms, material goods, and credentials (Bourdieu, 1986), “allow[s] culture to be used as a resource that provides access to scarce rewards...and, under certain conditions, may be transmitted from one generation to the next” (Lareau & Weininger, 2003, p. 588). Cultural norms formed by higher social classes can disadvantage college students from working- and lower-class families (Lareau & Conley, 2008), as educational institutions value dominant cultural capital, or high-status cultural markers of class (Lareau & Weininger, 2003). Middle- and upper-class students are better prepared socially for the collegiate academic setting, and have more peer and family support (Lott, 2012). For example, young children from upper- and middle-class families are encouraged to participate in conversations with adults more often, resulting in upper class children having “increase[d] willingness to speak, interrupt, and talk with adults as conversational equals” (Streib, 2011, p. 349). In contrast, children from low-income households often struggle with stigma due to their

class, assumptions about their parents' abilities and a lack of confidence in their capacity for learning (Lott, 2012), making it difficult for them to navigate academic institutions on their own (Ward et al., 2012). Furthermore, dominant cultural capital is not only required to navigate academic institutions (Ward et al., 2012), it is recognized as superior and therefore is rewarded within these institutions (Bourdieu, 1986). The valuing of dominant cultural capital allows institutions to continue to promote themselves as “uphold[ing] meritocratic principles” (Martin, 2012, p. 429), while simultaneously oppressing students not privileged enough to have accrued this form of capital.

As first-generation college students (FGCS) are viewed as socially mobile, they are expected to leave behind their class cultures and begin, or continue, accruing dominant cultural capital in order to be successful (Martin, 2015). However, despite narratives about the possibilities for social mobility for those who are willing to work hard, there is actually very little social mobility in the United States (Lareau & Conley, 2008). The cultural capital an individual accrues is class specific, providing indicators to others in society about which class one belongs to, without knowledge of income or occupation (Bourdieu, 1986). The dominant cultural capital middle- and upper-class students begin accruing from birth gives them an unspoken advantage in educational institutions; as a result, dominant cultural capital, or lack thereof, is considered to be the largest disadvantage FGCS face (Bourdieu, 1986; Lareau & Conley, 2008; Ward et al., 2012). FGCS come from a wide range of social classes. Examining what cultural capital FGCS have and how FGCS experience class once they have arrived at their post-secondary institution may be more insightful than measures of social class, such as socioeconomic status, or generational status alone.

## **Class Consciousness Framework**

Class consciousness, a micro-level construct that references individuals, refers to “elements of a person’s subjectivity” (Wright, 2000, p. 193) that are accessible though may not be continuously present at all times. Because having consciousness of something implicates intentions and results in choices, the study of class consciousness is useful because it can provide information regarding the connection between people’s actions, such as what activities they choose to participate in, their class location and the society they live within (Wright, 2000). While some have conceptualized class consciousness to be the degree to which “an individual has an awareness that he or she belongs to a social class system and how this system plays out in his or her life” (Liu, Soleck, Hopps, Dunston, & Pickett, 2004, p. 104), class consciousness is better operationalized utilizing Wright’s (2000) framework which defines class consciousness as aspects of consciousness that have distinctive beliefs, and effects of beliefs, about one’s class.

Wright (2000) outlines class consciousness as including three elements: (a) perceptions and observations, (b) theories and beliefs about consequences, and (c) preferences. Perceptions are shaped by class through experiences and interactions with people from a variety of class locations and provide information about what we know to exist (Wright, 2000). For college students, perceptions of class may include views regarding choices for a major or how one perceives themselves to stylistically fit in with their college peers. However, perceptions alone do not inform decisions; this also requires a theory regarding what one sees as possible, known as the consequences of actions (Wright, 2000). Theories of consequences may be exhibited by spending and saving habits, or the outlook on the likelihood of obtaining employment with a given degree. Finally, preferences are an “evaluation of the desirability of those consequences”

(Wright, 2000, p. 196). Some students may choose not to socialize with certain peers, or decide on a major that has a better likelihood of employment as opposed to a major that they feel passionately about (Ward et al., 2012). Despite FGCS reporting an awareness of how class impacts their actions, they have not been found to report class as a salient identity (Martin, 2015).

### **First-Generation College Students**

Despite a lack of consensus regarding how to classify first-generation college students (FGCS; Davis, 2010), research has demonstrated that parental educational level strongly influences student success (Pascarella, et al., 2004). The cultural capital gained from parental educational experiences, and generationally passed down, has been found to be a predictor of academic and career success (Davis, 2010). Therefore, it is recommended that FGCS seeking bachelor's degrees be defined as students whose parents do not have a bachelor's degree (Davis, 2010; Ward et al., 2012). However, socially constructing a student identity based solely on implications brought forth due to parental educational level can lead educational institutions toward misconceptions and assumptions about FGC students' academic ability and familial support (Wildhagen, 2015).

With educational institutions' and researchers' increased interest in FGCS since the early 2000's, the identity of FGCS has largely come to be recognized by the disadvantages these students face (Wildhagen, 2015). Research on FGCS has revealed low retention rates, lower-income career and degree choices, lower rates of participation in extracurricular activities, higher rates of depression and life satisfaction for women, and less peer and family support (Davis, 2010; Jenkins et al., 2013; Pascarella et al., 2004; Rubin, 2012; Ward et al., 2012). Educational institutions have begun to offer supportive services to this population, including tutoring, special

housing and advising (Lightweis, 2014), promoting the FGCS identity to students who may not know that this identity exists, or applies to them, until they arrive at college (Wildhagen, 2015). However, despite improved retention rates, increased attention in research and supportive services, the number of FGCS enrolled in 4-year programs has declined over the past several decades (Park & Denson, 2013; Saenz, Hurtado, Barrera, Wolf, & Yeung, 2007).

FGCS are not abandoning college altogether, but are instead choosing to attend two-year colleges, even though they would be more successful at obtaining a bachelor's degree if they begin their college career at a four-year institution (Ward et al., 2012). Their choices of educational institutions do not reflect their academic capabilities but rather, their accrual of dominant cultural capital (Davis, 2010). FGC students' choice in institution relates to many factors, including race, academic preparedness, peer influence, parental involvement and familial class background (Horn & Nuñez, 2000; Ingels, 2005; Tate, Caperton, Kaiser, Pruitt, White & Hall, 2015). Parents who have not experienced college themselves may not have knowledge about the differences in types of institutions, financial aid, degree choices, or social networks to aid students in making decisions (Ward et al., 2012). This creates a gap in cultural capital that influences both students' choices of educational institutions and their experiences of their chosen academic institution. Many factors for both academic and career success hinge on student and parental perceptions and beliefs regarding what is known to be possible; this can be considered evidence of class consciousness that is influenced by accrual of cultural capital (Davis, 2010; Tate et al., 2015; Ward et al., 2012; Wright, 2000).

Some FGCS benefit from the transition to college, reporting increased self-confidence and self-respect now that they are in an environment that is more attuned to their desired educational class practices (Aries & Seider, 2005). These students also recognized and used

strengths from their class backgrounds, including pride in their capacity for independence, and reported fewer feelings of inadequacy and exclusion (Aries & Seider, 2005). In addition, this group of students perceived some affluent students as lacking “independence, self-reliance, empathy and understanding” (Aries & Seider, 2005, p. 438). Recognition of strengths and pride in class background may indicate greater attunement with the educational institution, perhaps suggesting these students’ class practices were already partially centered in dominant cultural capital.

The cultural gap between home and school lives for FGCS not only influences student outcomes but also creates interpersonal conflict, as each requires a separate form of cultural capital (Weininger & Lareau 2003). For example, FGCS disclose less information about their college experience to friends and family from home, because they feel their family does not understand, which increases their level of stress (Barry, Hudley, Kelly & Cho 2009). More so, they experience family achievement guilt, or guilt experienced about the opportunities available to them when they are not accessible to other members of their family (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015). Furthermore, FGCS often experience feelings of inadequacy, or fear of judgment, due to their home environment and school environment carrying societal connotations of inferiority and superiority respectively (Baxter & Britton, 2001). This may lead FGCS to have conflicted feelings regarding their own class backgrounds and shift their perceptions about the social class of their new college peers.

Aries and Seider (2007) conducted a study that examined how the college experience differs for lower-income students who attend a state university versus lower-income students who attend a private college. Lower-income students enrolled in a private college were more aware of their lower-class standing, as they reported greater differences between them and their

college peers. Students enrolled in a state university reported noticing fewer differences between themselves and other students at their university, specifically with language, dress and ability to fit in, compared to the students at the private university (Aries & Seider, 2007). In addition, students at the state university also felt more connected to their families, while the students at the private college felt better equipped to perform class in a manner consistent with their middle- and upper-class peers, but felt more disconnected from their families (Aries & Seider, 2007). Further exploration into how the FGCS identity influences perceptions, beliefs, and performance of class and how this relates to social and institutional adjustment is warranted.

### **Application of Class Consciousness Framework**

Changes in the experience of class can have a variety of impact on students. Even with new opportunities, including clubs, organizations, networking events, and other forms of exposure to cultural capital, Wright's (2000) framework for class consciousness suggests that students are likely to select class practices based on their currently existing preferences, theories, and perceptions. Class consciousness will then be transformed by these new experiences. As this process occurs and an individual's class consciousness transforms, studies indicate that some students experience "a painful dislocation between an old and newly developing habitus" (Baxter & Britton, 2001, p. 99).

Martin (2015) utilized the Social Class Worldview Model (SCWM), interviewing seven first-generation, low-income, white students to explore their class consciousness, salience, and values, identifying four themes among participants: "(a) student's consciousness of material differences, (b) the minimized salience of social class to students' identity, (c) students' attitudes toward hard work, and (d) students' attitudes toward financial resources" (Martin, 2015, p. 477). Findings regarding salience of social class to the identity of the students were largely



based on students' statements that they currently do not identify with their class background, or do not feel as though their class background is an important piece of who they are now (Martin, 2015). While students did not report salience of their class identity, all seven reported being more aware of their class since beginning college (Martin, 2015). Students also identified that they often thought about their SES and acknowledged that it influences their thoughts, their worldviews, perceptions of others and preferences for participation in activities (Martin, 2015).

Wright's (2000) framework for studying class consciousness examines the relationship between class location, class practices and class consciousness. Class location is thought to be where an individual is within a given "structure of class relations" (Wright, 2000, p. 190). Given this definition, the class location of a first-generation college student (FGCS) is not explained fully by their class background. While their class background will have provided a limited availability of class practices, or activities chosen to realize class interests, these students have also adopted a new class structure, the educational institution (Wright, 2000). This provides for new class practices, which will transform both the students' social location and class consciousness (Wright, 2000, p. 200). Thus, Martin's (2015) claim that FGCS lack class identity salience is problematic in that it does not take into account the addition of the educational institution, with new cultural capital transforming class location, and instead conflates FGCS class identity with their class background. Efforts to make FGCS a salient identity, focusing the identity on parental education attainment only, can deter students from class consciousness (Wildhagen, 2015).

Class consciousness is linked to class practices by one's perceptions, beliefs, and preferences when choosing activities to participate in based on class interest (Wright, 2000). Practices, in turn, transform class consciousness and class location, partially by generating

economic and cultural capital (Wright, 2000). Therefore, students that have selected similar class practices since admission to college may have similarities in class consciousness. Due to the broad way in which FGCS are defined, reactions to shifts in class location and practices could be affected by a number of other influencers, including the intersectionality of race, class, and gender identities, which must be taken into consideration (Davis, 2010; Wildhagen, 2015).

### **Intersectionality**

Intersectionality emerged out of feminist and critical race theory as a term that called for the consideration of both the meaning and consequences that come from belonging to multiple social identities, most commonly race, class, and gender (Cole, 2009). Utilizing the lens of intersectionality allows for examination of both identities that are disadvantaged and ones that are privileged within the same population (Cole, 2009), such as white lower-class FGCS who may lack the cultural capital necessary to navigate the educational system, but are privileged by their whiteness. This privilege may make it easier for these students to find similarities between themselves, staff and faculty, and their college peers. When considering intersectionality, no identity is ranked higher or primary over another identity as this would cloud the examination of a set of identities as a whole, and the disadvantages or privileges that can be experienced exponentially by any combination (Ramsay, 2014).

Despite research demonstrating how diversity on college campuses enhances educational experiences (Espenshade, Radford & Chung, 2009), recruitment and retention of both racial and ethnic minority students and students from the lower- and working-class, representing over half of all FGCS (Saenz et al., 2007), has decreased (Park & Denson, 2013). Retention rates have been directly linked to student adjustment evidenced by institutional attachment (Baker & Siryk, 1999). White lower socioeconomic status students may promote acceptance of diversity within

an educational institution, as this population group has been found to be more likely to interact with students across different races (Espenshade et al., 2009). Therefore, increasing the retention and recruitment of white FGCS may also aid in the adjustment experience for students of color and increase the level of diversity on campus.

Racial identity has been found have a substantial impact on educational success (Jencks & Phillips, 1998). African American students score, on average, 25% lower than white students on standardized tests, even when family income is controlled for (Jencks & Phillips, 1998). A student of color's awareness of racial diversity in the classroom can make the environment feel more threatening, redirecting mental energy that could be used for learning instead to a vigilant mindset (Cohen & Sherman, 2014). Furthermore, students belonging to racial and ethnic minorities also report less personal interactions with professors, reporting instead that these interactions are generic and formal, even in programs designed to promote socialization between these students and faculty (Anaya & Cole, 2001). Given the impact that race has on educational experience, race amongst FGCS must be taken into consideration when examining this population.

Poverty is often racialized in the United States, with conflation of black racial identity with that of poverty, rendering those who identify as white living in poverty invisible and those who identify as black more commonly assumed to also be poor (Hooks, 2000). Kuriloff & Reichert (2003) found that white working-class boys are lacking a discourse on class and often internalize shame and blame for academic and social failures. Black male students that were able to form a Black Student Alliance (BSA) were able to unite across classes and compare their experiences across these class lines (Kuriloff & Reichert, 2003). This allowed these students to form a more unified critique of their school experience and develop a greater awareness of both

racism and classism (Kuriloff & Reichart, 2003). Understanding how students experience race and class together is imperative when seeking to understand students' experience of class.

Furthermore, gender must be considered in conjunction with class and race when examining class consciousness (Bettie, 2003). Bettie (2003) examined high school girls and their identity formation of class, race and gender in which students sorted themselves based on gender and race, at times performing a different class to fit in with these other identities. This cross-class performance can be done to fit in with peers of the same gender and racial identity, such as a Latina student from an upper- or middle- class family performing working-class to better fit in with the larger Latina population, or a white, working-class, female student performing middle-class to fit in with the student population in higher-level academic classes (Bettie, 2003). Thus, when examining class consciousness, such as students who choose to perform a class other than their own, it is imperative to also account for race, class and gender.

### **Class Performativity**

Class location is visible to others through physical markers of class including clothing, use of language, hairstyles, or type of car driven (Aries & Seider, 2005; Bettie, 2003; Lott, 2012; Ostrove & Long, 2007). Perceptions about how material items mark class location will inform what choices are made about how one performs class. While cultural performativity unconsciously reflects our social location, there are times that one will chose to perform an identity, such as class, that is not their own (Bettie, 2003). Performance of class relates to the power structure within class; for example, high school aged students were found to have an informal hierarchy of peer groups separated by class-based interests, each with a corresponding style (Bettie, 2003).

How one performs class is related to one's "implicit recognition of cultural difference, in the everyday symbolic boundaries that people employ to understand their own and other's sense of place" (Bettie, 2003, p. 33). This recognition is expressed in combination with other social locators including race, gender, and sexuality, and is displayed by "one's relationship to and creative use of commodities" (Bettie, 2003, p. 44). Given that performing class is an intentional choice, sometimes made for the purpose of class passing, examining intentions, perceptions, preferences, and theories about class performance will provide information about class consciousness.

Class performance, marked by clothing, language and leisure activities, can impact the sense of belonging for students from all class backgrounds (Ostrove & Long, 2007). Performance of class as perceived by college students can include physical appearance and material goods, such as possessions or how one decorates their dorm room, both of which have been found to impact sense of college belonging (Ostrove & Long, 2007). This suggests that a closer look at how FGCS perform class may provide insight into one's level of comfort with class background or current class location, as well as reactions to changing class consciousness.

### **College Adjustment**

Adjustment to college is more than adapting to a new academic climate. Students learn new ways of socializing with peers and faculty, new roles and responsibilities and how to separate their individual identity from that of their family (Crede & Niehorster, 2011). Adjustment can serve as a predictor of academic success and retention (Baker & Siryk, 1999). Given the many facets of adjustment, researchers have approached measuring first-generation college students (FGCS) adjustment in many ways.

Several studies have utilized the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ; Rubin, 2012), which measures social integration in relation to “formal and informal social activities, loneliness, and sense of belonging” (p. 25), as well as questions about whether the student feels accepted or a part of the college community. In a meta-analysis, Rubin (2012), found the SACQ-social subscale was a superior and powerful tool compared to other assessments, and the most likely to detect differences in class.

Rubin (2012) identified two factors that impacted FGCS adjustment to college: living situation and age. FGCS living at home are often less integrated socially than FGCS living on campus; and older students as compared to younger students reported less time available to engage socially due to other commitments. In addition, the relationship between social class and social integration was found not to vary based on year of study (Rubin, 2012).

### **Summary and Implications**

Given that class consciousness, performance of class, and cultural capital have all been found to influence adjustment to college, further study into how these aspects of class interact to shape the college experience is warranted. Measuring how first-generation college students (FGCS) have been able to adjust to college with potentially new exposure to dominant cultural capital, and what role class consciousness plays in this process, is critical. Examining class access and opportunities prior to college attendance may provide valuable insight as to what new opinions and experiences are formed in new class environments. The intersections of race and gender with class should be given strong consideration, as both of these identifiers are likely to affect class performance and class practices. Utilizing the umbrella term of FGCS for college services is problematic unless further concentration is placed on how these students are

experiencing class and how this varies depending upon other identities, including race, class and gender.

This study seeks to address a gap in the literature by examining how the intersection of class consciousness, race, and gender impacts FGCS. While many studies incorporate either working- and lower-class students or FGCS into their study, it is rare to have a study independently focus on FGCS experience of class. Current literature lacks insight into how FGCS experience their class location while they strive for social mobility. Studies to date also lack large enough sample sizes to examine important intersections of race and gender with class (Bettie, 2003; Martin, 2015).

## CHAPTER III

### Methodology

The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine the ways in which race, class and gender influence class consciousness, and how class consciousness relates to social adjustment and institutional attachment for first-generation college students (FGCS). The research questions that guided this study were:

1. How does class performativity relate to social adjustment and institutional attachment?
2. How does prior access and opportunities for social capital relate to social adjustment and institutional attachment?
3. How do perceptions and beliefs about class relate to social adjustment and institutional attachment?
4. How is the relationship between class consciousness and social adjustment and institutional attachment to college influenced by the intersecting identities of race, class and gender?

The hypotheses were:

1. The class performativity scale will have a positive association with both social adjustment and institutional attachment, so that the more middle- or upper-class the performativity, the higher the social adjustment and institutional attachment.
2. The access and opportunities scale will have a positive association with both social adjustment and institutional attachment, so that the more access and opportunities that students had to middle- or upper-class activities, the higher the social adjustment and institutional attachment.
3. The perceptions and beliefs scale will have a positive association with both social adjustment and institutional attachment, so that students with perceptions and beliefs



aligned with middle- or upper-class consciousness will be associated with higher social adjustment and institutional attachment.

4. Race, class and gender will moderate the relationship between the class consciousness scales and the two adjustment to college scales for social adjustment and institutional attachment.

### **Research Design**

This study utilized a quantitative approach in an attempt to obtain a large enough sample size to be able to evaluate how the intersectionality of race, class and gender influence the class consciousness of participants. An anonymous online survey was developed to enhance accessibility, allowing participation to occur from any electronic device anywhere in the United States.

The anonymous survey was comprised of 68 items, including five multi-item likert-type scales, three of which operationalized class consciousness and two operationalized adjustment to college. The three class consciousness measures were: a 12 item perceptions and beliefs scale, a 10 item class performativity scale, and a 10 item access and opportunities scale (Ostrove & Long, 2007). Adjustment to college was operationalized with two subscales of the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ; Baker & Siryk, 1999), the social adjustment scale and the institutional attachment scale, for a total of 27 items. Multi-item scales were utilized in an effort to fully assess validity, accuracy, and reliability (Gliem & Gliem, 2003).

### **Sample**

There were 115 initial respondents. However, only 60 participants met the inclusion criteria, and of those 60, only 46 completed all measures in this study. Due to the limited sample size, adjustments were made regarding how demographic information collected was utilized.

Participants were assigned to one of two racial groups: White students ( $n = 28$ ) and students of color ( $n = 27$ ). Income groups included: parental income less than \$40,000 ( $n = 29$ ) and parental income more than \$40,001 ( $n = 26$ ). Participants' gender identity included: female ( $n = 41$ ) and male ( $n = 12$ ).

**Inclusion criteria.** Eligible participants were FGCS from any class background, with any racial and gender identity, in an effort to gather a sample capable of examining the relationship between these identities and class consciousness. Participants were able to complete the survey if they (a) identified as attending a highly selective private educational institution, (b) had neither custodial parent possess a bachelor's degree and (c) were a 'traditional' student, defined as living in official campus housing during the school year, enrolled in 12 credit hours during the present semester and between the ages of 18-25.

**Recruitment procedures.** Participant recruitment occurred in three major ways: (a) by advertising the survey on social media, including Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, and first-generation student blogs (Appendix A), (b) by contacting FGCS organizations, student organizations for males and student organizations for students of color (Appendix B), and (c) contacting elite private undergraduate institutions asking them to send out an email to students (Appendix C). Institutions were provided with an email to send out to students that included a link to the survey (Appendix D).

Recruitment via social media provided an easy point of access for students, as social media is easily accessible and heavily utilized in youth culture. Online recruitment also allowed students from any elite private undergraduate institution to participate. Despite recruitment efforts, the sample consisted mainly of students attending schools located on the east coast ( $n = 50$ ), with very few other locations ( $n = 4$ ).

**Feasibility and recruitment limitations.** Survey recruitment methods, recruitment materials and inclusion questions created several limitations for this study. First, the survey recruitment materials indicated that this study was seeking FGCS, making it more likely for a student who self-identifies as a FGCS to click on the link over other students whose parents do not have bachelor's degrees. Second, students were asked to self-identify as attending a highly selective private undergraduate institution. This statement is subjective and as such could be interpreted differently by FGCS, as this population has been found to have higher rates of feelings of inadequacy and decreased self-esteem (Ward et al., 2012). Third, due to the sample containing primarily female identified participants, gender was unable to be considered in analysis. Similarly, the location of participants over-represents east coast schools. Lastly, the inclusion question: are you and your parents born outside of the United States, was removed during the study in order to gain a larger sample size. This question was moved to the demographic section and was controlled for upon analysis.

There were two larger complications, primarily due to the small sample size, that limited the results to this study. A large enough sample size was not collected to be able to make any conclusions about how the intersecting race, class and gender identities moderate the relationship between the class consciousness scales and adjustment to college, rendering this hypothesis unconfirmed. Furthermore, the perceptions and beliefs scale ( $\alpha = 0.41$ ) did not perform well enough to be included in the analysis as a measure, as its reliability was below .70. Therefore, analysis and discussion primarily focus on the interactions between class performativity and prior access and opportunities and social adjustment and institutional attachment.

## **Ethics and Safeguards**

The Human Subjects Review Board at Smith College School for Social Work approved the methodology of this study prior to beginning this research (Appendix E). This study was amended to include students who were born outside of the United States or who have parents born outside of the United States in order to increase the sample size (Appendix F).

**Risks of participation.** Participants were informed that this survey was for the purpose of learning more about how FGCS perceptions, beliefs, and preferences about their social class affect their adjustment to college. Prior to participation, students were informed that this study may be an uncomfortable topic for them to explore, and that they could elect not to participate, skip questions on the survey, or end participation at any time. Students were given as much time as they needed to complete the survey. Included in the consent was encouragement to contact their college counseling services at their educational institution if they experienced any emotional distress during participation. This message also appeared at the end of the survey.

**Benefits of participation.** Through participation, students may have gained greater awareness about their class background and may have been called to reflect upon how their class background has impacted their college experience. Survey questions may have helped to develop ways to think about class background, as language about class identity in our society is often lacking (Lareau & Weininger, 2003). Development of a discourse regarding class identity in conjunction with racial identity may help students articulate experiences of classism (Kuriloff & Reichert, 2003).

**Precautions to safeguard confidentiality.** No participant was asked their name and no identifying information was collected. Data was downloaded to an excel spreadsheet with no identifying information, as each participant was assigned a number. Data was stored offline in a

password-protected folder. The researcher and the research advisor only accessed data. All data collected was stored on Qualtrics, a program that allows data to be encrypted, password-protected, and viewed only on secured servers. All electronically stored data was password-protected, firewalled, and encrypted during the storage period and destroyed properly by U.S. DOD methods, per Qualtrics security procedures (Qualtrics Terms of Service, 2016). Per Qualtrics Terms of Service (2016), the survey creator owns all rights to data collected and Qualtrics guarantees to not sell or make available any information about account holders or data collected.

All research materials, including recordings, transcriptions, analyses and consent/assent documents were stored in a secure location and will continue to be kept for three years, in accordance with federal regulations. In the event that materials are needed beyond this period, they will be kept secured until no longer needed, and then destroyed.

### **Data Collection**

This quantitative study examined associations among three class consciousness scales, namely the class performativity scale, the access and opportunities scale (Ostrove & Long, 2007) and the perceptions and beliefs scale, demographic data, social adjustment to college and institutional attachment (Baker & Siryk, 1999). Data collection for this study occurred via a quantitative online survey form on Qualtrics. The survey took approximately 10-20 minutes to complete and was anonymous, as no identifying information was collected and there was no way to connect participants to their responses.

The online survey began with five questions that determined eligibility for participation. These questions were: (1) Do you attend a highly selective, private undergraduate institution? (2) What is the highest degree your custodial parents or guardian have obtained? (3) Do you live in

official campus housing during the school year? (4) Are you between the ages of 18-25 years old? and (5) Are you currently enrolled in 12 or more credits? After students met inclusion criteria they were taken to an informed consent page and were asked to consent to participate in the study (Appendix G). Once consent was obtained, they were asked to enter a password, per the SACQ terms of agreement (Appendix H). Following completion of this step, participants were given 10 demographic questions (Appendix I) followed by the perceptions and beliefs scale developed for this study (Appendix J), the class performativity scale created for this study (Appendix K), the access and opportunities scale (Ostrove & Long, 2007; Appendix L) and then the SACQ adjustment questions (Baker & Siryk, 1999; Appendix M) successively. Data collection began in February and ended in April.

### **Measures**

This study used three pre-existing, published scales, which were tested for validity and reliability. First, the access and opportunities scale (Ostrove & Long, 2007) was made available for research through consent from the author (Appendix N). The SACQ social adjustment and institutional attachment scales were purchased (Appendix O). In addition, two scales were developed for this study to capture FGCS class consciousness, the class performativity scale (Appendix K) and the perceptions and beliefs scale (Appendix J). These were based off of previous studies that explored FGCS, social class experiences in college, or both (Aries & Seider, 2005; Baxter & Britton, 2001; Bettie, 2003; Lareau & Conelly, 2008; Lightweis, 2014; Martin, 2015; Ostrove & Long, 2007; Pascarella et al., 2004; Ward et al., 2012; Wildhagen, 2015). Each scale is described below in relation to the concept or variable that it measured. All measures are self-report measures.

**Demographics.** Participants were asked to answer 10 demographic questions (Appendix I). They were asked to describe their gender identity, racial identity, approximated familial income, how far from home the participant's school was located, if they have a job on campus, if they have a sibling in college, what year are they in college, what their major is, if they or their parents were born outside of the United States and where their educational institution is located.

**Perceptions and beliefs scale.** This 12 item likert-type scale was developed for this study to capture participants' beliefs about their current social class and how this was impacted by their class background. Half of this scale consisted of six questions that are positive, optimistic, statements that students have made in qualitative studies, such as "Compared to my peers, I have a good work ethic" (Aries & Seider, 2005; Martin, 2015). Of the remaining six questions, three are negative, pessimistic, statements found in qualitative studies that were reverse scored, including "I feel left out because I do not have money to spend" (Aries & Seider, 2005; Martin, 2015; Ward et al., 2012) as well as three questions from a six-item measure developed to assess concerns about time, money, and friends (Ostrove & Long, 2007). All 12 statements will were rated on a five point likert-type scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). In this study, internal consistency as measured by Cronbach's alpha was .41. See Appendix J for the items to the complete perceptions and beliefs scale.

Due to the low Cronbach's alpha score on the full 12-item measure, a secondary measure consisting of five items was also created. Items in this measure included: item 7) "I feel left out because I do not have money to spend", item 8) "I feel frustrated by my peers' spending habits", item 9) "My peers will be more successful than me because of their connections", item 11) "My friends don't understand why I'm concerned about money" and item 12) "Sometimes I have conflicts with friends at college related to class issues (money, values, etc.)". Internal

consistency for the revised measure, as measured by Cronbach's alpha was .76. Two questions, question two (Q2), participation in clubs and/or activities in order to enhance a resume, and question 4 (Q4), "Because of my class background, I value saving money more than my other college peers" were also utilized individually during analysis to more fully examine the differences between the class performativity scale and the access and opportunities scale.

**Class performativity scale.** A 10 question likert-type scale was developed for this study based on the research literature on class performativity (Aries & Seider, 2005; Baxter & Britton, 2001; Bettie, 2003; Lareau & Connelly, 2008; Martin, 2015). Class performativity includes physical markers of social class, including style of dress and mannerisms that provide information regarding one's social class status to others (Bettie, 2003; Lott, 2012). Questions about class performativity included questions about material goods, such as "My style of dress is similar to most people on campus", as well as questions about mannerisms, including "I feel confident that I use proper etiquette interacting with faculty". These questions were rated on a five point likert-type scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). A higher score indicated a greater ability to perform class in a manner consistent with the culture of the institution. Ratings were averaged to obtain a mean score. The internal consistency reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) for this scale was .82. See Appendix K for full class performativity scale.

**Access and opportunities scale.** Access and opportunities for pre-college accrual of dominant cultural capital was measured utilizing Ostrove & Long's (2007) 10 question likert-type scale. This scale included questions pertaining to access to things such as education or music lessons, as well as how important participants felt these opportunities were. Nine questions were rated with a 5 point likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (did not have access or not



important at all) to 5 (had excellent access or very important). Additionally, one question pertained to neighborhood safety and, lastly, a question regarding perceptions of financial security that ranged from “my family was never financially secure” to “my family was always financially secure”. Higher scores indicated greater access and opportunities to accrue dominant cultural capital prior to beginning college. The internal consistency reliability coefficient (Cronbach’s alpha) of for this scale was .81. See Appendix L for complete scale.

**Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ).** The SACQ (Baker & Siryk, 1999) subscales for social adjustment and goal commitment/institutional attachment were purchased for this study (Appendix M). The Social Adjustment (SA) subscale measured how successfully a student is coping with the interpersonal-societal demands of college (Baker & Siryk, 1999). The internal consistency reliability coefficient (Cronbach’s alpha) for this scale was .90. The Goal Commitment/Institutional Attachment (IA) subscale measured the quality of attachment a student has to their chosen undergraduate institution (Baker & Siryk, 1999). The internal consistency reliability coefficient (Cronbach’s alpha) for this scale was .87. Some questions overlap into both subscales, including “I feel that I fit in well as part of the college environment.” with a total of 27 SACQ questions included for both scales in the survey. Despite some overlap in questions, each subscale of the SACQ has been found in previous studies to be capable of measuring distinctive facets of college adjustment (Baker & Siryk, 1999). These scales are measured on a 9 point Likert Scale from ‘applies very closely to me’ (1) to ‘doesn’t apply to me at all’ (9). For the ease of interpretation, the scores for this scale were reversed in order to coincide with the other measures.

## Data Analytic Plan

Originally, I planned to examine the intersections of class, race, and gender on FGCS academic and social adjustment at elite private colleges. However, because of the small sample size, the original analyses were modified to address the research question within the data analytic scope of the sample size. In addition, gender was not able to be included in some analyses due to the sample primarily containing female identified participants.

To address research questions (1) “How does class performativity relate to social adjustment and institutional attachment?” and (2) “How does prior access and opportunities for social capital relate to social adjustment and institutional attachment?” I examined correlations among the class performativity scale and access and opportunities scale with both adjustment scales, race, class, gender and Q2 and Q4 from the perceptions and beliefs scale. Additionally, I ran two hierarchical regressions with the class performativity scale and the access and opportunities scale as independent variables in both analyses, and the social adjustment and institutional attachment scales as dependent variables.

Research question (3), “How do perceptions and beliefs about class relate to social adjustment and institutional attachment?” was assessed by examining correlations. Specifically, I examined correlations among the modified perceptions and beliefs subscale as described in the measures with both adjustment scales, race, gender and income.

Finally, to address research question (4), “How is the relationship between class consciousness and adjustment to college influenced by the intersecting identities of race, class and gender?” two 2 (Income) x 2 (Race) MANOVAs were performed to determine the main effects of income and race on social adjustment and institutional attachment, along with class consciousness, measured by the class performativity scale, the access and opportunities scale and

the perceptions and beliefs scale. Unfortunately, interactions examining the intersections among gender, class, and race, could not be run because of the small sample size and uneven distribution of the variables.

## CHAPTER IV

### Findings

This chapter provides analysis to the research questions: 1) “How does class performativity relate to social adjustment and institutional attachment?” 2) “How does prior access and opportunities for social capital relate to social adjustment and institutional attachment?” 3) “How do perceptions and beliefs about class relate to social adjustment and institutional attachment?” and 4) “How is the relationship between class consciousness and adjustment to college influenced by the intersecting identities of race, class and gender?” First, I present an overview of the demographic data followed by an examination of scale reliability for all five measures: the class performativity scale, access and opportunities scale, perceptions and beliefs scale, institutional attachment scale and social adjustment scale. Then I present the primary analysis for research questions (1) and (2). This is followed by correlations among variables that address research question (3), before presenting the results for question (4).

#### Preliminary Analysis

**Demographics.** A total of 60 participants completed the demographic item (see Table 1 for racial sample demographics). Participants were asked to select an approximate family income from five options: 1) < \$20,000/year ( $n = 10$ ), 2) \$20,001-\$40,000/year ( $n = 19$ ), 3) \$40,001-\$60,000/year ( $n = 14$ ), 4) \$60,001-\$80,000/year ( $n = 8$ ) and 5) >&80,001/year ( $n = 4$ ). The majority of responses reported household incomes of less than \$60,000 per year. Due to the distribution and limited sample size, this study divided the responses into two categories for analysis: family income less than \$40,000 ( $n = 29$ ; 48.3%) per year and family income more than \$40,001 ( $n = 26$ , 43.3%). This income grouping appeared logical as it divided the reported

income into two relatively even groups, and was close to the median annual household income in the United States, which is \$53,657 (DaNavas-Walt & Proctor, 2015).

From the sample obtained, White was the most commonly selected race ( $n = 28$ ). Due to the low sample size obtained, and an uneven distribution of racial identities, this study identified two race categories for data analysis: students of color ( $n = 27$ ; 45%) and white students ( $n = 28$ ; 46.7%).

Table 1

*Racial Distribution of Sample*

<u>Race</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
White, non-Hispanic	28	46.7
Asian	11	18.3
Hispanic/Latino	9	15.0
Black or African American	4	6.7
More than one race	3	5.0
Unknown	5	8.3

*Note.*  $n = 60$

The reported gender identity of this sample was skewed heavily toward female identified participants ( $n = 41$ ; 68.3%). Therefore, data analysis was unable to be completed for any effects of gender.

Regarding geography, the sample largely included students attending institutions located on the east coast ( $n = 50$ ; 83%); however, there were a few participants from campuses across the United States. The disproportionate amount of participants from east coast schools could be due to several factors. First, there are many more private colleges on the east coast than anywhere else in the United States (Mitchell, 2015). Second, all of the institutions that agreed to share the link with students or student organizations were located on the east coast. Lastly, I am attending an institution on the east coast and had more personal contacts in this region of the country.

Participants that were recruited from other areas of the country were recruited via social media and not personal contacts. In addition, there was an even distribution of how far the participants had traveled from home to attend their institution, which ranged from less than 100 miles ( $n = 11$ ; 18.3%), 100-500 miles ( $n = 17$ ; 28.3%), 500-2,000 miles ( $n = 12$ ) to more than 2000 miles ( $n = 15$ ; 25%). This suggests that while most institutions were located on the east coast, the participants were from a more diverse geographic region.

Participants' academic majors were placed into one of four categories based on their self-selected major: science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) ( $n = 18$ ; 30%), humanities ( $n = 16$ ; 27%), social science ( $n = 14$ ; 23%), and undecided ( $n = 12$ ; 20%), with a relatively even distribution of responses.

The majority of the sample ( $n = 60$ ) included students who did not have siblings that attended college (66.7% did not, 23.3% did, with 10% non-responding), and most of the participants held a job on campus (68.3% did; 23.3% did not; 8.3% non-response).

Because the original study initially excluded participants who were, or whose parents were, born outside of the United States, the sample contained a majority of students who were born in the United States to parents who were also born in the United States, with 66.3% of participants and their parents born inside the US ( $n = 40$ ), and 33.3% of participants or parents born outside the US ( $n = 20$ ).

**Scale Reliability.** All five measures, the class performativity scale, access and opportunities scale, perceptions and beliefs scale, institutional attachment scale and social adjustment scale, were examined for internal consistency using Chronbach's alpha. Chronbach's alpha, which ranges from 0-1, assesses how closely related a set of items are to a group. The closer a set of items are to 1, the more closely the items are interrelated (Chronbach, 1951) and

can be summed or averaged to form a scaled score. Alpha scores at or above .70 or are considered acceptable (Nunnally, 1978). For the measures assessed here, only the complete perceptions and beliefs scale,  $\alpha = .41$ , did not meet reliability standards, and thus was not used in further analysis. However, the perceptions and beliefs scale was modified using modification indices suggested by interclass correlations, as discussed in the measures. All other scales met or exceeded Chronbach's alpha cutoff of .70 and were used in further analyses. See Table 2 on the following page for scale means, standard deviations, confidence intervals and reliability.

### **Primary Analysis**

**How does class performativity and prior access relate to social adjustment and institutional adjustment?** Analysis for research question (1) "How do class performativity relate to social adjustment and institutional attachment?" and research question (2) "How does prior access and opportunities for social capital relate to social adjustment and institutional attachment?" included an examination of correlations and a hierarchical regression analysis of both the class performativity scale and access and opportunities scale with both adjustment to college scales.

Four scales, the class performativity scale, access and opportunities scale, social adjustment scale and institutional attachment scale, along with the dichotomous race, class and gender demographic variables and two individual questions from the perceptions and beliefs scale, Q2 and Q4, were tested for correlations (see Table 3). The class performativity scale positively and moderately ( $\beta = .368$ ) significantly correlated with the access and opportunities scale, in addition to both the social adjustment scale ( $\beta = .455$ ) and the institutional adjustment scale ( $\beta = .469$ ), both with moderate significance.

Table 2

<i>Descriptive Statistics of Scales</i>						
<u>Scales</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u><math>\alpha</math></u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>95% Confidence Interval</u>
						<u>Lower Bound</u> <u>Upper Bound</u>
Class Performativity	28.98	7.33	0.8	1	53	26.90 31.06
Access and Opportunities	28.45	6.09	0.8	0.8	50	26.79 30.1
Perceptions and Beliefs	11.75	4.25	0.4	0.5	53	10.70 12.80
Adjusted Perceptions and Beliefs	11.84	3.67	0.76	0.50	53	10.87 12.83
Social Adjustment	106.9	29.40	0.90	2.5	46	101.93 111.90
Institutional Attachment	91.50	21.1	0.9	2.3	47	86.83 96.17



The access and opportunities scale also moderately statistically significantly and positively correlated with social adjustment ( $\beta = .346$ ) and institutional attachment ( $\beta = .283$ ). These positive associations suggest that the more confidently a participant reported performing class in a manner consistent with their peers and institution, and the more prior access to cultural capital, the better this sample adjusted socially with closer connection to their institution.

The correlation between the class performativity measure and the access and opportunities measure could suggest that students with more prior access to cultural capital are better equipped to perform class, or that the ability to perform class is improved by access and opportunities prior to college. Due to the relations between these measures, further investigation of their relationship was warranted. Two hierarchical regressions were performed to determine whether class performativity explained the variance in the social adjustment and institutional adjustment scales above and beyond the variance explained by the access and opportunities scale. For both college adjustment dependent variables, the access and opportunities scale, was added in step one, and the performativity scale was added in step two.

For the first hierarchical regression for variables predicting social adjustment, in step one, access and opportunities significantly contributed to the regression model,  $F(1, 43) = 5.84, p = 0.02$  and accounted for 12% of the variance in social adjustment. In step two, the addition of class performativity significantly explained the variance above and beyond access and opportunities,  $F(1, 42) = 5.99, p = 0.02$ , change in  $R^2 = 0.10$ . In addition, when both access and opportunities and class performativity were in the model, access and opportunities became non-significant ( $\beta = 0.14, p = .36$ ). This suggests that class performativity explains more about social adjustment than access and opportunities to accrue dominant cultural capital. See Table 4 for the hierarchical regression outcomes.

Table 3

*Correlations Table*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Class Performativity	-									
2. Access and Opportunities	.368**	-								
3. Perceptions and Beliefs	.640**	.309*	-							
4. Social Adjustment	.455**	.346*	.399**	-						
5. Institutional Attachment	.469**	0.283*	.439**	.850**	-					
6. Race	0.091	-.168	0.071	0.08	0.063	-				
7. Income	0.153	.338*	0.081	0.026	0.007	-.128	-			
8. Gender	0.021	0.008	-.083	0.055	-.049	0.079	0.099	-		
9. Q2	.330*	0.16	0.044	0.045	0.096	0.124	.397**	0.075	-	
10. Q4	-0.323*	-.019	-.497**	-.218	-.190	-.131	-.020	0.075	-.011	-

*Note.* N ranged from 46-55 \*p<.01 \*\*p<.001

Table 4

*Hierarchical Regression for Variables Predicting Social Adjustment*

Variable	$\beta$	SE	$R^2$	$t$	$p$	$\Delta R^2$
Step 1						
Access and Opportunities	0.35	0.41	0.12	2.42	0.02	0.12
Step 2						
Access and Opportunities	0.14	0.47	0.02	0.86	0.36	
Class Performativity	0.38	0.38	0.14	2.35	0.02	0.10

Note.  $n = 46$

For the second hierarchical regression for variables predicting institutional attachment, in step one, access and opportunities significantly contributed to the regression model,  $F(1, 44) = 3.83$ ,  $p = 0.06$  and accounted for 8% of the variance in social adjustment. In step two, the addition of class performativity significantly explained the variance above and beyond access and opportunities,  $F(1, 43) = 6.17$ ,  $p = 0.01$ , change in  $R^2 = 0.14$ . In addition, when both access and opportunities and class performativity were in the model, access and opportunities became non-significant ( $\beta = 0.06$ ,  $p = 0.73$ ). This suggests that class performativity explains more about institutional attachment than access and opportunities to accrue dominant cultural capital. See Table 5 for the hierarchical regression outcomes.

Table 5

*Hierarchical Regression for Variables Predicting Institutional Attachment*

Variable	$\beta$	SE	$R^2$	$t$	$p$	$\Delta R^2$
Step 1						
Access and Opportunities	0.28	0.39	0.08	1.96	0.06	0.08
Step 2						
Access and Opportunities	0.06	0.43	0.00	0.35	0.73	
Class Performativity	0.39	0.34	0.15	2.81	0.01	0.14

Note.  $n = 46$

**How do perceptions and beliefs about class relate to social adjustment and institutional attachment?** Analysis for research question 3) “How do perceptions and beliefs about class relate to social adjustment and institutional attachment?” included an examination of correlations for the modified perceptions and beliefs scale; in addition, Q2 and Q4 from the scale were included to further evaluate the ways in which these items related to class performativity and prior access and opportunities. See Table 3 for complete list of correlations.

The modified perceptions and beliefs scale was moderately statistically significantly and positively associated with social adjustment ( $\beta = .399$ ), institutional attachment ( $\beta = .439$ ) and the access and opportunities scale ( $\beta = .309$ ; Ostrove & Long, 2007). The class performativity scale was strongly statistically significant and positively associated with the modified perceptions and beliefs scale ( $\beta = .640$ ). Q2, participation in clubs and/or activities in order to enhance a resume, was significantly and moderately statistically significant and positively associated with class performativity ( $\beta = .330$ ), but was not statistically associated with access and opportunities ( $\beta = .160$ ). In addition, Q4, because of my class background, I value saving money more than my other college peers, was moderately statistically significantly and negatively related to class performativity ( $\beta = -.323$ ), but was not statistically associated with access and opportunities ( $\beta = -.019$ ). Overall, class performativity differs from prior access and opportunities for dominant cultural capital, as it appears to relate to participants’ choices in activities to better their chances for success and impacts some financial values. This may be due to class performativity necessitating the need for material goods that requires access to money in the immediate moment.

**How is the relationship between class consciousness and adjustment to college influenced by the intersecting identities of race, class and gender?** Analysis for research question (4) “How is the relationship between class consciousness and adjustment to college influenced by the intersecting identities of race, class and gender?” included two types of analysis. First, because of the limitation of sample sizes, means and confidences intervals were examined for differences among race and income individually (see Appendix P), as well as the intersection of race and income in combination with one another (Table 6 and Table 7). Second, to statistically examine group mean differences, correlations were run among the variables, and two 2 (Race) X 2 (Income) MANOVAs were used to determine the main effects of race and class on college adjustment, measured by the social adjustment and institutional attachment scales, and class consciousness, measured by the class performativity scale, the access and opportunities scale and the revised five question perceptions and beliefs scale.

Table 6

*Descriptive Statistics for Class Performativity Scale by Race and Income*

<u>Race</u>	<u>Income</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>n</u>
White Students	below \$40,000/year	27.31	10.62	13
	above \$40,001/year	29.57	5.77	14
	Total	28.48	8.37	27
Students of Color	below \$40,000/year	28.79	5.89	14
	above \$40,001/year	31.11	5.44	9
	Total	29.30	5.63	23
Total	below \$40,000/year	28.07	8.36	27
	above \$40,001/year	29.78	5.53	23
	Total	28.86	7.18	50

*Note. n = 50*

Table 7

*Descriptive Statistics for Access and Opportunities Scale by Race and Income*

<u>Race</u>	<u>Income</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>n</u>
White Students	below \$40,000/year	27.00	6.84	13
	above \$40,001/year	31.43	5.20	14
	Total	29.30	6.34	27
Students of Color	below \$40,000/year	26.00	5.99	14
	above \$40,001/year	29.22	4.94	9
	Total	27.26	5.71	23
Total	below \$40,000/year	26.48	6.31	27
	above \$40,001/year	30.57	5.11	23
	Total	28.36	6.09	50

Note.  $n = 50$

**Examination of means.** Means for both the class performativity measure and the access and opportunities measure were examined for the intersection of race and class. Again, while analysis was limited due to sample size, the data reflect some small differences in class performativity based on race and income (see Table 6), with the students of color who reported familial income greater than \$40,001 per year having the highest average scores for class performativity ( $M = 31.11$ ) compared to all other groups, including White students who reported familial income greater than \$40,001 per year ( $M = 29.57$ ). White students with reported familial income under \$40,000 per year had the lowest class performativity scores ( $M = 27.31$ ).

The means for the access and opportunities scale were different than the class performativity means, with White students who reported familial income greater than \$40,001 per year scoring the highest on average ( $M = 31.43$ ). Students of color with reported familial income of less than \$40,000 per year were the lowest scoring group for access and opportunities ( $M = 26.00$ ).

**Examination of correlations.** Race, income, and gender were not statistically significant with any of the tested scales, with one exception. The access and opportunities scale was

moderately statistically significant and positively correlated with reported familial income ( $\beta = .338$ ). This correlation suggests that participants who came from a family with higher income has more access and opportunities to dominant cultural capital (see Table 3). All other correlations for race, income, and gender were not statistically significant; however, due to the small sample size, this may not be a true reflection of FGCS experiences.

**MANOVAs.** Unfortunately, the size of the sample collected was not adequate to analyze the interaction of race, class and gender in explaining differences in social adjustment and institutional adjustment. While a full model analysis including interactions could not be performed, I examined the main effects of race and income level on the broad concepts of college adjustment and class consciousness. The main effects of gender were not tested because of the uneven gender distribution in the sample.

A 2 (Income) X 2 (Race) MANOVA was performed on college adjustment, measured by two dependent variables, social adjustment and institutional adjustment. Because of the small sample size ( $n = 46$ ), I only tested for the main effects of race and income on both adjustment scales. There were no statistically significant main effects for either race,  $F(2, 42) = .17$ , Wilks  $\lambda = .99$ ,  $p = .85$ , partial eta squared = .01, or income,  $F(2, 42) = 1.78$ , Wilks  $\lambda = .89$ ,  $p = .97$ , partial eta squared = .01. See Table 6 for means and standard deviations.

A 2 (Income) X 2 (Race) MANOVA was also performed on class consciousness, measured by three dependent variables: class performativity, access and opportunities, and perceptions and beliefs. Because of the small sample size ( $n = 46$ ), I only tested for the main effects of race and income. There were no statistically significant main effects for either race,  $F(2, 44) = .17$ , Wilks  $\lambda = .99$ ,  $p = .85$ , partial eta squared = .01, or income,  $F(2, 44) = 1.78$ , Wilks  $\lambda = .89$ ,  $p = .97$ , partial eta squared = .01. See Appendix P for means and standard deviations.

## CHAPTER V

### Discussion

This study contributes to the body of knowledge pertaining to the importance of social class in education by demonstrating how class performativity and perceptions of social class interact with social adjustment and institutional attachment for first-generation college students (FGCS) at elite private undergraduate schools. The literature on FGCS reflects that it is the lack of access to dominant cultural capital, which is the high-status cultural markers of class (Lareau & Weininger, 2003), that is one of the biggest disadvantages faced by this population group (Ward et al., 2012). This seems implicit, as the definition of FGCS is constituted by one of the greatest opportunities for accrual of cultural capital, the educational level of their parents. However, this study highlights how their current experience of class, including class performativity and perceptions and beliefs about class, impacts how FGCS are adjusting socially and how connected they feel to their chosen school.

#### **How Do Class Performativity and Prior Access Relate to Social Adjustment and Institutional Adjustment?**

Findings for research questions (1) “How does class performativity relate to social adjustment and institutional attachment?” and (2) “How does prior access and opportunities for social capital relate to social adjustment and institutional attachment?” demonstrate the importance of examining FGCS current experiences of class. I found that both class performativity and access and opportunities for cultural capital had a strong, positive correlation with social adjustment and institutional attachment. This aligns with prior research that demonstrates how subjective and objective measures of class and accrual of cultural capital influence student belonging, attrition rates, and the wellbeing of students (Ostrove & Long, 2007; Pascarella et al.,



2004; Ward et al., 2012). However, this study expands the understanding of how class influences adjustment by capturing FGCS current class experiences with the class performativity scale in addition to their pre-college access and opportunities to accrue dominant cultural capital. This allowed for examination of whether current class experiences are a better predictor for social adjustment and institutional attachment than cultural capital.

Class performativity was found to be a better indicator, not only of social adjustment, but even more-so of institutional attachment, than prior access and opportunities to accrue dominant cultural capital. This means that the better that FGCS perform class in a manner consistent with their college peers, faculty and staff, the better their adjustment scores were, regardless of prior access and opportunities. This also implies that some students who did not have prior access and opportunities may be able to perceive their class performativity as adequate, and that this perception positively influences their social adjustment and institutional attachment.

The FGCS identity has been largely constructed under the notion that the lack of cultural capital obtained, due to having parents that did not attend college, impacts students' ability to navigate the educational system and creates difficulty with adjustment to college (Pascarella et al., 2004; Ward et al., 2012). The FGCS identity has also been critiqued for its focus on generational status, as it deters from awareness of social class (Wildhagen, 2015). The findings in this study also challenge the importance of the FGCS identity, as the findings demonstrate that class performativity is a better indicator of social adjustment and institutional attachment than is dominant cultural capital. Therefore, FGCS success is more dependent on current experiences of class and the formation of class identity.

In the literature reviewed, Martin (2015) found that low-income FGCS discussed how class impacts their actions, but that they do not have a salient class identity. While my findings

with the perceptions and beliefs scale appear consistent with Martin's (2015) findings, the relevance of class performativity and how performance is related to identity formation suggests these students may be in a developmentally appropriate space for formation of class identity (Erikson, 1994). According to Erikson (1994), during adolescent identity formation there is a preoccupation with how one is seen by others. This suggests that, in part, class identity is developed through class performativity. Furthermore, Erikson (1994) discussed the development of a negative identity, which occurs as the result of a lost identity, which is then expressed through distain toward the dominant culture of this identity. This relates to the findings of this study, as students who did not perform class consistently with their peers and institutions had lower social adjustment and institutional attachment scores.

However, class performativity may not be an indicator of class consciousness, as there is no way to determine whether the participants in this study intentionally performed class or not. This would be difficult to assess, given the lack of cultural discourse about class that exists within the United States (Lareau & Weininger, 2003), as students may be making choices based on class preferences, such as what brand of clothing to wear, without being fully equipped to articulate this as a class-based preference. Class consciousness implies that this information is accessible, although does not require it to always be present (Wright, 2000). Broaching class in therapy and aiding FGCS in developing a narrative about how their class status influences their interactions with others and the closeness they feel toward their institution may help to close barriers related to discourse.

## **How do Perceptions and Beliefs about Class Relate to Social Adjustment and Institutional Attachment?**

Findings for research question (3) “How does perceptions and beliefs about class relate to social adjustment and institutional attachment?” were limited due to low alpha reliability. While FGCS have been found to report their class background as influential in their daily life (Martin, 2015), the questions in the perceptions and beliefs scale regarding the impact of class background, class values, and internalized beliefs about class were not answered consistently by respondents. However, correlational findings occurred with the modified 5 item perceptions and belief scale that focused on access to money: item 7) “I feel left out because I do not have money to spend”, item 8) “I feel frustrated by my peers’ spending habits”, item 9) “My peers will be more successful than me because of their connections”, item 11 “My friends don’t understand why I’m concerned about money” and item 12) “Sometimes I have conflicts with friends at college related to class issues (money, values, etc.)” .The questions utilized to compose the modified scale largely pertain to participants’ current financial state, with the exception of the question pertaining to the social capital of peers enabling them to have more connections. The modified scale had positive correlations to class performativity, with strong significance, and access and opportunities, social adjustment and institutional attachment, all with moderate significance. This indicates that participants with greater access to financial means and less conflicts with friends regarding money are more likely to have positive social adjustment and more connection to their institution. The link between financial access and class performativity could be related to the nature of class performativity requiring material goods that are obtained with financial means (Bettie, 2003).

The two individual questions, (Q2), participation in clubs and/or activities in order to enhance a resume, and question 4 (Q4), because of my class background, I value saving money more than my other college peers, bring forth additional information that provides further clarity to the class performativity findings. Saving money (Q4) negatively correlated with class performativity. This negative correlation between the value of saving money and performance of class supports the link between financial access and ability to perform class, as it may be difficult to save money and obtain material goods for performance. Participation in clubs (Q2) positively correlated with class performativity, suggesting that participation in activities to enhance a resume may be a part of class performance. This is reflective of prior research regarding high school students who participate in activities across class lines in order to join with peers (Bettie, 2003). Neither Q2 nor Q4 correlated with prior access and opportunities to dominant cultural capital, providing examples of ways in which class performativity, or students' current experiences of class, differs from accrual of dominant cultural capital prior to college.

### **How is the Relationship Between Class Consciousness and Adjustment to College Influenced by the Intersecting Identities of Race, Class and Gender?**

While findings for research question (4) "How is the relationship between class consciousness and adjustment to college influenced by the intersecting identities of race, class and gender?" were limited due to sample size, there were two findings that are worth exploration.

First, the only scale to statistically significantly correlate with race, class or gender was the positive correlation between class and the access and opportunities scale. This finding is consistent with existing literature, as dominant cultural capital is more accessible to those with greater financial means (Bordeaux, 1986; Lott, 2012).

Examination of scale means, including the intersection of income and race, illustrates how students of color in the higher dichotomous class bracket have the highest mean for class performativity. This finding is consistent with existing research that explored how black male students at a private high school were more able to process both matters of race and class amongst themselves in school clubs designed for students of color, as opposed to white students who discussed race and class with less frequency and did not have structured time to do so (Kuriloff & Reichart, 2003). Awareness of social class differences may increase the ability to understand both one's class identity and the social class of peers.

### **Implications for Social Work Practice**

This study contains four major implications for social work practice. First, clinicians should listen for cues throughout work with first-generation college students (FGCS) regarding how the students believe their class performativity relates to the class identity of the institution itself, as well as that of their college peers, in addition to information about the student's class background. Second, institutions attempting to implement programs to aid in FGCS adjustment should consider discussions about class performativity, in addition to considering how the institution itself performs class, and how the students will read this identity. According to the findings in this study, the more similarly a student feels they perform class with the institution, the more positive their attachment to this institution.

Third, therapists working with FGCS at elite private institutions may benefit from examining the ways in which students who are clients perceive their class performativity. A therapist at a college counseling center may be viewed as part of the institution itself, which may create some conflicting messages about the class identity of the therapist. College counselors

may also benefit from examining the ways in which they are reflecting back to clients perceptions of markers of class.

Finally, college counselors working with FGCS should provide support with class identity development by helping this population develop narratives that capture the complexity of their current class status. Narratives pertaining to social class frustration, especially in regards to perceptions and performance of class, would indicate a higher risk for poor adjustment.

### **Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research**

This study had several limitations. First, the sample was not large enough to have any conclusions regarding the effects of race, class, and gender on class consciousness or adjustment to college. Future research on how the intersections of race and class relate to performativity is needed, given the findings that higher income students of color reported higher class performativity scores than white peers, and all students of color reported fewer access and opportunities. In addition, focusing on elite private colleges may have been problematic because students were asked to self-identify as attending a selective institution. Third, the sample disproportionately represented students who identify as female. Lastly, this study only included first-generation college students (FGCS), therefore no conclusions can be drawn regarding whether findings are specific to only FGCS or to the larger student population.

Given how little research has been done specifically examining FGCS adjustment and social class, there are many future recommendations for research. One recommendation would be to investigate further what motivates students to perform class, and if this motivation is related to the items pertaining to money on the perceptions and beliefs scale. Exploration into how intentional the performance of class is for FGCS and how these intentions relate to prior accrual of cultural capital, intersectionality and adjustment to college could shed more light onto

the importance of class consciousness. How class performativity relates to the imposter phenomenon would be another study worthy of exploration based on the findings of this study, as Ostrove & Long's (2007) study highlights how subjective reports of class can impact sense of belonging.

Given theories of social identity development, investigation into the relationship between student acceptance and ease of performing class in a manner consistent with their peers and institution, compared to students who reject the dominant class and perform a different class identity, is warranted. Furthermore, given the findings of this study, class performativity should be controlled for in future studies regarding FGCS and adjustment to college. Class performativity could also influence other decisions made by FGCS, including choice of institution, choice of major, self-esteem, or academic performance.

## **Conclusion**

The intent of this study was explore the ways in which class consciousness, including class performativity, perceptions and beliefs about class, and access and opportunities to accrue dominant cultural capital impact first-generation college students' (FGCS) adjustment to college. This study's findings highlight the ways in which FGCS current experiences of social class affect their adjustment to college more-so than prior accrual of dominant cultural capital. This concept challenges the construction of this identity on generational status alone.

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## Appendix A

### Social Media Recruitment

A link to the survey will be posted on social media sites along with the following statement:

I am conducting a study for my master's in Social Work on how race, class, and gender relate to class consciousness, defined as perceptions, beliefs, and preferences based on class, and how this affects adjustment to elite private undergraduate institutions for first-generation students, or students who do not have a custodial parent with a bachelor's degree. If you are a full-time first-generation student living on campus between the ages 18-25 at an elite private undergraduate institution, you can participate by completing my anonymous online survey.

Participation will take no longer than 20 minutes. You can further help me by sharing this survey with other first-generation students you know.

If you wish to complete the survey, please click on the link below. You will be asked 6 multiple choice questions to determine if you meet the study's criteria, and will then be directed to a consent page.

Many thanks,  
Rachel Redd  
MSW student

Smith College School for Social Work

This study protocol has been reviewed and approved by the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee (HSRC).

## Appendix B

### Recruitment Email to Student Organizations

Dear Student Group XXXX,

I am a second year graduate student at Smith College School for Social Work. Currently, I am conducting research for my thesis, examining how race, class and gender relate to class consciousness, defined as perceptions, beliefs, and preferences based on class, and how this affects the adjustment to elite private undergraduate institutions for first-generation students.

You are eligible for participation because you meet the following criteria: neither of your parents have a bachelor's degree, you attend an elite private undergraduate institution, you and your parents were both born in the United States, you are currently enrolled in at least 12 credit hours, you are 18-25 years old, and you live in official campus housing.

I would like to ask XXXX to help me recruit students to take an online survey by emailing your group members or posting on your social media site a link for the survey. Participation will take no longer than 20 minutes to complete the 68 question survey. Would this be something that XXXX would help with? Additional information about this study can be provided upon request. This study protocol has been reviewed and approved by the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee (HSRC).

Thank you for your time and consideration,  
Rachel Redd  
Masters of Social Work Candidate

## Appendix C

## Recruitment Email to Educational Institutions

Dear XXXX,

I am a second year graduate student at Smith College School for Social Work. Currently, I am conducting research as partial fulfillment for my Master's in Social Work (MSW) thesis, examining how race, class and gender on class consciousness affects the adjustment to elite private undergraduate institutions for first-generation students, or students without a custodial parent that has completed a bachelor's degree. I am including full-time, first-generation undergraduate students living on campus, ages 18-25 years old, from all class backgrounds.

Survey questions may help students develop a narrative that describes their class background, as discourse about class identity in our society is often lacking. This study may also help college counseling centers identify students that are experiencing complications with adjustment due to their class background more efficiently and directly. It may also help university and college services better detect what class perceptions, beliefs, and experiences cause lower retention and satisfaction rates for students with consideration to race, class, and gender.

I would like to ask XXXX to help me recruit students to take an online survey by emailing the link for first-generation students, or posting a link to the 68 question survey with a brief explanation of the study's purpose on social media sites utilized by students that participate in XXX. Would this be something that XXXX would help with? Additional information about this study can be provided upon request.

Thank you for your time and consideration,  
Rachel Redd  
Masters of Social Work Candidate  
Smith College School for Social Work

This study protocol has been reviewed and approved by the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee (HSRC).



## Appendix D

### Student Recruitment Email

Dear First-Generation Student,

I am conducting a study on how race, class, and gender relate to class consciousness, defined as perceptions, beliefs, and preferences based on class, and how this affects adjustment to elite private undergraduate institutions for first-generation students for my MSW program thesis research project.

You are eligible for participation because you meet the following criteria: neither of your custodial parents have a bachelor's degree, you attend an elite private undergraduate institution, you are currently enrolled in at least 12 credit hours, you are 18-25 years old, and you live in official campus housing.

Participation will take no longer than 20 minutes. You can further help me by sharing this survey with other first-generation students you know. If you wish to complete the survey, please click on the link below. You will be asked 6 multiple choice questions to determine if you meet the study's criteria, and will then be directed to a consent page.

If you have any questions about this study, please reach out to Rachel Redd via email at [rredd@smith.edu](mailto:rredd@smith.edu).

Many thanks,

Rachel Redd

MSW student

Smith College School for Social Work

This study protocol has been reviewed and approved by the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee (HSRC).

Smith College School for Social Work

## Appendix E

## HSR Approval



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School for Social Work  
Smith College  
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063  
T (413) 585-7950 F (413) 585-  
7994

January 12, 2016  
Rachel Redd

Dear Rachel,

You did a very nice job on your revisions. Your project is now approved by the Human Subjects Review Committee.

*Please note the following requirements:*

Consent Forms: All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

Maintaining Data: You must retain all data and other documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

*In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:*

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

Renewal: You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

Completion: You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

Congratulations and our best wishes on your interesting study.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elaine Kersten'.

Elaine Kersten, Ed.D.

Co-Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Shannon Audley-Piotrowski, Research Advisor

Appendix F  
HSR Revision



---

School for Social Work  
Smith College  
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063  
T (413) 585-7950 F (413) 585-  
7994

March 16, 2016

Rachel Redd

Dear Rachel,

I have reviewed your amendment and it looks fine. The amendment to your study is therefore approved. Thank you and best of luck with your project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elaine Kersten', written in a cursive style.

Elaine Kersten, Ed.D.  
Co-Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Shannon Audley-Piotrowski, Research Advisor

## Appendix G

## Informed Consent



## Informed Consent

2015-2016

Consent to Participate in a Research Study  
 Smith College School for Social Work • Northampton, MA

.....  
 Title of Study: First Generation College Students and Class Consciousness

Investigator: Rachel Redd, Masters of Social Work Student (413) XXX-XXXX  
 .....

## Introduction

You are being asked to be in a research study that examines how race, class, and gender relate to class consciousness, defined as perceptions, beliefs, and preferences about class, and how this affects the adjustment to college for first-generation undergraduate students at elite private undergraduate institutions. You are eligible for participation because you meet the following criteria: neither of your parents have a bachelor's degree, you attend an elite private undergraduate institution, you are currently enrolled in at least 12 credit hours, you are 18-25 years old and you live in official campus housing. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to be in the study by contacting Rachel Redd via email at rredd@smith.edu.

## Purpose of Study

The purpose of the study is to determine the ways in which class consciousness affects adjustment to college for first-generation students. Class consciousness may change for students as they enter a college or university setting, as exposure to different class cultures may occur. This study seeks to explore how students class perceptions, beliefs, and preferences may impact social adjustment and connection to an elite private undergraduate institution.

This study is being conducted as a research requirement for my masters in social work degree. Ultimately, this research may be published or presented at professional conferences.

## Description of the Study Procedures

If you agree to be in this study, you will be taken to an on-line survey where you will be asked questions about the following topics: (a) your perceptions and beliefs about your own class background and of your experiences with your college peers. (b) how material belongings, mannerisms specific to class, and other outward displays of class are perceived (c) access to opportunities prior to college attendance and (d) your adjustment to college, including social interactions and level of attachment to your chosen undergraduate institution.

The survey will take you no longer than 20 minutes to complete. You can chose to end your participation at any time during the survey or you may choose to skip questions at any time. After the survey is completed, there are no further requirements for participation.

## Risks/Discomforts of Being in this Study

Should you begin to experience any type of emotional distress during participation, please feel welcome to end participation, or skip questions. You are encouraged to contact your campus counseling service should you feel any emotional distress.

#### Benefits of Being in the Study

Through participation, you may gain greater awareness about your class background, and may be called to reflect upon how your class background has impacted your college experience. Survey questions may help you consider how class perceptions, beliefs, and preferences have influenced social interactions and satisfaction with your undergraduate institution.

This study may identify students that are having difficulty adjusting due to social class more efficiently and directly. It may help college staff and faculty, as well as students, more clearly identify experiences of class at the university or college setting. It may also help university and college services better detect what class perceptions, beliefs, and experiences cause lower retention and satisfaction rates.

#### Confidentiality

This study is completely anonymous. There will be no way to track the identity of individual participants. All research materials, including data obtained from the survey will be stored in a secure location for three years according to federal regulations. In the event that materials are needed beyond this period, they will be kept secured until no longer needed, and then destroyed. All electronically stored data will be password protected during the storage period. I will not include any information in any report we may publish that would make it possible to identify you. No IP address information will be collected during survey participation.

#### Payments/gift

You will not receive any financial payment for your participation.

#### Right to Refuse or Withdraw

The decision to participate in this study is entirely up to you. You may refuse to take part in the study *at any time* without affecting your relationship with the researcher of this study or Smith College. Your decision to refuse will not result in any loss of benefits (including access to services) to which you are otherwise entitled. You have the right not to answer any single question, as well as to withdraw completely at any time.

#### Right to Ask Questions and Report Concerns

You have the right to ask questions about this research study and to have those questions answered by me before, during or after the research. If you have any further questions about the study, at any time feel free to contact me, Rachel Redd at [rredd@smith.edu](mailto:rredd@smith.edu) or by telephone at (413) XXX-XXXX. If you would like a summary of the study results, one will be sent to you once the study is completed. If you have any other concerns about your rights as a research participant, or if you have any problems as a result of your participation, you may contact the Chair of the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Committee at (413) XXX-XXXX.

#### Consent

By selecting the box 'CONTINUE' below, you will indicate that you have decided to volunteer as a research participant for this study, and that you have read and understood the information provided above.

If you do not wish to participate, select the 'END NOW' button and your participation will end.

## Appendix H

### SACQ Terms and Agreement

Western Psychological Services will authorize you to adapt and arrange for delivery of SACQ material as described—using only the Social Adjustment and Attachment subscales as described in the email of 09Nov'15—including your administering the scale a specific number of times within the project, and your creating a scoring-only computerized key for tabulation of item responses, as based on our proprietary hand-scoring key. Our authorization is for the sole purpose of conducting the above-described study, and not for continued or commercial use, and is subject to satisfaction of the following conditions:

- (1) You must purchase from WPS a non-exclusive license for the anticipated number of SACQ administrations.
- (2) The license fee for this described use of the SACQ will be based on prevailing prices for the hand-scored SACQ Test Form (W-228A), less 20% Research Discount, with one hundred (100) minimum licensed uses; shipping and handling fees are not applicable to licensing fees (e.g., 100 administrations is \$179.20 license fee). Additionally there is a one-time \$50.00 administration fee. However because you are a student the \$50.00 administration fee has been waived.
- (3) The license fees must be prepaid in U.S. dollars drawn on a U.S. bank or by international money order (Visa, MasterCard, American Express and Discover Cards are accepted and swiftest), and are non-refundable. To ensure proper handling of your licensing arrangements, and to guarantee the rate in condition 2 above, please send the payment to my attention with a signed copy of this letter, within the next thirty (30) days. *Allow the emphasis that you must contact WPS Rights & Permissions to arrange payment of your license fees; please do not contact WPS Customer Service for this purpose.*
- (4) Each reprint or viewing of the SACQ material must bear—such as on each screen of SACQ item presentation—the required copyright notice that will be provided to you by WPS. WPS maintains its proprietary rights to all material directly sourced from our copyrighted material as contained within SACQ research adaptations.
- (5) With specific regard to the online administration, access to the SACQ items must be granted only by a secured password that you provide solely to participants in the study.
- (6) You agree to provide WPS with one copy of all articles (including research reports, convention papers, journal submissions, theses, etc.) that report on the SACQ use in your research. The articles should be marked to the attention of WPS Rights & Permissions. WPS reserves the right to cite or reference the data included in such reports; you will of course receive proper acknowledgment if we use your research results.
- (7) WPS acknowledges that you will need to adapt our copyrighted scoring key for the purpose of computerized evaluation of responses to your research instrument—and you have our authorization to do so provided you agree to destroy the adapted key following completion of

your research. Also, documentation for your computerized adaptation of the SACQ key must bear the required copyright notice that will be provided to you by WPS.

(8) You acknowledge that—by undertaking a licensed modification in format and/or content of WPS’s proprietary, formally published material—you assume full and sole responsibility for the WPS content used within your study and related results determined as a result of the investigation. You further agree to indemnify WPS, its assignees and licensees, and hold each harmless from and against any and all claims, demands, losses, damages, liabilities, costs, and expenses, including legal fees, arising out of the use of WPS-published material from which your uses shall derive.

(9) This agreement shall be governed by the laws of the State of California, in the County of Los Angeles. If any portion of this agreement that may be deemed as unenforceable or otherwise not applicable, all remaining clauses and content herein shall remain in full force.

Upon receipt of your license payment with signature to this letter (see below), WPS will send to you the required copyright notice (see conditions #4 and #7), and we’ll issue and send to you a license to create the online adaptation, reprint the material, and to administer and score it the specified number of times.

NOTE: To source the administration instructions, item content, and scoring guidelines needed for your customized application, please refer to the SACQ Manual. In case you do not have (or have direct access to) the SACQ Manual (W-228B), this message serves for the next 60 days as your authorization to purchase one at 20% Research Discount (and note that discounted orders cannot be completed over our website); if you have questions about ordering the Manual, contact WPS Customer Service at 800/648-8857 or 424/201-8800, weekdays 7:30am to 4:00pm Pacific.

## Appendix I

## Demographic Questions

Instructions: Please answer the following 10 demographic questions to the best of your ability  
Demographic questions.

1. Please choose the race that you most identify with:
  - a. White, non-Hispanic
  - b. Black or African American
  - c. Hispanic/Latino
  - d. Asian
  - e. More than one race
  - f. I do not see my racial identity listed
2. Please choose the gender that you most identify with:
  - a. Female
  - b. Male
  - c. I do not see my gender identity listed
3. Indicate the distance between your home and college:
  - a. less than 100 miles
  - b. 100-500 miles
  - c. 500-2,000 miles
  - d. 2,000+ miles
4. Do you have a job on campus?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
5. What is your approximate family household income?
  - a. Less than \$20,000/year
  - b. \$20,001-\$40,000/year
  - c. \$40,001-\$60,000/year
  - d. \$60,001-\$80,000/year
  - e. More than \$80,001/year
6. Do you have an older sibling that has attended college?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
7. What year are you currently in college?
  - a. First year/Freshman
  - b. Sophomore
  - c. Junior
  - d. Senior
8. What is your major? \_\_\_\_\_
9. What region of the country is your college or university located? \_\_\_\_\_



10. Were you or either of your parents born outside of the United States?

- a. Yes
- b. No

## Appendix J

## Perceptions and beliefs scale

Instructions: The following 12 questions will ask you about your perceptions and beliefs about your own class background and of your experiences with your college peers. Please rate items to the best of your ability.

Students will rate the following statements using a five point Likert Scale:

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

(R) indicated reversed scored

1. Compared to my peers, I have a good work ethic.
2. I participate in student clubs and/or activities to enhance my resume.
3. Being at college will better my chances to make money.
4. Because of my class background, I value saving money more than my other college peers
5. My class background helped me be more independent.
6. I feel proud of how hard I have worked to get where I am today.
7. I feel left out because I do not have money to spend. (R)
8. I feel frustrated by my peers' spending habits. (R)
9. My peers will be more successful than me because of their connections. (R)
10. I spend more time working to earn money than many other people I know at school (Ostrove & Long, 2007). (R)
11. My friends don't understand why I'm concerned about money (Ostrove & Long, 2007). (R)
12. Sometimes I have conflicts with friends at college related to class issues (money, values, etc.) (Ostrove & Long, 2007). (R)

## Appendix K

## Class performativity scale

Instructions: The following 10 questions will ask you about how material belongings, mannerisms specific to class, and other outward displays of class are perceived based on your experience. Please rate items to the best of your ability.

Students will rate the following statements using a five point Likert Scale:

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

1. I feel confident in my ability to use the same vocabulary as my college peers
2. I feel confident that I use proper etiquette when interacting with faculty
3. I feel confident that I use proper etiquette when I eat meals with college peers
4. I am unable to articulate ideas as well as my peers. (R)
5. I have less to contribute during conversations with college classmates about travel.  
(R)
6. My style of dress is similar to most people on campus.
7. My classmates wear similar brands as I do.
8. I feel self-conscious about my dorm room appearance. (R)
9. I do not fit in because I cannot afford to buy nice things. (R)
10. I feel envious of other students' belongings. (R)

## Appendix L

## Access and opportunity scale.

Instructions: The following 10 questions will ask you about access to opportunities you had when you were growing up. Please rate items to the best of your ability.

Students will rate the following 4 statements using a five point Likert Scale:

1	2	3	4	5
Did not have access				Had excellent
access				

1. I had access to a good education
2. I had access to lessons (e.g., music, dance classes, etc.)
3. I had access to travel opportunities
4. I had access to basic needs (e.g., sufficient food, shelter, etc.)

Students will rate the following 3 statements using a five point Likert Scale:

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all important				Very
important				

5. How important was access to a good education to you?
6. How important was access to lessons to you?
7. How important was access to travel to you?

The remaining 3 questions will include:

8. Lived in a safe neighborhood

1	2	3	4	5
Never or hardly ever				Always

9. Overall, how financially secure was your family?

- a. my family was never financially secure
- b. my family had periods of financial insecurity a lot of the time
- c. my family had periods of financial insecurity some of the time
- d. my family had a few periods of financial insecurity, but for the most part we were financially secure
- e. my family was always financially secure

10. Overall, how would you characterize your life growing up in terms of “ease?”

1	2	3	4	5
Life was quite difficult				Had a life of ease



11. I am getting along very well with my roommate(s) at college. (SA)
12. I feel that I have enough social skills to get along well in the college setting. (SA)
13. I am having difficulty feeling at ease with other people at college. (R) (SA/IA)
14. I am satisfied with the extent to which I am participating in social activities at college. (SA)
15. I haven't been mixing too well with the opposite sex lately. (SA)
16. I have been feeling lonely a lot at college lately. (R) (SA)
17. I feel I am very different from other students at college in ways that I don't like.  
(R) (SA/IA)
18. On balance, I would rather be home than here. (R) (SA/IA)
19. I have some good friends or acquaintances at college with whom I can talk about any problems I may have. (SA)
20. I am quite satisfied with my social life at college. (SA/IA)
21. I am pleased now about my decision to go to college. (IA)
22. I wish I were at another college or university. (R) (IA)
23. I am satisfied with the number and variety of courses available at college. (IA)
24. I expect to stay at college for a bachelor's degree. (IA)
25. Lately I have been giving a lot of thought to transferring to another college. (R)  
(IA)
26. Lately I have been giving a lot of thought to dropping out of college altogether and for good. (R) (IA)
27. I find myself giving considerable thought to taking time off from college and finishing later. (R) (IA)

## Appendix N

## Permission to use access and opportunities scale

Re: Research Interest

Joan Ostrove <ostrove@macalester.edu>

Tue, Oct 6, 2015 at 6:02 PM

To: Rachel Redd <rredd@smith.edu>

Dear Rachel,

I'm delighted to learn about your thesis topic, and am more than happy to share the materials with you.

I've attached a document with the relevant questions; for the last one, you'll note that only some are about exclusion (and all of those are taken from the Langhout/Rosselli study from Wesleyan University, as noted).

Hope this helps, let me know if there's anything else I can send you.

Good luck with your work. Best, Joan

Subject: Research Interest

On Tue, Oct 6, 2015 at 3:52 PM, Rachel Redd <rredd@smith.edu> wrote:

Hello Professor Ostrove,

I am currently a Master's of Social Work student in my second year at Smith College School for Social Work. I am researching the relationship between class consciousness and adjustment to college for first generation students attending private colleges for my thesis. Would you be willing to consider allowing me to use some of the measures you developed for your research study: Social Class and Belonging: Implications for College Adjustment? I am specifically interested in the five-item measure for access to basic needs and to educational and leisure opportunities, the six-item measure used to assess concerns about time, money, and friends, and the five-item measure to assess classism and exclusion.


I greatly appreciate your time and consideration. I would be happy to provide you with any further information about my study if needed.

Sincerely,  
Rachel Redd



## Appendix O

## SACQ Rights and Permissions



## Rights & Permissions

Certificate of Limited-use License

License #:	Date:
70094800	November 18, 2015
Principal Investigator's name and title:	
Rachel Redd, Graduate Student	
Name of the Assessment:	Permitted number of uses:
Student Adaption to College Questionnaire (SACQ)	100

Description of the study:

Examining first-generation students adjustment to elite private colleges throughout the United States.

Reference terms dated 13Nov'15.

Method of administration:

For both paper-based administration with hand-scoring & via a secure, password-protected, online environment with computerized-scoring.

The required copyright notice that must be affixed in its entirety to each reprint/viewing of the assessment:

Material from the SACQ copyright © 1989, 1999 by Western Psychological Services. Format adapted by R. Redd, Smith College, for specific, limited research use under license of the publisher, WPS, 625 Alaska Avenue, Torrance, California 90503, U.S.A. (rights@wpspublish.com). No additional reproduction, in whole or in part, by any medium or for any purpose, may be made without the prior, written authorization of WPS. All rights reserved.



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## Appendix P

## Class Consciousness and Adjustment Scale Means by Race and Income

<i>Class Consciousness and Adjustment Scale Means by Race and Income</i>				
<u>Scale</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>95% Confidence Interval</u>	
			<u>Lower Bound</u>	<u>Upper Bound</u>
Class Performativity	28.98	1.03	26.90	31.06
Race				
Students of Color	29.51	1.53	26.42	32.58
White Students	28.46	1.40	25.64	31.26
Income				
<\$40,000/year	28.05	1.40	25.24	30.87
>\$40,001/year	29.90	1.53	26.82	32.98
Access and Opportunities	28.45	0.83	26.79	30.1
Race				
Students of Color	27.68	1.22	25.23	30.14
White Students	29.22	1.12	26.98	31.47
Income				
<\$40,000/year	26.51	1.12	24.27	28.76
>\$40,001/year	30.40	1.22	27.94	32.86
Perceptions and Beliefs	11.75	0.52	10.70	12.80
Race				
Students of Color	11.78	0.77	10.24	13.35
White Students	11.69	0.71	10.28	13.11
Income				
<\$40,000/year	11.48	0.71	10.06	12.90
>\$40,001/year	12.01	0.77	10.46	13.57
Institutional Attachment	91.50	2.32	86.83	96.17
Race				
Students of Color	92.89	3.37	86.10	99.68
White Students	90.12	3.21	83.65	96.58
Income				
<\$40,000/year	90.89	3.21	84.42	97.35
>\$40,001/year	92.12	3.37	85.32	98.91
Social Adjustment	106.91	2.47	101.93	111.90

Race				
Students of Color	108.29	3.60	101.05	115.54
White Students	105.53	3.42	98.64	112.43
Income				
<\$40,000/year	106.30	3.42	99.41	113.20
>\$40,001/year	107.52	3.59	100.28	114.77

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*Note.*  $n = 46$