"THE REAL ONES": A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF LOW-INCOME STUDENT DINING WORKERS AT AN ELITE UNIVERSITY

By
Renee Louis

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Renee Louis

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Abstract

As elite universities increase efforts to provide access to low-income students, more attention is required to examine these students' sense of belonging and inclusion on campuses that have been the historic prerogative of the wealthy. Focusing on Princeton University, I ask what happens to the supposed promise of equality when many low-income students are assigned to work as student servers in the dining hall. Through interviews with these students, I found that while student dining workers are made aware of class differences through the job, the overwhelming sentiment is of refuge and pride, not exclusion or disadvantage. Student workers reframe their identities, mindset, and lifestyle as more "real" and counter-cultural to aspects of campus culture from which they wish to distance themselves. In doing so, they are able to reconcile parts of their identity that were seemingly incompatible before to achieve a surprisingly robust sense of belonging despite sharp class difference.

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Preface

In 2001, Princeton University became the first college in the country to commit to a need-blind financial aid policy for all in-coming students that consists not of loans, but only of grants and campus employment.[1] Since then, the university has continued to increase its commitment to socioeconomic diversity by accepting higher rates of low-income students. In the most recently admitted class of 2023, eighteen percent of admitted students will be the first in their families to attend college, while twenty-six percent are identified as being of lower-income backgrounds.[2] Some observers – including students, parents, journalists, and even scholars – have spoken as if this generous financial aid policy promises not only a debt-free golden ticket for low- and middle-income students, but also four years of egalitarian camaraderie that does not distinguish along class lines but only along lines of scholarship, dedication, and intellectual prowess. It is as if regardless of the disadvantages outside the orange bubble[3], inside it the struggle will cease.

Viviana Zelizer and Lauren Gaydosh cite this expectation in an article examining cross-class transactions at Princeton, "The College Economy: How Students Man-

[1] Peterson 2012.
[2] "Princeton is pleased to offer admission to 1,895 students for Class of 2023" 2019.
[3] A term used to described Princeton University and its associated culture.

age Everyday Inequalities." Accordingly, "class inequalities are expected to blur so that all participants are equally able to participate in an egalitarian economy."[4] Once inside the orange bubble, "everyone is equally expected to convert into a Princeton student."[5] In their article, Zelizer and Gaydosh find evidence for how this expectation is undercut by varying levels of success in the "relational work" that students across class lines undertake in their day-to-day economic transactions. Despite the expectation of equality, lower income students at Princeton are often made aware of lacks in their economic and social resources through interactions with the affluent majority.[6] Given the disparities in resources as well as what Pierre Bourdieu first termed as "cultural capital"[7] – which scholars in the field have long found to be rigorously stubborn markers of difference and disadvantage[8] – how successful are low-income students at "converting" into full-fledged Princeton students? At a university where there are still more students from families in the top 0.1% of the national income distribution than those from the bottom 20%,[9] are the egalitarian goals of the college too lofty for even its impressive financial aid policy to meet?

For some low-income students, induction into the confines of the orange bubble is neither complete nor equalizing. Although each year more than 2,500 students work on campus at a variety of jobs,[10] a vast number of financial aid students are assigned to work specifically at one of the five residential dining units at Princeton. In 1915, the first year in which dining halls began offering employment to disadvantaged students,

[4] Zelizer and Gaydosh 2019a.
[5] Ibid., page 4.
[6] See also Armstrong and Hamilton 2013; Jack 2019; Aries and Seider 2005; Granfield 1991.
[7] Bourdieu 2018.
[8] Lareau 1987; Lareau 2011; DiMaggio 1982.
[9] Aisch et al. 2017.
[10] *Student Employment*.

the *Daily Princetonian* wrote that "some people have prophesied that Princeton democracy – or aristocracy, they are not sure which – would lead to friction between the servers and the served."[11] Although ultimately dispelling any real reason for conflict, the remark makes it worth asking what happens to the promise of equality – what Zelizer and Gaydosh would term the "democratic pact"[12] – if three times per week many low-income students are required to put on an apron and gloves and (at least partially) step outside the walls of the protective orange bubble? For those required ten hours, students are not quite card-carrying members of the elite Princeton community, but rather "servers" to their peers. As one student dining worker at Princeton described the awkwardness of serving her peers, "[other students] are, I think, hesitant to come and say hi…I think [they] would rather not have an interaction with me when I'm like wearing an apron and serving them, you know what I mean?" She reflected that it felt as though her job as a server "makes [other students] feel entitled to treat me as something different than they are," instead of as a fellow student with the "same academic responsibilities."

In a related article, "Class on Campus: How Students Manage Everyday Inequalities," Zelizer and Gaydosh describe three strategies that low-income students adopt in their everyday navigation of class differences and economic transactions in Princeton: "outing," "silencing," and "passing."[13] Generally but not always, low-income students are able to choose which strategy to adopt to the best of their ability. For student dining workers, however, passing is simply not an option as it is generally believed that the students who work in the dining hall only do so out of financial

[11] "The Student Waiters" 1915, qtd. in Zelizer and Gaydosh 2019.
[12] Zelizer and Gaydosh 2019a, page 17.
[13] Zelizer and Gaydosh 2019b.

necessity. Across the board, when asked how they believe other students see them, student workers often cite socioeconomic status first. "They know you are of a lower income status if you work in the dining hall," said one student. Not only is it the sort of job almost exclusively held by low-income students, it is also one that is visible enough; as one works during meal times when student traffic in the dining hall is at its highest, one is almost certainly "outed" as a low-income student. Catherine, a student manager at the Whitman dining hall had this to say: "Working in the dining hall is an especially visible job on campus... and I think it is pretty much the kind of job where you don't have it for fun... you are working there to make money. As much fun as it is and as much as I do enjoy it, if I didn't have to, I wouldn't be working there." She reflected that she did not blame others for believing she works there only because of the money since it is technically true, but it does makes things awkward. Forced "outing" for low-income students in a historically wealthy student context is certainly one of the inadvertent consequences of the student employment program for campus dining at Princeton. And the consequences to such outing remains a largely unexplored question that Zelizer and Gaydosh raise only at the end of their article.[14] While a little awkwardness in itself might not seem like such a hefty price for these students to pay, Zelizer and Gaydosh as well as numerous others[15] make it clear that the micro-dynamics of class that exist between peers at elite universities such as these can translate into much larger disparities in identity, experience, and success at the institution.

One scholar who explores this relationship in several articles and most recently

[14] Zelizer and Gaydosh 2019a, page 46.

[15] See also Charles et al. 2009; Armstrong and Hamilton 2013; Aries and Seider 2005; Ostrove 2003; Ostrove and Long 2007; Lee 2016.

in his book, *The Privileged Poor: How Elite Colleges Are Failing Disadvantaged Students*, is Anthony Abraham Jack.[16] In this study, Jack describes how Doubly Disadvantaged[17] students who arrive at an elite institution (dubbed "Renowned University") encounter invisible and often overlooked barriers to success from which their affluent peers are exempt. This can take the form of culture shock from witnessing the affluent majority's spending habits and clothing choices,[18] but it can also be the result of not knowing the implicit rules that allow one to take full advantage of the university's resources and that more privileged students have learned years before entering Renowned. Jack explains how disadvantaged students at Renowned are made aware of their difference on both an interpersonal, interactional level as well as on an institutional and structural one and how this exacerbates their disadvantage. He describes an overarching mechanism: disadvantaged students who are made aware of their difference are reminded that Renowned (or elite institutions in general) is not made for people like them. They "might be at Renowned, [but] they [are] not of it."[19] This interrupted sense of belonging to or ownership over the university then feeds into overwhelming sentiments of alienation, isolation, and an inclination to disengage from the campus community, life, and resources.[20] In short, feelings of difference translate into disadvantage and disengagement.

Of particular relevance to this study is Jack's example of the Community De-

[16] Jack 2019.

[17] Low-income students who, until college, only attended school in the public system which were typically segregated, underfunded, overcrowded and with other low-income students. This stands in contrast to the Privileged Poor, who come from equally poor families and neighborhoods but who attended high school or middle school at elite and private institutions with peers who were mostly white and upper class.

[18] See also Jack 2014.

[19] Jack 2019, page 136.

[20] See also Aries and Seider 2005.

tail program at Renowned. Both as an option during pre-orientation programming and during the academic year, Community Detail is an on-campus program through which students receive jobs cleaning the dormitory rooms and bathrooms of other students.[21] The similarities in the experiences of low-income students employed through Community Detail at Renowned and those employed by Campus Dining at Princeton are uncanny. Despite a fairly wide range of other campus employment, low-income students at both institutions are disproportionately funneled into such jobs which are more readily available, more convenient and flexible, and higher-paying than many of the other options. Typically, only the most financially constrained students take the jobs and as a result are "outed" as being low-income. Sentiments of being regarded not as peers but as servers or cleaners abound in the accounts of student workers in both groups.[22] Jack fits these into his larger model of how signifiers of difference translate into disadvantage by interrupting a sense of belonging at the institution:

> The Community Detail program, in which some students were hired to clean other students' rooms, undercut poor students' sense of belonging. In the classroom, all students were supposed to be equal; but when poor students scrubbed rich students' bathroom counters and toilets, their relationship mirrored worker-client relationships in the outside world and set up a hierarchy between them. . . [the job] did not affirm the students' academic identity or provide them with resources to advance their careers.[23]

During the course of my research, student activity regarding student dining hall workers on campus proliferated on a Facebook group called "Tiger Confessions." The

[21] See Jack 2019, page 137 and 143.
[22] Ibid., page 147.
[23] Ibid., page 176.

Facebook group provides a platform for students to post anonymously and publicly while offering group members a chance to comment or reply through their Facebook account (not anonymously). Over the course of a week or so, a series of back-and-forth posts between student workers and anonymous student patrons generated numerous comments and reactions[24]. One such post included a student worker describing her shifts at the dining hall as the "only time [she] feels invisible and unappreciated," while another comment in response to a student patron's dismissal of student dining hall workers states "just a few shifts of publicly cleaning up garbage for ungrateful classmates [would] make you, too, feel like garbage in no time." Student workers employed by campus dining at Princeton, as Jack himself specifically conjectures,[25] are by no means exempt from the same patterns of cross-class interaction that he lays out in *The Privileged Poor*.

It might appear then that the "prophets" quoted in the 1915 Princeton article got it right,[26] and that a century later, as low-income students enroll in increasing numbers at the school, a job in the dining hall that temporarily splits academic peers into the "servers" and the "served" does create grounds for friction. Even within the promised inclusion of the orange bubble, many low-income students are required to be visibly excluded from the rest. Over the course of a few months, I conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews with fourteen student workers from across all four residential dining units that employ undergraduates. Through these interviews

[24] Posts averaged about 80 "likes" or reactions from other students who actively affirmed or rejected the sentiments of the post. Comments from individual students reached close to 30 separate comments on a single post.

[25] "Renowned is not the only institution that places students in manual labor or service-oriented positions... Princeton University hires students to work as servers or cleaners in their cafeteria and eateries. As at Renowned, these jobs attract lower-income students because they often have the most flexible work schedules, higher hourly wages, or both." Jack 2019, page 178.

[26] "The Student Waiters" 1915.

and my own observations and interactions as I worked alongside them as a student worker at the Whitman Dining unit, I got to know the experiences and opinions of being a student dining worker. In my conversations with them, it became evident that for the most part they did see themselves as set apart from their peers on the basis of their status or role as student dining workers. Almost every student expressed sentiments similar to Catherine's and agreed that dining hall work has changed their position in and relationship to the university. It is as if their participation and membership in the orange bubble fluctuates in and out during the shifts, and they find themselves occupying a liminal space in their citizenship at the university. And yet, the overwhelming sentiment expressed in this liminal status was one not of exclusion, but of refuge. It was not one of inferiority or disadvantage, but instead of pride and even rebellion. In fact, for many student workers the dining hall appears to be a place of a welcome counterculture from the orange bubble of Princeton. Albeit with some exceptions and conditions, the vast majority of student workers I spoke with consistently viewed the dining hall and by extension the students who work there as antithetical to aspects of Princeton culture or experience from which they wished to distance themselves.

Without discounting the importance and relevance of the mechanism of amplified disadvantage that Jack posits in his account of student "cleaners" at Renowned, it appears that the story is slightly more complicated than he would expect. His model assumes a little too unquestioningly that realizations and reminders of class difference necessarily translate into disadvantage by undercutting a sense of belonging. The accounts of student dining workers at Princeton, however, paint quite the opposite picture. The members of the dining hall have come to regard the space as the

real world amidst the fairy-tale existence of the Princeton orange bubble. There, they have created a community that consistently reframes and positions their identities, values, and perspectives in deliberate opposition to wider campus culture. Disadvantages are reconstructed as moral advantages[27] that carry over to the rest of their collegiate career through a surprisingly robust sense of belonging to and ownership over this protected space of the dining hall and by extension, Princeton. These students find refuge from the stressful and overwhelming academic culture with their fellow student workers and full-time staff who share their perspectives and collective identity. Student workers do not wait for their affluent peers to remind them of their difference – they themselves emphasize, reclaim, and boast of such distinctions, even embracing their implications for social class. In a space historically dominated by a narrow archetype[28] – rich and white – of what it means to be a Princeton student, student dining workers have defined for themselves a new type of Princeton identity, and in doing so have exempted themselves from conforming to one that feels dishonest. To a certain extent, they reconcile the "cognitive dissonance"[29] that one doubly disadvantaged student in *The Privileged Poor* describes as "wanting to succeed but feeling uncomfortable at playing the game."[30] Even if only for a few nights a week, it is just enough of a break in familiar territory to allow low-income student workers to return to "playing the game" alongside the rest of Princeton's community. To romanticize the phenomenon of almost exclusively low-income students holding manual service jobs on such a historically affluent campus would be problematic and ulti-

[27] See also Lehmann 2009.
[28] See Karabel 2006.
[29] For more on cognitive or status dissonance experienced by low-income individuals in elite spaces see also Lubrano 2004; Ashford 1990; Lehmann 2014.
[30] See Jack 2019, page 110.

mately damaging. And yet to dismiss too quickly what is going on with the student dining workers at Princeton as wholly degrading or grievous would be to miss out on some valuable insights. What we are left with is a curious confounding relationship that both strengthens a student's ties to the school, and yet alienates them; that is an added responsibility to carry, but also stress-relieving. The following chapters will dive into how these two types of forces can occur simultaneously, but also how for many student workers, the dining hall ultimately recasts their feelings of difference as affirmative and not devaluing.

* * *

Among the students I spoke with is Samantha, a senior in the Chemical and Biological Engineering Department who has been working in the Rocky-Mathey dining hall since her first semester at Princeton back in 2015. My conversation with her revealed her to be emblematic of the many other students I spoke with both in terms of her background (she is a low-income student from a working class family) and in sentiment. As we spoke of how she views her role as a student dining worker vis à vis the rest of Princeton's undergraduate population, she had this to say at the end of of our conversation: "We are the real ones. Those who know the real world and who live in the real world." So often in the students' explanations of what it means to be a student worker and alongside notions of difference and counter-culturalism emerged the notion of authenticity and of being "real." Even in their distancing from the wider Princeton culture, student dining workers do not necessarily consider themselves as not being Princeton students. In fact, when it comes to their collegiate identity, the mechanism occurring does not appear to be erasure but rather one that qualifies their Princeton identity as a distinct one – one that is even more authentic. In breaking

down Samantha's statement, we can see three larger, overarching things that give student dining workers a sense of differentiation, distance, and "authenticity": their identity, their mindset, and their lifestyle at Princeton.

Chapter 1

Identity

> *"**We are the real ones**. Those who know the real world and who live in the real world."*

In an article that appeared in the *Boston Globe* in 2015 entitled "What is it like to be poor at an Ivy League school?", undergraduate students from the likes of Harvard, Brown, Yale, and Princeton tell their stories of their transition from growing up in some of the poorest conditions in the country to being at a top university on full-ride financial aid.[1] Amidst tales of hesitating to speak up in class out of fear of mispronouncing words or of having to join a different line for free tickets to the freshman formal, each story spoke of a fundamental issue that plagues low-income students at elite colleges: the struggle to feel a sense of belonging. And while scholars of higher education such as S. J. Mann[2] note that all college students regardless of socioeconomic background can be expected to spend some time wrestling with their identity, the problem is compounded among poor or first-generation students, espe-

[1] Foster 2015.
[2] Mann 2001.

cially in historically elite universities.[3] In their 2007 piece entitled "Social Class and Belonging: Implications for College Adjustment," Joan Ostrove and Susan Long say "sociologists of education (e.g., Giroux, 1983) focus on class-based institutional cultures and systems to question whether real upward mobility by education is possible, or whether the educational system in fact serves to reproduce social inequity; in fact, these 'uses of education' may not be entirely mutually exclusive. In either case, from a psychological perspective, we would argue that the concept of 'belonging' is critical in analyzing the connections between class and education."[4] The *Boston Globe* article tells the story of Julia Dixon, who grew up on food stamps in rural Georgia before matriculating at Yale. She recounts how her parents, during their one visit to the campus in New Haven, asked the cafeteria workers, whom Julia regards as "family", to look out for her. "That her parents reached out to dining hall staff on their one visit to campus, rather than a professor or faculty member, gets at the heart of the split identity Dixon has grappled with since her freshman year," the author writes. In addition to the anxieties of the transition to college, low-income students at elite universities also bear the burden of reconciling their place in two very different worlds. Alongside a lack of belonging to the wider college culture, these students "may feel as if they don't belong at home, either."[5]

From the likes of Alexander Astin's influential piece, "What Matters In College,"[6] that found that socioeconomic status (SES) is strongly related to virtually every measure of student satisfaction at college, it is perhaps in response to substantial sociological evidence of the unequal academic outcomes of low-income students

[3] See Jack 2019; Leonhardt 2005; Reay et al. 2001; Ostrove and Long 2007.
[4] Ostrove and Long 2007.
[5] Foster 2015.
[6] Astin 1993.

vis à vis their middle-class peers that universities like Princeton adopt certain money-related policies. A generous financial aid policy, albeit crucial, is only one such example of the ways in which the university seeks to reverse, or at least mitigate, the disadvantages of socioeconomic background for its students. In my interviews, I spoke with Theresa, a first-year student from New York who at the time was working her second semester at the Whitman Dining hall. As a low-income student, she spoke of just how much she has received as a result of such efforts. She shared examples of always finding free food on campus and of being able to participate in a fully-sponsored global seminar[7]. "It creates these incredible opportunities that I can't even dream of because I haven't been exposed to this kind of affluence before." In the form of debt-free aid, grants, and "free stuff" on campus, there is a sense that the effort towards fostering a sense of belonging among low-income students is created largely by removing class disparities.

In my conversations with Theresa about her job at the dining hall, it was revealed that in a documentary film-making course she had taken the previous semester, she had decided to produce a short film entitled "Through the Looking Glass" that showed "how Princeton made [her] feel about [her] class status" and her grappling with it through her job at the dining hall.

The film opens with the music of "Oh Sing, Sweet Nightingale" from the Walt Disney animated 1950 classic,"Cinderella". Shots of Theresa choosing an outfit in front of her mirror are interposed with scenes of storefronts in town and price tags of expensive clothing items. Her own voice replaces the music as she offers reflections on her class identity on campus:

[7]Summer study abroad course taught by Princeton faculty. Theresa will spend six weeks in Kenya this summer.

> My mother worked as a personal organizer when I was little. She'd spend hours throwing out other people's trash and cleaning their houses. Scrubbing toilets was my job a lot. She'd give me a twenty dollar bill for the day. "You earned that", she'd say. She taught me how to work for what I have, and that there was no job I was above doing. Princeton tries to erase our class identities for better or for worse. Ice cream socials with professional DJs, lawnparties, free Patagonias, all to say "we're equal here. Money isn't a problem. It doesn't matter who you are outside the orange bubble." Well, it matters to me.
>
> When I put on my apron, tie my hair back, and put my gloves on, I feel like I know my place again. I step outside campus and I'm reminded that the world is not so class-blind. I'm reminded of the things I can't have. I'm reminded there are places I don't belong. *I can't let go of the girl who scrubbed toilets, I am now the girl who mops floors.* In here it's like a fairy tale, when I go to work my shift at the dining hall, it's as if the clock strikes midnight. I'm confused when people suddenly look at me with pity, and they say they feel bad that I'm working, as if the rest of the world doesn't work for their money. And thus, I'm stuck, between the ivy-league intellectual and the domestic worker.

While the efforts of the university have certainly (at least partially) bridged the gap of opportunity for low-income students, their impact on identity remain to be seen. Theresa's metaphor of the fairy tale recalls Samantha's dichotomy between the orange bubble and the "real world." While being in the orange bubble has its

creature comforts, when there is no avenue to be found – no middle ground of sorts – for reconciling these two disparate identities, a sense of belonging in either world may become difficult. Are students truly able to leave their class identities at the university gates thanks to free Patagonia sweaters and trips abroad?

My interviews with Theresa and the other student workers of the dining halls, however led to no steady narrative of a lack of belonging – at least no more than one might expect from any group of college students regardless of socioeconomic background. In fact, while feeling "stuck between the ivy-league intellectual and the domestic worker," Theresa also said that she "can [now] belong in places where [she] would never have been prior to [Princeton]." Perhaps, by working at the dining hall, low-income students are able to stay tethered to both Princeton and their socioeconomic backgrounds. Instead of fostering a sense of belonging on campus by erasing class differences, the job somehow manages to strengthen the sense of belonging in Princeton by painting back the lines erased by admission into the school – by restoring class identity. The dining hall is able to function as a space that is both legitimately Princeton as well as legitimately working-class – two things that are quite rarely coupled together.

The student workers with whom I spoke seemed to have an interrupted or incomplete sense of belonging due to their being low-income in a largely middle-class or even "class-less" space and to their encounters with other non-working students during their shifts in the dining hall. This is consistent with the findings of Jack (2019) and others. In this respect, the visibility of the job and the inability of the workers to "pass" as upper-middle class students interfere with their building a legitimate identity at Princeton. However, in a sort of mutually confounding relationship, the

dining hall simultaneously restores a sense of belonging to these student workers thanks to the work itself, the community it offers, and the collective identity formed as a result.

Interrupted Sense of Belonging

Citing examples of how money "is not really an issue" for many opportunities offered by Princeton, Theresa qualifies this experience by stating, "Princeton kind of creates this class-less space... [which] creates an unrealistic expectation of what life outside of Princeton will be like because what your family situation is, is never really going to leave you." She shares how jarring it was for her to come from a context where class very much played a role in her identity and everyday life to a space where people avoided talking about it or felt that it did not matter. This discrepancy impacted not only her life at Princeton, but also her experience back home. "Going home is kind of a weird situation because I am reminded further that Princeton is just like, it doesn't exist... it can't be sustained in a real context." It seems as though this kind of classless context takes its toll on students whenever they return home to the "real" world and find themselves feeling slightly displaced. After just one semester at Princeton, Theresa already felt that a shift had occurred in the places where she belonged and did not belong. "I can do whatever I want [at Princeton], which is so exciting and freeing and liberating, but at the same time it's like, I feel so removed from people who I am more similar to in terms of money and that kind of thing, more similar to than [to] the people here... it's like there is this whole culture that I am not at all involved in and kind of like... I don't want to say I don't care about it, but I just don't understand it anymore." While being from a low-income background

at Princeton can result in an internal clash of identities, being a student dining hall worker often times externalizes this clash of identities between student and worker.

"At the beginning, it was kind of hard because it felt like people who I had spent orientation with, people in my zee-group[8] reacted in a weird way... they would kind of do a little double-take, and it was like 'oh, you work here?' And it wasn't a 'oh, you work here?' [enthusiastically]. The tone was completely kind of 'hmm, that's kind of strange'. Some people would joke and be like 'oh take this plate for me, oh do this blah blah blah,' and that for me was really annoying and really discouraging because are we not friends? Why are you making fun of the fact that I have to work here?" Although she has since changed the way she approaches her work, Theresa admitted that these discouraging interactions had initially made her ashamed and quiet when she worked. "I would [try] to not look people in the eyes, not talk to my other workers, and that kind of thing," she said. She repeatedly referred to what she believed to be the perception that other students had of working at the dining hall – that it was "strange" or "weird" – essentially an activity that did not quite fit into the mold of what they expected of a Princeton student. On top of being unconventional, it entailed a server-patron relationship that somehow interfered with an egalitarian peer relationship – a democratic pact – and thus implied a hierarchy that warranted differentiated treatment. "With some people," she explained, "it's kind of like I put the apron on, and I'll get a glance as opposed to an actual conversation."

Theresa's account of the initial reactions of her peers after they found out she was a student worker at the dining hall was far from a unique experience among the student workers with whom I spoke. Catherine had too felt an initial moment of

[8] first-year students who live in the same area of their residential college and share the same Residential College Advisor are known as "zee-groups"

awkwardness before her peers when they "found out" that she was a student dining worker. Not all, but some of her acquaintances were "hesitant to come and say hi, and would rather not have an interaction when [I am] wearing an apron and serving them...some people are just really awkward about it and pretend like they don't see [me] or pretend not to make eye contact." As in the case of both Catherine and Theresa, student workers would frequently refer to the apron as a flip switch of sorts that invited differentiated treatment from peers or a refusal to make eye contact and that thus led to an uncomfortable or "dehumanizing" experience. As Catherine observed, "maybe for me this is really skewed just towards [my eating club], but like, you're in the same eating club[9] as me, like you know who I am." In her reference to her shared membership in a notoriously exclusive eating club – a culturally strong social symbol in the Princeton context – Catherine's frustration seems to lie in the fact that even if she is equal to her peers outside the dining hall, her status becomes slightly blurred once she dons her orange apron.

Gabriella, the student coordinator at the Forbes dining hall articulates this more explicitly. In her experience, other students feel "entitled to treat [her] as something different than they are...I get frustrated by that because you know, I have the same academic responsibilities as you do, but on top of that I also have this job...yes I'm supposed to clean it up, but the way you treat me is a little bit unfair." This disclaimer that all students are either in the same social circles or have the same academic responsibilities (and perhaps even *more* responsibilities) insinuate that certain encounters in the dining hall leave student workers feeling as though their status as students and legitimate members of the community is invalidated or

[9]Social clubs where most upperclassmen students eat in place of a meal plan in the residential dining halls. See Hu 2007.

under threat. Conor, a senior who worked at the Butler-Wilson dining hall during his sophomore year, ultimately attributed such treatment by other non-working students as one of the main reasons he chose to stop working at the dining hall. "[It was] students who thought they were above us that were like patrons, you know... the reason why I switched over was I wanted to do something where I felt like the people I was working for would love me [laughs]... while in the dining hall, rarely did students say thank you. It was a thankless job, really." From these and other accounts, it is clear that at least for some students, encounters with non-working students who seem to be looking down on or de-legitimatizing their status as fellow students are no laughing matter. It is enough of a reason to work somewhere else, and certainly enough of a reason to feel as though one does not belong, something that Jack confirms in *The Privileged Poor*.[10] In this respect, by accentuating (perceived) class status, dining hall work may have a hand in interrupting or interfering with many low-income students' sense of belonging at an elite institution like Princeton.

Restoration Through Work

Reconnecting to Blue-collar Roots

Even as it contributes – at least a bit – to an interrupted sense of belonging by compounding class distinctions, dining hall work also restores a sense of belonging to some students at Princeton by helping them build a new identity that is both legitimately Princetonian and working-class. Such work not only ties them to the university (a sense of belonging that leads to better academic results[11]) but also to

[10] Jack 2019.

[11] For studies relating sense of belonging to academic outcomes see also Hurtado and Carter 1997; Strayhorn 2012; Hausmann, Schofield, and Woods 2007.

some extent reconciles the dissonance in status between their homes and Princeton.

When Theresa describes Princeton as a "class-less space," she is speaking of the school's effort to make sure that money is not an issue or motivation in any of the choices students make while participating in campus life. The expectation is that a student's desires and decisions should neither be barred nor incentivized by money and thus makes good on the promise that the pursuit of scholarship is egalitarian. This is why Theresa's peers "look at [her] with pity", and "feel bad that [she's] working." It is with confusion that she responds to their reactions. She is happy to work for her money, confirming, "with this [dining hall] job, I *am* working for money, which is something that is completely removed from the culture of Princeton." While almost everything else is meant to erase class identities, she notes "I think the dining hall definitely does restore [them]... When I put on my apron, tie my hair back, and put my gloves on, I feel like I know my place again."

Samantha likewise speaks of this return to or re-connection with one's working class roots, observing: "because I'm low income; my parents had to do that kind of dirty work; I'm not above that kind of work, right? It's something that I'm blessed that I don't have to experience after graduation, but I should do it now because then I understand the value of it more." For Samantha, the physical and humbling nature of dining hall work was an "experience [she] wanted to have personally," as a way to stay in touch with and remember her humble origins, as her own parents do very similar work. She frames it as something she does not "have to" but "should" experience in order to "understand the value of it." For both Theresa and Samantha, working in the dining hall keeps them from losing the ability to understand the struggle of their family, home community and peers. It keeps them tethered to the culture they were

part of before Princeton. Even though Samantha shared that she "had [her] first job at 14 and so [had] been working forever," the job at Princeton is especially important to her because being a student at an elite institution points to a clear intention to transcend a blue-collar background. With social mobility on the horizon, it becomes all the more crucial to stay connected – even tenuously – with one's humble origins. It is almost as if this is her last chance to experience what her parents did in order to make ends meet. "I think it is valuable for me to experience," she says, "because once I move on, I can say okay I'm here now... I have an office job and I'm doing better, but I still know the values I learned from that [job]... the physical values, the respect that you should have for people who do this job."

One of the student coordinators at the Rocky-Mathey dining hall unit is a senior named Annabel. In our conversations, she expressed her discomfort with the lack of humbling jobs on campus that require physical labor, ones that are counter-cultural to the typical "privileged" Princeton lifestyle. Differently than at home, where these things are commonplace, at Princeton one has to intentionally search and carve out such openings on campus. As she pointed out, "the bottom line is this: you go to Princeton, it's pretentious, it's privileged, whatever. It is what it is. And I think there aren't a lot of opportunities like the dining hall on campus... I don't know, when I'm home, there's always an opportunity to take out the trash or do dishes or whatever, but there aren't a lot of opportunities to really just do something that is a little gross here... I just feel like a lot of the time I feel a little bit too dainty or whatever, and I don't like feeling that." To some extent, the ability to mop floors, wipe tables, and take out the trash thanks to a job at the dining hall reflects how these student workers view themselves and their identities at Princeton but also signals their new

dual identities to everyone else. For Annabel such a job means not having to feel a part of the privileged, pretentious or "dainty" lifestyle that other students bring with them to Princeton. Similarly, Samantha, an engineering student who may one day end up in a cushy office, is also not above doing the blue-collar work that her parents do for a living, and that she did before college. Students like Theresa do not have to completely "let go of the girl who scrubbed toilets" in order to embrace a Princeton identity, but are instead able to be "the girl who mops floors." They manage to find a small blue pocket in the orange bubble.

"Real" Work and Skills

Other than a way to maintain a connection with one's blue-collar background, dining hall work also offers a sense of belonging and identity thanks to the creation of a new type of Princeton student identity, one characterized by being able to do "real" work that includes and exceeds academic competencies. The "real ones," as Samantha calls them, are further distinguished from their privileged peers because they have real world skills and responsibilities. Despite the fact that the poor treatment of student workers by non-working peers is bound to create distance between them, many student dining workers capitalize on and even embrace this distance in order to reframe their difference and their identities in a positive and even superior light. For them, their stakes are higher, their responsibilities larger; and their identities and experiences more real.

One of the student workers I interviewed was Emmanuel, a senior in the Chemistry Department who is a student manager at the Rockey-Mathey dining hall. When describing his experience, Emmanuel drew comparisons not only between dining hall

workers and the larger Princeton student population, but also between their kind of work and more typical or popular campus jobs in libraries. During his interview, he leveled this criticism at the latter:

> Emmanuel: ...so you literally sit there and do homework, you get paid to do your homework. Whereas we, I know at least in RoMa[12], we sort of consider ourselves, we're doing actual work.
>
> Renee: So do you think it feels good to get "real work" done?
>
> Emmanuel: I do. My guess is just like I've had a legal job since I was fourteen and was getting paid under the table for other stuff and those jobs, and I've been working for so long...that first real job I had at fourteen was in a restaurant washing dishes

Much like Samantha, Emmanuel consistently based his identity on a job that differed from others and that in his mind was "real." When I asked him about "real work," he started recounting his experiences working before Princeton, first as a dishwasher for a restaurant and later at other odd jobs in the food industry. It appeared that he qualified jobs as "real" if they required manual labor and effort – as opposed to sitting in a library – and if the stakes behind taking a job were higher. He had worked in high school for the same reason he was working at Princeton: because he had to. He explained that he was paying for his own expenses, something he knew many of his peers did not have to do. He went on to say:

> And I think it's also good to mention that in my sociology class, SOC101, we had a competition among the class who had the worst job. I told them

[12]short-form for the Rockey-Mathey Dining Hall Unit

> – oh I won it for my job working at a restaurant as a dish washer. And now I look at that job now, and I think like, that was nothing, you know what I mean? That job is the kind of job you get when you're fourteen or sixteen and you just wash dishes and it's fine. And I think about how in my class of a hundred something kids in it and nobody had a worse job than washing dishes? Like, to me I don't know if that's an artifact of it being Princeton and there being rich parents. . . or you know students just don't have to work because their parents are just like you don't have to work till you're out of school. But I mean my parents are like you have to pay for yourself, we don't have the money to be shelling out to you.

What is noteworthy about Emmanuel's experience and comments is that even when he was singled out in a large class as having had the "worst" job before Princeton, he viewed it not as a disadvantaged class-based distinction, but rather as a sign of greater responsibility, experience, and independence. Working a "difficult" job at the dining hall in order to support himself financially was something he had done for years by now, and while that made him different it also placed him ahead of his peers in some sense. He also thought that "everyone should work a dining hall job because that's closer – it's not there – closer to what an actual, real job is, because I feel like I know so many people at this school who never worked a job at high school." The experience of having had a "real job" – be it in the past or at Princeton – allows financial disadvantage to be re-framed as an asset that most Princeton students lack.

In her assessments of working in the dining hall, Gabriella also appears to see the job as more "real" due to its higher stakes and the pressure it places on students. As an example, she noted that one of the student workers – an international student – in her dining hall at Forbes, uses her paycheck to send remittances to her family back home: "She is actually sending money from here back home to her family so her family sort of depends on the job. . . I feel like when you're a college student at

Princeton you have this image of like [being] carefree and going to parties or having the time of your lives and like whatever, right? Not for her." Due to this obligation – to these higher stakes that a typical, "carefree" Princeton student lacks – Gabriella sees many student dining workers as being more mature and more in touch with the real world and the responsibilities of adulthood. In fact, she says "the dining hall work experience actually gives you more... it could also push you into being more adult." The job that "no one [has] for fun" is a job that requires "real" workers.

Samantha elaborates on what qualifies dining hall work as "real" by pointing out the authority that student managers have at their job in the dining hall. Comparing dining hall work to other on-campus jobs, she says "I think that the other jobs are nice in their own ways but they are *student* jobs." One might think that by labeling a certain group of jobs as "student" jobs, Samantha is implying that working in the dining hall is inappropriate for undergraduate students. However, this is not the case. To Samantha, to have a "student" job is to have little authority or responsibility that might be comparable to a "real" job. The dining hall job offers this sense of authority.

> At least for me as a student manager I really feel like I have authority. But as a student you lose that, you have to follow the rules of what everyone else is doing, whatever your professor says to do... you don't really have authority. But in the dining hall, as a student manager, you have just the same status as the professional workers, right? ... you don't really feel like a student you feel like a worker ... it's not the normal college experience it's a real job

To Samantha, "student" is a label signifying a lack of authority, dependence, even infantility. And once again she deliberately distinguishes the identity of a dining hall worker from a "normal college" worker and characterizes the former as real.

In addition to responsibility and authority, student dining workers also claimed having a set of basic, real-world skills that are rare among the general Princeton population. Recalling Emmanuel's tirade on his classmates who had designated his high-school dish-washing job as the "worst" in the class, Samantha remarked that "very few people here are exposed to doing things like washing other people's dishes, you know?... even washing their own dishes sometimes." To her, due to the humbling aspect of the activity and its value simply as a skill, washing other people's dishes is not an unfortunate task that places student workers beneath their peers, but rather something that any Princeton student should but does not do. When Emmanuel first took up the dining hall job, he found that the tasks were right in his comfort zone: "I was like, oh yeah, this is what I've been doing for four years when I was in high school." He expected the experience to be a normal one, and something familiar to other students. "But then I came here, and there are people who have good work ethic, [who] come in and decide to be a dining hall worker, and they don't know stuff and it shocks me... And then there are even greater numbers of people who are just like them but who will never know anything." The fact that he had to show some of the other dining hall workers, let alone the wider student population, how to use a mop, was appalling to Emmanuel. Hyper-awareness of his singularity, however, does not come from shame or inferiority, but rather comes from a sense that he knew things that other students did not but would do well to know. Usefulness and practicality are categories used to distinguish certain skills in a similar fashion as realness is to distinguish identity.

Samuel, a senior student worker at the Butler-Wilson dining hall, reflected on what it would be like if every student had to work a shift at the dining hall:

> You know they think like "oh that's so easy, that work is like... beneath me" but then they jump in and are like ... bad at it, I assume it would be eye-opening ... you know you can't even wipe this table correctly, you don't know how to mop or like sweep and stuff like that ... it's like they may be straight-A students but they are literally trash at doing a job like this... so you learn that about people; that smarts don't necessarily equal like commonsensical smarts

Samuel also speaks of a general lack of ability in doing basic, domestic tasks such as mopping floors despite regular "smarts." Even if his hypothesis is largely untested, it speaks of the value that student dining workers place on these skills as a way of characterizing and distinguishing their particular Princeton identity. It does not undermine academic ability, simply adds to it. It may be an uncommon identity, but it remains very real and legitimate.

Reliable and Essential Worker

Another way in which we see dining hall work restore a sense of belonging and identity to student workers is by making them feel proud of the work they do as they become good and reliable at their jobs and essential to keeping the dining hall running. Given that most of the student workers I interviewed occupied some sort of student leadership position in their respective dining hall units (captain, manager, or coordinator), it is not surprising that many of them, when asked, considered themselves good at their job. What was surprisingly apparent throughout the interviews, however, was that many of them claimed that they liked the job because it allowed them to be regarded as good or reliable workers. Take Regina, for instance, a junior student worker at Rocky-Mathey: "I feel like part of [why I like the job] is also because I kind of know that I'm kind of good at it. So it's almost like a point of pride,

where it's like yeah, I can do this thing." Even if this was not the first or main reason why they liked the job, many students ended their remarks with some variation on "I'm good at it."

For one student worker, Minh, the reputation of being a particularly efficient and reliable student worker was so important that he would come in and work understaffed shifts as the only student worker apart from the manager even when he was busy and had little reason to do so. For two weeks he worked four weekend shifts alone. (Typically there are at least six student workers on a shift.) Referring to last semester, when worker attendance was very low, Minh says "the other managers know that I'm a reliable person that always comes to their shifts. . . I try to make the work process in the shift as effective as possible, like doing new things to accomplish a certain task." When I pushed further to ask why he was so committed, he had this to say:

> Minh: I guess, well every person likes to feel like they are contributing to something. . . to add something to the work they are doing or they want to feel like the work they are doing has meaning or is contributing to society in a direct way. . . that's definitely contributing to why I like working in the dining hall.
>
> Renee: Right, so what kind of impact or contribution do you feel like this work has?
>
> Minh: . . . well obviously if I didn't come to a shift and worked, no one else would come. . . when you are just a student I guess you just put the dishes on the conveyor belt and you. . . don't really know what goes on behind it. But working behind the scenes. . . the dining hall workers are really essential for dishes to be clean. Because I remember one time the machine actually broke down so we had to clean a whole bunch of plates by hand. And if we didn't do that, then the next day the students [would have] come in for breakfast and not have enough plates for the students

> to have meals. And that can't happen. So it's like a machine where you need to have the necessary parts for it to work, because the machine is always doing stuff to help other people and is doing that constantly.

Minh sees his job as having meaning or making him feel as though he is "contributing to something" larger than himself. His reliability means something to him especially because the dining hall to some extent relies on him (or the student workforce collectively), and he sees his role specifically as "necessary" and "essential." His absence has real consequences on other people, consequences that "can't happen." Regina similarly claimed that the dining hall "gives [her] that sense of appreciation" because "suddenly you're one of the people helping keep the university running," you "become one of the cogs." For Samantha, the student workers' role in keeping the dining hall – and by extension, the university – running was part of what made it and them real: "it's a real job. And I think that's the crazy part of it. It's not a library job where you're sitting and not really doing anything essential. You are actually doing the work that the dining hall uses and it's cool." The job is both valuable to the university and legitimate, and their status as student workers is what ties them to being an important part of the larger campus. They are essential, they are proud, and they certainly belong.

Restoration Through Community and Collective Identity

Being "Down-To-Earth"

In almost all of the interviews carried out with student dining workers, one of the first questions was whether they enjoyed their job at the dining hall, and, if so, why. The most frequent and formally consistent way of responding to this

question was through references to the friendships and community formed among student workers, followed by explanations of why these friendships were different or unique compared to others on campus. Take Regina for instance, who said, "so the way that I've met most people on campus is actually through the dining hall and I've met some like really great people through this... [which is] one of the main reasons that I really enjoy it." Afterwards she referred to the camaraderie that arises among students simply from working at such a job together, and immediately went on to say that she agreed with a friend who had once told her that she "[didn't] think anyone normal works in the dining hall." Laughing, she elaborated by stating "everyone has a certain sort of eccentricity to them like there's a kind of energy that you have to have." Such eccentricities could range from a "very specific brand of humor" to a particular approach to work and type of conversations generated. Most frequent of all, however, is something akin to the quality of being "down-to-earth."

Samuel repeats this pattern in his own description of the community of student workers he has found at the dining hall: "I've noticed that especially last year, a lot of my close friends were in the dining hall... people that you meet are really great, like humble people and not the typical insane people... and it's been nice meeting a lot of just kind and down-to-earth people." A certain tendency and perspective among other student workers is revealed here in the way that Samuel positions student dining workers. He distinguishes their characteristics as the exception and not the norm in the immediate society; they are not the "typical" student at Princeton. At the same time, the "typical" student is categorized as "insane," as an extreme, perhaps in relation to the rest of the world outside of Princeton. And so student dining workers are in a way normal in terms of quality, but not the norm in terms of quantity.

Later on Samuel repeated this sentiment in relation to independent students[13], who, he claimed, almost all the upperclassmen student workers were: "In general, they are more down-to-earth and less superficial than the typical Princeton crowd." Once again we see how the qualities of student dining workers are almost always expressed in opposition to what is deemed as "typical" in Princeton. By outlining and normalizing a separate but legitimate identity, student dining workers are able to find a place of belonging amongst themselves despite feeling quite decidedly different from their perceived collegiate archetype.

Both Samantha and Conor situate student dining workers similarly. While the first and most obvious prerequisite for someone to work in the dining hall is financial need, student dining workers also refer to a type of personal quality required by those who take the job. As Samantha told me, "I will say that the people here [in the dining hall] are very humble, very down-to-earth... but I don't think that a lot of other people have blue-collar work experience or... even want that." Conor stated that "everybody [in the dining hall] was really comfortable to talk to, very humble, very grounded, and like not pretentious whatsoever which... I don't know, I don't think you get from other people on campus." To these two, it is not simply that student dining workers are down to earth, grounded or real, they are these things in a context where they see most people as not being so. These qualities are noteworthy and important mostly because they go against the grain of the stereotypical Princeton student. Safety in numbers means that such feelings of difference can be embraced. The community then validates student workers' belief that they can be quite the

[13] independents are upperclassmen who are not eating club members or part of an underclassmen meal plan and so "become responsible for their own sustenance". Winnie Hu. "More Than A Meal Plan". In: *The New York Times* (2007). https://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/29/education/edlife/princeton.html.

opposite of what a Princeton student is expected to look, talk, or act like, yet still find a collective to which they belong.

Across the board, it is with a certain amount of pride that student workers speak of being the real, down-to-earth versions of Princeton students. Annabel, for example, described an encounter she had had with an employee from a company outside of Princeton who had been hired to cater an event on campus that took place in the dining hall during one of her shifts. The employee apparently had had an "incident" with an undergraduate student and faculty member during which he had felt disrespected and treated unfairly. Annabel recounted that she had had to deal with an especially bad mess left by a group of students that day and that the employee had come to speak with her as she was cleaning it up:

> So I was cleaning it up and then that man from the chocolate fountain company came over to me, was talking to me and was like "that's ridiculous like people are like animals whatever" and we had this whole conversation and he mentioned that [incident] to me and I was just like "wow that's totally uncool". And that same worker recognized me a few months later when he came back from another event and was like "you're the most down-to-earth person I've ever talked to at one of these places".

In the upside-down, fairy-tale world that is Princeton – "one of these places" where privilege and pretentiousness both real and imagined abound – student dining workers take pride in being recognized as being different and down-to-earth. The initial culture shock that many of these students likely felt in their initial months inside the orange bubble is abated once they find refuge among other "real ones" in the dining hall.

Safe Space for Low-income Students

According to Foster's article in *The Boston Globe*, back in 2014, three Brown students started 1vyG, the Inter-Ivy, First Generation College Student Network in response to a general lack of belonging among first-generation low-income (FLI) students at Ivy League universities.[14] "Brown wasn't made for students like us," one of their founding student members said, "but we have to make it ours."[15] In February 2019, Princeton hosted the fifth annual 1vyG conference with the theme "From Moment to Movement: Capitalizing on Our FLI Experiences to Become Agents of Change in Our Communities."[16] The conference was among other campus initiatives such as the Hidden Minority Council and the Scholars Institute Fellows Program (SIFP) that had been created to foster safe and shared spaces in which FLI students could build a sense of belonging through a shared community and collective experience. When student workers like Emmanuel and Samantha speak of having a job since they were fourteen, either to help their families out or simply to support themselves, they knew that their experiences were rare among the general student population, as Emmanuel elucidated when describing his sociology class "competition." Programs like SIFP and 1vyG have become increasingly relevant as despite the university's efforts to increase socioeconomic diversity in recent years, students with backgrounds like Emmanuel's and Samantha's remain few and far between on the Princeton campus.

In the dining halls, however, experiences like theirs become the norm rather than the exception. In my conversations with Minh, for example, the social component

[14] Foster 2015.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Aronson 2019.

and community formed by the student workers is a crucial part of his student dining worker experience and identity. As he told me, he had made "at least 60%" of his friends on campus by working at the dining hall. He spoke of the "shared pain" of working in the dish room, of the fun that came from playing music during shifts, and of the fact that "generally people who work in the dining hall are all very nice and friendly." This was the space in which he could find people like him.

> Minh: And I found that all the people who work at the dining hall are, I mean I don't want to necessarily comment on the social aspects behind this –
>
> Renee: – no you can
>
> Minh: Oh okay. So people working in the dining hall, definitely most of them are on a lot of financial aid, and another small portion of people who just need money, which mean that they are definitely not from rich families so I guess I'm a lot more comfortable interacting with not rich people because I'm also a part of that socioeconomic group, if that makes sense...

To some students like Minh, it is enough to know (or be able to assume) that his co-workers are of a similar class background as he is. All things being equal, it is enough for him to know that his co-workers have the same responsibilities as he does in order for him to feel more comfortable around them. Samuel too spoke of this "additional responsibility" known to student dining workers. It is the mutual struggle of knowing that "you need to be working, you need to be making money as opposed to people who are very well-off; they won't have to work here... or perhaps a day in their life." Perhaps student dining workers are comfortable claiming their distance and difference from the majority student population. This does not take a

toll on their sense of belonging only because they are among a group of students in which their experiences are the norm. Functioning in a similar fashion to what the Hidden Minority Council and SIFP were created to do, the dining hall student worker community shifts the expectations from privilege and alienation to shared experience. "We are the real ones," Samantha says. Perhaps in addition to being more real than other students, this is a space in which student workers can go and be their real selves.

This feature of the student worker community is something that was of particular importance to Estrella, a manager in Rocky-Mathey. She comments that many students at Princeton "have never worked in their life." Even if academic demands are high for everyone and so all can "bond over the [school work] struggle... not everyone is trying to balance it with an actual job." There are some struggles she faces that most Princeton students cannot relate to. However, this particular struggle is something "nice to relate to" with her friends at the dining hall. When I inquired further, she responded by saying "It could just be another thing we're able to relate on. There's a reason the athletes are kind of tight and hang out all the time, people with different interests too... We [at the dining hall] have similar concerns, we have similar backgrounds, a lot of us have worked in a restaurant or dining hall or something before Princeton, so yeah, we have similar things to talk about, you know." As Estrella implies here, common experiences prior to Princeton as much as an unspoken mutual understanding that they share the same burden draw people together. There are issues and concerns that she can voice to her dining hall friends, who will offer her an empathetic ear – something that she will not necessarily find elsewhere at Princeton. "We're cool just talking about, oh yeah, like 'when I was in high school

and worked two jobs.' No one is fazed by that, you know? And to be honest that's not something I always talk about with other friends here at school because they're just like 'what?' [laughs] 'Why did you have two jobs in high school?' You know, and I don't have to explain it to anyone in the dining hall." The alleviation of the burden of having to explain oneself and one's experiences is a frequently cited reason for demanding affinity spaces for minority groups, be these racial, ethnic, linguistic, or economic. In Zelizer and Gaydosh's "Class On Campus", a self-identified "dirt poor" student at Princeton named Jill recounts an experience similar to the one described by Estrella when she confided in her friends about money concerns.[17] As the authors relate: "[Jill] recalled their startled expression: a 'look on their face... that they don't realize that they're making, kinda like shocked.' "[18] For Estrella, Minh, and many other student workers, the dining hall can serve as a refuge from the more affluent and sometimes uncomfortably privileged wider population. By building a legitimate, collective identity based on similar backgrounds or experiences, student workers are better able to embrace the distance felt between them and their peers. Far from being hostile, their socioeconomic differences take on a far more casual and playful tone when the stakes of belonging no longer rest solely on cross-class communities. As one student worker put it, "at least when [non-working students] make you feel like crap, you can turn around and complain about it to everyone else [at the dining hall]... then they become these funny stories or inside jokes... we all have them." Discouraging experiences become opportunities for solidarity.

* * *

[17] Zelizer and Gaydosh 2019b.
[18] Ibid.

When Theresa was first inducted into the pristine halls of Princeton, she learned very quickly that part of who she saw herself as being – the girl who scrubbed toilets – did not belong. While the other-worldly, class-less space created in Princeton gave her opportunities she had never had before, she found it was at the expense of part of her identity. By finding work at the dining hall, however, she discovered a very refreshingly "un-Princeton" space, in which her apron, gloves, and mop reinstated a part of who she had been before in her routine, lifestyle, and identity on campus. She and many of her co-workers find the work restorative and something that allows them both to retain their blue-collar background and belong to the university, as well as encounter an array of other Princeton students in the same boat. In the dining hall, being a Princeton student and being working-class are no longer antonyms, but are equally legitimate states of being and something to be proud of. Even if the student workers feel themselves to be decidedly different from the rest of campus culture, it is not because they do not belong at Princeton. *They* are the real ones, after all; it is the rest of Princeton who have not caught on.

Chapter 2

Mindset

> *"We are the real ones.* ***Those who know the real world*** *and who live in the real world."*

In my conversations with various student dining hall workers, be it during a formal interview or just in passing during our shifts at the dining hall, the topic of the Princeton orange bubble often emerged amidst exchanges about life and identity on campus. Understood by its more approving supporters to mean the pervasive culture of academic rigor, immersive and exciting campus life, and tight-knit community, the orange bubble could equally be described as insular, suffocating, and uncomfortably far removed from the world outside its four walls. However, be it as a testament to the strength of Princeton's culture or the ineluctability of its pressures, one of the most frequent descriptions of the orange bubble is in terms of a particularly pervasive mindset that holds its members together.

I sat down with Annabel to talk about her work and how it influenced her experience at Princeton. When I came to the topic of the culture of the "orange bubble," she chuckled and rolled her eyes. "Don't get me started", she seemed to

say. "I think the orange bubble is just like everybody is hyper-stressed, hyper-focused on a very particular set of their goals... not as much attention or awareness for what necessarily is going on beyond their life... [it is] having their perspective be completely dictated by their academic and career future goals... and not thinking about anything else." She joked about having once literally pitched a tent on the soccer field on the far side of campus just to spend one night feeling like she was "off-campus" in order to escape the grasp of the orange bubble. For Annabel, being part of the orange bubble has to do with one's focus, attention, level of awareness, and perspective – all of which point to a particular way of thinking. It is a self-focused mindset restricted to one's individual ambitions, achievements, and immediate circumstances.

In his description of the culture of student life, Minh lamented that "a lot of people here, they do their own stuff, and in the long run it's about furthering themselves and just themselves... people in the orange bubble, they're doing work for themselves." His take on the orange bubble is that it is a largely self-focused mindset. For yet another student worker, Estrella, the orange bubble is about being "just very Princeton-focused." When one is in it, one doesn't "think much outside of what's going on in school or things on campus... it's almost as if it doesn't occur to [one] that there's another world out there."

In our conversation, Annabel spoke of the work at the dining hall as having a "sobering" effect – a sentiment many of her fellow student workers echoed in their own various words. Consistently positioning their mindset and their way of thinking in opposition to the typical, orange bubble mindset of many of their peers, which they characterize as insularity, self-focus, and entitlement, student dining workers appear to identify as the collectively sober-minded – the ones who "know the real world."

In general, two mechanisms actuate and maintain this. The first is that since the dining hall functions as a "default" assignment to many students on financial aid, the population of students who are assigned to work at one and actually begin working there includes students with a variety of perspectives and mindsets. However, due to the difficulty and the "dirty" nature of the work, student workers see a sort of filtering process that occurs after a semester or two, when only those who have this particular sobriety of mind remain on the job. Essentially, the nature of dining hall work facilitates a self-selective process, leaving behind students who already have or are predisposed to a particular type of mindset. The second mechanism is that a job in the dining hall itself broadens and influences the perspectives of the students who continue to work there, which further distances their way of thinking from the rest of the student population.

Filtering Out the Wrong Mindset

Humbling and "Dirty" Work

For each freshman who begins working at the dining hall, the orientation session explaining the workspace, duties, and expectations of the job concludes with the advice to "remember to set aside a pair of work shoes." In response to the occasional quizzical looks that might follow, the more senior student workers warn prospective employees: "Just don't wear shoes you like because they are going to get disgusting, and you will never want to wear them outside of work again." During one of my own work shifts at the Whitman dining hall, the four student workers working the "front of the house" took a break at our usual spot during a slight lull before the

7 o'clock dinner rush. Lined up with our backs against the grill and sneaking illicit sips from our coffee mugs, which were stashed behind the stacks of disposable gloves, we playfully engaged in a familiar ritual: comparing our work shoes. Catherine stood among us with her long brown hair tied loosely behind her face and grinning with pride as the two younger student workers admired the worn soles of her navy ASICs running shoes. "I've had them since freshman fall," she said affectionately. She proudly displayed the grime, stains, and visible wear and tear collected over five semesters on her feet like badges of honor. Here in the dining hall, the dirtier one's shoes, the more authentic of a worker one is regarded.

Undisputedly, working at the dining hall is a dirty job. Pit it against the perceived Princeton culture of comfort, quality, and even luxury, this aspect of dining hall work is probably most saliently different from other aspects of campus culture and life. It is also unique to dining hall work as practically all other on-campus student employment takes place in office spaces or libraries. One student who had briefly worked in the Forbes dining hall before switching to a different on-campus job implied that he left the job because of this: "I hate cleaning up after people... I did not go to Princeton for this." Repeating this statement to the other students I interviewed, I asked them what they believed he meant and whether they agreed. The students I interviewed, who were almost exclusively low-income, consistently shared that going to a competitive university and gaining a prestigious education was a way of getting on the path to a white-collar career. When discussing the "dirty" dining-hall work with Samantha, she shared that because she was a low-income student from a blue-collar background, "[her] parents had to do that kind of dirty work" so that she could go to college and graduate with a degree to put her on a white-collar path.

Discussing the fact that she did this sort of work at Princeton, she said "well that's not the goal of going to college, right? The goal of college is to not do blue-collar work or do dirty work." She and many others had not come to Princeton simply to "[clean] up after people," but rather to escape such a fate and enjoy social mobility. What value, then, do low-income students see in doing such dirty and manual labor – especially since many of them are not unfamiliar with such work, thanks either to personal pre-college employment or through their parents and families? Why come to Princeton to "clean up after" other students or to congratulate each other on having the dirtiest shoes?

It was in reference specifically to the dirty nature of dining hall work that Annabel described it as sobering: "I think it is really almost sobering to have sort of disgusting jobs at times, like cleaning out drains and like picking things out of the compost and accidentally spilling unknown liquid from the trash onto yourself. I think those experiences are what help craft a person and I don't like just sitting on this pedestal of 'I'm a student at Princeton, I don't have to deal with any garbage or anything like that'." Two things stood out to me in Annabel's statement that prompts further discussion. As did other dining hall workers, Annabel valued dirty dining hall work because it was antithetical to the larger Princeton culture of entitlement. As disgusting as the work may be, Annabel admitted that it was better than the alternative – that of constantly "sitting on this pedestal." Student workers do not necessarily see inherent value in doing dirty work in and of itself but rather frame it in relation and defiance to the rules and norms of the orange bubble.

Annabel's second observation speaks to a broader aspect of the dining hall mindset. Using her metaphor, if to be stuck in the orange bubble is to be drunk

on privilege, comfort, and entitlement, then the uniqueness and extreme humility of the dining hall's tasks keep the mind clear and grounded to the real world. It is not that Annabel sees "cleaning up after people" as a necessary part of her goals at Princeton. Indeed, she might even agree with the aforementioned student who quit the job since she admits it is "definitely not a job [she] would want to continue after Princeton." However, it is through her job that Annabel distances herself from her perception of the Princeton mindset as being "above" the crude tasks of dining hall work. In a similar spirit, it is not without a sharp awareness of the students dressed in three-hundred-dollar Hunter boots or thousand-dollar Canada Goose parkas[1] that the student workers perched next to the grill compare the dirt on their work shoes. They raise their voices loud enough for their laughter and quips to carry across the room to their well-dressed peers.

Samantha, whose family comes from a working-class background, also noted a push back against the mindset of being "above" such work:

> I understand that it's not for everyone. Not everyone can handle grossness and stuff like that but I think that it's an actual part of our world and you can't live in this world without trashmen and janitors and it's something that someone does and I'm not above them. I don't think I'm above them and I think that it's okay to say that I'm not going to do that but you have to recognize that someone is going to do it

For Samantha, the "ability" to work a humbling, dirty job or even the desire to do so is secondary to the mindset of feeling that it is not beneath you. She went on to say that in college and especially in the orange bubble of Princeton, it was easy to forget

[1]Hunter and Canada Goose are popular clothing brands that Jack (2019) identifies as examples of important status signifiers at Renowned University. These expensive brands are also popular among students at Princeton University.

that "someone is going to do" the work, even if not the students. Once again, the distance that Samantha notices comes not from resistance to the work in itself but rather from a mindset that holds that some people are "above" such work, or forgets how necessary such work is and that it is "an actual part of our world" and that one "can't live in this world" without blue-collar workers. A mind that recognizes such jobs as valid and important is what sets the dining hall workers apart.

Another student worker, a first-generation, low-income senior named Natasha also viewed the dirty work of the dining hall as a respite from and subversion of a specifically "Princeton" mindset. "I guess it is just an extension of the mindset that everyone at Princeton is here to serve me," she said. Mocking entitlement, she continued: "I've been put on this campus to work and it's everyone else's job on campus to facilitate that for me." When pushed to speak further about this mindset, Natasha went on to explain the pervasiveness and almost inescapability of buying into the belief and mindset of entitlement. "It is like the university does everything in its power to convince you of this from day one." Everything from extravagant study breaks, to generous grants, to the narrative of exceptionalism serves to remind students that they are at Princeton to nurture and develop their intellectual and personal aspirations. Entitlement is "definitely" part of the orange bubble, she claimed. As Samuel observed, "I think [working in the dining hall] just gives you perspective... like not everything revolves around you. Like sometimes you'll be serving people and you're not always going to be served." Regina took a more light-hearted and humorous stance towards the mindset of the larger student body but spoke largely to the same point; she "thinks it's good" to do work as humbling as dining hall work since then "maybe [it will] shrink that entitlement just a bit... just a touch," she added playfully

with a chuckle. "It is easy to forget just how lucky you are here," she added. As she pointed out, sometimes it takes "actual trash" to keep one's head out of the clouds.

For Minh, the mindset required to work in the dining hall and that is generated by such a job has a particular moral tone. He is grateful that working in the dining hall gives him the opportunity to "get [his] hands dirty" as it "definitely builds character... and contribute[s], definitely to a morality." He finds that working in the dining hall has contributed to several new "personal principles" he now carries with him that include never wasting food, being grateful for his opportunities at Princeton, and being appreciative of the workers around him. As we already know, Minh associates the orange bubble with a very self-focused mindset that is occupied only with self promotion and ultimately making lots of money. He positions his job at the dining hall as countercultural to the self-focus of the wider population and says "but working in the dining hall the work you do... [is] not just for yourself... you are maintaining the fact that there are clean dishes for people to use... the main difference is that people in the orange bubble are doing work for themselves but in the dining hall [they're] not." Although he admits he does not know much about other on-campus jobs and cannot speak to the experiences of other working students, the way he regards dining hall work as unselfish work is particularly striking. The sense of a superior morality of sorts in the mindset and approach of student dining workers appears again with Emmanuel. He compares it not with the student population in general, but rather with the students employed in a campus library – a very common and popular campus job. In reference to library workers, he says "and then there's us in the dining hall who are like, how do you stand just sitting there and getting paid to do nothing, that seems like so much bullshit. You know you're not doing any

work, you realize that right? Doesn't that make you feel at least morally obligated to do something you know?" For both Minh and Emmanuel, having a certain mindset and regarding work as more than a means of making money – but as a contribution to the university or simply more than "doing nothing" – grants dining hall workers a separate and almost superior moral quality. And it is this specific point – their approach to work – that student dining workers consistently reveal as one of the most important identifiers of the "sober" dining hall mindset.

Work Ethic

I spoke to Samantha about relationships between student workers in the dining hall, and she replied that though people come from a variety of backgrounds and majors and possess many different personality types, she is surprised by "how similar everyone is." When I asked her what she meant by that, she said, "I think work ethic is one of the biggest factors" in bringing people together in the dining hall. As we spoke about the problem of retaining dining hall workers, she observed: "I think the people who stay are very indicative of people who want to work hard... who have a very strong work ethic... if you want to just sit and get paid and work a library job, you can. But if you want to work a dining hall job, you have to want to actually work." Emmanuel says something similar: "I just feel like people who work in the dining hall usually have a strong work ethic towards like doing work at work." Both Emmanuel and Samantha attribute a particular mindset and approach to work and the desire and commitment to "actually work" as the defining and unifying traits of student dining workers. These also work as a filtering mechanism that guarantees that only like-minded student workers stay at the job. In an attempt to clarify what

Samantha meant by "work ethic," I pushed back, observing how interesting it was for her to say that when so often we think of Princeton students as having got to where they are because of their strong work ethic. "It's a different type of work ethic," she replies. "It's like I'm not better than the people who are making this food, you know?" Her qualification of a work ethic as one that includes a certain sense of humility recalls previous accounts of student workers who had distanced themselves from the attitude of being "above" dining hall work. Butler-Wilson's Samuel is more dubious of the idea that the dining hall necessarily attracts a certain type of person right from the onset. He certainly qualifies the student workers as different from other Princeton students, in that they are "humble people, not the typical kind of insane people." However, to him, it is thanks more to the "process of elimination [that] the people who are left are people who are humble enough to like work [at the dining hall] and not feel embarrassed."

Samuel and Samantha were certainly not alone in their views on this matter. Their sentiments were echoed also by Regina, who said that she thought student dining workers were pretty unique because they "have to actually want to be there versus taking a library job at the first chance [they] get." The comparison to library jobs and specifically to students who want and take library jobs is a frequent trope that reveals how student dining workers see themselves amidst the larger canvas of the Princeton population. Although the "first-round" filtering occurs at the administrative level, since the only students generally assigned to work in the dining hall are ones on financial aid, being low-income does not in itself guarantee a proper "dining hall mindset." Many low-income and middle-class students work in libraries and at offices on campus. It is only those students who choose to stay and who somehow

value dining hall work above working in a library or elsewhere who, according to the student workers, have this specific "energy" or "work ethic." The group of students we are left with is something quite different from a collection of students lumped together according to financial need, even if they come almost exclusively from low-income families and/or are first-generation students. Although for the students with whom I spoke the admittedly high turnover rate is a problem that should be addressed, the filtering mechanism that reduces the crew to those student workers with the right mindset is something many student workers value and appreciate.

Of this, Annabel says "I think [dining hall work] also attracts a certain kind of person. And I think it is good that it does that because no, I don't want people who are going to be there and whine about everything. . . I want people who are willing to get their hands a little dirty and willing to work hard if needed." Similarly, student coordinator for Forbes, Gabriella, says "like if you think this is not like luxurious enough for you, I'm not gonna, I'm not gonna fight for you. I'm kind of like, even if I'm short on workers I will definitely not go for you if you don't want to do this work." When speaking of her affinity to the other student workers Samantha says "I think the only thing that people don't get along with in the dining hall is people who work hard and people who don't and I think that's the biggest differentiating thing." This unity in mindset and approach to work both filters out dissimilarly-minded students (through what Samuel calls a "process of elimination") and creates a camaraderie among the currently employed students through humility and work ethic.

Rejection of Exclusivity

Another interesting recurring sentiment among the student workers is a certain sense of pride or appreciation for the fact that dining hall work is counter-cultural to the wider Princeton culture of exclusivity. This is in the context of a highly competitive environment in which students, who have "beat out" 30,000 applicants to get into the University[2], often lament the ways in which many groups and opportunities at Princeton are competitive and application-based. The dining hall, however, stands in marked contrast to this phenomenon of exclusivity, prestige and competition. When explaining either why so many non-working students see dining hall work as "the bottom rung of the social ladder" or how they came to acquire the job, many student workers note the ease of getting such work. As Theresa points out, "The dining hall is very easy... that's where you go if you need a job quick. It doesn't require an application, it doesn't require anything like that, compared to working at the library or working at the welcome desk." Annabel similarly noted that, "you don't really have to apply or anything, it's like if you want to work, you can work. So it's like [puts hand on the ground], bottom tier. Campus dining, you want to make money, you could do that." Gabriella feels people wrongfully regard dining hall work as the least desirable job because of its lack of exclusivity: "I feel like since you know library jobs, it's an application and interview process, in their eyes, it makes it more worthy [than dining hall jobs]... they know it's going to be an instant yes [to work at the dining hall], so that's kind of low on their priority list." "We will literally accept anyone," admits Samuel.

[2]For the Class of 2022, admission rates were 5.5% out of more than 35,000 applicants. https://admission.princeton.edu/how-apply/admission-statistics

In keeping with his claim that the dining hall gives a perspective that "not everything revolves around you," Samuel explains what he believes to be the "Princeton trajectory of self-esteem":

> Here's my philosophy about Princeton culture in general. So people come in thinking they're like the shit right, thinking they're like the smartest at the school and then obviously you get like... totally slammed your freshman year and you realize that you're not actually that smart... And that makes a lot of people feel... like the whole imposter syndrome[3] thing, like I'm not good enough, blah, blah. And then, say like sophomore year, you hear about eating clubs,[4] you figure out that inside of Princeton, which is already like this extremely exclusive environment, there are further levels of exclusivity that you can get into. Like if you're good enough to be in them, right? If you do end up getting into an eating club, I feel that's kind of like bolstering your self-esteem, like you are reassured. "Oh I do belong here because these people want me to eat with them."... And not only eating clubs, like getting into an a capella group or a dance group, because they're so popular here.

If we were to believe Samuel's painted picture of Princeton's social world, then exclusivity is the currency with which students buy back the sense of belonging that they have lost after their initial academic disappointment. The sense of belonging in the student worker community in Princeton's dining halls, however, is created through an upside-down "application." To many student workers, the qualifications needed for the job are minimal from the perspective of academics or ability, but maximal when it comes to attitude or even moral sense. The "filtering mechanism" of the proper mindset is key, therefore, because it ensures that some students are, in fact, excluded –

[3]The "imposter syndrome" was first developed by Clance and Imes 1978, to describe the feeling of intellectual incompetence or phoniness they found among high-achieving women.

[4]Several eating clubs require a "bicker" process for new member selection by current club members. See Hu 2007.

something that makes many current student workers happy, as previously mentioned – without having to buy into the wider Princeton culture of exclusivity. The student dining hall community retains a certain character and quirkiness in which its members can take pride and find belonging while still being counter-cultural and maintaining a distance from what they perceive to be the unwelcomed ubiquity of competitive application or selection processes. All students are accepted at the dining hall, but the nature of the work weeds out some and unites those who remain. Rejecting the supposed superiority of exclusive groups, the student dining workers prove that they share a mindset, the "real world mindset" that is so important to the job. The test of character and proper mindset, therefore, does not depend on whether the community chooses you, but rather on whether you choose it. In addition to referring to this filtering process, many of the student workers claimed that the experience of dining hall work broadened their own perspective and allowed them to "know the real world," or at least to continue to remember it.

Broadening Perspectives

A One-way Mirror

In each of the different dining hall units there is a designated spot for people-watching. If one is not in third crew working in the back room behind the servery running the dishwasher, one is likely to be a "front of the house" worker who helps replenish cups, bowls, silverware, cereal, and other items. Most of one's work shift occurs while fellow students shuffle along the lines to get their dinners after long days in class. While waiting for something to run out, student workers pick a spot to

congregate and converse. Often congregating in one of the more inconspicuous corners of the servery – next to the grill in Whitman and behind the salad bar in Butler-Wilson – student workers choose a spot that manages to be both highly visible and invisible, depending on who one asks: visible in the sense that one's bright orange apron is difficult to miss, and it is quite impossible to hide the fact that one is a student worker. As Catherine notes above, if one works in the dining hall, people will know and by extension know that one needs the money. Yet the job is often referred to as invisible as well – invisible in the sense that other students often pay very little attention to the workers' presence. As Estrella says, "there are people who you're invisible to, who'll just walk into you. When you're wearing the orange apron you're completely invisible." She jokes about other students: "Do you not see this cart that is three times the size of you? If I hit you, you're going down. You got to move." Samantha says something similar: "I say this to the other managers, but we have a little apron and a hat, and I say you put those on and you become invisible, like people just walk into you."

For Samuel, this sense of invisibility, while annoying at times, can also be an inadvertent advantage. As a student dining worker, he can stand at the edge of the orange bubble and observe "highlighted aspects of Princeton culture" from a sort of protected position since patrons of the dining hall do not really pay attention to student workers. "It's like a one-way mirror," he says. "It's really weird because you're still in Princeton, but you are kind of coupled with the professional workers where. . . your role there isn't like a student, you're like a worker, right? So you get to see these things from an outside perspective and it's really weird and kind of jarring." As both an insider and an outsider he can take a step back and reflect on the "strange

and funny things Princeton students do." Similarly, it was seeing just how much food student patrons waste that led Minh to his current "personal principle" never to waste food.

While some student workers may feel "dehumanized" and "uncomfortable" if they are treated like someone other than a regular undergraduate student, others find that it gives them a different perspective on what goes on at their university. Several students, for example, claimed that working in the dining hall helped them stop taking certain tasks, privileges, and roles for granted. For Regina, "the part of the dining hall that works to pop [the orange bubble] is realizing that not all of this is like guaranteed... it [helps] you not to take it all for granted." As part of a behind-the-scenes process, "you see some of the working parts and you realize some of the hard work that goes into keeping everything going, so it's not that self-evident, or this university doesn't just keep going because it's Princeton, it keeps going because of all of the people that have to live and work here to like keep it going." I often repeated Annabel's remark that "everyone should work at least one shift in the dining hall" to other student workers and asked what they thought. In response to this, Gabriella recounted a story of a particularly rowdy and disrespectful group of students to whom she said, "At least if one of you [other students] worked, you wouldn't be doing this," and added, "So yeah, I think it made me more aware of things happening behind closed doors." Working offered her a unique perspective of the university to which most other students were not privy.

Samantha believes that working in the dining hall has given her more than simply a deeper appreciation of the effort it takes to keep a dining hall running; it has also helped shape her treatment of other "invisible" workers such as the professional

dining hall or the janitorial staff, which she has seen being poorly treated by patrons during some of her work shifts. As she observes, "People see the outside of the dining hall, but they don't see all the inner workings." She feels that working in the dining hall would give people "a better appreciation of their actions and what other people have to do to clean up after them," and adds, "You have to recognize that even if it is not you, someone's going to do it." Annabel echoes Samantha's sentiment and repeats her metaphor regarding the sobriety that one gains by working in the dining hall. "I think working in the dining hall *gives* you that [sober-minded] quality because you see the way people act and you're like, hey, that's not okay... because you see the atrocities of other people."

While some student workers manage to frame poor treatment by other student patrons as a healthy dose of reality for their otherwise privileged Princeton mindsets, not everyone necessarily sees "knowing the real world" through dining hall work as a good thing. As mentioned earlier, a student worker writing on the Facebook "Tiger Confessions" page said that "working in the dining hall for a week should take care of the "massive ego" of some of the other student patrons on the page. "Just a few shifts of publicly cleaning up garbage for ungrateful classmates will make you, too, feel like garbage in no time." Her remark demonstrates the variety of responses to this unique perspective or "window" onto campus culture. While some may be grateful for the job or even the privileged insight it offers, others may see such "real world" perspective as contributing to a sense of inferiority.

Working With Full-time Staff

In conversations about the insularity of the orange bubble, many student workers spoke about how sheltered campus life is from the real-life experiences of people outside of Princeton's campus and academic community. I spoke with Conor, a senior who no longer works at the dining hall but did so during his sophomore year as a way to earn some extra cash. He noted in particular the rarity of close interactions between student workers and professional workers at the dining hall. Much as Samuel did when describing "coupling" with professional workers, Conor claimed that his dual role as student and worker had broadened his understanding of the immediate community surrounding the university:

> Hearing a lot of [the professional workers'] life stories that are obviously vastly different from the student population... you honestly felt in-tune with people who lived in the community because you're able to gain access [to that community] through working in the same space as them. Which sounds like I'm in this orange bubble, which reality is that we are. I'm from Colorado so I don't really understand... I feel disconnected from New Jersey's population. I don't understand any of the sociopolitical [issues] of the people who actually live here so it's nice to actually see who is working at the university I study at.

Even if their co-workers' perspectives are not necessarily their own, students who work with professional workers – the majority of whom are working-class immigrants – claim that they develop a sense of the "real" world that the orange bubble so effectively blocks out. It is by working alongside real people that the student workers gain access to knowing the real world. "I feel like at no other job at Princeton you are engaged with an immigrant community" or any "normal" people. "At other jobs at

Princeton you're either so isolated or the people you are working with are people in the higher ups of Princeton institutions." To Theresa, one of the most transformative aspects of being a student worker has been being in touch with "real world" issues and burdens that she would otherwise be shielded from completely. She recounts hearing full-time staff telling her that they made more money from their Uber-driving job but remained employed at the university due to its policy of covering half the college tuition of staff members' children. Repeating the sentiments expressed by Samantha, Regina, and Annabel that their job has taught them not to take things for granted, Theresa says, "In Princeton it's like you don't really find people who are freaking out about debt... because Princeton just takes care of it. Not that that's a bad thing, it certainly isn't. It's just, when you're removed from that, it kind of begs the question like why am I, why am I getting all this stuff? Because I did a good job on my SATs? Because I had a lot of extracurriculars?" Hearing some of her full-time co-workers speak of their anxiety about their children going into debt in order to cover college tuition gave her an avenue to reflect on her own privilege. "It just makes you think about that kind of stuff," she says. "I'm thinking about it more, and that's almost like the most important thing, isn't it?" If, as Annabel says, the orange bubble is about "having [your] perspective be completely dictated by [your] academic and career future goals... and not thinking about anything else," or as Estrella says, "it doesn't occur to [you] that there's another world out there," then perhaps it is simply thanks to thinking about these issues more that student dining workers sober up from the orange bubble mindset and come to "know the real world."

Chapter 3

Lifestyle

> *"We are the real ones. Those who know the real world and* ***who live in the real world****."*

For many students – workers and non-workers alike – Princeton is hard. "You don't realize how competitive it is until you actually get here," one student worker said. Even as they arrive from some of the most competitive and demanding high school programs as valedictorians and at the top of their class, having passed the highly selective admissions test, many Princeton students report experiencing feelings of being overwhelmed by the academic demands of college. If we recall Samuel's self-described trajectory of a Princeton student, a typical freshman year is often marked by disappointments and a struggle to keep up. Just as they described the orange bubble as a particular mindset or perspective, students often framed Princeton's culture as a high-intensity lifestyle or routine that its members are expected to maintain while dealing with immense demands. Regina referred to it as "the scramble." There is no time or excuse afforded to those who want to slow down and "take it all in;" it is always about getting to the next opportunity or goal. Annabel discusses the

orange bubble perspective alongside the environment of "just like not being able to relax and be a person and do random spontaneous things... [it is] just being way too into what you're doing" and trying to achieve here in college. When speaking of this phenomenon, students often admit that since "everyone is grinding[1]," not to join this culture and lifestyle means immediately falling behind. Gabriella captures this aspect of the orange bubble in her description of what she calls the "Princeton study beast-mode":

> You're always reading, you're trying to get your problem sets down, trying to get like everything done. They drop their social life, they cancel their employment – which can sometimes alleviate that stress in my opinion – and what they do, they just remain in their room and their libraries and whatnot, and they kind of go into this eight hours of straight-up studying. I've seen those people, and it might be helpful. But also, my personal idea is that you need some breaks, because your brain kind of exhausts itself and that's not the point of Princeton.

Although she invents her own term for it, Gabriella is touching on the pressure students on campus consistently feel to complete their academic demands and to prioritize academic demands over other things, like their social life or campus job.

In addition to being very demanding, the orange bubble is also very difficult to escape. Due to their physical isolation in a suburban town in New Jersey (as opposed to a large city), students rarely find opportunities to interact with people who are not associated with the university or connected to campus culture. Conor explains how rare it is to be able to interact with people who are not students, professors, or college administrators. As he points out, "You're either so isolated or the people

[1] working intensely

you're working with are people in the higher ups of Princeton institutions." Students joke that going to Nassau Street[2] is as "off-campus as it gets."

In keeping with the orange bubble lifestyle, the most sought-after campus jobs are often the ones that offer students enough down-time to attend to other demands (e.g. homework, studying) while on the payroll. Samuel, who as student coordinator in Butler-Wilson often has to manage the especially high turnover rate of student workers, says, "I know a big reason that people leave the dining halls is because they find a better job, [like] one [in which] the starting pay is enough but you get to do your schoolwork during it." Student workers know this, acknowledge the legitimacy of this rationale, and even express a certain sense of envy at times. And yet almost all the student workers I interviewed admitted to having the option to seek jobs like these, but have instead decided to remain working in the dining hall[3]. The student workers who stay often see themselves as different from those who do not. One student articulated the general reason why many of her peers would not choose to work in the dining hall: "I mean if it's not going to add to your resume or your GPA... why do it you know?" According to the logic of the orange bubble, to work at the dining hall as opposed to one of these other jobs does not make much sense. And yet the dining hall is a valuable part of these student workers' lifestyle and routine not simply *despite* its incongruities with wider Princeton practice, but *because* of it.

In my interviews with the student dining workers, the dining hall proved to be

[2]the street located directly outside of the Fitzrandolph gates across from Nassau Hall, where the President's office is housed

[3]Other campus jobs are available to low-income students to fulfil work-study requirements. However, most jobs are either lower-paying or, for the ones with comparable or higher pay, are more competitive or require specific qualifications (e.g. peer-tutoring or research jobs). Typically these jobs are not readily available to first year students who need a job quick, but as the students progress through the years, more opportunities to change campus jobs emerge. By this time, however, pay raises and perks still make it difficult for financially constrained students to make the switch.

not only a community in which like-minded students whose thinking differed from the orange bubble mindset congregated, but also a place in which the student workers could take a break from the demanding and academically-driven lifestyle that characterizes the orange bubble. Samantha described the dining hall work as "outside the college lifestyle" and as a "break from being a student." In terms of the type of work and tasks it entails, as well as the relationships and interactions it generates, the dining hall brings temporary but crucial relief, refreshment, and refuge from the typical Princeton lifestyle – just enough for students to recharge before continuing with Princeton's demanding schedule.

Physical and/or Non-academic Work

Perhaps one of the occupational hazards of being at a selective university where ninety-eight percent of undergraduate students live on-campus is that day-to-day life feels exclusively academic or intellectual. Annabel offers a snapshot of what that means:

> Yeah, so I think when you're a student here, you get very wrapped up in all the things you have to do – and that's very reasonable because you go to class, you do homework, you talk to friends about how stressed you are, you do more homework, you go to bed, you have meals, and people ask "How is your day?" and it's all like classes, all job applications, whatever people have going on.

Routine, conversations, and every-day tasks revolve around academics or future endeavors (job applications). Even when one is not in class, one is talking about it or doing work in preparation for it. Working at the dining hall, however, is quite

the opposite. When one's tasks consist of restocking dishware, mopping floors, and taking out trash, one "doesn't have to think too much at all," says Samantha. "It's a break from Princeton," she continues. "Princeton is all very like thinking, and dining hall is very physical, you just carry things, you just wash things, you don't have to think about any of it." Student workers frequently describe their shifts as opportunities to "turn [their] brain off," as a break, an escape, or simply a change in pace from the rest of their day. As Theresa says "Tuesday [one of the days on which she does a shift] would otherwise be an incredibly academic day, and it's kind of like those drain me mentally, whereas working in the dining hall is like a mental break for me." Samuel also notes that one of his favorite aspects of dining hall work is that it is very non-academic and akin to manual labor. He sees it as "an escape from schoolwork." "Saturday I was there for like ten hours so that was a lot of escape... probably shouldn't have done that," he laughs. Notably, it is almost always with reference to Princeton's academic demands that student dining workers position the work as valuable and as an important part of their routine. For some, like Samuel and Samantha, manual labor or "working with [their] hands" is something they enjoy. For the vast majority, it is in reaction to the intensity and ubiquity of academic culture that a manual job becomes a welcome treat.

Several student workers also likened the physicality of dining hall work to exercise. A self-described "outdoorsy" person, Annabel finds solace from the intensity of Princeton in physical activities like biking and running. "And I feel a very similar way actually to how I feel about running that I do about working in the dining hall," she says. Annabel is far from being alone in enjoying the physicality of dining hall;

Regina agrees and jokes, "Who needs the gym when you can just work in Ro-Ma?[4]" She laughs and continues, "I like the physical aspect of it... I've actually felt myself getting stronger over the course of working, which is kind of cool... like lifting plates actually does something for me." Minh also cites the physical component of dining hall work as a major reason for why he enjoys it. "I also like how the work itself is sort of physically rigorous," he tells me. Like Annabel and Regina, he claims the work serves a similar purpose as going to the gym to play basketball. Minh takes the component of physicality a step further as he sees it not only as a break or change of pace from the rest of Princeton, but as a different kind of work that he can add to his repertoire and that makes him a better rounded worker. Since it is not "purely mental work... it definitely expands your working range," he says. "Like your working range can't just be academic work or writing essays or problem sets... students who have work study and have to do it get a sort of – like an additional component." If it is Princeton, it is intensely academic. Dining hall work, in contrast, is purposefully mindless.

Mindful Work

An interesting variation on the theme of the physical or non-academic nature of dining work as an escape from the orange bubble emerges in students' claim that in addition to offering a simple change of pace, the "busy-ness" of dining hall serves as a mindful practice of sorts. To them, the mindlessness of the job is what makes it mindful. Catherine, one of the first students whom I interviewed, claimed that this was one of the most valuable aspects of her job:

[4]Rocky-Mathey dining hall unit

> I also liked that it was three hours in my day where I wasn't supposed to be doing anything else. Here it feels like you are supposed to be multi-tasking all the time and doing your reading while you are eating, or, you know, you are supposed to not have any amount of time dedicated to just one single task. Even in class people are always doing other things. So in that way it was really mindful, and it was also really nice to do something physical.

Catherine brings up a facet of the orange bubble, namely, the constant expectation that students multi-task or be as efficient as possible to avoid falling behind academically. To her, it is not about tuning her mind out per se, but rather about being able to focus on getting just one thing done and seeing it get done. It may seem unexceptional to an outsider that she would describe her time at her job as precious because it is a time in which she isn't "supposed to be doing anything else." After all, what is a job if not a specific, assigned task? In the case of many other (and more sought after) campus jobs, however, it is normal for students to multi-task or engage in other aspects of Princeton life while on the job. Front desk workers at the student center complete papers as they respond to inquiries and give information, while book-finders for the library do course readings between assignments. Of this, Gabriella says "I just compare to library jobs, where you're just kind of sitting down, doing your work, but you're not actually getting out of this Princeton study beast mode... because again, you get two options. You can just have free time because you're not actually doing anything and then it kind of leads you to think "oh you know if I spend time not doing work – the study [academic] work – I'm going to fall behind." So you kind of continue doing that." Although to many students this flexibility may be the very thing they find desirable, to Catherine, Gabriella, and other student workers, it is paradoxically a disadvantage to be able to do school work while on the job because

according to the rules of the orange bubble one is implicitly *expected* to. Work at the dining hall, however, offers temporary relief from this expectation.

This unexpected value of dining hall work came up again in my conversation with Emmanuel. He noted that during particularly slow shifts of running the dishwasher there can occasionally be enough downtime to do homework if that is really necessary. All the same, he feels quite strongly about separating his work from academic demands:

> Renee: So do you mean like even when there was an opportunity to do school work, it was. . . you'd rather just work?
>
> Emmanuel: Sometimes it's just like, I don't want to do school work. It's like sometimes when you are doing the [dining] work you're just like, I'm standing in a dish room, I'm sitting on a cup crate and it's just not the time. That's not what I want

It appears that part of the value of dining hall work as an effective escape from the orange bubble is that even if the work is not particularly difficult, it is demanding enough to require some attention and physical exertion. As the tasks require a certain minimum level of concentration and effort, they keep one's mind busy enough to avoid the "Princeton study beast mode" or the orange bubble expectation of having to multitask and get homework done even on a job. The physical and non-academic tasks conducted in the dining hall can adequately fill their mind instead of school work or longer-term academic demands and stress, and thus become a mindful practice of sorts.

Theresa alludes to this: "I really enjoy mopping, I find it to be very, like it clears my mind. It's like I'm really stressed about something, but if I could just mop

this floor, you know." It is almost because the work is so different from other tasks at Princeton that she is able to leave her academic self and the stresses associated with that self at the door as she steps into the dining hall to do her job. The work offers her a chance to be involved in and focus on something that is neither academic nor particularly stressful. As she admits, she "likes that [she] can take [her] mind off something that is not what [she is] dealing with at whatever moment, and it kind of helps [her] relax a little." Annabel similarly says that work "just gets you out of this really specific mindset of what you want to accomplish [on-going academic stress] and you're like, actually right now my goal is to somehow get this liquid into that container, and I don't know what it is." Theresa, Gabriella, and Annabel express the distraction of dining hall work as being enough to allow them to push other goals or demands aside during the three hours of their shift and focus instead on getting the job done. The short-term goals and physical tasks require little enough attention to let one take a mental break from other larger and often overwhelming academic expectations. It is in this balanced medium of being demanding but in a vastly different way from most other college tasks that dining hall work finds its place as a stress-reliever and mindful practice in the routines and lifestyles of student workers. Even if it's not school work, it is still "productive."

Forced Fun

Much like Catherine appreciates the lack of multi-tasking at the dining hall and how that makes her mindful of her duties, other student workers also see their dining hall shifts as something that forces them to have fun and relax. Annabel embraces the dining hall job for allowing little to no time for multi-tasking or getting school

work done and sees it as an opportunity to let loose and operate almost as if those demands were not there:

> I think that we like lose the importance and value of that kind of time when we're in the orange bubble because we're just so driven and motivated to achieve very specific goals that are related to our academic success and our future and careers and whatever. And you're in the dining hall you're like okay, I'm going to get a very limited amount of work done – like little to none – to the point where I might as well just not. And then you just sort of have this forced moment of like, I'm just going to talk to these people and laugh and dance to this song or whatever. And that's like a very refreshing experience.

Dubbing it her "forced hang-out time," Annabel is grateful for the constraints of the dining hall as these necessitate an entirely different frame of mind. Once she takes the possibility of getting any school work done off the table, she is able to reframe dining hall work not as time lost – as it might be considered by many others in the orange bubble – but as time for having fun. She claims that outside of her work, "there aren't a lot of opportunities that present themselves, in like academic contexts" that she would "remember to recall to somebody" as noteworthy or as a memory worth sharing. Emmanuel also talked about how some of his non-working friends marveled at how he could work five-hour-long shifts, but for him these were merely five hours among friends. Samantha says that in the "more relaxed environment" of the dining hall, she and her fellow student workers "really get a chance to hang out and talk to each other." It is due in part to this antidote to stress and this forced fun that Annabel (and others) does not see having to work in order to support herself financially as a disadvantage. It is almost as if being financially obligated to her job forces her to refresh herself – an obligation many of her wealthier peers do not know.

Structure and Efficiency

Some student workers take this idea further and suggest that shifts at the dining hall and "scheduling in" time for fun, relaxation, and breaks force them to be more productive and intentional with their remaining time. Annabel admits that after the "forced hang-out" and fun time she gets from her shift, she not only feels refreshed and ready to get into her school work, but also, because she has already used up some time, she can say to herself "Oh crap, I only have x amount of time now, I need to be more efficient," and then go on to waste less time on her phone. As she points out, "This hang out culture [enables me] to be more efficient and more productive." Emmanuel likewise describes his job as something that "really pushes [him] to schedule things appropriately during the week and also forces [him] to do all [his] homework earlier." As he says, "I think that is good because I need structure." He admits that in the absence of structure he would not get much done during the free time anyway and additionally miss out on the fun and social experiences that the dining hall work provides for him.

* * *

The perspectives of all these students offer a rather particular and unique take on work study for low-income students. Be it implicitly or explicitly, many of them claim that they would have chosen to take this job regardless of financial need, as it "forces" them to take Annabel's hang-out time and engage in Catherine's mindful moments. We expect an obligation as time-consuming as a part-time job while enrolled in an especially demanding undergraduate program to be an added burden to low-income students. This is both true and not surprising. At the same time, however, we see an

equally evident element of relief and appreciation. Since the constraints of Princeton offer no room for frivolous "hanging-out" or mindful absorbing tasks, being "forced" outside the orange bubble for a few hours per week offers some respite. And though, if given a choice, Annabel, Catherine, and many other low-income student servers may not have chosen to work at the dining hall right from the onset of their college career, they are almost glad that they never had that choice insofar as the job has proven counter-cultural to and a relief from the specific and especially suffocating aspects of the orange bubble.

Accomplishable and Simple Work

Closing down the dining hall after dinner ends at eight o'clock every evening falls among the responsibilities of the student workers. The crew members know that though restocking and maintaining the servery during meal times is important, the most crucial part of the job is "clean-up," that is, shutting down the machines, putting things away, cleaning the tables and floors, and taking out the trash. Higher stakes are involved when student workers fail to show up for this part of the shift because, as one student worker put it, their day only "ends when the shift is over... when [they] finish everything and the job is accomplished." Although practice varies from one dining hall unit to another, because of the late hour of the shift, the full-time workers and managers often leave before the student workers are finished for the night. This heightens the urgency to complete all duties in a timely manner as they fall squarely on the students' shoulders. As one student put it, unlike other student workers on campus, they are "not trying to wait out [their] time card," but rather "are waiting to accomplish something every night." While this may seem like a potentially stressful

situation, it is important to note that the job brings urgency without complexity. Although it is crucial for student workers to finish their job, almost all of them would acknowledge that it is not an especially difficult task. It is the clarity of the task – its necessity but also its simplicity – that grants a sense of accomplishment to many student workers. Such a source of accomplishment becomes valuable in a place where a sense of accomplishment can be rare.

Amidst heightened academic demands and a fragile sense of self-worth tied (as it so often is) to tangible and measurable outcomes like grades and awards, students find the doable nature of the job and the tangible quality of accomplishing a task fulfilling. For low-income students, for whom the quest for a personal sense of accomplishment is magnified by disadvantage in such a competitive environment, this becomes all the more significant. Samantha, for example, speaks of the wider Princeton culture of having the "sense of never being done with something." She notes the stressful long-term projects, applications for jobs, or even her year-long senior independent project. Through her job at the dining hall, however, it is with a welcome sense of pride and satisfaction that several times a week she can say to herself, "Okay, I accomplished something."

> I've always been a hands-on type of person. I enjoy working with my hands and I think I feel most productive then. Especially as a CBE[5] major I feel like I'll sit on a desk and work on two problems for five hours and not get anywhere. But with hands-on jobs you actually see things being done. You load something in the dish washer and it gets washed. It's very cause and effect, you can *feel* productive

In keeping with her reflection on the mindfulness of dining hall work, Catherine says,

[5]chemical and biological engineering

"A lot of the work we do here is like typing essays, which, you know, is rewarding in its own way, but it definitely does not *feel* as rewarding for me as cleaning the floor and seeing that process of it becoming clean." Both Catherine and Samantha compare the feelings of doing schoolwork, which often seems endless or unproductive, to the feeling they get from finishing the work they do at the dining hall. It is within an environment in which no task is easy or simple that loading dishes into a machine or sweeping and mopping floors after dinnertime becomes elevated to a treat. A treat in the sense that practically anyone with the right work ethic, regardless of academic aptitude or socioeconomic advantage, can do it and do it well. Theresa also notes the uniqueness of dining hall work in that "it is something you don't get [to do] really often at Princeton, to just sit or stand or mop the floor. That's all you have to do, sweep, mop, you're finished, it's done. You don't have to think about it, you don't have to figure something out." There is no puzzle, test, or difficulty beyond being willing to get your hands a little dirty.

Theresa also elaborates on the simplicity of dining hall work and the fact that it serves as an "equalizer" of sorts because anybody can do it. She is glad that working at the dining hall "doesn't require a talent; it's not like you're singing; it's not like you're on a sports team; it's really just like, if you're nice to them they're nice to you." This simplicity and equalizing process translates to a lack of competition, of the need to prove oneself, and of the stress of achieving something at the expense of somebody else. In the dining hall, every worker is on the same side and achieving the same goal. As Theresa states, "There is no competition, there is not like stress, and it's kind of like you know you're going to have it done. You know that they have your back and that you're going to help them out too."

It is interesting that the value that student workers place on both the physicality and the simplicity of the tasks is based *on the extent* that the job is counter-cultural to Princeton's intensely high academic demands. Very rarely are these characteristics framed as valuable and important without any reference to or positioning against the overwhelming expectations dictated by orange bubble culture. Thus in some sense, we can say that the higher the academic demands, the more rare and valuable any shelter from such stress becomes. At the same time, however, higher academic demand also means greater cost of time and energy for low-income students required to take a physically-demanding, part-time job. Working and non-working students alike acknowledge this. This creates a curious, confounding relationship in which it is both more costly and more valuable to hold a dining hall job that is deemed counter-cultural to the Princeton mindset. When examining the consequences of low-income students taking on these jobs, we are left neither with romantic notions of good-old-fashioned hard work nor signs of an unbearable burden carried by disadvantaged students. Instead we bear witness to something that lies somewhere in between.

Non-academic Relationships

Within their protected space, many student workers also extend the category "non-academic" to relationships and interactions in the dining hall, and not simply the work being done. In a previous chapter, we saw how some student workers see the dining hall as an affinity space of sorts that allows them to have "safe" conversations about class and financial issues. In this sense, student workers conceive of their collective identity as being quite apart from the "typical" Princeton student. Aside from their collective identity as low-income or down-to-earth students, some

student workers also see their interactions and relationships as being outside a "student mentality." Samuel describes the dining hall as a place where one is in close proximity with other students and gets to foster meaningful relationships with them while maintaining a "separation from the academic world." He implies that what tethers student workers together is not academics, but something refreshingly "real" and not focused on college stress and demands. He speaks of the uniqueness of his friendships with the other student workers in the dining hall: "That's one of the few times... we are both like not in a rush to do anything else. We would just talk about other stuff." Much as Annabel and Emmanuel speak of being "forced to hang out" with their friends, Samuel also sees time in the dining hall as a time to nurture his friendships. In addition, the non-academic environment generates conversations and friendships that are not centered around academics. Gabriella appears to agree with Samuel's view on this matter:

> I think [work] takes you out of this orange bubble because you're not talking about classes. I mean, sometimes you start with "Oh, how's midterms week going?" but then you end up talking about different things most of the time, so you never actually stay in academics or Princeton-related stuff, and it gives you an opportunity to take it from Princeton to something more.

While the non-academic nature of student co-workers' relationships is important to some student workers, most of the ones I interviewed did not make that distinction. They spoke far more frequently of their relationships and interactions with the professional full-time staff as being refreshingly non-academic and a break from the Princeton orange bubble.

Relationships with Professional Dining Hall Workers

If you were to take an attentive walk around the Whitman dining hall during dinner hours on a weekday evening or perhaps during late-morning brunch on a weekend, you would hear the music that each group of workers at their respective stations play as they cook, clean, and serve the undergraduate students that frequent the servery. If you were to stand by the grill waiting to order a breakfast burrito on a Saturday morning, you might be treated to a selection of R&B hits from the eighties, nineties or early 2000s. Beyonce and Rihanna's upbeat numbers are interspersed with the slower power ballads of Mariah Carrey, Whitney Houston, and Celine Dion. Walk a few paces to the left to where the hot entrees are placed, and you might instead hear the familiar opening guitar rift to Guns N' Roses' "Sweet Child O' Mine" or the saxophone introduction to Springsteen's "Born To Run." If then you were to step behind the buffet line into the area where the food is prepped and cooked, you would probably hear a range of Latin dance music – bachata, merengue and salsa being the most common. Sometimes on their way to the backroom, student workers cannot resist stopping to dance a few measures as the cooks play their tunes. Finally, if you were to walk through the double doors, away from the servery and enter the dish-room that houses the enormous industrial dishwasher, you would almost certainly encounter the full-time workers singing along to a mixture of reggae classics and lively gospel music as they keep the dishwasher running.

Theresa considers the music the full-timers play one of her favorite things about the job and says it makes you feel that "you have just travelled through the decades and through the continents." Another student worker claims that this medley of music is one of her favorite things about working in the dining hall as it takes her to

"a whole other place" and almost makes her forget that she is at Princeton.

When interviewing the student workers, I often asked them whether there was anything about their job or experience that those on the outside might find particularly surprising or unexpected. Some student workers believed that many non-working students would be surprised at how "real" the job is or how essential their role is to the university. Many, however, spoke about the authenticity and depth of the relationships they have with the professional full-time dining staff. As Theresa said, "I think people would be surprised at how much friends we are with the actual workers because I feel like... when I'm not on shift, but I'm getting dinner and I say 'hi' and just strike up a conversation... I see people looking like it's weird that I'm doing that." Some student workers regarded the relationship as a mostly silent one based on mutual understanding and respect among people working towards a common goal. The interactions, they claimed, were casual but refreshing.

Many others described their relationships with the professional workers in terms of a familial bond or a specifically parental one. Annabel recalled instances in which the chefs would make her a favorite, comforting dish to keep if she was very busy and had to miss a meal. Natasha spoke of having been driven to the airport by one of the professional workers when she expressed anxiety about paying for a taxi. Gabriella, who is now a senior after working in the Forbes dining hall for close to four years, certainly takes this view. If she were having a difficult week, a particular professional worker, she recalls, "would just stand there with his arms open and I'm like [makes an excited sound]... He is like a father figure or maybe a grandfather figure," adding, "It's nice knowing that there is someone who doesn't know specifically what you're going through, but is there to unconditionally support you anyways... Yes, so I love

them." She reflects on the "wordless" support she receives and is grateful that she is never expected to explain herself or situations, since the full-time workers are quite separated from the "academic" part of Princeton.

The recurring theme of these relationships being qualitatively different from all other relationships on campus frequently comes up as student workers speak of their friendships and conversations as being different from the "academic" culture of Princeton. Theresa uses the following example to express this sentiment:

> [The professional workers] will be like "oh I'm from this country, and we speak French." And I'm like, oh that's so cool, teach me a little bit of French then. And it's not like "oh I'm taking a French class, and let me show you how to say these words." It's like this is their culture, and this is their language, it's just like yeah, I don't know, I really like that. It's like a breath of fresh air around here.

Comparing her interactions with a French-speaking employee to that of taking a French class, Theresa sets this interaction in contrast to an intellectual or academic endeavor that is inorganic or devoid of cultural grounding. Opportunities for academic growth may abound on campus but Theresa holds her interactions with the full-time staff in particularly high esteem for their rarity and informality. This is very much in line with the recurring theme of authenticity and "realness" that student workers frequently ascribe to the dining hall. As Theresa says about her professional co-workers, "you actually see real relationships with people," as opposed to ones centered around and based on academic connections or goals.

Natasha also sees her relationships with professional staff as familial or parental and as qualitatively different from other on-campus relationships. "They are like my family on campus," she states. "I feel like it's nice to have adult friends who

are not like other eighteen-year-olds stuck at Princeton, you know?" She does not necessarily reject or undermine her peer relationships with other students, and does insist on their importance to her. Yet she frames her relationships with employees as an important aspect of her life that she would otherwise sorely miss in her collegiate culture and experience.

When I push further to understand what this adds to her experience, Natasha speaks about the difference between having conversations and interactions with people who share similar academic goals or circles, and those who occupy a space beyond that lifestyle. Once again, she admits to an overwhelming sense of refreshment and refuge:

> When we talk they're not going to talk about classes or midterms... they tell me stories about their families or like the jobs they used to work or all those "when I was your age" type stories... Now as a senior everybody I meet is like "how's the thesis?" but when I see Thomas, or Rina, or Kevin... they don't care if I've written nothing at all [laughs]; they're not going to ask me about that you know?

In the context of repetitive and often stress-inducing conversations among peers or faculty who are inclined to inquire about various academic demands, Natasha's interactions with the professional dining workers relieves her of that stress. Since the professional workers are outside the orange bubble, having a relationship with them allows her to temporarily step outside as well. Natasha goes a step further to claim that her relationships with them offer a refuge from judgment whenever she feels as though she is falling behind or not meeting certain academic expectations. They offer her a break from monotony, her school-related stress, and potential critique of not living up to certain expectations or demands.

For Theresa, these relationships are part of what puts her in the "real world" despite the fairy-tale-like environment of Princeton:

> It's like being in the real world, finally. The people there are just so colorful, they bring a completely different dynamic to the school, 'cause when you're here, the adults that are surrounding you are all like Nobel prize winners and are really respected... there's a level of separation... Maybe I'm just shy, I don't know.

In contrast to the intimidating and often formal interaction with faculty or professors,[6] those with co-workers in the dining hall who are detached from Princeton's academic scene generate a sense of comfort that breeds authenticity. These relationships lack the "emotional tax" to which Jack refers with regards to interactions between low-income students and high-profile faculty at elite institutions.[7] In their relationships with professional workers – regardless of whether these entail casual exchanges or deeper familial bonds – student workers find respite from the self-consciousness that comes from maintaining an intellectual identity. Interactions can have depth without heaviness, and be affirmative without words.

Like the sense of accomplishment that comes from simple tasks at the dining hall and from being able to concentrate on one task instead of several, these relationships allow student workers to temporarily suspend the rules of life within the orange bubble and take off their Princeton cap when they replace it with the dining hall one. As one worker put it, it is like coming up for air to escape a lifestyle that can feel like drowning. In her concluding comments about her relationships in the dining hall, Natasha remarks that she feels as though she can "be something other than just a

[6]For the intimidation low-income students feel in interacting with faculty, see also Jack 2019.
[7]See ibid., page 94.

Princeton student" when she is with the professional staff. Since these relationships have not been fostered in relation to her academic identity (the "Princeton student"), instability in her academic self will not translate into instability in these specific relationships. And stability – amidst the overwhelming, demanding, and rapidly paced lifestyle of the orange bubble – seems to be far more valuable to these student workers than we might initially expect.

Conclusion

On March 12, 2019 – sixteen days before the class of 2023's "Ivy-day"[8] – an array of at least fifty parents, coaches, and university admission officers were discovered to have attempted to influence the admission of prospective students into elite universities across the nation.[9] Although Princeton was not named in this scandal, Yale, Stanford, and Harvard were among the eleven selective college programs allegedly involved. The parents had paid as much as 1.4 million dollars per applicant to get admissions officers to look the other way, to hire stand-in test takers for standardized tests, and to bribe coaches to falsely designate their child as a recruited athlete.[10] Among the parents indicted were popular actress Lori Loughlin and her husband, actress Felicity Huffman, William E. McGlashan Jr. (a partner at the private equity firm TPG) as well as many other influential, prominent, and incredibly wealthy individuals.[11]

Although practices such as athletic recruitment for elite sports like rowing, tennis, or sailing, legacy admissions (sometimes termed as "affirmative action for rich

[8] The day when all the Ivy-league and a few more of the most elite universities in the nation announce their admission decisions for regular decision first-year students.
[9] Witz, Medina, and Arango 2019; Benner, Medina, and Taylor 2019.
[10] Benner, Medina, and Taylor 2019.
[11] Ibid.

white kids"[12]), or even large donations to programs or new buildings have long been ways of gaining entry into elite institutions, the scandal came as a sobering national reminder of just how many ways wealth can place its privileged children ahead in the game. In the *New York Times* article "What Does It Take?: Admissions Scandal Is a Harsh Lesson in Racial Disparities," the authors gathered reflections from high-achieving, poor minority students who were waiting to hear the admission decisions of various universities, including those involved in the scandal.[13] Recounting stories of supporting themselves and their families through part-time jobs in high school, the students understood that being poor and black meant having to work twice as hard to earn a spot in a university that catered to everything they were not – a "harsh lesson in the limits of meritocracy."[14]

Even so, the response of the students seemed more indignant than discouraged. As the authors noted, "in a strange way, the advantages of wealth and privilege that some students may bring with them to college could make [these disadvantaged students] feel more confident when [they] arrive on a campus this fall."[15] One student responded by stating:

> I'm not going to feel like I'm at a disadvantage compared to them because I know that I have character, I have values that they haven't had to develop. They've had things handed to them. Having things handed to you versus having to earn the things you have, they create two different characters.

Although the authors found this response surprising and "strange," this type of moral re-positioning is consistent with the narratives I heard from disadvantaged student

[12] Flanagan 2019.
[13] Eligon and Burch 2019.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.

workers in the dining hall at Princeton University. Over and over again, the attributes of both the work and the workers were viewed as being diametrically opposed to specific aspects of the wider campus culture from which these students wished to distance themselves. They embraced the differences that came with socioeconomic disparity and sometimes even exaggerated them to fit into a larger narrative of counter-culture and exceptionalism.

The relatively recent influx of economically disadvantaged students makes them the generation of low-income students tasked with establishing and legitimizing a new type of identity in a landscape historically occupied by the elite. The dining hall has become a space on campus that is both legitimately Princeton and legitimately working-class. Scholars have long found evidence that for students like these a sense of belonging at elite institutions are undercut and undermined whenever class disparities are brought to the forefront as these remind them that places like Princeton are not made for students like them. Such realization leads to disengagement and compounded disadvantage. In many ways, this remains true and no trivial matter even to some student dining hall workers. For others, however, the dining hall has become a place where low-income students find their disparities evoked, but on their own terms. Students who cannot fully escape the burdens and realities of the "real world" back home and outside the college gates find themselves unable to erase their class identities. Theresa's story – although marked by confusion and duality – of feeling like herself once she puts on her orange apron for a shift at the dining hall, attests to an alternative way of building identity without rejecting one's class. The dining hall operates by affirming class identities as valuable and legitimate. Student dining workers feel as though they are an essential part of keeping the university running

and often as "insiders" to a behind-the-scenes process to which other students are not privy. They feel both tied to the school and a valuable part of the school, even if the rest of their peers may not know that.

Furthermore, we also see evidence that a collective identity and a community of like-minded and similarly situated students offer refuge to student dining workers, a safe space in which they can find solidarity in class-related burdens or experiences. The need for "passing" or "avoiding" class disparities that Zelizer and Gaydosh identify as coping strategies for handling asymmetrical class interactions[16] are suspended in the protected space of the dining hall, where the assumption is that other student workers can empathize and relate to one's background. The definition of deviance is flipped once the student passes into the social space of the dining hall job and can experience relief[17] from the performing or passing that occurs elsewhere on campus.[18] Although institutional attempts to create spaces such as this have led to the Hidden Minority Council and the Scholars Institute Fellows Program, many student workers I spoke to were not actively involved in these formal programs. The reluctance to participate in and validate such institutional efforts might stem from their suspicion that such spaces are not organic or "real" enough. The spontaneity and lack of institutional control in the dining hall almost seems to grant students a greater sense of ownership over the construction of their collective identity and an amplified sense of going against the institutional grain.

We have seen how student dining workers cite their job as evidence of possessing

[16] Zelizer and Gaydosh 2019b.

[17] In "Making It By Faking It: Working-Class Students in an Elite Academic Environment," Granfield notes that while tactics of passing offer "rewards associated with being seen as normal," they also "frequently contribute to psychological stress" Granfield 1991, page 332.

[18] For identity management through "passing" as nondeviants, see also Goffman 2009.

a vastly different mindset from their peers, who, they claim, are stuck in the "orange bubble mindset." They define the orange bubble culture at Princeton as a mindset characterized by stress, excessive self-focus, and snobbery. Student workers do not necessarily see "dirty work" in the dining hall as valuable in and of itself, but rather as valuable to students who wish to distance themselves from the orange bubble attitude of being "above" manual labor or "dirty" jobs, such as those dealing with food or janitorial services. They regarded a different type of work ethic, one marked by a willingness to engage in manual or dirty work, as morally transcendent in some way and as the ultimate mark of a true dining hall worker. They saw their relationships with the full-time staff as a break from the deep insularity of the orange bubble and a way of staying connected to issues that plague the outside world. They distinguished themselves as the "real ones" thanks to their sobriety, inclusiveness, humility, and knowledge of the real world.

Finally, they positioned dining hall work against the orange bubble culture through the refuge it brings from particularly overwhelming aspects of campus life at an elite institution. In a context in which it is simultaneously more costly and more valuable to hold a counter-cultural job such as one in the dining hall, student workers frame their financial obligations to the job as an obligation to refresh themselves. With a sense of self-awareness, some admit that without a job like one in the dining hall that forces them to "hang out" or spend some mindful time, it would be difficult for them to resist giving into "the scramble" of Princeton. It is in reaction to the ubiquity and intensity of academic culture that the simple, manual task of mopping floors or taking out the trash become stress-relieving, mindful, and even confidence boosters as they enable the student to accomplish something important.

Relationships and interactions with full-time staff are also marked by familiarity and refreshment. Both Foster's article in *The Boston Globe* as well as A. A. Jack's *Privileged Poor* draw on examples of low-income students and their families finding similar ease and comfort among the dining hall or cafeteria workers in elite spaces.[19] Student workers regard the dining hall as a place in which they can put aside their academic self and the pressures associated with it. In contrast to what Foster and Jack imply, this does necessarily reflect an internalized intellectual inferiority or an inability to regard themselves as academic equals to their wealthier peers. In fact, many student dining workers speak with indignation about peers who think that "serving" undermines status. They speak about being part of similar social circles or groups and having equal – if not more – academic responsibilities than such peers. They put aside their academic self on their own terms and reward themselves with a much needed break from the stress and emotional tax of keeping up with the demands of the orange bubble lifestyle.

Looking outwards towards the larger implications of these findings, how are we to interpret this tendency of low-income student dining workers to position themselves and their work as counter-cultural to mainstream campus culture? How do we situate this in the larger literature on identity, class disparities, access, inclusion, and other issues surrounding poor students in elite spaces? One argument that could be made is that this cognitive positioning and the narrative surrounding dining hall work is a coping mechanism that low-income students adopt in response to alienation and exclusion. When comparing the experiences of low-income students who went to state colleges with those who went to elite colleges, Aries and Seider found

[19] Foster 2015; Jack 2019, page 40.

sentiments of class-based pride among low-income students.[20] They see such narratives as examples of what Crocker and Major identify as self-protective strategies that the socially stigmatized use to buffer self-esteem.[21] Aries and Seider compare their findings to the work of Snow and Anderson, who examined the strategies used by homeless subjects to construct a personal identity that granted them a dignity that the surrounding society denied them. As they concluded, "Just as the homeless accepted and asserted their street role identities, so too did the lower income students [in elite colleges] affirm aspects of their class identities."[22] It might appear, therefore, that the restructuring of economic disadvantage and disparities of cultural capital into a moral advantage is a similar tale to that of the working class men in Michele Lamont's "The Dignity of Working Men."[23] If we apply Lamont's theory to the student dining workers, we could view their cognitive and moral re-framing as a necessary means for maintaining dignity and affirmation when mainstream methods of obtaining these remain decidedly out of reach in the orange bubble.

While plausible, I suspect that the story of the student dining workers at Princeton is not simply one of coping mechanisms made necessary by social and economic exclusion. In them one finds a greater sense of autonomy and an absence of alienation that the self-protective strategy theory does not fully account for. Unlike the homeless individuals in Anderson and Snow's study or Lamont's working-class men, student dining workers are able to take off their orange apron at the end of their shift each night. The dining hall is far from their only way of experiencing Princeton; though many were "forced" to take the job out of desperation in their first semester,

[20] Aries and Seider 2005.
[21] Crocker and Major 1989, qtd. in Aries and Seider 2005.
[22] Aries and Seider 2005, page 435.
[23] Lamont 2009.

they have come to take pride in actively continuing to work there. Even if they are constrained in ways that their more affluent peers may not be able to relate to, the experience of these students cannot be fully explained by their lack of choice but rather, as I argue, by their ability to seize the opportunity to reconstruct their identities at such an elite institution in opposition to the mainstream one.

Returning to A. A. Jack's *The Privileged Poor*, one of the doubly disadvantaged students in his volume, William, expresses a type of frustration that perhaps warrants more attention than Jack is willing to grant it:

> The biggest challenge [of being at Renowned] is the pressure to become one of them. When you come here, you become one of the elite... People forget where they come from. They live here for four months and they're not living at home and they forget what it means. Then, after four years, they don't go back home. They go to New York... It is just expected that one social class is inherently better than the other, more desirable.[24]

Jack notes that William wanted "nothing to do with the moneyed life at Renowned or the income-obsessed industries his peers would enter upon graduation."[25] For so many students from the most disadvantaged families and neighborhoods in the nation, admission into an elite university like Renowned or Princeton represents such a profound cultural shift that they are ill-equipped to deal with the resulting dissonance and dislocation. I contend that low-income, student dining workers regard the counter-culture of the dining hall as a valuable component (but, notably, not the only one) of their sense of self at Princeton partly in response to their changing "privilege status" as they become a member of the elite from which they have been

[24] Jack 2019, page 47.
[25] Ibid., page 48.

locked out for so long. Even as most aspire to eventually move out of their social class, the dining hall becomes the vehicle through which they are able to push back against the cultural complicity so closely tied with the economic mobility they seek. It becomes their way of expressing to themselves and the world what William did, namely, that no social class is inherently better or more desirable than another, even as they transition into a new one.

Zelizer and Gaydosh conclude their study by asking what happens if stigma surrounding class starts shifting its weight: "As concern with class inequalities gains prominence on campus, open displays of wealth may become increasingly embarrassing, burdened by what Sherman calls the 'moral stigma of privilege'. Outing one's poverty, meanwhile, could be newly legitimized as a virtuous moral claim thereby flipping outside social hierarchies."[26] Whether conventional social hierarchies determined by class on elite campuses such as Princeton's have actually reversed themselves, we do not know. Evidence seems to say we are still far away from that point. In the dining hall as a distinct counter-cultural pocket in Princeton, however, we *do* begin to see the early emergence of this "flipping" of mainstream social hierarchies and norms in which legitimacy is associated not with wealth and privilege, but with the lack thereof and its associated moral claims. When these low-income students arrive on a campus such as Princeton, it is not without some desire to leave behind a part of who they once were. They often seek to leave behind the hardships, the prejudice, and the disadvantages of their upbringing. However, it is wrong to assume that all of these students want to resemble their privileged peers, or as William put it, to "become one of them."[27] Instead, the student dining workers have forged a new type

[26] Zelizer and Gaydosh 2019a; Sherman 2017, qtd. in Zelizer and Gaydosh 2019a.
[27] Jack 2019, page 47.

of Princeton citizenry. These newly legitimized Princeton citizens are neither defined by nor ashamed of the orange apron. They may live in castles but they clean them as well. They are the real ones.

* * *

What this research has pointed towards is that all the money in the world cannot guarantee that every barrier of disadvantage will fall apart at the gates of an elite institution such as this. As the endowments of colleges like Princeton, which in 2018 stands at 25.9 billion dollars,[28] grow at rates of 14 percent year after year, and financial aid policies remain on track, it becomes increasingly conceivable that the pure dollar gap between the resources of undergraduate students could close at such places. Whether this will give rise to allowances for off-campus meals, increased grants and programming for covered experiences and trips during school breaks, or the elimination of college work study altogether, we may see tremendous leaps in narrowing the day-to-day economic disparities between students on campus. Many scholars, with good reason, advocate this position. Yet as class lines in monetary terms are further erased – a goal we have long celebrated as the end-all-and-be-all of our egalitarian ideals – disadvantaged students might still struggle to achieve a sense of belonging and foster a collegiate identity that feels both honest and legitimate – honest to the world they came from and legitimate to the one they are entering.

And so, even though this may put us on a path far less concrete than we may want and far more long-term than we may like, elite universities should begin to seriously examine the ways in which cultural pockets of difference and diversity – such as the one the student dining workers have created for themselves – can be estab-

[28] "Princeton endowment earns 14.2 percent return, supporting teaching, research and financial aid".

lished in wider campus culture. This means diversity should not only be reflected in admission statistics or in faces in the classroom, but also in the cultural and social narratives constructed and reconstructed about what it means to be and how to become a full citizen at a world-class academic institution. This is not to say that reproducing class hierarchies that exacerbate cross-class relations is unproblematic; it is. But seeing what students themselves have created in response to this particular collision of cultural worlds gives us insight into robust solutions and the things that matter in the fostering of identity, belonging, and alternative roads to achievement. How can we acknowledge variety in socioeconomic statuses without reinforcing problematic historical hierarchies? How do we celebrate the diversity in class backgrounds but reject the disadvantage? I posit that perhaps not all students should take the same path towards success at college. To many low-income student workers at the dining hall, complete assimilation in the orange bubble culture of Princeton is neither an option nor ultimately rewarding. Instead, the dining hall has become a place in which the larger cultural narrative has shifted – not by concerted or structural effort on the part of the administration but through a mixture of incidental details and the students' own reclamation and reframing. It has become a place where exclusivity and competition are suspended. It has become a place where students who speak freely about financial difficulties can expect solidarity and not alienation. It is where the dirtiest shoes, not the most expensive jacket, occupies the place of honor. And it is where students have found and created for themselves a small blue pocket within the orange bubble.

Appendix A: Interview Guide

Opening Information

- Where do you work?
- How long have you worked there?
- What position do you hold (e.g. manager, coordinator etc.) and/or what does your job entail?
- How often do you work there in a given week?

Attitudes Towards the Job

- Do you enjoy your job? If YES, why?
- Have your sentiments towards the job changed over time? If YES, how?
- What are the drawbacks towards working at the dining hall?
- Have you thought about getting a different job? Which one?
- How did you get the job in the first place?
- Many students are assigned to work at the dining hall as part of their financial aid package. Were you? Do you identify as low-income and/or first-generation?
- There tends to be a high turnover rate among student employees at the dining hall. Why do you think this is the case?

If student brings up any sense of the orange bubble or dining hall being counter-cultural, move on to Orange Bubble section, if not, skip ahead to Other Students section.

The Orange Bubble

- What is your understanding of the "Princeton Orange Bubble"?
- Do you feel like the dining hall is outside of that?
- If YES, in what ways?
- Are there any other places/activities/groups on campus that you feel similarly towards?

Other Students and the Job

- How do you think other Princeton students see student dining workers? Are there any assumptions they hold?
- What are your interactions with other non-working students on the job like?
- Is there anything that students on the outside would find most surprising about your job?
- Do you find there are status differences between campus jobs? Which are the most desirable? Where does campus dining fall along that?

Community

- What are your relationships like with the other student workers?
- What are your relationships like with the professional full-time staff?
- Is there anything unique about this particular community compared to other spaces on campus?

(Optional) Reactions

- Another student who used to work once said that he "did not come to Princeton for this" in reference to the dining hall job, what do you think he meant by that? Do you relate?
- Another student worker said she felt like every student should work a dining hall shift at least once. Do you agree with that? What would working a dining hall shift give students?

Appendix B: More Information on the Recruitment Process

I contacted the student coordinators of each dining unit and asked if they were interested for an interview. From there, I asked each interviewee to recommend their student colleagues and I would send an email out to those students (snowball sampling). At every stage, not all students I emailed responded, I did not follow up or try to push after the first email. In the Whitman dining hall, where I worked, I asked several students in-person if they would be interested to be interviewed and I set up an interview with those who responded positively. The text of the email I sent to the student coordinators is as follows:

> We met a couple times during coordinator meetings (I'm at Whitman), I was wondering if I could ask a favour! I'm writing my senior thesis on work-study in Princeton and I would really love to interview you just to ask you about your experience as a student worker in the dining hall and broadly a working student on campus. Would really appreciate it, let me know if that is something you could do (it won't take long), and when you would be free to do it. Thanks so much hope the semester is going well!

The text of the email I sent to the student workers following the recommendations

from the student coordinators is as follows:

> My name is Renee and I'm the student coordinator at the Whitman dhall, I hope you don't mind I got your name from your coordinator. I'm a senior in the sociology department and I'm doing my senior thesis on work-study and campus employment and would really love to conduct a short interview with you if you are willing to. It's just to ask about your experience as a student worker in the dining hall and more broadly a working student on campus. Let me know if that is something you could do (it won't take long), and when you would be free to do it. Thanks so much I hope your break is going well!

One student I interviewed volunteered to do so after I spoke to him about my senior thesis topic in passing. Each interview lasted anywhere between thirty minutes to a little over an hour.

Appendix C: More Information on the Interviewees

- Total of 14 student dining workers, only one of whom no longer works at the dining hall. Thirteen of them were employed at campus dining at the time of the interview
- Six students were Caucasian, eight were students of color (2 African-American, 4 Asian-American, 2 Latinx)
- Twelve out of fourteen students explicitly expressed being low-income, first-generation, "working class" or of just coming from "no money"
- Six students from Rocky-Mathey; four students from Whitman; three students from Butler-Wilson; one student from Forbes
- Three underclassmen (2 sophomores, 1 first-year); eleven upperclassmen (7 seniors, 4 juniors)
- Four student coordinators, six student managers, three captains, and one regular worker
- Names and identifiable information were changed to maintain anonymity

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