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Sara Feinstein April 8, 2020

Socioeconomic Status and College Extracurricular Involvement

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Abstract

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Many elite colleges have publicly committed to increase the socioeconomic diversity of their student bodies. Yet despite recent efforts to support and increase diversity on campus, places at elite colleges are still predominantly filled by students with high socioeconomic status backgrounds. Sociologists have recently begun investigating the experiences that students have while in college. Sociologists have shown that students' college experiences may differ on the basis of socioeconomic status. I aim to further this research trend by investigating how student socioeconomic status shapes extracurricular involvement at an elite university. I conducted 20 in-depth, qualitative interviews with Emory University students in their 3rd or 4th year of their undergraduate degree program. I asked participants about their socioeconomic backgrounds and their extracurricular experiences at Emory. I find several themes and patterns, reflecting the continued importance of differences in socioeconomic status for extracurricular involvement at an elite college.

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Introduction

This study seeks to investigate how socioeconomic status shapes extracurricular involvement in college. The interplay of socioeconomic status and education are well documented. Stratification scholars have long demonstrated that differential socio-cultural resources impact educational attainment (DiPrete and Buchmann 2013), which subsequently impacts labor market returns. Furthermore, sociologists have demonstrated that educational institutions privilege some forms of socio-cultural resources or cultural capital over others (Lareau 2011). Recently, sociologists have begun to focus on college as a "sieve" or "incubator" (Armstrong et al 2008), in other words studying the ways that college experiences sort and shape students, rather than just patterns of attendance, graduation, and labor market outcomes. While scholars have demonstrated the importance of socioeconomic status for college experiences and outcomes, there is not has much scholarship examining the relationship between socioeconomic status and college extracurricular activities.

Though previous sociological scholarship has revealed many ways that socioeconomic status influences college extracurricular involvement, the present study has the potential to illuminate a research gap. While scholars have demonstrated the importance of socioeconomic status in shaping students' college experiences at elite schools, there is little research that focuses specifically on extracurricular activities and socioeconomic status and even less that does so in an elite setting. Elite colleges are the focus of much academic research, but there is still little understanding of the ways that extracurricular activities at such schools may shape student experiences differently on the basis of socioeconomic status. The research site, which I elaborate on below, presents an ideal setting to gain further insight.

Research to fill this research gap is important for several key reasons. Rivera (2015) demonstrates the critical role of college extracurricular activities for elite job recruitment. Rivera finds that elite employers focus on extracurricular activity involvement to assess a candidate's "cultural match" with a given firm. Extracurricular involvement even played a central role in many job interviews for these firms. Extracurricular involvement may even be used by the elite firms as a signal of or a proxy for a candidate's socioeconomic background. Friedman and Laurison (2019) also briefly show that cultural capital gained through college extracurricular involvement can help with mobility within a particular firm. Thus, the interplay of extracurricular involvement and socioeconomic status may be related to labor market stratification. Furthermore, Arum and Roksa (2011) and DiPrete and Buchmann (2013) present evidence that extracurricular involvement relates to social connections and persistence in college. Finally, Stevens (2009) demonstrates that high school extracurricular activities are critical for elite college acceptance. Therefore, given its influence on college enrollment, experience, completion, and labor market stratification, it is critically important to investigate differences in college extracurricular participation.

Research Question

The aim of this study is to investigate the relationship between socioeconomic status and extracurricular involvement at an elite university. My research question is, how does socioeconomic status shape extracurricular participation at an elite university?

Literature Review

Though sociologists of education formerly focused mainly on academic achievement in college and job market outcomes, during the past ten years sociologists have shifted their conceptualizations of college. In their review article, Armstrong et al (2008) outline several areas of higher education research and emphasize the need for greater research on the "experiential core of college life." In particular, Armstrong et al suggest that social sorting on college campuses may be influenced by extracurricular involvement and call for further research investigating student experiences on college campuses. Throughout the past ten plus years sociologists have begun to answer the call, exploring various aspects of the college experience, including extracurricular involvement. Yet despite the recent scholarship on the subject, there are still significant research gaps within sociological understandings of college extracurricular involvement. Specifically, few studies focus solely on extracurricular involvement and fewer still compare the experiences of students on the basis of socioeconomic status.

Cultural capital, which while defined differently by scholars revolves around socioeconomic status, has been shown to impact education. Of particular note is the foundational work of Annette Lareau (2011), who investigated the childhoods of working-class and middle-class children. Lareau found that parents of working class children demonstrated a "natural growth" perspective, allowing their children to entertain themselves and leaving educational skill attainment to teachers. Parents of middle class children embraced a "concerted cultivation" perspective, which involved a very hands-on and resource intensive approach. Lareau emphasizes that neither of these perspectives is in any way intrinsically better

than the other. But Lareau found that middle class children's cultural capital or behavioral habits, which they learned through their parents' "concerted cultivation," were rewarded in educational settings. For example, middle-class children learned to speak confidently with adults, which teachers rewarded in the classroom. Thus, the behaviors that are rewarded in schools are not class neutral, but rather reflect the cultural capital and norms of the people who shape and maintain the educational institutions themselves (i.e. middle-class people). Lareau's research demonstrates the importance of culture, and cultural capital in particular, in shaping educational experiences.

Several recent sociological works explore student socioeconomic status and college experiences. Jack (2019) explores the ways that institutional policies and culture shape students experiences with low socioeconomic status and differing preparation. Jack finds that students with low socioeconomic status experiences at a very elite, private university differed on the basis of secondary school. The students who attended private secondary schools or participated in intensive college preparatory programs were more comfortably and easily able to navigate the elite culture of the school, in part due to cultural capital. Yet the book also explores the ways that institutionalized pathways and culture hinder social mobility for students from low income backgrounds who have had limited experience in elite spaces. Thus, Jack demonstrates that while family socioeconomic background matters for higher education, so do previous school experiences. While Jack does not investigate extracurricular activities in great detail, his research suggests that previous extracurricular experiences in previous educational settings may be important.

While Jack demonstrates the importance of previous school experiences and student socioeconomic status, Stevens (2009) underscores the important of extracurricular activities in college admission. Stevens' ethnography of a college admissions team at a selective liberal arts college includes rich detail about the ways that admissions officers evaluate extracurricular involvement. The admissions officers rank students' extracurricular involvement and high levels of commitment or specific skills may lead to a students' admission.

Other studies show that higher education institutions shape institutional culture in ways that mold students differently on the basis of socioeconomic status. Lee (2016) describes the normative discursive frames employed by college professors and administrators at an elite liberal arts college. These frames assume that students have particular, class based resources at their disposal. Thus, the experiences of low socioeconomic status students are often erased from the primary institutionalized norms and representations of life at the college. Yet Lee focuses on campus culture more generally, not on extracurricular involvement, with a focus on a single student organization for low income and first-generation students but not on other organizations or activities. Her analysis demonstrates that a lack of elite cultural capital and economic capital impacted the experiences of low socioeconomic status, despite campus wide pro-diversity rhetoric. Thus, both Jack and Lee demonstrate the importance of cultural capital within an elite college, which suggests that cultural capital will play a role in student extracurricular involvement in my study.

Several recent works focus on social capital or networks and student activities. Chambliss and Takacs (2014) do not focus on socioeconomic status but do include information about student organizations. Chambliss and Takacs use several forms of analysis, all collected at

a small, elite liberal arts college. Chambliss and Takacs show how student organization involvement creates social networks that connect some students and groups to many others, while leaving some groups and students more socially isolated. The centrality of some groups over others seemed to relate in part to campus culture and values, and thus is certainly not arbitrary. Thus, Chambliss and Takacs demonstrate that student organizations may be central in the attainment of social capital during college. Given that their research is longitudinal, they are able to demonstrate causality.

Though much of the work I describe is not directly comparable to this study, Stuber (2009) does compare the extracurricular experiences of students with low and high socioeconomic status. Stuber finds that cultural and social capital shape students' extracurricular experiences on the basis of socioeconomic status. This suggests that cultural and social capital may be important for my analysis as well. Importantly, Stuber investigates students at a large state university and a small, selective liberal arts college. Furthermore, Stuber focuses her analysis on differences in cultural, economic, and social capital, and does not focus on the ways that institutional structure influences extracurricular experiences.

Institutional structure itself may shape student experiences differently on the basis of noneconomic status. The research of Armstrong and Hamilton (2013) is particularly well known and explores how the institutional "pathways" at state flagship university impact women differently based on socioeconomic status. The researchers use qualitative methods to investigate the influence of socioeconomic status on the college experiences and projected outcomes of over 50 female students at a large, flagship state university. The researchers found that differential cultural orientations or capital interacted with different institutionalized

programs or pathways. Political and institutional factors, such as decreasing government funding prompting the university to strategically seek out tuition dollars from wealthy out of state students, impacted the relative visibility or robustness of certain institutional pathways. These pathways benefitted or were an appropriate match for some students more than others, on the basis of socioeconomic status. For example, the researchers found that the highly visible "party pathway" was detrimental to the academic outcomes of the students with low socioeconomic status. In many ways Armstrong and Hamilton present evidence that supports Bourdieu's social reproduction theory, given that few of the students in the sample were projected to be socially mobile after the five years of the study. Armstrong and Hamilton's research shows the importance of institutional structure for student life, which thus may be related to extracurricular activities.

Along similar lines, Binder and Wood (2013) explore how institutional structure influence the ways that student clubs operate. Binder and Wood compare conservative student political clubs at a large state college and a smaller, elite private university. The researchers demonstrate that students at the smaller, elite university employ less divisive, more "intellectual" debate style rhetoric, whereas the students at the large, state school stage divisive protests and highly visible public demonstrations. Their research implies that campus structure and size impacts student organizations, which emphasizes the importance of further research on extracurricular involvement on different types of college campuses.

Several of the works that explore the impact of socioeconomic status on the college experience notably do not focus on paid student activities. Jack (2019) is one exception, as Jack explores the impact of particular work study positions that involve extensive, sometimes

demeaning, interaction between work-study students and other, non-working students. Jack demonstrates that student-workers may feel isolated by their campus work experiences, which may serve as a clear label of their financial status. Further, Jack does this research at an elite university, which is thus very comparable with my study site. Goldrick-Rab (2016) also discusses the impact of paid extracurricular employment on students and demonstrates that employment comes with stress, exhaustion, and decreased focus on academics for some students. Yet Goldrick-Rab focuses solely on students with the highest financial need in Wisconsin, many of whom do not work on campus, and thus her study population is not as directly comparable with those in my sample. Overall, both Jack (2019) and Goldrick-Rab (2016) find that student employment may exert a deep influence on a student's experience while in college and that this influence may differ on the basis of financial need or economic capital.

Hypotheses

Based on the previously discussed empirical research, I hypothesize that institutional structure will differentially shape the extracurricular participation of low and high socioeconomic status participants. I also hypothesize that differences in cultural capital, conceptualized as differences in legitimated knowledge, taste, and manners, will be related to the types of activities that members of the comparison groups choose.

Methods

I conducted this study at Emory University. Emory University is a mid-size, private research university located in Atlanta, Georgia. Emory University is ranked within the top 25 universities in the United States by US News and World Reports (US News and World Reports) and is considered "most selective." Thus, Emory University may be considered a prestigious or

elite university. Yet Emory is comparably more socio-economically diverse than many of its peer institutions. One recent study (Chetty et al 2017) ranked Emory in the top five compared to other elite colleges in its "share of students from the bottom fifth" or whose families earned $20,000 or less per year. The study also placed Emory at number 57 (out of 65 elite colleges) in its "share of students from the top fifth." In other words, Emory has relatively more students from low socio-economic status backgrounds and fewer students from very high socio-economic backgrounds compared to other elite colleges. Thus, Emory presents a context where socioeconomic status may be examined in an elite, but relatively more socioeconomically diverse, setting.

Sampling

I limited my sample to undergraduate students in their third or fourth year, given that these students have had more time in college and thus more experiences to discuss. I recruited participants through snowball and convenience sampling techniques, first reaching out to students that I knew and then asking participants to refer me to their friends (Chambliss and Schutt 2016). I recruited many of the participants through direct emails, Facebook messages, and word of mouth referrals. I also posted several flyers in college wide, online groups. Though I did not specifically reach out to students of particular socioeconomic backgrounds, I described the study in recruitment materials and later asked participants to refer me to others they felt might fit my criteria. This allowed me to tap into social networks of low income and first-generation students, which form through particular activities (as I elaborate on in my analysis).

Data Collection and Analysis

I chose to conduct semi-structured, qualitative interviews, which ranged from 30 minutes to an hour. Qualitative interviews allow participants to speak for themselves, explaining their experiences in their own ways and allowing the researcher to inductively learn from participants what themes and experiences are important (Chambliss and Schutt 2016). I conducted the interviews in library study rooms, providing a quiet and private environment. Before each interview, I discussed the focus of the study and informed consent with the participants, and each participant completed an informed consent form. I asked students about their extracurricular participation in college, their high school participation, the parental support that they received, and their demographic information. I was able to allow themes to arise organically throughout the interviews and gain insights through the ways that participants chose to frame their experiences and emphasize certain themes themselves. I interviewed a total of 20 students, 9 from low income backgrounds and 11 from high income backgrounds, my categorization of which is explained below. I recorded each interview, transcribed the recordings, and then analyzed the data using the MAXQDA analysis software. I began with an inductive analysis, paying particular attention to different types of capital. After coding for the initial themes to arose, I conducted a second deductive analysis to assess the ways that the themes formed patterns amongst the participants' responses (Chambliss and Schutt 2016).

Socio-economic status has been conceptualized and measured in a wide variety of ways by sociologists. Given that not all students can accurately report their family income (or might feel that income is a particularly sensitive matter to discuss with a researcher), I assessed socio-economic status through questions about parents' education and employment or jobs, both of

which have been used widely by sociologists to assess socioeconomic status in past research (Friedman and Laurison 2019; Lee 2016). The parent education variable was my primary means of delineating my comparison groups, but I felt that the occupation variable was a helpful supplement. The low socioeconomic status comparison group is composed of primarily students whose parents do not have undergraduate degrees. Further, there are three exceptions to this delineation whose parents (one or both) do have four year undergraduate degrees but who work in occupations that do not require a college degree (including as secretaries, landscapers, and assistants) and whose responses matched the patterns that I observed in the low socioeconomic status group. The parents of the participants in the high socioeconomic status group all have college degrees and many have graduate degrees.

Low Socioeconomic Status	High Socioeconomic Status
Tina- one parent had high school degree, one parent did not have high school degree	Megan- one parent had 4-year college degree, one had graduate degree
Ian- both parents had 4-year college degrees	John- one parent had 4-year college degree, one had graduate degree
Jane- both parents had high school degrees	May- both parents had 4-year college degree
Nick- one parent had high school degree, one had 4-year college degree	Logan- both parents had graduate degrees
Raul- parents did not have high school degrees	Ella- one parent had 4-year college degree, one had graduate degree
Leila- both parents had high school degree	Cassie- both parents had graduate degrees
Stacy- one parent had high school degree, one parent had 2-year college degree	Matthew- both parents had graduate degrees
Amy- parent did not have high school degree	Josephine- both parents had graduate degrees
Bill- both parents had high school degrees	Tommy- one parent had 4-year college degree, one had graduate degree
	Kendra- both parents had graduate degrees
	Morgan- both parents had 4-year college degree

Table 1: pseudonyms for each participant, along with parents' educational attainment

Results

My results were rich and varied, with both similarities and differences between the two comparison groups. Several important themes arose, demonstrating the central areas that relate to extracurricular choices and experiences for many college students. Though my findings reflect a range of themes, they may be understood through the theoretical concepts or focuses of cultural capital and institutional or organizational structure. Further, some of the findings relate to motivators of or pathways to extracurricular participation, while others reflect the impacts of extracurricular participation on the lives and experiences of the participants. These organizing concepts and theoretical focuses, along with the comparison between the two groups, shape my results.

Institutional Structure and Pathways to Participation

Given the importance of high school extracurriculars for admission to elite colleges (Stevens 2009, Golden 2006), it is not surprising that high school extracurricular activities played a role in the activities that participants in both comparison groups chose in college. Yet, the types of high school participation that members of the groups engaged with and the ways that high school participation impacted their college extracurricular choices differed between the groups. In understanding the activities that the participants chose in college, I found it useful to learn about their high school extracurricular participation.

The low socioeconomic status participants described diverse, varied high school experiences, which are an important backdrop to understanding their extracurricular participation. Several of the low socioeconomic status participants spoke about attending very rigorous high schools with lots of AP classes and Tina said of the IB program at her school: “Hell

yeah, it prepared me for Emory…it was a ton of work…it was very academically rigorous." In contrast, several of the participants also discussed schools that were "underfunded and under-resourced" with teachers that would "never stay for longer than a year because they would always quit," and in which they did not have access to more rigorous, AP coursework. Yet despite these differences in academic experiences in high school, the low socioeconomic status students all reported high levels of extracurricular involvement in high school. The low socioeconomic status respondents participated almost exclusively in activities organized by their high schools. One participant detailed her involvement as less a matter of choice and more of necessity, given that there were no buses to her home and her parents could not pick her up after school: her only option was to participate in school-sanctioned after school activities. Others were "over involved" by choice, pursuing their interests for fun and hoping to boost their resumes and college admissions chances. Finally, two participants described high school extracurricular passion projects aimed at fulfilling needs that they noticed in their communities and even their own lives. For example, one participant established a food pantry at her school after experiencing periods of food insecurity during her childhood. Thus, it seems that the activities that the low socioeconomic status participants engaged with prior to college were organized through their schools, a structural or institutional dynamic of the extracurricular marketplace as these activities were free or had moderate fees (such as for equipment or uniforms). The low socioeconomic status participants took advantage of activities that were available to them at school, which varied in type and quality based on school resources, and created their own initiatives based on the needs that they saw in their communities. Interestingly, most of the participants de-emphasized paid employment and

focused on the unpaid activities that they had participated in. Thus, they participated in varied activities that were structurally constrained by their high schools or motivated by their communities.

Similar to the low socioeconomic status participants, the high socioeconomic status participants reported high levels of extracurricular involvement high school. Thus, the high levels of high school extracurricular participation may well be a selection effect produced by the Emory admission criteria, which purports to weigh extracurricular involvement, like many of its peer institutions (Stevens 2009). Many of the high socioeconomic status participants were active in school sponsored activities such as school newspapers and sports teams. Furthermore, the high socioeconomic status participants unilaterally reported attending highly resourced, rigorous schools, in which "…they had like over 30 APs [classes]… a robotics club, a golf club, everything." Thus, the high school experiences of the high socioeconomic status participants were less varied than those of the low socioeconomic status participants overall.

In contrast to the low socioeconomic status participants, several of the high socioeconomic status participants were involved in activities outside of school, many of which required years of costly lessons. These activities tended to be the sort that their schools did not have the resources to offer, such as individual music lessons or private sports clinics. It is possible that these sorts of private lessons enabled the high socioeconomic status participants to gain greater mastery over musical instruments or sports, which the university in turn rewards through its admissions process (Golden 2006). One striking example of this institutionalized advantage for high socioeconomic status participants or students with the economic capital to access intensive extracurricular training is the case of Megan. Megan's

parents provided ample support for her intensive music training, beginning well before even high school. Megan recounted,

> When I was little, I really liked birds…I went to a performance of Peter and the Wolf, a classical piece where each instrument is an animal, and I wanted to play the flute because in that piece the flute sounds like a bird…I asked [my parents] to play the flute and they have always paid for lessons, driven me to rehearsals.

Megan continued to play the flute throughout high school and was introduced to several organizers of the Emory music program during her campus tour. These strategic introductions, organized based on her qualifications, facilitated her entry to several extracurricular orchestra programs before she even enrolled in classes. The parental support that Megan describes prior to college seems directly linked to their socioeconomic resources, given the significant time and money that her parents made available for her lessons. Thus, Megan's description of her entrée into Emory music groups demonstrates the structural advantage that students with intensive extracurricular preparation prior to college enjoy in finding and becoming involved with extracurricular activities. While it may be possible that such intensive preparation may be accessed by both low and high socioeconomic status students, my analysis demonstrates that it may be more easily accessible to high socioeconomic status students, given the intensive and costly preparation that they may engage in.

Many of the low socioeconomic status participants explicitly linked their high school activities with their college involvement, seeking to "smooth" their college transitions. Ian reported that "Cross country was just a continuation of what I did in high school…When I got to college it was something familiar, so I fell back on that in a new place." The high socioeconomic status participants did not discuss extracurriculars as a means of smoothing the college

transition. While several of the high socioeconomic status participants did choose to continue with activities that they had participated in in high school, they were far less likely to directly link these activities to the college transition than the low socioeconomic status participants. Whereas low socioeconomic status participants were more likely to use extracurriculars as a means of aiding in the college transition, high socioeconomic status participants did not report a similar strategy. Exclusive, pre-college orientation activities hosted by the university may play a role in these differing transition strategies, as Jack (2019) also reports. Logan spoke fondly of his time participating in an optional, and financially costly, summer pre-college orientation. This allowed him to have a "friend group" before the school year even began. Yet this option was not open to many of the low socioeconomic status students given the high cost and lack of aid (at the time). In fact, one of the low socioeconomic status participants explicitly mentioned her frustration at being unable to participate in the summer pre-orientation because of the high fees and lack of institutionalized assistance. Thus, differing extracurricular transition strategies relate to institutional programs that are structurally confined to students with financial resources and time during the summer months (thus assuming implicitly that participants do not have summer employment that they are unable to leave).

In addition to the college transition, institutional structure impacted participants' means of initial extracurricular involvement. Almost all of the participants in both groups mentioned the Student Activities Fair, which is held annually in one of the first weeks of the fall semester. The fair is organized with support from the administration, but is largely staffed by students who sit at hundreds of booths representing different student organizations. The event is held in a field in front of the first-year dorms and adjacent to the dining hall, virtually ensuring that first

year students cannot miss it (as first year students are required to live in the dorms on campus and to eat at the campus dining halls). Further, as several participants attested, the event is effectively promoted with flyers throughout campus. Many of the participants described "stumbling upon" clubs that they found interesting and chose to get involved with while at the fair.

While the Student Activities Fair effectively connected students with campus organizations, the sheer size of the event, which includes over 400 student organizations (Emory Campus Life) and the hundreds (perhaps even thousands) of students who attend also made it difficult for some participants to discover valuable potential opportunities. In particular, one low socioeconomic status participant, Jane, told me that she started her own informal student mentorship program for first generation students after realizing that no such club existed at Emory. Yet, in fact there is an organization for first generation students that includes mentorship and workshops. Thus, the sheer size and breadth of the activities fair seems to have prevented Jane from finding an organization that she not only was searching for but whose mission is to support first generation students like her. The concept of matching (Clotfelter 2017) is useful here in highlighting the potential pitfalls of the Student Activities Fair. It is possible that the size of the fair, as well as the sheer number of student organizations at Emory, makes it difficult for some students to find opportunities suited for them or aimed at them. In other words, appropriate matching between students and organizations may be hindered by institutional features of the Emory extracurriculum.

Apart from the Student Activities Fair, almost all of the participants reported joining student organizations after finding them through online Facebook groups and attending events

that were advertised through Handshake (a social networking site for Emory organizations) and around campus. The use of online platforms to apply for club leadership positions and to learn about events seemed to gain importance later in college, after the initial rush of the first year and the Activities Fair and other orientation events. I did not find large differences between the comparison groups in use of online platforms to secure positions, but this in part might be related to the use of online platforms later during their time in college by many of the participants in both groups. The online platforms were also coupled with physical fliers and events, such as Wonderful Wednesday, that provide central, physical space for organizations to spread the word about opportunities. Through providing space for fliers (such as large boards at the front of dorms) the institution facilitated access to events and opportunities, given that few students could miss these advertisements (as first and second year students are required to live on campus). Stuber (2011) also briefly discusses the ways that the presence of physical flyers on campus may facilitate access to opportunities, and maintain a culture of involvement on campus. These methods of activity recruitment were reported by members of both comparison groups as means of discovering extracurricular opportunities, and thus appear to facilitate more egalitarian means of activity recruitment.

While many methods of finding extracurricular opportunities were similar across the two groups, there were several exceptions. In particular, the case of paid employment demonstrates dramatic differences between the two comparison groups in types of activities that participants were involved in and methods of securing positions. The low socioeconomic status participants all took part in some form of paid employment for at least part of their time in college. Though the estimated number of hours per week differed between participants,

almost all of the low socioeconomic status participants reported working greater than 10 hours per week but less than 20 hours per week. Most of the low socioeconomic status participants participated in less competitive work-study jobs. These jobs often involved staffing library service desks or helping the AV team. The exceptions were two participants who held highly competitive positions as a Residential Advisor (RA) and a Research Assistant respectively. These positons denote a high level of leadership, authority, and power.

In contrast, only about half of the high socioeconomic status participants held paid positions. In fact, several of the participants explicitly explained decisions not to participate in paid employment. For example, John explained, “My parents wouldn’t allow me to get a campus job because they want me to focus on academics.” John thus demonstrates how parental support and financial resources play into decision-making and that his parents do not view paid employment as important or as a valuable resume or career booster in comparison to academic achievement. The high socioeconomic status participants who did hold paid positons did so as RAs, teaching assistants, and research assistants. These positions were viewed as high status or desirable, with many participants hoping to gain valuable experience and linking this experience to future hopes for research careers, graduate school applications, or social status. Thus, the high socioeconomic status participants had more varied amounts of experience with paid positions, both in number of positions that they held as a group and in continuity of this participation. As May discussed when speaking about quitting her research assistant positon, “…it was all just exhausting and stressful. I just couldn’t take the pressure anymore so I cut back a lot on my participation…I was taking on a lot of responsibilities and not getting much out of it.” May notably does not explicitly refer to the financial compensation from the position, and is

able to quiet the position based on her stress levels without worrying about the financial loss. It seems clear that financial necessity makes paid employment unavoidable for many low socioeconomic status students, even if the work becomes stressful or overly time consuming (Goldrick-Rab 2016). The clear differences in approaches to paid employment that the comparison groups displayed demonstrates the importance of paid employment as a stratifying mechanism on campus, shaping the experiences of low and high socioeconomic status participants respectively. The structure of financial aid itself, which requires work-study students to work on campus for a specified number of hours, arguably maintains this stratifying mechanism.

Perhaps even more notably, the means of securing paid employment differed between the two comparison groups. As noted above, two of the low socioeconomic status participants held highly competitive positions. While Nick secured his RA position after witnessing a flyer advertising the position in his residence hall, Bill gained the position through an institutionalized research program that connects students with professors. Importantly, Bill's cousin, a medical student, helped him find the program, which was not well advertised. This indicates an absence within the organizational structure of widely visible and available means of securing high status or highly competitive paid employment. In contrast, the high socioeconomic status participants procured competitive, paid positions on campus through contact with administrators and professors. In particular, several of the high socioeconomic status participants were able to secure paid work assisting professors after the professors reached out to them or they informally spoke with the professors. Only one of the low socioeconomic status participants used a connection with her boss, an administrator, to secure

a new position, though the position in question was temporary. My results demonstrate that despite the wide range of ways that opportunities are advertised on campus, many positions, particularly high-status opportunities, are secured in informal or not widely advertised ways. Furthermore, these informal means of gaining positions appear to benefit high socioeconomic status students, which I elaborate on below.

Cultural Capital and Pathways to Participation

Cultural capital has been defined in a wide range of ways by scholars (Lareau and Weininger 2003), and is highly contextual. As Lareau and Weininger discuss, cultural capital has been defined as possession of "elite" cultural knowledge, separate from skills or "human capital" by many sociologists, but an argument can be made for a wider, encompassing definition that takes into account skills (such as interactional and linguistic styles). I defined cultural capital as knowledge, taste, and manners legitimated by the college institution.

As I discussed above, several of the high socioeconomic status participants were able to gain specialized extracurricular skills through intensive, expensive, training during high school. As Golden (2006) demonstrates, colleges value particular skills and credentials over others, often in a bid to improve their athletic performance (a marker of status and publicity and means of gaining alumni donations) or otherwise improve and maintain elite status. Though notability, Emory differs from many other elite colleges in that few of its athletic teams are particularly competitive and it does not have a football team. Yet, the types of extracurriculars that colleges value also potentially shape the choices that high school students make. Participants in both groups spoke about choosing extracurriculars in high school with college admissions hopes in mind. Yet a particular hierarchy of all extracurricular activities, with some

denoting cultural capital, did not become clear to me, with regards to the high school activities discussed by the participants. While Megan's story about meeting the organizers of several Emory classical music groups demonstrates that classical music groups may be an institutionalized priority, I found no evidence of a differential attitude in favor of classical music groups or other student organizations that might be termed to relate to classically elite cultural capital, according to Bourdieu's designation (Lareau and Weininger 2003). I did not notice any clear trends as to the types of extracurriculars that members of the groups chose in high school that they explicitly linked in their interviews to college admissions. For many of the participants, those in both groups, it seemed that differentiating themselves through showing commitment to the activities that they chose in high school, rather than choosing activities that would be more attractive to college admissions officers, was the priority. It must be noted however, that Emory university admissions officers themselves may differentially evaluate extracurricular activities, though this is outside of the purview of the present study. Further, the types of activities that high schools offer, as well as the intensive lessons that those with financial capital may engage in, themselves may be shaped by the non-culturally neutral priorities of universities.

In contrast to high school involvement, cultural capital played a greater role in differences in motivations for specific types of college extracurricular involvement between the two comparison groups. Many of the low socioeconomic participants spoke about their extracurriculars as they related to future plans. To this end, many emphasized specific skill and knowledge acquisition that they felt directly related to their chosen career paths. One participant spoke about attending workshops hosted by a club for first generation students

saying, “It is really helpful to attend workshops…to help even the playing field…” Many of these types of workshops, as described by several participants, involved tutorials on using LinkedIn and other websites, creating resumes, and tips for securing recommendations. Another spoke about his video editing and music hobbies as a chance to “build skills” for his future career.

Almost all of the high socioeconomic status participants emphasized the connection they sought between their extracurricular participation and future career plans. The high socioeconomic status participants spoke about “resume boosters” and desires to connect with potentially fruitful professional networks and gain valuable recommendations. Thus, the high socioeconomic status participants referred to social capital acquisition and a general use of extracurriculars to gain career prospects, in contrast to the specific skills and knowledge sought by many of the low socioeconomic status participants. Thus, it seemed that the high socioeconomic status participants were aware of career benefits that could be obtained through extracurricular activities, even seemingly unrelated activities such as sports or travel abroad programs. Though participants in both groups referred to resume enhancements, the high socioeconomic status participants seemed to have a wider definition of what activities might constitute such an enhancement. As Rivera (2015) demonstrates, extracurricular activities can be integral in securing certain types of high status jobs. Rivera also demonstrates that extracurricular activities may serve as interview talking points and may communicate a candidate’s socioeconomic status background to interviewers. Thus, the high socioeconomic status participants may be operating in ways that will benefit their career prospects in the future. I interpret these differences in motivation, which reveal differences in understanding about the potential labor market utility of particular activities, as differences in cultural capital.

Here cultural capital is demonstrated through the specific knowledge that the high socioeconomic status participants demonstrate, which may prove valuable in the future.

Further, as discussed above with regard to paid campus positions, cultural capital may have played a role in the methods that participants used to secure positions. While participants in both comparison groups used formal means of learning about organizations, such as through online posts or flyers, the high socioeconomic status participants appeared to more easily utilize informal connections to gain positions. The differences in the ways that many of the high socioeconomic status participants went about securing paid positions, through connections with professors, indicates the ability of the high socioeconomic status students in particular to forge connections with their professors, a skill that may be termed cultural capital. Increased ease in connecting with professors or teachers has been shown to relate to socioeconomic status and experiences in elite educational institutions (Jack 2019; Khan 2011). Further, this finding relates to Lareau's (2011) work, which shows that different interactional styles, some of which are legitimated by educational institutions and teachers, may be termed cultural capital.

Cultural Capital and Impacts of Participation

Along with differing motivations for extracurricular participation, cultural capital also contributed to differential evaluations of particular positions. Specifically, I found that more than half of the participants alluded to a symbolic hierarchy of paid campus positions. I attribute the differential evaluations of paid positions in part to differences in cultural capital necessary to attain the positions and to be successful in the positions. I attempted to use phrases like "involvement" during the interviews in order to allow participants to elaborate in their own ways and focus on what they felt was most important. Many of the participants (in

particular in the low socioeconomic status group, though they also participated in more paid positions as a group) noticeably neglected to mention the paid activities that they participated in until I prompted them, preferring to focus on unpaid campus involvement or assuming that by "involvement" I meant only unpaid activities. Yet, given the importance of paid positions in the lives of students (Goldrick-Rab 2016, Jack 2019), I felt that the inclusion of paid activities was important in my study. As Raul said, "I have never really done a paid activity, apart from my job." This statement demonstrates that for Raul, who worked at the library, his paid position occupied a different category than other "activities" for him. In this case, the notion of symbolic boundaries is useful, which may be understood as "conceptual distinctions" that can be used to group particular social objects, phenomena, and even people (Lamont and Molnar 2002). Raul thus draws a symbolic boundary between his paid employment at the library and his activities or his campus "involvement."

Furthermore, and perhaps most important for eventual career outcomes, many of the participants alluded to the direct career benefits that could be reaped from the most high status positions in the hierarchy of paid positions. As one high socioeconomic status participants said, "I justify the jobs [paid positions] that I have done because they benefit me academically and career wise, as a resume booster…It would not have the same effect if I had a paid position working at the front desk at the library." Thus, the high socioeconomic status participants also drew symbolic boundaries around some positions, alluding to a hierarchy of potential career value. The distinction between front desk positions versus others reflects a symbolic boundary, creating different categories. Lee (2016) documents a similar phenomenon in which some internships were funded by a university but not others, with university officials

justifying differential funding based on how "professional" or linked to white collar careers that the internships were. It is worth noting that at Emory not all campus positions are compensated equally, and that many of the research positions are compensated at higher rates than the library positions, to name a particular comparison. Thus, it seems that the hierarchy of value that participants referred to might in part be related to the material differences in compensation, which themselves might reflect cultural notions of skills and career.

Along with the creation of a symbolic status hierarchy through differences in cultural capital, extracurricular participation contributed to shifts in habitus for several of the participants. Habitus is defined as cultural orientation or style, which Bourdieu defined as the result of internalized social position, creating differences in manner and taste based on one's social origins (Lee and Kramer 2012). Yet Bourdieu also defines cleft habitus, "the experience of transitioning and hold two habitus at one time…" (Lee and Kramer 2012:19). Lee and Kramer (2012) demonstrate that low income students at a selective college experience both a cultural tension between their school community and their home community as they experience social mobility or "cleft habitus." Several of the low socioeconomic status participants described experiencing a conscious awareness of a shift in manner, a change in communication style in order to conform to cultural norms at Emory. I felt that this shift went beyond mere embodied cultural capital and reflected shift in habitus. Amy, a first-generation college student who had attended a severely "under-resourced" high school noted,

> When I met my roommate for the first time I went to her house with my family…She lived in the richer part of town. She went to private school…Her parents spoke differently and I thought "oh god, I don't know how to talk to her." I didn't know how to interact with them… I adapted. I found out how to speak to her, how to network. I am confident about being in these spaces. I have learned this skill…But I had to actively work with that…I think that SGA [student government organization] was the

> biggest one in learning how to act and speak in a more privileged space…the speech or the mannerisms…Being part of SGA did make me a better negotiator, a better presenter.

Beyond mere differences in experiences, Amy described differences in habitus, in speech and manner and exposure to a new social world. Yet Amy also described learning to speak and act differently in order to fit into an elite space. Amy describes gaining a sense of confidence and spoke with me about changes she noticed in her own conversational style. Amy described her time as part of a recognized student organization as central in her shift in cultural orientation or habitus, underscoring the importance of extracurriculars in shaping and maintaining elite cultural norms. Furthermore, Amy's experience of confusion and intimidation when faced with new speech, tastes, and mannerisms contrasts with the high socioeconomic status participants who did not mention similar discomfort. Though Amy offers a particularly vivid account of a change in habitus and its relationship with extracurriculars, several other low socioeconomic status participants alluded to similar feelings of initial unease and adaptation to new forms of speech.

Discussion

In this study, I examined the relationship between socioeconomic status and extracurricular involvement at an elite, private university. I found that institutional structure and policies contributed to differing motivations for extracurricular participation. I also found that cultural capital played a role in participants' choices to join particular activities. Furthermore, I found that cultural capital and habitus influenced and were influenced by extracurricular participation. My results are comparable to past research but also add to the research and contrast with elements of past studies.

My hypothesis that institutional structure would shape participants' extracurricular involvement on the basis of socioeconomic status was confirmed. My results are thus comparable to recent works by other researchers, including Jack (2019) and Armstrong and Hamilton (2013). I found several ways in which institutional structure shaped participants decisions to become involved with particular positions and groups. I found that the venues through which opportunities were advertised related to the types of students who were able to access a given opportunity. Activities that were advertised in public spaces, frequented by most students seemed to be more equitable, whereas positions that relied on informal information and connections were more easily accessed by high socioeconomic status participants.

While I found ample evidence of the impacts of institutional structure on the extracurricular paths that participants chose, I found less evidence of the impacts of institutional structure on the effects of extracurricular participation. This may in part stem from the study design, as impacts of participation may become evident when students graduate from college and enter the labor market (as demonstrated by Armstrong and Hamilton 2013).

I also confirmed my second hypothesis, that cultural capital shapes extracurricular participation differentially on the basis of socioeconomic status. I found evidence that differences in cultural capital shaped the ways that participants felt that extracurriculars might connect to their future careers. High socioeconomic status participants sought more general, less directly career related resume boosters and networking opportunities, while low socioeconomic status participants were more likely to participate in very directly career related opportunities to build specific skills and competencies. I also discovered that cultural capital related to the gains or takeaways from extracurricular participation, and even habitus itself was

subject to change on the basis of involvement. These results are similar to findings by Stuber (2009), and dovetail with Lareau's (2011) findings on the relationship between education, cultural capital, and socioeconomic status.

My study not only sheds light on a research gap, but also has larger implications for elite universities. Though many elite universities, Emory included, have very publicly sought to increase socioeconomic diversity within their undergraduate populations, my research reveals that ways that institutional policies and dominant culture may prevent equity amongst students. Universities must assess the ways that informal opportunities privilege some students over others, should provide formal mentorship programs for students, and must advertise positions and organizations in public, easily accessed areas and online. Furthermore, my study adds to the research (such as Lee 2016) that demonstrates that legitimated, dominant university culture privileges some students over others. Though culture may be difficult to change, campus wide conversations about the prevailing norms and understandings amongst students and employees might facilitate greater understanding of the socioeconomic implications of shared understandings or culture.

My study has several limitations. Perhaps most importantly, my study is limited because of its small sample size and the non-random sampling method, which means that it is not generalizable or representative of the population of undergraduate students at Emory University. Yet, the in-depth interview style allowed for a nuanced analysis despite the sample size. Furthermore, though the in-depth interview style allows participants to speak for themselves, greater insights may be revealed through ethnographic observations. Finally, given the complexity of socioeconomic status, my study is limited by my chosen operationalization of

socioeconomic status. Though my operationalization of socioeconomic status is typical, the variable is complex and may differ substantially based on school type or geographic area (Friedman and Laurison 2019). Future research might focus on parental income or student financial aid amounts as a means of operationalizing socioeconomic status.

Throughout the course of my research several unexpected themes arose that merit further investigation. One such theme is the symbolic hierarchy of paid positions. Jack (2019) explores the stigma that student workers in positions that are experienced as demeaning feel. My findings indicate that student workers' experiences of stigma may be related to a larger hierarchy, which itself is created and maintained by institutionalized structures, and that these feelings may thus differ based on the campus symbolic hierarchy. My findings indicate that the differing experiences of student workers must be investigated further. Another area that necessitates further research is the impact of differing types of campus marketing of events and organizations. Many of the students discussed similar means of accessing involvement opportunities on campus, yet there were still differences in access to needed or desired activities and positons between the two comparison groups. While I found that students in both comparison groups used online platforms, given research on the differential use of online platforms (Hargittai 2010), this area merits further exploration. My findings indicate areas for further research and demonstrate that further action must be taken by colleges to improve access to extracurricular opportunities for students with low socioeconomic status.

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