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High Maintenance: How Gender, Status, and Power Affect the Perceptions of the
Custodian-Teacher Relationship

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A common theme in the sociology of work literature is how inequality is maintained in work settings where men generally hold higher status occupations and possess more power than women. Less common, however, are studies that examine the consequences of status and power processes where women hold a higher occupational status and more power than men. I address this limitation by examining perceptions of work roles made by teachers and custodians in an elementary school. Although teachers are expected to have a higher status in relation to custodians, their dependency upon them to maintain and clean the school may allow custodians to have more power over teachers in some of their interactions. To address this unique context, I analyze 26 semi-structured interviews of teachers and custodians working in a school district in the Northeast. The interviews reveal that teachers hesitate to recognize the lower status of custodians in the school and instead characterize their work environment more as a community than as a hierarchy. Custodians, on the other hand, indicate their lower status by referencing instances of blame they receive for items that go missing or for tasks that are inadequately fulfilled, disrespect, and through the identity work they perform. In spite of their lower status in the school, however, the nature of custodial duties fosters the dependence of teachers on custodians and enables custodians to possess more power over their individual interactions with teachers. This greater power is evidenced by ways custodians resist the requests of teachers and how teachers attempt to lessen their dependence. Implications for the operation of gender in influencing how teachers and custodians perceive their relative status and power are discussed.

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INTRODUCTION

Research on the gendered relations of power in the workplace often focus on typical work settings in which men hold higher status occupations and more powerful positions than women (e.g., Bradley 1999; Kanter 1977; Reskin and Padavic 1994). In these studies, scholars examine how gender inequality is maintained in everyday interaction (e.g., Ridgeway 1997). Settings in which women hold a higher occupational status and more power than men, however, receive far less attention. I attempt to address this gap by examining the consequences of status and power processes in the context of custodians and teachers in an elementary school. Status is defined as respect, esteem, or worthiness and represents the social standing of an individual (Berger, Rosenholtz, and Zelditch 1980; Thye 2000), while power refers to the potential ability individuals have that allows them to achieve their own will in spite of the resistance of others (Weber 1958). Custodians (predominantly men) possess a lower status occupation than elementary school teachers (predominantly women) and appear to have less power within the school system. Specifically, I investigate how status and power processes influence the perceptions that teachers and custodians have of their own and other's work roles. In doing so, I can elucidate the implications status and power processes have for the custodian-teacher interaction when a *traditionally* male and lower status occupation intersects with a *traditionally* female occupation to fulfill a common task of facilitating the operation of a school. As well, this study should provide key insights into examining how gender, status, and power operate in a work environment.

The custodian-teacher relationship provides a unique context because it signifies two gendered occupations that work alongside one another to ensure the proper

functioning of a school. School custodians, who are mostly men, fulfill traditionally “feminine” housekeeping duties, such as cleaning, as well as “masculine” duties, such as heavy lifting and repairs, and are subject to the demands of teachers, who are mostly women. As a group, custodians have a lower occupational status than teachers, yet are mainly male and thus possess a more valued state of gender in general. Relative to custodians, teachers have a higher occupational status (General Social Surveys 2003) because they achieve higher educational credentials and better pay¹ but possess a less valued state of gender. I expect teachers to have higher status (i.e., worthiness and prestige), even though they are female, because they have high education credentials and their abilities are more directly relevant to the goals of the school, which is to educate. The more central a job is to the mission of the establishment, the more highly valued it is perceived (Messing 1998).

In addition, teachers are afforded more power in the school system as a whole. Teachers have more power because they are better able to affect the decision making process of the school and can jeopardize the jobs of custodians by reporting those who perform their work inadequately. Although they have more power in general, I argue that they are more dependent upon custodians than custodians are upon them for the completion of their work within their relationship context. Power is also a function of dependence. Namely, an individual possesses less power in a relationship when he or she is more dependent on another for a valued resource (Emerson 1962). Teachers depend on custodians to maintain a clean and safe environment to help them complete their jobs, which thus complicates the power relationship between teachers and custodians. The

¹ The local and regional variation in the salaries of teachers and custodians precludes a citation so as to not endanger the anonymity of my sample.

important function custodians fulfill may lead teachers to perceive themselves to be more dependent on custodians than custodians are upon them. Therefore, it is possible that custodians may have more power over teachers in their interactions. These differences in status and power may influence how custodians and teachers view their work and the work of each other by causing the relationship between teachers and custodians to become strained.

Examining the custodian-teacher relationship also allows me to investigate whether occupational status has a greater bearing than gender on the relationships between teachers and custodians (Berger et al. 1980). Teachers and custodians may fail to acknowledge the gendering of their work roles and environment because gendered behavior and attitudes are implicit in the organizational structure of the school system (Apple 1990; Acker 1990)², thus enabling their positions in the school hierarchy to structure their relationships. In addition, I examine whether the behavior of the maintenance staff in this setting replicates previous findings demonstrating that workers in lower status positions may resist their lower status. I explore whether custodians find ways to resist their lower status position by utilizing their more powerful role in their encounters with and their references to teachers.

To ascertain how gender, status, and power processes operate in the custodian-teacher relationship, I conducted 11 custodian interviews and 15 teacher interviews with individuals employed in a public school district in the Northeastern United States. I asked teachers and custodians how they perceive each other in their respective work roles, and how these perceptions influence interactions between teachers and custodians.

² I consider gender not only as a diffuse status characteristic but also in terms of unstated gendered notions that may affect the interactions and perceptions of custodians and teachers.

In order to address the nuances of the custodian-teacher relationship, I first examine the work literature to highlight recent trends and gaps in the study of gender and work. Second, I draw upon status characteristics theory to discuss how teachers and custodians share common and uncommon tasks that may activate status processes that affect their behavior. Third, I draw upon power-dependence theory to show how the relationships between teachers and custodians are characterized by dependence. Last, I present my results and discuss the perceptions of power and status custodians and teachers have for themselves and each other. In doing so, I show that the operation of status and power in the custodian-teacher relationship reflects the occupational position and gender of custodians and teachers.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND PREDICTIONS

Gender and Work

A major finding in the work and occupations literature is that men, on average, are the recipients of greater rewards than women in the workplace (Abbott 1993; Acker 1990; Britton 1997; Elliot and Smith 2004; Williams 1995). For example, men achieve higher earnings, administrative positions, and span of power than women (Williams 2006). Furthermore, men in traditionally female occupations encounter structural advantages that improve their careers because stereotypical notions surrounding gender place more value on men and masculinity by associating men with greater competence than women (Williams 1992). Men in traditionally female occupations are paid more because it is believed that they have to provide for a family. Also, some men are pushed into leadership positions in these occupations because it is thought they would be better able to represent the interests of their female colleagues to male management (Williams

2006). The more advantaged position men hold allows them to amass greater rewards such as higher salaries, greater likelihood of promotion, better job preparation, and higher levels of perceived competence (Britton 1997).

The higher occupational positions men tend to occupy also confers on them greater power through the authority they possess in the workplace (Elliot and Smith 2004), which is in part due to their advantages in education, seniority, and tenure in comparison to women (McGuire and Reskin 1993). The tendency for men to be higher up in the organizational hierarchy has been explained by differences in human capital between men and women (i.e., women choose not to pursue powerful positions because they value authority positions less than men, or because they often take on more family responsibilities than men) and the location of women in marginalized positions in society that prevent them from moving up the organizational ladder (Smith 2002).

When men possess a lower occupational position than women in an organization, however, their occupational status may be more important than gender processes in determining the power and status they are afforded in the work context. Johnson (1993, 1994) suggests that formal authority is a more important predictor than gender in accounting for gendered patterns of interaction in an occupational setting. Therefore, organizational position may play a more relevant role in determining how status and power operates among teachers and custodians (Johnson 1993, 1994).

Status Processes

Status refers to the social standing of an individual that is defined as respect, esteem, or worthiness. Status characteristics theory identifies how valued distinctions of status in society affect expectations of competence and social interaction when

individuals interact in groups that are focused on completing a common and shared task (Berger et al. 1980; Thye 2000). A status characteristic has two or more states that are differentially valued by society where one state is perceived as more highly valued or worthy than another. They may be diffuse, i.e. they may activate performance expectations for a range of tasks. Examples of diffuse status characteristics include race and gender, which lead individuals to treat whites and men as more competent in general and at the specific task at hand. Status characteristics may also be specific by being associated with specific abilities related to the task. For instance, in a group, custodians should be considered more competent and have a higher status than teachers in using a buffer machine or fixing an air conditioning unit because they possess this type of knowledge (Thye 2000). Performance expectations associated with status characteristics in a particular situation produce inequalities in interaction among status unequal groups. Status unequal groups are composed of individuals who are not matched on certain demographic characteristics, such as age, race, gender, and education (Thye 2000; Berger et al. 1980). These expectations thus emerge from interaction and from prior beliefs individuals hold about certain characteristics group members possess (Berger et al. 1980).

Consistent with status characteristics theory, custodians and teachers should develop performance expectations for themselves and each other based on their diffuse status characteristics. A status characteristic becomes salient when group members are differentiated on that characteristic or when it is relevant to the task at hand. Gender, occupation, and education should be the most highly salient diffuse status characteristics that influence perceptions of custodial and teacher work roles and their interactions due to their respective genders and the tasks they are required to perform. Race will not serve

as a relevant status characteristic because the majority of participants in this study are Caucasian. Teachers have higher status than custodians due to their higher occupational status and educational attainment. Teachers may exercise their higher status position by making demands instead of requests, or asking custodians to do too many things. In addition, however, male custodians have an advantage in terms of gender status, given the cultural assumption that men are more highly valued than women in general (Acker 1990; Berger et al. 1980; Britton 1997; Williams 1992, 1995, 2006).

Occupational status and education, however, should be more relevant than gender in an educational context. Because the task of the school is to educate its students, teachers have more expertise that is relevant to the overall goals of the school. The occupational status of teachers may then also serve as a specific status characteristic because teachers hold specific knowledge regarding the operation of a school. In addition, although custodians are not the subordinates of teachers, they are required to aid teachers in instituting the educational program. Therefore, custodians and teachers should develop performance expectations for themselves and for each other regarding the fulfillment of their separate tasks that are oriented to the collective goal of ensuring the proper functioning of the school through education (teachers) and maintenance (custodians) (Thye 2000). Given differences in occupation, education, and expertise, I predict the following:

Prediction 1: Teachers and custodians will perceive that custodians are lower in the status hierarchy than teachers in the school context.

Power Processes

The higher occupational status of teachers allows them to possess more power than custodians in the larger school context. Teachers are more central to the operation

of a school and thus are better able than custodians to influence the decisions of school officials. Moreover, teachers can report custodians who fail to adequately perform their job duties to school administrators and the head custodian, which could eventually result in either placing the custodian on probation or terminating his employment.

Even though occupational status is an important predictor of the amount of power an individual can obtain in the workplace, gender and specific knowledge can combine with occupational status to grant others more power. Through this power individuals may obtain higher status. For instance, although they do not possess high occupational status in the school system, custodians hold a vital position in the school next to the principal (Garber 1922). The custodian safeguards valuable school property, ensures the proper functioning and maintenance of the school, and protects the health and safety of children, teachers, and administrators in the building (Garber 1922). In addition, custodians are necessary to ensure that the school runs smoothly (Hart 2006).

As a consequence of the maintenance functions that custodians fulfill, teachers come to depend on them. Emerson (1962) defines power as a function of dependency. Power is the potential ability of an individual to get what they want despite resistance of another. It also is a feature of a social exchange relation between two or more social actors. The power of one actor over another is equivalent to the dependence of the latter on the former. Dependence is a function of the value of the resource desired and the availability of that resource. Therefore, the dependence of an individual on another actor increases when the resource is scarce and highly valued by that individual. The dependence of an individual decreases when that person can pursue multiple avenues to obtain the valued resource (Emerson 1962).

Regarding teachers and custodians, I argue that teachers will be more dependent on custodians to help them complete their job duties than custodians are upon them to accomplish their work. Custodians ensure the maintenance of teachers' classrooms and the school and thus enable teachers to educate their students in a safe and clean environment. Teachers would not be able to accomplish their job if they also had to ensure the proper functioning and cleanliness of the school. Custodians ready the school each day by opening doors and turning on lights, maintain the heating and cooling equipment of the school, set up the cafeteria for lunch, plan special events by setting up chairs and other equipment, and unload and deliver boxes that come to the school (Klingel and Noyed 2001). Teachers do not have the specialized training and, in some cases, the physical ability to accomplish many of the tasks custodians fulfill.

Furthermore, although teachers may engage in maintenance in the form of minor cleaning, their priorities lie in planning lessons and setting up their room for the next day or week. Teachers expect other cleaning or safety issues to be addressed by the custodian assigned to their rooms.³ Therefore, the work requirements of a custodian foster the dependency of teachers on them. Teachers may recognize this dependency through the help seeking behaviors they engage in within the school. Help seeking implies dependency and powerlessness (Lee 1997). For instance, teachers must rely on custodians because their job duties preclude them from adequately maintaining and cleaning their own classrooms. Moreover, teachers need custodians because they do not

³ In the classroom, custodians are required to empty the wastepaper basket, empty the pencil sharpener, dust mop or vacuum the floor, wash chalkboards and trays, spot wash walls, doors, and switch plates as necessary, clean desks as needed, spot mop the floor as necessary, dust furniture and counter tops, align furniture, lock windows, close shades or drapes, check room temperature, check light replacement need (changing tubes and light bulbs as needed), note any maintenance needs, and leave the room in a clean and orderly condition ("Contract" 2006).

have access to cleaning and maintenance supplies, such as paper towels and soap.

Custodians, however, are required to accomplish any tasks that maintain an environment that facilitates the educational program (“Contract” 2006). This additional requirement may lead custodians to be dependent on teachers to reduce their workload or to make their daily duties lighter by ensuring a tidier room or doing basic maintenance tasks themselves. Nevertheless, custodians should not perceive themselves as more dependent upon teachers than vice versa because, regardless of any help they may receive, custodians are still required to fulfill their daily work duties to produce a clean and safe environment.

Custodians should therefore perceive that teachers are more dependent upon them than they are dependent on teachers. The maintenance requests that teachers make also enable custodians to recognize that teachers need them to perform tasks in the school. Custodians are trained to replace faulty light bulbs or fix broken ballasts and may realize that teachers do not have the expertise or the time to ensure that their classroom is safe and clean. In order to teach in their classrooms teachers need custodians to provide them with a clean and functioning work space that is equipped with soap, garbage pails, and paper towels. Therefore, I predict:

Prediction 2: Teachers and custodians will perceive that teachers are more dependent on custodians than custodians are dependent upon teachers.

The dependency of teachers on custodians may lead custodians to have more power in their interaction with teachers, particularly in performing maintenance tasks and the ability to manipulate the physical environment of the school.

As a result of this power imbalance, custodians have the power to reject the requests of teachers by placing other job tasks above those needs or by stating that certain

requests are not feasible. Even though they are required to respond to the various demands teachers make, these demands must be considered legitimate, i.e. appropriate for their job (Zelditch and Walker 1984). Power, then, operates when one actor makes a demand that goes against the wishes of another actor. When there is increased resistance to the demands of an actor, the power of that actor decreases and vice versa (Emerson 1962). Custodians may assert their power over teachers by ignoring these requests or taking a longer time to accomplish them.

Unbalanced power relations are therefore more likely to characterize interactions between teachers and custodians than balanced power relations due to differences in dependency and the operation of resistance. Teachers may engage in balancing operations to reduce power imbalance in the relationship (Emerson 1962). Balance may occur by reducing the motivational investment of the more dependent actor in the more powerful actor. For example, if custodians possess more power, then teachers may employ tactics that decrease their dependence on custodians by maintaining the cleanliness of their classroom. In this way, teachers will not be as dependent on custodians or perceive themselves to be dependent when they and their students perform maintenance duties in the classroom. In the case of the interactions between custodians and teachers, I predict that:

Prediction 3: The power-dependence relationship of custodians and teachers will allow custodians to exercise their power through resistance and teachers to seek ways to lessen their dependence on custodians.

Yet, the power of custodians may be reduced when they fail to perform their job duties in a satisfactory manner. When custodians inadequately fulfill their work tasks, teachers have the ability to complain to the head custodian or to administration, which

may cause problems for custodians and increased performance pressure. Therefore, teachers may have more power in the school due to their status position but have less power in their personal interactions with custodians.

METHODS

Recruitment and Sample

To address how status, gender, and power influence the perceptions that teachers and custodians have of their respective work roles, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 11 custodians and 15 teachers (Lofland et al. 2006; Weiss 1994). While working as a sub-custodian⁴ and teacher's helper in the same school district, I acquired my sample using a snowball technique, starting with personal connections that I have at an elementary school that is part of a public school district in the Northeast. The school district is located about 40 miles away from a major urban center in a relatively affluent white suburban area. It is composed of seven elementary schools, two junior high schools, and two high schools. The district has a 26% minority population and has been cited for excellence in comparison to the other nine school districts in the area.

Participants were initially recruited by me via letters or face-to-face communication. I informed potential participants of my study, of the voluntary nature of their participation, and the expectations of the interview. In this initial phase of recruitment, I asked approximately 13 custodians to participate and eight accepted (62%). Out of approximately 26 teachers that I asked to participate, 15 accepted (58%). In some instances teachers would refer me to other teachers interested in participating by providing me with their contact information so I could schedule an interview. To find

⁴ The job of a sub-custodian is a position that is usually filled by college-age individuals, or people trying to get a job as a full-time custodian. Being a sub-custodian requires you to do most of the same job duties as a custodian, except for specialized tasks such as boiler maintenance.

several more custodians (approximately four are assigned to an elementary school), some custodians referred me to other custodians in the district by asking whether they would be interested in my study. Through this avenue, three of eight custodians who were contacted agreed to participate (38%), giving me a total of 11 custodians.

All of the teacher interviews were conducted with teachers that belong to the same elementary school. I interviewed eight custodians who are or were employed⁵ in three different elementary schools, two custodians who worked in a middle school and one custodian who worked in an administrative building of the same district. Although I attempted to contact teachers in other elementary schools in the district and acquire more elementary school custodians, I had difficulty in obtaining the participation of these individuals. This sample then, is a non-probability sample of teachers and custodians who agreed to participate from five different schools. Thirteen of the teachers are white women, one teacher is a white male teacher, and one teacher is an African American female. All of the custodians are white men. The teachers are more highly educated than the custodians in my sample. However, teachers and custodians are similar in age and earn a similar income level, with only teachers who are employed 25 or more years surpassing custodians in their earnings.

(Table 1 about here)

Therefore, the composition of my sample allows me to better assess how gender and occupational position influence the operation of status and power processes within the custodian-teacher relationship than in other contexts where these factors are not as constant.

⁵ One participant had recently been employed as a custodian in an elementary school but at the time had obtained a different vocation.

Interviews

The interviews were conducted from June 2006 to January 2007. Participants were interviewed in their homes, their place of work after school hours, or during their break. Interviews averaged about 40 minutes, and were digitally recorded. At the beginning of each interview I obtained informed consent from the participants. Participants were told that the study was about the perceptions of custodian and teacher work roles. I informed the custodians and teachers that their participation involved answering questions about how they view their job duties and the work roles of each other. Participants were told that the interview was completely voluntary and confidential, would take place at a time and location convenient for them, and would take about one to two hours to complete. Respondents received \$20.00 for their participation in the study.

Custodian-Teacher Interactions

Custodians and teachers were asked about how they interact with each other. For example, teachers and custodians were asked to describe the frequency and quality of their interactions with each other and whether or not they ever had problematic interactions (refer to Table 2 and Appendices).

(Table 2 about here)

In regard to how custodians and teachers perceived their relationship, they were asked whether they perceived that the other group valued them and their work, did their job in a satisfactory way and were professional, and if they viewed themselves as dependent on each other. Participants were also asked to describe how they view their work in relation to the work of the other group. The questions assessing perceptions allow assessment of

levels of perceived status and power present in the custodian-teacher relationship.⁶

Questions about Status

I asked the following questions in regard to status: (1) Do you feel that custodians/teachers value you and your work as a teacher/custodian? (2) How do you view your work in relation to the work custodians/teachers do? (3) Do you think that custodians/teachers do their job in a satisfactory manner? (4) How do you think teachers/custodians should do their jobs? (5) Do you think teachers pay attention to the condition of their classrooms? (6) Do you think teachers care more about the presentation of their classrooms and displaying their work than teaching?

(Table 3 about here)

The perceptions custodians and teachers have of their own and each other's work roles reflect the status position custodians and teachers hold in the school system.

Questions about Power

My questions related to aspects of dependency present in the relationship between custodians and teachers. Therefore, dependence was assessed by the questions: (1) Do you feel that custodians/teachers are dependent upon you for the accomplishment of their jobs? (2) Do you depend on custodians/teachers to help you complete your job? Furthermore, I asked questions about the ways individuals may resist the demands of others or make inappropriate demands that would facilitate this resistance. I used the following questions (Table 3): (1) Do you think that custodians pay attention to your work requests? (2) Do you think that custodians respond promptly and efficiently to your requests? (3) Are custodians readily accessible for your maintenance requests? (4)

⁶ Responses to interview questions were typically followed up with a probe in order to ensure a more in-depth answer from the participant.

Do you think teachers make appropriate work requests?

I did not directly question teachers regarding any techniques they use to reduce their reliance on custodians. Teachers, however, mentioned how they would sometimes engage in simple maintenance tasks when describing their typical workday and when they perceived that custodians did not adequately fulfill their job duties.

Data Analysis

Interviews were first analyzed one by one through inductive coding techniques (Miles and Huberman 1994). Data were reviewed line by line within each paragraph and a list of categories or labels were generated and organized under the topics I had created for my interview guide. These topics were expanded in this process as new themes emerged from the data. I then reviewed these codes and created a more organized and abstract coding scheme by collapsing and combining categories (Miles and Huberman 1994). Interviews were then recoded with emphasis placed upon analysis of the operation of power and status in the custodian-teacher relationship. After the second round of coding I compared respondents both within and across groups (Lamont 2000) to establish confirmations or contradictions of the emergent patterns (Glaser and Strauss 1967). The qualitative data management program, MaxQDA, facilitated this process.

Although my job experience eased my entry into the research site, it is possible that it also produced researcher effects on the data. The insider perspective I was able to adopt with both teachers and custodians may have limited the description participants provided in their interviews (Lofland et al. 2006). My previous understanding may have impeded me from asking more probing questions and participants from providing more detailed explanations. However, the fact that I was able to navigate both a teacher and a

custodial perspective could have provided me with enough distance from my sample to obtain rich data. My unique positioning to the research site may have allowed me privileged access to the custodian-teacher relationship by incorporating both perspectives when conducting interviews. Consequently, my experience as a sub-custodian and as a teacher's helper facilitated the research process more so than if I had not held these roles (Lofland et al. 2006).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Here I detail the perceptions custodians and teachers have for themselves and each other regarding their interactions and work, and how these perceptions indicate the status and power processes that operate in the custodian-teacher relationship. I first detail how teachers and custodians perceive their own and each other's placement in the status hierarchy of the school. I then explore the amount of power teachers and custodians are provided in the custodian-teacher relationship and in the overall school context.

Location of Custodians and Teachers in the Status Structure

Perceptions of Status

Teachers

When evaluating the position of custodians in the school system, the majority of teachers (10) focused on the community aspect of the school environment and how custodians and teachers worked together to respectively perform important yet distinct jobs in fostering the operation of a school. Nine of these teachers mentioned how the custodian-teacher relationship is a give and take where everyone has to do their share to facilitate the working relationship and running the school.

Kara: I think that everyone in this school works together for a kind of a common goal. And we all have our roles that are things that we have to do and kind of

work together to make everybody's life a little bit easier. That you know, I don't want to work in like, or have the kids in a really nasty place and they don't want to come into a really nasty place. So, I think we just try to work together to make things positive.

Furthermore, of these teachers, two identified the school as a community that promoted a cooperative working relationship and environment.

Marge: We're a community and we're not a hierarchy. I really don't look at [it] like that. I look at it as all of us together are working for the good of the school. All of these people make a community to help make the school run smoothly. So everybody has an important job and nobody's job is more important than others.

The perception of the school as a community fostered the belief that no single job within the school system took precedence over others or was viewed as more important.

Five teachers stated that the work of custodians and teachers was equally important.

Tiffany: I think it's equally important. I think without them we really wouldn't be able to do our job.

Interviewer: *And is that in regard to just maintaining the classroom and the building?*

Tiffany: Yeah and just things in general. Just keeping it clean, keeping it orderly, fixing things . . . we wouldn't be able to function as a school without them.

Gladys: Oh um... I think it's one of the ingredients that are necessary. So if they're necessary, they're as important because if they weren't there, then someone else would have to do it, probably me. Obviously, like educating kids is different than cleaning the surroundings that they spend their day in but it's definitely important. It's definitely one of those things where if it wasn't there it would not be easy to like live or spend time in that environment. It would just be horrible.

Although Gladys believed that custodial and teacher work are two necessary components of the school equation, she qualified her statement by differentiating between them.

Thus, custodial work was viewed as equally important to the work teachers performed within the context of the school but not the larger society.

In contrast, two teachers indicated that one could not compare teacher and

custodial work because of their different natures and responsibilities.

Francis: [Laughs] Well it's like apples and bananas [Interviewer Laughs]. I mean they have work to do, they have things to take care of . . . and also Jacob, Jacob is a head custodian so he has a lot more to deal with. You know he's running a school. You can't compare him to Brian who's just sweeping classrooms.

Interviewer: *Because it's more difficult to maintain the school?*

Francis: Yeah so he has a different type of job, Jacob. I mean yeah he has a very stressful job and he has a lot to take care of like I do. I mean it depends you know? Beth, the principal, has a very stressful job compared to me and my stresses. You know, so they're different.

These teachers stated that it is difficult to compare the work custodians and teachers perform because teachers have a lot more responsibilities than custodians. Therefore, the different nature of the job duties of custodians and teachers precluded these teachers from recognizing any similarities regarding their work.

Moreover, four other teachers noted that custodians do have less status than teachers. Three of these teachers indicated that teachers have a more primary role in the school. Gladys mentioned that although both teacher work and custodial work were necessary for the operation of the school, they differed in importance. Only one of these three teachers explicitly stated that her job was more important than the custodian's. This was in reference to a disagreement she had with a custodian regarding how she should setup her room.

Christine: Hank was kind of funny [Laughs] in his attitude that his job was kind of more important than mine.

Christine felt that custodial work and the work that she performed both had their place within the school, but that custodians and teachers should take each other's work into account and work cooperatively together. In reference to comparing custodial and teacher work she mentioned:

Christine: Yeah, I think they both have their place. You know, I mean I don't

feel I should interfere with their work, but then you know I don't feel that they should interfere with mine either. Like at the end of the day if you are teaching after school, they're pretty respectful about not coming in and emptying your garbage cans even though maybe your room is the one that should be done now, because it will interrupt with the instruction, you know. . . . They realize, oh okay, I'll come back to you later. They switch the order.

Furthermore, two other teachers alluded to how the relation between teachers and custodial work represents a collaborative effort even though they indicated that they served a more primary function to the school than custodians.

Eva: Um, well they're sort of, you know, if the classroom is a stage, I'm sort of the director and they're the scenery guys in the back and to have a successful production you need both. So, I definitely value them and I think it's a very hard job, you know, and so many of them have been at it for so many years. God bless them.

Custodians

In contrast to the hesitation of most teachers to identify their high status, custodians more readily identified their lower status in the school. The majority of custodians indicated that they received blame for missing items and job responsibilities that fell short of the expectations of teachers and other school employees because of their lower status. Even though all 11 custodians indicated that they or other custodians had experienced blame, six custodians specifically mentioned that this blame occurred because they were considered by others to occupy a lower position in the school's organizational hierarchy and in society.

Harry: Yeah, well that's the joke. Everything, the custodian did it no matter what. Like we've had sub-custodians here and money was missing, right away, 'The custodian did it. Who was that guy?' And they end up finding the money. But right away, I always say no matter what it's the custodian that did it [Both Laugh]. Blame the custodian for anything. It's an easy target. You know?

Interviewer: *Why do you think that's so?*

Harry: . . . I don't know like I said it's like class. The bottom line when all else fails, blame the custodian. He was in there. It must've been him.

Therefore, the attribution custodians made to their status for the blame they received indicated that they and other school employees recognized their lower status position in the school system.

The lower status of custodians was also evidenced by the disrespect they received. Seven custodians perceived that teachers disrespected them due to their occupational status. Three custodians specifically mentioned that the tone teachers use to make requests is sometimes disrespectful.

Cory: Oh yeah. Yeah, instead of talking to you like an adult [they] talk to you like you're a child, which nobody wants. You know nobody wants to be talked down to and teachers have a very good tone of talking down because they talk down to people everyday. You know?

Eight custodians also stated that teachers disregarded them. Three custodians reported that teachers would sometimes ignore them in the hallways.

Larry: You know it's like they just walk by with their head, you know, like turned . . . and like snooty little face, like don't like look at me you know? It's just like you're a piece of garbage, you know? And some, ugh we don't even bother with them.

Six custodians referenced this disregard by stating how teachers would ignore the work that custodians needed to accomplish.

Paul: You could go down a hall and all the rooms will be half decent. Then you walk into one room and it's just like a bomb went off. . . . That's just a disregard of, let them get it, you know? Naturally you don't expect them to be moppin' and you know, doing everything, but if they could make a little bit of an effort that shows that, you know, at least they're thinking of it.

Moreover, three custodians alluded to their lower status by indicating that they felt their role was sometimes not valued within the school system. One night custodian mentioned:

Cory: They walk out of the room everyday with their eyes closed and they walk in and the room is clean and they feel that when they walk out of the room the

room is the same way. Some teachers think we do nothing, or some teachers think that the head custodian does everything where the head custodian is here till three o'clock and he goes home. He's not cleaning the rooms, but they'll kiss his ass.

These three custodians, in addition to three others, stated that their work is of a lesser importance than the work of teachers.

Larry: No, I think what they do is more important because the kids have to definitely know how to read, write, and do all that stuff.

This greater importance is predicated on the *perception* custodians have that teachers do more for society through the education of children, get paid more, have more schooling, and perform more difficult tasks. In addition, one custodian stated that others may not consider custodial and teacher work to be equal even though he perceived that both were important and necessary.

Of these six custodians, two emphasized that custodial work is still important because their work facilitates the functioning of a school.

Alex: Well obviously a teacher's job is more important so they get paid more, but I'd say it's still important because it needs to be done. You cannot have a dirty school. You cannot have a dirty place for kids. And I think that pay, I guess, shows how much a job is worth. You can say that. A lot more people would take... can get this job than can get a teacher's job so, [a teacher's job is] obviously a little more important than a custodian. That's why you need school to do it.

Four of the eleven custodians, however, consider custodial work to be equally important. Of these four, two are head custodians and the others are night custodians, one of whom had obtained a college degree.

Interviewer: *How do you view your work in relation to the work that teachers do?*

Michael: Just as important. That's right. Oh yeah, it's definitely just as important. I mean we run the facility and you know if it's, if it's a nice clean looking facility that everything works good and the upkeep is good, I think it goes a long way to the morale, to the pride, and I think that carries over to everybody.

The other head custodian, Ethan, felt that custodial work was just as important as the

work teachers performed, yet he still recognized that teaching served as the primary function of the school. He perceived that custodial and teacher work complemented each other to ensure that the school would operate.

Ethan: I guess it's kind of, probably equal in importance. Of course the main job of the school is to educate the students, but without the school or without the cleaning of the school it just wouldn't be possible. There's a lot of supplies and a lot of outside things that have to go in to running a school besides just teaching.

Bill, a night custodian, echoed this sentiment by viewing custodians as a support staff that helped teachers "maintain the educational integrity" of the room.

Finally, only one custodian indicated that custodial work was more important in comparison to the work that teachers did within the school.

Greg: I would say that our job is more important in a sense of in the winter we have to have these parking lots, and walkways, and stairwells cleared of the snow so people go in and out of the building. Also we have to make sure that nobody slips and hurts themselves. Opening the building is a big part of our job. We run the show here. I mean without us they would be in trouble, and without them the kids would be in trouble. So their job really doesn't reflect on us too much, it's more or less we reflect on them, you know, but they all feel that they're doing us a favor. Meanwhile they're not, you know? We're more a less doing them a favor.

This custodian may have underemphasized the importance of teacher work due to previous negative experiences in the past, such as being blamed for wrongdoing that occurred within the school system, or in order to elevate the status of his work.

Identity Work

Embracement

The lower status of custodians was also illustrated by the identity work they said that they performed. Identity work represents the "range of activities individuals engage in to create, present, and sustain personal identities that are congruent with and supportive of the self-concept" (Snow and Anderson 1987: 1348). Ghidina (1990, 1992)

suggests that custodians engage in identity work to enhance their self-concepts. This seems to occur in several ways when custodians talk about their work. One way that they did identity work is by embracing their roles as custodians. This form of identity work entails acceptance and attachment to a particular role individuals occupy, in order to secure a positive self-image (Snow and Anderson 1987). For example, four custodians elevated their self-images by stating that custodians were important for the maintenance of the school. Two of these three custodians mentioned how important it was to have individuals perform “dirty work” for society.

Cory: You know everybody [has] a job. Everybody has demeanors. And you shouldn't look down because this guy collects garbage; he's a garbage man . . . that he's a piece of garbage. He's not. He's providing a service for you. You know you may be a high, a upscale lawyer but you still have garbage to throw out and if you just let that garbage buildup in your house you're gonna have rats.

Ethan recognized how others may perceive his job as being lower class but he had no problem stating that he worked as a custodian due to its importance for the school.

Ethan: Some people are unhappy with the job. Some people think that this is a lower class job. Someone might think, 'Oh he cleans toilets for a living.' I have no problem telling people I work as a custodian. I think we'd be in big trouble if garbage men didn't show up. I think everyone's job is definitely necessary. If the guy who delivers your food doesn't show up, then how important is the doctor now?

Furthermore, three custodians self-enhanced by embracing aspects of their jobs that emphasized their knowledge. Harry, a head custodian, highlighted how he had specific knowledge of cleaning all aspects of the school, which therefore raises his status and importance. In addition, Cory, a night custodian, stated:

Cory: You know if they're working with glitter, every kid should bring in a towel. You try explaining this to teachers that the towel is gonna catch the glitter and it's not going to go all over the floor and they just like think you're coming from left field [Interviewer Laughs], but you're the one who cleans it up and

you're the one who pretty much knows how to clean it up, and how to prevent it from [having to be cleaned] up.

The other head custodian, Larry, self-enhanced by mentioning how being a custodian is progressively becoming more difficult because it is a good job and more people with college degrees are entering the field. Therefore, custodians who view their work as important for the maintenance of the school and society, and who emphasize the technical aspects of custodial work, all embraced their occupational status and thus enhanced their role within the school to ensure a positive self.

Distancing

A second way custodians engaged in identity work and self-enhanced was through associational distancing and role distancing. Custodians embraced their occupation by distancing their job from the label "janitor." Such action is a form of associational distancing, which entails disassociating oneself from a particular group of individuals because the social identity of the group is negatively evaluated by others (Snow and Anderson 1987). All custodians indicated that they preferred the job title of "custodian" rather than "janitor." Six custodians stated that the job title of custodian was more applicable for the tasks they did, which encompassed more than just cleaning.

Interviewer: *Why do you prefer the job title of custodian over janitor?*

Bill: Only because I think custodian best describes what we do. You know . . . janitor, I think the definition too is a cleaning person, which again that's what we do but as I said before we're also a support service. We get events ready, clean up events, prepare events, reschedule things in the building, so you know it's more than cleaning up.

Michael: A custodian is a little bit more than a janitor. It involves maintenance work also, light maintenance, and a janitor sounds more old-fashioned, maybe derogatory, and you know, I am a custodian, not a janitor.

Two other custodians specifically said that they did not like the word janitor. For

example, Ethan did not know why he perceived the occupational title of janitor negatively, while the other, Greg, thought it sounded outdated. Three custodians thought that the job title of custodian seemed more professional. This reference to professionalism highlights how custodians may try to protect their identities and raise their status by claiming a label that they believe is associated with higher status than “janitor” (Ghidina 1990; Hood 1988).

Furthermore, nine of the eleven custodians self-enhanced by engaging in role distancing, or the active commitment to separating themselves from a particular role that implies a negative conception of the self (Snow and Anderson 1987).⁷ Of these nine, six custodians revealed that they were aware of their low status position by mentioning a required course, offered by the district, to improve their self-concepts.⁸ The course emphasized how individuals should not let their occupational title affect how they perceive themselves as persons. Two head custodians, Larry and Michael, stated that this course dealt with improving the self-image custodians had of their jobs and creating positive interactions with others who may disrespect them by distinguishing themselves from their occupation.

Michael: But, yeah a lot of it is about how you perceive yourself and your job. That was what that was all about, and I think that has a lot to do with how you feel as yourself as a person. Really it’s not, it’s not all I’m a custodian and I should feel this way. It’s like I’m a good person, so I should feel this good. . . . It was about how we are perceived by people. And I guess it was a little bit, I don’t know, about maybe working on our images, type of thing like that. I mean it’s funny the perception of a custodian but, you know, we all earn our pay so, you know, you should feel good about it.

⁷ The two custodians, who did not illustrate instances of self-enhancement besides their categorization as custodians instead of janitors, were both night custodians, one of who may not have needed to self-enhance because he had only been working as a custodian for six months.

⁸ Custodians mentioned this course at different points of the interview. Custodians who took the course stated that the interview I conducted reminded them of a course regarding how teachers treat them.

Interviewer: And what's the perception that they were talking about in the course of the custodian?

Michael: They were perceiving that as if you would be maybe like on a lower scale of a person. That a lot of times custodians are looked at [like that]. That was more or less when they were called janitors.

Although this custodian was a head custodian and possessed a higher status than other custodians, he still self-enhanced by distancing himself from the lower status aspects of his occupation by defining himself first and foremost as a person and not simply by his job. The course sponsored by the district thus aided custodians in viewing their tasks as useful within the school, striving for the respect they deserved, and enabling them to address any disrespect they might experience in a positive manner.

Additionally, three custodians distanced themselves from their lower status position by separating their self-concepts from their work. Harry, a head custodian, mentioned that he was equal to teachers as a person but not according to his job duties and that his job did not define who he was as a person.

Harry: You know it's funny, when I first started here I thought it was like a stigma in fact to be a custodian. I thought it was pretty much a down job. You know what? You are what you are, man. You know? Your job is your job. Like you're you, you know? That's the feeling that I got. But I feel like some people think that if they're teacher, they're above you.

Rick also emphasized his equality as a person, while Walter, a night custodian, became defensive when comparing his work to the work of teachers.

Walter: And you know I'll be honest. I got this job. It has never been my lifelong dream to be a custodian. All right? I've always had decent jobs. I only got this job because now my parents don't have to worry about me. I've always made decent money, don't get me wrong. Yeah, you make decent money, so now they don't have to worry about me.

Custodians who identified themselves as custodians and not janitors, and who disassociated themselves from their profession, engaged in identity work by distancing

themselves from similar others (associational distancing) and from their occupation (role distancing). Snow and Anderson (1987) along with Killian and Johnson (2006) suggest that low status individuals engage in identity work by rejecting their lower status label. Moreover, the abandonment of a lower status label allows individuals to raise their status and to establish a positive self-concept (Ghidina 1990, 1992; Hood 1988).

Criticizing the Other

A third way self-enhancement occurs is by criticizing others, in this case, the teaching profession. Larry and other custodians seemed to pursue this strategy.

Larry: They think they have it so rough [Laughs]. . . . And we're just looking at them like this is just a part-time job for you. You know? [Laughs] What would they do if they had a real job? It's like we don't think they could handle it, you know? They think like, 'Oh I have to go home and grade papers.' Like oh what do you think people in the real world do? You know it's like they still go home and have to type things out and bring work home with them and stuff. It's like, what do you think, their world ends when they go home? It's like, no. It's like, do you think they work six hours a day? No. It's like, they work all year round. They don't work 183 days a year.

Some custodians thus derogated higher status others in order to improve their self-image. Indeed, Hood (1988) finds that custodians critique the cleaning ability of their superiors and question the common sense of others who possess higher levels of education. Here, for instance, nine custodians associated messiness with teachers performing their job poorly.

Rick: Like yeah, we're here to clean it and make it look presentable for the next day, but it's also theirs and they have to look at it as you know, and it does reflect their representation. I would guess, cause if the principal walked into their classroom during the middle of the day and it looked like a bomb went off, it's not saying much of the teacher.

A messy classroom was identified by seven custodians with how well a teacher controlled his or her class. For example, Walter stated:

Walter: Well it's just like in passing. I'll see how they're teaching, how some teachers can handle a class better than others. . . . The kids shouldn't be writing on desks. They shouldn't be writing on walls. I went to school. I had teachers. If a student was writing on a desk, they stopped it.

According to custodians, teachers who could not control their classes were poor teachers because they could not fulfill the function of their jobs, which was to educate. Five custodians mentioned that inadequate control of the class led to subpar instruction of students.

Larry: I see a lot of the styles they teach too and like a lot of the ways the kids don't get it. I'm always like in and out of their classrooms. Like I'm always in the background. I'm always watching [Both Laugh], and like a lot of the teachers have totally no control of their classroom at all. You can tell the kids are just not even paying attention and just not gettin' it at all.

Of these five, Bill mentioned that lack of control indicated that a teacher was not qualified to perform his or her job.

Bill: I believe like again that reflects society. They're not putting the kids first. If their room is an explosion, then they're not taking control of the kids and again, in my mind anybody can do that now.

Therefore, having control over one's students and classroom translated into a guarantee that students were learning and were being taught by a professional.

Furthermore, disorganization and messiness were attributed to a lack of dedication to the job. Four custodians stated that a clean room demonstrated a teacher's dedication to his or her job.

Greg: During the school year you can see, you know, when you walk into a classroom and if the classroom is pretty much taken care of that definitely tells me something, that these teachers care more than other teachers, you know?

Teachers who would take the time to tidy their rooms showed how they cared about their vocation. In contrast, teachers who did not take the time to clean up their room demonstrated their lack of awareness of how their actions affect custodial work. These

teachers were also perceived by custodians to make excessive requests and to prioritize their own needs above others. Almost all of the custodians (10) indicated that these teachers were not positively viewed. Greg, a day custodian stated:

Greg: We get aggravated when we come across the people that just don't care, have no common sense, and it's just they ask for the most bizarrest things.

Harry, a head custodian mentioned:

Harry: We just cleaned the room and we put in all clean pails. And the teacher came in and dumped a half full coffee in the brand new pail. So my custodian said, 'Couldn't you have just dumped it in the sink?' Then the next day she did the same thing and when he dumped the pail the coffee spilled on the nice clean floor that we worked our asses off on. . . . That's not right. It's things like that. If she thinks like there's a class system, she's out of her mind. It's just inconsiderate. I just think she just didn't mean any harm by it. It's just stupidity. And she wouldn't do it to me. I don't know, maybe she would. Maybe she's just absentminded.

Perhaps the fact that Harry was a head custodian and had higher status than the custodian he referenced allowed him to perceive that a teacher would be more considerate of how her actions affected his custodial work. However, his role as head custodian could also have provided him more opportunities for interacting with teachers and developing a closer relationship with this particular individual.

High Maintenance versus Low Maintenance: Teachers who failed to understand how they impacted the job responsibilities of custodians were labeled "high maintenance teachers." Throughout the interviews an emergent theme was the classification of teachers into those who were excessively demanding and those who were not. This label served to further derogate teachers. Ten custodians classified teachers as being high or low maintenance.

Ethan: There's some teachers that in all honesty I can go two, three, four weeks and our contact will be in the hallways saying good morning, good afternoon, and there might be another teacher that three or four times a day she might ask me to

do something. So that would be what I call a high maintenance teacher, that no matter what I always have to do. There's another job, another job, another job.

According to custodians, high maintenance teachers were those who pay careful attention to the condition of their classroom, are messier, make too many requests, are demanding, have unrealistic expectations of cleanliness, make unrealistic requests, ask custodians to do things because they felt it was not their job, and are unprofessional.

Eight custodians mentioned how teachers sometimes make unrealistic requests.

Unrealistic requests are those that require custodians to fix, build, or move things that are not school issued. These requests could also range from a teacher expecting a custodian to clean off his or her car, lift heavy things, or ask that the air quality be checked.⁹

Greg: The high maintenance teachers mainly make the unrealistic requests. I've had teachers over at the high school ask me to clean off their car when there was a snowstorm. They call me over and whatever, 'Listen here's my keys. Do me a favor turn on my car and the heat. . . .' I've had teachers ask me to go over their house to paint. 'Why can't you get the paint and come over to my house?' Oh yeah, some crazy requests.

In addition, ten custodians mentioned that teachers in general sometimes had unrealistic expectations of cleanliness. Bill stated:

Bill: Again you get the person that doesn't understand the building is forty years old, you get the person that's messy to begin with and then wants it you know immaculate, and you can't have it both ways. You gotta have that room ready for me to keep clean. I can't be starting from scratch and rebuilding the room as I always say.

Some teachers also expect custodians to maintain the school in ways that are not realistic in relation to the time custodians have to accomplish the request.

Walter: Like just to give you an example, some teachers . . . want the room spotless, but I mean sometimes you can't clean the rooms as good as some days as others because there might be something going on in the school and you have other things to take care of.

⁹ Nevertheless, the majority of custodians (9) evaluated the work requests of teachers in general as appropriate.

These “demanding teachers” are unaware of how their actions impact the work of custodians and negatively affect the custodian-teacher relationship. Unrealistic expectations produce problems for custodians because teachers place extra demands on them and are more likely to complain when their expectations are not met, thus increasing the chances that custodians will be in trouble for not properly cleaning their areas. Eight custodians mentioned times when teachers would complain about the condition of their room.

Cory: You know you get teachers who you can do everything and they go, ‘What you do? My room still looks the same.’ And I turn around to the teachers and say, ‘Well if your room still looks the same tomorrow when you leave turn around and look at the room. When you get in in the morning remember what the room looked like yesterday when you left. Is it the same way? Is the sink full of water, is there pencil shavings all over the place, . . . is there soda bottles, water bottles on their desks under their desks, garbage, you know spots in the room, is it still there?’

Low maintenance teachers, in contrast, are perceived as more professional, considered to be those individuals who could maintain their classrooms and who did not ask for too many requests or have unrealistic expectations and requests. Five custodians preferred interactions with low maintenance teachers to interactions with high maintenance teachers. The former are perceived to be better teachers, more dedicated to their jobs, and more appreciative of what custodians did.¹⁰

Summary

Ultimately, teachers were less likely to perceive the lower status of custodians, while custodians readily identified their lower status in the school context through the blame and disrespect they experienced and identity work they performed, thus supporting Prediction 1 for custodians and not for teachers. Although teachers are more central to

¹⁰ However, one night custodian, Bill, stated that some high maintenance teachers could be good teachers as long as they could maintain control over the room.

fulfilling the educational purpose of the school and therefore are more highly valued than custodians (Messing 1998; Berger et al. 1980), the way that teachers talk about their status position reveals that their higher status may allow them the luxury of perceiving custodians and teachers as cooperatively intertwined. In addition, teachers express a view of cooperation and community within the school system (Carli 2001; Rudman and Glick 2001), and this gendered communal view seems to downplay the status hierarchy somewhat, at least in teachers' accounts of the school environment.

As subordinates in society, women are more likely to be identified as communal and to act in communal and deferent ways toward others in order to maintain the stereotype of feminine niceness (Rudman and Glick 2001). There is a cultural expectation for women to demonstrate communal traits (Carli 2001). The communal gender stereotype may therefore explain why teachers are more likely to emphasize a warm cooperative school atmosphere than assert their higher status, at least publicly. Additionally, the gender of teachers may have allowed them to experience lower status in other situations and make them less likely to label others as lower status.

Custodians, on the other hand, recognize their lower status position in the school system and society. The majority of custodians attributed the blame they received for job responsibilities that fell short or items that went missing in the school to their lower status. In addition, custodians recounted instances of disrespect they experienced from teachers when they were asked to do things in a demanding tone, ignored in the hallway, or when teachers failed to recognize how the messes they produced would impact their work. Some custodians also classified teacher work as more important than their work because of what it does for society and because of the higher education teaching requires.

Perhaps custodians readily identified their disadvantaged position because lower status individuals are better able to recognize their subordinate status as a result of the associated stigma that conflicts with the establishment of a positive self-concept (Goffman 1963; Killian and Johnson 2006; Snow and Anderson 1987). To address their lower status position and maintain a positive self-concept in spite of their occupation, some custodians engaged in identity work. Identity work thus serves as another indicator of the lower status of custodians.

Previous studies show that workers in low status occupations manage their self-definitions in order to protect themselves from the threat their lower status work produces for their identities (Ghidina 1990, 1992; Gold 1952, 1964; Hood 1988; Snow and Anderson 1987). In some instances custodians maintained a positive self-concept by embracing their occupational role through their emphasis on the knowledge and expertise they needed to perform their custodial duties. At other times they distanced themselves from the low status of their job title and from similar others (Snow and Anderson 1987).

Unlike Snow and Anderson (1987) who find that the form of identity work homeless individuals engage in varies according to the length of time they are on the street, no similar pattern emerged for the length of time custodians were employed in their occupation. The only two custodians who did not engage in role distancing were night custodians, one who had worked for a total of 13 years and the other who had been employed as a custodian for six months. This latter custodian may not have needed to distance himself from his role because he may not have fully identified with being a custodian. Yet, three of the five custodians who embrace their occupational role are educated above the high school level and have worked more than ten years in the

profession. Perhaps, the fact that they are highly educated for their position led them to elevate the status of the custodial occupation in order to justify why they remain employed in this field. Moreover, their length of time being employed as custodians may have led them to positively transform their occupation by elevating its status.

The absence of a pattern regarding how custodians performed identity work is similar to the results of Ghidina (1990, 1992), who demonstrates that various types of custodians (elementary and secondary school custodians, janitors, and those employed in a hospital and a university) all seem to engage in similar forms of identity work due to the nature of their occupations. Therefore, unlike the homeless, who can be distinguished according to the time they spend on the street, the label of custodian may provide an overarching identity that leads individuals employed in this occupation to engage in comparable processes of identity work.

Lastly, custodians appeared to self-enhance by derogating higher status others (teachers) (refer to Hood 1988). Regardless of whether teachers were performing their professional duties through the instruction of students, custodians did not perceive to be highly competent those who they considered messy, disorganized, or lacking control over their pupils, which are factors that all led to a dirty classroom.¹¹ Custodians used criteria to rate teachers that more closely resembled the tasks they were required to perform, which may reflect an attempt to enhance their status through their knowledge and ability associated with maintaining the school. Cleanliness became the primary factor for

¹¹ Six out of the nine custodians who negatively evaluated teachers according to the condition of their classrooms, however, recognized that the association between messiness and poor teaching could not be generalized to all teachers. Moreover, Paul, one night custodian, was not sure how messiness would affect a teacher's job performance and Harry, a head custodian, mentioned how he thought teachers with messy classrooms did a better job and were more dedicated to their profession because they were putting more into their work.

teacher evaluation and allowed custodians to derogate teachers. The classification of teachers as high or low maintenance furthered their critique of the lack of cleaning and maintenance knowledge these teachers possessed as evidenced by the excessive demands they placed upon custodians. The “high maintenance” label was applied to teachers who were unprofessional, messy, performed their work poorly, depended excessively on custodians, and had unrealistic requests and expectations of cleanliness. Yet, custodians may have used cleanliness as a criterion to judge teacher performance because most custodians are only able to directly observe the messiness of the classroom and not the type of instruction teachers provide their students.

The classification of cleaning as a feminine task (Duffy 2007; Johansson 1998), however, may also have played a role in how custodians negatively evaluated teachers according to their maintenance of the classroom. Custodians may have expected teachers, who are mainly female, to adequately take care of their classrooms by keeping them relatively clean. Six custodians who considered the classroom to be like a second home for teachers further alluded to this gendered association between the classroom and cleanliness.

Greg: You know a lot of people think that they’re home. You know what I mean? If we were able to lay carpet in their classroom they want us to carpet it. . . . They want us to hang curtains over the windows and stuff like that. I mean I don’t have time to go shopping at JC Penny’s, you know?

Therefore, a teacher who failed to keep a clean classroom may have been perceived as someone who inadequately fulfilled tasks associated with her gender.

Power in the Custodian-Teacher Relationship

Perceptions of Dependence

Teachers

In regard to the perceptions of power, the majority of teachers perceived that they are dependent on custodians to get their jobs done. Fourteen teachers stated that they depended on custodians to complete their jobs.¹²

Francis: I have big boxes on top of my closet and I need a custodian to get it down for me every month because it's physically impossible for me to do it. I need them to move heavy furniture. I just generally need them to help keep my room clean.

Hannah: I couldn't do my job if my room was filthy. . . . It would bother my head if my room was a mess and I was trying to teach.

Five teachers mentioned that when custodians did not maintain the cleanliness and functioning of the school their ability to concentrate on teaching was affected. For example, four teachers stated that a messy room would lead students to not concentrate on their work because of the mess.

Nicole: If a custodian doesn't clean your room, you can't work in a room that's dirty. If you can't work in a room that's dirty, then the kids aren't gonna work and it's gonna be like a domino effect. . . . So, if your floor is dirty, you're not gonna want to sit on the floor and it's gonna affect your attitude and all kind[s] of things.

In addition, seven teachers stated that custodians not fulfilling their duties would negatively influence the health and safety of school occupants.

Also five teachers indicated that they depended on custodians to help the school run smoothly.

Allison: I remember when I student taught, the teacher gave me this advice. She

¹² The only teacher (W) who mentioned that she was not dependent on custodians stated that she performed the majority of the maintenance of her classroom herself. Nevertheless, this teacher mentioned instances during which she was dependent on the help of custodians.

said, 'Get friends with the custodian right away. . . .' That's gonna be the person that you're gonna be, 'We need paper, we need paint. . . .' She said, 'Get a good reputation with the custodians.' That's basically what she was saying. I never understood what it meant until I got into this school cause then you realize that [custodians] are needed a lot. You know we need [them] for that, this, and the other thing. So, it makes sense.

Teachers needed custodians to have a working clock, functioning lights, and school supplies and thus be able to work in a functioning classroom environment.

Although teachers were in a dependent position upon custodians, nine teachers indicated that custodians were also dependent upon teachers to complete their jobs. If teachers left their room a mess, the custodian would spend too much time cleaning up the room and then not have enough time to do a good job in the rest of his area.

Leslie: Dependent upon us.... Well I would say to an extent because what we do impacts on their jobs. . . . There's one teacher in our building who leaves his room a mess. And it takes the custodian a long period of time to clean it. So therefore it impacts on other rooms that that custodian has to clean. And I've even gone through different wings and I have seen garbage on the floors that has been unbelievable.

Some teachers felt that they could help custodians with their jobs by doing simple tasks like picking up chairs or tidying up the room. Only three teachers felt that custodians were dependent upon them so that they had a job. One teacher indicated custodians did not depend on her classroom maintenance to a great extent.

Kara: I think if what I do can make their job easier. But like, say I've had a party in my room and the kids have gotten stuff on the floor and we haven't had time to clean it up. The classroom will probably look the same the next day because they'll kind of make up for the difference in how I usually leave the room. You know that I can make their job easier, but even if it's just been a rough day, they'll still take care of it. You know?

Six teachers indicated that custodians were not dependent on teachers to get their jobs done. For example, David mentioned that custodians still had to work over the summer, and Jackie and Tiffany stated that it was because teachers made the messes and

would ensure that their students cleaned up those messes. Lastly, Wendy stated that in spite of the help teachers provided, custodians must clean and maintain the building.

Regardless of the dependence teachers perceived custodians to have upon them, teachers recognized that they are more dependent on custodians to complete their jobs. Custodians have more power in their interactions with teachers because they were able to structure the pace of their work by necessitating that teachers write notes to make requests. This was especially relevant when addressing the head custodian and other custodians for specialized work requests. Also, six teachers indicated that custodians had control over certain cleaning supplies, like soap.

Christine: As I say, you know, just the basic stuff. As long as the paper towels are in the thing. You know if you can't get paper towels or there's no soap in the dispenser and you've asked for it, does that make it a little difficult? Yeah, you know, just cause it's another thing to take care of.

Moreover, three teachers recognized a need to develop a good relationship with custodians in order to have their maintenance needs fulfilled.

Nicole: Just like with secretaries, if you want anything done, you have to be friends with them and respect them.

Custodians

The greater power that custodians have over their individual interactions with teachers is further evidenced by the perceptions custodians held of the dependency of teachers in the custodian-teacher relationship. Seven custodians perceived that the nature of their jobs provided important services that would enable teachers to fulfill their jobs. Five custodians felt that teachers were dependent upon them to accomplish their work.

Ethan: Oh definitely. . . . I'm in charge of ordering the fuel oil. So you know without somebody paying attention to the level of fuel oil, we don't have any heat. I also check both boilers, you know? I maintain the roof. I maintain the ventilation of the building, the plumbing system of the building, all this. There's a

lot involved in just keeping a building that size operating everyday to keep it clean and safe.

Two custodians, however, alluded to the important support function they fulfilled for teachers but did not explicitly mention that teachers were dependent upon them to complete their jobs.

Alex: Well it would be real bad to work there if they had dirty rooms everyday. But I don't know if they depend on me. I guess, I guess in a little bit. They have clean rooms every day.

Interviewer: *Do you think that if it was a dirty room, do you think that they would not be able to do their jobs?*

Alex: Well they'll be able to do it, but they would probably take time to clean up everyday so they'd end up staying after a long time or making the kids clean the rooms, or whatever the case may be. But it definitely helps them out.

Interestingly, four custodians perceived that teachers were not dependent upon them. Larry felt that his job had nothing to do with teachers. Rick thought that teachers could do custodial duties but would just want more money if custodians were not present. Paul stated that teachers could do their jobs regardless of the messiness of the room.

Five custodians also stated that they depended on teachers because teachers enabled them to be employed as custodians, and two head custodians indicated that custodians were dependent upon teachers to help make their jobs easier.

Harry: Am I dependent on teachers? Yeah. Yeah they have to, you know, do their job right. They make our job easier. Obviously, yeah, I mean they could be a horror show. If every classroom was terrible, we could never do our job. You know, they have to help.

Four custodians, however, indicated that they were not dependent upon teachers in any way. Greg perceived that teachers could not offer him anything, while Bill and Rick stated that they did not depend upon teachers because regardless of the messiness of the room their job needed to get done.

Interviewer: *Do you feel that you are dependent on teachers in any way?*

Rick: No cause . . . if they're a messy teacher, they're a messy teacher and if they're a clean teacher, they're a clean teacher. I still gotta go in and do the job that I have to do. Some might be quicker than another.

Resistance and Power Balancing

The greater perceived dependence of teachers on custodians to get their jobs done created some opportunities for custodians to resist teacher demands, particularly those seen as “unreasonable.” Also, teachers often react to this dependent situation by engaging in balancing operations.

Custodians

Custodians resisted the authority of teachers by not fulfilling their requests if they were physically unable to do so, encountered practical constraints (e.g., not being able to spray for termites), or did not have the expertise to do so. In addition, resistance emerged when the request was unrealistic or was not part of their job duties.¹³ Five custodians stated that they sometimes did not have the time to answer the work requests of teachers.

All custodians alluded to instances when extra requests from teachers caused extra work and impinged upon their time to fulfill their own job duties. Eight custodians indicated that their limited time created tension with the teachers because custodians would have to choose which requests that they would be able to fulfill in light of their duties.

Ethan: Again I think they just want something done. This is what we're gonna do with my class today, and they plough right ahead. Some of 'em do that. And again I gotta think of how best to spend my time for that day. And a particular teacher wants a white board installed in their room that day but we have a plumbing

¹³ Teachers also mentioned instances when custodians would resist their requests. Six teachers referenced times when custodians would not answer their work needs. Some teachers, however, clarified that custodians would answer their requests if they were able to do so.

fixture that's leaking water all over a classroom, it's the plumbing fixture first. And that's what they gotta realize sometimes. There are definitely priorities, and the priorities will change during the day as stuff happens.

This head custodian, Ethan, and five others indicated how this tension could lead to conflict because of differences in the job responsibilities of teachers and custodians.

Rick: Well like I said before you know maybe carry a box to their car, or help them hang something up, put a box on a shelf that they couldn't reach, you know nothing out of the ordinary. And I always had the right to say, you know, 'No, I have no time right now, maybe a little later or tomorrow.'

Other custodians would request teachers to write a note or fill out a work request.

Greg: Yeah, I'll ask them to just write it down and leave [the note] in our mailbox. Because a lot of times the teachers will come to us and say I need something fixed, or somethin's wrong, or whatever the case may be and at that point they feel their job is done. Now if anything happens, if somethin' don't get fixed or somethin' is broken and we don't take care of it, 'Well, I went to Greg and I told him.' Now you know we forget. So we just simply ask the teachers, do us a favor, just write it down and leave it in our mailbox. This way we will remember.

Therefore, the different priorities of teachers and custodians could make the custodian-teacher relationship problematic because the requests of teachers took away from the ability of custodians to accomplish their own job duties. Custodians have to ensure that the building is maintained and is running smoothly, while teachers are primarily concerned with their classroom tasks and curriculum.

Other custodians (5) stated that they resisted requests asked by teachers who they perceived were disrespectful toward them.

Harry: Obviously, it's human nature that a person that likes you more would do a better job. So he might take more time cleaning your room. He would do a better job for the people that he likes than the people that give him a hard time. A great example is when they're first moving into their rooms and stuff. My staff will help the people that they like to move them in. It's just human nature. They'll go the extra yard for them.

The only two custodians who did not explicitly mention instances of resistance were

night custodians who had limited interaction with teachers.

Teachers

The greater power of custodians led teachers to attempt to balance the custodian-teacher relationship. Teachers reduced their dependence on custodians through the performance of simple maintenance or cleanliness tasks in order to keep up their classrooms. All teachers stated that they or their students would perform basic maintenance tasks in their classrooms. Specifically, eight teachers mentioned instances where they would do themselves what custodians did not do or did incorrectly. Teachers would perform certain cleaning tasks when custodians refused or did not do them in what they considered to be a satisfactory manner. Thirteen teachers mentioned instances in which cleaning was not done properly.

Interviewer: *What kind of complaints were [being made]?*

Marge: The bathrooms smell again, or . . . we had leaks in the ceilings. Some people still have all ratty ceiling tiles. They worry about the vents, whether the vents are ever cleaned, whether dust or mold or whatever is going around.

Some teachers complained of bathrooms being dirty, classrooms being dusty, sinks not being cleaned properly, corners of the classroom being missed, not having supplies like paper towels, toilet paper, new garbage pail liners, or light bulbs replaced, having the common mat area left dirty, floors remaining dirty, tables being dirty, custodians reusing dirty mop water, and custodians not picking up chairs.

When custodians failed to do their own work tasks, the jobs of teachers were made more difficult to accomplish. Eleven teachers indicated that custodians not fulfilling their job duties affected the completion of their jobs by making them take time out of their schedules to clean. Teachers reported that they were not able to do things because they did not have the proper supplies like paper towels, lights, or soap, or made it

a less positive work environment.

Nicole: If they don't clean the room, then it's twice as hard for me. Then I have to make sure that I clean up after the things cause I'm not gonna work in a dirty classroom. . . . Certain things you just learn that there are certain custodians that aren't going to clean certain things, and you just say, 'Forget it, this is what I have to do.' And I make sure my kids scrub my tables and do all these things.

Interviewer: *Can you give some more examples of what you would have to do?*

Nicole: Picking up the dust bunnies and straightening out the chairs.

Floors that were improperly cleaned were maintained by the teacher or their students, while other teachers dusted or had their students dust. Marge would fulfill certain tasks herself and not even bother to ask a disagreeable custodian or fix problems when custodians failed to address her concerns, while Christine mentioned how she would ask another teacher for help so as not to be too demanding on the custodians.

Christine: For the most part, as I say, I try not to be too demanding. You know, the little things I just take care of myself and sometimes if another teacher's hanging out who, like Mrs. Tessa who is quite a bit taller than I am, I'll ask her if she's there and she's happy to do something for me, or you know one of the other teachers, who is taller or stronger than I am. I will climb on a chair and take something light down from on top, but I limit myself because of my age and all that. You know, I don't want to hurt myself, so then I wait until there's somebody else who's available.

Summary

The unequal distribution of power in the custodian-teacher relationship is evidenced by the dependency of teachers upon custodians and the processes of resistance and power balancing. The majority of teachers recognized their greater dependence on custodians to accomplish their jobs than vice versa, which indicates that custodians are more powerful over their individual interactions with teachers (Emerson 1962).

Moreover, the majority of custodians (7) recognized how the nature of their job duties fostered the dependency of teachers upon them, and five custodians explicitly stated that teachers rely on custodians to accomplish their teaching duties. Therefore, the greater

dependence of teachers on custodians as perceived by both custodians and teachers supports Prediction 2.

The seven custodians who recognized that they depend on teachers to either have a job or to help make their jobs easier, however, indicate that teachers still possess some power in the custodian-teacher relationship. The existence of teachers in a school environment necessitates the presence of custodians to help aid in the cleaning and maintenance of the school. Custodians also sometimes rely on teachers to help them with their duties by keeping a clean and orderly classroom. Even though custodians are not as dependent upon teachers as teachers are upon them, these two functions that teachers serve highlights the mutual dependence that exists between these two groups (Emerson 1962).

Moreover, the amount of power that is afforded to teachers and custodians in the custodian-teacher relationship allowed custodians to engage in resistance and enabled teachers to take part in balancing operations to try to lessen the power of custodians. The power advantaged position of custodians allowed them to resist the authority of teachers by structuring their work environment and resisting their requests. Studies of custodians and janitors have found that these individuals took control over their work environment and their superiors by answering their requests according to their own schedules (Ghidina 1990, 1992; Gold 1964; Hood 1988). This resistance could thus serve as a form of identity work by custodians attempting to counter their lower status position by asserting their power. Custodians may stall their work in order to increase their self-worth (Ghidina 1990, 1992). Ghidina (1990, 1992) discovered that when custodians were unable to experience work satisfaction due to problematic work conditions, they would

train building occupants¹⁴ by trying to shape their behavior to support their self-image and accommodate their work routine. Custodians would delay their response to requests in order to foster respect for their work and themselves. This resistance was also evident among janitors in the studies conducted by Gold (1964) and Hood (1988). Gold (1964) reported that janitors would make tenants who requested immediate service wait. Therefore, the more powerful positions of custodians allowed them to use a different technique of resistance than teachers. Resisting the requests of other school personnel is a strategy that allows custodians to enhance their prestige in the school and their sense of self.

Studies also indicate that individuals in lower status occupations, such as secretaries, can resist their disadvantaged status (Ames 1996). Ames (1996) suggests that secretaries resist their lower status position by working together in a collegial manner, asserting the important functions they perform for the organization, and highlighting their ability to leave the workplace if necessary. The essential organizational duties that secretaries fulfill imply that, like custodians, they can have more power over individual interactions with other personnel because they foster the dependency of higher status others upon them. For example, Reyes and McCarty (1990) find that superordinates are susceptible to the unofficial power secretaries wield through their access to and control over persons and information. Regardless of occupational status, the important duties that individuals in lower status positions perform can thus lead them to have greater unofficial power in an organization (Kanter 1977).

Less powerful others, however, may seek to balance their unequal relationships

¹⁴ Ghidina (1990, 1992) interviewed custodians in elementary and secondary schools, janitorial businesses, a hospital, and a university to examine how they defined themselves in relation to their low-status occupation. Building occupants thus represent individuals who occupied these locations.

(Emerson 1962). For instance, the lack of power teachers have in the custodian-teacher relationship and their minimal control over the accomplishment of custodial work, as evidenced by the resistance of custodians, led them to engage in simple maintenance tasks in order to increase the control they have over their work environment. Teachers actively sought to lessen their dependence on custodians and in the process enhanced the control they possessed over the classroom setting (Emerson 1962).

The way teachers engaged in power balancing indicates their less powerful position in relation to their individual interactions with custodians. Teachers mainly performed cleaning tasks themselves when custodians failed to do so or performed them inadequately. In this way, teachers exhibited withdrawal behaviors to avoid direct conflict with custodians and lessen their dependence upon them, which further indicates their disadvantaged power position. Moreover, the performance of simple maintenance tasks by teachers only aids custodians in fulfilling their jobs, thus allowing custodians to maintain their advantage.

Power in the School

In addition to engaging in maintenance tasks to correct for unmet expectations of cleanliness, teachers could also report custodians to the head custodian or administration if they did not perform their custodial duties in a satisfactory manner. This ability of teachers allowed them to have greater power over custodians in the larger school context. Four custodians indicated that they would fulfill the requests teachers made in order to prevent trouble for themselves.

Cory: So let's say the teachers ask you to do something, then they go to the administrator and the administrator says, 'Why aren't you doing this?' So it's easier to do it than to go through the hassle of not doing it and having administration come down on you.

Five custodians mentioned specific instances of when not satisfying teachers could get them into trouble.

Greg: I mean my experience over in this building in the last two years I had three requests where they would leave me a note asking me to clean out their sink. Sometimes I forget, you know? They come to me out of courtesy or if I don't do it, go to the head and then the head will go to me. If it's still not done, they'll go to the principal. But I haven't had that over here. That's why I try to do what I can for them.

Seven custodians stated that some teachers would pass their complaint onto a higher authority rather than directly addressing their own custodian.

Larry: We had a stuck up... one teacher like over here and she would just be like, 'Ugh go get me something out of my car. Go get me this. Go get me that.' And she'd toss me her keys and I just walk by and just let her keys fall. I was like I'm not your servant. I just keep walkin'. Then she'd go tell the principal, you know? It's like, 'He wouldn't go get me this.' And she just tell her like, 'Well he's not your slave.' You know, it's like what do you expect, you know? [Both Laugh] It's like, 'That's not his job to do that to run out to your car and get something from your trunk when it's pouring rain out.'

Three of these seven in addition to another custodian told of instances when teachers would also complain to the head custodian when custodial job performance was not completed to their liking.

Rick: I guess some teachers expect their classroom to be spotless, perfect, and with the amount of classrooms that you have to clean, cause I cleaned 14 to 15 and I was in a split shift cause I did two buildings, so you know the other guy here was cleaning 28 classrooms. So it's a lot of work so you try to get done not as quick as you can but as efficient as you can. So you know, sometimes they don't like the job that you're doing and then they'll, you know, complain, dislike you, make your job worse because then they start complaining to your boss, and the principal. It could be a big mess.

Nevertheless, only three teachers indicated that they complained to a higher authority.

Leslie: Well I think there should be guidelines. We've talked to the head about this about, you know, using bleach to disinfect with. Now I've noticed since . . .

we addressed this problem with our head and I think [the district] has also gotten involved, the maintenance department, and now more cleaning is done, as far as disinfecting cleaning. It used to be that they just cleaned with dirty water. Now they have Clorox in the water.

Therefore, not meeting the expectations of teachers regarding the cleanliness of their rooms can produce problems for custodians.

Also, five teachers would address the custodian assigned to their area when they encountered a problem.

Interviewer: Did you ever have a problem when you gave a work request and it wasn't attended to?

Nicole: Yeah. . . . If it's little things like soap, paper towels, or things like that [that I need] . . . I let my regular custodian know.

However, three of these five individuals would sometimes do nothing to resolve a conflict.

Like teachers, custodians did have the power to address a higher authority if a conflict occurred with a teacher. Five custodians mentioned instances where they had to go to administrators or supervisors to address a conflict or disagreement with a teacher.

Paul: I mean this lady is leaving paint from one end of the school to the other. And you know now the [administrators] are getting involved in it so we go to them and then they gotta go to her and she yeses them to death and now it's a joke. But, you know, tell her once, twice, and then she keeps doing it. It's just not fair. You know, it's disrespectful to us.

Two of these individuals were head custodians. Michael sought out an administrator at the school, while Harry had to go to the head of maintenance to resolve a conflict with a teacher who wanted him to get rid of termites.

Harry: I mean I told my supervisor. He told me there's nothing to be done. She went to the principal. Done. It's out of my hands. . . . It's not my fault the termites are here.

Six custodians mentioned that they would talk to teachers in order to resolve a

problem. Three of these custodians were head custodians and thus had more interaction with teachers and more authority to reach a resolution through communication.

Interviewer: And how do you usually resolve them?

Ethan: We go back and forth. They'll tell me what I need to do and I'll tell them what I can do. And generally there's a middle ground where we can meet at [Both Laugh] and it's never that bad.

Also, this head custodian (Ethan) demonstrated that he had the authority to assess whether or not a teacher had a legitimate complaint and thus if a disagreement or conflict needed to be resolved.

Although both custodians and teachers had the ability to address a conflict they had with each other to a higher authority, the greater power teachers had in the overall school allowed them to have a greater ability to negatively affect the work environment of custodians by endangering their jobs. The disagreements teachers have with custodians potentially cause more trouble for custodians if they attempted to resolve their disagreements with an administrator. Custodians were under increased scrutiny for not fulfilling the job duties they were supposed to accomplish. Custodians who consistently inadequately perform their duties are liable to be placed on probation and ultimately fired. In this way, teachers had more power over custodians when conflict resolution situations occurred.

The intricacies of the operation of power among custodians and teachers complicate their relationship. Custodians have the power to resist the authority of teachers, and teachers attempt to lessen this unofficial power by performing simple maintenance tasks. These actions represent counterproductive work behaviors because they prevent custodians from facilitating the operation of the school by helping teachers and lead teachers to focus time on cleaning in lieu of the educational curriculum. Further

complicating this relationship is teachers' ability to complain about unsatisfactory custodial work to a higher authority.

CONCLUSION

The differential levels of status and power afforded to custodians and teachers due to their structural location in the school system offer insight into a relatively unexamined work context; a context where men in a lower status occupation (custodians) are advantaged by their position through the power they wield over individual interactions with higher status women (teachers). Regardless of the lower status position of custodians, the higher status of teachers appears to afford them the ability to not classify custodians as lower status but to categorize the custodian-teacher relationship as indicative of a cooperative community environment, which may also reflect the operation of a gendered process (Carli 2001; Rudman and Glick 2001).

On the other hand, custodians clearly gave accounts about their subordinate position by recounting experiences of blame and disrespect. Moreover, the identity work that custodians performed is further evidence of their lower status position (Snow and Anderson 1987). Custodians self-enhanced and attempted to elevate their status by engaging in role embracement, associational and role distancing, and by derogating teachers. Teachers were criticized for being high maintenance (i.e., unprofessional, messy, and excessively demanding) and according to their lack of knowledge and ability to maintain a clean classroom.

Despite the lower status of custodians, the dependence of teachers on them revealed that custodians wield more power over their individual interactions with teachers, than vice versa, as seen by their ability to resist the demands of teachers that fall

within and outside their purview of authority. The greater power of custodians is also evidenced by the attempt of teachers to balance the custodian-teacher relationship by reducing their dependence on custodians through the performance of simple maintenance tasks.

Yet, the broader base of power teachers hold in the larger school environment further complicates the operation of power and status among custodians and teachers. Teachers can report custodians who fail to adequately fulfill their job duties to higher authorities, which can result in custodians being placed on probation and ultimately fired if they continue to perform their job in an unsatisfactory manner. Thus, it appears that the nature of the custodian-teacher relationship leads custodians and teachers to attempt to check the power they hold in different contexts. The more powerful position of teachers in the school allows them to have power over certain aspects of custodial jobs, while their dependence on custodians enables custodians to possess more power over the individual interactions they have with teachers through the process of resistance.

Ultimately, the status and power processes that operate among teachers and custodians could negatively affect their relationships. The presence of resistance and possible disrespect custodians may receive on the part of teachers making excessive demands ultimately represents counterproductive work behaviors that impede the group task of ensuring the successful operation of a school. The resistance that custodians engage in also could impede the operation of the school by limiting the ability of teachers to accomplish their jobs because they have to take the time to fulfill work requests themselves. In this way, resistance and power balancing could adversely affect the instruction of students.

The findings of this study make two important contributions to the status and power literatures. First, the study reveals that not only is the organizational context important in determining how power and status may operate among two work groups that differ by gender, status, and power, but that the interactional context is important as well (Ridgeway 1997). Second, it suggests that structural position and gender both play a complex role together in determining how teachers and custodians perceive each other in the status hierarchy of the school. Even though a gendered process may be operating with female teachers identifying the school as a community and not readily announcing the lower status of custodians, their higher status may afford them the ability to do so. In spite of the high status of teachers, power struggles may arise in daily interaction due to the power-dependence dynamic between teachers and custodians.

Although an important strength of my study is that it directly assesses the differential levels of power afforded to higher status males and lower status females by controlling for other potentially influencing factors, such as race and salary differences, future studies should examine how gender, race and salary impact the relationship that exists between custodians and teachers. For example, the relationship between male and female teachers with both male and female custodians should be further compared by studying teachers and custodians in different school contexts. For instance, in a high school the fact that teachers do not have their own permanent classrooms may lead power to operate differently in the custodian-teacher relationship than in an elementary school. High school teachers may not be as dependent on custodians for the maintenance tasks they perform because they are not as reliant on custodians to ensure that their classrooms are in a certain condition to teach for the day. In addition, the interactions of custodians

and teachers who differ by race (African-American and Latino/a) should be studied. Different diffuse status characteristics need to be examined in order to determine whether the position teachers and custodians have in the school system, rather than their gender, determines their location in the status-power hierarchy. Occupational position may also be more important than gender in determining which groups engage in resistance and power balancing. It would be interesting to note whether different contexts produce similar or differing patterns in the way these groups evaluate each other and use the power they possess.

Research regarding the nuances of power and status between lower status men and higher status women should also look into other contexts in which men and women are mismatched on the amount of power and status they are afforded in the work environment, such as the case with male paralegals and female lawyers. Moreover, it would be a worthy pursuit to investigate a context in which janitors, custodians, and maintenance staff interact with higher status professionals. The operation of status and power processes in these groups may take different forms depending on the degree to which higher status others depend on the work duties these group fulfill, which may have implications for how janitors, custodians, and maintenance staff interact with each other.

Future research should also assess how the status and power of custodians and teachers impact their personal and professional relationships with each other. For example, the status and power dynamic of teachers and custodians may affect their perceptions of fairness of interpersonal treatment (Bies and Moag 1986). Unfair treatment may lead to perceptions of interactional injustice, which involves treating individuals with disrespect (VanYperen 2000). This type of injustice often leads to

counterproductive work behaviors (Conlon et al. 2005). Counterproductive work behaviors include supervisors leaving the organization, employees neglecting their work by reporting sick or coming in late, trying to change a situation by only taking into account one's own interests (VanYperen 2000), and co-workers blaming each other for their own mistakes (Robinson and Bennett 1995). The potential operation of interactional injustice and its resultant counterproductive behaviors may affect how smoothly a school operates through the job performance of teachers and custodians, and thus highlights how this context requires further attention.

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Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

	Custodians n = 11	Teachers n = 15
Gender	11 Males	14 Females 1 Male
Race/Ethnicity	11 White	14 White 1 Black
Age Mean Age % Under 40 % 40 and Above	41 36% 64%	47 20% 80%
Education High School Some College Associates Degree Bachelor's of Science Master of Arts Master of Arts+	4 3 2 1 1	8 7
Personal Income 20,000-40,000 40,000-60,000 60,000-80,000 80,000-100,000 Other (100,000+)	6 5	4 4 5 2
Union	11	15
Years Worked in School Under 1 year Under 5 years Under 10 years More than 10 years 20 or more years	2 3 2 4	4 4 2 5
Shift (Custodians)	Day 5 4 Head Custodians 1 Custodian Night 6	
Grade Level (Teachers)		Kindergarten 2 First grade 4 Second grade 1 Third grade 5 1 Special Education Fourth grade 1 Fifth grade 1 Art 1
Years Worked in Occupation Under 1 year Under 5 years Under 10 years More than 10 years More than 20 years 30 or more years	1 2 1 4 2	2 2 4 2 5

Table 2: Questions Regarding Interactions with Teachers and Custodians

	Custodians	Teachers
Interactions	<p>How often do you interact with teachers?</p> <p>How would you describe your working relationship with teachers?</p> <p>Do you get along better with teachers in your area or with other teachers in the building?</p> <p>Tell me about your communication with teachers.</p> <p>How do teachers treat you? How do they refer to you? How do you refer to teachers?</p> <p>Some custodians tell me that it is sometimes difficult to get along with teachers. How do you feel about this statement? Do you agree or disagree?</p> <p>Have you ever had a disagreement with a teacher? Can you tell about a time when this happened – and how you resolved it?</p> <p>I've heard some custodians say that it's easier to get along with (or communicate with) some teachers than others (or that they enjoy interacting with some teachers more than others). Is this true for you?</p> <p>Do teachers sometimes do things that make your job more difficult to complete?</p>	<p>How often do you interact with custodians?</p> <p>How would you describe your working relationship with custodians?</p> <p>Do you get along better with the custodian who cleans your classroom than with other custodians?</p> <p>Tell me about your communication with custodians.</p> <p>How do custodians treat you? How do they refer to you? How do you refer to custodians?</p> <p>Some teachers tell me that it is sometimes difficult to get along with custodians. How do you feel about this statement? Do you agree or disagree?</p> <p>Have you ever had a disagreement with a custodian? Can you tell me about a time when this happened – and how you resolved it?</p> <p>I've heard some teachers say that it's easier to get along with (or communicate with) some custodians than others (or that they enjoy interacting with some custodians more than others). Is this true for you?</p> <p>Do custodians sometimes do things that make your job more difficult?</p>

Table 3: Questions on Status and Power

	Custodians	Teachers
Status	<p>Do you feel that teachers value you and your work as a custodian?</p> <p>How do you view your work in relation to the work that teachers do?</p> <p>Do you think that teachers do their job in a satisfactory manner?</p> <p>How do you think teachers should do their jobs?</p> <p>Do you think teachers pay attention to the condition of their classrooms?</p> <p>Do you think teachers care more about the presentation of their classrooms and displaying their work than teaching?</p>	<p>Do you feel that custodians value you and your work as a teacher?</p> <p>How do you view your work in relation to the work that custodians do?</p> <p>Do you think that custodians do their job in a satisfactory manner?</p> <p>How do you think custodians should do their jobs?</p>
Power	<p>Do you feel that teachers are dependent upon you for the accomplishment of their jobs?</p> <p>Do you depend on teachers to help you complete your job?</p> <p>Do you think teachers make appropriate work requests?</p>	<p>Do you feel that custodians are dependent upon you for the accomplishment of their jobs?</p> <p>Do you depend on custodians to help you complete your job?</p> <p>Do you think that custodians pay attention to your work requests?</p> <p>Do you think that custodians respond promptly and efficiently to your requests?</p> <p>Are custodians readily accessible for your maintenance requests?</p>

Appendix A

CUSTODIAN INTERVIEW GUIDE

Project Title: Perceptions of Custodial and Teacher Work Roles

Principal Investigator: Heather Scheuerman, Ph.D. student

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Karen Hegtvedt

First, I'd like to ask you a few background questions:

Do you prefer the job title of janitor or custodian?

[Record gender.]

What year were you born?

What is the highest grade or degree you finished in school?

What is your personal income bracket? [20,000-40,000; 40,000-60,000; 60,000-80,000; 80,000-100,000; Other]

Do you belong to a union? What is the name of the union?

What is your position in the school?

How long have you worked in this school?

What shift do you currently work?

Have you worked as a custodian in any other buildings or school districts?

General Work Environment

1. I would like to get a general impression of your work.

Can you describe a typical day for me?

PROMPTS: Start with what you do when you arrive, then go through the day for me.

What is involved in your care of the building? What does your area consist of? (number of rooms)

What is your role in maintaining order among the students?

I am going to ask you how often you interact with different groups:

How often do you interact with teachers?

When and where do these interactions occur?

How often do you interact with parents?

When and where do these interactions occur?

How often do you interact with students?

When and where do these interactions occur?

How often do you interact with custodians?

When and where do these interactions occur?

How often do you interact with administrators?

When and where do these interactions occur?

Of these groups, with whom do you most often interact besides other maintenance workers?

How would you classify these interactions? (enjoyable or not enjoyable)

Cooperation

2a. How would you describe your relationship with the head custodian? [If head custodian insert: fellow custodians.]

PROMPT: Is it cooperative?

2b. How would you describe your relationship with other maintenance workers? [If head custodian do not ask.]

2c. Who are the other custodians you work with?

2d. How would you describe your relationship with school administrators?

2e. How would you describe your relationship with parents and students?

PROMPT: Are these relationships cooperative?

If the interviewee does not indicate a positive relationship with any of these groups, ask:

3. Why do you have problems with these individuals?

4. What would need to change for interactions with these individuals to become enjoyable?

Interaction With Teachers

Let's turn now to talk more specifically about your interaction with teachers in your school.

5a. How would you describe your working relationship with teachers?

PROMPT: Do you feel that you have to ensure their happiness in regard to doing things for them and cleaning their rooms?

5b. Do you get along better with teachers in your area or with other teachers in the building?

PROMPT: Can you tell me the names of the teachers in your area?

5c. Tell me about your communication with teachers.

PROMPTS: Is it generally good, poor?

How do you communicate – through notes? In person?

What types of things do you “talk” to them about?

5d. How do teachers treat you?

5e. How do they refer to you?

5f. How do you refer to teachers?

5g. Some custodians tell me that it is sometimes difficult to get along with teachers. How do you feel about this statement? Do you agree or disagree?

6. Have you ever had a disagreement with a teacher? Can you tell me about a time when this happened – and how you resolved it?

Do conflicts with teachers occur often?

Do these conflicts impede your ability to do your job?

7. Do teachers sometimes do things that make your job more difficult to complete?

8. I've heard some custodians say that it's easier to get along with (or communicate with) some teachers than others (or that they enjoy interacting with some teachers more than others). Is this true for you?

What makes it easier to get along with or communicate with some teachers?
PROMPTS: Is it the type of person they are? Their age or experience?

9. Do you feel that teachers value you and your work as a custodian? (Or respect you?)
What shows you that teachers value your role? (Or respect you?)
If not, why do you think this is so?
How does this make you feel?
10. How do you view your work in relation to the work that teachers do? How do you think others (teachers, administrators, other staff members, parents, and students) view your work?
11. Do you feel that custodians are blamed for things?
12. Have you ever taken a course dealing with anger management or how to handle situations when individuals treat you poorly?

Perceptions About Teachers

13. Do you think that teachers do their job in a satisfactory manner?
PROMPT: How do you think teachers should do their jobs?
Does the state of their room say something about the type of job teachers do?
14. Do you think teachers make appropriate work requests?
PROMPT: What sorts of things do teachers ask you to do for them? (helping them informally and professionally)
Are these requests realistic? (relation to the supplies, manpower, and time available)
Do you feel that teachers have unrealistic expectations about the cleanliness of their rooms?
15. Do you think teachers pay attention to the condition of their classrooms?
16. Do you think teachers care more about the presentation of their classrooms and displaying their work than teaching?
17. Do you feel that teachers are dependent upon you in order to complete their jobs?
18. Do you feel that you are dependent upon teachers?

Is there anything that we talked about that you would like to go back to? OR anything about these issues that I did not ask, that you think is important?

I also need to know if you would mind talking to me again at some point – if I needed to clarify something we had talked about today?

THANK YOU!

Appendix B

TEACHER INTERVIEW GUIDE

Project Title: Perceptions of Custodial and Teacher Work Roles

Principal Investigator: Heather Scheuerman, Ph.D. student

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Karen Hegtvedt

First, I'd like to ask you a few background questions:

[Record gender.]

What year were you born?

What is the highest grade or degree you finished in school?

What is your personal income bracket? [20,000-40,000; 40,000-60,000; 60,000-80,000; 80,000-100,000; Other]

Do you belong to a union? What union do you belong to?

What is your position in the school?

How long have you worked in this school?

Have you worked in any other schools? Where and for how long?

General Work Environment

1. I would like to get a general impression of your work.

Can you describe a typical day for me?

PROMPTS: Start with what you do when you arrive, then go through the day for me.

What is involved in your care of your classroom and students?

What is your role in maintaining order among the students?

What do you do after school?

I am going to ask you how often you interact with different groups:

How often do you interact with teachers?

When and where do these interactions occur?

What do you talk about? Are these interactions formal or informal?

How often do you interact with parents?

When and where do these interactions occur?

How often do you interact with students?

When and where do these interactions occur?

How often do you interact with custodians?

When and where do these interactions occur?

How often do you interact with administrators?

When and where do these interactions occur?

Of these groups, with whom do you most often interact besides other teachers and students?

How would you classify these interactions? (enjoyable or not enjoyable)

If enjoyable why are they enjoyable?

If not enjoyable how could these interactions be made enjoyable?

Cooperation

- 2a. How would you describe your relationship with other teachers?
PROMPT: Is it cooperative?
- 2b. How would you describe your relationship with parents and students?
- 2c. How would you describe your relationship with school administrators?
- 2d. How would you describe your relationship with custodians?
PROMPT: Are these relationships cooperative?
- 2e. Who are the custodians you work with? Full names?
PROMPT: Who is the custodian who cleans your classroom?

If the interviewee does not indicate a positive relationship with any of these groups, ask:

- 3. Why do you have problems with these individuals?
- 4. What would need to change for interactions with these individuals to become enjoyable?

Interaction With Custodians

Let's turn now to talk more specifically about your interaction with custodians in your school.

- 5a. How would you describe your working relationship with custodians?
 - 5b. Do you get along better with the custodian who cleans your classroom than with other custodians?
 - 5c. Tell me about your communication with custodians.
PROMPTS: Is it generally good, poor?
How do you communicate – through notes? In person?
What types of things do you “talk” to them about? (professionally and not)
 - 5d. How do custodians treat you?
 - 5e. How do they refer to you?
 - 5f. How do you refer to custodians?
 - 5g. Some teachers tell me that it is sometimes difficult to get along with custodians. How do you feel about this statement? Do you agree or disagree?
6. Have you ever had a disagreement with a custodian? Can you tell me about a time when this happened – and how you resolved it?
Do conflicts with custodians occur often?
Do these conflicts impede your ability to do your job?
Do you think that conflicts could impede the ability of teachers to do their jobs?
Why do you think these conflicts occur?
Have you ever had a disagreement with a custodian at another school?
7. I've heard some teachers say that it's easier to get along with (or communicate with) some custodians than others (or that they enjoy interacting with some custodians more than others). Is this true for you?
What makes it easier to get along with or communicate with some custodians?
PROMPTS: Is it the type of person they are? Their age or experience?

8. Do custodians sometimes do things that make your job more difficult?
9. Do you feel that custodians value you and your work as a teacher? (Or respect you?)
What shows you that custodians value your role? (Or respect you?)
If not, why do you think this is so?
How does this make you feel?
10. How do you view your work in relation to the work custodians do? How do you think others (teachers, administrators, and other staff members) view your work?

Perceptions About Custodians

11. Do you think that custodians do their job in a satisfactory manner?
PROMPT: How do you think custodians should do their jobs?

If not what don't they clean?

12. Do you think that custodians pay attention to your work requests?
13. Do you think that custodians respond promptly and efficiently to your requests?
14. Are custodians readily accessible for your maintenance requests?
15. Do you feel that custodians are dependent upon you for the accomplishment of their jobs?
16. Do you depend on custodians to help you complete your job?

Is there anything that we talked about that you would like to go back to? OR anything about these issues that I did not ask, that you think is important?

I also need to know if you would mind talking to me again at some point – if I needed to clarify something we had talked about today?

THANK YOU!