

**A Thesis Presented to  
The Faculty of Alfred University**

**Exploring a Theoretical Framework of Student-Professor Performance, Power Relations and  
Structural Inequalities Affecting Students' Ability to Perform**

**by**

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**Abstract**

My thesis looks at the age-old question regarding the college classroom: Why don't students read for class? I explore power dynamics in the classroom between professors and students as well as students and students in terms of completing assigned reading and the effects of gaining social capital. My thesis looks further at the entire education system and inequalities in playing the student role as well as the effect of capitalism on the classroom experience. Using a combination of social theory and quantitative research I have found that the literature suggests that there are outside factors affecting the student as well as performances in the classroom demonstrated by the professors and other students that may contribute to one of the many reasons students do not read for class.

**Introduction**

In many college classrooms around the country, students are not completing assigned reading for class. Professors are frustrated, and students are not getting everything they can out of a college education. I first got the idea to write about this topic when I chose it as a prompt to write for a paper in my junior year of college. As a student I knew there were all sorts of reasons students do not always complete the assigned reading. Personally I had experience being a student that would occasionally slip up on assigned reading, and I had also been a student that ended up speaking on behalf of an entire classroom that had not read. I was interested in this topic because I have taken a lot of courses and the participation levels always varied. Some students read, some students do not. Some professors make the classroom experience worth participating in, others do not. Some students can perform without actually knowing the material while others cannot. There are so many variations in the potential classroom experience that I just had to dive deeper and see what else I could find.

I became even more interested in the subject after speaking with a number of my peers. My friends regaled me with stories of their own experiences in the classroom: Some of them described classes in which they never learned anything aside from their own analysis because

other students would not contribute. Others spoke about being overshadowed by the presence of other students, or simply had a hard time participating in class even if they had completed the readings. Everyday conversation about how people's classes were going gave me a lot of insight before writing this paper. Other roles aside from being a student were having an impact on people's ability to devote the required amount of time to each course they are taking. Whether it is work, extracurricular activities, or other course work that has a higher priority, the students I know are struggling to get it all done.

After a lot of thinking, conversations with my peers, and processing my own lived experiences in the classroom I decided once and for all that I *had* to pursue this topic of research. Using a combination of social theory, quantitative studies, and my own classroom experiences I pursue the age-old question: Why don't students read for class? I researched the elements of this question exploring differential values between students, the student professor relationship and power dynamic, and structural inequality surrounding education. These questions need to be answered if education is ever going to improve.

Playing the role of a student is difficult and often requires a lot of time management skills. Students are students, but they are also workers, athletes, club presidents, volunteers. Students have lots of priorities just as anyone else, and for some students, like student workers, they have no choice but to prioritize certain activities over academics. Students who are working while going to school often have no choice but to be student workers in order to pay for their education. For my four years of college I have been a student worker. There are some years I have worked less and some years that I have worked more, but without employment there is no way that I would be able to afford to go to school. Because of these harsh realities and things like

socioeconomic privileges and disadvantages, every student is either prioritizing what they have to or what they chose to over education.

Socioeconomic disadvantages are not the only inequalities that show up in the classroom. Other aspects of a student's social location may affect their performance in the classroom as well. Bias in the classroom is going to have an effect on students' ability to perform and to perform well in their role as a student. I myself have experienced sexist biases in previous courses. Many of my peers have experienced sexism, racism and transphobia among other things on a long list of biases carried out in classrooms either by other students or by the professors themselves. Experiencing microaggressions and overt biases over and over again can be an exhausting task. I found it to be incredibly important to talk about how the societal perceptions of a student's own identity might be shaping their peers' views of them, and ultimately affecting the performance of anyone who is not a heterosexual, cisgender, white, middle-class, able bodied, young man.

Systemic hierarchies deepen the divides between different groups of students. Every student is taught to learn from a very young age. However, how a student is taught to learn varies by geographical location as well as socioeconomic status. Students who come from low-income areas with under-funded school systems are going to experience education differently than that of an upper-middle class student who goes to a state-of-the-art public school with more opportunities and more advantages. The concept of education goes even further than that. If a student does not come from a home that places value on education, it is less likely that the student is going to see the value in education. Without the support system and resources to make children into students who want to learn, students barely have a fighting chance.

There are always stories of students who have overcome adversity to become incredibly successful in their fields. These students have worked hard to defy odds that were stacked against them, and that is no small feat. Although these stories are powerful and uplifting, it makes you question the structure of education in the United States. Students who want nothing more than to continue learning are having their performances undermined from when they first begin their journeys with education at a young age to whenever they complete their final course. There are some students that pull through despite the system being out of their favor, but these students cannot continue to distract society from the massive inequality rooted in the fact that some students must overcome adversity to succeed while other students need not.

I knew I would have to explore the complex relationship between students and professors as well as students and other students. To explain the relationship between these roles I use the term social capital, which describes anything you get out of a connection with another person. Social capital can be gained between student and professor if the classroom environment is the right setting for both the student and the professor to perform their role. From there social capital can become a future recommendation letter, a job opportunity, or any intangible form of capital achieved between the social relationship of student and professor.

Professors have an incredibly important role by design. They exist to teach us and prepare us for the future, but yet there is this disconnect between professor and student that often occurs. For both professors and students to perform their roles there needs to be an environment conducive to these performances. I began to think that maybe the status of the professor was getting in the way of the power balance that needs to occur in the classroom. Although professors have ultimate authority, they need to work to create trust in the classroom so that students feel like they matter and their opinions matter. If the professor cannot set the

metaphorical stage as a part of their role, the performances of the students are going to suffer.

However, professors can only do so much in their own role before the power is imbalanced in a different direction.

As I have stated it is clear that students may not read for class. However, the problem cannot be explained by chalking it up as student apathy toward assignments; We must explore the relationships between student and professor, professor and student, student and student, and their power imbalances in the classroom as well as how role performance affects these relationships. We must also look critically at the conditions required to perform in the classroom including social factors as well as the culture of capitalism. Society is structured around capitalism as an economic structure, so it only makes sense that the cultural effects of capitalism are felt in everyday life. Capitalism's key concept that if you work hard you will be a good capitalist dismisses the fact that every individual starts off on unequal footing the day they are born in the United States. Unequal opportunity and inequality in education lead to unequal outcomes in society. These inequalities are ultimately responsible for the state of the education system, and our perception of society under capitalism skews the view to center on the individual as a problem. The urge to define students as either "good students" or "bad students" prevent us from defining what conditions may lead to a perceived "bad student" and fixing the issue from the root of the problem. As a society we are more focused on the labels than actually finding a solution to the vague definition of "bad student". I argue that students do not read for class because of a combination of student-professor power imbalance, unequal access to opportunities to education, and the culture of capitalism that promotes the "every man for himself" mentality in all aspects of society including inside of the classroom.

**Literature Review:**

## Establishing the Reading Problem

When composing research for my thesis I used a combination of both qualitative and quantitative research. There are numerous quantitative studies that address the issue of students not reading for class. Almost all of them are trying to show that students are measuring just how much students are not reading. Some of the sources address the reasons that students are not reading. Some address both. None of the literature addresses structural issues within the education system that might account for students not reading for class. The empirical studies measure how much students were actually reading for classes to establish the reading problem itself (Clump, Bauer, and Bradley; Baier, Hendricks & Cochran). Here we see that students are not only not reading, they do not even think it is necessary to read in class to get a good grade. In other studies, we see quantifiable data about what might get students to read. These studies test scenarios such as mandatory quizzes versus non-mandatory quizzes to get students to read (Burchfield, C. M. & Sappington, J.; Hatteburg & Steffy). Here we see that there are band-aid solutions to accepting the fact that students do not read for class, but no explanation of how we got to this point inside the classroom.

After researching the problem of students not completing assigned reading as well as the potential remedies to the problem, I wanted to dig deeper into *why* students were not completing the reading. In the studies they found a positive correlation between parent involvement with students and succeeding academically (Anderson; Dhingra & Manhas). These studies may say how parent involvement helps students, but what happens to students whose parents are uninvolved. I want to look closer into the idea that stable homes are a certain type of privilege

and having an academic relationship with your parents is also not something that everyone benefits from.

For my thesis, I explore the concept of social capital. The basis of my definition of social capital came from Pierre Bourdieu and James Coleman. In Bourdieu's "Forms of Capital" he describes social capital as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group" (Bourdieu). James Coleman states that "Social capital...is when the relations among persons change in ways that facilitate action...social capital is even less tangible [than physical and human capital], for it is embodied in the relations among persons" (J. Coleman S100). Although social capital is hard to define, both theorists have made it clear that for social capital to form there needs to be social interaction. However, I use these definitions in the terms of past, present, and future social capital as well. Social capital reveals itself to be an ongoing form of capital even when you aren't thinking about it and because of that we have to look at it from all different points of time (Bourdieu).

### Performance and Racism in the Classroom

Erving Goffman talks a lot about performance. In fact he defines performance in the general sense and describes settings for these performances as fronts (Goffman). Goffman defines performance, but the way I want to look at it specifically addresses the classroom. We can study the relationships within the front which is the classroom and see how performance is affected based on certain things. Goffman also inadvertently gives us examples of how bias can affect performance by demonstrating that bias himself. In Goffman's work he often only refers to



individuals who perform as ‘he’ even though he often uses examples of women in roles and sexist examples of women in his work such as describing the performance of “ filling station attendants who resignedly check and recheck tire pressure of the anxious women motorists” (Goffman 18), and continues on to speak of “personal fronts” and how “clothing, sex, age, and racial characteristics” (Goffman 24) among other things will affect how an individual is perceived before they are even able to perform. Multiple studies support the idea that Black students in the classroom are experiencing bias and racism in both high school and college classrooms (Campbell & Williamson; Schmidt; Davis). Goffman acknowledges that performance is altered by things like racism and sexism but never actually says it in those words. Goffman appears to take it at face value, maybe for the sake of the performance argument, but I want to look closer into the actual effects of this bias and discrimination and also find the problems at the source.

### Power in the Classroom

Professors have ultimate authority in their classrooms because of their role as professor. However, if they have too much power or do not value the students enough, it could spell disaster for the whole course. One theorist discusses power-dependence relations and the relationships must be applied to the classroom setting (Emerson). Emerson is not specifically applying his argument on power-dependent relationships to the classroom, but we must turn to power-dependence relationships to explain the student professor dynamic. Although the professor will always have the authority, we can get closer to equilibrium in the classroom by getting rid of custodial pupil control ideologies (Taylor; Golish & Olson; Koutrouba). Even though this paper explores larger structural concepts it is important to look at how experiences

with education can shape a student's view on education. Here we start to notice differences in how student relationships surrounding education and why they might be that way.

## **Defining Social Capital**

Capital comes in many forms. Oftentimes because of how our capitalist society views capital, the only form of capital we can imagine is physical. Physical capital can come in the form of currency or being paid in some way for working. Physical capital is something that you literally have like a \$10 bill or a loaf of bread that you traded a painting for. Physical capital is tangible and material. However, there are more types of capital than just physical. Human capital, cultural capital, and social capital exist and are necessary in our day to day lives. These forms of capital are intangible yet can explain the social relationships of our society and are just as valid as the forms that we can hold in our hands. As Bourdieu states, "It is in fact impossible to account for the structure and functioning of the social world unless one reintroduces capital in all its forms and not solely in the one form recognized by economic theory" (Bourdieu). If we as a society are able to recognize the importance of capital other than that of the markets and the economy, we place value on the entire human experience instead of just a dollar sign.

Before discussing social capital, we must discuss the relationship between human capital and social capital. Human capital is what you, the individual, are bringing to the table. Knowledge, ideas, or other intangible qualities that you have are your own human capital. The social capital appears when the relationship extends beyond that of the individual with themselves. Social capital is something that is formed in relationships of people. Coleman states that "social capital ... is created when the relations among persons change in ways that facilitate action ...; human capital is less tangible, being embodied in the skills and knowledge acquired by an

individual; social capital is even less tangible, for it is embodied in the *relations* among persons” (J. Coleman S100). Human capital and social capital go hand in hand, but their differences are important to note. Without human capital it would be impossible to try and gain social capital, as someone without human capital is going to be less desirable of a person to engage in any type of relationship with. Without human capital the individual has nothing to contribute and provides nothing for others to gain in the form of social capital.

Cultural capital is also pivotal to the make-up of human capital and a strong component of social capital. Cultural capital, like human capital and social capital can be intangible, but there are tangible examples of cultural capital as well. Religion, art, music, traditions, all of these things that exist within our society make up cultural capital. Cultural capital is partly recognized as human capital in the sense that human capital can be composed of intangible examples of cultural capital. For example, if you were raised Jewish, there are going to be traditions and rituals that you have learned because of your heritage, thus resulting in cultural capital. Even if you were not raised Jewish but you converted later in life and learned all about Judaism, that is still gaining cultural capital. Cultural capital is also what gives everyone in society a social location. A social location is your class, race, gender, sexual orientation, ability, age, religion, or any other category that identifies your place in society. In Bourdieu’s interpretation of cultural capital, he says,

“Cultural capital can be acquired, to a varying extent, depending on the period, the society, and the social class, in the absence of any deliberate inculcation, and therefore quite unconsciously. It always remains marked by its earliest conditions of acquisition which, through the more or less visible marks they leave (such as the pronunciations characteristic of a class or region), help to determine its distinctive value (Bourdieu).

Cultural capital exists whether we choose to recognize its importance or not. Human capital makes up everything we as individuals know, experience, or have to offer. Cultural capital can

be an element of human capital in this way. Without society, cultural capital would not exist, and without cultural capital people's sense of identity could not be defined.

Social capital is a tricky concept. It may be intangible; however it is not indescribable. Have you ever had an experience with someone, made an important connection with someone, or simply had an exchange with anyone that left you feeling something you were not feeling before the exchange? In the simplest terms, these are concepts of social capital. Human capital, what you know, feel, have experienced, have learned, is your own. Cultural capital is what you see, what you hear, what you are. As soon as this combination of human capital and cultural capital are brought to society or to any form of social interaction, the capability to gain social capital presents itself. Knowing people is a form of social capital in the sense that that relationship has the potential to blossom into other forms of capital.

Everything you know, everything you value, and everything you are aware of makes up your human capital. Human capital makes us who we are. To engage in the pursuit of social capital, there is a certain level of human capital required for social interaction to progress into social capital. Human capital is something that every individual person has. It is intangible, but it makes everyone who they are. Without human capital we do not have the knowledge to interact and socialize with others to be able to gain social capital.

Human capital works with physical capital the same way; Without human capital there cannot be physical capital. If you do not know how to do anything, how are you going to earn physical capital? The same can be said for social capital. If you do not have any social capital, no connections, no interactions, and no network, how can you prove yourself to result in physical capital? Not every job position requires a glowing recommendation or even a name drop, but some do. Who cares about some nobody when I could hire my best friend's brother's kid to work

in my office? Social capital acts as a catalyst to physical capital because social connections are what moves society forward. Without making connections, without getting your name out there, it would be almost impossible to move forward in our society because of how the capitalist economy operates.

To further define social capital I argue that we should look at it in terms of the past, present, and future. An example of past social capital can be a capital gain from a social interaction or relationship in the past; You previously had a relationship with someone that ended in you gaining social capital. An example of past social capital would be volunteering somewhere and adding your supervisor to your list of references on your resume while in high school. Even simpler, your best friend worked somewhere, and they put a good word in for you so you can get hired. These are examples of past social capital. Any example of gaining social capital at any time before the present would constitute past social capital.

Present social capital is what is occurring on a day to day basis within day to day social interactions. Any social interaction at any given moment possesses the potential to end in social capital. Social capital can have long lasting effects, but the effects can be immediate as well. In a classroom setting there is always a potential to learn something in a way that you have not yet considered. For example, if a student points out something in the reading that another student had not considered. Another example would be if a student brought up a personal experience on an issue that students would not understand if they had never had that experience. Listening to these different perspectives can result in this shared experience gaining social capital and also gaining human capital as well. Present social capital is more immediate and contributes to gaining overall social capital as well. Without present social capital, without those instances in

immediate interaction where someone may decide whether or not the relationship is trustworthy and valuable, social capital does not have the same room to grow.

Trust is absolutely essential to the growth of human capital. As Coleman states, there are two critical elements to form social capital, “the level of trustworthiness of the social environment...and the actual extent of the obligations held” (J. Coleman S102). To apply this concept to a college classroom, let us think of where trust is necessary and where we are going to find social capital. For present social capital to develop the relationship must be dependable otherwise social capital cannot be created because one of the individuals does not trust the other to actually provide them with social capital.

Future social capital is social capital that could come out of both past and present social capital. At any given point someone you know could call you out of the blue and say “Hey, I know you and because I know \_\_\_, here’s an opportunity to \_\_\_”, and because of the past and present social capital present in the relationship, the end result will be this form of future social capital. Future social capital is almost as difficult to explain as social capital itself for that fact that it is so intangible you do not even know when you will actually reap the benefits of it. When you have a relationship between individuals, say professor and student, there is going to be a certain familiarity between them after the trust is secured. A student might know that a professor likes them and values their presence in the classroom, but the student has no idea what this connection might offer. The assumption could be that the professor may write a letter of recommendation for the student for a future internship or graduate program, but there is no way of knowing when that future social capital will be needed or when it will simply present itself as an option. There is no way of telling what opportunities will present themselves in forms of future social capital.

Forms of capital aside from physical are often overlooked, however, we need social capital to even think of upholding the capitalistic society as we know it. Social capital is important in and of itself, but if people looked at social capital in terms of physical capital, it becomes clearer how social capital aligns with capitalism. An example of social capital becoming physical capital is going to college, arranging a network of people for yourself through social interaction, and having them as contacts for future employment. If the connection really turned into a job, it would be social capital evolving into physical capital. The social capital still exists, but the physical capital might not exist without the social capital.

When considering social capital in the classroom, it may be easier to go think in terms of future social capital. The assumed point of college is to get a degree to pursue a career in a field that requires a certain level of education to qualify for. The end expectation is that these jobs payout more physical capital. If a student was unable to make connections and engage in social interactions during college, the transition to the working world may be difficult without support from college professors. To prepare effectively, the student must make room for future social capital, and to do that past and present social capital has to exist or have existed in the classroom. When a professor and student interact, and a professor thinks to themselves, “Hey, I value this student”, there has to be a reason. The interaction between professor and student has to demonstrate some sort of present social capital before this professor is able to demonstrate the gained social capital by being an active connection for the student at some point in the future. Present social capital then becomes future social capital as time passes and the present social capital is no longer there. It is necessary to continue to build a relationship that may eventually result in future social capital.

Gaining social capital would be, in the simplest terms, using your human capital to engage in a social interaction that results in some kind of knowledge or experience or anything that you get from this specific interaction. For example, let's say you are a bartender as well as a student at the university across the street. Many of your customers are often professionals like administrators and professors. After getting to know a local person, he tells you his wife is looking for an office aid and thinks that you might be the right fit. This is an example of gaining social capital. Even though the bartender was not expecting this form of social capital from this regular customer, it happened because of natural social interaction that had previously occurred.

To get into college requires many forms of capital, including physical capital to pay for it, and human capital to essentially prove yourself to an institution before you are admitted or rejected. Once you have proved yourself with all your examples of human capital like good grades, a well-written essay, extracurriculars, volunteer hours, etc., you have earned your spot in an institution to begin earning human capital for yourself and providing social capital to others both inside and outside the classroom. However, social capital does not just start flowing everywhere once you step into your classroom for the first time. Trust is essential both within the classroom, and with the individual students and professor (J. Coleman). As Coleman states, there are two critical elements to form social capital. To apply this concept to a college classroom, let us think of where trust is necessary and where we are going to find social capital.

In most, if not all courses, there is going to be a certain amount of coursework that students are expected to complete. These assignments can be any number of things like labs, or reports or essays, but for this example I am going to focus specifically on the idea of assigned readings. The expectation of the professor is that the students complete the reading and are prepared for an informed discussion on the material for the following class. The professor



possesses human capital in the form of knowledge: they are a college-educated professional who is an expert in their field, and their job is to pass along this information to the students. Here we see human capital, the professor's knowledge, turn to social capital when combined with the professor-student relationship. Students have already proven their human capital by getting into the college or institution, and by completing assignments and participating in class they are taking the social capital they are receiving, and it becomes the student or students own individual human capital. However, there is no guarantee that everyone's collective human capital will manifest into social capital. The only way for social capital to generate is if there is a certain level of trustworthiness between all members of a group, and in this case, the members of a classroom.

When a professor assigns a reading and the majority of the class has not read it, the professor's human capital has no opportunity to turn into social capital. The professor still has their own knowledge, but without contribution or feedback from the rest of the class, the professor doesn't gain anything<sup>1</sup> and the students also do not gain anything. Without the promise of the students completing the reading, the trust between professor and student is broken before it even has a chance to form. The same issue applies between student and student in the class. If one student completes the reading, and another does not, the student who read furthers their own human capital, but neither gains social capital in the relationship between each other. The reason that the students cannot form social capital in this instance is because there is no trust between students if not every student is doing the reading.

When students do not complete the readings the professor as well as the students in class who have read cannot trust the students who did not read for class. Trust is essential to forming

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to acknowledge the professor in this instance; however I would like to discuss this topic further in my larger work.

bonds in relationships. Without trust, it would appear that the students do not see the dependency that exists between them. If you ask someone to do something, and you know they are not going to do it, what's the point? You are not going to gain any form of capital if the task is not completed, and trust will still not be present. It is unlikely that you willingly depend on this person to help you if your goal is social capital. The same goes for the person who did not complete the task. Maybe they do not trust you either. They see no reason to complete the task even though they said they would, and they neither lose or gain anything. Trust is not only essential to social capital, but it is its own form of social capital. If the person had simply completed the task, trust could begin to form, spurring the formation of social capital. If the person who wanted the task completed had not asked this dishonest person to complete it, the person may not realize the untrustworthiness of the individual.

The classroom operates on the basis of a mutual classroom dependence. In a classroom students and professors depend on each other to gain social capital. Without the professor, the student could not learn from them. Without the student the professor could not teach and could not learn from the students. Without each of these relationships the traditional classroom setting that one might imagine disappears. Everyone in the classroom is interdependent upon each other which supports the idea of mutual classroom dependence. Mutual dependence is when A needs something to accomplish a goal and B also needs A to help them accomplish a goal.<sup>2</sup> They depend on each other to succeed and gain as much capital as possible. Although not Coleman's original intention, this scenario applies directly to the college classroom. However, mutual classroom dependence can be interrupted by power imbalance and value differences. A student who always completes the assigned reading, regardless of whether or not the rest of the class has

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<sup>2</sup> In relation to Coleman's figure 1 closed triangle S106

read the material, is still mutually dependent on the other students because they are not receiving as much social capital as they could. The students who are not reading are mutually dependent on the student reading to gain human capital, but they are also missing out on the potential for social capital by not participating in class. Even though there is still capital to be salvaged in these instances both the student reading and the student who did not read still need each other to reach the maximum potential for social capital gains in the classroom.

### **Good Student/Bad Student**

What does it mean to be a student? Students are characterized as people who are in school. In that same regard, professors are people who teach college students. However, there are more to roles than their very loose and universal descriptions. There are students and professors, but there is also a way in which each individual person characterizes the forms of students and professors. The characterization and perception of both student and professor are dependent on performances. According to Erving Goffman, performance is used “to refer to all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observer” (Goffman 22). Goffman defines the setting of performance as a “front” and the established front for professors and students to perform their roles is in the classroom. So now we have our roles, student and professor, and the “front” which is whatever classroom, lecture hall, computer-lab, or any space your class is held in. What about the actual performance itself? It is one thing to say you are a student or say you are a professor, but it is another to actually perform the role. When we figuratively open the curtain on the classroom experience, the roles always stay the same, but the performances will differ.

We often put students into the categories of good students and bad students. These categories need to be labeled as ideal types. Goddard explains Weber's ideal types saying, "the multiplicity of ideal types does not allow us to grasp the experience, but it does permit us to make a clear analysis of it from the point of view which we take toward it" (Goddard 15). These ideal types are ideal types for the fact that they may only exist under perfect circumstances, but it is critical that these types are established for the sake of clarity. When I picture a good student off the top of my head, I see someone who comes to class, actively participates and demonstrates knowledge of the material that they have learned to the best of their abilities. However, my personal definition of a good student is not going to align with every single person's individual interpretation of a good student. The same goes for the bad student label. Some people may think a bad student is simply someone who does not complete readings, does not participate, and cannot demonstrate overall knowledge of the course. However, when I think of a bad student I think of someone who does not leave space for other people to learn and does not contribute effectively. There are different personal definitions of both good and bad students for different people, so for this paper "good student" and "bad student" refer to students who do the reading and consistently participate in class and those who do not.

"Good student" and "bad student" are just labels for how individuals play their student role. These labels are based off of the performance of that student role. The professor and other students in a classroom have their own roles, but they are observers as well. Everyone in the classroom is part of this front that is performing for each other every time the class occurs. This performance may even exist outside the class in interactions with actors or students from the class, but for now we will just focus on the relationships occurring inside the classroom.

Essentially, there are no “good students” or “bad students”, but only our perceptions of them within the constraints of this society.

If a student in the classroom demonstrates they are an active part of the course by performing as a “good student,” then we take their performance at face value; If we think a student is performing well because we have observed them participate and demonstrate knowledge, the rest of the class is going to assume they are being a “good student”. If a student is performing as a bad student and does not actively demonstrate their part in the classroom, the class will perceive that performance. Observing performance often gets conflated with what is actually true. Is every perceived “good student” or perceived “bad student” defined accurately by these labels? No, because we have already discussed that deviations almost always occur outside of the ideal types. Just because someone appears to be a “good student” does not necessarily mean they are one. An example of this would be a student who is outspoken during class and is able to infer answers based on discussion but might not actually be completing the reading. If we as observers know that this student is not doing the reading, we may be more inclined to label this student a bad student. The performance of the student in question conflicts with what we thought we could assume was good and bad. The performance in itself is good, the student appears to be good. We are only taking the performance into account, so the “bad student” traits are overshadowed by “good student” performance.

Perceived “bad students” are similar to perceived “good students” in the sense that the key to the label is performance. If you do all the reading and know all the material, but you never demonstrate that knowledge to your peers, you risk the label of “bad student” because of your role performance. This example of a secretly “good student” perceived as a “bad student” should make us think about how classrooms are structured. If a “good student” cannot participate or will

not for whatever reason participate in class discussion, the class is losing out on one more student who actually knows what they are doing. Relying on performance as an indicator becomes tricky in the circumstance of a “good student” perceived as a “bad student” as well as “bad student” perceived as a “good student”. Performance does not equal truth, but simply an actor acting in whatever assigned role they are in.

Professors are actors too. Although their position is different from that of a student, they have to perform their role just like anyone else in the classroom. Professors have the expectation to teach students. If professors do not perform, students cannot perform. If students cannot perform, the professor has to try to force performance to the best of their abilities or they cannot fulfill their role as a professor. Like students there are labels such as good and bad for everyone including professors. However, because there is this achieved status of being a college professor that trumps the status of being a college student, I do not believe that the categories of “good professor” or “bad professor” are necessary here. When you tell people your career the response usually isn’t “Well are you any good at it?”, but for students this question is an expectation. “Are you a good student?” is a question that is asked time and time again. For this reason I think we need to look at the professor’s role as a whole instead of looking at it through the lenses of the ideal type.

### **Taught to Learn**

The college classroom and the high school classrooms are not the only places students have the potential to gain social capital. Although public schooling is one place where students are taught to learn, it is not the first place. Before students reach school going age they have learned so many things from living in the world around them. Parents, siblings, extended family

members, family friends and anyone else that a five-year-old has interacted with has provided them with the concept of cultural capital. Cultural capital is a form of human capital that you gain from the relationships around you. In your formative years your cultural capital is shaped by your family, the values they have, and the things they want you to believe in. However, early schooling is where you are finally learning to perform your role as a student. Do your work, clean up your messes, and play well with others. Socialization as a student begins in the classroom, but relationships with this socialization also take part in the student's home outside of the student role.

Every individual has a different relationship with education. These relationships are based on many factors that revolve around learning during your formative years. I remember as a kid my parents sitting down with me to help me with what they could, and always making sure my homework was done. Many people share this experience, but not everyone does. The way that we are taught to learn and the age at which we are taught to learn are vital to the way we receive knowledge and perform in the classroom for our entire academic careers.

Think about the education you received as a child. What was the attitude surrounding completing homework when you were eight years old? Did your parents make you get it done and help you when they could? Did your parents assume you would do it and had a more casual attitude towards completing homework assignments? What about the less assumed perspective: Did your parents have to prioritize certain responsibilities, like working, over making sure your homework was done? Did you even have parents or an adult taking care of you, or even a stable enough living situation at eight years old to develop these study habits at a formative age? Not every school age child is living the same life and not everyone is taught to learn in the same way.

In one study they found a positive correlation between parents scoring highly on the parent-child interaction index and children performing better in Reading, Mathematics, and Spelling (Dhingra & Manhas). Essentially, having a parent who is more involved in their students' schooling is going to benefit the student academically. Here we see a clear disadvantage to students that do not have an active family support system.

Another topic discussed in the study was the Teacher Attitude rating scale. They noted finding a positive correlation between teachers having a good attitude and outlook on teaching, and students doing well in their classes (Dhingra & Manhas). If the people around you, for example your parents or your teachers themselves, are constantly undermining the education system, how is a student supposed to see the benefit of the schooling? If you have gone through the school system being taught by teachers and adults in your life that schooling does not matter that much, that attitude is going to affect not only college performance, but college enrollment of students who have had this experience.

Another study shows that “the findings indicate that social capital, as measured by family interaction and help with homework, contributes significantly to predicting positive student outcomes in terms of grades” (Anderson). This study also supports the idea that if students are benefitting from parent interaction and positive attitudes about schooling, then the students who do not have this privilege are going to be at a disadvantage before higher education and a disadvantage in higher education.

The attitudes of students and parents surrounding education are pivotal to how students are taught to learn, but the way students are taught to act in a classroom setting can also shape their view of education. Pupil control ideology is a term used mostly by student-teachers to explain how they are controlling a classroom (Taylor). Pupil control ideology exists on a sliding



scale between custodial and humanitarian. Custodial pupil control ideology focuses on subordination of students and total classroom control. Humanitarian pupil control ideology is a more student-centered approach that is less about subordination and more about making the classroom more humanitarian in nature while still existing as a pupil control ideology. The student-teacher or simply just the practicing teacher or professor, are performing on this sliding scale from custodial pupil control ideology to humanitarian pupil control ideology. If you are taught in a more custodial manner, education might be something that you associate with negative feelings. As is previously noted custodial pupil control ideology and actions like displaying blame rituals<sup>3</sup>, are used to keep students subordinate to the teacher's authority. In this teaching example, the goal here still might be education for all students, but the values have been blurred to the point that the goal shining through is total control for the teacher.

In one study we see an exploration into the classrooms of student-teachers (Taylor). Here, the student-teachers learn their teacher role and step into their position of power. After conducting research in the one classroom they conclude that "Undoubtedly, the teacher has much power in the classroom by virtue of the authority vested in his role as teacher, while the student has little if any. Student teachers realize the need to be in control of their classes as they attempt to fulfill the expectations of the teacher role held by others" (Taylor 15). Essentially, these student-teachers needed to display forms of control in the classroom, but just having the teacher title gives you a lot of power even before relationships are formed.

Instead of looking at custodial pupil control ideology in the sense that professors are displaying it, let's assume that students have all experienced custodial pupil control ideology in one way or another. Even if students did not typically learn in a custodial environment, people

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<sup>3</sup> Blame rituals are any tactic used to shame and blame individuals as an attempt to regain power in a situation (to be defined further in the section "Students and Professors").

have experienced a teacher or professor who is, for lack of a better word, a hard ass. However, the likelihood of experiencing more custodial pupil control ideology in the classroom can depend largely upon the student's geographical location. According to a study, "Student teachers in the inner-city, ghetto schools were more custodial in their attitudes before student teaching than the student teachers of the white, middle-class schools were both before and after their student teaching experience" (Campbell & Williamson 1). Here we see that there is bias that exists inside student-teachers before they even enter the classroom. The study continues, "Those who are to student teach in the inner-city, ghetto school enter that setting equipped with attitudes that reflect a more dehumanizing kind of environment for the students in the inner-city ghetto schools" (Campbell, Williamson 1). Custodial pupil control ideology focuses largely on the judgement of students. According to Wayne K. Hoy, "Students are stereotyped in terms of their appearance, behavior, and parents' social status. Teachers do not attempt to understand student misbehavior; in fact, they view misbehavior as bad and believe that irresponsible and undisciplined persons should be controlled through punitive sanctions"(Hoy 425). If the student-teachers are fulfilling roles with preconceived notions and biases of inner-city schooling, the teacher is going to act accordingly. If there is no trust in the classroom because the teacher does not trust the students because of bias, and the students do not trust the teacher because of the constant subordination, trust cannot form to begin creating social capital in the classroom.

### **Racism in the Classroom**

Racism in the classroom is an extremely important concept to look at. In our racist system, there are barriers facing Black and Brown students that do not affect white students. Black and Brown students face adversity and discrimination in their daily lives, both inside and

outside the classroom. In one study, colleges take a look at their numbers of Black men in the classrooms of predominantly white colleges (PWIs). According to the study “Black men are outnumbered two-to-one by Black women” (Schmidt 5). The study says that “The overall college performance of black men is so poor that some college officials and advocates for black students are reluctant to even talk about the problem, for fear that doing so will further stigmatize black men and make things even worse”, and the City College of New York (CUNY) has worked to promote the “Black Male Initiative” of 2004.<sup>4</sup> However, this initiative was criticized and,

“the New York Civil Rights Coalition, an organization that champions racial integration and opposes programs it views as racially separatist, filed a complaint with the U.S. Education Department's Office for Civil Rights, claiming that CUNY violates federal civil-rights law by singling out black males for special treatment...Michael Meyers, the coalition's executive director, argues that such programs are paternalistic and ‘stigmatize and stereotype’ all black males as underachievers.” (Schmidt 7).

In this study we see colleges and universities trying to shift the focus from them onto Black men themselves. Predominantly white institutions (PWIs) do not want potential enrollees thinking that they are responsible for the low success rates in colleges for Black men, so they create initiatives such as the Black Male Initiative so that the university can get credit for having a program for Black males. With these programs in place it appears they must be solving the issues that Black men are having. However, we cannot simply look at a student and assume they are not achieving academically because they are Black or more specifically Black men. In the classroom it is necessary to separate assumptions and bias from actual lived experiences. Statistically, Black men are succeeding at incredibly low rates at predominantly white institutions, but instead of asking why, society once again asks who. Instead of recognizing the

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<sup>4</sup> Black Male Initiative is: a University-wide student development initiative with more than 30 projects focused on increasing matriculation, retention and graduation rates of underrepresented students, particularly men of color (CUNY 2010).

issue as a combination of social, economic, and cultural influences, there is now a continued stereotype that the Black man is uneducated, referring to all Black men. This notion is detrimental to society at large as well as in the smaller-scaled relationships in the classroom. The roles of professor and student are now subjected to the roles of professor, student, and the Black student or students. In fact Michael Myers went on to state that “It would be better, he says, for CUNY to directly tackle underlying educational problems, such as those associated with poverty or low-quality public schools, rather than associate such problems with an entire segment of the student population” (Schmidt 7). Here Myers brings systemic issues to the forefront, and the blame finally shifts off of Black male students.

Schmidt’s study goes on to describe the state of Vermont “where the black population is small and widely distributed...black children tend to graduate from high school at about the same rates as white children do. The biggest race-linked gaps in achievement, he says, are in states with large black populations concentrated in schools with inadequate resources, poor teachers, and low expectations for their students” (Schmidt 8). Black men do not need help performing *because they are Black*. There needs to be a structural change in our society that actually gives equal access to equal education and equal encouragement for all types of students. Institutions cannot continue to use band-aid solutions like initiatives for Black classroom involvement when it is clear that these institutions are failing Black men just as is noted in primary and secondary education. If you come through a school district that had largely custodial approaches, with teachers that did not care about you, and a school that is falling apart around you because of lack of funding, is it likely that you will correlate school and good feelings? Or is it possible that each step of the way the educational system is letting certain students down and then blaming these people for not caring about their education enough.

One study acknowledges that “Harper says his research on black men faring well in college has found that ‘there is no one pathway to success.’ But ‘nothing is more important than the consistent articulation of high expectations from parents’” (Schmidt 9). This data compliments that of Dhingra & Manhas that suggests parent-student interaction is important for students' success.

Although there is a two to one ratio of Black women to Black men in the classroom, Black women are still underrepresented. One journal states, “Black women were underrepresented at predominantly white universities (PWIs), especially among high-achievers (Coleman & Kotinek, 2010)” (Davis 5). Not only are these Black women underrepresented, they also face discrimination in these institutional settings. In this study a student named Asia gives her experiences which “addressed a number of issues that required additional attention in higher education research, including cultural insensitivity in the classroom, a lack of community among students of color, and the challenges of teaching and learning across color lines” (Davis 2). The end result for students like Asia are often “isolation, alienation, and negative interactions with faculty and peers, [that] were commonly associated with the experiences of students that leave college (Tinto, 1975; Strayhorn, 2009)” (Davis 8). Black women and black men *are* achieving in the college classroom, yet the system is so inherently white supremacist in nature it discourages growth. It also reinforces the idea of equal opportunity. Equal opportunity is one thing, but equal outcomes are entirely different. Just because a student gets into college does not necessarily mean that the outcome for everyone will be graduating with a degree. High achieving Black women are dismissed by peers and professors, and they are also at a disadvantage systemically. Colleges and universities are still scratching their heads to figure out why Black women are so

underrepresented but are reluctant to acknowledge the systemic factors as well as the factors that are present in the classroom experience: racism and structural inequalities.

Performance is only as strong as perception, and if someone is biased against you for whatever reason they are going to perceive you differently. I want to jump back to the sliding scale of “good student” and “bad student”. These ideal types of labels are incredibly dangerous for the fact that they give anyone the power to label a student whatever they want. The problem is that the labels “good student” and “bad student” are not exempt from bias and discrimination. In fact, in a more custodial approach to teaching we see that “students are stereotyped in terms of their appearance, behavior, and parents’ social status” (Hoy). Even professors who have an incredibly humanitarian approach to teaching may still find themselves marginalizing students and committing microaggressions that they do not even realize. A professor might think that the only “good student” out there would be a straight, white, cisgender, able-bodied, economically advantaged, man who is also a student. It is also deeper than just professors or other students having implicit or explicit biases against students. If the education system under capitalism is knowingly or unknowingly targeting poor, urban, Black communities, there are going to be discrepancies in education overall. However, we cannot let these racist atrocities continue to perpetuate racist stereotypes that lead to further microaggressions inside and outside the classroom.

Racism and performance in the classroom are not topics that individuals like to discuss. However, we must acknowledge the realities for Black students enrolled at PWIs. If some Black students are struggling to perform, society must address the issue of PWI on Black students. In one study they find that “Success in a college is not only a matter of intellectual ability. It is also a matter of achieving a sense of membership, belongingness, or integration within a college’s

academic and social communities (Boyer, 1984)” (Kraft 424). If Black students are struggling to perform at PWIs even when they are high-achievers, then colleges and college classrooms are failing these students. How can you be expected to build trust to gain social capital when your identity, your credentials, and your social standing are being undermined because you are being viewed through the lenses of a racist education system that disproportionately affects Black students?

Because of the racist structure of society and ultimately our education system, Black and Brown students are at a constant disadvantage when it comes to trying to gain social capital in the classroom. You cannot create an environment of trust if the student who needs to form this trust is constantly being discriminated against. Whether it be professors or other students in the class being overtly racist or constantly reinforcing microaggressions, Black and Brown students are experiencing this betrayal over and over again to the point that trusting a majority white class barely becomes an option.

### **Capitalism in the Classroom**

The education system is a system that co-exists alongside capitalism. Although capitalism is an economic structure, the capitalist model shapes every aspect of our society. Racism in the classroom and the differing access to education are direct results of capitalism. Capitalism is both an economic structure as well as a culture in and of itself. Not only does our society operate under capitalism, it is shaped by capitalism. According to Max Weber capitalism “simply exists, to each person, as a factually unalterable casing in which [they] may live. To the extent that people are interwoven into the context of capitalism’s market forces, the norms of its economic action are forced onto them” (Weber 77). Under capitalism you are expected to act in a certain

way economically to protect your own self-interests and be the best capitalist possible. If businesses cannot compete with rival businesses, they cannot remain successful for very long.

Capitalism at its roots traces back to the Protestants. The Protestants believe that whether or not you were going to heaven was predetermined before your birth. Working hard and showing people how ready and willing you are was a good indicator that you were going to heaven, so this was the ideal that people strived for. Work hard, self-deney, and reap the benefits of heaven after a life well served under the Lord. Although the Protestant Work Ethic is not an economic structure, it is a guideline for capitalistic societies (Weber).

In a college classroom there is a focus on gaining both social and human capital, but the ultimate goal is to graduate college in order to gain physical capital. In classrooms where there is a power imbalance between student and professor, as well as student and student, these capitalist overtones begin to shine through. Instead of acknowledging a mutual classroom dependence to gain knowledge as social capital, it becomes every student for themselves. The “good students”, the “bad students”, and the professor are forced to fend for themselves. An example of these capitalist tendencies is embodied in the example of a “good student” who is perceived as a “bad student” because they make themselves the sole focus of the class. The student is only worried about their own grade and their own knowledge because they have been reduced to accepting this mentality because of either the lack of participation from their peers or the fact that they harbor the spirit of capitalism subconsciously and cannot help but force themselves ahead of others. If the student will not help themselves then how can they expect me, a good student to help them? It makes sense that in a dysfunctional classroom some students are going to try to salvage the experience to make sure they gain some sort of capital.



The “bad students” and perceived “bad students” become the lost causes of society. The “good students” must have simply worked hard to get ahead, but the “bad students” are perceived as simply apathetic to assignments. “Bad student” is not synonymous with the label “bad person”, however the label of bad student works similarly to the label “bad capitalist”. Why doesn’t the student just work harder, or study harder, or just be better to be a good student? The questions placed in the context of a good capitalist asking a bad capitalist, would simply translate to asking why the bad capitalist cannot just stop being poor and help themselves.

Capitalism as an economic system as well as the culture of capitalism assume that every individual in this society starts on equal footing. Everyone who is born under capitalism has the same opportunities as the next person, but it is up to the individual to be a good capitalist for themselves. The assumption that everyone is starting from the same point when they get to college aligns with this same idea. Not everyone has the same experiences, the same privileges, the same kind of education, when entering into a college classroom. The differences in how students are raised, how they are taught to view education and their social location are going to have an effect on how students are going to perform in the classroom. These differences are not the result of something the individual has done, but the gross reality of larger systemic issues. If your social location has been strategically targeted and undermined by capitalism, the classroom modeled after capitalism is going to have these same shortcomings when it comes to certain students' ability to learn and overall access to society's resources. Without the certain privileges in capitalism you cannot get ahead, and without these same privileges in the classroom the ability to gain social capital is also in jeopardy.

## Students and Professors

It is important that students and professors are on the same page in the pursuit of social capital in the classroom. Although professors have an achieved status, it is still possible to reach a certain equilibrium of power between professor and students. Emerson's equation  $P_{ab}=D_{ba}$  and  $P_{ba}=D_{ab}$ <sup>5</sup> can be applied to professors and students regardless of the status gap. Let's say that students are individual A and the professor is individual B. When students are in the classroom with the professor, there is no way for the student to have the same level of power solely because of the professor's title. However, if the professor is providing human capital to the student and gaining social capital at the same rate that the student is gaining both human capital and building social capital, this equilibrium can be reached. It is the truest form of equilibrium that students and professors can share because of their differences. As soon as the professor has to modify their performance to attempt to keep the equation in line, there is already a power imbalance strong enough to threaten the stability of the whole course. An example of this modification might be just accepting the fact that the students are not reading and not attempting to enforce it or try to rebalance the classroom. In this scenario the students have more power than the professor in the sense that the professor has stopped expecting the student roles to be fulfilled.

We also have to note that both the professor and student are dependent on one another. The professor needs to teach and the students need to learn. They need each other to successfully earn knowledge as human capital and also to gain social capital. Emerson's equation works because even though the professor is ultimately in charge, the professor still depends on the students. For this reason  $p_{ba}=d_{ab}$  and  $p_{ab}=d_{ba}$  can be applied to the student and the professor.

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<sup>5</sup> "The power of A over B is equal to, and based upon A. Recognizing the reciprocity of social relations, we can represent a power(P)-dependence (D) relation as a pair of equations (Emerson 33)

There will always be a difference in the roles of professor and student. Of course this difference is necessary to educate these students for the future. The problem is that the professor potentially has so much power that the status of being a professor in itself may be enough to discourage active performance in a classroom. According to Moch and Huff “potential position power can be translated into actual power through the use of language and ritual” (Moch & Huff 2). There are numerous ways for professors to demonstrate the power in their role. The professor is merely an actor just as any student, but with increased power comes increased responsibility for success.

When a professor is attempting to regain power in the classroom they may use something known as a blame ritual. To clarify, think about the last time you did something wrong in class, or at work, or even at home with your family. If you were reprimanded, yelled at, or punished in some way, you experienced a blame ritual. Now, think about a classroom in which you have experienced a blame ritual. I was once enrolled in a course where if we were more than two minutes late for class, the professor made the student in question sing a song for the amount of time they were late. Even though this was a strange form of punishment, it isolated a student from the rest of the class to make an example of them. Here the professor was displaying their power to remind the students that they are subordinate to the professor and they will be punished if they do not arrive on time. Other professors might employ the use of blame theory in differing ways, like raising their voice or aggressively showing their frustration with the group or speaking to someone in a specific tone to put that individual down. Regardless, all of these examples are forms of blame theory. Blame rituals do not bode well for forming trust, which is essential in the pursuit for social capital, but it does effectively promote subordination.

Blame rituals and a more custodial approach to teaching do not appear to have the development of social and human capital as outcomes in their formulas, whereas a humanitarian social control theory leaves more room for this potential. Both blame rituals and custodial approaches focus solely on subordination. If all the students are listening, if all the students are under control, they cannot undermine the power of the professor or any institution for that matter. A “this is how it’s going to go”, take it or leave it attitude as opposed to a more humanitarian and open approach only reinforces this authoritarian approach. Although these terms are often used when describing student-teachers who are starting out their careers, they appear to apply throughout one's entire teaching career regardless of the level. If there is too much of a barrier between students and the professor, there is no room left for trust. Although the students know they need the professor to teach them the material, the professor has to show the student or students that they can provide them with human capital as well as social capital inside and outside the classroom. M.P. Follett and Coleman both discuss the importance of building trust before a relationship can form (Follett; James Coleman). The professor and students must form a relationship of trust to achieve a certain sense of community in the classroom. If one does not trust the other, the power imbalance widens and the class suffers. Because of the professor’s status, the professor will have to ensure that they are someone the student or students can trust as they have a lot of the classroom’s power.

The control that comes out of custodial pupil control ideology and blame theory is largely fear based. If the teacher has power, the students may fear the consequences of speaking out against them or advocating for themselves. The result is a dysfunctional classroom in which students are not able to perform their student roles without fear of the professor’s subsequent performance. However, if the teacher or professor continues to abuse their power, the students

are forced to act. In one study the findings state that “students react passively to power abuse due to fear of possible consequences, aggressively when a teacher’s power is regarded as excessively unfair, or positively when relations of trust and acceptance have been established between the teacher and the student” (Koutrouba 185). There is only so far the professor can take their power before the students are forced to react, but there is leeway for the professor before fear-based tactics are finally challenged in the classroom.

The professor has a certain duty to help create a trustworthy environment in the classroom. Can we trust the professor to assign relevant materials and consistently keep the class engaged and on track? If the professor is not assigning relevant materials and is not promoting discussion, the class may feel as if completing assignments is a waste of time. However, the professor is only going to know their course is relevant by gauging the opinions of the students in class. If the professor does not know what is happening in the class, the group as a whole may revert to a classroom in which the students are not learning and the professor is unable to teach. The reason for the professor not knowing what a class is feeling could relate to the professor’s inability to provide necessary social interaction to form social capital. If the professor is not assigning relevant materials and is not promoting discussion, the class may feel as if completing assignments is a waste of time. If there is no value in the class and no social capital to be gained in the minds of the students, then there is no real incentive to do anything for the course.

If the professor has lost so much power that the class is unable to perform, the professor may feel that it is their only option to employ blame rituals and custodial tendencies in an effort to restore balance of some kind. The professor is an actor and an observer in the classroom. Without the professor the class would not run. The perspective of the professor is important to note because often this one individual professor is responsible for keeping the power balance

intact between themselves and ten, twenty, thirty plus students. Choosing to be a professor means choosing to take on this responsibility, but just because it is an expectation of the role does not necessarily mean the structure of our education is reflecting what will enhance the best performance outcomes for both professor and student.

There may be a dangerous assumption surrounding humanitarian pupil control ideology that there is a certain loss of power forfeited by the professor to the students in order to mimic true equality in the classroom. However, this surrendering of power is more so operating in the realm of mutual classroom dependence than it is actually giving up any power; Here we are working to create an equilibrium balancing the equation  $p_{ab}=d_{ba}$  and  $p_{ba}=d_{ab}$ . The professor is A and the student is B, and even with the differences in status there is mutual classroom dependence that demands what at least appears as equal power between A and B. The professor performs their role but they are still individuals who are able to be appealed to. Professors are not robots, they are multi-rolled actors like anyone else. In a study students said that they did not feel as if they had much power over professors but could use necessary behavior alteration techniques (BATs) to “gain compliance from them” (Golish & Olson 293). Behavioral alteration techniques include begging for an extension on an assignment, trying to remind the professor of their own youth to push a test back a class, or even praising the professor to win them over somehow (Golish & Olson). An example of a displayed BAT of honest sincerity would be a student saying “To be totally honest, I was sick and didn’t have enough time to study. I didn’t have enough time to complete the assignment. I wish I had an excuse, but I just didn’t get it finished” (Golish & Olson 297). Their study also noticed a positive relationship with students’ perceptions of power and the teacher’s power. Any way a student changes their main performance in order to gain social capital or even human capital in the classroom would constitute as a BAT. The capital in

this example might be social capital earned if the BAT was a student advocating on behalf of the class, asking for an extension on an assignment or asking to have a test pushed back. This advocacy for the student or students in question may result in the student advocate being labeled as a “bad student” by the professor, but a “good students” by the rest of the class who also benefited from the student or students in question employing a Group Persuasion BAT (Golish & Olson).

Pro-social BATs and the reception of them by professors seems to soften the relationship between professor and student. Pro-social BATs include things like honest sincerity, flattery, private persuasion, group persuasion, performance, and utilitarian justice<sup>6</sup>. These categories were the ones in which students reasoned with professors and treated them respectfully. Pro-social BATs work better than anti-social BATs when gaining compliance from the professor.

Pro-social BATs go hand-in-hand with the concept of teacher immediacy. Immediacy itself refers to “communication behaviors that reduce the psychological and physical distance between people...Approach or immediate behaviors indicate greater ‘liking’”(Golish, Olson 299). If a professor performs in a way in which they make it clear that they care about students and student perspectives and opinions, there is the ability for social capital to form out of this mutual bond between professor and student. In fact, “Researchers have found that students may feel less powerful with a teacher who uses coercive power because of a fear of being reprimanded and or realizing that their opinion has little impact on teachers’ decisions” (Golish, Olson 298). When a professor has total rule over a college classroom or any classroom for that matter, the impacts on the class are apparent. If a student as an observer knows that a professor does not like them and does not value their opinion, the performance of the student is going to be affected. Because of

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<sup>6</sup> Golish and Olson 297; Note below Table 1

this student's altered performance, the rest of the students as well as the professor are at risk of having their performances altered because the class is so imbalanced. How are you supposed to receive social capital from someone who does not like you? You could still receive human capital if you happened to still be learning in the course but without the connection and trust there is no social capital to be earned between student and professor.

Students and professors are more than just students and professors. They are people with lived experiences and they definitely wear more than one hat when it comes to the roles they have to play. Just because you are a professor or a student doesn't mean that you might not also be a sibling, a parent, a friend, a co-worker, a teammate, a club president. Roles come in all forms in every aspect of life and we are expected to play our parts accordingly. However, when there are this many roles in life to play, role strain as well as role conflict, is bound to take its toll. That being said, when does a student get to stop being a student? In this instance I do not mean when does this student *literally* stop being a student. We know that a student is anyone studying at school and they are no longer a student whenever they graduate. When you are actively in school as a student, when do you get to pause that role and play the new role of line cook or library staff? A football player or club president? The thing about being a student is that it is an assumed full-time role. However, for a majority the privilege of being just a student is one that many do not have. Students are students until they graduate and find a new role to perform, but they are seldom acknowledged for the multiple roles they perform while performing under the master role of student.

Role conflict is often overlooked when it comes to talking about students. Differences in student experiences result in different privileges amongst students. An example would be that students that are not economically privileged often have to work their way through college. For



many choosing not to work is not an option, because without an income they might not be able to afford to continue as a student at an institution. In fact, “About 40 percent of undergraduates and 76 percent of graduate students work at least 30 hours a week. About 25 percent of all working learners are simultaneously employed full-time and enrolled in college full-time” (Carnavale, Smith, Melton, & Price 11). If almost half of students in the United States are working almost full-time there is going to be a certain amount of role strain affecting the performances of these students. In fact, we might want to think critically about how the label “student” itself has become synonymous with the term “student-worker”.

According to one study they were able to use empirical data to support the hypothesis that there is a negative relationship between working more than 20 hours a week and having a GPA under 3.0 (Miller). If 40 percent of college students are working at least 30 hours a week, that means there is a potential that these 40 percent of students are working to maintain a B average. Students who are working more than 20 hours a week are at a disadvantage academically because the time they should be spending on schoolwork is likely to conflict with their work schedule. Students who do not have to work while in college or who work less than 20 hours a week have an advantage here. These students have more time to devote to their student roles. Is it guaranteed that students who are not working are putting that energy into completing class assignments? Absolutely not, but there is more of a potential for these students who have an advantage economically to experience less role strain. If you are at work and cannot complete an assignment or a reading there is nothing you can do. One of the upsides to working through college are fine-tuning time management skills, but costs of working while in school are that you might not be able to do it all. Role conflict with the student role will ultimately lead to

role strain for the student. There has to be a certain level of acceptance for the role of student worker which may mean that the student role has to come second.

While some students have to balance necessary roles like being a student with being a worker, or being a student while being a parent, other students are balancing roles that they choose to have. For instance, playing on a sports team that does not contribute to your financial aid award with your institution. Being part of a club or an organization. Volunteering or completing an internship. Even though these are all examples of ways to gain both human and social capital, they are not necessary to the survival of the student themselves in the way that working a paying job is. The justification for the underperformance of students who do not necessarily need to play other roles but do is the same as those who have to work. Although they are different circumstances and student workers are essentially forced to work and learn, the role conflict is still present and something to consider.

All forms of capital are valued, but physical capital is what keeps you alive under our capitalist society. For some, juggling the extracurricular activities of college is their first experience in time management. Performing as a student means that time management must be a priority, but as the saying goes, there are only so many hours in a day. Role strain and role conflict are going to happen when you are a student regardless of whether the conflict is critical to your survival or critical to your experience. Every student that misses an opportunity in another role because of their student role is still missing out. The question is whether or not they value the other roles more than their student role. If the role is something inescapable, like the student-worker role, how can students be expected to perform only as students? If the issue is that students simply value other roles more than their student role, student performance also suffers.

People are always going to hold different values from one another. The classroom is no exception to a place where individuals have differing priorities. People prioritize the things that are the most important to them, reflecting the values that they hold. In the classroom one of the assumed values may be formal education. If everyone is enrolled in college, everyone must be there to learn. However, not every student is the exact same. No student fits the ideal type of “good student” or “bad student”, so we cannot just say that the “good student” values education and the “bad student” does not value education. There are differing values that come across in the classroom performances. The perception of student performance by other students and the professor are inevitable. If a student does not value a class and does not see the value in completing class assignments, this attitude is going to come off in a student’s performance. However, we can only assume students’ values based on their observed classroom performances. Both the professor and the other students are observers of this student. As I have noted perception is not truth, but at times it is our truth. If we are in the classroom and people perform their student roles according to what they value, the labels they receive may reflect that.

Students value all sorts of things: family, financial security, social interaction, organized sports, education, you name it. The differences in these values may end up affecting the way a student performs in class. If you were up late at a practice and then up early for a team lift, by the time you get to class your performance is already suffering. If you decided to go to the movies with some friends instead of reading for class, your performance is going to be affected. If you have to care for a family member, but you do your best to stay up late to complete the reading, the classroom performance is still going to be affected. Being a student and performing as a student are different tasks. Anyone in school is a student, but not everyone is able to solely

perform as a student. If a student is unable to perform, or sees no reason to perform, there may be a conflict in values of the student.

The differences between values of professors and students are present as well. Professors and students are often at completely different points in their lives. Students need to graduate college to go on to careers that require college degrees. Professors are teaching students for a living. Being a professor is a career. Being a student is a pathway to a potential career. Professors experience role conflict and role strain, and professors were also once students themselves. Where does the separation from student to careered individual begin? The answer may lie in the position of the professor itself. Professors are taught to be professors through years of schooling and field experience, whereas students are taught to be students during early education. As Goffman puts it,

“reinforcing these ideal impressions there is a kind of ‘rhetoric training’, whereby labor unions, universities...require practitioners to absorb a mystical range and period of training, in part to maintain a monopoly, but in part to foster the impression that the licensed practitioner is someone who has been reconstituted by his learning experience and is now set apart from other men” (Goffman 46).

The role of being a professor is an achieved status, whereas in the United States everyone is required by law to be a student until they have legal permission to drop out of high school. However, college students do have more of an achieved status than that of a high schooler completing the required courses to graduate. As I have already addressed, there is an application process for most colleges, including private 4-year colleges, that require you to prove all of the human capital you possess. Regardless, professors already have their careers and are working to prepare students for their own careers. This necessary gap in knowledge leads to a gap in power and in status between the roles of student and professor.

Students need to gain human capital in college to pursue careers in fields that require a college degree. If they do not read for class it is likely they will have gaps in knowledge that might affect their pursuit of physical capital for the future, but is that true? In one study the data suggests that “Only 24.8% of students indicated they read the assigned materials before coming to class” (Burchfield & Sappington 5). It appears unlikely future employers will ever know if you really did all the reading in pursuit of your undergraduate degree. Therefore you will not know the benefit of reading or not reading for a course until future capital does or does not present itself somewhere down the line. If such a small margin of students are reading for class then it is clear that there is a gap between the value of gaining knowledge and the actual necessity of reading for class. If students can get pushed through college the way some students are simply pushed through primary and secondary schooling, then what is stopping students from coasting through? Although students cannot gain social capital from the classroom in this way, the cost and benefits are neutral in a sense because they cancel each other out. The student is not gaining knowledge, but they also are not losing valuable time reading for a class when no one else does anyway.

The college classroom is a place for all sorts of performances to occur to result in social capital. The roles of professor and student are always there, but everyone plays their part differently. Professors and students have relationships, students and students have relationships, and with these relationships both professor and student can gain human capital and social capital if the class runs successfully. Completing class assignments and contributing to the flow of discussion are incredibly important aspects of performing as a student at a college or university. However, participating in the college classroom is more difficult than one might expect. If you have not been prepared for college, or if life has not prepared you for education, there is going to

be a huge gap in both privilege and the amount of present social capital gained between professors and peers. A student should not be labeled a “bad student” because they have not had the same opportunities to develop a good relationship with education as their peers have. On the flip side, a “good student” or students should not be able to take control of an entire course even if both this student and the professor feel as if it is necessary. With society structured around capitalism in the economic sense of the word, the cultural effects are felt in everyday life. Capitalism is ultimately responsible for the state of the education system as well as the state of general inequities in our country. Society is only worried about churning out students to make a good capitalist and does not consider the consequences of unequal opportunities to social capital in regards to education. Until the day that all students have equal access to education as well as access to a family support system and a supportive education system, professors must adapt the classroom experience to benefit the whole as much as possible.

## **Conclusion**

When it comes to the actual question: Why don't students read for class?, professors and students alike know that the answer to the question is not so simple. What the answer appears to come down to is a mix of differential values and student performance differences due to personal education experiences at home and in school during both primary and secondary schooling. Essentially, your education follows you from the time you start learning to the time that you stop and habits of your schooling are going to form accordingly. Although students not completing reading in the classroom is a serious problem, it stems from a much larger problem in our white-supremacist, sexist, capitalist society that results in unequal opportunities for all different kinds of students. The classroom is a space to work on relationships and gain social capital in an

academic setting. Through work to maintain power imbalances between both professor and student, and student and student, performance in the classroom as the ideal type class would lead to everyone being perceived as a “good student” giving the overall course the label of “good course.” This *ideal* ideal type of classroom is unlikely to maintain because of the outside influences and role conflicts that conflate with the roles of professor and student. With capitalist culture embedded into most individuals in our society, and an unequal and broken education system, it is unlikely that students are going to complete more reading any time soon. We cannot expect professors to fix all of these issues inside the classroom, however, it is important that professors strive to create a learning environment in which social capital has the ability to flow. We also cannot expect more from students if there is not major systemic change to fund schools with depleted resources, train student-teachers in more humanitarian approaches to teaching regardless of location, and support communities in their efforts towards education and teaching children to want to learn. Without serious reform some students will continue to remain at a disadvantage, and classrooms everywhere will continue to feel these effects.

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