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Out with the Old, In with the New? Habitus and Social Mobility at Selective Colleges

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What is This?



Out with the Old, In with the **New? Habitus and Social Mobility at Selective Colleges**

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Abstract

Sociologists have long recognized that cultural differences help explain the perpetuation of inequality by invisibly limiting access to elite cultural norms. However, there has been little investigation of the ways students reconcile shifts in habitus gained in educational settings with existing, nonelite habitus. The authors use both qualitative and quantitative data to examine the ways students navigate what Bourdieu called a "cleft habitus." In particular, the authors examine how students of low socioeconomic status experience contacts with their families and hometown friends, arguing that these moments are crucial to understanding whether and how their habitus is changing and whether that change creates a divide between those students and their origins. Interview and survey data both show that social mobility does not come without sacrifice and that these sacrifices warrant more serious study in the sociology of stratification.

Keywords

college, habitus, higher education, mobility, socioeconomic status

Social mobility through higher education is as much the process of learning elite mannerisms, behaviors, and "rules of the game" as it is the process of gaining credentials, knowledge, or wealth. Scholars of mobility have documented the inherent clash between elite and nonelite ways of being that arises during that process, typically focusing on how upwardly mobile students fare on campus (e.g., Aries 2008; Aries and Seider 2005; Goodwin 2002; Ostrove 2003; Stuber 2006, 2009, 2010; Torres 2009). A corollary—students' interaction with their nonelite home communities—has received far less scholarly attention. Although scholars have examined the price of mobility for racial and ethnic minorities (Bowen and Bok 1998; Carter 2003), consideration of rifts along class lines at home rather than on campus have been limited largely to memoirs (Dews and Law 1995; Lubrano 2004; Ryan and Sackrey 1984). Here we focus on that understudied component of class mobility by examining how the transition into an elite habitus affects students' interactions with their home communities.

Habitus highlights the role of unconscious and internalized cultural signals that perpetuate the power and impact of cultural differences that are structured by one's history and class position in society (Bourdieu 1977, 1990; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Lamont and Lareau 1988). To Bourdieu, habitus is a critical component of the perpetuation of inequality: Individuals internalize their class status and social position into their tastes and worldview, which then reinforce that

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very same social position and unconsciously reproduce one's status. Critics argue that the original formulation of habitus is overly deterministic-if one's disposition cannot change over time, then there is no opportunity for mobility (e.g., King 2000). This criticism, we assert, is due to a misinterpretation of Bourdieu's concept of habitus. Instead, as Bourdieu argues, "habitus, as the product of social conditionings, and thus of a history (unlike character), is endlessly transformed either in a direction that reinforces it . . . or in a direction that transforms it and, for instance, raises or lowers the levels of expectations and aspirations" (Bourdieu 1990:116). Several recent works have observed that habitus can change as one's social position does, albeit not without significant difficulty (Baxter and Britton 2001; Lehmann 2009; Horvat 2003; Horvat and Davis 2011), but none have empirically focused on the interactions with the home community in exploring the process and problems of habitus reformulation.

Like Bourdieu (1996), we believe that the experience of nonelite students in elite colleges is a prime opportunity to explore the connection between habitus and social mobility. We pair qualitative and quantitative data to examine the habitus conflicts that result from enrollment in selective colleges. Bourdieu describes that experience of transitioning and holding two habitus at one time as a *cleft habitus* (2004:111). To emphasize this return to Bourdieu's less static understanding of habitus, we reintroduce that term here in our analysis. We first examine which students report losing connections to their home communities, which-if patterned by socioeconomic status (SES)—would suggest that socially mobile students do develop a new elite habitus at college and that the new habitus causes a "cleft" between the students' college identity and habitus and their home communities. Building on those results, we use in-depth interviews to examine the nature of habitus cleavages experienced by low-SES students. Rather than focusing on experiences on campus, we examine tensions between socially mobile students and nonmobile home communities. We show that these students struggle to maintain ties to home, often adopting interaction management strategies to navigate their relationships with parents, siblings, and high school friends. Our findings suggest both immediate and long-term consequences for students, which we discuss in the concluding section along with theoretical implications for the study of mobility through higher education. Quantitative data are drawn from the National Longitudinal Survey of Freshmen (NLSF), a national sample of students attending 28 selective colleges and universities, and our interview data come from students at one of the campuses included in the NLSF, a women's liberal arts college. First, we contextualize our arguments by considering the literatures of social mobility, habitus, and higher education in more depth.

LITERATURE

The Experience of Mobility through Education

Socially mobile students face a unique pressure to acclimate to the dominant elite culture. Nonelite students often perceive themselves to be less prepared academically (Aries and Seider 2005; Stewart and Ostrove 1993) and find little in common socially with higher SES peers (Ostrove 2003). This lack or mismatch of symbolic capital is a visceral experience, memorable long into adulthood (Stewart and Ostrove 1993, as well as memoirs from formerly working class adultssee, e.g., Dews and Law 1995; Lubrano 2004; Ryan and Sackrey 1984; Tokarczyk and Fay 1993). Scholars examining the experiences of nonelite students at these institutions often analyze these difficulties as evidence of either a deficit of elite cultural capital or a devaluing of home culture by the organization (e.g., DiMaggio 1982; Stuber 2010. The analytical focus is squarely on the processes and experiences that take place in the elite setting rather than how students interact with their nonelite home communities after adjusting to an elite setting that requires a new disposition or habitus.

However, scholarship on race in elite educational institutions suggests that students may also experience challenges in encounters with friends and family from their home communities (Gaztambide-Fernandez and DiAquoi 2010). Work on racial and ethnic identity examines the complexities of shifting from a nonwhite home community into elite, predominantly white institutions through upward social mobility. Through these shifts, ties to hometown family and friends may become attenuated or cut off entirely (Carter 2003; Stanton-Salazar 1997; see also memoirs by Carey 1991, Rodriguez 1982)—losses that are also tied to negative outcomes in college

acclimation (Cabrera, Nora, and Castaneda 1993; Guiffrida 2006; Melendez and Melendez 2010; Nora and Cabrera 1996; for a counter example, see Turley, Desmond, and Bruch 2010). As Carter's research (2003) illustrates, students moving between discrepant home and school communities must make substantial efforts to maintain successful ties with family members and friends from home while attending elite schools. These works exemplify a shift toward understanding seemingly static identities (such as race) as a fluid, contextual social process instead of a fixed social position. Race is a critical component to a person's habitus, and work problematizing racial identity as fluid also highlights the inadequacy of considering habitus as an overly static and deterministic concept (Horvat 2003).

Social Mobility, Habitus, and Its Discontents

Previous research has shown the difficulties caused by moving between "worlds" and the challenges of fitting existing relationships and personal beliefs in new status contexts. Those personal beliefs, preconceptions, and ways of being can be labeled as an individual's habitus, created and formed largely by that individual's class status and background. Traditionally in American sociology, habitus is seen as rarely or never changing and as embedded within an individual's identity at an early age. The concept has therefore been criticized as theoretically inadequate for analyzing social mobility (Aries and Seider 2005). We use a more nuanced interpretation of habitus as "an individual's internalization of possibility" (Horvat 2003:7) that allows for the possibility of mobility as individuals are exposed to novel opportunities and definitions of personal possibility (for an empirical example, see Horvat and Davis 2011). In an overview of Bourdieu's work, Wacquant (2006) explicates the dual role of habitus as supporting both continuity and change in social structures and stratification:

Habitus is also a principle of both social continuity and discontinuity: continuity because it stores social forces into the individual organism and transports them across time and space; discontinuity because it can be modified through the acquisition of new

dispositions and because it can trigger innovation whenever it encounters a social setting discrepant with the setting from which it issues. (P. 268)

The correct conceptualization of habitus, then, is a fluid set of dispositions that are constantly changing as individuals go through different experiences and interact within and with new fields. How these changes occur and the effects of those changes have rarely been analyzed.

As an empirical example that challenges the common static reading of habitus, Horvat and Davis (2011) show that educational programs can and do reshape individuals' habitus within the American social class hierarchy; importantly, those authors note that changes in habitus are not total. Although an individual may experience social mobility and a related change in habitus, "the habitus formed by early childhood experiences (either positive or negative) is not washed away, but new experiences can be and are incorporated into it" (Horvat and Davis 2011:166). Similarly, Granfield's (1991) work concerning law students from working-class origins provides a nuanced example of how dispositions change as part of the mobility process. Although he does not apply the concept of habitus, Granfield finds that his respondents recalibrated their goals and expectations to be much more similar to those middle-class peers through the course of "faking" middle-class status to fit in with classmates: Pretending to know the habitus of the elite institution led to the internalization of that habitus. Granfield's work also shows that changes in habitus affect not only how respondents interact with others but also how others interact with respondents. That is, internalizing a new habitus led to changes in external relationships with other, elite individuals in law school.

However, as noted above, most empirical examinations of mobility—including those of Granfield, Horvat, and Davis—focus on the mobile individual's experiences in the new, elite setting. Whether internalizing that new habitus led to problems with respondents' original social networks too often has gone unexamined. Baxter and Britton (2001) are a valuable exception here. In their study of working-class British returning adult students, the authors find their respondents "on a trajectory of class mobility, which is experienced as a painful dislocation between an old and newly developing habitus, which are ranked

hierarchically and carry connotations of inferiority and superiority" (2001:99). Their work—with a different population in a different country—captures the difficulties we expect traditional-age nonelite students to report about their interactions with their home communities and habitus.

Although the process described above could be interpreted as one of changing identity, we argue that habitus change and potential dislocation reflect the experiences of these students more readily. Interpreting these moments as interactions between multiple social class experiences provides a more nuanced lens than interpreting them as part of an identity change, a concept that implies a more total and self-reflective change within the individual. That is, one's habitus changes without conscious effort or knowledge. Just as it is first internalized unconsciously in early childhood, so too is its change an unconscious shift in one's dispositions. By contrast, identity change involves a shift in how one consciously thinks about one's self—a process that occurs in college for many students (Sidanius et al. 2008) but may not actually occur with regard to class identity for students. Mobile students may still identify as a member of their home communities, but their "common sense" and predispositions have changed. That schism between their new, hybrid habitus and the community's working-class habitus does not mean those students no longer identify as working class but rather that their new habitus changes how and what identifying as working class means to them and to others. Bourdieu's term cleft habitus highlights the complex "both/and" (and "neither/nor") nature of a socially mobile habitus. Despite Bourdieu's repeated use of the concept of a cleft habitus in his later work, empirical work more commonly treats habitus—even for socially mobile individuals—as an either/or part of their identity and experience. We follow Bourdieu and Wacquant when they argue that a cleft habitus is formed naturally during mobility, because habitus is "constantly affected by [experiences] in a way that either reinforces or modifies its structures" (1992:133). A cleft habitus is then built on accumulating many modifying experiences over time, such as through college.

Actively working to fit into the elite culture of selective colleges may help low-SES students gain the same benefits as their elite peers at college and is often interpreted as a positive process of gaining cultural capital. Here, however, we challenge the notion that successful acclimation to elite cultural settings is uniformly positive by shifting the focus from fitting in to going home. We ask two questions: First, do upwardly mobile students experience conflict between nonelite home habitus and elite campus habitus? Second, if so, how are such conflicts managed? We examine this through nonelite (defined here as low-income, workingclass, or lower-middle income) respondents' reports of contact with hometown friends and family after acclimating to life in an elite college setting. We focus on elite residential colleges where the development of a new habitus is likely to occur due to the near-total immersion required (cf. Cookson and Persell 1987). Moreover, habitus plays an important role in the American tradition of educational privilege because elite education in the United States has historically focused on instilling students with a homogenous habitus along with cultural and social capital (Karabel 2005). These colleges are an important rung in the ladder of mobility, providing access to social capital and economic benefits, but they also present an environment in which elite cultural capital is uniquely important. These aspects can make elite colleges especially valuable for low-income students, who have the most to gain by enrolling in and completing college, but also may make them the most difficult in which to feel a sense of belonging (Ostrove and Long 2007).

DATA AND METHODS

By pairing a large quantitative data set and indepth interviews at one of the campuses included in the NLSF, we are able to pair individual experiences and strategies with more generalized evidence about the prevalence of habitus cleavages. A multimethods approach is important because habitus is particularly difficult to operationalize (Lamont and Lareau 1988). Quantitative data show whether any reported schism between home and college communities is correlated to SES or other demographic factors. If low-SES students are indeed more likely to report a schism, this strengthens our understanding of the challenges facing nonelite students at a national sample of selective institutions. In short, quantitative analyses allow us to make broader and more generalizable claims about the nature of the relationship between class, habitus, and college. At the same time, the quantitative data can only tell us whether such a schism exists; it does not capture how and why that schism exists. If, for example, that schism exists only because of difficulties traveling to and from college due to cost or because the students' families are less supportive, that would not be indicative of habitus dislocation. We use qualitative data to add evidence that the schism is, in fact, due to the development of a cleft habitus for socially mobile students.¹

The quantitative data come from the NLSF, which tracks the academic and social experiences of roughly 4,000 undergraduates at 28 selective colleges and universities and is designed to survey equal numbers of white, Asian, Hispanic, and black students. During the first wave of the survey, students were surveyed face-to-face as freshmen in the fall term of 1999. That wave was followed by shorter telephone surveys administered during the spring terms of 2000, 2001, 2002, and 2003. The surveyed institutions range from private institutions like Princeton (the most selective institution in the sample, with an 11% acceptance rate) or Miami University of Ohio (the highest acceptance rate at 79%) to large, public universities such as Penn State and UC Berkeley. The response rate for the baseline survey was 86% and produced a sample of 1,051 black, 959 white, 998 Asian, and 916 Hispanic students. Sampling restrictions required that participants be U.S. citizens or legal residents.² First-generation immigrant students are those who identified as being foreign-born themselves, whereas second-generation is defined as having reported at least one foreign-born parent. All racial categories are based on student selfidentification during the first wave of the survey. Table 1 provides the demographic makeup of the sample in greater detail.

Roughly 2,400 of the original 3,924 students completed the questions comprising our scale of satisfaction in the fifth wave of the NLSF. We use multiple imputation with the full sample before deleting any respondents with imputed values in the dependent variables (von Hippel 2007). Multiple imputation provides an improved statistical accuracy compared with list-wise deletion in cases in which the missing data are not missing completely at random (Allison 2001).

Our qualitative data come from in-depth longitudinal interviews that were conducted with 53 students from low- and middle-income backgrounds and a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds at

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics, National Longitudinal Survey of Freshmen

Demographic characteristics	
Race/ethnicity/nativity status, %	
White	27.8
Black	25.7
Hispanic	12.2
Asian	19.9
Multiracial	14.4
First-generation immigrant	15.3
Second-generation immigrant	34.8
Female	59.8
Male	40.2
Socioeconomic characteristics	
Parents' education, %	
No college degree	19.5
One bachelor's degree	12.9
Two bachelor's degrees	14.9
One advanced degree	29.6
Two advanced degrees	23.1
Parents' income, %	
>\$100,000	40.7
<\$100,000	34.8
<\$50,000	16.2
<\$25,000	8.3
Ever on welfare, %	11.3
Homeowner, %	84.8
Educational characteristics	
High school segregation, %	
>70% white	70.3
Mixed	15.0
>70% nonwhite	14.7
Public high school, %	72.5
Private high school, %	14.5
Parochial high school, %	13.0
Top 10 selective college, %	36.8
School undergraduate	13,773 (10,124)
population, N	
Ever transferred, %	7.6%
Lost connections rating (0-10)	2.44 (2.18)
GPA (0-4)	3.06 (0.53)
Satisfaction rating (0-10)	7.3 (2.19)
N	2,394
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Note: Standard errors in parentheses.

"Linden College," an elite women's college. Although this setting prevents us from discussing the relationship between gender and cleft habitus in a rich way, it still provides unique advantages for our study because the interviews include questions specifically focused on relationships between the college students and their home communities. The interview data thus shine a crucial light on

the students' understandings of habitus change and conflicts between home and college (i.e., elite) locations that otherwise would not have been available. For this study, we analyze responses from students who are low-income (family income below \$40,000 per year, no four-year college degree)³; working class (family income above \$40,000 per year, parents working in blue-collar job, no four-year college degree); and lower-middle class (family income below \$80,000, only one parent with a four-year college degree). We refer to these 29 respondents collectively as "nonelite." Because all responses used here are from students in these three categories that we aggregate as "nonelite," we do not provide each respondent's individual SES.

Interviews at Linden were conducted between 2008 and 2010. Linden students were recruited through e-mails sent to all students with family incomes below \$80,000 per year. All students who volunteered to participate were interviewed (as noted above, interview data included here are from low-income, lower-middle class, and working-class respondents only). Interviews took place in locations selected by the respondents. These interviews typically took place at the student center or a café near campus. Interviews were semistructured and open-ended so that a core of questions was asked of each respondent but follow-up questions were added in order to pursue topics that arose in individual interviews. Respondents were asked generally about relationships with friends and family from home and how they managed these interactions. The themes included here were then developed from students' responses. All respondents were asked to select pseudonyms, and other personally identifying information was changed or omitted by the authors.

Linden College (LC) is located in a small city in the northeast United States. The campus is an especially attractive one, with a great deal of green space and picturesque buildings. Students are required to live on campus for all four years of their enrollment at Linden, in small to medium-sized dormitories that house no more than 100 women. The cost of attending LC is on par with similar private institutions and was above \$53,000 annually in estimated costs in 2009-2010. A large financial aid budget supports those students whose families cannot finance this cost, and the college frequently notes publicly that approximately 60% of the student body receives financial aid. Although this figure sounds high,

need-based grants may range from \$500 to more than \$40,000, and the average Linden student is likely to be middle class or upper middle class. LC is selective, admitting fewer than half of its high-achieving applicants.

FINDINGS

Although sociologists frequently focus on the mismatch between the dominant habitus expectations of the college and the struggle of nonelite students to fit in, they neglect the corresponding struggle to fit newly acquired skill sets or outlooks, so helpful on campus, into home environments. In some cases, this new learning is in direct contradiction to familiar practices or beliefs, whereas in others it is simply strange or confusing. The acquisition of new habits, mannerisms, and knowledge—a new, college-educated habitus—differentiates the student from his or her family members and/or friends. Below, we explore in detail how that differentiation occurs and the difficulties that arise due to a cleft habitus.

Does Class Matter? Growing Apart while Growing Up

Sharing a habitus with one's fellow community members makes it easier to connect: People with similar habitus have similar interests, have similar reactions to events, and share common presumptions about how the world works and should be. If, however, the acquisition of cultural capital via elite colleges is related to the acquisition of elite habitus as well, we should expect that students from less advantaged backgrounds will report higher levels of difficulty interacting with their home communities during college. In the fifth and final wave of the NLSF completed during students' fourth years on campus, students were asked to report how much they feel they have become "an outsider in my home community." We argue that this measure of precollege loss, combined with similar questions about losing connection to old friends and family (Cronbach's alpha = .70), is quantitative proxy for whether a student feels that schism between collegiate habitus and home habitus (0-10).4

To understand whether low-income students were more likely to experience a loss of connection to home than other students and whether this loss might be patterned by other demographic

variables, we first examine bivariate relationships between measures of socioeconomic background, race, gender, and perceived sense of loss. Overall, we see that students report relatively low levels of perceived loss. In a scale from 0 to 10, students reported levels of loss that average between 2 and 3. This finding does not come as a surprise, as work on friendship homophily suggests that high-achieving students' friends in high school will likely be similarly high achieving and thus likely to share the selective college experience with students in our sample (Kandel 1978). This low level of reported loss shows that college does not always create schisms between home and college experiences. Going to college-even for socially mobile students—does not automatically lead to a large sense of social distance. Rather, in line with Bourdieu's idea of a cleft habitus, these low levels of loss highlight the subtle changes in predisposition that create seemingly "natural" class distinctions.

Even with low reported levels of loss, there were statistically significant differences by background. In short, there appears to be a connection between class and sense of loss but not race. In regard to race and ethnicity, black and Hispanic students report the same level of loss as white students, whereas Asians report slightly higher levels of loss (possibly due to the disproportionate number of students from immigrant families in the Asian population). In contrast, we see a significant linear effect of socioeconomic background on sense of loss via both our measure of income and parental education, with workingclass students experiencing a greater sense of loss than middle-class students. As Bourdieu originally theorized, habitus is a class-based means of perpetuating inequality, not a racebased means of doing so. Although the association between class and a heightened sense of loss is small and does not directly measure changes in habitus, it provides evidence that attending a selective college creates greater schisms between home culture and school culture for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Although we can see that this sense of loss is patterned along class lines, we cannot yet say what informs it, and for that we turn to interview data, below.

In addition, these descriptive findings mirror previous research showing that stigmatization based on intellect in school ("acting black") is related to socioeconomic class and racial dynamics in schools rather than a widespread problem in all black and Hispanic communities (Tyson, Darity, and Castellino 2005). In Table 2, the final two rows show that male students, on average, report more lost connections than female students. Because our qualitative data were gathered at a women's college, we are unable to address this association with gender directly. Importantly, this suggests that our interviewees may be reporting a less distinctly cleft habitus than we would have found were we to have conducted interviews at a coeducational institution.

Table 3 shows the results of an ordinary least squares regression, controlling for possible clustering of results by college, modeling whether the bivariate relationships described in Table 2 persist in a multivariate model. We expect that students from communities least like the selective institutions should feel the greatest sense of loss. To some extent, that is the case—but with important exceptions. First, our model's low r^2 value (.06) highlights the limited overall relationship between student demographic and socioeconomic background and perceiving a sense of loss. Although this is an important rejoinder that individual demographic and socioeconomic characteristics do not guarantee an emotionally and culturally difficult experience in college, it does not negate the substantial and significant associabetween class and perceived loss. Immediately notable are the statistically significant differences by race or ethnic group. Black students are, perhaps surprisingly, less likely than white students to perceive a loss of community (-.30, p < .05), whereas Hispanic and Asian students do not differ from white students at a statistically significant level. As with our bivariate results, this runs counter to the "acting black" theory. These results lend credence to the idea that cleft habitus is not a race-based problem.

Turning to our measures of social class, students from highly educated families (i.e., families in which both parents have at least a bachelor's degree [-.42, p < .05] or in which one parent [-.52, p < .01] or both parents [-.76, p < .001] hold an advanced degree) report lower levels of loss of community than students whose parents who do not both hold bachelor's degrees. This is likely due to the internalization of the elite collegiate habitus, whereas their parents lack any comparable dispositions with which to understand the collegiate experience and subsequent changes in their children. Similarly, those whose family

Table 2. Sense of Loss by Race and Class

Mean Sense of Loss		Ν
Parents' education		
No college degree	3.04 ^{abcd} (2.45)	461
One college degree	2.61 ^{acd} (2.25)	299
Two college degrees	2.39 ^{ad} (2.13)	340
One advanced degree		693
Two advanced degree	. ` ′	547
Race	, ,	
White	2.27 ^a (2.13)	644
Asian	2.61° (2.15)	463
Black	2.43 (2.29)	584
Hispanic	2.52 (2.25)	279
Multiracial	2.40 (2.12)	340
Parents' income	, ,	
<\$25,000	3.38 ^{abc} (2.54)	171
<\$50,000	2.81 ^{abc} (2.29)	401
<\$100,000	2.38 ^{abc} (2.03)	723
>\$100,000	2.16 ^{ab} (2.13)	796
Gender	, ,	
Male	2.72 ^a (2.24)	990
Female	2.25 ^a (2.13)	,473

Note: Superscript letters indicate a statistically significant (p < .05) difference between groups with the same letters.

incomes were below \$25,000 per year during childhood or whose families were ever on welfare (.63, p < .05 and .46, p < .001 respectively), and those whose high schools are more than 70% nonwhite (.54, p < .001) are more likely to report a loss of precollege community. We also find that the bivariate relationship between gender and reporting lost connections persists in our multivariate model.

The data suggest that some students frequently considered by sociologists to be disadvantaged in their pursuit of higher education accrue an additional stumbling block during their college years, that is, loss of connection to family and home-community peers (although this effect is not consistent across groups). We use the term *stumbling block* because numerous studies have shown the connection between supportive home communities and college success (usually academic), especially for those students who are statistically less likely to complete four-year degrees (see Cabrera et al. 1993; Charles et al. 2009; Guiffrida 2006; Melendez and Melendez 2010; Nora and Cabrera 1996).

Our quantitative analysis can only suggest that socioeconomic background is related to perceived

Table 3. Ordinary Least Squares Regression Coefficients with Clustering Control Predicting a Sense of Loss of Precollege Community, Friends, and Family Using Multiple Imputation and Then Deletion

	В
Intercept	2.61*** (.57)
Demographic background	,
Race/ethnicity/nativity status	
Male (I = yes)	.49*** (.09)
Black	30* (.1 4)
Hispanic	23 (.Ì7) [^]
Asian	.12 (.16)
Multiracial	16 (.15)
First-generation immigrant	.26° (.15)
Second-generation immigrant	.22ª (.12)
Socioeconomic background	()
Parents' education	
One bachelor's degree	20 (.18)
Two bachelor's degrees	42* (.18)
One advanced degree	52*** (.15)
Two advanced degrees	76*** (.16)
Parents' income	
<\$100,000	.08 (.11)
<\$50,000	.39* (.16)
<\$25,000	.63* (.26)
Ever on welfare	.46** (.17)
Homeowner	.11 (.14)
High school segregation	
Mixed	09 (.13)
>70% nonwhite	.54*** (.16)
College experience	
Top 10 selective college	.10 (.10)
School undergraduate	04 (.06)
population (log)	
R^2	.06
N	2,394

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. + significant at .10, * significant at .05, ** significant at .01, *** significant at .001.

loss; it cannot identify that these perceptions of loss are themselves caused by and related to the experience of attaining a cleft habitus. To answer that question, we turn to our interview data for more detailed evidence of how such a sense of loss is experienced and explained by nonelite students at a selective liberal arts college. In addition, the responses from these nonelite students provide evidence that the class differences in perception of loss is related to changes in habitus and not to pre-existing differences between students and their

communities or more mundane concerns such as ability to return home frequently or stay in touch with friends and family via telephone or e-mail. The interviews expose how habitus changes are manifested and the difficulties these changes create for low-SES students in interactions with family and friends (i.e., cleft). We then discuss the ways that students manage their interactions with family and friends to minimize such conflicts.

Habitus Shift: On Becoming a Snob

The conflicts between home and college habitus are most clearly expressed in interaction, particularly conversation. Because habitus is cultural in nature, it encompasses even the most mundane aspects of life, meaning that even a seemingly safe conversational topic or style itself can become an area for contention or misunderstanding across two incompatible habitus. Respondents in these interviews describe mundane subjects such as new food preferences-for example, Andrea (White) talked of learning to enjoy sushi and "all these motherfucking [kinds of] cheeses" and Kay (biracial) of becoming vegetarian—as being tense topics with friends and family. Over time, respondents find that their conversational repertoires have shifted such that they have difficulty communicating with the friends and family members that they left behind at home. For example, Paula (white) recalls with exasperation how difficult it is to talk with her mother over breaks:

It's not just avoiding conversations or talking to [my mom], it's feeling on a totally different place. We wouldn't even talk about the same things, much less try and talk about them in the same way.

Amber (white) has similar difficulties trying to explain to her friends and father, whose outlook she shared more closely as a teenager, the reasons their off-hand comments or jokes are not appropriate. Sitting on her residence hall's couch with her feet tucked up, she explains:

Amber: But it's really hard, because there are some people that are in my group of friends that just clearly, I mean, I don't claim to be informed at all but they just don't have an idea with what's going on, with things like health care. They're very opinionated

despite not really knowing anything. It's really hard to have conversations like that with people when you already kind of feel you put on this air of superiority just because I go to school like Linden. And I don't want to come across with someone who's like trying to enlighten everyone, but at the same time I think it's an important thing to talk about. I don't want to offend people, not make them defensive. I think it's hard to do with people that you're close to.

Interviewer: That must be tough. So how did you deal with that? Like with your dad, friends, and acquaintances.

Amber: Well, with my dad, I kind of, I just sort of tell him whatever, and I don't know if he even really. . . . Sometimes he listens to what I say but sometimes he just kind of writes me off like a college kid. So, like I'm going through a phase or something. But with my friends it's a little bit harder, and I have to deal with some things, more with humor. I have a couple of friends that's still, will say really homophobic things or stuff like that. I kind of got into this habit of using a Bruno voice.5 Whatever they had to say something, like, "oh God, the guy is so gay" and then I say, "Oh yeah, he totally was. Like white after Labor Day." I don't even know if they get my point across, but it's better than not doing anything I guess.

Interestingly, her father assumes that her new ideology or habitus is skin deep: Once she is out of her elite environment, he expects her to return to the "true" Amber, one who will agree with him once she passes her "college kid . . . phase." Amber interprets her new beliefs and attitudes as part of a permanent shift in her understanding of the world. Both respondents describe a new difficulty communicating with friends and family because their interests, ideologies, and expectations have changed. Although the details of what has changed is different—Paula's more abstract daily conversations, Amber's new political sensitivities—the end result is the same: Their changed habitus has led directly to a newfound social distance from their friends and families (we discuss this point further below).

It is important to note that low-income or working-class students are not the only ones to

return home from college with new habits that are unintelligible to their families or friends. However, for nonelite students who are frequently the only ones in their home communities to attend elite colleges, these changes are heavily weighted by the symbolism of cultural change and status transition. This differs from the experiences of middle-class children, whose parents may simply chalk changes up to maturation or steps toward independence. Similar to Lamont and colleagues (1996), whose work examined moral judgments, we find that low-income or working-class students are more subject to moral comparisons or to be seen as making those comparisons themselves. For example, Liz (white) describes quietly how her parents "feel like I'm . . . you know, too good for them." Andrea (white) worries that her parents will think she has become a "snob." Anxiously pushing her long hair out of her face, she describes:

Even when I go to visit my parents, [I am] so scared of them thinking Linden has turned me into a an elitist snob, my brother said [that] and I just lost it. . . . He constantly makes fun of me for going to Linden, this whole British accent like, signifying high class, asking me if I'm, like, going to marry someone from Harvard, you know.

Similarly, Brianna, a White student with an outgoing, confident demeanor, describes how there is "a little bit of tension there" in her interactions with her siblings, who did not go to coland work low-wage jobs unemployed: "My sister . . . always sneaks something in under the surface, about, like, oh you're really proud to go to college aren't you, and not in a way that's nice. . . . I'm not a sellout. It's hard to make her see that." Allison (white) characterizes her relationship with her family as "semiugly" because of the clash between her choice to leave home and study at Linden and her adult siblings' choices to not attend four-year colleges and live closer to their parents. She explains,

I'm very different from many of them [family members]. My older sister a lot of the time would give me a hard time about things that aren't under my control, like not being home all the time, things having to do with my being here [at Linden], and me going to school. Because she didn't do that, she doesn't get it.

Whereas students such as Amber expressed difficulties based on novel interests or outlooks, Allison's problems show that there are also micro-aggressions from members of one's social class of origin that help create and perpetuate a class divide, even within their own families.

Interaction Management: Hiding the New and Faking the Old

Because of the frictions described above, lowincome and working-class students work hard to reconcile their mobility with their home communities. This requires significant effort via multiple impression-management strategies. attempt not only to manage their interactions with others in order to preserve a positive image (or to avoid a negative image) but also to maintain a personal sense of identity in line with their earlier status, even as they understand changes in this status are happening. Respondents describe avoiding certain topics or styles of speaking in order to present themselves in an unchanged light, similar to Granfield's (1991) concept of "faking it," albeit in this case "faking" their original habitus. For example, Andrea (white) avoids using big words that she would not have used before enrolling in college: "I'm so, like, constantly checking myself when I go home, I don't want to use these big academic jargon-y words that Linden demands you use here, [that I] never ever knew before coming to Linden." She also takes care to emphasize her pragmatic, financial reasons for enrolling at Linden without which (she reminds her friends) she otherwise might not afford college: "I always say, if I can sort of sense that people are like, judging me a little bit, I say, 'The only reason I'm going there is because they give me a ton of money." Andrea's verbal strategies help her to show that she has not become "an elitist snob" and remind friends from home that she is in the same financial boat they are. Chatting in the student dining hall, Ramona (White) explained how she avoids talking about her experiences at college, preferring to allow friends from home—a small Midwestern city—to simply think whatever they will about Linden rather than engage in a detailed conversation about college life:

Yeah, I think they don't really know what it's like here, kind of preconceived notions about what a woman's college . . . is supposed to be like, so I guess I end up giving

into that stereotype just to make the conversation go a little faster, [rather than] to sit down and explain what's here.

Similarly, Anna, a White senior who grew up in a small rustbelt city not far from campus, opts to keep quiet in conversation with friends at home because she wants to avoid implicit comparison. She remembers, "When I came home [from study abroad, it was like], I gotta stop talking about going abroad and doing all these things because people were like, 'I'm never gonna have the opportunity [to do that,] stop rubbing it in my face that you [did].'" She describes the way she "[has had] to kind of teach yourself not to talk about [study abroad]" and other advantages not available to friends at other colleges or who are working.

These stresses of staying attached to one's less privileged background also manifest on campus for students. As a senior, Kay (biracial) has begun to make an effort while on campus to remind herself of her own background so that she does not become too dissociated with her home community or her history:

Because I feel like what I say, in reminding myself of like, "you went to [Europe] on a scholarship, your mom is a truck driver," it's really the only way I can keep myself, like, in check to remind myself where I come from. If I meet someone and talk about my thesis, my experiences, you'd never know [that I grew up working class]—and that's just part of me. I know how much I've grown and everything, but I just want to keep a hold of that.

In sum, respondents struggled to balance new experiences with their home relationships—often, relationships with others who are not upwardly mobile. Low-SES students' descriptions of their efforts to actively manage those relationships give further indication of their worries about potentially losing connections.

Going Home . . . or Not

A changing habitus makes contact with home difficult for many of the students in our sample. Although some students are able to manage conflicts through strategic self-presentation, as shown above, others attempt to avoid the types

of situations or "fields of interaction" in which self-censorship might occur. In fact, some students report not returning home specifically to avoid facing the challenging interactions mobility creates. Liz, a White student from a rural area not far from Connerston, notes that although she likes seeing her family, she rarely goes home. In fact, though she lives only a few hours' drive from campus, she spent only two out a possible five days at home over the fall holiday: "I don't go home a lot. . . . It's not that I don't like home, because I like seeing my folks and my two friends that are there. [But] I know that I'm different now, very subtle things make me not fit there anymore, just like my political beliefs and the ways that I carry myself, everything, it doesn't fit anymore." And Kay (bi-racial) says simply, "They're extremely separate places for me, in my mind." This makes the transition between home and school "hard" for her. Paula (white) sums many respondents' situations up well when she muses,

It's a double-edged sword. I really like that I've gained this knowledge and these ways to talk about these things. It definitely makes my life better to talk about these things, it's really important to be aware of things, it's definitely helpful for me. [But] I feel you definitely lose so much when that's the only way to talk or that's the only way to be heard, all those things about how it's unfair, why do I get to learn these things, what happens when you go home and you can't talk to your families or community.

In line with the work of other scholars of class in education, many of the students interviewed at Linden describe a cleft habitus in which their experiences in college have led to novel social difficulties with their families and friends. This cleft is not something for which these students felt prepared or one which they embrace without struggle; students do not interpret their entrée into a new social status as an easy transformation. Not only do these students face unique burdens at school (Aries and Seider 2005) as outsiders, but they also experience social burdens at home that traditionally elite students likely do not experience. Next, we look at the ways respondents understand the effects of mobility in themselves.

Keeping the Old, Accepting the New?

The interview data thus far have highlighted the complications low-SES students encounter interacting with nonmobile friends and family. But Bourdieu's discussion of a cleft habitus (as opposed to one that is simply changing or being reformulated) suggests that socially mobile students will also encounter conflicts within their own worldviews as they attempt to understand their new position in the social structure without the ability to "unlearn" the lessons, dispositions, and common sense born of their previous positions. In line with that analytic framework, students in our sample do not express a sense of a completely changed self-identity but rather one that has now become more complicated and hybridized—a cleft habitus is both working class and elite, fitting into neither comfortably. As Paula (white) reflects, "Once you learn things, you can't really unlearn them. It's a choice but, I don't know, you can't unmake that choice to know what you know." She refers here not to her class mobility as a college student on path to graduate but rather a novel perception of herself as highly educated. Students like Paula will not be able to go back to sharing the same world as their hometown friends and family. For some respondents, this came as an unanticipated and uncomfortable realization, as suggested Kay (biracial), whose tone of resignation makes her description especially poignant:

I thought I'd just kind of like learn things and just be like a . . . you know, a working class person who, like, knows how to contend. I thought that's what it was all about, but especially this year for you know, maturity or whatever, I'm realizing, it's not about pretending. I've become this person. I have this experience, [and] growing up as a working class student—nothing about me says that anymore.

Kay does not assert that she self-identifies differently, and she explicitly explains that she does not want to do so. Instead, she asserts that her mannerisms and experiences, that is, her habitus, has changed and that change means that others do not see her as working class. In contrast, Andrea (white) asserts that graduating from Linden will enforce a new "identity that I'm going to carry with me and all its connotations":

Also graduating from Linden, that means I'm never going to, like, now this is really an identity that I'm going to carry with me and all its connotations and I can't deny that, I can't—it changes the way people look at you, even if you don't think it changes you. But it definitely changes the way people look at you.

Again, however, Andrea does not lose her original socioeconomic background: She has instead added another identity to "carry," even as she believes that she sees herself as unchanged. These shifts do involve an identity change but one that students do not necessarily internalize as total or all-encompassing. These students articulate the fact that a cleft habitus is both an internalized and externalized problem, shaped not only by their interactions with nonmobile family and friends but also within their own minds, by their own assessments of their social positions, and by how those positions are interpreted by others. Their presentations of mobility as a form of irrevocable personal change belie the idea that mobility is a seamlessly beneficial process. The speakers' words are tinged with a sense of regret or loss about the ways they might be changed by their mobility. Students struggle with that mobility and its implications.

Moreover, respondents highlighted the ways that their cleft habitus caused them to judge their new advantages skeptically. Brianna (white), for example, worried that the "natural process" of changing at school and becoming "part of an educated middle class" may make her irrevocably different from her parents and siblings:

In fact something I've been scared about before is not losing my roots, but I can feel myself becoming very different from my family in ways that I don't think-I mean I can try and slow it down but it's gonna happen anyway. I mean, it's a natural process. I'm becoming different from them in the way that my siblings haven't, in just that I'm going to graduate and I'm gonna be part of an educated middle class. Okay, I might not be making that much money at first but you know like, I'm still part of [that group]: I've got a bachelor's degree. I'm probably gonna get my master's degree, and what does that mean? How am I different? So there's almost a feeling of selling out a little bit.

Brianna directly articulates a changed identity but still distances herself from that change. At the same time, Brianna never articulates that change as internalized: She questions whether she has changed and expresses her social mobility as joining a group, not changing how she sees herself or her class background. Of our respondents, Briana was one of the most explicit in depicting herself as undergoing any sort of identity change. Even then, she linguistically distances herself from that change and cannot articulate how she is different from her previous experiences. That invisibility of the identity change fits well with Bourdieu's concept of habitus—habitus emphasizes the invisible "common sense" that guides individuals through social interactions in subconscious ways. Briana is experiencing a cleft habitus and recognizes the tension between her old and new social class locations but has much more difficulty explaining how and why she herself has actually changed. That difficulty born from the invisibility of habitus complicates efforts to sustain relationships that had previously been intraclass but are now cross-class relationships.

DISCUSSION

Previous research shows that many students, particularly low-income first-generation students (Carnevale and Rose 2004; Tinto 2006-2007), face additional hurdles over the course of their enrollment, indicating that researchers should focus more on the college experience and persistence as well as access to college. Academics and other professionals from poor or workingclass backgrounds frequently recall college as a difficult transition period (e.g., Dews and Law 1995; Ryan and Sackrey 1984), marked by feelings of "wanting" rather than "belonging" (Ostrove 2003). This is complemented by the findings of sociologists arguing that students from these backgrounds—particularly those at elite campuses-find it difficult to connect with peers, feel at home, and make the most of academic opportunities because they lack cultural capital (Aries and Seider 2005; Ostrove 2003; Stuber 2009, 2010). Sociologists typically focus on how cultural capital and habitus function within these elite settings; that is, they are concerned with the mechanisms and interactions that take place in the site of mobility. This article adds to that literature by illustrating how mobility also dramatically affects interactions with one's previous community as well as the new, elite educational environment. We find that students experience what Bourdieu termed a *cleft habitus* as they shift between a nonelite home environment and an elite school setting, demonstrating the ways that "habitus [can] be practically transformed by the effect of a social trajectory leading to conditions of living different from initial ones" (1990:116).⁶

Our study makes both theoretical and empirical contributions. We apply Bourdieu's concept of habitus in a novel way to examine the process and problems of mobility. Rather than focus on the enhanced cultural and social capital of the socially mobile student, we use Bourdieu's concept of a cleft habitus to understand how mobility affects the students' interactions with nonmobile friends and family. Empirically, we find that nonelite students struggle to maintain these ties, often adopting interaction management strategies to navigate their relationships with parents, siblings, and high school friends. In addition to increasing low-SES students' campus stress levels in ways that may be detrimental to students' academic achievement (Charles, Dinwiddie, and Massey 2004), these findings also have important implications for larger mobility processes. As we show, low-SES students decrease or curtail communication with nonmobile friends and family as they develop cleft habitus. This reduces their capacity for becoming (echoing Carter's 2003 term) multiclass navigators who might be instrumental in a long-term family or community process of mobility. That is, rather than passing along knowledge about how, for example, to navigate an interaction with a faculty member or participate in classroom discussions, low-SES students instead deflect, obscure, and minimize their new habitus when interacting with their home community. This may limit mobility to the individual student rather than support efforts to distribute the new elite cultural capital gains through family or community ties. Moreover, our interview data suggest that this is a two-pronged problem. Students in the process of attaining socioeconomic mobility both feel the conflict of cleft habitus within themselves and are confronted with it by their friends and family from home.

Our quantitative analysis demonstrates that not all students experience strains with their home communities equally. That sense of strain is associated with demographic, primarily class, differences. Class-disadvantaged students (i.e., those whose families have lower incomes or education

levels) report higher senses of lost community, and our interview data indicate that this is likely because their dominant cultural frame shifts over their four years in college. This confirms our hypothesis that nonelite students experience a cleft habitus. In particular, students indicate that interactions with one's family and friends from home require attention and management, and these students reveal the kinds of moral questioning that arise through comparing habitus and cultural capital gains. In addition, the regression provides evidence that our interviews at a women's college may be a relatively conservative barometer of the levels and effects of cleft habitus, because men report higher levels of loss than women. Our qualitative data demonstrate the ways that ties become attenuated over time. As interactions with friends and family become strained, particularly as conversation becomes weighted with moral comparisons, communication and contact become more difficult to maintain.

Theoretically, this work joins with Horvat and Davis (2011) to reconsider how sociologists of mobility incorporate Bourdieu's concept of habitus. Although others contend that the concept is overly deterministic, we show that habitus can and should be seen as fluid: The students in our qualitative sample demonstrated the effect of college on their habitus-changing their food preferences, their conversational style, and their expectations. That individual habitus can and does change-particularly via an institution like a residential college—is not a novel finding. What is novel is our exploration of how those changes affect individuals' abilities to reconnect with their home communities. Cleft habitus has the effect of constraining and weakening relationships between those socially mobile individuals and their home communities.

These findings should be considered in context of scholarship on higher education retention. As scholars of college retention make clear, support from home is important to college completion for students who are not in the demographic majority on campus (Cabrera et al. 1993; Guiffrida 2006; Melendez and Melendez 2010; Nora and Cabrera 1996). Forming bonds to campus, be they purely social, work related, or otherwise extracurricular, is also important for retention. Juggling both, however, may be uniquely difficult for socially mobile students. Our findings also complement and extend those examinations of cultural capital that highlight

students' attempts to hold multiple habitus simultaneously. For example, Carter's research (2003) shows how students develop strategies for moving between academic and home settings, adjusting accordingly to each. Carter's work shows that students moving between discrepant school and home cultures must make special efforts to maintain ties to home, a process only exaggerated at a residential college. Granfield's (1991) respondents similarly demonstrate a need to manage this contrast between home and school. However, although the law school students he interviewed generally avoided confrontation with their earlier lives, this strategy is less feasible for undergraduates who typically return home over school breaks and maintain ties of at least minimal emotional and economic support and care with family and friends from home.

Our findings expand on these earlier works by examining qualitatively the ways that a cleft habitus is experienced and measuring quantitatively the schisms between home and school associated with a cleft habitus. Social mobility is not a tidy process, and scholars should look not only at the difficulties upwardly mobile individuals experience in their new environment but also how elite settings create a cleft habitus that complicates contact with nonmobile friends and family. Moreover, our findings are important to those scholars and administrators seeking to improve the collegiate experiences of low-SES students. Even at elite schools with extremely high retention and graduation rates, low-SES students lag behind middle and upper-middle income classmates on these measures (Tinto 2006-2007). As colleges increasingly focus on managing low-SES students' continued enrollment (Tinto 2006-2007), understanding the dynamics of acclimation including the tensions created at home—may help in implementing effective support programs. These might include providing outreach to families, counseling students like this study's respondents in managing relationships, or creating peer support groups to compare experiences.

Although we believe that measuring a sense of loss (combined with key demographic variables) identifies which students notice a change in habitus, cleft habitus is difficult to quantify and our proxy is only a limited effort to do so. Some students may feel a similar loss for more psychological and individual reasons as well. It is possible that some students want to lose connections with their home communities; many students who did

not enjoy high school, regardless of personal background, view college as a new start. Moreover, students may not have felt well supported by high school friends or family to begin with, and replacing them with college friends could be a welcome change. Nonetheless, few of our interviewees reported such a desire, and our regression results showed that class is associated with a loss of connections. In addition, previous literature suggests that middle and upper-middle income students are both better able to adjust to the culture of college life and supported by networks of similar peers (Kaufman 2005). Finally, some students may not feel that they have lost connections to home even when they have, or they may be able to switch between home and collegiate habitus depending on their situation. Nonetheless, although our measure is inexact, it is a significant step toward quantifying the experience of changing one's habitus and measuring the impact of such a change.

A second gap in our data is that the qualitative sample is too limited to draw distinctions along racial, ethnic, or gender lines. As Kramer's (2008) and Kuriloff and Reichert's (2003) works suggest, black students in private high schools are already shifting their stores of cultural capital through their enrollment in private schools and contact with elite culture in that setting. This very likely has an impact upon their experiences in elite college settings and their ability to align habitus and increasing cultural capital. Results not shown here also suggest an interaction between race and ethnicity, cleft habitus, and class status. Unfortunately, there are too few nonwhite students in the sample to draw conclusions in this direction. Moreover, there are no male students in the qualitative sample, so the association between gender and feeling disconnected from home communities that existed in our regression models cannot be fleshed out through interview data. Male students reported higher "sense of loss" than female students across all of the NLSF schools. Although several interviews indicated that gender may be an important aspect of the classed experiences of low-SES students (e.g., through gendered expectations of family involvement), we are not positioned to compare qualitatively the connections between gender, class, and family. Future research should address in more detail how the intersections between race, class, and gender can affect the likelihood of experiencing a cleft habitus.

Overall, our results provide an important caveat to the standard narrative of mobility via higher education. Mobility is often treated as a universal good-that is, acquisition of middle or upper class habits or preferences leads to positive outcomes for the individual. Our data suggest that students find it difficult to balance the newly gained cultural capital needed for college (and beyond) with their habitus and that these difficulties demand a potentially painful process of habitus cleavage. Our interview and survey data both show that social and cultural mobility does not come without unique sacrifices. As Stevens (2007:3-4) notes, studying both those with privilege and the process of learning to wield that privilege is important to understanding social stratification. Unfortunately, as our qualitative and quantitative data both show, learning to wield that privilege often causes personal strain and potentially negative academic consequences that warrant future exploration.

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NOTES

 Several years passed between the data collection for each sample. The NLSF is unique in its sampling of students at (primarily) selective colleges, which made it ideal for our purposes: examining lowincome and middle-income students' experiences at elite colleges. Moreover, although some years passed between completion of the NLSF survey and our interviews, respondents in each sample are within the same generation and share many of the same cultural reference points and class-based habitus.

For a more detailed description of the overall NLSF institutions, sampling method, and individual characteristics, see Massey et al. (2003).

- 3. The \$40,000 cutoff was selected because of its accordance with the approximate income level below which Pell grants—federal financial grants awarded to students with the highest financial need—are awarded, making it a relevant marker when studying higher education and class.
- 4. We used three questions to create our scale: "To what extent do you agree with the following statements about the relative benefits of a college education: (1) My going to college has led to the loss of some of my friends. (2) My going to college has made me feel less a part of my family. (3) My going to college has made me an outsider in my home community."
- A satirically flamboyant gay fashion designer character created by Sacha Baron Cohen.
- We thank an anonymous reviewer for directing us to this passage from Bourdieu.

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