MANAGING UNEMPLOYMENT: A COMPARATIVE, CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS OF UNEMPLOYMENT ORGANIZATIONS

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ETHNOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS OF UNEMPLOYMENT ORGANIZATIONS

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Philippians 4:13 ~ I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

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ABSTRACT

Unemployment can be extremely challenging to manage. Depending on an individual's social class status, unemployment experiences can differ greatly. The longer people grapple with unemployment the more likely they are to seek help from unemployment support organizations. This study takes a comparative, critical ethnographic approach to the study of unemployment support organizations across social class lines. The findings revealed five major themes: 1) The Middle-Class Imperative: Learning the Language of Privilege, 2) Symbolism of Social Class through Artifacts, 3) Text and Body Job Search Practices, 4) Managing Intersecting Stigmas in the Absence of Work, 5) Metaphorical Assumptions: Dependent Children and Competent Entrepreneurs. Ultimately, this study discovered the ways social class materially and discursively emerges in the cultures of unemployment organizations. The findings also shed light on the differing way people from varying social class backgrounds manage unemployment experiences through organizations. A critical analysis of the data revealed and critiqued systems of power within the organizational cultures of two unemployment organizations.

CHAPTER ONE: RATIONALE

According to the National Bureau of Economic Research, there have been 10 recessions in the United States since 1948, with the most recent starting at the end of 2007 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012a). The unemployment rate was at five percent prior to the 2007-2009 recession. In October, 2009 the unemployment rate doubled when it peaked at 10 percent. This is the highest the U.S. unemployment rate has been since the 1982-1983 recession, when the rate reached 10.8 percent (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012a). This project was first designed in late 2012; three years after the 2007-2009 recession had technically ended. The United States' unemployment rate at that time was 7.8 percent, which was nearly the lowest it had been in the previous 2 years. Unfortunately, at that time there were still 12.2 million U.S. citizens searching for work (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). Of those 12.2 million people, approximately 4.8 million were considered long term unemployed, those who have been unemployed for longer than 27 weeks (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). One distinguishing aspect of the 2007-2008 U.S. recession is that it includes a larger proportion of people who are considered long-term unemployed when compared to previous recessions (Aaronson, Mazumder, & Schechter, 2010). As the duration of unemployment persists, the severity of its consequences potentially increases as well. These statistics shed light on a period of America's economic landscape.

While technically the last recession ended in 2009, millions of people continue to seek employment. Extended periods of unemployment can be difficult for individuals to manage, which is why many people seek help as they cope with the absence of work (Gregg & Wadsworth, 1996). Thousands of unemployment offices opened across the

U.S. in the 1980s as a way to both provide Americans relief and help the government manage extreme periods of economic recession (Ness & Brooks, 1991). These organizations are central to this research.

Unemployment Organizations

There are many different types of organizational resources that people turn to when they are experiencing unemployment. These various types of organizations are referred to by many different names, such as unemployment offices, career centers, employment security agencies, vocational rehabilitation, and more. I refer to these organizations using the umbrella term unemployment organizations because their main goal is to help the unemployed. As an organizational communication scholar, I am primarily interested in the way these organizations use communication to facilitate job search and professional/skill development processes with the unemployed.

Some types of unemployment organizations aid up to 15 million people annually (Jacobson, 2009). The involvement of these organizations impacts job search efforts. Unfortunately, the success of unemployment organizations is varied and questionable due to poor management and little accountability (Gregg & Wadsworth, 1996; Jacobson, 2009; Rangarajan & Novak, 1999). If unemployed Americans want to be able to maintain a quality livelihood by acquiring employment, the success of unemployment organizations is paramount. Thus, scholarly attention is needed to better explore what is happening inside the context of unemployment organizations. One aspect that influences unemployment organizations is their ability to target and tailor services to various audiences who are seeking work.

Some unemployment organizations cater to specific social class groups, which likely create classed organizational spaces. For example, the 40Plus Club is an unemployment organization that only caters to unemployed middle- and upper-class people who are at least 40 years of age and who made a minimum of $40,000 in their previous year of employment. The efforts of the 40Plus Club to tailor its services to the upper/middle class groups classes this organizational space. In fact, Newman (1988) highlights the classed nature of the corporate structure, dress, and language used in 40Plus clubs. Allen (2011) explains how organizational spaces are classed materially and discursively. For example, work places are classed through both discursive notions of hierarchy and also through material conditions, such as wearing uniforms or having a corner office. I anticipated that unemployment organizations were classed in these two ways as well (i.e. material and discursive). However, more research needs to uncover how social class is embodied in unemployment organizations. Doing so could reveal how issues of power become part of the search for work namely how larger structural issues manifest in individual lives.

Taking an in-depth look at unemployment organizations would shed light on the ways these organizations communicate, which may enable and/or constrain American job search efforts. Qualitative research about unemployment organizations may also reveal how or why Americans maintain, reproduce or transform social class statuses. An insider's view of unemployment organizations could ideally provide a richer understanding of American unemployment as a classed experience. Hence, a look at the organizational culture of unemployment organizations is warranted. In order to fully establish the rationale for the proposed project it is necessary to review two connections

across scholarly literature. First, I review the relationship between organizational culture and power. Then I review the connection between unemployment and social class.

Organizational Culture and Power

Organizational culture accounts for both material and discursive facets of organizational life. First, several theoretical approaches to organizational culture account for material reality (for example see Keyton, 2011; Schein, 1992) in part because much of organizational life happens within a material space. For example, Schein's (1992) model of organizational culture includes cultural artifacts and behaviors, which are simply defined as the tangible, visible, audible aspects of an organization's material reality. Second, organizational culture is also part of our discursive reality because it emerges through the communication and interaction of organizational members (Keyton, 2011). Active members of unemployment organizations materially and discursively participate in organizational culture.

Since organizational culture partially emerges through communication, it can be viewed as a manifestation of discourse. Simply put, discourse can be understood as public and private systems of verbal, non-verbal and written communication that span from naturally emergent to mediated forms (Collier, 2001). Discourse is central to all organizational processes (Taylor, 2005). Discourse is powerful because it guides thinking and behavior in organizations. Alvesson (2002) directly addresses the power-laden nature of organizational culture and recognizes that organizational culture inherently directs behavior toward dominant cultural norms. In unemployment organizations it is important to understand how their organizational cultures draw from dominant cultural norms and dominant discourses as they facilitate job search processes. Unemployed patrons engage

the organizational cultures of unemployment organizations as they manage periods of job loss. Since organizational culture is communicative, scholars should better understand the role and function of communication within these organizations.

In his book *Understanding Organizational Culture,* Alvesson (2002) argues that scholars have the responsibility to scrutinize the effects of organizational culture. Research can reveal the ways in which power operates in organizational cultures. Organizational culture may influence organizational members and their tendency to think less critically and engage less in dialogue or questioning (Alvesson, 2002). Due to the power-laden nature of organizational culture, I propose the use of critical ethnography (Thomas, 1993) as a way to gain knowledge about the role and power of organizational culture and social class within unemployment organizations. Critical ethnography allows for a deeper understanding of power by investigating how power manifests communicatively in the organizational culture of unemployment organizations. I am specifically interested in the role of power as unemployment organizations communicatively facilitate job search processes with their unemployed members.

Joblessness is an experience that can trigger experiences of downward social mobility. Mobility, both up and down the social class ladder, is inherently tied to issues of work and power. In short, in order to garner knowledge about unemployment organizations it is necessary to understand social class and the way it is connected to unemployment.

Unemployment and Social Class

Based on the afore mentioned statistics regarding the number of Americans without work, it is evident that unemployment is a reality for millions (U.S. Bureau of

Labor Statistics, 2013). In fact, unemployment will continue to exist as a looming threat for many others even as the economy continues to recover from recession. The potential to experience unemployment negatively threatens the well-being of all Americans. However, the probability of experiencing unemployment is much more likely for socially marginalized groups (e.g. near poor, racial minorities, those who have attained little education, single women with dependents) (Wilson, 1996). Katherine S. Newman's sociological scholarship explains that the constant fear of losing employment is a reality for many marginalized groups. Newman's body of scholarship addresses issues of work, poverty, and economic decline. A review of Newman's literature reveals that threats of economic instability (i.e. potential downsizing, job loss, divorce, sickness, etc.) are experienced differently based on one's social class status. Using Newman's work I illustrate this reality below, first by explaining how unemployment affects near poor Americans and then how unemployment is experienced by the middle class.

Unemployment and the Near Poor.

Americans whose social class status puts them on the lower end of stratification face a frightening existence when they lose the ability to work. In order to make this argument, I am going to first reference qualitative research published in a book titled *The Missing Class* written by Katherine S. Newman and Victor T. Chen. Newman and Chen (2007) explain how a bout of unemployment can send many Americans into an inescapable downward spiral. *The Missing Class* is an in-depth study that highlights experiences of the near poor in the United States. Newman and Chen (2007) address the millions of people who live with an unstable financial reality in our society.

The near poor are described as people who have household earning incomes between $20,000 and $40,000 for a family of four (Newman & Chen, 2007). The U.S. Census Bureau's (2010) American Fact Finder classifies household incomes by families of four into the following annual income brackets: less than $10,000; $10,000-14,999; $15,000-$24,999; $25,000-34,999; $35,000-49,999; $50,000-74,999; $75,000-99,999; $100,000-149,999; $150,000-199,999; $200,000 or more. According to this statistical resource, currently more than 19 million families of four in the United States live just above the poverty level making $34,999 or less annually. This figure of 19 million families equates to approximately 35.7 percent of total American households. In short, 35.7 percent of American households could be considered the missing class. It is important to note that these figures do not account for families and individuals who are at or below the poverty level. In addition, working-poor and poor Americans also fear unemployment and other negative economic conditions.

Unemployment is dangerous to the missing class because they are not recognized in public discourse (Newman & Chen, 2007). For example, public discourse can happen in the form of policy debates. These public forums generally address poverty stricken Americans, but discussions of the working poor or near poor are absent because they are formally considered independent and employed (Newman & Chen, 2007). The missing class is made up of people who make too much money to receive public assistance, but not enough money to have any sense of stability in their financial situation (Newman & Chen, 2007). Yet when Americans in the missing class find themselves without employment, they often enter poverty in a way that becomes nearly impossible to escape (Newman & Chen, 2007).

The missing class lives with the constant threat of unemployment (Newman & Chen, 2007). When unemployment strikes people in the missing class, they experience downward social mobility in an extremely different way than individuals who come from middle or upper classes. In short, Americans who live life on the bottom of the social class strata live in fear of unemployment because it can likely catapult them into poverty. However, this is not the experience for all Americans who experience unemployment. In order to grasp the notion that unemployment is experienced differently based on one's social class status I will now explore unemployment experiences from a middle-class perspective.

Unemployment and the Middle Class.

Newman's (1988) book titled *Falling from Grace* addresses the experience of unemployment from a middle-class perspective. In this text Newman dubs the experience of downward social mobility from a middle-class standpoint as "falling from grace" (p. 8). She labels middle-class unemployment experiences this way because their previous employment situations and social class backgrounds gave them a sense of stability and comfort. However, once middle-class individuals lose the opportunity to work, they experience a loss of control over their lives (Newman, 1988).

Middle-class Americans, who find themselves in the throes of unemployment, generally have a financial safety net that provides a small window of time for them to maintain a consistent quality of life (Newman, 1988). These financial safety nets commonly take the form of home equity, retirement funds, savings, or other investments (Newman, 1988). The ability to pull from such financial assets allows many unemployed middle-class Americans the privilege of keeping their homes, social lives, and other

commitments for a period of time. In addition, many middle-class Americans are able to tap into social networks in order to facilitate the job search process (Newman, 1988). While experiences of unemployment are still extremely stressful for middle-class Americans, they are able to manage in different ways compared to the near poor because they live without the immediate threat of poverty, homelessness, or hunger. That is not to say that middle-class experiences are without stress or should be diminished. In fact, many middle class Americans deeply internalize their unemployment as personal failures (Newman, 1988). The longer these individuals are unemployed the more helpless they feel. Financial safety nets do not last forever and social networks grow weaker the longer middle-class individuals stay unemployed (Newman, 1988).

A comparison of Newman (1988) with Newman and Chen (2007) reveals that the narrative experiences of people from the missing class differs greatly when compared to middle class workers who have "fallen from grace." Downward social mobility deeply impacts both groups and their ability to manage life—yet in distinct ways. Hence, social class is a defining feature of how unemployment is experienced.

Theoretical Framework: Web-of-Power

Because unemployment is a classed phenomenon, it would be most beneficial to use a class based theory to fully analyze the cultures of unemployment organizations. While there is a plethora of communicative work that develops the notion of organizational culture, there is only one existing work that conceptualizes the essence of social class as a communicative phenomenon. I use Dougherty's (2011) web-of-power framework to theoretically analyze the culture of unemployment organizations, which is more thoroughly explained in the next chapter. Social class can be re-conceptualized as a

powerful communication phenomenon (Dougherty, 2011). Communication scholars generally, and organizational communication scholars specifically, have an opportunity to contribute to the ongoing social class discussion using Dougherty's (2011) theoretical framework. In order to advance social class scholarship, a communicative lens is needed. While a more detailed history of social class scholarship is covered in the literature review, please note various disciplines have already considered social class by looking at individual variables (e.g. income, type of work), considering cultural ways of life (e.g. class-based values, rituals), or even by looking at societal structures (e.g. capitalism) (Dougherty, 2011). Much of the previous sociological and anthropological work on social class hints at communication, but does not delve deeply into the role of communication. Dougherty's (2011) work serves as a call for communication scholars to enter social class scholarship by foregrounding the role of communication in the understanding of social class. Dougherty (2011) argues that communication is the mortar for social class. Communication can be conceptualized as the adhesive between social class elements in life such as type of work, education level, net worth, cultural values, classed behaviors, or capitalism. Many social class differences and identities emerge in interaction through communication with others. Through communication, people have the power to produce, maintain, and transform social class. This research attempts to uncover some of the powerful connections between communication and social class through an analysis of unemployment.

The web-of-power is a theoretical way to understand the many types of power that can entrap a person based on their social class status. This theory provides an explanatory instrument that allows scholars to understand, articulate, and critique the way

various forms of power may intersect and entrap a person based on their social class standing. Dougherty's (2011) theory provides the imagery of a spider's web and asks scholars to, "Imagine social class as a web in which different strands represent different types and processes of power" (p. 82). Each strand of power in the web is connected and when viewed holistically, the theory illuminates how individuals from lower social classes find themselves helpless, just as a fly might find itself helplessly tangled in the web of a spider. The metaphor of a spider's web is presented as a way to understand how various types of power work together as interconnected processes. Dougherty (2011) explains, "When taken alone, each form of power can be resisted. When woven together, social class becomes a part of the social fabric of society" (p. 82). In order to understand the web-of-power's explanatory application it is important to note four guiding premises. Each premise can be seen as a strand in the web-of-power. These four strands in the web-of-power theory illustrate the complexity of social class phenomenon in our society. These four strands are not fully comprehensive nor are they mutually exclusive; rather they illustrate the nuanced ways social class powerfully impacts social life. The following four strands are covered in detail in the next chapter: a) social class is simultaneously fluid and fixed; b) social class is physically unmarked and communicatively marked; c) social class is a dialectic of material and discursive reality; d) social class is an unconscious and conscious communication struggle. Social class is a powerful phenomenon and part of its power is found in these four strands and the way they connect in the web-of-power. Another contribution of this study is the use of the web-of-power to study a unique organizational context—unemployment organizations.

Conclusion

Social class is central to unemployment experiences. For people on the lower end of the social class strata the threat of unemployment is severe because they are economically closer to poverty. However, people from all social classes struggle to manage joblessness. Middle and upper class people have a great deal to lose from a financial perspective when they experience unemployment, which means that their experiences are also severe. Despite these differences unemployed people from all backgrounds seek support from unemployment organizations. Unfortunately, it is commonplace that unemployment organizations are poorly managed and unsuccessful (Gregg & Wadsworth, 1996; Jacobson, 2009; Rangarajan & Novak, 1999), which is why more scholarly attention should explore what is happening inside these organizations. From an academic perspective, it is important to explore the role of discourse within the culture of these organizations. Social class exists within the tension of material and discursive reality (Dougherty, 2011). Thus, dominant societal discourse may manifest within the communicative, cultural practices of these organizations. This research is theoretically important because organizational communication scholars have an opportunity to better understand how and in what capacity discourse is playing a role within unemployment organizations. This proposed research is practically important because these organizations play an integral role in attempting to alleviate one of the most severe social problems of the 21st century.

I hope that both scholars and practitioners will gain a better understanding of the role of communication within unemployment organizations during the job search process and in the relationships unemployed members have with these organizations across social

class lines. Social class is a power-laden phenomenon (Dougherty, 2011). Because social class is directly connected to work, it makes sense to analyze job search processes across social class lines. Unemployment organizations play a vital role during periods of recession (Jacobson, 2009; Ness & Brooks, 1991) and these organizations are inherently classed. Yet, there is no communication literature that examines the ways these organizations communicate. This research uses a comparative, critical ethnographic approach to reveal a complex and nuanced understanding of the communicative relationship between unemployment organizations and their members.

With that said the purpose of this project is three fold. First, I aim to discover the way social class materially and discursively emerges in the cultures of unemployment organization. Second, I seek to better understand how people from differing social class backgrounds manage unemployment experiences through organizations. Finally, I aim to examine and critique systems of power as they emerge in the organizational cultures of unemployment organizations. Examining these facets aid in the ability to understand how unemployment organizations (re)constitute social class norms in society. Ideally, from a pragmatic standpoint, the findings of this research would also provide helpful guidance to unemployment organizations and practitioners.

I argue that organizational communication scholars are primed to analyze social class as a phenomenon because of two main criteria. First, social class as a phenomenon is inherently tied to our organizational memberships as laborers or non-laborers in society. Second, the meaning of social class in our society is highly discursive and material from macro to micro levels. As an organizational communication scholar I seize the opportunity to further our knowledge of social class through research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The three overarching goals of this dissertation research are: a) to discover the way social class materially and discursively emerges in the cultures of unemployment organization, b) to better understand how people from differing social class backgrounds manage unemployment experiences through organizations, and c) to examine and critique systems of power as they emerge in the organizational cultures of unemployment organizations. I use Dougherty's (2011) web-of-power to theoretically analyze the culture of unemployment organizations. I begin this chapter with a thorough explanation of the theoretical framework. Furthermore, to fully understand the scope of this research and its place among existing scholarship, it is then necessary to review several areas of scholarship. Specifically this literature review covers scholarship on the topics of communication, social class, The American Dream, stigma, unemployment, unemployment organizations and organizational culture.

Theoretical Framework: Web-of-Power

The Web-of-Power is a theory that accounts for the complex manifestation of social class in society through four tenants or premises. Please note that these premises are neither finite nor complete, but rather a starting place as a way to understand the messiness of social class. Each of the following tenants is covered in detail below: a) social class is simultaneously fluid and fixed; b) social class is physically unmarked and communicatively marked; c) social class is a dialectic of material and discursive reality; d) social class is an unconscious and conscious communication struggle. Social class is a powerful phenomenon and part of its power is found in these four strands and the way they connect in the web-of-power. Below I lay out Dougherty's (2011) framework. Then

the remainder of this literature review is organized and structured through these four strands or premises.

Social Class Strand: Fluid and Fixed

The nature of social class is simultaneously fluid and fixed. The tension between the states fluid and fixed comprises one strand in the web-of-power (Dougherty, 2011). According to the American Heritage Dictionary (1994a) one definition for the word fluid is, "readily changing or tending to change." Social class, its manifestations, and scholarly understanding are readily changing and have a tendency to alter over time. Yet at the same time, social class is fixed. According to the American Heritage Dictionary (1994b) the first three definitions of the word fixed are as follows, "1. firmly in position; stationary 2. Determined; established: *a fixed price* 3. Invariable; constant: *a fixed income*." One reason social class is such a complex and powerful phenomenon lies in its nature as both fluid and fixed.

Social class is fluid because the meaning of social class is constantly changing and contested. Scholars have studied and analyzed social class for decades. Despite the consistent interest in social class as a phenomenon, "there is also confusion and a lack of clarity around the very word "class"…" (Lareau, 2008, p. 12). The ambiguity that coincides with notions of social class is evidence of its fluidity. Some scholars attempt to measure class in terms of objective factors, such as material wealth (Wright, 2008). Others conceptualize social class as a lifestyle or cultural milieu (Lareau & Conley, 2008). Material wealth and lifestyle are simply two differing examples of social class definitions; many others exist. The many social class conceptualizations are not wrong per se, but rather incomplete. Varying ideas about what constitutes social class are

accepted and this complicates social class research efforts and scholarship. The fluidity of social class also manifests because it is studied by many different disciplines, including, but not limited to: economics, sociology, psychology, anthropology, public administration and policy. Clearly each discipline has a distinct historical background that informs the way social class is framed, defined, conceptualized, and operationalized. All of these dynamic factors contribute to social class's fluid nature.

The ambiguity around social class is necessary. Conley (2008) sees efforts to succinctly define social class as useless and argues for a "kitchen sink" approach. Conley (2008) argues for a broader definition stating that if a succinct or concrete definition is adhered to, scholars will ultimately limit their understanding of social class. The limitations imposed by a concrete definition effectively miss the complexity of social class. Social class is a necessarily fluid phenomenon. Yet despite the fluidity of social class, it is a historically pervasive phenomenon, which also means it is fixed.

Social class is fixed in two main ways. First, social class is a persistent phenomenon that has existed for centuries (Dougherty, 2011). Second, social class is fixed because the same social groups are marginalized due to their social class backgrounds (Dougherty, 2011). These two mainstays regarding social class as a phenomenon speak to its stability. Not only have social class manifestations been prevalent across time, but also across cultures and structures (Dougherty, 2011). According to Henry (2001), "Class structure is evident in every settled society" (p. 2). Manifestations of social class are evident in our global history of slavery and colonization. For example, social class was present during systems of feudalism, socialism, capitalism, etc. (Dougherty, 2011). Today, social class is manifest in multiple

countries in varied forms from India's formal caste systems to America's informal stratified social landscape. The pervasive existence of social class is due to social interaction, which makes social class systematically stable and self-perpetuating (DiMaggio & Mohr, 1985). Class-based interaction systematically structures society, resulting in the growth of upper/middle class networks and the stagnation of working-class networks (DiMaggio & Mohr, 1985). In short, there is a connection between class-based interaction, social networks, and larger organizing structures in our society.

There are consequences to class-based interaction because social class and social status are linked. Unfortunately, inequality is always the result of social class (Henry, 2001). The unjust effects of social class are evident in various ways. "At the heart of this social organization lies inequitable distribution of a mix of resources and constraints that systematically impacts material advantage and quality of life" (Henry, 2001, p. 2). The stable, fixed nature of social class is located in persistent social inequalities.

The simultaneous fluid and fixed nature of social class is one reason why social class is so powerful in society. Part of social class's power is found in the way it dynamically changes over time and across cultures. This fluidity of social class means that it fits different forms of social organizations and people understand social class from a diverse range of standpoints. There is no singular agreed upon definition of social class because scholarly understanding and literature is expansive regarding social class phenomenon. Yet, part of the power of social class lies in its consistent and persistent existence. Regardless of the way society has changed over time, social class is there. Social organization through class is a constant phenomenon; one that is complex to understand and see. In the next section, I will address the second strand in the web-of-

power. This strand addresses one of the ways in which social class is difficult to recognize.

Social Class Strand: Marked through Communication

Social class is communicatively marked and physically unmarked (Dougherty, 2011). This strand in the web-of-power represents the reality that social class becomes apparent through discourse and is not necessarily apparent in the body. The concept of markedness emerged from the discipline of linguistics (Brekhus, 1998). Scholars Nikolaj Trubetzkoy and Roman Jakobson illustrated that when studying phoneme pairs, one half of the pair was actively foregrounded, highlighted, or marked while the other remained in the background and simply defined by the absence of an accent (Trubetzkoy, 1975). Brekhus (1998) argues that this notion of markedness is heuristically applicable to scholarly work. Dougherty (2011) uses the concept of markedness by presenting the notion that social class is physically unmarked, backgrounded, or invisible. Instead social class is marked (or highlighted) in our communication (Dougherty, 2011).

Differences in social class backgrounds emerge in both the mode and content of our communication (Dougherty, 2011). Various scholars note the way social class differences correspond with communication differences (e.g. Dougherty, 2011; Lubrano, 2004; Lucas, 2011a, 2011b; Philipsen, 1975; Lareau, 2003; Schatzman & Strauss, 1955). For example, individuals from differing social classes seem to use and value silence as a mode of communication differently (Dougherty, 2011; Lareau, 2003). Also, the flow of communication differs across social class lines both within families (Lareau, 2003) and at work (Lubrano, 2004; Philipsen, 1975). The content of communication is also a point of differentiation. Bourdieu’s (1987) work regarding cultural capital addresses this notion.

Cultural capital includes various bodies of cultural knowledge (Bourdieu, 1987). People from different social classes can speak to differing bodies of knowledge based on elements such as their social networks or life experiences. During conversations one's cultural capital can become discursively or communicatively apparent. Individuals note these differences when reflecting on times they communicated with people from other social classes (Lubrano, 2004). Middle-class communication norms are privileged in America and when people fall outside those norms they are marked with a lower social class status. Unfortunately, the marking of lower class statuses based on communication also comes with various negative connotations. Many times these negative connotations correspond with stereotypes of various physically marked and marginalized social groups. People who are physically marked because of race, gender, age, or disability are also marked and marginalized in part due to their assumed lower social class status as well. This is one way in which the power of social class entraps people through multiple angles. Discursively marking people in this way is problematic and exemplifies how social class remains physically unmarked (Dougherty, 2011).

We cannot necessarily see social class by simply looking at a person. Social class differences are hidden in many ways because they are not clearly apparent to the naked eye. Dougherty (2011) explains that social class is physically unmarked, which makes it difficult to identify social class differences. If people want to appear to belong to a particular social class, they might adorn their physical bodies with symbols from that social class through clothing, accessories, or other various behaviors (Dougherty, 2011). Simply put, looking at one's physical body is a problematic way to understand a person's social class status or background. In fact, many times people commonly use "stand-in

markers," such as race, to determine social class status (Dougherty, 2011). In American culture, race serves as a "stand-in marker" of social class because racial minorities historically hold lower social statuses. Sadly, people use race as a "stand-in marker" that equates to positions lower in the social class stratification. Unfortunately, racial minorities typically do fall lower on the social class strata. That is evident when you consider statistics regarding unemployment by race.

Every month the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics produces a report titled, the Employment Situation Summary. When you look at the unemployment rate broken down by race, group level inequities are reported. It is also evident that being a racial minority and having a lower social class status often coincide. In this report, unemployment figures are broken down by a number of demographic factors. In December, 2012 when this project began, the Employment Situation Summary reported that 6.6 percent (561,000) of the Asian population, 6.9 percent (8,485,000) of the White population, 9.6 percent (2,344,000) of the Hispanic or Latino population, and 14.0 percent (2,577,000) of the Black population are currently unemployed (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). Consider the notion that unemployment lowers one's position on the social class hierarchy. These numbers show that in America both Black and Hispanic/Latino populations are experiencing disproportionately more unemployment than other racial groups, which means they are more likely to hold lower social class statuses than other racial groups. Using race and other "stand-in markers" contribute to the intersecting power-laden existence of social class in our society. Unfortunately, many people use these markers to make judgments about others. All of this contributes to both discursive and material reality, which is addressed in the next stand of the web-of-power.

Social Class Strand: Dialectic of Material and Discursive Reality

The manifestation of social class emerges out of a dialectic between material and discursive reality (Dougherty, 2011). Dialectics are unresolved tensions that result in situations caused by two contradictory or opposing forces (Putnam, 2004). In other words, social class is co-created by our simultaneous existence in both physical and socially constructed realities. In the continuum of reality one could see the material as one extreme and the discursive as the other. Both realities simultaneously exist together, in tension, co-creating one another. Social class statuses are partially derived from the material work and resources people have, but also from the meaning that is discursively ascribed to those resources.

Social class is connected to materiality. Social class is partially derived from the type of work that people physically execute and the physical resources that are garnered by that work. Working class people more frequently participate in manual labor or body work to make a living (Marvin, 1994). Doing manual labor is part of one's material reality. Middle class people more frequently participate in text based labor to make a living (Marvin, 1994). Participating in text based labor is part of material reality as well. The financial capital that is earned from either body or text based work contributes to our material livelihood (i.e. our ability to provide food and shelter).

Social class is also connected to discursive reality. In fact, the material facets that contribute to social class (i.e. type of work and the amount of compensation) also connect to discursive reality. People ascribe meaning to the material livelihood others provide for themselves. In other words, people pass judgment on one another based on material livelihood (Dougherty, 2011). Meaning is a part of discursive reality. For example,

meaning and value are frequently ascribed to the amount of financial capital that is earned for work. Discursive reality constitutes the meaning/value that is associated with different types of labor. To illustrate this consider the financial compensation (a form of material reality), which varies according to different types of labor. The amount of financial compensation a given occupation earns corresponds to the meaning and value attached to the type of work. Logically, one reason why financial compensation varies is derived from discursive reality. Discursive reality is made up of social constructions in society and is manifested in the way meaning is created and associated with various types of work. For example, American society has a discursive reality that generally devalues working-class labor when compared to middle-class labor.

Compensation figures across gender differences provide another example of this strand in the web-of-power. According to the U.S. Census Bureau research (2011), a woman earns .77 cents to every dollar that a man earns. Part of the discursive reality in American culture is that women's work has been devalued. Lower compensation is the material reality that results as part of this discursive devaluation of women's work. Women's social class status is generally lower due to the tension between this discursive and material reality (Dougherty, 2011). An elaboration of this point is illustrated later in the literature review, but it is necessary to understand the connection between discursive and material reality during this explanation of the theory.

The important take away from this strand in the web-of-power is that our material and discursive realities manifest in social class. The amount of physical resources people have in their material reality exists in tension with their discursive reality. Henry (2001) explains that resources impact our life experiences, our worldviews, and opportunities. In

short, our material reality can both enable and constrain our discursive reality (Henry, 2001). Dougherty (2011) explains that the converse is also true—our discursive realities also shape our material reality. Both types of realities are mutually constitutive (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004). As one type of reality shifts and changes, the tension results in shifts and changes in the other.

Many times the presence of social class in our lives is prevalent and conscious. For example, social class is clearly evident when material conditions of poverty or hunger are highlighted. Other times, the presence of social class is unconscious and unapparent, such as the difference in pay across gender or race. These figures are reported, but infrequently addressed. Social class is simultaneously an unconscious/conscious communication struggle.

Social Class Strand: Unconscious/Conscious Struggle

The last strand in the web-of-power includes the notion that social class is an ongoing communication struggle between class consciousness and class unconsciousness (Dougherty, 2011). This strand represents the idea that Americans are both aware and unaware of social class as an interwoven aspect of our culture. On one hand it is easy to be aware of social class because of consistent social ills like homelessness or poverty. Unfortunately, it can be difficult to maintain awareness because American class stratification is informal and discourses like the American Dream convey ideals of equality. Dougherty (2011) explains that the struggle of class consciousness is the effort people make to normalize class based equality in our society.

Efforts to normalize equality in our society have been a part of America's history since the country was established (Cullen, 2003). Historical events such as the civil war

and the civil rights movements of the 1960s have class based implications. These, among other historical turning points in our nation's history, have dramatically influenced class based injustices regarding free labor, democracy, and citizenship. In particular, social activism and movements are also a part of the class conscious communication struggle. Dana Cloud's work highlights class based labor movements and the communication struggle to be heard.

One example is Cloud's (2005) piece that analyzes the voices of workers from Staley Manufacturing. These workers fought against unjust working conditions through various modes of resistance, including picketing, protesting, and boycotting. Cloud's (2005) work highlights an example of a class conscious communication struggle. She shares the ways in which working class laborers struggled for just conditions, to have their voices heard, and to have their rights honored. In our nation's history there have been hundreds of examples of similar, conscious class-based struggles. These struggles are a concerted effort to bring the unconscious, underlying class-based injustice to the forefront of consciousness. Efforts to fight social class injustice are communicative in that they seek to give a voice to the marginalized. Unfortunately, so many social class injustices remain hidden (Cloud, 2001) and are part of an unconscious struggle.

There are two forms of unconsciousness that work together to powerfully silence communication about social class. The unconscious class struggle first stems from the unwillingness to acknowledge social class differences in society. Secondarily, the unconscious class struggle incorporates an active avoidance to recognize marginalizing behavior. In short, people work to remain unconscious about social class injustice, which

functions to minimize the communication surrounding such inequality. Struggling to remain unconscious of social class imbues the phenomenon with power in society.

The informal structure and discourse that socially organize American life makes it easier to escape the recognition of social class stratification in America. It can be difficult to recognize social class because Americans surround themselves with similar individuals. As a consequence, America makes it easy to be blind to extreme instances of social class injustice (Dougherty, 2011). For example, most Americans who are isolated in the ghetto will rarely have exposure to experiences outside of their current class-based residential environments (Massey & Denton, 1993). Conversely, most people outside the ghetto will never spend considerable time there, which contributes to a limited understanding of what happens in this cultural enclave (Massey & Denton, 1993). In addition discourses such as the American Dream, convey the notion that in America all people have equal opportunity and the chance for upward mobility (Fisher, 1973). Drawing from discursive logic allows Americans to succeed at their struggle to remain unconscious about social class and to normalize equality. The logic conveyed by the American Dream provides a belief in class-based equality, despite existing inequality (Fisher, 1973; Hochschild, 1995).

We struggle to remain class unconscious because it is easier to remain unconscious of social class and our contribution to its injustices (Dougherty, 2011). Historically many people have used a fiscally based rationale to neglect acknowledgment of active contributions to social class injustice. Paul Farmer's (2005) book, titled *Pathologies of Power*, shares several global instances where citizens actively contribute to the oppression of the poor. Farmer's unique perspective as both an anthropologist and

a medical doctor allows him to critique cultural structures and their direct contributions to the violation of health and human rights. He argues that instances of oppression of the world's poor are many times active efforts, which are justified through ideology and executed structurally. Farmer (2005) explains that cost-effectiveness is a way our society works to rationalize existing inequality. Cost-effectiveness becomes a scapegoat to lessen efforts that alleviate inequality (Farmer, 2005). Being cost-effective globally perpetuates social class oppression (Farmer, 2005). When policy makers or governmental officials consider the resources it would take to alleviate poverty, they struggle to be unconscious about the severity of social class injustice. Farmer (2005) comments on the consciousness of poverty when he states, "In fact, the suffering of the world's poor intrudes only rarely into the consciousness of the affluent, even when our affluence may be shown to have direct relation to their suffering" (p. 31). Farmer (2005) points out many examples where citizens and governments neglect to take responsibility. When people neglect to address these issues, social class injustice remains in the unconscious and people neglect to communicate about these issues.

Another reason why social class remains an unconscious struggle is because of the previously addressed notion of "stand-in markers" such as race, gender, age, disability, etc. Cloud (2001) explains that class based scholarship seems to have fallen by the wayside and been consumed by issues of identity, difference, and culture. For example, scholars have defined social class as a social identity (Allen, 2011). However, it is important to state that social class is not only an issue of identity and difference. Social class holds a unique place that should be analyzed by considering both material and discursive reality. Please note that difference and identity matters are important, but

shifting the focus of scholarly attention away from social class to other areas of difference is a normalized practice. The problem is not that scholars study social class as an identity or difference, but that we fail to recognize the relationship between notions of identity and difference, in conjunction with social class. When people neglect to address social class directly, they displace social class onto our bodies and into our space, which becomes part of the ongoing communication struggle (Dougherty, 2011). In essence, it becomes difficult to articulate and recognize the presence and impact of social class in ways that extend beyond the "stand-in markers" such as race, gender, age, and ability.

Summary of Theoretical Framework

Social class is a communication struggle because it is nearly impossible to articulate what social class is and how exactly it operates. Social class has an expansive existence in our society and its power is seemingly everywhere as it is interwoven into social life. The web-of-power provides a way to better understand the multi-faceted ways that social class imbues power and powerlessness during interactions with others. Hence, the web-of-power is an appropriate theoretical lens to use for the study of unemployment organizations because it provides a lens through which I can view the interplay between both materiality and discourse. Accounting for both material and discursive reality is directly relevant to both social class related phenomena, such as unemployment, and organizational culture. This theoretical approach is also beneficial to apply because it provides a communication-centered way to understand the way social class permeates discourse from macro- to micro-levels.

The remaining sections of the literature review are organized and structured by the tenants of the web-of-power because it is the theoretical foundation for this project. In

other words, each metaphorical strand of the web-of-power is a section of the literature review. It is important to interrogate the literature regarding social class and unemployment through the web-of-power premises because Dougherty's (2011) framework has never been applied to empirical data outside her own scholarship.

The first strand covered is the dual fixed and fluid nature of social class. As I interrogate the literature regarding this strand in the web-of-power I will review various scholarly approaches to the study of social class. In this section I present unique challenges that social class scholars grapple with as they study such a complex phenomenon. I then explore the theoretical implications of the duality of a fluid and fixed social class within the context of unemployment. Literature is then interrogated regarding the second strand of the web-of-power, which addresses the relationship between communication and social class. The notion that social class is communicatively marked (Dougherty, 2011) is explored and explained in further detail. Then the communication experiences of the unemployed are reviewed. The third strand of the web-of-power is the tension between material and discursive reality. In this section I review scholarly literature regarding social class and labor. Specifically I address two different types of labor: blue-collar and white-collar. These two types of labor coincide with differing material and discursive realities. One discursive construction that dramatically impacts American conceptualization of work is the American Dream. This discourse is reviewed in detail because it is directly connected to social class and the American expectation to work. Specifically I highlight the meaning of work in the American cultural context by looking at the American Dream. I then theoretically consider the material and discursive implications for the absence of work. Finally, the fourth strand in the web-of-power

addresses social class as a simultaneous conscious and unconscious communication struggle (Dougherty, 2011). I probe literature that discusses ways in which this struggle is manifest in society. Unemployment is one specific experience that makes social class struggle more salient. I then review extant literature that addresses unemployment and social class. Many Americans from all social class backgrounds struggle to manage unemployment experiences. Thus, jobless people seek help with unemployment organizations (Gregg & Wadsworth, 1996). In order to understand the potential role of power in the context of the unemployment organization this literature review briefly presents the historical emergence of unemployment organizations and explains why a closer scholarly analysis of these organizations is warranted. Finally, a review of organizational culture scholarship specifically shows how power may emerge in unemployment organizations. I close by presenting three potential research questions that frame my line of inquiry for this dissertation research project.

Interrogating Literature: Fixed and Fluid Nature of Social Class

Social class is a complicated phenomenon. Part of the complexity of social class stems from its simultaneously fluid and fixed nature (Dougherty, 2011). This section overviews various approaches to social class. During the review of this literature I will show how the dual fluid and fixed nature of social class complicates its meaning and manifestation. Because social class is fluid, its definition and understandings are constantly in flux. In addition, the fluidity of social class causes individuals to understand their own social class status in generally inconsistent ways (Dougherty, 2011). Social class is a metaphorically nebulous construct because it cannot be pinned down. Yet, in the same vein social class is fixed.

Social class is fixed because it is a stable, pervasive, consistent phenomenon (Dougherty, 2011) that transcends societal structure, historical time periods, and cultural milieus. Social class is a consistent manifestation of power in the social world and it is a fixed structure of social life—one that has not and will not cease to exist (Henry, 2001). This first section of the literature review extrapolates this argument by reviewing an interdisciplinary body of scholarship on social class. The literature reviewed in the next section illustrates the dual fluid and fixed nature of social class. I then review the theoretical implications of this dual nature in the context of unemployment.

Social Class: Fluid

Before understanding how social class directly relates to work and organizational communication, it is necessary to briefly review the varied ways in which social class has been approached by scholars. It is important to note that none of these approaches is wrong per se, but rather incomplete (Dougherty, 2011). Each approach to social class only captures one facet of a multi-faceted phenomenon. Because of the fluidity of social class, it is studied and conceptualized in a myriad of disciplines and approaches.

Variable Approaches to the Study of Social Class.

Colloquial or surface level conceptualizations of social class define social class as an amalgamation of variables such as income, education, type of work, and home ownership (Carib, 2002). Approaching an understanding of social class in this way simply looks at variables that attempt to triangulate one's social class status (Dougherty, 2011). Scholars delineate social class differences by grouping people based on these surface level variables. For example, Storck (2002) explains that class delineations have been determined by variables such as a group's access to resources and various

educational or occupational statuses. Social groups have even been defined by their ability to wield power or wealth and their ability to influence others (Storck, 2002). However, social class is much more complex and one cannot simply define groups in this way (Dougherty, 2011; Storck, 2002).

Using variables such as income, occupational status, or net worth to define social class differences is a limited way of understanding group differences. As scholars note, social class differences influence much more in our lives such as our value systems (Lucas, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c), families' lives (Lareau, 2003), communication patterns (Schatzman & Strauss, 1955), definitions of success (Lamont, 2000), and more. The variable approach to analyzing social class does not allow scholars to approach the study of social class phenomenon effectively (Dougherty, 2011) due to its over simplicity of the phenomena. Studying social class from a variable approach does not allow scholars to analyze the way class emerges in social interaction. A cultural approach to the study of social class has historically advanced our knowledge in more rich and nuanced ways.

Cultural Approaches to the Study of Social Class.

Many scholars have examined social class as a way of life, or a culture. Sociologists who have taken this approach include but are not limited to, Pierre Bourdieu and Annette Lareau. Pierre Bourdieu (1987) understood class through his concepts of economic, cultural, and social capital. By taking Bourdieu's framework one can understand how individuals from differing social class backgrounds are able to navigate social life with varying degrees of success. For example, economic capital refers to financial assets; however, according to Bourdieu (1987) having such capital can provide access to advantageous resources in the social world. Such resources might include the

ability to pay for private education or travel abroad. Having access to advantageous resources provides individuals with cultural capital, which Bourdieu (1987) defines as a knowledge base or linguistic skill set. The ability to travel abroad provides travelers with knowledge about their experiences and exposure to different countries and cultural norms. These experiences provide knowledge that serves as a linguistic resource. In short, having the ability to talk about one's experiences abroad increases one's cultural capital in the social world. Finally, Bourdieu addresses social capital, which he defines as a network of connections. Having access to economic capital provides people with the opportunity to pay for and participate in experiences that connect them with a larger network of people. Having access to a larger network of people also provides increased advantages. For example, many career opportunities are passed on through social contacts (Allen, 2011). In fact, Massey and Denton (1993) address how individuals who are insulated from developing extensive networks (i.e. urban residents of the ghetto) fail to foster social capital in their lives. Bourdieu's (1987) framework is helpful because it provides insight into the way people leverage advantages and disadvantages that social class memberships provide. However, these notions of capital fail to capture the complexity of social class relationships in our society. In short, there is more to social class than the ability to navigate social life and develop advantages and disadvantages through these various forms of capital. Social class structures macro-level society.

Annette Lareau (2003) studied social class differences in regard to family child rearing practices. Viewing social class as a culture or way of living, Lareau (2003) is able to delineate between social class groups by identifying separate child rearing strategies. Lareau's ethnographic findings show that middle class families approach child-rearing

like project management. She dubs this strategy the “concerted cultivation” approach to child rearing. Parents from middle class families believe it is their job to strategically develop and cultivate their children’s skill sets. Middle class families generally achieve this by having their children participate in a variety of extracurricular activities. These activities systematically produce advantages and develop values so that their children are positioned for potential success in American society. Lareau (2003) notes that this approach develops a sense of entitlement in middle class children. In sum, middle class children feel entitled and expect certain things in life such as equal opportunities.

Conversely, Lareau (2003) findings suggest lower-class and poor families approach child rearing in a different way. These parents feel that their children should evolve without parental intervention. Lareau (2003) dubs this approach the “accomplishment of natural growth.” Instead of taking a hands-on approach to child rearing, lower class families allow their children to have more control over leisure activities. Child’s play is one way this type of child rearing is characterized. Children from lower income families are allowed to have unstructured, unsupervised playtime with friends and family. This allows children to develop skills such as conflict resolution. However, this also creates a distinction between parental/adult space and children’s space. Unfortunately, children from poor and working-class families feel a sense of constraint, not a sense of entitlement. Lareau (2003) provides a useful way of understanding the “cultural logic” that parents from differing social classes employ through child rearing. Her analysis provides an important point of comparison and illustrates how social class permeates family life.

In Lareau's analysis she goes to great length to explain that neither approach to child rearing is better than the other, but rather that they are different. However, in her analysis Lareau explains that privilege is granted to middle-class child rearing strategies in the American context. Ultimately, she concludes that it is likely certain advantages are given to middle-class adults that were raised under the concerted cultivation approach. For example, Allen (2011) explains that most college admissions professionals look favorably upon extracurricular activities when screening applicants. Frequent participation in extracurricular activities is one benefit middle-class children have due to the way they are commonly raised. This privilege increases middle-class applicants' likelihood of acceptance and is thus inherently a privilege to those who are raised in middle-class families. Conversely, Lareau explains that the accomplishment of natural child growth is not inherently bad; however, it produces disadvantages because it is not privileged in American society. Lareau's work is insightful and allows scholars to see how social class is tacitly embedded into American culture.

The cultural approach to studying social class only captures one context of social class and does not explain how social class permeates society in a larger context. Dougherty (2011) argues that, "…social class is not just about the culture of the people living in their material environment. It is also about the behavior and judgment of the people in the surrounding environment" (p. 57). As a whole, a cultural way of understanding social class is much more nuanced than that of a variable approach. However, it does not explain how people from various social classes constitute and maintain societal structures. These cultural approaches do not account for the full complexity of social class as a phenomenon that permeates society.

Structural Approaches to the Study of Social Class.

Historically, a structural way of understanding social class has been used to scrutinize the relationship between various social class groups by analyzing issues of power. Looking at social class from a structural standpoint means that scholars are analyzing social structures that organize and constitute our society. By looking at the way social class is embedded into various structural forms scholars have been able to critique the pervasive injustice that exists globally.

One theorist, Karl Marx, has been widely cited in social class scholarship. Marx viewed social class as a form of economic structure where groups exist in a hierarchal social order (Dougherty, 2011). Marx's (1967/1867) work on capitalism explains social class based on the social division of labor, which generally separated the masses into two groups: bourgeoisie and proletariat. Most Marxist discussions of social class also include descriptions of capitalism as the primary economic structure. Marx's (1967/1867) work provides a historical foundation for one way social class has been traditionally structured. The bourgeoisie are the ruling class, a group of people with economic capital at their disposal. The proletariat is a group of people in society without substantial economic capital. As a way to compensate for their lack of capital, the proletariat sells their labor to the bourgeoisie. Based on Marx's scholarship, social class differences infuse society with a power structure. In his theorizing, Marx carefully explains how the bourgeoisie's ability to own the means and modes of production grants power in a capitalistic society. He addresses the disadvantages that accompanied the proletariat as they sell their labor to the bourgeoisie. Marx also illustrates the way members of society begin to develop a fetish for material belongings. One's ability to gain capital and obtain material wealth displaces

the power structure of our society onto the market of exchange. Carib (2002) highlights Marxist theory and explains that scholars have used Marxist thought (specifically, the relationship between laborers and the modes of production) to examine social relations.

Overall, scholars have used Marx to address the way individuals from various class groups can or cannot participate in the market of exchange. Carib (2002) presents a critique of these traditional approaches to understanding social class phenomenon. He explains that it is limiting to envision social class as something that primarily stems from one's relationships to production. Instead, people should understand social classification as a way to comprehend the intersection of various characteristics such as psychological states, social identities, type of skill/work, level of skill/work, employment relations, supervisory experience, and more (Carib, 2002). Finally, Dougherty (2011) points out that social class stratification is a persistent and pervasive societal phenomenon that existed prior to the advent of capitalism (Dougherty, 2011). In sum, a structural understanding of social class also falls short at capturing the complexity of this phenomenon.

Social class is a multi-faceted phenomenon that can be studied in many different ways, such as the triangulation of variables, a cultural way of life, and societal structure. But every way that social class has previously been studied fails to account for the way in which social class status fully constrains and enables life. Social class is manifest in micro-, meso-, and macro-levels of social life. Using a communication lens, it is possible to cross cut and analyze all three levels of social class manifestation. The fluidity of social class makes it difficult to define (Dougherty, 2011). The web-of-power is a new conceptualization that helps to account for the complicated nature of social class.

Social class is fluid, which is likely why scholars have attempted to understand it through multiple conceptualizations (i.e. variable, cultural, structural). The dynamic understanding of social class allows it to transcend both time and space. Social class is fluid because its meaning shifts and evolves over time (Dougherty, 2011). The fluidity of social class is also evident in that it transcends various types of economic structures (i.e. capitalism, feudalism) and cultural milieus (e.g. European, African, Indian, American, etc.). Because of its fluidity, we cannot accurately narrow the notions of social class to one singular definition. The way in which Americans understand social class changes based on our location in time and space. It also changes based on how one defines success (Lucas & Buzzanell, 2004) and how one measures the bar of success in life compared to the lives of others (Lamont, 2000). Social class is powerful because it is something that cannot be clearly defined or clearly articulated. Thus, the power of social class is partially derived because it is elusive. However, in the same vein social class is also pervasive. In this way, social class is fixed.

Social Class: Fixed

The fixed nature of social class manifests because the same people are historically marginalized on the social class strata (Dougherty, 2011). As Dougherty (2011) explains, social groups who are poverty stricken and who hover above the poverty line are fairly consistent across time and space. Inequality and injustice are concepts that are inextricably connected to notions of social class because they provide hierarchy and stratification (Carib, 2002). For example, Massey and Denton (1993) argue that poor residents of the ghetto will almost always remain poor because of the structural oppression built into American society. Similarly, Farmer (2005) illustrates the way in

which poverty extends all over the globe and how society works against those at the bottom of the social class strata in “structurally violent” ways that keep the poor in poverty. As Carib (2002) states, “In this respect, economic inequality is important because of the differential resources to which different socio-economic groups have access” (p. 347). The poor, working poor, and near poor experience social class in ways that permeate multiple areas of life and well-being. Being poor in America is more than a simple indicator of the amount of material resources people have at their disposal. Long term poverty violates basic human rights and influences one’s ability to maintain and live a dignified quality of life (Farmer, 2005). Being poor generally inhibits one’s ability to be clean, safe, healthy, fed, educated, and employed (Farmer, 2005). Those individuals at the bottom of the social class hierarchy remain in a relatively fixed disadvantaged state. Scholars have explained that race intersects with class, especially when you consider the structural disadvantages that certain minority racial groups experience (Dougherty, 2011; Massey & Denton, 1996). While it is difficult to name what exactly social class is, it is not difficult to see who exactly benefits from or is hurt by social class.

Unemployment: Fluid and Fixed

The fluid and fixed nature of social class has theoretical implications for unemployment as a social science phenomenon. If social class is dually fluid and fixed, then it is helpful to theorize ways in which unemployment might be conceptually similar. Theoretically, unemployment changes that which seems fixed (i.e. employment status, social class status) into a less stable and more fluid experience. The loss of work is detrimental on both macro and micro levels (Latack, Kinicki & Prussia, 1995). From a macro-level standpoint, a country’s economic viability and stability is threatened when a

nation's unemployment rate rises (Dooley & Catalano, 1980). On the other end of the spectrum, job loss threatens individual life with a similar destabilizing effect (Leana & Feldman, 1988). Job loss takes the fixed, more stable, situation of regular employment and makes lives uncertain (McGrath, 1976).

In addition, experiencing unemployment contributes to the fluidity of social class. By this I mean one's social class status can likely change based on unemployment experiences. Social class is not something that is fixed in a person's life. Social class statuses have the possibility of changing over the course of one's life. For example, experiencing long bouts of unemployment can move a person down the social class strata. The significant rate of long term unemployment in America's current economic struggle is a unique challenge during the recovery of the most recent recession (Aaronson, Mazumder, & Schechter, 2010). The financial hardship that ensues during long periods of unemployment starts many individuals, not to mention the economy, on a downward spiral (Peck, 2010). Thus it is important to understand how the unemployed experience social class during the absence of work.

However, unemployment is also fixed in a sense. Newman (1988) explains that periods of recession and joblessness are a natural and recurring part of our nation's economic landscape. Since 1948, there have been 10 recessions in the United States (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012a). Even in times where the economy is strong and America is not in a recession there is always some percentage of the population that is unemployed. Since 1948, the lowest the unemployment rate has ever been was in 1953 at 2.5%. In short, unemployment is a fixed aspect of our American economy. Someone is always without work in America.

Unemployment is also fixed in the sense that it continues to disproportionally affect the same groups of people. Oesch (2010) examines the reasons why low-skilled workers are disproportionally unemployed in both Europe and North America. In most affluent countries the following four explanations have been attributed as reasons why certain groups experience disproportionate unemployment: wage-setting institutions, employment regulation, globalization, and monetary policy (Oesch, 2010). These explanations are laid out in more detail below.

Economists have argued that government sanctioned minimum wages ultimately hurt low-skilled workers (Oesch, 2010). The rationale behind this argument explains that if a country's minimum wage exceeds the productivity of low-skilled workers it will challenge the viability of organizations and result in unemployment (Oesch, 2010). Secondly, employment policy and regulation has been debated as a reason why low-skilled workers experience high levels of unemployment. Some scholars argue that unemployment insurance decreases the intensity of the job search resulting in both increased rates and prolonged periods of unemployment (Oesch, 2010). On the other side of the debate scholars argue that unemployment insurance is not sufficient and results in job seekers settling for jobs that render them underemployed, which subsequently results in turnover (Oesch, 2010). Third, globalization has a disproportionate negative impact on low-skills workers in developed countries. Developed countries, such as the United States, have a concentration of manufacturing that require highly educated employees with specialized skill sets. This concentration leaves low-skilled workers in developed countries unemployed. Instead of hiring low-skilled workers, developed countries are consuming goods that require low-skill manufacturing internationally from developing

countries. Finally, monetary policy or macroeconomic demand is blamed for the increased rates of unemployment among low-skilled workers. During economic recession low-skilled workers are out of demand and disadvantaged because high skilled workers can do low-skilled work and high skill sets are more expensive to replace. Economists explain that if a recession lasts several years low-skilled workers would fall into structural, cyclical unemployment. Macro level institutions work together to produce structures that fix unemployment on certain groups of people (Farmer, 2005; Wilson, 1996). Massey and Denton's (1996) work exemplifies how segregation is a structural factor that keeps urban residents of ghettos unemployed and in poverty. It is important to note that residents of urban ghettos are structurally segregated, not only because of class but also because of race.

Unemployment for socially marginalized groups (e.g. racial minorities, uneducated workers, disabled workers, women with dependents) is a fixed reality and a constant threat. Thus, it is important to research the management of unemployment experiences in socially marginalized groups. What may be more revealing is a comparative analysis of efforts to manage unemployment across social class groups. This comparative analysis reveals differences in the ability to manage the absence of work and the job search based on one's social privilege or social marginalization in the face of the fixed, persistent reality of unemployment.

Summary: Fluid and Fixed

Social class is fluid, which may be why scholars have not fully captured its essence in a single definition (Dougherty, 2011). Yet social class is fixed because it is constantly part of the social landscape in a way that separates people and their ability to

live well. Unemployment is part of the social class experience in both fluid and fixed ways. Unemployment contributes to the fluidity of social class because it is frequently a catalyst that changes one's social class status. However, unemployment is also a fixture in our economic landscape that persistently threatens groups of people at the bottom of the social class strata. Grasping the simultaneously fluid and fixed nature is a way to understand the complexity and power underlying social class phenomenon. However, the intricacy of social class also emerges in communication. A communicative lens is an alternative way to understand how Americans conceptualize, participate in, and organize work. In turn, a communicative focus also has implications for the way Americans conceptualize, participate in, and organize the absence of work. In the next section I explain the manner in which social class is evident in the content and practice of communication. Then I illustrate the way in which communication changes during periods of unemployment.

Interrogating Literature: Communicative Marking of Social Class

The web-of-power accounts for the way communication is classed. One of the tenets or strands of the theory is that social class is physically unmarked and communicatively marked (Dougherty, 2011). Most people attempt to judge social class differences based on appearance or other physical characteristics, but social class is not simply an outward projection. In fact, physically masking social class status is not difficult. Because social class is deeply embedded into our psychological (Carib, 2002) and social selves (Allen, 2011), it is more clearly evident through communication. In short, social class differences are evident when considering the manner in which communication norms differ between social class groups. People from different social

class groups communicate differently. These communication differences have been noted in the literature regarding both the content and mode of communication behaviors (see Lubrano, 2004; Lareau, 2003; Schatzman & Strauss, 1955 for examples). Dougherty's (2011) argument highlights the way that people can physically mask their social class. People may do so by adorning their physical bodies with symbols of wealth (i.e. brand name material goods, accessories, trendy clothing). There are also people who 'pass' for working-class by participating in similar behavior (Dougherty, 2011; Lubrano, 2004). Unfortunately, another way people assess social class status is by nonverbal cues. Race and gender play a role in the assessment of social class because they are frequently embodied aspects of our identity. Dougherty (2011) argues that we use race and gender as substitute markers for social class. Using race and gender as substitutes happen because racial minorities and women (especially women with dependents) are more likely to have a lower social class background than White, male counterparts (Dougherty, 2011). Thus, when people interact with others from certain races or genders they make social class assumptions and interaction with them according to dominant societal norms (Dougherty, 2011). Simply put, social class is a complex reality that is not always apparent physically, but rather manifests itself through communication. Viewing social class in this way can help communication scholars study and theorize about social class.

The variable, cultural, and structural ways of conceptualizing social class make it challenging to connect, decipher, and understand. Communication is a vehicle scholars can use to relate these varying social class manifestations. Dougherty (2011) urges her readers to shift their understanding of social class by re-conceptualizing communication as the "mortar for social class" (p. 75). Using the metaphor of mortar we can consider

each of these manifestations of social class as bricks in a wall. Each brick in the wall is composed of variable, cultural, structural, social, or even psychological manifestation of social class. Communication binds and holds these bricks together. Metaphorically, communication goes through and connects each facet of social class. Because the mortar is the unifying feature, it makes sense to look between the spaces to see how communication and discourse constitute, empower, bring together, and uphold social class manifestations in our interactions. Dougherty (2011) uses the following quote to address the relationship between social class and communication, "rather, it is the silent force between the cracks of wealth, income, occupation, and education that constitutes the mortar of the class system" (Conley, 2008, p. 371). Dougherty's (2011) argument is that communication is the force or mortar between the cracks of social class. In order to better understand this, it is important to know how communication is classed. The next section of this paper will share literature that exemplifies the notion that social class manifests in our communication.

Social Class and Communication

People are socialized into both communication behaviors and social class. In short, the ways we are taught to communicate are inherently classed. Socialization may be either explicit or implicit, but nevertheless it happens. Much of our socialization into the world begins at home and then is subsequently developed as we go about life through organizational entities such as school or work. In this section I share literature that addresses the way communication is classed. I start with Lareau's (2003) work on the social class and family life, pulling excerpts that illustrate communication differences. I then share Lubrano's (2004) work that illustrates the way communication differs in

workplace contexts. Next, I recap some of the main differences that have been noted about communication across social class. I then review linguistic norms that differ across social class lines. I close this section by reviewing literature that explains how unemployment impacts our already classed communication.

Social Class and Childhood Communication.

Families teach their children how to communicate. It is logical that one's social class status might influence this type of socialization. Lareau (2003) used intensive naturalistic observation and in-depth interviews of 12 families to better understand child rearing strategies across social class lines. Her study looked at poor, working-class, and middle-class families and examined the ways children have been socialized into their various social class identities. While her study focused on child rearing methods, here I will focus on extrapolating her findings that are specific to communication. It is important to note that Lareau's participants were families from both European American and African American backgrounds. She concluded that social class was a more influential factor in familial lifestyle than race (Lareau, 2003).

The social class backgrounds of our families have large implications for how we communicate. For example, working-class family homes are characterized by comfortable silences that are punctuated with short interjections of speech. According to Lareau's (2003) findings, silence is a normative aspect of lower-class homes. The use of silence is an important distinction to understand because silence can be a communication vehicle (Covarrubias, 2007). Scholars have argued that silence should not be framed as the absence of communication (Covarrubias, 2007); framing silence as the lack of communication supports the privilege that verbosity has in American society (Dougherty,

2011). Clair (1998) argues that both language and silence are both significant forms of expression. “The silences around the words are as powerful and as numerous in meaning and valence as the words themselves” (Clair, 1998, p. 23). Working-class use of silence is important to note because when children learn to incorporate the use of silence into their communication it carries implications for adult communicative behaviors, which is covered in the next sub-section. Also, in working-class and poor families, children are not seen as equal to adults. Feeling unequal is evident because working-class and poor children are not spoken to as equal conversational partners. In essence, working-class and poor children witness a divide between themselves and authority figures. However, working-class children feel closer to their peers because they primarily play unsupervised with other children in their families or neighborhoods. In sum, communication behaviors are distinct for working-class and poor families because silence is embraced, hierarchical downward communication flow is normative, and the majority of childhood interactions are with family.

Conversely, middle-class family environments differ considerably. Children participate in a large amount of structured organizational activities (e.g. team sports, girl/boy scouts, dance) (Lareau, 2003). This means that they commonly interact with people outside of their familial circle. Middle-class children are spoken to as equal conversational partners and are explicitly taught to summarize, highlight, and give context during verbal communication (Lareau, 2003). Middle-class homes are characterized by a constant flow of speech and communication with small instances of silence (Lareau, 2003). In sum, communication behaviors are distinct for middle-class families because they participate in constant speech acts, are accustomed to

multidirectional communication flow, and frequently experience social interaction with those outside the family.

Familial experiences that socialize children contribute to their collective social class identities and their communication behaviors. Unfortunately, these differences are not value/power neutral in our society and sometimes produce inequality and conflict in our social systems. Lareau (2003) explains that while neither approach to child-rearing is better, the middle-class approach does give advantages to those individuals in our American capitalistic system. Such advantages are especially evident when individuals are interacting within various organizational settings. In order to illustrate the inequities that resulted due to the way communication is classed, I will share one organizational example from Lareau's (2003) text.

As previously mentioned, middle-class children were communicatively groomed by their parents. Explicit communication grooming produces advantages in American organizational settings. After shadowing parents who took their children to a medical appointment, Lareau observed that these experiences are dramatically different because of how parents' and children's communication differs across social class lines. Alexander, a middle-class child from Lareau's study, addressed the doctor directly, looked the doctor in the face and asked questions (Lareau, 2003). On the ride to the doctor's office Alexander's mother prompted him to think about what he would tell the doctor and how he would explain his ailments. Harold, a working-class child from Lareau's study, mimicked his mother's communicative behavior by avoiding eye contact and mumbling to the doctor when asked questions. This brief example illustrates how small differences in our communication have potentially larger implications for our

navigation through organizations. In America, middle-class communication is privileged (Mills, 2004) and in the organizational setting of a physician's office this privileging results in a higher quality of health care. However, this is one instance of classed communication during childhood. The way social class is marked through communication is manifest in many adult experiences as well.

Social Class and Adulthood Communication.

Communication differences across social class are easily recognizable by people who have had multiple social class experiences. In order to highlight communication differences between working-class and middle-class people, I review literature that highlights social mobility. Social mobility complicates the notions of social class, the social class structure, and ideological norms found within various social class groups. Social mobility complicates social class structure and norms because it means that social class boundaries are permeable. Specifically social mobility highlights communication differences. Work-life challenges due to upward mobility are reviewed in Lubrano's (2004) book titled, *Limbo: Blue collar roots, white collar dreams*. In this text, Lubrano (2004) shares his findings from a journalistic research endeavor where he interviewed over 100 people and sought out narratives from social class straddlers. He defines straddlers as people who grow up in working-class households and achieve upward mobility primarily through education that led to middle-class careers (Lubrano, 2004). In this text he highlights mobility related challenges such as identity struggles, differing value systems, alternate communication norms, and more. Below I focus on the different communication patterns that his interviewees addressed.

Straddlers described middle-class communication norms as indirect, subtle, passive, and quiet; ultimately, straddlers thought middle-class communication behavior was ineffective, political, and insincere (Lubrano, 2004). This is one example of the constant struggle social class straddlers endure as they teeter between social class lines. For example, white-collar office politics and communication norms are often a site of discursive struggle for socially mobile individuals, those who have parlayed themselves into middle-class jobs from working-class backgrounds. Lubrano's participants realized that what they observed from their parents blue-collar work experiences was inapplicable to their new white-collar work surroundings. Lubrano (2004) distinctly addressed office politics when he states, "American corporate culture is based on WASP [White Anglo Saxton Protestant] values, whether or not WASPs are actually running the company. Everything is outwardly calm and quiet. Workers have to be reserved and unemotional…" (p. 130). Among working-class people, direct and emotional communication is more commonly expected and accepted as an appropriate form of communication (Lareau, 2003; Philipsen, 1975). This form of communication is preferred and provides clarity amongst the working class. Trying to understand appropriate middle-class communication norms (in both practice and content) is a source of anxiety for straddlers (Lubrano, 2004). Lubrano (2004) elaborates by saying, "Language too is a sticking point – both what you say and how you say it..." (p. 130). Most straddlers felt inept as they entered the middle-class world and struggled to learn the language of their white-collar counterparts. Feelings of inadequacy likely surface because middle-class communication norms and linguistic rules are privileged in America (Mills, 2004).

Linguistic Differences.

Various scholars have noted how communicative behaviors differ across culture sharing groups (for example see Covarrubias, 2007; Macaulay, 2002; Morris, 2007; Mills, 2004). Specifically regarding social class, it appears as if basic linguistic behavior changes across social class lines in significant ways that impact communication and interaction (Macaulay, 2002; Morris, 2007). Unfortunately, there is a classed based privileging of middle class communication norms (Mills, 2004) that puts individuals from the working class at a disadvantage within America culture (Rushton & Young, 1975). Frequently privileged communication norms also put people from non-dominant racial and gender groups at a disadvantage as well (Morris, 2007). Even in scholarship, privileging middle-class communication norms has put working-class individuals under unfair scrutiny (Rushton & Young, 1975). Important linguistic differences, which have been highlighted regarding classed communication, are found in both the mode and content of communication.

Several scholars have noted how the mode of communication changes across social class lines. I will specifically highlight research that examines how silence and loudness are points of communicative distinction. Silence has largely been overlooked in communication scholarship as a positive mode of communication (Covarrubias, 2007). Covarrubias (2007) explains that from a Eurocentric, dichotomous point-of-view, verbal communication has a positive valuation and silence has the opposite. Silence is also treated as the absence of communication, pregnant with potential for communication rather than a form of communication itself (Covarrubias, 2007). Instead of conceptualizing silence in this manner Covarrubias (2007) introduces two distinct ways

of thinking about silence. The first is consumptive silence. Consumptive silence is a negative space, a communicative deviance. She defines it as silence that is addressed as, “the locus of interpersonal malfunction” (p. 268). Conversely, Covarrubias (2007) coins the term generative silence, which is a creative, powerful means of communication that is a means to engage people and to validate the self and others. Similarly, Clair (1998) argues that silence communicates expression and that just as the origins of language evolved, silence was also articulated. Having multiple conceptualizations of silence is important when considering issues of social class. The assumption is that members of the working-class are communicatively incompetent or less skilled since the need for frequent verbal communication is not necessary for their line of work (Dougherty, 2011). A deficit model of communication is applied to working-class communication standards when they are compared to middle-class communication norms (Dougherty, 2011). In a deficit model of communication a less frequent use of words is seen as a shortcoming.

Another middle-class norm of communication that is evaluated in our society is the volume of speech. Both Brown (1997) and Morris (2007) note the way class and gender intersect specifically as it relates to volume of verbal communication. Their analyses point to middle-class norms of femininity, which favor quiet communication. In Brown’s (1997) analysis of White working-class girls she notes that her participants are aware of the socially constructed, normative middle-class lady-like ways of communication. Brown’s (1997) participants mocked their teachers who encouraged them to follow these norms by speaking more quietly and properly. Morris (2007) focuses on Black working-class girls and highlights the intersection of class, race and gender in communication. Morris (2007) analyzes organizational communication at

school. Teachers called Black female students “loudies” instead of ladies, calling attention to the increased volume of their speech (Morris, 2007). The most common criticism of Black girl students was that they were too loud. The increased volume in their speech allowed the girls to defend themselves against other students when they were being picked on, messed with, or teased (Morris, 2007). Yet the teachers of the Black working-class girls attempt to socialize the girls into White, middle-class communicative norms that followed traditional expectations for White femininity.

The intersection of race, gender, and class is important when considering the volume of speech, especially in light of stereotypes. Morris (2007) explains that Black female students who came from single parent households were likely louder and had a tendency to assert themselves. Teachers associated this with the matriarch stereotype of Black women and Black female teachers had a tendency to work to reform the girls’ behavior so that it did not play into the stereotype of the matriarch. From a historical perspective, Black women have long struggled against injustice and worked outside the home, which makes them more likely to be assertive (Morris, 2007). Increasing one’s vocal volume is a way to fight and to be heard. Regardless of race, scholarship identifies loudness as a commonality across working-class girls and recognizes this differentiation in communicative behavior when compared to middle-class norms (Brown, 1997).

Social class status has large implications for the way we communicate. The mode of communication across class lines differs largely in regard to silence and volume. Frequently a deficit model of communication is applied when people make sense of working-class communication behaviors (Dougherty, 2011). Using a deficit model reinforces ideological norms and ultimately marginalizes people from non-dominant,

culture sharing groups that communicate differently than the normative White, middle-class standard. Pattillo (2008) explains when race and class intersect structural hierarchies of domination and biases emerge against non-dominant group members. These complex systems structure society so that normative group members can pool and hoard resources disadvantaging others (Pattillo, 2008). In addition to the mode of communication, the content of communication differs across social class lines as well. Communicative differences across social class lines are not only manifest in how one communicates, but can also be found in what one communicates.

When considering personal narratives, there have also been differences in regard to content that can be likely attributed to social class (Schatzman & Strauss, 1955). Schatzman and Strauss' (1955) identified four areas where personal narratives differed by social class status: centering, imagery, classifications, and organizing frameworks (Schatzman & Strauss, 1955). The first area, centering, addressed the foci of narratives. Working-class individuals centered their narratives on themselves versus middle-class individuals who told narratives from a variety of standpoints. The second area, imagery, addresses the communication of pertinent contextual information. According to their findings middle-class individuals provided a framework to their stories while working-class individuals provided an account that was framed around their direct experiences (Schatzman & Strauss, 1955). The third area, classification, addresses the way narrators spoke about the characters in their story. Working-class individuals were able to classify individuals in concrete terms, often designating them by familial names suggesting that working-class individuals mentally compartmentalize people in distinct ways (Schatzman & Strauss, 1955). By contrast, middle-class speech was laden with social classifications

in regard to group membership. The last area titled organizing frameworks suggests that people pattern and organize their speech differently across class lines (Schatzman & Strauss, 1955). Researchers noticed that middle-class participants provided summaries and highlighted particular content. Working-class narratives did not follow rigid structure and instead provided a flow of communication that allowed the storyteller to pursue other topics when speaking (Schatzman & Strauss, 1955). While this study was completed fifty-six years ago, and despite the many critiques that could be discussed (e.g. sexist language and bias framing of findings toward middle-class modes of communication), there are key conclusions that still ring true and apply to the present discussion.

First, Schatzman and Strauss (1955) recognize their bias as middle-class researchers and articulate the way in which this may inhibit their interpretation and analysis. As scholars we must continue to check our tendency to privilege our worldviews, especially when researching differences such as social class. Second, it is important to note that our communication differs across class lines because social class implicates the way we understand the world and the way we organize to achieve collective goals, such as, for example job seeking. The way in which an individual approaches storytelling (a micro-discursive formation) highlights her/his standpoint and worldview and can give listeners of the story a glimpse into larger scale, structurally based experiences (macro-discursive formations) (Greimas, 1987).

Unemployment: Marked through Communication.

Communication is classed through differing class based linguistic rules. In addition, communication is classed because we are socialized into communicative behaviors that are reinforced by institutions such as family, school, and work.

Communication behaviors are an important aspect of our unemployment experiences. In this section I review literature that explores the way communication and discourse change during periods of unemployment.

Communication scholars have noted how narrative communication changes during periods of unemployment. Buzzanell and Turner's (2003, 2012) work on family dynamics during periods of unemployment can speak to these communication changes. Their research took a discourse-centered approach to the study of job loss. Specifically Buzzanell and Turner (2012) examined the way that families with unemployed fathers rearticulated their family narratives against dominant discourses that privilege work over family. The findings of this study illustrate that family narratives privilege the father's point of view. Since fathers were the ones who lost work in their participants, they maintained a level of centrality and control over the families' narrative about the unemployment. Secondly, family members worked together to maintain family values and integrity by continuing to participate in their familial traditions and interaction. For example, families might still dine out on a weekly basis as a way to facilitate family bonding. However, the job loss commonly altered these interactions because of financial constraints yet their maintenance contributed to a sense of normalcy. For instance, even though families continue to dine out weekly the selected restaurants became more affordable. These actions contribute to a discursive construction of a new normalcy. Efforts to construct a family's new normalcy are evident in their use of metaphor in family narratives. When families explain the initial shock of job loss they use metaphors that describe a major disruption and devastation, yet as time went on and families rework their understanding and their narratives convey a stronger sense of stability. This is one

scholarly example that illustrates how our communication is marked or changes as Americans experience unemployment.

Not only do familial conversations change as a result of an unemployed breadwinner, but communication about one's identity changes for the unemployed as well. In other words, coping with unemployment changes how people perceive and talk about both their selves and the absence of work. Garrett-Peters (2009) study of self-concept during periods of unemployment illustrates the ways that our identity shifts when Americans are without work. Focusing on unemployed, white-collar job seekers, Garrett-Peters (2009) identified five self-concept repair strategies that people used. All of these repair strategies marked a discursive shift or a collaborative effort to reframe the stigma of unemployment. For example, people talked about their unemployment as opportunities or challenges. Job seekers also re-articulated their definitions of accomplishments by recognizing their ability to successfully complete familial tasks (Garrett-Peters, 2009). People also formed accountability partnerships in order to remain active in their job searchers (Garrett-Peters, 2009). Communicating with accountability partners was a way to stay motivated during the job search (Garrett-Peters, 2009). Communication is also an important part of the job search because executing a job search requires deliberate and strategic communicative acts.

Job candidates use communication to seek information about job opportunities, apply and interview for specific positions, and to negotiate final terms when securing a position. There is an entire genre of popular press job seeking literature that informs people how to strategically and persuasively communicate about oneself during the job search process (e.g. Bolles, 2009; Burns, 2009; Oliver, 2005; Powers, 2010; Rosenberg,

1996; Ryan, 2008). It is likely that this communicative process is highly classed as well. The type of communication potential employers desire and deem appropriate likely differs depending on the type of work employers are offering. Simply put, organizations or employers that are seeking blue-collar workers likely expect different types of communication from potential employees than white-collar organizations or employers. With that said, it is also likely that unemployment organizations communicate to their patrons in classed ways. The type of organizational communication that takes place within unemployment organizations likely differs regarding the social class groups these organizations seek to serve. This research studies unemployment organizations and reveals how organizational members communicate in classed ways.

Summary: Communicative Marking of Social Class

Communication differs across social class lines. Communication differences become evident in organizational spaces such as work and school (Allen, 2011). People who are socially mobile can easily look like they belong to a particular social class because social class backgrounds are physically unmarked (Dougherty, 2011). Instead it is through communication that social class backgrounds manifest (Dougherty, 2011). Socially mobile individuals experience communication struggles at work because they have been socialized differently. For example, the use of silence is a differentiating communication behavior across social class lines (Dougherty, 2011). Also, the flow of communication in relation to hierarchy and power is also a differentiating characteristic that alters the way people from differing social classes communicate (Lareau, 2003). The way we communicate is classed.

The communicative marking of social class carries implications for unemployment experiences. Not only does unemployment change how we communicate about ourselves (Garrett-Peters, 2009), but communication is critical during the job search process. Deliberate, strategic communication is imperative to a successful job search. The ability to find work dramatically impacts other strands in the web-of-power because it impacts both material and discursive realities. In the next section, I illustrate the ways in which social class exists as a dialectic between materiality and discourse. I also review the way unemployment dually manifests in material and discursive realities.

Interrogating Literature: Materiality & Discourse of Social Class

As scholars study social class they must consider both material and discursive reality. This is a strand in the web-of-power. Social class as a phenomenon includes both objective and subjective elements (Hout, 2008). Material and discursive worlds are co-created and many times exist in tension with each another (Dougherty, 2011). Dougherty (2011) suggests scholars complicate notions of class by considering the dialectic between material and discursive constructions of class. Social class has obvious material implications because class status generally impacts one's ability to provide or maintain physical well-being. This material reality of social class commonly includes quantifiable characteristics such as income, type of labor, etc. However, quantifiable characteristics of social class status also coincide with connotative meanings.

In American society, meaning is ascribed to our material reality. Part of that ascription includes the meaning of work, which is derived from socially constructed ideals. In order to understand the materiality and discourse of unemployment, it is first important to view the material and discursive elements of work. The value of work, its

salience to American identity, and expectations to work are all part of discursive reality. It is clear that both material and discursive realities are deeply integrated aspects of life. In addition to exploring the way social class is connected to work, this section also shows how the material reality of work exists in tension with discursive constructions about the meaning of work. I address the theoretical implications of a dialectic between material and discursive classed realities by considering the ways in which reality changes due to the absence of work.

Materiality and Discourse of Work

Labor plays a particularly important role in the habitants of capitalistic societies, such as America. As previously explained, social class is inherently tied to labor. Before delving into issues of unemployment and social class it is important to understand the way social class and work are both material and discursive. Once the relationship between social class and work is explained, I address social class as it relates to the absence of work. There is a wide body of interdisciplinary literature that examines social class as it relates to work. In order to focus this review, please note that the purpose of this section is twofold. Primarily I review ways in which social class and work are connected. Awareness about this connection provides context to scholarly understanding about unemployment. Secondarily, I show how material and discursive reality exist in tension with one another regarding social class, work, and unemployment.

Our ability to work in this country is directly connected to our ability to produce and maintain physicals aspects of life (e.g. shelter, food, clothing, transportation, education). Logically the inability to work has similar implications for material realty. The quality of life provided through the compensation for labor partially constructs our

social class status. In short, our work experiences, failures, and successes ascribe social class status to American lives. Allen (2011) explains that all work experiences are highly classed. She states, “Class biases appear in many routine practices in organizations” (p. 109). Organizational hierarchies create class-based distinctions between senior level executives and lower level staff (Allen, 2011). Even physical aspects of the workplace signify class. For example, most people lower on the hierarchy have public, standardized work spaces while those higher up have private, personalized spaces (Allen, 2011). Organizational attire denotes class difference as well; frequently maintenance staff and other working-class positions are required to wear uniforms while those in middle-class positions have the freedom to select their attire (Allen, 2011). Allen’s examples illustrate the material reality of social class and the way that social class is connected to multiple facets of our organizational work experiences (e.g. work space, hierarchy, attire, prestige, etc.). Allen’s examples reveal that value and meaning are symbolically ascribed to material aspects of work.

Social class and work are connected, but that connection is complicated by various connotative meanings in American society. Connotative meanings about work imbue different types of work with hierarchical value. Ultimately, individuals employ social class as a way to understand divisions of labor. Marvin’s (1994) scholarship is reviewed in the next section as a way to provide a deeper understanding of the way social class based divisions impact the material reality of labor and our discursive constructions of what labor means.

Body Class and Text Class.

Many conceptualizations of social class draw discursive lines between various social groups (i.e. lower, middle, upper). These divisions carry little meaning and are arbitrary to some degree. Social class is a fluid phenomenon that cannot be concretely defined or meaningfully understood using hierarchical language. However, if we look at the manifestation of social class through a lens of materiality and discourse, more meaningful differences have emerged in the literature.

The use of discursive and material practices lay at the intersection of social class and work. Literacy-based skills sets are primarily a discursive practice. Literacy is, "a set of variable and culturally specific techniques for organizing, expressing, and performing social relationships around the interaction of texts and bodies" (Marvin, 1994, p. 129). Marvin's (1994, 1995, 2006) scholarship deeply unpacks the use of literacy and its role in the social order. Marvin's work has heuristic value for any discussion of social class. Using her arguments, Dougherty (2011) locates the material/discursive tension of social class in the primary use of literate practices to do work. Marvin's (1994) historical analysis reveals the way Western society has transformed over time, granting privilege to those who frequent use literate practices to do work. Years ago the majority of American workforce was mainly comprised of trade based occupations. Many traditional trade based professions primarily use physical labor to execute work (i.e. carpentry, farming, blacksmithing, mining, etc.) As America has moved into a post-industrial, service based workforce the use of textual production (read: literate practices) has emerged to the forefront where physical labor has fallen into the background. This shift changes both the

landscape and meaning of work. Physical labor was pushed to the margins while text based labor was privileged.

Looking specifically at the historical evolution and legitimation of surgeons as a highly regarded profession, Marvin (1994) shows the transition of work from physical labor (an embodied process) to the production of text (a disembodied product). Surgeons not only execute physical work with their hands but they also work specifically with bodies in grotesque ways. During renaissance times, surgeons learned through apprenticeship by dissecting corpses (Marvin, 1994). There was no formalized higher education for surgeons, they simply learned by doing bodily work (Marvin, 1994). As significant medical findings were made surgeons began to document their knowledge, which ultimately led to formal medical education (Marvin, 1994). The 16th century saw the emergence of a separation that privileged literate students of medicine and socially constructed them as legitimate members of the medical profession (Marvin, 1994). Graduates of these early medical programs, mastered the formalized medical education system, yet many had never examined an actual patient (Marvin, 1994). Eventually surgeons who had not successfully completed formalized education were no longer allowed to execute surgical operations (Marvin, 1994). Hence, the production of text and consumption of literate knowledge was privileged in the medical profession. Over time those who neglect to consume literate knowledge are delegitimized and socially constructed as dangerous and uneducated surgeons. Fear is socially constructed about people who do not participate in the literate learning of medical practices (Marvin, 1994). In essence, the corporeal use of the body in physical labor is discursively constructed as negative and positioned in opposition to textual labor, which conceals the body through

the production of texts. Concealment of the body is a feature of many modern day industries, “Textualization is a feature of professionalization across occupations” (Marvin, 1995, p. 164). Marvin (1995) explains that people who do not conceal their bodies through literate processes, either because they are not willing or are unable, become social monsters. In short, the body class employs an increased use of non-literate practices to do primarily physical work, which has resulted in their social marginalization.

Using the dialectic of materiality and discourse as a filter, the American workforce can generally be split into two classifications: body and text (Marvin, 1994). The first include groups who primarily do physical work to maintain a livelihood, which Marvin (1994) coins the body class. The second group of individuals includes those who primarily execute their work through words producing texts, which Marvin (1994) dubs the text class. Dougherty (2011) expands on Marvin’s concept of text and body classes explaining that these social groups participate in text and body work. For example, work that is colloquially called blue-collar or working-class might be understood as body work. Conversely work that is colloquially called white-collar or upper/middle-class might be understood as text work. Both types of work are needed to maintain society, yet both are not equally valued in America. The remainder of this section will elaborate on the differences between classes and then will illustrate the ways in which class as a social construction has implications for our material reality.

Those who regularly use literacy based skill sets to execute work are distinguished from those who do not. Marvin (1994) explains that social distinctions are made based on experience with literate practices—use and manipulation of texts. In

American society, literacy is a privileged skill set. While all workers use their body in some capacity to do work, the members of the text class minimize this use of their physical body and place primacy on text based work that emphasizes discursive practices (Marvin, 1994, 1995). Conversely, in the body class the infrequent use of literate work brings an increased corporeal use of the body, which means labor is embodied (Marvin, 1994). Members of the body class minimize the use of literate tasks and place primacy on manual tasks. To clarify, I am not suggesting that physical labor does not require knowledge or a specialized skill set, but rather that the physical body is emphasized and primarily used to do the work of the body class. There is a shifting tension between body work and text work that is based on the type of labor in which one participates. Part of this tension also manifests in the way that body and text work are valued differently in American Society. For example, in American society text work is privileged and highly valued and this changes the material reality for members of both the body and text classes (Dougherty, 2011). The underlying value and privilege of text work can be seen through national compensation data provided by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2012b).

As reported by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2012b) in May, 2011 the top ten largest occupations were low paying and these frequently included body class positions. The top five largest occupations are retail sales, cashiers, food preparation, food service, and fast food workers. These most largely populated occupations fell below the annual mean wages, which mean that compensation for these positions ranged between $18,790 and $33,120 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012b). The majority of the U.S. workforce is comprised of body work positions, which receive the lowest compensation. Please note that these figures show there are material implications that

coincide with the discursive reality of membership in the body class. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2012b), “The lowest paying occupational groups were food preparation and serving related; farming, fishing, and forestry; personal care and service; and building and grounds cleaning and maintenance occupations. Annual mean wages for these groups ranged from $21,430 for food preparation and serving related occupations to $25,560 for building and grounds cleaning and maintenance occupations” (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012b, p. 2). Below average wages are material manifestations of the social constructions that correspond with body work. The body class is devalued in our society despite the fact that millions of people participate in this important type of work. The devaluation of body class work can be seen through the compensation figures because they are consistently below the benchmark of the national average compensation.

Conversely, our society highly values text work. The highest paying occupations in our society are all text work occupations such as: management, legal, computer and mathematical, and architecture and engineering (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012b). Please note that all of these occupations generally require a formal literate education and the frequent use of literate practices to do the work. Of the most highly paid positions, annual compensation ranged from averages of $77,120 for architecture and engineering occupations to $107,410 for management occupations (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012b). Thus, a different material reality coincides with the discursive constructions for members of the text class. This is evident in their monetary compensation as seen in the financial numbers above, but also because text class workers commonly receive other

forms of compensation such as health insurance benefits or paid-time off. Divisions of labor based on literate practices have powerful implications for our society.

Body/Text divisions construct a material/discursive social class power structure. In essence, Marvin (1994) argues that social distinctions based in literate practice become a "principle organizing dynamic" for social stratification and division (p. 131). Social class differences specifically implicate social constructions of work and what it means to be a body or text worker. This is another way in which our material reality (read: the type of work we do) is in tension with our discursive reality (read: the meaning ascribed to the work we do). The type of work individuals participate in provides certain advantages and disadvantages. For example, many body workers are disadvantaged in society because they are stigmatized. Marvin (1994) explains that there is a fear of the body class and that the dominant discourse informs the public that they should work smart and not hard. She states, "socializing accounts of literacy suggest a stratifying mechanism in which those with access to powerful literate currencies learn to conceal their bodies in the production and manipulation of literate signs through costly stratagems of self control" (p. Marvin, 1994, p. 130). Many body workers are stigmatized because their labor is frequently considered dirty work. The colloquial terms blue-collar and white-collar are likely derived from participation in dirty work. Marvin (1994) provides an explanatory description,

> [T]he body associated with literacy is not soiled and does not disport itself in conditions in which it can easily become soiled. It wears a clean white collar. The body of illiteracy wears a blue collar that may become soiled

> and makes its presence known by producing an odor of sweat and toil (p. 131).

Social class distinctions contribute to the privilege of the text over the body and construct the stigmatization and fear of the body work and workers.

Stigma.

Stigma is associated with dual material and discursive realities and is relevant to the study of social class. Stigma is one way power is exercised and accomplished in contemporary society (Dougherty, 2011). Stigma can be loosely understood as an ascribed questionable moral status or a discrediting mark that places taint upon an identity (Meisenbach, 2010). Dirty work literature includes scholarship that looks at frequently stigmatized work and workers. Social class is a relevant topic in this discussion of stigma because many working-class occupations (e.g. waste management, janitorial services, firefighting, etc.) are commonly categorized as dirty work. Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) recognize the following three types of taint that may result in the stigmatization of various occupational members: moral, social, and physical. Moral taint is ascribed to workers who are involved in questionably moral practices such as deception or lawlessness; for example bail bondsmen, prostitutes, and telemarketers may be morally tainted. Socially tainted work involved subservient work or tasks that bring the worker in contact with stigmatized populations such as social workers, AIDS clinic employees, police, or guards. Physical taint specifically addresses work that handles dirt, death, or discharge or where work is done in dangerous conditions such as farming, pest control, butchering, or construction (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) explain that the stigma of dirty work rarely falls into mutually exclusive

categories. But regardless of the type of taint, stigma negatively impacts workers. The discursive reality that body class workers are frequently stigmatized has implications for their material reality.

The amount and type of taint involved in different types of labor impacts the social construction of stigma. Dougherty (2011) explains that the amount of perceived filth or dirt of one's work (i.e. the material reality) directly contributes to the social construction of the stigma. She states, "…social class shapes how we construct the meaning of the stigma" (Dougherty, 2011, p. 198). Many body class workers incur stigmatization because of the type of manual labor in which they are involved. This stigma is a discursive construction. Smith (2007) looks at the phenomenon of stigma through a communicative lens by developing a model of stigma communication. Smith (2007) defines stigma communication as ''messages spread through communities to teach their members to recognize the disgraced (i.e., recognizing stigmata) and to react accordingly'' (p. 464). A lot of working-class physical, manual labor is considered dirty work and is therefore stigmatized. The stigma associated with dirty work and the body class constructs a certain fear of the body class in American society (Marvin, 1994). As Dougherty (2011) states, "there is also the struggle to loosen the stigma around particular ways of life—the struggle to retain a valued class based lifestyle that is socially stigmatized" (p. 94). Thus, the management of stigma through communication is something that many working-class individuals must frequently engage.

When people feel stigmatized it is a difficult experience, which is why individuals may attempt to manage stigma through communication. Meisenbach's (2010) theory of stigma management communication builds upon previous literature (e.g. Ashforth,

Kreiner, Clark & Fugate, 2007; Smith, 2007) and argues that stigma management communication is a complex process that warrants a closer look. Stigma arguably must be considered from both the perceptions of the stigmatizer and the stigmatized (Meisenbach, 2010). Looking at both the perceptions of the stigmatizer and the stigmatized allows scholars to dually consider both parties and their roles in the co-construction of stigma. First, scholars should consider whether people agree that stigma exists (Meisenbach, 2010). For example, people may follow the status quo or challenge the status quo regarding the stigma around being a fast food worker. Even if people do believe that there is a status quo stigma about fast food workers, they might not necessarily accept that the stigma applies to them personally. In short, Meisenbach's (2010) theory looks at two dimensions: 1) an individual's attitude toward the validity of the stigma and 2) challenge or acceptance that stigma applies to oneself. Considering both of these dimensions provides a map of communicative behavior around stigma management. Previous conceptualizations of stigma management assume that people accept stigma, but that is not necessarily the case.

Based on one's belief in the validity and their challenge or acceptance of stigma, Meisenbach (2010) explains how people could communicatively treat the stigma. The developed typology has the following four quadrants based on two dimensions: 1) accepting stigma's existence and applying stigma to self, 2) challenging stigma's existence and applying stigma to self, 3) accepting stigma's existence and not applying stigma to self, 4) challenging stigma's existence and not applying stigma to self. I will now elaborate and use unemployed job seekers as an example to explain.

Unemployment is highly stigmatized in America (Vishwanath, 1989). The longer one stays unemployed the more difficult it is to find work partially due to the stigma associated with joblessness (Oberholzer-Gee, 2008; Vishwanath, 1989). Unemployed job seekers who accept the stigma and believe that the stigma applies to them may use seven different strategies to manage the stigma. When people accept stigma and its application to self their communication may result in the use of silence (passive acceptance), disclosure about the stigma, apology, or isolation (Meisenbach, 2010). Accepting the stigma may also be communicated by efforts to bond with other stigmatized group members, use humor in the form of comic relief, or to blame the stigma for various negative outcomes (Meisenbach, 2010). However, unemployed job seekers who challenge the validity of the stigma, yet accept that the stigma applies to them may either evade responsibility or reduce offensiveness of the stigma (Meisenbach, 2010). For example, an unemployed job seeker might evade responsibility by stating their previous employer laid off workers due to a loss in market share or profits; this blames their occupational status on other structures, such as industry competition. Or an unemployed job seeker might reduce the offensiveness by arguing that they were wrongly laid off or fired. Individuals still accept the stigma as it personally applies, but try to challenge public perception regarding the stigma about their group. According to Meisenbach's (2010) typology individuals who accept the public existence of stigma, yet challenge the stigma's applicability would react differently by avoiding the topic. This individual's avoidance could result in hiding the stigmatized attribute, dodging situations where the stigma may need to be addressed, stopping the stigmatized behavior, distancing oneself from the stigma or making a favorable social comparison (Meisenbach, 2010). For

example, an unemployed individual may not tell friends or family that he/she was let go from work or they may avoid socializing with others. This is an implicit acceptance of the stigma's existence, yet allows the individual to deny that the stigma personally applies. The final quadrant in the typology accounts for a dual challenge that the stigma exists, but also rejects the notion that a stigma might personally apply. These individuals would communicatively deny or ignore stigma (Meisenbach, 2010). If unemployed job seekers felt like someone was trying to stigmatize them they might discredit the stigmatizer, highlight a logical fallacy in the stigma, or present evidence to the contrary (Meisenbach, 2010). Unemployed individuals might also ignore stigmatizing efforts from others.

Unemployed individuals likely feel the need to manage stigma communicatively because employment is highly valued in America. In American society the American Dream serves as a commonly known discourse that imbues work with value. Stigmatized workers draw from the American Dream as a discursive resource. However, scholars should consider how people without work use discourses, such as the American Dream that implicitly devalue the absence of work.

Summary: Materiality & Discourse of Work

The previous section shows the ways in which social class is connected to work and illustrates the way work impacts both discursive and material reality. The material reality exists in both the type of work we do (body and text) and in the compensation for that work because compensation contributes to the quality of life that Americans can produce. I also review the ways in which social constructions regarding social class status emerge. The privileging of text work over body work is a social construction. The stigmatization of body class people and their type of work is a discursive reality that is

rooted in material reality and has material implications (i.e. lower pay, no health benefits, physical wear on the body, etc.). “Symbolic language impacts material conditions and material conditions impact symbolic language” (Dougherty, 2011, p. 92). The discursive reality of social class is located in the meaning and value of work. Social class is partially a discursive construction that is woven into the fabric of American culture. One way values about work are integrated into culture is through discourse. In American culture, one of the most ubiquitous discourses that addresses social class and impacts the understanding of our material condition is the American Dream.

The American Dream

This section describes the American Dream and its function as a dominant discourse. The literature reviewed in this section illustrates the way that the American Dream connects to social class. Then I illustrate the way the American Dream contributes to the web-of-power as a part of our discursive reality. I also review organizational communication literature that explains how the American Dream fails to fully account for body class conceptualizations of work.

The American Dream serves as a dominant national ideology (Hochschild, 1995). In general, it is built on several core beliefs that place a frequently unobtainable value on the ability to succeed on one’s own merit (Lair, Sullivan, & Cheney, 2005). Smith and Dougherty (2012) have identified the American Dream as a master narrative. The idea of a master narrative is used throughout communication literature (see Deetz, 2003; Trethewey, 2001 for examples) to explain dominant, widespread, stories that people use as discursive tools to understand the social world. In essence, the American Dream is a master narrative because it serves a role as a pervasive, persistent storied ideology in

American culture. Tannen (2008) explains that there are two types of narratives. There are social discourses or large “N” narratives that mold the second type of narrative, our micro discourse or small “n” narratives. Ultimately, large “N” narratives inform people about the social world because they give meaning to cultural norms and provide expectations for our lives. The American Dream gives meaning to the cultural norm of employment and discursively conveys the expectation that all Americans should work.

The American Dream is perpetuated throughout the nation’s history through discourse (Cullen, 2003). This particular discourse is steeped in our country’s history and started when the founders of this nation came to America and began a new destiny for themselves (Cullen, 2003). Yet the American Dream is not an outdated narrative, instead it is dynamic and has evolved over time to incorporate newer articulations that include notions of upward mobility and equality (Cullen, 2003). The American Dream is connected to social class because it is infused with expectations about work.

The American Dream is a story about work that has changed over time to meet the needs of various social groups. Cullen (2003) addresses the way that the American Dream has served as a dynamic narrative structure for various marginalized groups in American history. First he describes Puritans and their common belief in reform as a way to correct a corrupt existence (Cullen, 2003). Puritans who left their origins maintained a belief in reform, which translated to a subtext of the American Dream, value in fresh starts or new beginnings. Second, he highlights the Declaration of Independence as an anchor for the development of the American Dream (Cullen, 2003). In the face of adversity, American men were able to change the course of their lives by establishing an ideal new beginning (Cullen, 2003). Cullen (2003) also illustrates the way that the

American Dream discourse was parlayed into notions of upward mobility. The desire for upward mobility and liberation was used as a narrative strategy during the civil rights movement and illustrates how the victories of that movement ultimately reinforce this ideology (Cullen, 2003). Then Cullen (2003) illustrates one way capitalism was more deeply woven into the fabric of the American Dream through the desire for homeownership.

National aspirations to achieve home ownership feed into middle-class ideals. Newman and Chen (2007) touch on this when they refer to home ownership as the cornerstone of the American Dream. They state, "It [home ownership] is also about accumulating equity and amassing a substantial net worth that opens possibilities in this consumer society…. a home is an important symbol: the ultimate marker of "making it" (p. 79). These scholars explain that homeownership provides access to equity and that equity is a pipeline to the American Dream (Newman & Chen, 2007). Homeowners have the opportunity to open home equity lines of credit, which help support families during times of crisis such as unemployment or illness (Newman & Chen, 2007). Furthermore, paid off homes become assets passed on to future generations, providing a safety net of wealth (Newman & Chen, 2007). The home has become an American symbol of success. Ultimately it represents a marker of personal fulfillment. Cullen (2003) illustrates that personal fulfillment is the most current collective goal of those who ascribe to the American Dream.

The American Dream is still a relevant discourse that informs American culture and the American people. This progression and expansion of the American Dream narrative illustrates the elasticity and pervasiveness of this ideological discourse. Hanson

and Zogby's (2010) most recent poll data regarding the American Dream maintain that people still believe in it. In fact their data illustrate that the American Dream narrative is persistent and informs the desires and hopes of Americans and its immigrants. Hanson and Zogby's (2010) findings suggest that hard work and determination are still important factors to succeeding in the United States. Cullen (2003) argues that the core of the American Dream is founded in the desire for agency. For example, every group (i.e. founders, migrants, civil rights activists, homeowners, workers, etc.) that has drawn on the American Dream as a master narrative or discursive resource essentially wants the power to be able to determine the course of their lives (Cullen, 2003).

Ultimately, the American Dream is strongly tied to the notion of "meritocratic individualism," which is an ideal that each person is responsible for her/his own fate (Newman, 1988). The American Dream generally functions by providing a sense of comfort and control over one's life and future (Lamont, 2000). The American Dream also serves as a narrative of hope, and provides something greater that people can aspire towards (Newman, 1999). The American Dream persuades us to ignore the structural and cultural forces around us and to solely believe in our own merit as the single driving force of our fate. Hochschild (1995) argues that this belief is wholly untrue. There is evidence that American systems and structures work to the distinct advantage of some and the disadvantage of others (Hanson & Zogby, 2010). Cullen (2003) contends that, "The American Dream would have no drama or mystique if it were a self-evident falsehood or a scientifically demonstrable principle. Ambiguity is the very source of its mythic power…" (p. 7). Conversely, other scholars also see the myth in the American Dream. According to Smith and Dougherty (2012), the master narrative masks the role difference

(social class, race, sexuality, ability, age, and gender) plays in the hindrance of one's ability to actually achieve the American Dream.

The structural disadvantages that impact the material reality of body workers challenge the viability of the American Dream. Walter R. Fisher is one scholar who scrutinizes the American Dream as a discursive vehicle. Fisher (1973) directly refers to the American Dream as a "myth". He argues, "Myths are vehicles of communication between the conscious and the unconscious, just as dreams are" (Fisher, 1973, p. 160-161). Fisher (1973) explains that the American Dream functions to provide individuals a sense of self and meaning about the social world and its social order. In essence, the American Dream serves as an underlying belief that guides aspirations, behaviors, attitudes, and identity. In Lamont's (2000) study of body class men, she explains that while men strive to achieve the American Dream they are also performing their American collective identity. The problem is that dreams are mythical and in essence falsehoods that partially drive and guide American lives. Many people subscribe to the central idea of the American Dream, which says people will succeed if they take initiative.

The American Dream is a successful discourse because it speaks to several American values and sensibilities – values in material wealth and equal opportunity. For example, Fisher (1973) argues that the American Dream specifically is comprised of a materialistic myth and a moralistic myth. The first stems from a value of upward mobility and success (Fisher, 1973). Current adaptations of the American Dream define success through materialism and capitalistic virtue (Lucas, 2011c). The second, moralistic myth is rooted and defined in the ideal that there is an equal opportunity for everyone in America to succeed (Fisher, 1973). In short, there is a value that everyone is worthy and dignified,

which supports the false hope that everyone has an equal opportunity for advancement. Newman (1988) describes the influences of Calvinist theology and the Protestant ethic on conceptualizations of work. In essence, "…worthy people are successful, and that success is indicative of merit" (Newman, 1988, p. 121). She further explains that success serves as a measuring stick for moral worth, thus your ability to obtain moral worth can be achieved through your efforts to gain the proper type of success (Newman, 1988).

Hochschild (1995) explains that success, according to the American Dream, has been conceptualized in three ways as *absolute*, *relative*, and *competitive*. Understanding success in *absolute* terms means the achievement of some pre-determined threshold, which generally equates to an actualized state where one is better off than where one started (Hochschild, 1995). Simply put, Americans who are successful have improved their status of well-being in the social world. Notions of success as *relative* use other people or points in time as a comparative benchmark. In other words, one is successful if you are doing better off than either previous generations or other groups of people (Hochschild, 1995). Third, individuals define success through *competition* where one's success ultimately means the failure of others (Hochschild, 1995). Hochschild (1995) explains that these various forms of success are associated with virtue.

Hochschild (1995) critiques this dominant ideology and highlights the flaws in what she calls the four tenets of the American Dream. She argues that the first tenet regarding equality and equal opportunity for all is simply untrue by highlighting the many marginalized groups throughout American history who have participated in civil rights activism to overcome inequality (Hochschild, 1995). Second, she explains that the next tenet, which maintains individuals can have a reasonable anticipation to achieve

success, is unrealistic since there are not enough resources and opportunities for which everyone can capitalize (Hochschild, 1995). Hochschild (1995) explains the logical fallacy behind the third tenet, which is that success results from actions and traits fully under an individual's control. It is unfortunate, but true, that many people who do everything in their power still cannot rise above their circumstances on sheer merit (Hochschild, 1995). Hochschild (1995) refutes the final tenet that success attributes virtue, and consequently, that failure is associated with evil or sin. She explains that this mentality has contributed to the stigma, discrimination, and exploitation of many Americans and ignores the larger disproportionate disadvantage prevalent in American society (Hochschild, 1995). The irony of the American Dream is that ultimately it posits a belief in a classless society, yet in order to achieve upward mobility, social class hierarchy is necessary (Lucas, 2011c).

The American Dream manifests in our discursive reality as expectations for work. Lucas (2011c) argues that this dominant societal discourse provides specific direction to Americans on how their work lives should be executed. More specifically the American Dream tells individuals how work should be accomplished and instills the ideal of upwardly mobile career paths. Lucas (2011c) states, "In short, this discourse constructs a strong belief that all individuals should do better than the previous generation to be socially mobile, and to move "up" in the social class hierarchy" (p. 352). It is evident then that the American Dream has direct implications for social class and work. Hochschild (1995) quotes President Bill Clinton in a speech at the Democratic Leadership Council stating,

> "The American dream that we were all raised on is a simple but powerful one—if you work hard and play by the rules you should be given a chance to go as far as your God-given ability will take you" (p. 18).

The challenge with these directives and Clinton's assertion is that the ability to achieve success prescribed by the American Dream is frequently inaccessible and unobtainable for many Americans. Newman (1988) states, "One can play by the rules, pay one's dues, and still be evicted from the American dream. There is simply no guarantee that one's best efforts will be rewarded in the end" (p. 229). Because of this reality, many working class members do not wholeheartedly buy into the American Dream because it provides an unsubstantiated promise that if one works hard one will achieve material success (Lamont, 2000). The material reality of American body workers has forced them to adopt an alternative world view that values and redefines success and notions of work.

Resisting Dominant Discourse: Adapting the American Dream.

This section provides a brief overview of body class value systems. Scholars have argued social class experiences differ in fundamental ways, which have led members of the body class to develop an adapted ideology (Lucas & Buzzanell, 2004; Lucas, 2011c). The body class has developed a discourse that better suits their way of life (Lucas, 2011c). There is an alternative discourse to the American Dream within body class culture that redefines the social construction of work based on blue-collar values (Lucas & Buzzanell, 2004; Lucas, 2011c). The need for an alternative discourse regarding work life is necessary in body class environments because notions of success, as defined by the American Dream (e.g. upward mobility, incremental income raises, improved social status), is virtually non-existent in most blue-collar professions (Lucas & Buzzanell,

2004). The development of an adapted ideological foundation can be conceptualized as a strand in the web-of-power. The dialectic between our material and discursive reality accounts for this ideological shift. Dougherty's (2011) discussion of material/discourse dialectic theoretically accounts for social class experiences such as these. Since the discourse of the American Dream fails to imbue body work with value, then there is a need to draw from separate discursive resources that provides the body class with dignity.

Body workers cannot fully use the American Dream discourse because, for the most part, it is inapplicable to the lives of those in their social class group. For example, the American Dream is a story of upward mobility. In reality body workers see little promotion or formal upward advancement in their careers (Lucas & Buzzanell, 2004). According to discourses like the American Dream, those who are in working-class professions are not successful if they maintain or reproduce social class statuses and do not move up the social class strata (Lucas & Buzzanell, 2004; Lucas, 2011b). Social class reproduction makes it difficult to maintain a positive understanding of body work.

In order to maintain a positive construction of working class labor, a separate value system has emerged. The *Working Class Promise* is a framework that emerged from Lucas' (2011c) data. This framework specifically establishes the notion that body class social structures have a foundation of four core values that convey positive cultural beliefs. These four core values are (a) work ethic, (b) provider orientation, (c) the dignity of all work and workers, and (d) humility (Lucas, 2011c). The first core value, work ethic, is commonly conveyed through a standard expectation of hard work (Lucas, 2011c). According to Lucas (2011c), hard work is an inherent part of living and for working-class people contributes to the essence and meaning of life. The second core

value, provider orientation, supports the first value of a strong work ethic; being a provider to one's family is viewed as a basic responsibility that allows body class families' survival (Lucas, 2011c). This includes the responsibility of providing shelter, food, and other essentials for body class families. The third core value, dignity of all work and workers, emerged in Lucas's (2011c) data as well. This theme supports the basic working-class belief that all who work deserve dignity regardless of the social status of their occupations. The final core value, humility, places an appreciation for people who remain humble and avoid having a prideful, haughty character (Lucas, 2011c). Humility supports the notion that no one's work is better than anyone else's and gives merit to the notion that all people deserve respect and dignity.

Please note however that the American Dream is not completely replaced by the ideology of the Working Class Promise, but rather layered with notions from the American Dream (Lucas, 2011c). The goal of this adapted discourse is for body workers to *maintain* a positive social class identity and membership, which is opposite to the assumption that Americans should desire upward mobility as promoted by the American Dream (Lucas, 2011c). Unfortunately, both ideologies work together to create a structural paradox (Lucas, 2011c). A paradox arises because when individuals succeed at achieving one set of directives (i.e. upward mobility) they have inherently failed at the other (maintaining body class membership).

Part of this adapted ideological premise can be found in discursive constructions that redefine the meaning of success. Lucas and Buzzanell's (2004) study on American underground miners explain how they define success as *sisu* (a Finnish term roughly meaning inner-determination) through occupational narratives. *Sisu* emerged as a core

concept that undergirded the sentiments of body class notions of success placing admiration on values such as “determination, perseverance, [and] courage” (Lucas & Buzzanell, 2004, p. 282). Redefining notions of success is one example of how body class worldviews are differentiated from text class worldviews.

Lucas’ (2011c) work identifies core working-class values as the Working Class Promise. Members of the body class are generally dedicated and committed to upholding these values and maintaining the body class (Lucas, 2011c). Abiding by these values guarantees one membership in body class communities (Lucas, 2011c). While the Working Class Promise incorporates some notions of the American Dream, it ultimately maintains a distinct ideological premise. This adapted ideology functions to provide a positive discursive resource about body class membership and labor.

Other scholars have identified similar belief systems when studying body workers. Lamont’s (2000) book, *The Dignity of Working Men* echoes similar findings. Lamont (2000) identified a cultural discourse that highlights four core body class values (a) family, (b) responsibility, (c) work ethic, (d) straightforwardness and integrity. Lamont interviewed approximately 150 working class and professional men across four cultural contexts and in her analysis juxtaposes the articulations of body/text workers by cross-referencing their interpretations of reality. The first core value, family, is similar to Lucas’ (2011c) provider orientation. Lamont explains that, “for these working class men, a key indicator of moral character is how committed one is to one’s family and what one is ready to sacrifice to this goal” (p. 31). The role of provider and protector of the family imbues a sense of purpose and duty to one’s family, which leads to the next core value, responsibility. Body class men saw discipline and taking care of one’s responsibilities as

respectable, especially since much of their labor was highly dependent on the actions of others (Lamont, 2000). In fact, irresponsibility could create issues at work and/or at home (Lamont, 2000). The virtue of responsibility dovetails with the expectation of hard work. The third core value, work ethic, is pervasive across body class discourse and scholarship. This expectation is widely regarded and discursively shared. Having a strong work ethic is a basic expectation; hence, laziness and slothful behaviors are demonized and detested (Lamont, 2000). The final core value, straightforwardness and integrity, were characteristics that warranted trust. Body class men valued honesty and transparency (Lamont, 2000). They also valued the courage to stand up for what was right, despite adversity (Lamont, 2000). These four values succinctly capture Lamont's findings and point to the vital role moral character plays in body class culture.

Body workers evaluate others and themselves on moral values (Lamont, 2000). Lamont states, "morality plays an extremely prominent role in workers' descriptions of who they are and, more important, who they are not" (p. 19). In fact, "Morality is the structuring principle in the world views of American workers…It is also important in maintaining a sense of self-worth and dignity" (Lamont, 2000, p. 51). Between these two frameworks (Lamont, 2000; Lucas, 2011c) and other scholarship regarding social class (e.g. Dougherty, 2011; Lareau, 2003; Lubrano, 2004; Lucas, 2011a, 2011b; Pugh, 2009; Philipsen, 1975; Steedman, 1986), scholars have outlined core values, assumptions, and experiences of those who collectively identify as the body class.

Summary: Materiality & Discourse of Social Class

Since body work is devalued when compared to text work, it is logical that body workers would construct a value system that provides a positive meaning to their labor

and lives. This is one way the discursive reality of the body class has shifted due to the tension between material and discursive reality. Shifts are likely to happen as a form of compensation for negative social constructions (i.e. stigma) regarding body class work. A significant amount of working class labor is stigmatized. The discursive reality of stigmatization impacts the material well-being of these workers. Material reality is impacted, for example, through lower compensation. This tension results in a need to reconstruct the discursive reality surrounding body work and workers. However, the body class is only one level of the social class strata and they are by no means at the bottom. Those without work also deal with a negatively constructed social reality.

Unemployment: Material and Discursive Reality.

Both social class and unemployment dually exists in both material and discursive ways. As previously stated, Marvin (1994) explains that the type of work (i.e. body or text) people do is a macro-level organizing component in society. If we organize our world through work, then the lack of work is inherently a disorganizing experience. The disorganization that accompanies unemployment experiences is also manifest in the tension between material and discursive reality. The combined discursive and material effects of unemployment can be identified in the large body of coping literature regarding job loss. Unemployed Americans have to cope both materially and discursively because experiences of unemployment disorganize our lives in both spheres of life. For example, losing the opportunity to work directly affects our material well-being because it impacts one's ability to provide physical necessities (i.e. food, shelter, clothing). In one sense, coping specifically relates to physical needs and one's ability to survive. However, coping from job loss is not simply a physical endeavor. Discourse plays a large role in

Americans' understanding of work and efforts to survive unemployment. As previously discussed, dominant discourse like the American Dream, specifically imbue work with value, which means that the absence of work is inherently devalued. Thus, people who are unemployed must cope with this discursive reality, because they are stigmatized (Oberholzer-Gee, 2008; Vishwanath, 1989). Much of the job loss literature examines the psychological tolls and identity negotiations that follow the loss of work (e.g. Eden & Aviram, 1993; Garrett-Peters, 2009; Latack, Kinicki & Prussia, 1995; Lin & Leung 2010). These stressors are also connected to the discursive reality unemployment creates. Hence, unemployment is managed both materially and discursively. One interesting context to consider the dual material/discursive manifestation of unemployment is unemployment insurance. Unemployment insurance is facilitated organizationally and is a construction of organizational discourse, yet these benefits directly impact material well-being.

One of the aims of unemployment insurance is to help people cope with the changes in material reality. "Anytime there is a large group of jobless workers forced to survive without an income, we have seen all too clearly the potential to undermine the living standard of all workers" (Ness & Brooks, 1991). The unemployment insurance program was originally established in 1935 (Wandner, 2008). The aim of the program was to support the income of Americans who became unemployed due to no personal fault, while they seek work (Wandner, 2008). Many unemployment insurance plans require proof of an active job search in order to receive financial benefits (Wandner, 2008). These benefits remove some of the financial strain on individuals, but commonly cannot cover the full expenses handled by the previous income. For example, in 2011

Hawaii was rated the best state for unemployment benefits (McIntyre, 2011). Hawaii covers approximately 54.3% of an employee's previous wage, which averages out to a weekly payment of $416 (McIntyre, 2011). Hawaii is the only state to provide more than 50% coverage of an unemployed individual's previous income and its unemployment insurance programs are entirely funded by employers (McIntyre, 2011). On the other end of the spectrum, Arizona's unemployment insurance only covered 26.2% of previous wages earned for Arizona's residents (McIntyre, 2011). Arizona's weekly payout, while not the lowest in the country, came in at $213 per week. The lowest weekly payout for unemployment insurance was documented in Mississippi at $190 on average per week covering 29.7% of the previously earned income for Mississippi residents. The weekly national average is $284 for unemployment benefits. To further complicate the material reality of unemployment, women without work commonly receive lower levels of support than men (McConnell, 2011). The job search is more challenging for women because they are more likely to have dependents (McConnell, 2011), yet the structure of unemployment insurance, which requires a consistently active job search, does not account for these challenges, as a result women's job search efforts as generally deemed less successful (McConnell, 2011). Gendered differences in levels of support are a material reality. Loss of income, amount of unemployment insurance, and gendered differences in support illustrate the material implications associated with unemployment.

Many times people's unemployment experiences also impact material behavior and habits. For example, many people scale back their spending habits by cooking at home and limiting the amount of times they dine out at restaurants (Newman, 1988). Some may continue to maintain their dining out habits but may alter their behavior by

becoming patrons of more affordable restaurants (Buzzanell & Turner, 2012). In many homes, families with unemployed parents will have broken down appliances because fixing them is too costly (Newman, 1988). For unemployed individuals in more difficult financial situations it is likely that the material effects could literally threaten survival.

There are several health implications that connect issues of unemployment to our material reality as well. People who are unemployed generally have increased reports of physical illness (Kessler, Turner, & House, 1988). Kessler, Turner, and House (1988) note that reports of illness significantly decrease once people are reemployed. In fact, their findings also suggest that there is a relationship between the longevity of unemployment and illness. People who experience longer periods of unemployment report lower levels of health (Kessler, Turner, & House, 1988). Several studies note claims of somatization, which happens when anxiety begins to manifest in physical symptoms (for example see Hamilton, Hoffman, Broman, & Rauma, 1993; Kessler, Turner & House, 1988; Langens & Mose, 2006). Generally somatic complaints are rooted in anxiety that is strongly correlated with other psychological states such as depression, lower self-esteem, and lower self-efficacy (Kessler, Turner & House, 1988). Unemployment is not only experienced in physical reality, but also in psychological reality. Jobless individuals psychologically and socially cope with stigma.

Experiencing unemployment is stigmatizing. Stigma is a discursive reality that is connected to our material reality, especially when considering social class related issues (Dougherty, 2011), such as unemployment. The stigma in American culture likely comes from the expectation to work that is constructed by dominant discourses such as the American Dream. For example, Vishwanath (1989) found that the stigma of

unemployment made the job search more difficult. In fact, the longer a job seeker is out of work the less likely hiring managers are willing to consider candidates due to the stigma of joblessness (Oberholzer-Gee, 2008). Social class plays a role impacting the relationship between the variables of mental health status and unemployment (Artazcoz, Benach, Borrell & Cortès, 2004). For instance unemployed, married, working-class men have the highest risk of poor mental health when compared to unemployed, married, middle-class men (Artazcoz, Benach, Borrell & Cortes, 2004). Their findings suggest that social class contributes to the stigma of being unemployed and that people must cope with the discursive reality of unemployment because of socially constructed norms. Stigma is already associated with many body class occupations, but it is likely that the stigma increases when body workers become unemployed. Coping with stigma is a communicative effort (Meisenbach, 2010) that exists in our discursive reality.

Coping with the effects of unemployment also occurs within the tension of both material and discursive reality. Scholars have noted various coping strategies that unemployed individuals use during periods without work. Coping strategies help individuals deal with the distress of being unemployed. Bennett, Martin, Bies, and Brockner (1995) examined problem-focused and symptom-focused coping strategies of laid off workers. Problem-focused coping accounts for efforts to change the environment as a way to reduce stress. For example, problem-focused coping addresses the problem by participating in activities such as job search efforts or developing additional skills sets. Symptom-focused coping accounts for efforts to decrease the hardship that corresponds with the stressful event. For instance, symptom-focused coping includes seeking out encouragement. Both types of coping allow individuals to deal with the psychological

distress, which in the end impacts their material reality. Furthermore, Eden and Aviram (1993) found that individuals who complete personal and career development training experience a boost in their general self-efficacy. Ultimately these individuals saw an increase in their job-search activity and of those participants who saw a boost in general self-efficacy there was also an increase in the success of their job search efforts (Eden & Aviram, 1993).

Our ability to cope with unemployment is likely connected to the quality and quantity of resources available. Thus, it is likely that experiences of unemployment greatly differ across social class lines because different resources are available to different people based on social class status. For example, the 40Plus Club, an unemployment organization, is only available to middle-aged people who come from middle and upper classes (Newman, 1988). Differences in the availability of unemployment support are representative of the marginalization of lower social classes. The next section addresses the unconscious and conscious struggles of those who are unable to fulfill the directives of either the American Dream or the Working Class Promise—those who are unwillingly unemployed.

Interrogating Literature: Unconscious/Conscious Class Struggle

There is heuristic value in conceptualizing social class as a communicative or discursive struggle. Class based injustices are evident in both macro and micro level discourse and emerge in the tension between consciousness and unconsciousness of social class inequality within our society. Americans are both aware and unaware of social class as an integral aspect of social life. Many Americans are consciously aware of the persistence of homelessness or poverty, yet it is easy to turn a blind eye by

unconsciously rationalizing away these social ills. Discourses like the American Dream allow Americans to blame the poor for being poor (Allen, 2011). Yet, the American Dream also provides hope because it tells the tale that all are able to determine the course of our lives.

The American Dream narrative suggests that America is a classless society (Lucas, 2011c). The belief in a classless society is deeply embedded in the American psyche. Dougherty (2011) argues that people struggle to be unconscious of social class. Simply put, people actively avoid thinking about social class differences and the way social class impacts American life. Perhaps the American Dream is one discourse that people use in order to avoid thinking about social class inequality. The struggle to be unconscious of social class is part of the web-of-power because it allows Americans to remain blind to the ways social class disadvantages much of the American population. Believing that all individuals are empowered to make their own destinies is a much easier reality to embrace because the rationale places responsibility on the individual and not on the structure of society. In this way the American Dream functions as an unconscious guide. The unconsciousness of the American Dream as an ideological guide is similar to the way Dougherty (2011) explains that social class is also unconscious. If there is unconsciousness then there must also be consciousness. While many strive to be unconscious of the social class divide through the use of discursive resources such as the American Dream, there are many who cannot remain unconscious. Many Americans are painfully conscious of social class and its inequitable consequences in our society. In this section I illustrate the way in which social class is a simultaneous unconscious/conscious communicative struggle, specifically within the context of unemployment.

The notion of a classless society is part of the web-of-power because it is a believable myth that causes people to ignore the unequal stratification of society. Social inequalities are a conscious struggle that many people have fought against for generations. The civil rights movement of the 1960s is one example of a conscious struggle where race and class intersect. Equal opportunity for people of all racial backgrounds was the primary aim of the 1960s civil rights movement and it illustrates one reason why race becomes a conscious marker of social class injustice. Race operates as a 'stand-in' marker for social class in American society (Dougherty, 2011). The substitution of race for class primarily happens because people from marginalized racial groups are more likely to find themselves segregated (Massey & Denton, 1993), impoverished (Pattillo, 2008), and largely disadvantaged (Allen, 2011). Struggle against race and class biases in society are still prevalent in American society because they are structural and institutionalized (Allen, 2007). There have been consistent efforts to fight inequality and injustice in our society. One of the most recent examples of social protest is commonly known as the Occupy Wall Street movement.

According to the website OccupyWallStreet.org (2012), this movement is a form of resistance that fights against an unfair global economy. The first demonstration took place on September 17, 2011 in Manhattan's Financial District and has spread globally (Occupy Wall Street, 2012). Wall Street is a literal space that represents the way the financial sector has usurped the democratic process (Occupy Wall Street, 2012), thus people are occupying Wall Street and other public spaces as a way to resist. Members of this movement blame Wall Street for creating the most recent recession. This movement fights the economic structure because capitalism maintains and protects the privileges of

an elite proportion of the population at the top of the social class hierarchy— the "one percent" of the population. This movement is a global effort that fights social class injustices. This modern day example of Dougherty's (2011) conscious social class struggle fights for economic equality.

The Occupy Wall Street movement has coined the phrase, "We are the 99%" arguing that the majority of the country is unfairly shouldering the lifestyles and benefits of the upper class. The movement's rhetorical stance argues that the injustice of our current economic structure is felt by the majority of the population. A public blog titled, *We are the 99 Percent* (2012) states:

> We are the 99 percent. We are getting kicked out of our homes. We are forced to choose between groceries and rent. We are denied quality medical care. We are suffering from environmental pollution. We are working long hours for little pay and no rights, if we're working at all. We are getting nothing while the other 1 percent is getting everything. We are the 99 percent. Brought to you by the people who occupy wall street. Why will YOU occupy? (We are the 99 percent, 2012, para 1).

People who participate in this movement are very conscious of social class and have pointed to its existence through their public rhetoric. Members of this movement argue that social class injustice is too often overlooked, or unconscious.

In the Occupy Wall Street movement, experiences of social class based struggles are shared through individual stories. Many people post stories that illustrate the web-of power in action. In addition, these stories commonly share unemployment experiences that frequently lead to downward social mobility and have negatively impacted the

material and discursive well-being of many Americans. Each event that occurs in a downward spiral of mobility is akin to a strand in the web-of-power that works to entrap people at the bottom of the social class strata. The stories speak for themselves and many have been shared through social media. Many of the stories on the "We are the 99 percent" (2012) blog come from unemployed Americans. One example is below:

> "I got my first job mowing lawns when I was 13. I went to work for the Federal government, laying fences, when I was 15. At 17, I left home and put myself through college and law school, without my parents' help. Yes, I had student loans, and yes, I paid them. I lost my job in 2009. Despite hundreds of phone calls, résumés, and a few interviews, it seems I am now "overqualified," at age 50, to be employed. I am coming to grip with the fact that I will never earn what I took for granted, just a few years ago. I have run through my savings, my investments, and my retirement accounts. I lost my house. My wife left me a year ago, and cancelled my health insurance. My heart medications, insulin, and related supplies, not to mention ADD meds for my teenager, total $3500 a month. I don't have $3500 to spend on meds, so I take a daily aspirin, and my kid is suffering in school. I'm waiting on the word that I have renal failure. A vial of insulin, that used to cost $15 a few years ago, now costs $80. Big pharma is gouging. Now, I am facing eviction. My two children have never seen daddy without money. I am facing the grim fact that my life insurance policy and social security death benefits may provide my kids better financial security than I can. Like George Bailey, I am "worth more dead

than alive." I AM THE 99% Occupywallstret.org" (We are the 99 percent, 2012, para. 6).

Many people in the Occupy Movement want to work, but cannot find work. The class conscious struggle of citizens in the Occupy Wall Street movement illustrates the web-of-power. This conscious struggle shows how an absence of work, which has the potential to lowers one's social class status, can leads to powerlessness. According to the stories on the *We are the 99 Percent* (2012) blog, people all over the world are doing everything they can to find work, yet they are unsuccessful. Unemployed people live at the mercy of various societal structures (i.e. capitalism, unemployment insurance, economy), which can easily work against them rendering them powerless as they try to change their jobless situations. The Occupy Wall Street movement is a way those at the bottom of the social class strata consciously communicate helplessness to those who are unconscious.

Unemployment experiences change one's reality in both material and discursive ways. Americans in our society are both unconscious and conscious of social class struggle. In America a lack of work means a dwindling livelihood because without work people eventually lose the ability to care for themselves. Entering into debt because of long-term unemployment leaves many ill, homeless, and without support. Whether one's previous social class status is upper class, middle class, working class, or poor—unemployment can be devastating. The next section illustrates the ways social class backgrounds complicate unemployment experiences.

Unemployment: Managing the Absence of Work

Now that literature illustrating the connection between social class and work has been reviewed, I consider the way social class is experienced in the absence of work.

First, I address the severity of the unemployment situation in the United States at the time this study began. Then, I transition to the role of unemployment organizations as a vehicle people use to manage unemployment experiences.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2013) reported that in December, 2012 the nation's unemployment rate was 7.8% meaning some 12.2 million people were unemployed. Despite the large number of people that struggle with job loss and securing employment, unemployed individuals are stigmatized (Vishwanath, 1989). "Downward mobility is not simply an episodic or unusual phenomenon in this country. It is a regular feature of the economic landscape that has been with us for many years" (Newman, 1988, p. 7). In fact according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2011), "Since 2007, [the] median household income has declined 6.4 percent (from $52,823) and is 7.1 percent below the median household income peak ($53,252) that occurred in 1999" (p. 5). While the American Dreams' expectation is to achieve upward mobility, the income numbers by household show that many Americans struggle to simply maintain their lifestyles financially. In general this means that many Americans fight the manifestation of nationwide economic recession via their employment status, standard of living, and social identities. Expectations to succeed contradict the reality of economic failure. This contradiction is managed personally and professionally throughout American lives. Newman (1988) explains that when individuals experience downward social mobility they have to recalibrate, reinvent, and accommodate themselves and their families. Individual and family adjustment to unemployment impacts people in financial, psychological, practical, and social ways. This is an adjustment that may remain fully incomplete in the lives of many downwardly mobile people (Newman, 1988). In short,

unemployment is challenging. Many Americans seek organizational help in order to manage and overcome barrier to regaining employment.

Unemployment Organizations

During periods of unemployment, many out of work Americans turn to unemployment organizations for support. For the purposes of this research, unemployment organizations are simply defined as either public or private sector organizations that people turn to or join in order to manage the experience of unemployment and/or to facilitate the job search process. Unemployment organizations vary widely in terms of structure and purpose. As I see it, some unemployment organizations facilitate the process of granting unemployment insurance and monitoring the job search process; these organizations are commonly called employment security agencies, unemployment offices, or career centers. There are also vocational rehabilitation offices where the skill sets of the unemployed are improved through various training exercises and career counseling. Vocational rehabilitation offices then facilitate the job search process through the organization (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2012). Brooks and Ness (1990) explain that in the 1980s a surge of unemployment agencies opened. This was a governmental reaction to the recession at that time. The recession of the 1980s is the most comparable recession to the one that ended in 2009. Many of these organizations collaborated and formed the National Unemployed Network (Brooks & Ness, 1990). In short, unemployment organizations surfaced to manage the high levels of unemployment across the country. The government needed ways to manage unemployment locally and to provide protection and support to

unemployed Americans who were struggling as the economy suffered and subsequently recovered.

Unemployed body and text workers often need help. Unemployment organizations need to become a more effective resource that can successfully assist the unemployed as they manage the absence of work and seek employment. According to Ness and Brooks (1991) the unemployed should be organized as a political force in order to fight for rights such as an extension of the term for benefit eligibility and increases in the amount of benefits received. However, there are of course, concerns with the feasibility of increasing such unemployment benefits. The majority of these concerns deal with a lack of material resources. It becomes virtually impossible to serve millions of out of work Americans when the unemployment rate sky rockets. Thus the role of unemployment organizations becomes pivotal in the management of jobless experiences. The demand for such services exponentially increases along with the unemployment rate.

Unemployment agencies service approximately 15 million people per year (Jacobson, 2009). Many of these agencies have been deemed One-Stop Career Centers because they both aid in low cost job seeking processes and long term intensive counseling and training (Jacobson, 2009). Many One-Stop Career Centers become the primary resource for those who need unemployment assistance. Unfortunately, funding has been dramatically cut, inhibiting the effectiveness of these organizations (Jacobson, 2009). Yet, during and after economic recessions these organizations are vital to the economic viability of our country and to the well-being of unwillingly unemployed citizens. I say this because the duration of jobless spells has increased exponentially in this past recession. As previously stated, the U.S. Department of Labor Statistics (2012)

reported that in December, 2012 there were 4.8 million people who were considered long-term unemployed (a minimum of 27 weeks or more). In addition to the long-term unemployed, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2013) also reports on the number of discouraged workers, which are people who have decided to stop looking for work because they believe there are no jobs available for them. In December, 2012 the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (2013) reported a total of 1.1 million discouraged workers, which is a number that has only slightly declined since 2011.

It is evident that finding new employment, even during post-recession times, is difficult and competitive. Unemployment organizations not only contribute to job seekers search processes, but they also help people who are unwillingly unemployed in their pursuit to become more competitive by training them to develop new skills. According to Jacobson (2009) One-Stop Career Centers serve dislocated workers, individuals whose job loss happened due to no fault of their own, as well as disadvantaged workers—the working poor who need help finding work and potentially achieving upward mobility. Hence, unemployment organizations potentially serve unemployed individuals from a variety of social class backgrounds. In 2009, there were approximately 1300 One-Stop Career Centers across America (The Hamilton Project, 2009). The effectiveness of these organizations likely enables and/or constrains the ability of unemployed Americans to find paid employment.

Unemployment organizations impact the livelihood and quality of life of unemployed Americans, yet the management of these organizations has been largely problematic. Jacobson's (2009) analysis addressed two reasons why One-Stop Career Centers have been ineffective. First, budget cuts have resulted in lower resources and the

inability to staff an adequate number of employees. This first challenge results in poorly managed One-Stop Career Centers (Jacobson, 2009). Second, One-Stop Career centers have poor accountability standards (Jacobson, 2009). The federal government has not imposed any consistent standards regarding performance for One-Stop Career Centers (Jacobson, 2009). Clearly, a deeper understanding of what happens in these organizations is warranted. Having a deeper understanding will provide clarity on how members can use these organizations to their advantage.

Social class is directly related to unemployment organizations because these organizations facilitate job search processes. The job search process itself is classed because it is inherently tied to the type of labor individuals are seeking (i.e. Marvin, 1994 - body or text class). It is likely that unemployment organizations embody and perpetuate social class. Thus, I chose critical ethnography as a way to examine the experiences of the unemployed within unemployment organizations. A critical ethnographic look reveals the ways in which unemployed individuals participate in the culture of unemployment organizations and how they participate in the discourses surrounding issues of unemployment and social class. This study examines the culture of unemployment organizations and provides insight into the ways the web-of-power is manifest in across social class experiences of unemployment. Due to the ethnographic nature of this study, it is important to review one final body of literature on organizational culture.

Organizational Culture

Organizational culture is a popular conceptualization of organizational life that took both the academic and the business worlds by storm in the 1980s (Alvesson, 1990). Understanding organizational life in this manner is a powerful way to explain what

happens between people in organizations. Communication scholars see culture as the essence of organizational life; in short it is what manifests as organizational members communicate with one another (Keyton, 2011). Organizational culture provides a way for scholars to incorporate both the material and discursive realities of organizational life because it takes into account explicit artifacts and behaviors as well as the underlying values and assumptions (Schein, 1992). Edgar Schein's work provides a foundation that many scholars use to study and understand organizational culture. Hence, it is appropriate to begin with a review of Schein's work before moving onto newer notions regarding organizational culture.

Schein's (1992) model of organizational culture presented three layers that work together to create an organization's culture. Those layers are artifacts, values, and assumptions. In the first layer of organizational culture, Schein (1992) accounts for tangible aspects of organizational life or our material reality. This can include, but is not limited to, physical surroundings, symbols, behaviors, dress, company colors, and even ritualistic interactions. The artifacts layer of Schein's model accounts for anything that is tangible, audible, or visible within the organization. The second layer of Schein's culture model accounts for values. Values can be defined broadly, but in general they are certain principles of importance that guide organizational behavior and decision making. For example, values tell organizational members what is worthwhile, ideal, and desirable within the context of the organization. These values are inherently guided by the assumptions of the organizational culture, which is the final layer of Schein's model. Assumptions are taken for granted beliefs that are deeply held by organizational members. Schein (1992) argues that at times these are nearly impossible to articulate

because they are implicit, abstract, and subtle. Both organizational values and assumptions contribute to organizational discourse.

Using Schein's model, it is easy to account for both discursive and material reality. Schein's model identifies three types of cultural elements. First, artifacts include cultural manifestations that are either in the material organizational space or part of our own physical behavior. Artifacts are cultural elements that are audible, visible or tangible to organizational members. For example, when organizational members dress in accordance with the company dress code, it constitutes a physical, material reality. It is evident when organizational members deviate from organizational guidelines such as dress codes, because doing so likely sends a message throughout the context of an organization. The message that is sent by a deviation in one's organizational behavior not only impacts the layer of cultural artifacts, but it ultimately stems from a disruption in organizational values or perhaps even assumptions. Cultural disruptions illustrate how our material environments may serve as a catalyst for communication, perhaps in the form of reprimand or feedback. Thus organizational culture emerges in communication. The ability to account for both discursive and material reality is similarly vital to understanding both social class (Dougherty, 2011) and organizational culture. Thus it is logical to marry the web-of-power theory to an academic conceptualization of organizations that also accounts for both discursive and material realities.

Scholars also take a critical lens to the understanding and study of organizational culture. Mats Alvesson (2002) centers his discussion of organizational culture on the relationship between meaning and culture. His book calls for a more rich descriptive approach to inquiry regarding organizational culture and argues that the traditional

functionalist way of studying organizational culture as a variable is limiting. Alvesson (2002) includes an in-depth discussion of organizational culture as a root metaphor for organizations. He believes that conceiving of organizations as cultures opens up fruitful avenues for research. Primarily Alvesson (2002) highlights the way culture guides and directs behavior and ways of thinking. He is also concerned with the way organizational culture guides decision making and maintains that scholars should use culture as a way of studying the destructive processes of organizations. However, the most central theme throughout his book is the importance of managing meaning in organizational culture.

Alvesson (2002) argues that approaches to studying culture can be grounded in Habermas' (1972) three motives to which any project of inquiry can be based. The first is Habermas' technical motive, which aims to develop knowledge regarding causal relationships, so that variables can be manipulated and controlled toward the goal of accomplishing certain outcomes. The second is the practical-hermeneutic motive where a researcher's goal would be to increase understanding about human existence. In the practical-hermeneutic motive, the creation of meaning and communication is studied in order to produce knowledge about people as cultural beings. In essence, understanding is the end goal. The final Habermasian motive is the emancipatory motive, which aims at freeing humans from external and/or internal repressive forces that prevent individuals from acting in accordance with their free will. The last of these motives falls in line with the use of the web-of-power theory, but first it is important to discuss organizational culture as a powerful influence on organization life.

Alvesson (2002) addresses organizational culture specifically as a power-laden phenomenon in his chapter titled, *Culture as Constraint: An Emancipatory Approach*. In

this chapter Alvesson (2002) first presents a rationale as to why it is important to consider the dark side of culture. While the benefits of culture are commonly highlighted, such as its ability to provide organizational members with a sense of meaning, guidance and purpose, there are also many negative possibilities that emerge out of the cultural analysis of organizations. Cultures imbue value to organizational members and influence our ideas about what is good, true, and natural (Alvesson, 2002). Because cultures inherently guide our thinking in implicit ways, they automatically limit our ability to think critically about our social environments and our lives in those social environments. Participating in organizational cultures shows our active participation in our passive acceptance of taken for granted cultural notions about how things are. Our active engagement in this type of subordination shows how powerful organizational cultures can be and how influential culture is in our lives. Culture guides and directs our thinking and behavior. This is particularly evident during our interactions with others and also become apparent in how we treat each other. This notion aligns with Dougherty's (2011) argument because she states that social class I much about how people perceive and treat one another. Particular social classes accumulate and protect resources drawing boundaries and delineating themselves and their resources as distinct from other classes (Dougherty, 2011). Unemployment organizations are classed spaces that create boundaries and provide resources, whether adequate or inadequate. Organizational members are socialized into organizational cultures and when individuals are indoctrinated into those cultures, meaning is produced, shared, and given significance. As organizational members enter and become a part of the culture they enact the cultural environment and are subordinate to it. It is important to consider the ways in which culture constrains us because it could

be potentially damaging or harmfully hegemonic; however, it is equally important to consider the ways in which culture empowers us because it provides privilege and advantages. Exploring the culture of unemployment organizations might illustrate the way social class discourses are maintained, reproduced, altered, or destroyed. We might also see the way people participate and embody these discourses through their organizational memberships. Alvesson (2002) states, “The task is then to provide inspiration to liberation from some of the constraints that culture exercises. Less ambitiously, this task can be seen as encouraging questioning and resistance” (p. 119). Encouraging resistance and questioning by organizational members may empower them to produce structural and systematic change within organizations. Power is not always the result of a single actor exerting influence or domination or control over others. Rather, frequently power exists intangibly and manifests itself in our organizational environments in a variety of ways. For example, cultural influence could emerge at the local or relational level (e.g. one’s workgroup) or at a material level (e.g. one’s access to organizational resources). Conducting a critical ethnography allowed me to better understand how power is discursively and materially manifest in tandem with organizational culture. Furthermore this methodological approach also allowed me to understand how social class is discursively and materially enacted in unemployment organizations. Since organizational culture and social class are power-laden phenomenon, the web-of-power theory provides a theoretical lens that could enhance understanding of how people manage unemployment experiences.

Summary of Literature Review

Social class is a pervasive and hidden phenomenon in our global society (Dougherty, 2011). In particular, social class is a persistent phenomenon in American culture because it is inherently tied to the work we do. In America, the American Dream serves as a strong ideological discourse that imbues work with value and those who work with dignity. However, the ideological understanding of work is complicated by social class because our society privileges text work and workers. Hence, body work and workers are stigmatized in ways that decrease the value of physical labor. As a result, adapted ideologies such as The Working Class Promise, have manifested amongst the body class in order to develop a positive discourse (Lucas, 2011c). Yet in our society, there is no alternative discourse or ideology that imbues value or provides a positive framework for those who do not work at all.

Even though the country has technically emerged from the recession, there are millions of Americans without work. The longer unemployment persists in the lives of Americans the more desperate they are for help. Unemployment organizations provide a resource to out-of-work Americans. Unfortunately, many unemployment organizations are poorly managed (Jacobson, 2009; Rangarajan & Novak, 1999). Social class complicates unemployment experiences for job seekers and likely for organizations that serve them. It is important to understand how cultures of these organizations are constraining and/or enabling Americans as they seek employment. Hence, the purpose of this study is threefold.

The three overarching goals of this dissertation research are: a) to discover the way social class materially and discursively emerges in the cultures of unemployment

organization b) to better understand how people from differing social class backgrounds manage unemployment experiences through organizations, and c) to examine and critique systems of power as they emerge in the organizational cultures of unemployment organizations. Communication is not only the mortar for social class (Dougherty, 2011); it also creates, maintains, and evolves organizational culture. Thus a critical ethnography that studies the cultural communication within the context of unemployment organizations would contribute to the various bodies of literature reviewed in this chapter—namely scholarship on communication during unemployment, social class, and unemployment organizations. This critical ethnography sought answers to the following research questions:

RQ1: How are the cultures of unemployment organizations classed?

RQ2: How do individuals from varying social classes manage unemployment through memberships in unemployment organizations?

RQ3: How do the cultures of unemployment organizations constrain and/or enable their members' unemployment experiences and reemployment efforts?

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

Organizational entities, such as the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, constantly research unemployment from governmental and economic perspectives. The quantitative data, which is commonly reported on a monthly or quarterly basis, paints a clear picture regarding the numerical scope of unemployment as a nationwide phenomenon. Management literature also covers a wide breadth of unemployment research but typically tackles the topic from a post-positivist paradigmatic approach. My project seeks to extend the knowledge regarding unemployment by going beyond these figures to localizing our knowledge regarding the experiences and management of unemployment.

The aim of this study is to better understand unemployment as a classed experience that is managed through organizations. In order to achieve this proposed goal I am drawing from both interpretive and critical paradigms (Deetz, 2001). Critical ethnography was used to conduct an analysis of unemployment organizations and their cultures. I employed participant observation, interviews, and document/artifact compilation as specific qualitative approaches to inquiry.

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the methodology and methods used to answer the research questions. First, I review my ontological, epistemological, and axiological commitments. Then I cover both qualitative interpretive and critical paradigms. An explanation of the combination of these paradigms is also shared. Next a detailed review of critical ethnography is discussed. Finally, an explanation of three methods will follow, including specific procedures. I close this chapter with a description of the data analysis and verification processes.

Philosophical Commitments

Paradigmatic commitments guide scholars as they conduct and evaluate research. As I share my paradigmatic commitments, I hope to show the guiding assumptions and methodological rationale that underlie this research. The qualitative interpretive and critical paradigms have rich, historical, interdisciplinary backgrounds that shaped the way I executed this study. The rationale behind the chosen methodology is based on specific ontological, epistemological, and axiological commitments. Before delving into the paradigmatic backgrounds, I share my specific ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions.

Ontological beliefs address scholarly assumptions about the nature of reality. I ascribe to dualistic ontological commitments. The ontological continuum spans from realist to social constructionist. Realists believe that reality is tangible, external to, and independent from the self and our perceptions (Corman, 2005). Social constructionists believe that there is a multiplicity to reality (Creswell, 2007) and that realities are created through social interaction and meanings that emerges from social systems (Allen, 2005). Committing to one type of reality over the other would limit my research, especially since issues dealing with social class have both realist and socially constructed components. I believe that reality is simultaneously derived from realism and social constructionism. Simply put, ontologically I believe in both material and discursive reality. In my research I remain open to both our material and discursive reality.

Epistemological commitments reveal scholarly assumptions that address how we come to know about reality. The epistemological continuum generally spans from objective to subjective ways of knowing. I commit more to subjective ways of knowing.

This is why I identify myself as primarily an interpretive scholar. However, I would like to clarify that I do not discount or ignore objective ways of knowing. Rather, for the purposes of this study, I am more interested in hearing the subjective accounts of people who are experiencing unemployment. Gaining subjective knowledge through this epistemological stance means that I will minimize the distance between me and my unemployed participants (Creswell, 2007). I want to know the subjective interpretations of people's accounts regarding their unemployment experiences. Since it is likely that participant accounts will include elements of a more objective, material reality, I am particularly interested in how these subjective perceptions are related to their objective experiences as well.

Axiological stances account for the role of values in scholarship. Generally post-positivists try to minimize the role of values while executing research. Interpretivists recognize values in their research. Critical scholars allow values to guide their research agenda. I both recognize the role of values in my research but also at times allow them to guide me. Not only do I recognize that my values and biases are present, but that they might guide my research and the design of my research efforts. Hence I identify myself as an interpretive scholar with critical leanings. Ultimately, I see my role as a researcher that seeks interpretive understanding. However, due to the subject matter of my research, which primarily looks at social class and organizations, I also see myself as a critical scholar. Organizations and social class involve issues of power. Taking a dual interpretive and critical approach to the communicative study of social class and organizations means that I seek understanding and when power issues emerge during the research process, I expose and explain power imbalances, critique current systems or

structures, and propose alternative ways of communicating. The proposed project seeks to promote understanding through the use of qualitative research.

Qualitative Research

A basic foundation to all qualitative, social science research is that it seeks to consider and analyze phenomenon from a localized, situated point of view. Qualitative research fulfills the need to capture the, "intricacies, nuances, and complications of human interaction" (Miller, 2005). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) provide an overarching description of qualitative researchers as scholars who participate in "interconnected interpretive practices, hoping always to get a better understanding of the subject matter at hand" (p. 4). Drawing from Denzin and Lincoln (2005) my aim is to gain a better understanding of unemployment experiences to see how they are managed across social class lines. I want to hear, observe, and participate in the stories and experiences that unemployed individuals live through their organizational memberships. It would be unwise to attempt to gain the level of in-depth insight I am seeking from a quantitative method. Since the purpose is to understand specific experiences, a qualitative approach to inquiry is best.

The history of qualitative inquiry is situated in a series of tumultuous debates and fights for legitimacy (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Scholars frequently questioned qualitative methodology, likely because they were trying to conceptualize it through the standards and criteria of post-positivism that privileged research elements such as objectivity, replication, prediction, and causality – in short, the benefits of qualitative research were ambiguous at first (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Qualitative research was originally judged as weaker, less rigorous science that was

characterized by biased observations and subjective instruments. The communication discipline experienced several growing pains in the 1980s as qualitative scholars argued for legitimacy and a rightful place for their methodology. The acceptance of qualitative scholarship continues to increase, which is evident by the existence of journals with a focus on qualitative research and newer divisions for qualitative methodology in academic organizations.

According to Lindlof and Taylor (2002), scholars recognize qualitative methodology is best suited to research issues of culture, interpretation, and power because it incorporates a relational style of fieldwork, inductive forms of logic, and flexible or accommodating analysis. According to Creswell (2007), qualitative researchers are the main instrument in their research efforts because they subjectively interpret the data.

Interpretive Paradigm

A foundation for all methodology that falls under the interpretive realm can be located in the notions of *verstehen* and *lebenswelt*. The notion of *verstehen,* which has been translated as understanding (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002) served a central role as I studied unemployment. For this research, I sought an understanding of the participants' points of view. Furthermore, my inquiry focused on how my participants' social class statuses filtered their understanding and experiences of unemployment. Gaining an understanding of the specific unemployment experiences is central to the interpretive methodology I ascribed to and required an inductive, cultural approach as I studied unemployment organizations and their members.

Related to the notion of *verstehen* is Husserl's notion of *lebenswelt*, which is translated into "life-world." Ultimately, the notion of life-world encapsulates the idea that individuals live in space or a "world of objects, people, actions, and institutions that is constituted in a characteristically taken-for-granted fashion" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 33). People make sense of the life-world by creating meaning and developing abstract understanding from patterns and unique events they experience (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). As an interpretive scholar, I am interested in how people from different social classes understand, interpret, experience, and make meaning of their unemployment. In addition, I sought to understand how they managed these experiences through organizational memberships. The specific life-world context I examined was the membership experience within unemployment organizations.

Critical Paradigm

As previously stated in the literature review, organizations are not power-neutral cultural environments. Organizational cultures guide and direct behavior because they are power-laden (Alvesson, 2002). Because of this reality I used a critical approach for this research. The final research question presented in chapter two specifically inquires about the way unemployment organizational cultures enable and/or constrain the specific behavior of job searching and skill/professional development. Deetz (2005) explains, "Fundamentally, critical work encourages the exploration of alternative communication practices that allow greater democracy and more creative and productive cooperation among stakeholders through reconsidering organizational governance and decision-making processes" (p. 85). I explored their existing communication practices and

considered alternatives forms of communication that might create more equitable cultural surroundings for organizational members.

The critical lens is a vital paradigmatic approach to my specific project because in addition to organizational culture, social class is also a power-laden phenomenon in American society (Dougherty, 2011). I analytically compared two organizational cultures that serve differing social class groups. Power issues emerged in this study connected to two power-laden phenomenon, social class and organizational culture, which are central to this study. I sought to understand how people manage unemployment through organizational memberships. Deetz (2005) explains that critical research has an expansive range considering power issues from macro (societal) to micro (situated) contexts. The findings in the analysis reveal the way macro level discourse manifests in micro level organizational interaction.

Weaving Together Interpretive and Critical Inquiry

This research deliberately marries both interpretive and critical lenses. The strategic design of this study pulled together individual experiences and understanding in order to gain a unique perspective about the role of power during unemployment from different social class perspectives. Please note that I did not impose power imbalances on the data. Rather, as issues of power emerged from the data I was open to these manifestations. The data guided my overall analysis.

Using a dual critical and interpretive lens allowed me to analyze participant understanding in the specific life-world of unemployment organizations. When power-laden experiences emerged in the collective experiences of my participants, a critical lens permitted me to analyze, for example, how ideology, dominant discourse, or hegemony

played a role. In this manner, I was also able to use participant understanding to explore and critique power and injustice in the lives of the unemployed. Social class played a role in the organizational lives of the unemployed as they joined, became a part of, participated in, and exited unemployment organizations. Critical ethnography facilitated my exposure of communicative, cultural practices that create, maintain, and/or resist power inequities. This critical interpretive analysis also allowed me to understand how social constructions (i.e. organizational culture, dominant social class discourses, local organizational discourse, etc.) impact material reality (i.e. ability to provide shelter, food, physical aspects of well-being) and vice versa.

In regard to the specific research questions, both interpretive and critical approaches were appropriate. The first research question specifically examined the culture of the organization, which was suited for both interpretive and critical lenses. Organizational culture emerges out of the communication between members (Keyton, 2011), however culture is also a guiding force (Alvesson, 2002). It was necessary for me to interpret the culture and then scrutinize its manifestation. However the first research question also asked for an examination of social class as it manifested within the organization. The class component of this question warranted a critical lens, since social class is about power (Dougherty, 2011). The second research question asked how individuals from varying social classes manage unemployment through these organizations. This is primarily an interpretive question; however, due to the participant experiences, a critical analysis was also necessary. The final research question sought to understand the role of control and power that unemployment organizations have over the job search and professional/skill development process. This question warranted a dual approach to

inquiry because I wanted to better understand how the power of these organizations either helped or hindered its members. In order to execute this study, I employed naturalistic inquiry. A naturalistic form of research provided me the opportunity to identify ideology, class-based discourse, and other macro-level influences as they emerged in micro-level interaction. During naturalistic research I studied the management of unemployment experiences by observing and talking to people during their participation in unemployment organizations.

Naturalistic Inquiry

Naturalistic inquiry is a form of research that scholars take when their primary aim is cultural description of the empirical environment (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). When researchers use this approach they go into local contexts and gather data in the natural settings as opposed to unnatural settings such as a research laboratory or other contrived surroundings (Creswell, 2007).

My aim for using naturalistic inquiry was to gain an in-depth understanding of the life-world as it was happening. I better understand how people from varying social class backgrounds manage unemployment, in part due to my personal participation in the life-world of unemployment organizations. I entered the organization and participated in the organizational culture to gain a situated and localized understanding of what was happening in the lives of the unemployed. Naturalistic inquiry must also be self-reflexive. My presence is represented in my research and writing. I was committed to an ongoing self-analysis as I took on the role of ethnographer who participated and observed the life-world I chose to study.

Ethnography

Ethnography can be loosely understood as both a process and product. Conventional ethnography is, “the tradition of cultural description and analysis that displays meaning by interpreting meanings” (Thomas, 1993). Historically ethnographic study of a culture is executed by field work. Field work is the practice of gathering information where a culture-sharing group works or lives (Creswell, 2007). I studied the culture of unemployment organizations by entering the field, in this case unemployment organizations, and immersed myself in the day-to-day activities. Ethnography is both the process and the product of the research, meaning that it is something scholars do and also something they produce (Creswell, 2007). According to Creswell (2007), “Ethnographers study the meaning of the behavior, the language, and the interaction among members of the culture-sharing group” (p. 68-69). The result of ethnographic study is a written format also called ethnography. In Goodall’s (2000) book titled *Writing the New Ethnography* he defines the written product as a “creative narrative shaped out of a writer’s personal experiences within a culture and addressed to academic and public audiences” (p. 9). As an organizational communication scholar, I was particularly interested in studying and writing about communicative behavior and performances within the culture of unemployment organizations.

Culture comprises various belief systems and serves as a filter or guide for personal interpretation, behavior, and understanding within a cultural context. “Culture generally refers to the totality of all learned social behavior of a given group” (Thomas, 1993, p. 12). Culture is a complex reality that incorporates both material and discursive elements. Schein’s (1992) model of culture includes three layers that account for both

material and discursive elements of organizational culture: artifacts, values, and assumptions. Culture is primarily relevant to communication because cultures emerge in social interaction. In addition, culture also develops the foundation for the communication of meaning (Thomas, 1993). Communication is the vehicle through which meaning is created, reproduced, and transformed. Thus, ethnographic study of culture necessarily includes communicative research. The fieldwork I conducted looked at organizational communication in four distinct ways. First I looked at communication between the organization (i.e. staff, volunteers) and its patrons. Second, I considered communication among the staff. Third, I considered communication among patrons. Fourth, I looked at communication I had with organizational members. The cultural study of unemployment organizations included an analysis of verbal, non-verbal, and written forms of communication. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) specifically address ethnography of communication.

Ethnography of communication does not see communication as independent message exchange, but rather a simultaneous flow of information that comes through multiple channels (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Dell Hymes developed ethnography of communication as a specific sociolinguistic effort to compare ways of speaking across cultural milieus (Hymes, 1961, 1962; Gumperz & Hymes, 1986; Philipsen & Carbaugh, 1986). An ethnography of communication conceptualizes communicative behavior as exchanges that are used and should be interpreted through the culture of the group. Ultimately, ethnography of communication is concerned with “the relationships between symbolic practices and social structure” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). In this project I studied cultural communication within the social structure of unemployment

organizations. Specifically I sought to understand situated organizational communication regarding the management of unemployment during job search and professional/skill development processes.

There are various types of ethnography. The most basic and conventional type, the realist ethnography, seeks to describe the cultural milieu and is closely tied to the traditions of cultural anthropology (Creswell, 2007). Traditionally, realist ethnographies attempt to simply describe and report from an "objective" standpoint and are often written in the third person where the presence of the ethnographer is traditionally omitted (Creswell, 2007). Modern day ethnographies still describe and report, but now frequently include the researcher's subjective presence and perspective written in first person (Goodall, 2000).

A second type of ethnography is called the critical ethnography. Critical ethnographies not only describe the culture but also account for and analyze issues of power in the cultural milieu (Creswell, 2007). I used critical ethnography in order to study the organizational cultures of unemployment organizations. In order to share the rationale behind this methodology, I review the purpose and background of critical ethnography in the next section.

Critical Study of Culture

Critical ethnography is a type of ethnography that branches out beyond conventional forms of ethnography (Thomas, 1993). Not only do critical ethnographies account for the cultural milieu by using description and interpretation, but they also subject the culture to additional scrutiny that aims to expose hidden power-laden assumptions (Thomas, 1993). Organizational cultures serve as metaphorical compasses,

blinders, or the social glue that enables and constrains organizational life (Alvesson, 2002). Thus, my aim as a critical ethnographer is to uncover the ways in which culture operates in unemployment organizations.

In order to execute a critical ethnography, researchers not only interpret their cultural data but they also participate in a critical reflective process (Thomas, 1993). The reflective process allows researchers to scrutinize the existing cultural norms and interpretation while making value laden judgments and conceptualizing alternative cultural manifestations (Thomas, 1993). For critical ethnographers the knowledge production process serves as a catalyst for positive social change.

Thomas (1993) describes critical ethnography as both hermeneutic and emancipatory. Hermeneutics is an interpretive process that unveils the meaning of the texts of the life-world (Van Manen, 1990). Ethnography is hermeneutic because it is first and foremost an interpretive act, one that seeks meaning in cultural texts such as communicative performances, cultural artifacts, rituals, rules, underlying values, etc. Critical ethnography uses the hermeneutic interpretation of the culture for emancipatory goals. “Emancipation refers to the process of separation from constraining modes of thinking or acting that limit perception of and action toward realizing alternative possibilities” (Thomas, 1993, p. 4). The term critical in critical ethnography represents the way critical thought challenges “truth” that is taken for granted and promotes a call to action (Thomas, 1993). In sum, the aim of critical ethnography is to both uncover issues of power that produce hegemonic or detrimental results and to serve as a catalyst for positive cultural change. My use of critical ethnography specifically took place within an organizational context. Like critical ethnography, organizational ethnographies also have defining characteristics.

Organizational ethnography is the study of culture within the context of an organization. It is appropriate to conduct a critical ethnography of organizational contexts because they are inherently power-laden entities (Allen, 2011). Allen's (2011) text regarding areas of difference exemplifies the ways in which organizations are raced, gendered, classed, and sexualized environments. Issues of power are infused within all organizational contexts. Hence, it is necessary to execute critical ethnography for this research not only because of the power-laden nature of organizations (Allen, 2011) and organizational culture (Alvesson, 2002), but also because of the issues of power that emerge when studying classed phenomenon such as unemployment.

Within the discipline of communication, H.L. (Bud) Goodall is a highly regarded organizational ethnographer. He wrote various texts that address organizational ethnography as both a process and a product of scholarship. Below, I highlight two of his texts as way to highlight the practices of organizational ethnography I used specifically.

In Goodall's (1994) *Casing the Promise Land*, he conceptualizes organizational life as a metaphorical mystery and argues that ethnographers should see themselves as detectives. As organizational ethnographers study and research the landscape of an organization they can gather data that serve as clues (Goodall, 1994). Each clue is a cultural artifact, value, or assumption that helps to tell the organization's narrative. Goodall (1994) explains that culture is a sensual experience; one that is seen, felt, heard, smelled, and tasted in the experience of an organization. In this text, Goodall (1994) takes the reader into various organizational contexts collecting clues, determining significance, and interpreting his findings. Goodall (1994) explains that in an organizational context

everything counts. In other words, small details that are observed are just as important as larger more explicit cultural displays.

Organizational ethnographers should pay careful attention to every detail, both small and large. For example, noticing nonverbal communication is an important way in which ethnographers can pick up on cultural themes (Goodall, 1994). Goodall (2000) provides specific types of communicative behavior that I took into account as I observed unemployment organizations. These various types of communication are: verbal exchanges, practices, and connections between and among verbal exchanges and practices (Goodall, 2000). Verbal exchanges included, but were not limited to: phatic communication/ritual interaction, ordinary conversation, skilled conversation, personal narratives, and dialogue (Goodall, 2000). Practices included, but were not limited to: routines, rituals, rites of passage, surprise and sensemaking episodes, risk-taking episodes, face-saving episodes, crises. Please note, these were not used as a priori codes for my data, but rather loosely understood as common communicative events within organizations.

Ultimately, the goal is that ethnographers interpret personal experiences into themes that are represented in their writing. The themes presented in my analysis represent the temporary and partial truth of these organization's cultures. The use of the terms "temporary" and "partial" are intentional because my experiences are only a snapshot in the existence of organizational entities (Goodall, 1994, p. 150). The process of writing is vital in qualitative research. This is the primary topic of the next work reviewed below from Goodall.

In Goodall's (2000) book *Writing the New Ethnography* he outlines the ethnographic process from a communication scholar's vantage point and specifically addresses writing and storytelling as an integral part of the ethnographic process and product. In the New Ethnography the author's personal experience becomes the principle organizing influence of the text (Goodall, 2000). Goodall (2000) explains that ethnographers' reflection about their personal experiences reveal the meaning of culture (Goodall, 2000). The final product is ideally an ethnographic narrative that serves as a dialogue between the author and the reader about personal cultural experience (Goodall, 2000). Goodall (2000) explains that this type of ethnographic work can be considered "empiricism because close observation, participation, and analysis established what was to be written about, but not necessarily how it was to be represented" (p. 76). The day-to-day communicative practices became cultural evidence of both organizational and individual meaning. In sum, ethnography is an interpretive act where the researcher is constantly trying to read the culture based on what is experienced. This text highlights various methods that ethnographers use. The justification and an explanation of those three methods (participant observation, interviews, and document/artifact collection) are described in the next section.

Methods

In this section I outline the specific methods of data collection that I used for this critical ethnography. Specifically, I explain techniques and procedures that were systematically used in order to learn about the cultures of unemployment organizations and the ways in which people manage jobless experiences. My fieldwork included participant observation, interviews, and document/artifact collection. Before I delve into

the details for these three methods, I address the participants and selected organizational sites.

Organizational Sites

I sought to better understand how people use organizations to manage their unemployment experiences. The participants for this study were all affiliated with a unemployment organizations. With that said, I am interested in researching employees/volunteers and patrons of unemployment organizations. Studying the experiences of these types of organizational members allowed me to gain a more holistic picture of the organizational cultures at unemployment organizations. In order to facilitate knowledge across social class lines, it was important to look at unemployment organizations who serve populations with differing social class backgrounds. In order to collect data across social class lines I looked at two unemployment organizations that serve different unemployed, social class populations.

Site Selection. In order to achieve the purpose of this study it was necessary to strategically select a site of observation. Ethnographers hand select sites because doing so purposefully provides an environment where the phenomenon is present and can be studied. Strategically selecting sites for research also allowed an ideal opportunity for me to better understand the phenomenon. Since the aim of this project is to better understand the management of unemployment within classed organizational spaces, I selected two separate unemployment organizations. Miles and Huberman (1994) explain that a fundamental reason for doing a comparative analysis is to deepen understanding and explanation through the comparison and contrasting of subject matter. One of these organizations primarily serves unemployed working-class individuals while the other

serves unemployed middle-class individuals. Ethnographers select specific cultural-sharing sites to study because it allows one to see how people interact in natural environments (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Using a multisite design was warranted by the research questions, which specifically ask about the management of unemployment through organizations as it was experienced across social class lines. Thus, a multisite design was appropriate because it facilitated a comparative technique into the design of the project. Below, I briefly review the two organizations I comparatively studied and then present a rationale as to why I selected these specific sites.

One unemployment organization I studied serves jobless, body class populations. I use the pseudonym Work Track to represent this non-profit unemployment organization. Work Track (WT) generally serves populations that are underemployed or unemployed racial minorities, disabled, at-risk youth, uneducated populations, and individuals with a previous criminal history. WT provides the following services, among others, to its patrons: affordable housing program, disability services, job search services, works related skills training, workforce re-entry services, youth career services, and transportation assistance. This non-profit organization has been open since 1965 and its aim is to provide career development and job placement assistance. Ultimately this organization seeks to prepare individuals for the work force so that they can increase their community participation.

I also studied another unemployment organization that serves jobless, text class populations. I use the pseudonym Executive Career Transitions to represent this unemployment organization. Executive Career Transitions (ECT) generally serves individuals who have previously held managerial or executive professional careers. ECT

offers the following services to its patrons: practice interviews, résumé review, financial/personal/career/legal counseling, access to online and published job search resources, networking events, job leads/connections, and personal marketing plan development. ECT originally started as a small church group for people who needed support and guidance during periods without work, but has since branched out as a separate organization. This not-for-profit organization has been open as an independent entity since 1972 and their aim is to help unemployed professionals manage unemployment related career transitions.

I selected these two organizations for several reasons. First, these are longstanding organizations that have a significant presence in their respective communities, structured programs, and established organizational cultures. Second, they ultimately share a similar mission, which is to help their members manage unemployment experiences through the development of various skills and by helping to facilitate a successful job search process. Third, they serve distinctly different populations and served as excellent points of comparison across social class lines. Through critical ethnography my aim was to analytically compare and contrast the cultures of these organizations and their member experiences. The ultimate goal was to develop in-depth knowledge about how people manage unemployment through unemployment organizations. I uncovered localized knowledge about the management of unemployment and how it differs across social class lines to facilitate a better understanding and to critique the role of power within these cultures.

I reviewed extensive, detailed empirical data at each site. The intent is not to generalize the information, but rather to understand particular instances that may shed

light on unemployment experiences (Creswell, 2007). I continued to collect data until no new information was found. As previewed earlier in this chapter, I employed three types of data collection: participant observation, interviews, and document/artifact compilation. In the next section I review each method of data collection in detail.

Participant Observation

In the role of participant observer, I entered the field to personally engage with the culture. My research purposes were openly acknowledged and all participants were aware of my presence as a researcher. My observations emerged out of my experiences as a participant (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). This is distinctly different than the role of a complete observer, where participation and engagement with the culture is marginal and avoids full immersion and involvement (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). On the other end of the spectrum, some ethnographers work as a complete participant and engage fully with the respective culture. I did not seek to be a complete participant because I wanted to maintain a somewhat analytically distant presence in the organization. Also I wanted the freedom to be able to step away during participation and attend to my research responsibilities, such as taking notes. Being a participant observer allowed me to engage on a voluntary basis by fulfilling a limited role within each organization where I also had the opportunity to foreground my need to observe and take notes. My voluntary role was negotiated with each organization's gatekeeper and is outlined in more detail below.

The amount of time I spent in the field was dependent on a few factors. First, it took time for me to develop rapport and trust with organizational members. In order for data collection to be successful, rapport had to be developed and there was no set time limit that indicated how long this should take. Second, it took time to travel between

locations and observe each organization. I alternated observation throughout the large majority of the data collection period. Alternating allowed me to comparatively experience each organization and systematically analyze and develop an understanding of each organization's culture. I proposed a data collection period that would last for a minimum of 3 months. However, the actual data collection lasted approximately 7 months, from January 23 to August 16, 2013. The data collection process took longer than anticipated because of material conditions (i.e. weather, holiday closings, and personal conflicts), the time it took to develop trust and rapport, and the time it took to reach saturation. I continued to conduct participant observation until I felt I had achieved saturation, which was when new information and insight stopped emerging during my experience.

During data collection, I used various types of notes to document my experiences as a participant observer. Field notes served as the formalized documentation of my observations. My field notes were developed from jottings, also known as scratch notes and headnotes. Every time I visited an organizational site I had a notebook in my possession. At times it was inappropriate or ineffective to take notes. During these times I relied on headnotes. According to Lindlof and Taylor (2002), headnotes are, "focused memories of specific events, as well as impressions and evaluations of the unfolding project." Headnotes were completed when scratch note taking was not a possibility. I either typed headnotes into word processing software, Microsoft® Word, or wrote down detailed notes in a legal pad before the end of the day. Jottings or scratch notes are, "condensed accounts written by researchers within the immediate field situation, or soon after leaving it….they involve brief notations about actions, statements, dialogue, objects,

or impressions that will be expanded later in field notes" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 159). Field notes were typed into Microsoft® Word documents and accounted for all scratch notes and headnotes; they served as my permanent chronological record of events and represent data for my analysis (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Field notes also included self-reflexive content and memos where I reflected, critiqued, and analyzed my own presence, behavior, and actions as a researcher and organizational participant.

The fieldwork for this critical ethnography included 155.36 hours of participant observation. I served as participant observer at both organizations on an approximate weekly basis from January 23 to August 16, 2013. In total, 84.74 hours at Work Track and 70.62 hours at Executive Career Transitions of participant observation were completed. This resulted in 681 pages of double-spaced field notes and analytic memos. My volunteer role and participant observation at Work Track included participating in classroom discussion and activities, helping patrons develop résumés, aiding in online searches for jobs, assisting in writing cover letters, conducting mock interviews with patrons, helping search for housing, participating in community service, aiding patrons during job fairs, and helping to straighten the facility. My volunteer role and participant observation at Executive Career Transition included participating in seminar discussions and activities, being a source of emotional support for job seekers, attending board meetings, brainstorming ideas for various organizational efforts, helping to set up and cleanup for meetings.

Interviews

I collected data with both unstructured and semi-structured interviews. Based on my observations and participation I determined areas that needed additional probing. The

interviews shed light on the culture of the organizations and enhanced my understanding through individual accounts of situated cultural experiences. I used interviews to also address issues of interest that needed further probing as they emerged in conversation with my participants.

Within each organization, I selected participants for both unstructured and semi-structured interviews. According to Bernard (2006), “choosing informants in ethnographic research is also critical-case sampling. It would be pointless to select a handful of people randomly from a population and try to turn them into trusted key informants” (p. 191). After executing a period of approximately 9 weeks of participant observation I began selecting informants at each organization to interview.

I recruited two types of informants, both key informants and specialized informants (Bernard, 2006). Key informants were people who are well versed in the culture and willing to share cultural knowledge with the researcher (Bernard, 2006). For example, Hammer was a key informant at Work Track because he had worked for the organization in multiple programs and in several different roles intermittently for a period of eight years. Hammer’s breadth of experience allowed me to understand the historical evolution of the organization and the relationships between various organizational programs. Scott was a key informant at Executive Career Transitions because he had used the services of ECT during periods of his own unemployment and now serves on the board of directors. Having the perspective of someone who has been involved from multiple vantage points provided a holistic understanding of the organizations. Specialized informants had a competence in a particular cultural niche and could shed light on areas that I needed to research more deeply (Bernard, 2006). I had the

opportunity to develop a rapport with organizational members who shared additional insight into particular aspects of the culture. For example, at Work Track, Maximus Constructionist gave me specialized insight into the construction trade program specifically. Due to safety reasons I could not spend extensive time at the work site or in the construction training facilities, but was able to speak with this construction instructor multiple times over the duration of my participant observation to gain insight into what the time at the construction work site was like and to better understand some of the cultural nuances. At Executive Career Transitions I was able to speak with Rick, an active unemployed member, who previously worked in human resources. He spent a great deal of time working with job seekers one-on-one, coaching them through mock interviews. Rick was able to reveal specific challenges that ECT members have with job interviewing specifically. These were not the only key and specialized informants. But I share them in order to provide context and description regarding the methods used.

Unstructured interviews were conducted during participant observation; this is commonly called ethnographic interviewing (Bernard, 2006). This type of interview happened during normal organizational activities and included informal conversations that would answer questions I had at the given moment. I asked for verbal consent for these interviews. These interviews were not audio recorded because they occurred spontaneously. Accounts of unstructured interviews and my reflections about them are captured in field notes and used as data for my analysis.

Semi-structured interviews were also conducted for this research. For the semi-structured interview, I selected people from two different groups of organizational members: staff/volunteers and patrons. I used various criteria to select organizational

members for semi-structured interviews. First, I interviewed volunteers or staff who works for each organizations. Ten volunteer/staff members at each organization were interviewed. This provided a unique standpoint because these interviewees have experience with the organization's culture as workers. Second, I interviewed patrons of the organizations. Ten patrons were interviewed at each organization. As people receiving services from these organizations their standpoint will differ from volunteers and staff. Finally, since both patrons' and volunteers/staff longevity of experience might be varied, I captured people with a variety of experiences and membership longevity (i.e. newcomers and veterans) within the organization. For example, I had newcomer and veteran patrons that shared a breadth of information about the organizational culture. After conducting interviews with select informants I asked for referrals to recruit additional interviewees. Simply put, I asked each person to recommend someone else I might interview and my pool of participants grew with each interview.

Semi-structured interviews helped to satisfy a need for additional in-depth information that I could not gain through participant observation. This type of interviewing used an interview protocol or guide and helped to ensure the systematic review of topical areas of interest with participants while still allowing freedom to follow leads and probes when necessary (Bernard, 2006). Please see Appendix A and B for examples of the proposed interview protocol. I asked semi-structured interview participants to fill out a demographic profile survey. Please see Appendix E and F for examples of the demographic surveys. This information simply served as a way to keep track of the demographic characteristics of in-depth interview participants. Semi-structured interviews were audio recorded with written participant consent. I conducted

40 semi-structured interviews, including 10 patrons and 10 volunteer/staff at each organization. The average interview time lasted approximately 51 minutes. All semi-structured interviews were transcribed prior to analysis by either me or a paid transcriptionist. The final transcriptions totaled 940 pages of single spaced transcripts.

The participants at Work Track (WT) included ten patrons and ten staff members. The WT patrons ranged from the ages of 18-67 with the average age of 28.4 years of age. Four of the ten patron interviewees were female and six were male. Six of the patrons self-identified their race as Black or African-American, Two of the patrons self-identified their race as White or Caucasian. Two of the patrons identified a bi-racial background. Three of the participants earned a ninth grade education, two earned an eleventh grade education, one earned a twelfth grade education with no high school diploma, one earned a high school diploma, and three had completed some college. Their previous vocations included positions like: cook, cashier, food handler, construction, janitorial, and under the table jobs. Their previous compensation ranged from $6.35 per hour to $10.00 per hour. On average they had been members of Work Track for approximately 7 months. The WT staff hold positions including: adult education literacy instructor, construction instructor, transformation specialist, career advisor, job developer and business consultant, assistant director, director, and vice president. The age range of the staff was 29-60 years of age with an average age of 42.5 years. The WT staff interviewees included seven men and three women. They had worked at Work Track for an approximate average of 5+ years. Five of the staff members self-identified their race/ethnicity as Black or African American, four as White or Caucasian, and one as Black African/Kenyan. The

demographics of the participants at Work Track differed greatly from those at Executive Career Transitions.

The participants at Executive Career Transitions included ten patrons and ten staff members. ECT patrons ranged from the ages of 44-64 with the average age of 54.6 years of age. Five of the ten patron interviewees were female and five were male. Nine of the patrons self-identified their race as White or Caucasian. One of the participants identified her race and nationality as Indian. Eight of the participants had earned a Bachelor's degrees and two had earned Master's degrees. Their previous vocations included positions like: senior financial analyst, human resources manager, pharmacist, sales manager, senior vice president of HR, insurance adjuster, public relations executive, and marketing coordinator. Their previous compensation ranged from $45,000 to $140,000 per year. On average they had been members of Executive Career Transitions for approximately 10.4 months. The volunteer staff who manages ECT hold positions including: president, vice president, executive career director, legal counselor, personal advisor, financial advisor, board member. There is one paid employee who serves as an administrative assistant. The age range of the volunteer staff was 48-77 years of age with an average age of 64 years. The staff interviewees included eight men and two women. All of the ECT staff self-identified their race/ethnicity as White or Caucasian. They had served as staff at ECT for an approximate average of 7.15 years. Please see Appendix G for tables that summarize participants' demographic information.

During my participant observation I contacted prospective semi-structured interview participants to see if they had an interest in volunteering for the study. Please see Appendix C for an example of recruitment materials. Once I received written/verbal

agreement from organizational members to participate as a semi-structured interviewee I also obtain written consent. Please see Appendix D for an example of the consent form. When I asked for their consent I shared both verbally and in written format the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of the interview, and requested to audiotape the interview. I explained that confidentiality would be maintained and asked participants to create pseudonyms for themselves. Some participants opted to have me assign them pseudonyms. Some picked pseudonyms that I revised because I felt the new pseudonym was too similar to their name or would not conceal their identity.

The interview covered four main topic areas. First, I generally inquired about what it was like to be unemployed and how participants managed this experience. Second, I inquired about the culture of the unemployment organization they joined. Third, I inquired about their specific interactions with the unemployment organization, asking about programs and services in which they were involved. Finally, I asked about how they felt these organizations helped and/or hindered the job search and skill development. I probed about issues of power as they emerged in specific responses. As necessary, I probed for specific stories and accounts from participants' personal experiences. Please see Appendix A and B for the interview protocol guides. Interviews were conducted both in person and via telephone. Face-to-face interviews were conducted either on the organizational premises in a private location or off site at a public location that was convenient to the interviewee. Telephone interviews were conducted in a private location on speaker phone. All interviews were audio recorded digitally. All identifying information was concealed and protected. All transcriptions are saved electronically and are password protected.

Document/Artifact Collection

Documents and artifacts are an important part of organizational culture. Cultural values and assumptions can be gleaned from the collection and analysis of organizational documents and artifacts. “To the qualitative analyst, documents are very important because they are the “paper trail” left in the way of historical events and processes” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 117). Documents and artifacts revealed unspoken aspects about organizational cultures. When document and artifacts were triangulated with other data (e.g. field notes and transcripts), they bolstered the rigor and depth of my research.

I requested permission to retain copies and take pictures of artifacts in order to analyze the documents that I encountered during my role as participant observer and that I thought would provide some additional cultural insight. I also asked organizational participants for their insight into what organizational documents/artifacts I should collect and analyze. I obtained 122 documents/artifacts in total. Specifically I collected 53 documents/artifacts from Work Track and 69 from Executive Career Transitions. Primarily I looked at items that increased my cultural knowledge. Documents included, for example, e-mails, posters, memos, training, marketing materials, handouts, newsletters, board minutes, board agendas, brochures, worksheets, reports, and policy documents. Artifacts included, for example, websites, social media pages, images, behaviors, events, signage, objects, environmental surroundings, etc. My reaction to certain documents/artifacts was documented in field notes. Organizational members’ use of, reactions to, and insight about documents and artifacts were typically documented in my field notes or discussed during interviews that were captured in transcripts.

Analysis

The data analysis process was necessarily iterative, reflective, and messy. Data collection and analysis began to happen simultaneously. As I experienced the culture, I reflected on it and began to connect my observations, experiences, interview accounts, and knowledge about document/artifacts. Thomas (1993) explains that the project's focus becomes clearer through the data collection process and that key concepts emerge from the data; this rang true for this critical ethnography. As I experienced and took note of cultural nuances, new questions were spawned, which led to sharper concepts and allowed me to conceptualize the critical components of my analysis (Thomas, 1993). My iterative process of collection and analysis included constant reflexivity, which means I considered, critiqued, and examined my own presence, actions, reaction, and involvement within the culture (Thomas, 1993). I was self-reflexive by being mindful about my presence and its consequences within each unemployment organization.

I began by following Wolcott's (1994) recommended three step process for ethnographic analysis: description, analysis, and interpretation. Ethnography is an interpretive act and in order to explain the interpretation it is first important to describe the culture of interest. My field notes began as primarily descriptive. I took note of everything I could during the participant observation experience. For example, I wrote about my surroundings, frequently drawing diagrams and pictures. I also wrote about communication I observed and conversations I had with organizational members. I frequently wrote about how I felt and how I perceived others felt. I described organizational routines, practices, and policy. Explaining culture in the form of a story is a common approach to ethnography. My field notes are chronological narrative accounts

of my organizational experiences. The findings in the following chapter emerged out of the critical components that were revealed in the data. The next chapter shares the analysis that emerged from my experiences. While the field notes document a chronological story, the findings are revealed through comparative themes. The ethnographic findings emerged through writing as a process of inquiry. My writing set up the scene, characters, and plot. Then I developed a deeper analytical lens to various aspects and elements of the organizational cultures in order to weave a nuanced explanation of my results. Description and interpretation are presented together in chapter five of this dissertation.

In order to analyze the data, I read the evidence from my research multiple times until I felt I had a holistic understanding of the culture (Creswell, 2007). I used Microsoft® Word and QSR NVivo 7 (qualitative management software) to assist me the initial coding process. Codes were assigned to chunks of text that were interpreted to carry meaningful significance (Lindloff & Taylor, 2002). The software helped me manage and navigate the large amounts of data I collected. I entered transcripts into the QSR NVivo for initial coding. The field notes were hand written and then typed into Microsoft® Word Documents. Images of artifacts were also entered into the word processed field notes. I coded the data by highlighting meaningful cultural elements, significant events, and communicative acts that I saw in the data. There were 144 initial open codes. Codes with a stronger prevalence were thought about in relation to and in connection with other codes (Lindloff & Taylor). For example, the school metaphor was one of the initial codes. Every time a transcript or field note included school like language in a meaningful way this was coded under “school metaphor.” As I read the

data that fell under this code, I thought about the school metaphor code in relation to other codes. For example, I saw connections between the school metaphor code and the organizational control code. These codes seemed to inform one another and revealed the way that job seeking patrons were controlled like children in a school. These two codes were written about in conjunction with one another in analytic memos. As I combined prevalent codes and eliminated weaker codes, dominant categories emerged through writing as a process of inquiry. The development of categories functioned as a form of data reduction (Lindloff & Taylor, 2002). This process was captured in analytic memos.

Analytic memos were written throughout the data collection process and after the data collection ceased. Memoing facilitated data reduction and interpretation (Lindloff & Taylor, 2002). I wrote analytic memos as a way to help reduce the data from initial codes to themes. I also wrote analytic memos whenever I thought I saw a consistent trend or occurrence. I articulated these trends and the connection they had to the literature. In addition, I wrote analytic memos when I learned new insight that seemed telling, surprising, contradictory, or counterintuitive. When I wrote memos I drafted declarative statements about what I observed, what I thought the observation meant, and how I thought that contributed to the larger picture of my study. Memos also included drafts of declarative statements that teased out the relationship between major conceptual ideas that emerged from my initial coding and categorization process. Many of these declarative statements were revised, kept, or dismissed throughout the collection and analysis process. The memo writing process was largely part of my interpretive effort helping me to understand deeper meanings in the data (Lindloff & Taylor, 2002). The data confirmed, disconfirmed, and redirected my analytical thought. These memos helped

to synthesize data (Lindloff & Taylor, 2002). Memoing also helped me to connect my observations to the existing literature and the theory.

Understanding the data between the two organizational sites was a rigorous analytic process. Each set of organizational data informed the analysis process for the other. Within a given week, I gained experiences at both organizational sites. Physically going to and participating in both organizational cultures allowed me to think about them in conjunction with one another and to analyze them together. Thinking, talking, and writing about the data over an extended period of time was a large part of the analysis process. Similarities and disparities across the different forms of data helped me to recognize themes as they emerged in the data. Themes were interpretively named based on their essence or meaning.

In order to critically interpret the data I worked to uncover power and its meaning as part of my analysis. This process included a defamiliarization process where I reframed the literal observations, accounts, and other information into something new (Thomas, 1993). Thomas (1993) explains that the defamiliarization process distances the ethnographer from the culture and allows the researcher to see things more critically. I tried to set aside the taken-for-granted nature of cultural norms, values, practices, and meanings to provide a critical interpretation of what was happening. I looked at the nonliteral meaning of the culture and its occurrences. When I did this I considered larger systems and structures of power to see how they could inform my understanding of organizational life. Researchers decode the way that societal structure and culture create asymmetrical power relationships that result in the constraint/disadvantage of some and the liberation/advantage of others (Thomas, 1993). Drawing from scholarly literature and

knowledge regarding societal power structures and social inequity, I was able to reveal mico-discursive and material behavior that drew from and exemplified these larger social norms. Thomas (1993) gives the following example,

> "When we defamiliarize our world, stairwells are no longer just avenues for moving between floors, but may be gender battlefields where women protect their spaces, bodies, composure, status, and identity. Classrooms are no longer a congregation of learners receiving information from a teacher, but a microcosm of discrete and overlapping manipulative struggles for status, respect, and sexual conquest, as well as ethnic hostility degradation rituals, facework contests, and power-domination games." (p. 44).

The critical analytic process of ethnography added explanatory power to the interpretive description of the culture. As I analyzed my data and thought about these organizational cultures, I made conceptual connections to power-laden structural issues through questioning. For example, I asked myself about the agency, choices, and resistance of organizational members. I asked myself what I experienced and observed that was empowering and disempowering. Then I asked myself about how these empower and disempowering instances connected to larger social structures. I sought answers to this line of inquiry in the data. My aim as a critical scholar is to provide heuristic value for future organizational members as they manage the absence of work. I will share my findings with each organization.

Incorporating a critical approach to my analysis meant that I made "value-laden judgments of meaning" in order to challenge the status quo (Thomas, 1993, p. 4). When issues of inequity, injustice or power imbalance emerged in the data my analysis identified and critiqued that reality. In addition, I discuss the implications of such power issues and then present suggestions or alternatives to the status quo. Thomas (1993) explains that critical ethnographic analysis "resembles literary criticism in that we look for the nonliteral meaning of our data texts" (p. 43). The critical analysis process unveiled meaning that interpreted cultural symbols, behaviors, norms and the like, so that, important discussions about inequality can take place (Thomas, 1993). Yet, critical analysis is not simply about the critique.

As a critical scholar I have identified alternatives, so that improvements to the culture can be made or considered. I actively brainstormed alternative behavior that organizational members could participate in that would counter constraining and oppressive attributes of each organization's culture. I also documented alternative ways of communicating that would specifically help organizational members produce a more caring and egalitarian organizational life. I suggest improvements that re-frame certain aspects of the culture in ways that are more compassionate or helpful. In short, I scrutinized what I and other organizational members experienced and suggested alternatives as a result of the critical analysis process.

Verification

In order to assess the trustworthiness of my findings and analysis, I employed two verification strategies: prolonged engagement and triangulation. Creswell (2007) recommends that a minimum of two types of verification be completed to ensure the trustworthiness of qualitative research. Prolonged engagement means "persistent observation in the field [including] building trust with participants, learning the culture, and checking for misinformation that stems from distortions introduced by the researcher or informants" (Creswell, 2007, p. 207). Specifically, this process included participating in the organizational life through fieldwork over the course of nearly 7 months. I also used triangulation as a method of verification. Using triangulation "involves corroborating evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective" (Creswell, 2007, p. 208). Lindloff and Taylor (2002) explain that the use of triangulation allows researchers to find a "convergence of meaning" across at least two types of data (p. 240). As outlined in the present chapter, I collected three sources of data (participant observation, interviews, and document/artifacts). These data were corroborated in order to confirm the authenticity of my analysis and interpretation.

Ethical Concerns

There were several ethical concerns that remained in the forefront of my mind as I conducted this critical ethnography. All research comes with ethical complications. A few of the main concerns that emerged dealt with the protection of the participants' identities, the history and nature of ethnographic fieldwork, the assumption of scholarly authority, and the crisis of representation.

I did my best to ethically protect my participants by keeping the confidentiality of both organizations and the individual participants who agreed to help with my study. One way I ensured the ethical backbone of this research was through the informed consent process. I was upfront and honest with the gatekeepers and all participants about the purpose of my study and my presence as a researcher. Being transparent about my research included disclosure about my purposes, my educational gain, and their rights/risks as participants. There were additional ethical concerns regarding my encounter and engagement with the organization and its members.

Participating in research and the knowledge construction process meant that I assumed a position of authority where I passed value-laden judgments about the cultures I studied. Not only did I assume this authority as a doctoral candidate, but I am also doing so for the advancement of my educational pedigree. I remain cognizant of and sensitive to the needs of my participants first and foremost. I balance the sometimes exploitative nature of all research and my pursuit of the doctoral degree with the ethics of integrity, responsibility, and care. In addition, ethnographers confront the crisis of representation. Goodall (2000) explains that the crisis of representation asks scholars to confront the following questions: (a) who get to speak for whom? (b) whose story is it anyway? It is my hope that my research gives voice to unemployed individuals on the margins. The story is only partially mine and I have permission to speak on behalf of my participants as they helped me to co-construct their experiences through ethnography. Unemployed individuals are stigmatized (Oberholzer-Gee, 2008), as such their struggles are minimized and rarely recognized as valuable. This project provides a space for the stories of the

unemployed to be documented and their voices to be heard albeit through my scholarly analysis.

Ethnography specifically stems from exploitative roots as a way to study the "other." In a colonial context, ethnography served as a technology for colonizers to better understand the areas and people they colonized (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Originally much ethnographic research passed judgment and took advantage of the knowledge that was garnered about native cultures (Bernard, 2006). Cultural "others" who were studied were ultimately objectified under the researcher's gaze (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The historical, exploitative roots of ethnographic inquiry bring up important ethical commitments for me as a researcher. The current conceptualizations of ethnography have dramatically evolved from its origins. Yet, it is important to remember this past and remain ethically conscious of the ways my research is rooted in this history and how it continues to evolve.

Summary of Methodology and Methods

The methodological design of this study was intentionally created to facilitate a better understanding about how people across social class lines manage unemployment through the use of unemployment organizations. Furthermore, this study aims to critically analyze the way unemployment organizations embody social class. A wide body of quantitative literature examines issues of unemployment. I seek to advance the literature by taking a critical, qualitative, in-depth look at unemployment experiences in unemployment organizations. I am particularly interested in understanding the cultural nuances that exist within unemployment organizations. The cultures of unemployment organizations constrain and enable their members' unemployment experiences and

reemployment efforts. Thus, a critical ethnographic methodology was appropriate. I collected data through the specific methods of participant observation, interviews, and document/artifacts compilation. The analysis of this critical ethnographic research included a comparative description, analysis, interpretation and critique across the respective cultures of both unemployment organizations. There were five dominant themes that emerged from the data; each theme addressed in chapter four speaks to both organizations.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

This chapter shares the findings as five emergent themes that resulted from the data analysis process. Before sharing the findings, I describe the cultural scene of these organizations so that the findings are grounded in the ethnographic context.

Ethnographic Context

In this section I describe the physical space, cultural tone, and hierarchy of each organization in order to ground the context from which my data collection and analysis emerged. Both organizations, Work Track (WT) and Executive Career Transitions (ECT), have distinct cultural spaces that were socially constructed by the members. Please note pseudonyms are used through this chapter to refer to various participants in my study.

Work Track

After gaining organizational access to Work Track I was assigned to the Westside Location. The director and I agreed that this would be the best location because of the constant stream of activity and its geographic location. All of the other locations only see people on a referral or appointment basis and, in the words of the Executive Director Mike Earhart, do not have much to observe. The Westside location, however, is bustling because it houses three different programs, all of which I conducted participant observation. These three programs are Workforce Reunification (WR), Restorative Justice (RJ), and Community Construction (CC).

The first program is the Workforce Reunification (WR) program. The WR program is specifically designed to facilitate re-entry into employment for individuals with a criminal history. This program lasts for 10 days and usually has between 2-10

members participating at a time. The patrons who participate in the WR program are generally referred from the local vocational rehabilitation office. This program covers communicative skills such as résumé writing, cover letter development, job application submission, and mock interviews. A large portion of the course also addresses the stigma of job searching with a criminal history and how to address this during the search for employment. The instructor for the course is Tina Crawford who also has a criminal history, which she discloses and is transparent about during each session throughout the 10 day period. My volunteer role and participant observation included participating in classroom discussion, helping patrons develop résumés, search for jobs, write cover letters, and conduct mock interviews with patrons.

The second program is the Restorative Justice (RJ) program. The RJ program is designed to facilitate a skill development process through community service. The participants of this program are 18-21 years of age and during their formative years have all come in contact with the juvenile justice system. During my time at the organization there were nine patrons enrolled in the program, which lasts between six and nine months. This program integrates five components: personal counseling, community service, internship opportunities, job search skill development, and adult education. During my field work each of the participants happened to emerge from the foster care system. All of the RJ members were also part of a non-profit behavioral health organization in a program that I have dubbed the Residential Transitional Emancipation Program (RTEP). RTEP is a group home complex that offers support and resources to individuals who have aged out of the foster care system, but are not yet independent enough to become fully emancipated. It is also important to note that all of the

participants in this program had a high school diploma earned from the “alternative high school,” which I describe in more detail below. All members of the RJ program earn a small stipend for each day they attend. They are paid monthly and if they go through the month without any behavior discipline issues the monthly amount is about $200. My volunteer role and participant observation included contributing to classroom discussion and activities, helping search for housing, participating in community service, aiding patrons during job fairs, helping to straighten the overall room, and conduct mock interviews with patrons.

The third program is the Community Construction (CC). In order to be a part of the CC program, participants cannot have a high school diploma, which is a stipulation put in place by the federal grant that funds the CC operation. All CC members are simultaneously pursuing their General Education Development (GED) and learning various construction trades that are nationally accredited. By the end of the six to nine month program each participant in the CC program should have earned their GED and be considered a journeyman in carpentry. Throughout the program each cohort builds a single family house from scratch. These houses are entered into an affordable housing program run by the city. During my time observing the CC program, I volunteered with four distinct cohorts. There were approximately 20-30 people in the cohorts combined, but the delineation was never clear as to which patrons belonged to which cohort. It was a mixed group that changed each time I came to conduct participant observation. I spent the majority of my time in the GED classroom. Due to safety reasons, my time on the work site and in the construction training room was restricted to one visit. Each cohort spent time in the classroom on different days. There are three cohorts: pre-apprentices,

apprentices, and journeymen. During my last weeks of observation a new cohort of pre-apprentices completed orientation. Each cohort works to be promoted up the hierarchy from pre-apprentice to apprentice and then finally to journeymen. The CC members earn a stipend for each day they are on the work site. This stipend is less than minimum wage and is calculated by the amount of time spent on the job site. As participants are promoted up they earn more per hour. If participants break a rule (i.e. tardy, improper uniform, etc.), their rate of pay is decreased. Each CC member also strives to earn a GED in order to complete the program and be recommended for hire to one of the many employers with which WT partners. My volunteer role and participant observation with the CC program included participating in classroom discussion and activities.

The description above provides an overview of the types of programs that I engaged with as a participant observer. It is now important to provide a bit more depth into the spatial climate and context. The following excerpt was documented in my field notes from January 23, 2013.

> As I drive to Work Track I drive into an urban part of town. The closer I get to the Westside Location I start to pass bus stops more frequently along with business and community markers such as a Title and Payday loan businesses, liquor stores, and two local pregnancy, or maybe they could be called family planning, organizations. A block later I pass the local housing authority a.k.a the projects. And in another stretch of the same street I pass a local high school that has been dubbed the “alternative high school” and has also been called the “detention school,” which to paraphrase the local newspaper, is an independent learning facility that caters to students who do not learn well in traditional educational settings. I then pass a park that I know has issues with crimes and violence. That park is two blocks away from Work Track. As you enter the building you will walk into the lobby with a small rectangular foyer. Visitor and patrons of Work Track must approach the glass partition and sign in with the front desk employee or volunteer, receive a visitor’s badge and then get buzzed through a metal door. All employees have a badge that they can swipe to enter into the front door. The overall office has a dated and institutional feel. White tile, brown woodwork, chipped paint in muted colors. The doors are either grey metal or wood and many

times do not have a window. The hallways are narrow and make the overall building feel confined.

Other spatial elements and arrangements will emerge as I share evidence from my field notes; however, it was important to give a general overview up front. In the next section I overview three programs and the context at Executive Career Transitions.

Executive Career Transitions

After gaining organizational access to Executive Career Transitions (ECT) we agreed that the best place to start was with their weekly Monday morning meetings. Every Monday morning at 9am the members of ECT gather to hear a speaker that will address some aspect of the unemployment experience. The speakers are pro bono presenters that share information on a variety of topics. For example, the following list includes several of the presentation titles:

- Providing A Prospective Employer with a Superior Customer Experience
- Creating Competitive Separation
- The Effects of Obamacare
- From Desperation to Deal: Learn Negotiation Techniques to Get All You Deserve
- REBOUND: Seven Steps for Coping with Change
- What's Going On in the Job Market?

The speakers have a wide variety of backgrounds. Some of them are alumni of ECT that have become entrepreneurs, others are career coaches or recruiters in the area, some are from a local mental health and counseling organization, and some are financial advisors. These Monday morning meetings are ritualistic and the staple existence of the organization. Everything else is an extension of this Monday morning meeting ritual. I begin this section by describing the traditional structure of the Monday morning meeting, and then I talk about various other facets and services that ECT provides to its members.

The Monday morning meeting is held at a local Presbyterian church in a suburban setting. This church allows the organization to meet for free in the basement multipurpose room. ECT also has a small office space within the church facility. This office space has a computer, printer, telephone and voicemail access that is run and occupied by the volunteer staff. The following excerpt is from my field notes from February 11, 2013:

> I drove up and took a mental note of the surrounding neighborhood. ECT is held at [local Presbyterian] church. When you drive to this location you travel through an older suburban residential neighborhood. The church is nestled in this community of older ranch style homes that have been well kept. I followed a yellow school bus through the streets picking up what looked like older middle school children or local high school freshman. The neighborhood is quiet. There are some people in workout gear walking for exercise with a brisk pace and others taking a leisurely stroll with their dogs. It was unusually sunny and warm outside. People wave when they see one another on the street and the cars follow the posted 25 mile per hour speed limit and stop when the school bus opens its doors. When I park in the [church's] parking lot, I sit in the car for a moment trying to adjust my things. I put my computer in the trunk, search for a pen, and smile at passersby. The ECT sandwich board is outside in the walkway. When I walk in I see Frank, an ECT volunteer staff member, sitting at the sign in table. I said good morning to Frank. He then asks if this is my first visit. I told him this wasn't my first time and that I was doing research on ECT with Scott the Executive Director. Frank seemed a bit concerned and he asked how many times I'd visited. I told him this was my third time. At that moment the president of ECT, Bob Wilson told Frank that I was one of the board members. I looked slightly confused but thought I'd go with the flow since Frank seemed a bit dismayed that I'd been 3 times and hadn't paid the membership fee. Bob said that he'd have a name tag made up for me so that the next time I came I wouldn't have to worry. I thanked him, signed the blue sign in sheet, and wrote my sharpie name tag. I then proceeded downstairs.

Other spatial elements and arrangements will emerge as I share evidence from my field notes; however, it is important to give a general overview up front.

The Monday morning meeting is strategically set at 9am to mimic a corporate work experience. For those who are unemployed it gives a strategic structure to the beginning of each week with an active job search. Official members of the organization come in, sign an attendance roster, and pick up their laminated name tag out of a wooden

bin that is divided alphabetically. Members typically engage in small talk or networking before the meeting begins. The meetings generally have between 20-30 people in attendance. The audience members are usually between the ages of 40 and 70. The majority of the participants are White men in their mid to late 50s. The number of attendees at meetings fluctuates greatly. There is a $40 one-time fee to join ECT and returning members are charged a fee of $20. All meeting attendees have the option to purchase the Green Book for $10, which is a resource manual that gives job search best practices.

The speakers almost always use PowerPoint as an audiovisual support. The meeting is always facilitated by an emcee for the week. This emcee calls the meeting to order, asks a member of the pastoral staff to open the meeting with a prayer, makes announcements about upcoming networking events or other unemployment organization meetings, and then asks the members if they have any upcoming interviews. Either at the beginning or end of the meeting the emcee asks visitors if they would stand, share their occupational background, the type of work they're seeking, and how they heard about ECT. The emcee's introduction and close of the meeting generally takes about 30 minutes of the allotted time for every Monday morning meeting. Then the speaker is usually allotted about an hour to present. Many of these presentations include some type of group or partnered activity. Frequently presenters will pass out worksheets or handouts that help to facilitate a discussion or thought around a particular concept. At the close of the meeting any final reminders are given and people help to clean up the room by putting away the chairs. At the back of the room there's always a table with hard copy descriptions of job openings that are broken down by industry: management,

finance/accounting, IT, and sales/marketing. People network, offer each other support, and talk on their way out. The meetings usually end between 10:30 and 11am.

Dues paying members of ECT are all unemployed and have a plethora of services and resources available to them including: free personal counseling, free legal counseling, free financial counseling, résumé review, mock interviews, Toastmasters public speaking chapter, entrepreneur start up support group, job seeker accountability meetings, and networking brown bag meetings. The various types of counseling available to ECT's unemployed job seekers are offered by volunteers who include a working full-time therapist, lawyer, and financial broker. These volunteer counselors are on the staff of ECT and offer 3 free sessions to all of the members of ECT. They are not compensated for their efforts and they offer the expertise and services for a limited amount of time. Both the résumé review and mock interviews are conducted by three unemployed members of ECT who formerly worked in HR and volunteer their expertise. The toastmaster's chapter is not free of charge, but does include a reduced membership rate. It meets monthly before the ECT meetings at 7:30am in the same Presbyterian church and is run by volunteers. The accountability and brown bag meetings are run as an off shoot of ECT by an unemployed, active ECT member. Both meetings convene on a weekly basis on Thursdays and Fridays respectively. My fieldwork also included participant observation during these meetings.

The accountability meetings are held every Thursday at 9am in a local Methodist church. This church allows the group to meet for free. It is in a suburban area that is more centrally located in the city when compared to the Presbyterian church. These meetings are run by Michael who is an avid ECT member and senior financial analyst on the job

market. The meetings generally start with introductions and everyone gives their elevator pitch. Then people will go around and ask for advice regarding particular situations in their job search. Frequently issues such as the following are discussed: when to follow up, how to network, tough interview questions, résumé revisions, target companies, and desired contacts. There is also a job search accountability report that is passed out among the members. This is a weekly report that members can do to strategically track their job search efforts. The meeting sometimes ends with practice interview questions and answers. Practice interview questions and answers are passed out in hard copy format and reviewed. Michael also runs a brown bag meeting on Fridays.

The brown bag finance and accounting meeting is held every Friday at 1:30pm in the same Methodist church. There are two brown bag meetings, one for finance and accounting and the other for sales and marketing. Michael runs this meeting with Keith. These meetings are focused on networking. Keith always brings a list of various networking meetings that are held throughout the month. These are announced on a weekly basis and are hosted by various companies and organizations throughout the city. Members also discuss target companies and people they would like to meet during these meetings. Generally the members also go around the table and give their quick elevator pitch as a way to get to know each other and make referrals. There is generally a conversation that emerges about LinkedIn at these meetings.

In sum, I observed Monday morning seminars, accountability meetings, and brown bag networking meetings. The remainder of this chapter will share results for each research question. Evidence from both of these organizational sites will be shared as the findings are discussed.

Findings

This chapter shares each of the themes that emerged from the data analysis process. These themes serve as answers to the following three research questions: RQ1) How are the cultures of reemployment organizations classed, RQ2) How do individuals' from varying social classes manage unemployment through memberships in unemployment organizations, and RQ3) How do the cultures of unemployment organizations constrain and/or enable their members' unemployment experiences and reemployment efforts? The themes collectively answer these sets of questions, but not in a neat, compartmentalized way. Instead at times multiple themes address multiple questions. This chapter describes and shares evidence for the following five themes: 1) The Middle-Class Imperative: Learning the Language of Privilege, 2) Symbolism of Social Class through Artifacts, 3) Text and Body Job Search Practices, 4) Managing Intersecting Stigma in the Absence of Work, 5) Metaphorical Assumptions: Dependent Children and Competent Entrepreneurs. In the fifth chapter an explicit discussion reviews how each research question is answered through the themes presented in chapter four.

The Middle-Class Imperative: Learning the Language of Privilege

Unemployed individuals from both organizations deliberately taught themselves to talk in particular ways for the purposes of the job search. This theme illustrates the way that social class is an embedded part of the communicative culture at unemployment organizations. All job seekers were trained to speak in ways that followed middle class communication norms such as speaking succinctly, talking with a confident tone, giving context, providing a framework, and speaking in concrete terms (Lareau, 2003; Schatzman & Strauss, 1955). Patrons of unemployment organizations participate in

activities such as role play, mock interviews, networking, and the development and practice of elevator pitches. These activities train job seekers how to speak for the purposes of finding work. Speaking in ways that did not follow recommended job search communication speech patterns was typically corrected or critiqued.

These data illustrate the way middle-class norms are privileged and how individuals from the middle class have a communicative advantage as they search for work. Dougherty (2011) urges her readers to shift their understanding of social class by re-conceptualizing communication as the "mortar for social class" (p. 75). In my data this concept became clearer because middle-class communicators were able to more strategically navigate the job market due to its bias toward middle-class communication norms. Metaphorically speaking, middle-class job speakers are already fluent in the "native" language of the job market. Middle-class communication "fluency" allowed middle-class communicators to strategically draw on dominant entrepreneurial discourse in order to promote themselves as candidates. Working-class people were at a disadvantage because they had to learn the mechanics of middle class speech. Metaphorically speaking, learning the mechanics of middle-class speech was like learning a "foreign" language. Working-class job seekers had to assimilate to privileged speech patterns in order to find work in a biased job market. The job market privileges middle-class communication, working-class individuals were at a disadvantage even though they were seeking working-class occupations. All unemployed job seekers trained themselves to speak in ways that follow middle-class norms. Individuals from the middle-class have more experience speaking this way and thus had an advantage in the job search process. Lubrano (2004) addresses middle-class communication norms saying,

“Language too is a sticking point – both what you say and how you say it...” (p. 130). This statement rang true as I experienced the cultures of both Work Track (WT) and Executive Career Transitions (ECT). The underlying message is that what one says and how one says it is critical because it could mean the difference between prolonged unemployment and the ability to secure the next job opportunity. Both organizations communicatively trained job seekers. While Executive Career Transitions strategically taught job seekers to draw from entrepreneurial discourse, Work Track taught the basic mechanics of middle-class speech.

Mechanics of Middle-Class Speech

The working-class members of Work Track (WT) were trained in the basic mechanics of middle-class speech. Their existing speech patterns were routinely criticized and devalued. The result of criticism and speech training at WT reinforced the dominant communicative privilege of the middle class. The data illustrate the way working-class speech patterns are marked in society.

During multiple observations in the Workforce Reunification (WR), Restorative Justice (RJ), and Community Construction (CC) GED classrooms I witnessed the way working-class job seekers were trained to speak more like the middle class. For example, on January 30, 2013 I was in the computer lab with a group of eight patrons in the WR program. One of the men was Joe Brown, a 35-year old former laborer, who had multiple felonies on his record. Joe’s job search was particularly challenging despite the fact that he has years of experience as a physical laborer. His experience was vast and included years of construction, factory work, and carpentry. I was sitting next to Mr. Joe Brown

watching him as he searched for jobs online in the computer lab. The following took place:

> Mr. Joe Brown perks up and asks the instructor about the construction finisher position he found online. The instructor, Tina Crawford tells him he should call about that job today. She said, "When you call what are you going to say?" Mr. Brown says, "I'ma call and tell them I want that job." Ms. Crawford says, "No. Okay, pretend I'm the receptionist. Ring. Acme construction can I help you? Now what do you say." Mr. Brown looks annoyed and says, "Hi I'm calling about the job you have open." Ms. Crawford tells him that is incorrect. She explains that he needs to tell the receptionist who he is and he needs to be more specific. She then does a role play of what he should say. Ms. Crawford says, "Hi my name is Tina Crawford and I'm interested in the construction finisher job that I found listed in the paper. Who should I speak to about applying for this position?" She looks at Mr. Brown and says, "Okay." Mr. Brown looks annoyed. Ms. Crawford says, "Okay, your turn. Ring. Acme construction can I help you?" Mr. Brown responds, "Hi my name is Joe I want to know more about the construction job I saw listed." Ms. Crawford says, "No, try again. You've got to be more specific. This receptionist isn't going to pass your information on if you can't clearly state who you are and what you're looking for. You should say, hi my name is Joe Brown and I found a job listing in the paper today for a construction finisher. Could you please put me in touch with the hiring manager so that I can apply for the position?" Tina Crawford continues, "Ok, try it again. Ring. Acme Construction can I help you?" Tina Crawford and Joe Brown did this role play for approximately 25 minutes. Over and over and over again until he got it. The rest of the class just listened in silence. Joe Brown turned red and shifted his weight in his chair several times throughout this process. He was visibly agitated. The final time Mr. Brown said, "Hi my name is Joe Brown and I saw a job posting for a construction finisher. I am qualified and would like to apply for the position today. Can you tell me who I need to speak with or how to go about applying?" When Tina Crawford finally said, "Yes, that's it, good job. Joe relaxed and slumped down in his chair." Tina Crawford said, "I know I'm coming down on you Joe, but people like us with a past don't get a second chance. We have to get it right the first time. You all will get a chance to practice like Mr. Brown. You have to get it right."

This particular scenario was commonplace in the WR training sessions. Nearly every participant did a similar role play with the instructor at some point during the 10-day, WR program. These role play activities were Ms. Crawford's way to teach the participants how to communicate during a phone call when they needed to inquire about a potential job opportunity, when they were going to go to a job fair, or when they had an interview

scheduled. However, the way she teaches them to communicate reinforces the privilege middle-class speech patterns hold within our society. In this excerpt Ms. Crawford tells Mr. Brown twice that he has to get it “right.” Ms. Crawford passes judgment on Joe’s speech implying that the way he currently communicates is wrong. Her instruction explicitly illustrates the way power will work against his current working-class speech patterns. Ms. Crawford threatens that if he does not get it “right” by assimilating his communication, his information will not make it to the hiring manager. This instructor actively points out her perceptions of Mr. Brown’s communicative shortcomings by repeatedly saying, “No.” The instructor also reinforces the “right” way to speak by repeatedly requiring Joe to participate in the role play until his speech more closely follows middle-class speech norms. Note that this interaction happened in a room of working-class job seekers. Each job seeker in the room has been exposed to this message and will then participate in a similar role play that is aimed at “correcting” their speech. Inherently, this program teaches working-class job seekers that the way they communicate is wrong. The reasons WT staff feels it is necessary to “correct” working-class job seekers communication is due to the biased societal job market structure. The larger social structure is biased toward middle-class communication because it is socially constructed as normative. The bias in the job market is not clearly articulated to WT job seekers because of the privilege given to middle-class communication. Middle class communication is socially constructed as the “right” way of speaking. Privilege is reinforced during the search for work because middle-class communication is perceived as the way to find a job. Simply put, work is given to people who communicate in middle-class ways during the job search process.

This instance connects back to the web-of-power theoretical framework, which argues that social class is communicatively marked. A deficit model of communication is applied to working-class communication standards, which marks these communication behaviors when they are compared to middle-class communication norms (Dougherty, 2011). What is particularly interesting is that Mr. Brown is qualified for the position and his current speech patterns and norms would be appropriate on the work site in the role of a construction finisher. Yet, Mr. Brown is trained in the mechanics of middle-class speech in order to secure working-class employment. Speaking the "right" way then becomes a barrier to securing employment for working-class individuals because their speech norms are perceived as "wrong." Put another way, communication is the mortar for social class because if the job seekers do not learn how to speak "correctly" like the middle-class they will likely not find work. Ms. Crawford has to "correct" the language of working-class job seekers if they are to find work. Her actions are a result of the demands of the larger structure. The demands of the larger structure create a systematic disadvantage to working-class job seekers because they are expected to assimilate and conform to middle-class communicative norms in order to find work. In this sense, bias works against the working class and for the middle class because they have already been socialized into a privileged communication system.

The previous example illustrates a consistent experience and message throughout my time at Work Track. Instructors frequently made comments to the patrons that encouraged communicative assimilation to middle-class speech norms. For example, earlier that day on January 30, 2013 Ms. Crawford told another patron named Ms. Dunn, "You've got to stop with all that slang language and use professional language." In this

statement you can see the dichotomy Ms. Crawford presents based on her perceptions of Ms. Dunn's speech. Ms. Crawford uses of descriptor "professional language" in opposition to "slang language," which is how she describes Ms. Dunn's language use. Telling Ms. Dunn to "stop with all that slang language" implies that it is wrong. Again Ms. Crawford passes judgment on a patron's speech; she seems to have internalized the structural bias toward middle-class speech and against working-class speech, despite her working-class background. Ms. Crawford implies that Ms. Dunn should use language that is "professional," which sends a message that this is the "right" way to communicate. Ms. Crawford's instruction reveals the way "professional" communication is socially constructed as appropriate for job searches and how other forms of communication are deemed unacceptable. Ms. Crawford's rejection of Ms. Dunn's speech contributes to the marginalization of her as a job candidate based on her ability to communicate using the mechanics of middle-class speech. The subtext of the instruction places criticism on the individual, not the structure, and reinforces the notion that Ms. Dunn needs to be corrected to assimilate to the larger structure. Encouragement to communicatively assimilate frequently occurred during the Community Construction (CC) GED preparation courses as well. Nearly every GED session where I conducted participant observation, the instructor, Ms. Lena covered vocabulary. The following discussion happened in the GED classroom on April 24, 2013.

> Ms. Lena: Get out paper. We're going to do some vocabulary and writing. We usually do vocab once a week and I haven't explained to the new guy why we do vocab.
>
> Ms. Lena says to Omarion: Can you explain why?
>
> Omarion: We learn vocabulary because young Black men use all this slang. Like swerve. You don't know what that mean, huh, Ms. Lena?

> Ms. Lena: Uh, no.
>
> Keon: [mumbles quietly] keeps me from sounding so Black
>
> Omarion: It helps you communicate better.
>
> Ms. Lena: It helps you read better too. Kids from lower level income homes graduate high school knowing about 600 words. Kids from middle income families know about 1200 words. That's twice as many. For example, if you were in a lower income family's home a parent might say "pick the fork up." If you were in a middle income family's home the parent might say, "could you please pick the fork up?" If you were in a high income family's home you might say could you please pick the fork up that fell on the floor under the table?" It all goes back to reading and communication. So we learn 8 words a week. Our first word is appropriate.

The instructor articulates her perception of the link between communication, language, and social class as she facilitates her vocabulary lesson to the WT patrons. Ms. Lena provides a numeric vocabulary count that increases based on social class status. In her instruction she illustrates with examples of how she perceives communication might differ according to one's social class status and vocabulary. Learning vocabulary is taught as a simplistic way to assimilate communication. Ms. Lena, similar to Ms. Crawford, trains her patrons in the GED classroom on the mechanics of middle-class speech—a simple boost in one's vocabulary. Ms. Lena's instruction ignores the larger social structures at play. Social class is a fluid phenomenon that is not simply found in variables such as income, level of education (Dougherty, 2011), nor the amount of vocabulary one knows.

Requiring an increased use of words and vocabulary is counter to working-class communication norms. Lareau (2003) noted that silence is commonly used in working-class homes. Silence is a powerful communication tool, but has been conceptualized as an absence of communication (Covarrubias, 2007). Thus, silence has been delegitimized

as a form of communication and a deficit model has been used to understand silence. Hence, the use of silence marks working-class communication norms as deficient. In society, verbosity and speech are privileged and socially constructed as legitimate communication, which works to the disadvantage of people who use the absence of speech communicatively. Overall, there is a classed based privilege of middle class communication (Mills, 2004), which results in a marginalization of working-class communication norms within American culture (Rushton & Young, 1975). The marginalization of working-class speech emerges in these data because WT job seekers are taught that the way they speak needs to be corrected to be more like the middle class. One reason WT staff teach the mechanics of middle-class speech is due to the larger social structure. The WT staff are equipping their job seekers to navigate a job market system and structure that privileges middle-class people who do not communicate like the working class. The amount of vocabulary one knows is simply a proxy for the larger structure at play. The underlying assumption of Ms. Lena's message is that by increasing one's vocabulary one can emulate a higher class status. While learning the mechanics of middle-class speech and vocabulary will impact communication and literacy, the patron's level of privilege will not simply increase with eight words per week.

The two patrons speaking with the instructor, Ms. Lena, in the exchange above were Black males in their 20s. Keon and Omarion refer to their race and language use from a deficit perspective. Omarion says, "We learn vocabulary because young Black men use all this slang." Keon says that one of the reasons they learn vocabulary is because it keeps him "from sounding so Black." In this instance we can see the intersection of communication, race, and social class. "A key insight of intersectional

theory holds that modes of inequality, such as race, class, and gender, can combine in ways that alter the meaning and effects of one another" (Morris, 2007, p. 491). Keon and Omarion imply that Black communication and slang need to be corrected.

Race and social class intersect, and in this classroom exchange the subtext points to the stigma associated with communication patterns that are non-dominant. There are negative stereotypes in American society about the speech of Black people (Leonard & Locke, 1993; Ogawa, 1971). In general, Black speech is stereotypically seen as inappropriate because it is perceived as louder and more hostile (Popp, Donovan, Crawford, Marsh & Peele, 2003). Social constructions about race and social class are tangled together regarding the expectations of communication. While there is a classed based privileging of middle class communication norms (Mills, 2004); there is also a race based privileging of White communication norms (Popp et al., 2003). Keon has internalized that sounding "so Black" is something that is negative and needs to be corrected. "Stereotypes are important because they may function not only to describe "what is" but also to prescribe "what should be" in social interaction" (Popp, et al., p. 319). Based on my interpretation of Keon's and Omarion's comments, they have negatively internalized stereotypes of Black speech as something that is wrong about them. There is no mention of the flawed raced and classed social system that privileges words, yet this is the social system all job seekers navigate in order to secure work.

Dominant communication norms are seen as superior, simply because they have been socially constructed as normative. This privilege marginalizes the voices of non-dominant communicators within American culture (Rushton & Young, 1975). Disadvantages emerge when considering the context of the job search and this is

illustrated in Work Track's cultural practices and the way social class is marked through communication. Middle-class job seekers were also communicatively trained, but in a different way when compared to working-class job seekers.

Strategic Management of Entrepreneurial Discourse

The middle-class members of ECT were mainly trained in networking communication skills. Networking is a middle-class discursive act that allows job seekers to communicatively manage the job search process. Networking also allows candidates to sell themselves on the job market, which allowed them to operate as "entrepreneurs of self." The "entrepreneur of self" is a theoretical notion that is covered in organizational communication literature (e.g. du Gay, 1996; Miller & Rose, 1990). ECT job seekers enacted the "entrepreneur of self" by marketing and promoting their abilities with the development of an elevator pitch and marketing sheets. Gill (2014) argues that entrepreneurial discourse aligns with upper and middle class ideologies. Gill's arguments rang true as I analyzed my data. When middle-class job seekers conceptualized themselves as "entrepreneurs of self," it empowered them with a sense of agency in the job search and allowed them to leverage and increase their social capital. Grannovetter's (1973) notion of weak ties is also relevant to this portion of my findings. Weak ties are people who serve as brides across disparate social groups (Granovetter, 1973). The use of weak ties is central to the way middle-class job seekers employed entrepreneurial discourse. ECT members sent their entrepreneurial messages out through weak ties, which allowed them to leverage social capital. Granovetter (1973) discusses the way multiple connections across networks are more likely to develop opportunity. I saw

middle-class job seekers capitalize on their ability to communicate their job search intentions across networks using weak ties through the use of entrepreneurial discourse.

Patrons at Executive Career Transitions (ECT) trained themselves to speak in particular ways for the job search. These patrons have an upper/middle-class status and train themselves to communicate in ways that follow middle-class norms. For example on July 29, 2013 I attended a Monday morning meeting that deviated from the typical format. It was evident because the room had round tables with 6 chairs around each table. Typically the room is set up with four or five rows of chairs facing the projector screen. Today there was no projector or screen. Rick, an unemployed, active member of ECT was volunteering to serve as one of two emcees for the day. Rick is a former Human Resources professional; he starts off our activity:

> Rick: That's a great segue into networking. Just because a job opening hasn't been put up yet it doesn't mean there isn't a need. Good managers who know what the business needs can move things around and create a position if they know a talented person is available. But they won't know about your available talent if you aren't out there networking. So we're going to try an exercise around the table with the elevator speech. There's no perfect elevator speech, but we need to be ready. If you run into someone at the grocery store you'll have 10 seconds to share your speech. If you go to a networking specific meeting you'll have more like 2 to 5 minutes. So we'll start with a 60 second elevator speech. Start with a time keeper and go clockwise. Give only positive feedback and tell each person the things you like. We're usually aware of the things we do badly.
>
> I served as the time keeper for the group. I joked and said I should be timekeeper because I'm a speech teacher. The group laughed and said that was funny. We all shared our elevator pitches. I held up my hand when ten seconds was left and then did a five finger count down for the last 5 seconds. Barbara was sitting at our table and she gave positive feedback and suggestions for improvement for each individual despite the instruction. Barbara is a former Human Resources Manager, so people generally deferred to her expertise.

The notion of an elevator speech or pitch was originally a business concept and is frequently used by business practitioners. According to writer Aileen Pincus at *Bloomsburg Businessweek* (2007) developing a good elevator pitch is,

> One of the most important things a businessperson can do—especially an owner or someone who is involved in sales—is learn how to speak about their business to others. Being able to sum up unique aspects of your service or product in a way that excites others should be a fundamental skill. Yet many executives pay little attention to the continuing development of "the elevator pitch"—the quick, succinct summation of what your company makes or does. That's too bad, because the elevator pitch—so named because it should last no longer than the average elevator ride—is far too important to take casually. It's one of the most effective methods available to reach new buyers and clients with a winning message.

This excerpt from *Bloomsburg Businessweek* illustrates that elevator pitches are used to promote businesses. ECT instructs job seekers to develop an elevator pitch about themselves as a job candidate, which implies that they should treat themselves like a business. In this sense the job seeker is promoting themselves as a business they own or more specifically an entrepreneurship. The elevator pitch is a colloquial phrase frequently used within the context of middle-class job seeking. An elevator pitch is a communicative strategy that is widely taught. Its use implies that job seekers should conceptualize themselves as businesses that must be promoted. There is a body of organizational communication literature that addresses the scholarly notions of "entrepreneur of self" and the "ideal entrepreneurial subject" which are relevant to this portion of my analysis.

In a sense, job seekers are in business for themselves and seek to strategically communicate the value they can bring to future employing organizations through elevator pitches. Thus, job seekers are "entrepreneurs of self." Theorists loosely describe the "entrepreneur of the self" as an opportunity individuals have to work on themselves and reach their potential similar, to that of a personal business venture (du Gay, 1996). The ideal entrepreneurial subject is what individuals who are entrepreneurs of the self are striving to become through continual self-improvement (Holmer Nadesan & Trethewey, 2000). Participation in ECT meetings is an effort to self-improve; job seekers are seeking to improve the way they promote themselves on the job market. The ultimate goal of the entrepreneur of self is to add value to organizations (Holmer Nadesan & Trethewey, 2000). In the excerpt above Rick says, "Good managers who know what the business needs can move things around and create a position if they know a talented person is available. But they won't know about your available talent if you aren't out there networking." Based on Rick's rationale the elevator pitch, a networking strategy, promotes the job seeker as a solution to business needs. This rationale aligns with the scholarly notion of the entrepreneur of self because as du Gay (1996) explains it, the ideal entrepreneurial subject strives to reach full potential in order to serve a corporation. Most job seekers at ECT were explicitly seeking to work for corporations. Rick mentions networking and explains that having an effective elevator pitch potentially opens up job opportunities if job seekers are communicating with the right person. Networking is an inherently communicative effort and the exercise described above is a way for ECT patrons to practice selling themselves effectively with an elevator pitch.

Putting oneself on the job market and learning to becoming an entrepreneur of self does not always come easily to job seekers. When people go through career transition or occupational change, identity work becomes necessary and is generally achieved through storied communication about the self (Ibarra, 2003; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). The stories ECT members created about their job seeker identities drew from entrepreneurial discourse. ECT makes a concerted effort to help job seekers conceptualize themselves and talk about themselves drawing from the entrepreneurs of self discourse. Grant, a 54-year old former public relations professional, explained his experience to me during his interview, "Every week I'm learning a little something on how to better myself in this [job search]. If you give me a product for a cause, I don't have any problem going out and trumpeting that—talking to journalists, being on national TV. I don't have a problem with it. But when it's…you really have to get into that mode of, you are a product. You have to promote yourself. Because there are people out there that don't know you're looking." Miller and Rose (1990) explain that the entrepreneur of the self participates in "innumerable training courses and seminars in order to enhance his/her technical skill base while, simultaneously, this subject endlessly seeks to perfect his/her personal image, self-discipline, and communication skills" (Miller & Rose, 1990, p. 26). You can see in Grant's description that he attends ECT meetings on a weekly basis so that he can continually improve his job search efforts. His experience is consistent with Miller and Rose's (1990) description of the entrepreneur of self. Thus, many of the job seekers at ECT drew on entrepreneurial discourses as they formed their elevator pitch.

Another entrepreneurial discursive strategy taught during ECT sessions was the creation of a one page marketing sheet. This marketing sheet promotes the entrepreneur of self in written form. During this networking session one of the patrons brought up his personal marketing sheet and the meeting's emcees brought it into the group discussion.

> Brian: I don't ask for a job. I ask for a 15 minute cup of coffee and I tell them I'm in a job search. And then I tell 'em I'm asking for their advice and I share my market sheet with them.
>
> Rick: Can we review your marketing sheet? [reaches over to grab and hold up the marketing sheet]. This is a marketing tool. It has his contact info, object with a job title and focus, highlighted skills, and target companies and names. Then when you have them with you at a networking meeting you can ask that person if they know of anyone you should meet based on what you're looking for.

The marketing sheet becomes a strategic written communicative tool that documents the metaphorical entrepreneurial business the job seeker is selling—oneself. This was not the only time I saw a marketing sheet. I frequently observed discussions about them and also obtained a job seeker's personal marketing sheet during a job seeker accountability meeting on August 16, 2013. This experience was documented in my field notes:

> I saw that [Jeremy] had a personal marketing one sheet. I asked him if I could have a copy. The contents include his name, e-mail, LinkedIn URL, headshot image, professional overview statement (two sentences overviewing experience and types of companies he has worked for), Accomplishments (4 bullets on professional achievements related to financial expertise), List of Target Companies (14 in financial services column, and 18 in an "other" category). Jeremy explained that this document serves as a leave behind after networking meetings and one-on-ones. He asked me if I knew anyone who worked at any of this target companies.

This marketing sheet functions as a talking point and a promotional networking tool that is used in conjunction with other types of entrepreneurial communication, like the elevator pitch. The elevator pitch and the marketing sheet are strategic communicative strategies that promote one's image and identity during the job search. Job seekers do this

promotion as an entrepreneur of self. Conceptualizing oneself as an “entrepreneur” empowers job seekers with a discursive roadmap for how to increase social capital through networking, which could lead to increased economic and cultural capital. Elevator pitches and marketing sheets are networking strategies that operate as a discursive act of entrepreneurial self-promotions; all of these discursive strategies are tied to social class.

Organizational communication scholars have argued that entrepreneurial discourse is highly classed. Rebecca Gill (2014) analyzed entrepreneurial discourse as a classed ideological construct. Ultimately, Gill (2014) suggests that entrepreneurs are valorized because they are privileged upper/middle-class individuals who bring ideas to market and increase economic vitality. In the job search process the “entrepreneurs of self” at ECT are trying to increase their personal economic vitality by selling the possibility of their labor in the job market. Middle-class job seekers also market themselves as an entrepreneur of self who can contribute to the economic vitality of the potential employer. Job seekers used communicative strategies such as the elevator pitch and marketing sheet to discursively establish and negotiate their value in the job market of exchange.

Participating in an organization such as ECT strategically teaches these unemployed job seekers how to navigate the job market. The type of communicative training that occurs within ECT and is described above does not just cover the mechanics of speaking, which is what happens at WT. The training at ECT strategically draws on entrepreneurial discourse that empowers job seekers to build social capital through networking. Networking is critical in the search for work. In fact, job seeking research

maintains that approximately 86% of jobs are found through networking contacts (Bolles, 2009). Bourdieu's (1987) notion of social capital is relevant when addressing job search networking efforts. The amount of social capital ECT patrons have to leverage outweighs that of WT patrons and create systematic advantages for middle-class job seekers during their search for work. Middle-class job seekers are more likely to be able to capitalize on the strengths of their weak ties (Granovetter, 1973). In this way, networking is a classed form of communication. Networking is the dominant way middle-class job seekers are taught to produce opportunity for themselves. Networking is an ongoing, discursive, promotional act done by the "entrepreneur of the self" who is on the job market. Furthermore, with practice ECT patrons can not only leverage the amount of social capital, but exploit it because they have been communicatively trained on how to sell themselves as "entrepreneurs of self" within the job market. Having the ability to network gives job seekers agency in the job search.

WT patrons are trained how to speak in ways that contribute to the marginalization of their current communicative speech behavior. WT job seekers are taught that the way they communicate is wrong. Furthermore, they are never given instruction on how to individually increase their social capital or network. Instead networking is done by a full-time WT staff member on behalf of the patrons. Hammer, a full-time WT employee, has been with the company off and on for approximately eight years. Hammer has worked in several different roles during his tenure with Work Track. When I asked Hammer to describe his roles and responsibilities he stated:

> I hang out. I do all the stuff I would have done if I was looking for work, just on other people's behalf. I just hang out. I try to develop rapport, try to learn about business, try to figure out what they need, what's going on there, who the personnel are, how they like to manage, what the staff looks like if it's really

> good, if I do a really good job. I just know business really well. If I know enough, the idea is ....Yeah, just hang out, learn the business. You know enough business, you're given an opportunity to say, "Hey, check this person out. Check this person out. It's worth your time."

Later in his interview Hammer described his role as, "third party networking," which involves his ability to make connections with local employers, learn their business, and then recommend an employee from the WT pool of candidates. Hammer describes his role as, "doing all the stuff I would've done if I was looking for work." His role requires him to participate in networking activities similar to the members of ECT.

Networking is a strategic communicative activity that leverages social capital (Ibarra & Hunter, 2007). The middle-class job seekers at ECT were able to use entrepreneurial discourse and attempt to leverage their contacts in a ways that could allow them to capitalize on future opportunities. Leveraging social capital allows the middle class to use their contacts in order to personally advance and accomplish goals (Ibarra & Hunter, 2007). While I do believe Hammer's position serves a critical role for the patrons of Work Track, it simultaneously operates against WT patrons because it removes their agency in the job search process. Hammer's role is necessary due to the structure of the overarching societal system. He networks for working-class job seekers because they have not been taught or socialized into networking communication. Networking is a middle-class way of communicating. If working-class job seekers were taught networking communication skills it would likely be a communicative struggle. However, the result of Hammer's role means that he is speaking *for* them. Omitting the voices of WT job seekers in the process of networking removes their personal opportunity at developing social capital by removing the chance and withholding the skill to make connections with potential employers. Withholding the skill of networking

segregates working-class job seekers and keeps them away from potential job opportunities. According to Massey and Denton (1993), segregation is largely responsible for the creation and maintenance of the underclass. The omission of working-class voices contributes to the maintenance of social class status because the absence of networking skills training decreases job seekers chances of making connections that may lead to job opportunities. Ultimately, third party networking reifies the existing social class structure.

WT job seekers need to be able to benefit from networking communicative behavior because it will equip them to navigate the social structure. Learning how to network will likely be a communicatively struggle for working-class job seekers because they do not communicate with words in the same way as the middle class. However, teaching the working-class networking is also problematic. If working-class job seekers are to network it would reify the existing social structure because it socially constructs networking, a middle-class communication behavior, as the "right" way to find a job. In a sense the situation that Work Track and working-class job seekers face is a contradiction. The absence of networking training at WT and the act of "third party networking" stilts the progress of a job searches for the working-class individuals and inhibits their ability to leverage social capital. However, teaching working-class job seekers to network like the middle class would also reify the existing structure and contribute to the marginalization of the working class.

Conclusion: The Middle-Class Imperative

Communication skills training took place at both Work Track and Executive Career Transitions through the use of activities such as role play, mock interviews, and

practice networking sessions. Job seekers at both organizations worked to speak in ways that followed dominant middle-class communication norms.

When working-class job seekers are trained in the mechanics of middle-class speech it ultimately reinforces the communicative privilege granted to the middle class. Furthermore, these communicative practices reinforce the way working-class communication is marked and socially constructed as inadequate or insufficient. Connecting back to the web-of-power, the organizational training that takes places at both WT and ECT illustrate the way that social class is communicatively marked. A deficit model applied to working-class communication marks these communication behaviors when they are compared to middle-class communication norms (Dougherty, 2011). The biased structure of the job market is at fault because it works against working-class job seekers creating a communicative barrier to employment.

The power of privilege in the job market works in favor of middle-class job seekers creating advantages in the job search. Middle-class job seekers do not need to be trained in the mechanics of middle-class speaking because they already communicate in ways that following middle class norms. Instead, middle-class job seekers are able to learn more strategic ways to navigate the job market communicatively. Drawing on entrepreneurial discourses, job seekers from ECT were able to leverage and maximize their social capital via networking. The culture of each unemployment organization represented communicative social class divisions that exist in society; these divisions also manifested in the tension between material and discursive reality.

Symbolism of Social Class through Artifacts

The second theme that emerged exemplifies the co-construction of materiality and discourse. The relationship between material and discursive realities is directly relevant to social class phenomena and is manifest in the way they co-create each other. Dougherty (2011) uses a social class lens to expound on the dialectic relationship between materiality and discourse.

Dialectics is a widely applied scholarly concept that primarily became popular in relational literature due to Leslie Baxter, an interpersonal theorist who developed the theory of Relational Dialectics (Baxter, 1988, 1990). Simply put, dialectics exists when people manage simultaneously existing tensions in life. Scholars have applied the theoretical framework of dialectics widely. I draw from relational dialectics specifically because social class is relational. "Social class is not just about the culture of people living in their environments. It is about the behavior and judgments of people in the surrounding environment" (Dougherty, 2011, p. 57). Social class strata guide social interaction and the way that people hoard resources, create boundaries, and treat one another (Patillo, 2008). Social class is relational and thus so is the dialectic of materiality and discourse. All people are shaped by both material conditions and discourse. However, Dougherty (2011) explains that people from working-class or poor backgrounds emphasize the way materiality shapes working-class life out of necessity because basic needs are less likely to be met. Comparatively, people from the middle class are more likely to have the privilege of emphasizing discursive reality because basic material conditions necessary for survival are typically met. The dialectic between materiality and discourse was complex in the cultures of unemployment organizations

and revealed itself through the organizational artifacts and values association with attire, food, and physical space. This tension revealed the maintenance of both materiality and discourse across social class groups.

There are many different functional and dysfunctional strategies that people use to manage dialectics. Middle-class job seekers solely recognized one pole in the tension—discourse (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). This middle-class strategy is dysfunctional because it ignores the way middle-class lives are shaped materially. Working-class job seekers used the segmentation strategy where they alternated between the poles of materiality and discourse attempting to manage both according to the context (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Due to their social class status, WT job seekers had to typically manage material conditions before managing discourse in relation to their joblessness. For working-class job seekers, materiality primarily dictated the context. This social class dialectic emerged in the differing relationship Work Track and Executive Career Transition members had with organizational attire, food, and space.

Organizational Attire: Suits and Uniforms

Attire is a classed material artifact that is embedded into the organizational culture of unemployment organizations. Expectations regarding attire became evident as I learned each organization's cultural norms regarding attire and what was socially constructed as appropriate or acceptable dress. There were consequences whenever attire based norms were broken. Organizational members use attire in a way that symbolically communicates social class status.

Symbolism of Caliber through Middle-Class Clothing.

Middle class job seekers at ECT were never told how to dress. Instead instruction regarding appropriate attire was absent in the micro-level organizational discourse because members of the middle-class had a common understanding of attire based expectations. Wearing symbols of wealth, such as business attire, is one way people mark their bodies and display social class status (Dougherty, 2011). There was an implicit expectation that ECT members personally owned business or business casual attire and knew what to wear.

At ECT members typically wear either full business attire or business casual attire. This type of dress is relatively consistent at all ECT events including the Monday morning meetings, accountability support groups, and all networking events. I took note of this during my first participant observation on January 28, 2013:

> Approximately 24 people settled into the room. Of those 24 people 7 were women. And based on my visual observation 3 of those women were racial minorities including myself. All other participants appeared to be White males. Everyone was wearing business casual attire at a minimum. Some people were in full business attire. All of the men who were board members/officers of ECT had on either a suit or a sports coat with a neon lime green, laminated name tag with their name and position listed. Regularly attending members had on white, laminated name tags with their name and previous industry. Newcomers, like myself, had on disposable name tags with a white background and red boarder. We of course had sharpie written names. This made it clear who the newcomers were. I noticed during the pre-meeting mingling that people frequently referenced each other's name tags if they didn't know someone's name.

The organizational attire at ECT was interesting because the norms were implicit, not explicit. No one ever audibly requests the members to arrive in business or business casual attire. Based on the common social class background of the membership, attire is understood. Gorman (2000) posits that "suits" are representation of the middle class and is symbolic of work that is socially constructed as dignified. Middle-class attire is imbued

with a powerful symbolic message. The job seekers at ECT will experience benefits during social interaction because they have had the resources to invest in their material wardrobes.

I interpret ECT's common attire (material condition) worn by members as a discursively embedded expectation because attire is never articulated. When I initially approached the Executive Director of ECT to request permission to use this organization as a site for my dissertation research I wore a business suit. My previous corporate work experience influenced this decision. I did question my decision to wear full business attire, but after I arrived I was happy that I made this decision. My attire matched the cultural norm of the organization, which helped to set a collegial tone during my initial request to gain access to ECT.

The name tags, part of the organizational attire, described in the excerpt above communicate organizational hierarchy. Individuals who serve as volunteer staff wear green laminated name tags. The color of the name tag and the fact that it is laminated designates a sense of authority and tenure with the organization. Official members who have paid membership fees all receive a white, laminated name tag. The color and lamination also designates one's status as an official member, which is established monetarily by paying the membership fee. Newcomers wear a disposable name tag that is handwritten. This symbolically designates a different location on the organizational hierarchy. At the end of this meeting on January 28, I went to the back of the room and observed an artifact that was related to attire.

> On another table there are a bunch of different documents and publications sitting. I can't make heads or tails of what all is there. But I did see a flyer for a JoS. A Bank's sale that said "70% off Corporate Day Sale". I guess corporate attire was on sale. This to me is an element of social class and unemployment.

The sale flyer is a particularly interesting artifact because it conveys the notion that unemployed job seekers are expected to uphold a corporate style of dress. The savings information is helpful for ECT's unemployed patrons because they do not have a steady source of income. JoS. A. Bank is a high end retail store for men. The online store includes the following major attire categories: suits, dress shirts, sports coats, pants, ties, sportswear, outerwear, shoes and accessories, and tuxedos (Jos. A. Bank Clothiers, Inc., 2014). To provide perspective, on the JoS. A. Bank retail website a white button down dress shirt for men is regularly priced at $87.50 and with 70% off the retail price the same shirt would cost $26.25 before sales tax. This is an important cost savings during periods of joblessness. In sum, there is an underlying expectation that middle-class attire should be maintained despite the material reality that ECT members have a loss of income. This expectation is likely feasible because ECT members come from a social class group where clothing may not be a challenging need to meet. The unemployed members of ECT likely do not have to focus on meeting basic needs even during the first months of their unemployment because they have likely accrued middle-class wardrobes during their periods of employment. Or perhaps the symbolic value of maintaining a middle-class appearance is great enough that it makes the financial cost worth it. Regardless, the expectation remains that middle class job seekers should maintain a certain appearance that symbolizes class belonging. The symbolic performance of appearing to be middle-class is part of the strategy to manage the material-discourse dialectic. The middle class recognize the discursive side of the tension and ignore the material side of the tension. Recognition of one side of the dialectic is a strategy outlined by Baxter and Montgomery (1996). This strategy is a dysfunctional maintenance of the dialectic because it ignores a

part of the tension (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996) that the middle-class is managing. Even though it is rarely articulated, materiality co-constructs reality of middle-class lives along with discourse. There is a struggle to symbolically perform middle class belonging despite the loss in income.

There were times when people deviated from the business casual attire with more casual clothing. This happened as the summer season approached and the humidity in the weather increased. I took note of this difference in my field notes because the change in attire deviated from the organization's cultural norm. I was surprised by the change in attire despite the fact that there is no explicit organizational instruction that mandates attire. I documented my surprise in my field notes after observing on August 12, 2013:

> I arrived at the Monday morning meeting and noticed a few differences. First, there were several new faces in the group, mainly White women. Also, I saw my first member with shorts on. This is very surprising to me considering the typical dress code. However, it is very hot and humid outside.

The change in dress surprised me because it was outside of the cultural norm for the organization. I mistakenly thought I was the only person who noticed this change in attire. After this observation, I interviewed Suzie Smith who commented on this shift in attire during her interview. Suzie Smith is a 44-year old former business-to-business sales manager who was laid off from a major car rental company. She was a newer member of ECT and during our interview I asked if she could compare ECT to any other unemployment organizations that she participates in, her comment about attire emerged in response to this question.

> Suzie Smith: It seems, and if I can say this without being negative, the caliber of attendees is different from the [ECT]. When I say caliber, I don't necessarily mean that in a bad way, people ... like I'm wearing a sweater and slacks [inaudible 40:48]. The people at the [ECT], some of the folks I think are very casual, but I think for the most part people are more business-casual dressed,

> whereas at [this other organization], many people will wear suits; so, I guess, more like the dress, I shouldn't necessarily say the caliber.

Suzie's comment here is interesting because she conflates ECT organizational members' "caliber" with their attire. Suzie's comment illustrates the symbolic valence that is associated with attire in the middle class. Suzie starts by saying she does not want to be "negative" and then explains that she perceives the "caliber" of members is lower at ECT when compared with the other unemployment support organization she attends because of attire. Suzie then elaborates by stating that people at ECT are "very casual" and "business casual," which she compares to the norm of "suits" at the other organization. There were only a few incidents where people came in casual attire, but people took notice and Suzie in particular passed judgment. While Suzie does reconsider her statement, it is important to note her association between the "caliber" of the members and the attire because social class is tied to the physical marking of our bodies (Dougherty, 2011). Wearing symbols of wealth (e.g. business and business casual attire) is one way that social class becomes part of our material reality (Dougherty, 2011). Passing judgment based on attire the way Suzie does during her interview is commonplace, especially throughout the job search process. For example, the Boston University Center for Career Development (2014) states:

> Appearances shouldn't matter, but they do when it comes to an interview. You will be judged to a certain extent by your attire. A clean, buttoned-up look is reassuring to prospective employers while an ill-thought-out fashion choice can harm your candidacy. For most interviews, this means a more conservative hairstyle, covering those tattoos, or taking out that nose ring….Research the organization's dress code policy and their company culture. Remember that an

> interview requires more professional attire than you might wear after being hired. Bottom line: You want to be remembered after your interview, but not for your outfit.

Attire is a way to express social class status and to maintain social class membership. Wearing particular attire is a way to manage the tension between discourse and materiality. By recognizing and performing the discursive symbolism of middle-class attire ECT job seekers can ignore materiality. The irony is of course found in the reality that attire is inherently material, yet the middle-class focus on its symbolism. If job candidates can dress in particular ways then they can leverage the outward marking of social class to help secure a new employment opportunity. Focusing on discourse is a privilege that allows the middle class to manage the dialectic between materiality and discourse. Members of ECT rarely spoke of attire; however, they followed an understood dress code. There was also an assumption that the middle class job seekers should uphold and maintain a middle-class appearance through their attire. This assumption became apparent to me as I analyzed the data. The JoS. A. Bank flyer provided a way for people to maintain a social class appearance. When members did not uphold this expectation their "caliber" was questioned by members like Suzie. Attire is an important organizational artifact that is part of the organizational culture at ECT and absent in the explicit micro-level organizational discourse. ECT Members were never told how to dress for an interview. Instead appropriate attire was absent in the job search discourse because members of the middle-class have a common understanding of attire based expectations. The struggle to manage the dialectic is found in the middle-class expectation to maintain a certain symbolic caliber that is constructed through the

symbolism of material attire. Materiality is ignored in favor of discourse because of middle-class privilege. Cultural norms regarding dress differed considerably at Work Track.

Uniform Conformity in Working-Class Dress.

This theme reveals the way that working-class job seekers alternate and attempt to manage both materiality and discourse. However, their social class standing and access to material resources frequently mandated that the working-class unemployed at Work Track first deal with and primarily emphasize materiality in their lives. The struggle for working-class job seekers is to manage their symbolic representation within their material means. At WT many working-class job seekers were explicitly told how to dress while on the premises. Attire was provided to members free of charge. Because of their social class status and lack of material resources WT patrons were not expected to purchase or personally own clothing that matched the dress code. When organizational members deviated from the dress code, they were policed using a point system. Requiring uniforms functioned to socialize WT patrons for working-class careers.

Patrons and staff involved with the Community Construction (CC) and Restorative Justice (RJ) programs are required to wear a uniform at all times, even when they are not out at a construction site or doing community service. This uniform consists of steel toe boots, a blue t-shirt or blue polo with the program name on it, and either tan or camouflage cargo pants. The CC and RJ programs have the largest enrollment of all the programs in the building, so the majority of people at the Westside location wear this attire on a daily basis. Please note individuals who serve in an administrative capacity

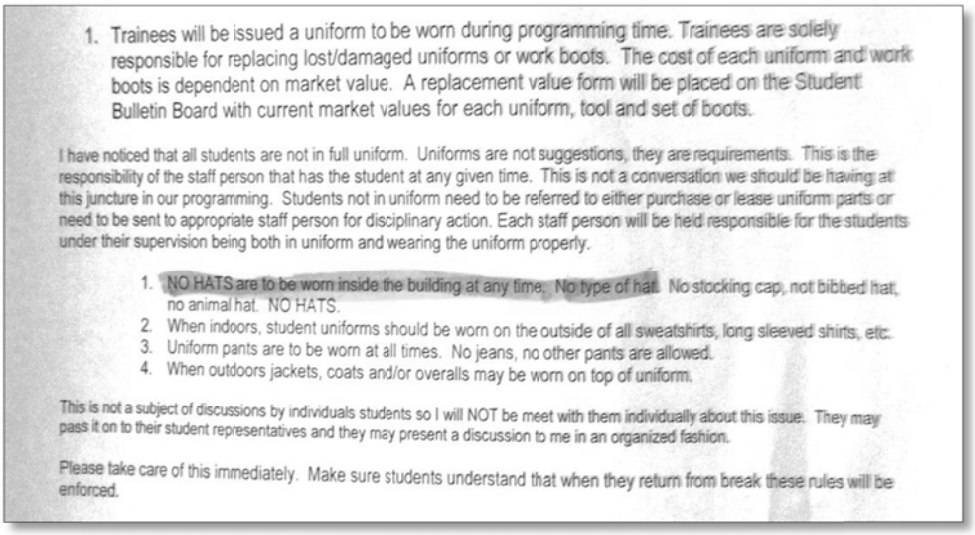
and patrons who are involved with the WR program are not required to wear uniforms. Uniforms came up while talking with one of the RJ career advisors on March 13, 2013.

> I ask Mr. Wanfeather if the patrons have to purchase their Work Track clothes he says, "No we have them in all sizes. They all borrow two sets and are required to wear them every time they're on the premises. It makes us unified and it takes the burden off of patrons to be concerned with clothing. It's just one way we help 'em out."

The required dress code at Work Track is provided and not purchased. Mr. Wanfeather explains that the clothes are given to each patron for a temporary period of time. I saw a storage room onsite at the Westside location that has hundreds of uniforms in all sizes. Mr. Wanfeather explains that providing clothing is a "help" to the patrons. The provision of clothing is connected to the material reality of the patrons who attend programs at Work Track. Work Track meets a basic need of their patrons by providing attire. The dress code requirement and regulation is explicitly communicated during member orientation. This significantly differs from ECT where patrons are never explicitly told what to wear and are expected to own and wear attire of their own accord. Wanfeather says that WT uniforms make the WT staff and patrons feel "unified." Wanfeather's comment is consistent with Joseph and Alex's (1972) explanation that uniforms promote group conformity by suppressing individuality. WT's uniforms promote conformity and there are consequences when WT patrons did not conform.

Patrons who arrive with attire that deviates from the WT dress code are disciplined using a point system or suspended from training for the day. The point system is explained in detail later in this chapter. Figure 1 is an e-mail sent from the WT Director to the staff regarding uniform policy. This e-mail was printed and hanging in the hallway.

Figure 1: Uniform Policy E-mail



1. Trainees will be issued a uniform to be worn during programming time. Trainees are solely responsible for replacing lost/damaged uniforms or work boots. The cost of each uniform and work boots is dependent on market value. A replacement value form will be placed on the Student Bulletin Board with current market values for each uniform, tool and set of boots.

I have noticed that all students are not in full uniform. Uniforms are not suggestions, they are requirements. This is the responsibility of the staff person that has the student at any given time. This is not a conversation we should be having at this juncture in our programming. Students not in uniform need to be referred to either purchase or lease uniform parts or need to be sent to appropriate staff person for disciplinary action. Each staff person will be held responsible for the students under their supervision being both in uniform and wearing the uniform properly.

1. NO HATS are to be worn inside the building at any time. No type of hat. No stocking cap, not bibbed hat, no animal hat. NO HATS.
2. When indoors, student uniforms should be worn on the outside of all sweatshirts, long sleeved shirts, etc.
3. Uniform pants are to be worn at all times. No jeans, no other pants are allowed.
4. When outdoors jackets, coats and/or overalls may be worn on top of uniform.

This is not a subject of discussions by individuals students so I will NOT be meet with them individually about this issue. They may pass it on to their student representatives and they may present a discussion to me in an organized fashion.

Please take care of this immediately. Make sure students understand that when they return from break these rules will be enforced.

Figure 1. E-mail from the director to the staff hanging in the hallway overviewing uniform policy.

The email states that "Uniforms are not suggestions, they are requirements." There is a financial penalty if WT members arrive without the required dress code. Patrons are required to "purchase or lease" uniforms if the one provided to them free of charge is not worn on the premises. WT staff is required to police uniform policy. Disciplinary action at times creates a conflict between the WT staff and patrons. One of the newly hired staff members, Harper, comments on this conflict during our interview:

Harper: Um, you know, the, the uniform situation, I'm okay with it.

Angela: Yeah?

Harper: The boot situation is a little much for me. You know, you get steel toe boots, it's 99 degrees outside. You gotta wear thick socks.

Angela: Right.

Harper: I don't blame them for putting tennis shoes on. "If I don't have a reason to have boots on today."

Angela: Right, if I'm in a classroom all day.

Harper: Yeah. Or if, if we're gonna work, "can I not put them on out of my locker? Why do I have to walk here in steel toe boots? It's 100

> degrees outside." So, I completely get them. Um, and I don't mess with a lot of them about it.

The steel toe boots, in particular, cause a point of conflict between CC patrons and staff. As the summer grew hotter and more humid patrons began to deviate by arriving in tennis shoes. It also seemed somewhat illogical, to me and Harper, to require patrons to wear steel toe boots on days when patrons were in a GED classroom for the day. If a patron is on a construction work site then steel toe boots are needed for protection. Many working-class jobs, such as construction or mining, are dangerous (Dougherty, 2011). Thus, it is logical to require steel toe boots when patrons are on the construction work site for safety. However, there are 2-3 days in a week where patrons do not go to the work site, yet they are still required to wear steel toe boots. This is a type of organizational control.

Harper's description of "99 degrees" and "100 degrees" is not an exaggeration. The weather reached triple digit temperatures many times during the summer of my fieldwork, which make heavy steel toe boots very uncomfortable. Why then does Work Track require uniforms at all times? I believe the dress code is likely required of patrons because uniforms are required for many working-class occupations (Allen, 2011). Nearly all the patrons at WT are seeking working-class jobs, which include: highway construction, residential carpentry, janitorial or cleaning work, factory work, among others. All of these occupations could potentially require a uniform. Work track is socializing their patrons for the work that they are seeking. Allen (2011) explains uniforms commonly highlight organizational status and differentiates the person wearing the uniform, which is what is happening at Work Track. White-collar occupations

typically allow a certain level of autonomy regarding the selection of work place attire (Allen, 2011). The requirement of uniforms is connected to social class.

Patrons were not fond of the restrictions on attire. The control over attire was perceived as excessive. Carlos, a 21-year old former food handler describes how he feels about the restrictions over his dress:

> Carlos: [Work Track], I have to say is one of the places where they honestly want to see you grow. Like, that's the purpose of [Work Track]. It's to see you transform into an individual. Like, I never seen somebody so strict on pulling up your pants...
>
> Angela: Um hmm.
>
> Carlos: Or, tucking in your shirt...or...I can't even put this—I'm not even supposed to have this pick in my hair right now.
>
> Angela: Right, right.
>
> Carlos: Like they'll see it, and be like, [mimicking a construction instructor with a southern accent] 'Hey, take that out your head, Mr. [Carlos]. You know what I'm sayin', they don't never say my name right [mimicking a construction instructor with a southern accent], [Carlos]
>
> Angela: [laughs]
>
> Carlos: You know what I'm sayin'? Like, I be over there like, "well, damn, I can't have a, a pick, that's meant for my hair in my head."

Carlos is frustrated with the way that his attire is policed. He describes the staff as "so strict on pulling up your pants" and "tucking in your shirt." Carlos also does not understand the logic behind having him remove a hair pick from his hair, which is a tool meant to be used for hair. However, despite his frustration with the restrictions on his attire, Carlos recognizes that there is a good intention behind the efforts of the staff. Carlos says that the staff is trying to help the patrons personally "grow" and "transform." Carlos describes a tension: Work Track attempts to empower their patrons through the

use of control. For examples, this tension emerges when WT socializes patrons for future occupations by requiring uniforms among other organizational mandates. The staff regularly police patron attire with the intention of preparing them for their future careers. Many of the instructors previously worked in construction themselves and are aware of the norms and expectations for the construction industry. The intention of the Work Track staff is to enforce industry standards and norms onsite so that their patrons can excel in their careers later.

Unfortunately, despite the good intentions Work Track patrons feel power exercised over them. Omarion, a 25-year old former janitorial worker, also commented on the strict rules about attire:

Omarion:	…the new rules they just made I'm not feelin'.
Angela:	What were the new…I don't know what those are?
Omarion:	The-the-the-the whole uniform [inaudible] I ain't even supposed to be havin' these on [points to his shoes], but...
Angela:	[laughs]
Omarion:	...you know what I'm sayin'. I'm--well, it's too late, I'm already recorded.
Angela:	It's fine.
Omarion:	But uh...yeah, it's certain things man, I just feel like man, I'm kinda grown for.... it's absurd, a little bit.

Omarion expresses his dislike of the clothing policies when he says he's "not feelin'" them. Omarion then explains that he feels like he is too old or has outgrown the part of his life where his clothing should be policed. Joseph and Alex (1972) explain that people may reject uniforms because of the control being exercised over them. I believe rejection of organizational control happens at WT. The regulation on clothing contributes to an institutional feel within the WT organizational culture. Requiring uniforms physically mark the bodies of WT job seekers with a symbolic representation of social class.

There are times at WT when it is acceptable for patrons to wear different attire. For example, if patrons are scheduled to attend a job fair the training program instructor generally asks the job seekers to wear their personal clothing and to come dressed in their best. On April 10, 2013 I attended a job fair with the RJ patrons.

> They were dressed in their best, which for most of them were denim blue jeans and a cotton top. Rasheeda did have on black jeans and a blouse. Several of the students were wearing tennis shoes. Brianna wore her WT uniform. They grabbed their folders and followed Tom Carter to the company van. I had planned to go with them to the job fair. This job fair was being held at [a local community college]….When we walked in there, was a small registration table. We were given canvas bags, a map of the floor layout, and a list of the exhibitors. There were a lot of community college students at this job fair and they were all in business attire (i.e. suits, slacks, skirts, button down shirts, blazers, ties, heels). Our students were severely underdressed, which I knew would put them at a disadvantage. The job fair was held in a gymnasium area. The bleachers were all pushed back. The room was large. There were 68 businesses and academic programs represented. Since this was a community college some of the tables represented institutions where the students could earn their bachelor's after earning their associates degree from this community college. There were about 4-5 aisles. The RJ staff told the students that they should review the list of businesses, decide which ones they were interested in, and go visit those tables. I could tell the WT patrons were discouraged. None of them moved quickly. They all stood still reviewing the list and avoided eye contact with the staff.

This job fair situation illustrates the significance of attire during the job search process. The physical marking of social class through attire is connected to these job seekers' material reality. At this job fair, attire communicated social class status. The struggle to manage the dialectic becomes apparent in the job fair exemplar above. While the RJ patrons wore the best attire they personally owned and were qualified for many of the positions at the job fair, they were at a disadvantage in part because of their attire. The materiality of their attire set the discursive tone for these job seekers interactions. Taylor and Cooren (2006) argue, "Intersubjective relations are only one dimension of identity. There is another: the relationship of subject to object, and object to subject" (p. 120). In

this instance Taylor and Cooren's statement is relevant because the social class identities of the patrons at WT was represented in the physical objects of attire. The exhibitors at the job fair reacted to the material conditions of their clothing. Thus the emphasis of their job fair experience was a result of the physicality of their attire, not on job seeker knowledge or qualifications. Exhibitors negatively reacted to WT job seeker clothing because the material conditions of their attire conveyed a symbolic message. The WT job seekers were caught trying to manage the tension by alternating between material conditions of attire and discursive symbolism. During the job fair, discourse and materiality co-constructed the job fair experience. The symbolic valence associated with appearance is similar to the way Suzie Smith at ECT negatively assessed the "caliber" of ECT members based on their casual attire. In short, attire negatively changed the nature of intersubjective interaction between the job fair exhibitors and WT job seekers. This disadvantage manifested in dismissive communicative behaviors from the job fair exhibitors.

> Brianna asked me if I'd walk around with her. I told her of course. Brianna did not have any other attire to wear, so she was wearing her WT uniform (blue t-shirt, cargo pants, and tennis shoes not steel toe boots). I knew that Brianna wanted to work with animals. She'd expressed that to me in the training sessions multiple times and during her practice mock interview. She was interested working for a pet groomer, kennel, or even in a role with larger animals. We first visited the [city's] parks and recreation table. When we walked up Brianna stepped forward. The person at the table did not make eye contact with her. Almost 3 minutes passed before Brianna decided to speak up and ask her about any open positions. The person at the table referred Brianna to their brochure and smiled. I was frustrated. I know that Brianna did not look the part, but that she was capable and smart. We then went to a [local college] equestrian program. This seemed ideal for Brianna because of her love for animals. When Brianna saw the equestrian program on the sheet she told me all about it. She was very familiar with the program and its structure. She told me she would love to get into this program. When we approached the table Brianna picked up various brochures and asked the representative about their enrollment. The conversation was short and

> sweet. I asked Brianna why she didn't talk with her more and she said she knew she couldn't afford to go there.

Short conversations and minimal eye contact were the commonplace treatment of many WT patrons as they went from table to table at the job fair. It happened several times that people started talking to me before they acknowledged our job seekers. I used that as an opportunity to introduce them, but it was frustrating for all involved. Working-class participants in Gorman's (2000) study of cross-class perceptions articulated that many people from the working class perceive that people from the middle class look down on them. I had similar perceptions during our trip to this job fair. The way job fair exhibitors responded to WT job seekers was in part a result of socially constructed norms regarding attire. Taylor (2006) explains that, "Objects can become powerful agents in channeling the organizational conversation" (p. 148). This notion reveals the way physical attire and material conditions literally impact discourse on a micro-level. Our job seekers had a different conversation than the job seekers who approached exhibitors in business attire. Nonverbal and verbal communication was kept to a minimum because of the appearance of WT job seekers. Despite the reality that WT job seekers were qualified for many of the positions, the conversation changed for them because of what they were wearing. Working-class job seekers tried to manage the dialectic materially by wearing the best attire they had, and then they alternated their strategy by attempting to discursively engage people at the job fair. WT job seekers were caught in the tension trying to manage both materiality and discourse. Unfortunately, the material reality of WT job seekers is unlikely to change unless they find jobs. Furthermore, they are unlikely to find jobs if they cannot assimilate their dress to middle class attire, which has been social constructed as appropriate for job seeking. Working-class job seekers were constantly managing the

tension between their material conditions and the discursive meaning of their social class status.

Summary: Suits and Uniforms

Attire can be symbolically interpreted as a nonverbal representation of social class. In the organizational culture of ECT expectations regarding attire were not formally stated to the members, but rather an unspoken rule. And when that unspoken rule was broken, ECT members took note and were seen to be of a lower "caliber." The data show that attire is symbolically imbued with discursive meaning. The dialectical struggle for the middle-class unemployed is to maintain a symbolic belonging to the middle-class by performing social class via the material conditions of attire. Privilege allows the middle class to ignore material conditions even though material symbolism is part of the way ECT members managed the dialectic. Expectations for the provision of appropriate attire on the job differ greatly across social class groups as well. ECT members are expected to personally own appropriate attire, while WT members are provided clothing. Dress codes at WT were explicitly communicated and restricted to a uniform for many participants. This type of organizational control was officially exercised by requiring certain attire and denying organizational services if the dress code was not met. Finally, when RJ patrons went out to seek jobs they wore the best attire they had available, yet were at a disadvantage despite their qualifications. The emphasis placed on materiality differs greatly across the two organizations and reveals the way working-class job seekers have to alternate managing their dialectic between both material and discursive tensions. Social class is physically unmarked, but people use attire as a proxy for social class in order to designate and assess social class status. Attire

is used to make judgments regarding job candidacy and impacts the way job seekers are communicated with on the job search. Hence, social class is characterized by a material-discursive dialectic that manifests relationally. In this analysis of attire a tension emerged between material conditions and symbolic representation. For example, middle-class job seekers from ECT owned and were able to wear material clothing that symbolized their ability and qualifications to do dignified work. Because of this privilege, ECT members are able to ignore the way materiality constructs their experience and focus on discourse and symbolism. Working-class job seekers could do dignified work and were qualified, but did not own attire that symbolically conveyed their abilities. Due to their struggle, it becomes necessary that WT members engage the dialectic both materially and discursively. The relationships individuals have with attire exemplify how material conditions are either emphasized or deemphasized in social lives according to one's social class status. Yet, both materiality and discourse shape reality. A similar emphasis/deemphasis of material conditions happened across the social class groups in regard to food.

Organizational Food: Sustenance v. Networking

The material and discursive co-construction of reality manifests in the relationship organizational patrons have with food. Food from a working-class perspective is primarily about material reality and survival (Dougherty, 2011). Food takes on a stronger discursive reality from a middle class perspective (Dougherty, 2011). The struggle to manage the dialectic changes across social class groups. There are many dominant discourses connected to food within a middle-class cultural milieu; for example, there are expectations that individuals in the middle-class should be familiar with rhetoric

regarding dieting, wine, or coffee (Dougherty, 2011). I saw distinct relationships with food across the two organizations during this study, which were connected to the members' social class status. For example, at ECT, middle-class job seekers only addressed food in relation to networking activities. Food was simply a means to a communicative end. The relationship middle-class job seekers have with food reveals an emphasis on discursive reality because they only addressed food as a conduit to networking and they ignore the way materiality co-constructs social life. The Work Track staff addressed food in relation to material need. Food was provided as a way to avoid hunger and support the material needs of the working-class unemployed. Job seekers could not discursively engage their job search and training until their material needs were met. Once material needs were met WT job seekers could alternate from managing one pole in the dialectic (materiality) to the other (discourse). In short, people's relationship to food is a fundamental way in which people *do* social class. The relationship working-class job seekers have with food reveals an emphasis on material reality because they use food to avoid hunger. The shifting emphases from materiality to discourse is connected to the classed privileged and disadvantaged standpoints.

Central Role of Food: Sustenance and Avoiding Hunger.

At Work Track food is primarily addressed as a way to avoid hunger. Breakfast and lunch are provided to any job search patron who wants it. Breakfast is promptly served at 7:30am and is available before training starts at 8:00am. Lunch is promptly served at noon. There is a sign-up sheet that goes around in each program during the morning session and then meals are prepared for those who sign-up. A calendar posted in the hallway states what meal is being offered daily. Lunch almost always includes a

breaded meat sandwich (e.g. chicken, fish, pork loin, etc.) on a bun with French fries. In fact, in seven months I only noticed two meals that deviated from that norm. Once there was lasagna and garlic bread and one other time fried jumbo shrimp and French fries were served. During my interview with Gordon, Director of the Westside location, he explained that a private donor provides the grant money for the food provided.

> Gordon: One of the things is nutrition was part of the concept of "Our students are hungry. You can't focus when you're hungry" so there's the feeding part. We do breakfast and lunch. In the first grant we bought a couple more vehicles um for transportation-wise. We also had um [pause] I forget what else we had the first time. Then, physicals became a piece when students come in to help fund physicals for hiring [Community Construction] students. No, for [CC] students to help pay for physicals and all of that. The food remained a part. We bought an ice machine because we needed that. We were spending money every day sending ice out to the work sites.

You can see from Gordon's description that the organization is in tune with the material conditions of the organizational patrons. Gordon states that, "you can't focus when you're hungry," which means patrons are less likely to succeed in the WT program and find work if hunger is not avoided. As a result of this logic, the organization provides food daily to job seekers who want it. Hunger is a material condition. Lower class people are much more likely to place emphasis on food as material reality because provision of food is an enduring material struggle (Dougherty, 2011). Once the material need of hunger is met, working-class job seekers can alternate their dialectical management strategy to engage joblessness discursively via education and training. Because food is a continual struggle, Work Track also provides groceries. During my interview with one of the construction instructors, a 54-year old man, Maximus Constructionist explained another component to the food provision:

> Angela: Then explain the food part to me. I know they get breakfast and lunch if they want here. Then, I know [RJ] has a

	relationship with the Food Bank. Do your [CC] students get that too?
Maximus:	Yeah, they have a buddy pack every Friday.
Angela:	Every Friday?
Maximus:	Every Friday they get a grocery sack full of food. Some of the students leave here ... Unless mom or grandma has got some food, they don't ...
Angela:	They don't have anything to eat, right.
Maximus:	This might be the only place they are eating. We give them enough food for the weekend…You ought to try to teach a class when you've got students in there that haven't ate [sic]. They just can't focus. I don't blame them. I love food too. I would be out of focus if I hadn't ate [sic] since yesterday.

All patrons of WT have the option to take home a grocery sack full of food on Fridays. Providing groceries on Fridays extends the provision of food so that it lasts the entire week. Maximus Constructionist says, "This might be the only place they are eating." Social class status necessitates an emphasis of material reality for the unemployed working-class. If the organization did not emphasize materiality and ignored the material condition of hunger it would negatively impact patron job search success because, as Maximus explains it without food, "They just can't focus." Maximus explains that he is empathetic and understands when he says, "I don't blame them." The employees at Work Track understand that if the physical needs of the students are not met they are not likely to succeed.

Food provision is a big part of these job seekers basic needs. Harper a newly hired employee commented on Work Track's ability to meet material need.

Angela: Um, what do you think that [Work Track] is particularly good at doing for its clients and students?

Harper: I think we pro- we, we provide a lot of their needs as far as you know, the Maslow hierarchy of needs.

Angela: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Harper: That, that whole thing and, uh, and I, I only use Maslow ‘cause I was explaining it the other day and I was like, “You remember the triangle thing?”

Angela: I teach it [laughs].

Harper: Yeah, yeah. I was like, “The triangle thing,” and they were like, Who? And I was like basic needs, safety…‘cause first of all you’ve got housing and food at the bottom.” And they’re like … I was like, “Maslow” and they were like, “I have no idea what you’re talking about.” I was like, “Okay I’m a dork because I enjoyed psychology.” But, okay.

Angela: I got you [laughs].

Harper: But, yeah I, I think we hit a lot of those different levels on the triangle.

Angela: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Harper: We, we provide them with that comfort that they need for, for physical and mental, we provide them with food, we provide clothe- clothing, shelter, because a lot of them if they weren’t here, they wouldn’t be doing anything through, throughout the day but walking around on the streets.

Angela: Right.

Harper: ‘Cause they don’t have anywhere to go. Or they’re not allowed at home during the day.

Angela: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Harper: Or it’s not safer to be at home during the day.

Angela: Right.

Harper: So, uh, I-I think, I think we do really good with that, just, just touching those basic needs.

Harper connects WT services and programs to "Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs." She explains that the provision of food, clothing, shelter, and safety are all ways that WT meets the basic material needs of their patrons. Due to the low social class status of the unemployed working class, they are more likely to need instrumental support regarding the provision of basic needs. Instrumental support includes the tangible, physical, and material ways Work Track provide support to job seekers. One way Malecki and Demeray (2003) describe instrumental support is the provision of money or materials. Work Track provides a hands-on level of support. The provision of food is one way instrumental support is accomplished.

From a critical perspective, the organizational effort that Work Track and their staff puts forth to support the material needs of their patrons is commendable. It shows their insight into the plight of their job seekers. Unfortunately, the food that is provided is bland and monotonous, but it does provide sustenance. Tiovonen (1997) explains that food choices are influenced by social class. There are multiple reasons why people select food for consumption. Tiovonen (1997) summarizes the selection of food due to reason of availability, cost, nutrition, enjoyment, and conspicuous consumption. People in developing countries with a lower social class status are more likely to eat what they can afford and what is available (Tiovonen, 1997). Furthermore, Tiovonen (1997) found that working-class people ate more filling foods (milk, meat, grains) due to the strenuous nature of their work and that middle-class people eat more fruits and vegetables. During my time at Work Track I never observed vegetables or fruits provided during meals. My observations are consistent with Tiovonen's (1997) findings. The meals at WT are filling

and helped the job seekers avoid hunger, but they were bland and monotonous. In fact Carlos, a patron in the CC program, mentioned the monotony of the food at the end of our interview:

> Angela: Is there anything else that we didn't talk about that you think it's important about [Work Track]? That I should know?
>
> Carlos: Uh...we need some more food, man.
>
> Angela: Yeah?
>
> Carlos: We just need a variety of food, I'm tired of eating these-
>
> Angela: It's like, French fries almost every day.
>
> Carlos: EVERY DAY and they be SOGGY.
>
> Angela: I've noticed that. And some sorta sandwich, usually?
>
> Carlos: [exhales] Always a sandwich.

Carlos emphatically said the words “every day” and “soggy,” which I interpret means he has grown weary of the food. The material reality is that the food is filling and helps patrons avoid hunger. The patrons eat the food because it is free and available to them and many of them do not have access to meals outside of what is provided at Work Track. Patrons did not eat the food at Work Track out of enjoyment or conspicuous consumption, but rather as a way to avoid hunger.

Food as a form of material sustenance became more evident to me as I continued to interact with the program participants at Work Track. On one occasion I ate lunch with a group of patrons who received moldy buns on their sandwiches. I documented their conversation after lunch on March 13, 2013:

> Today I sat and ate with the [RJ] patrons. The staff eats separately in their offices or the conference room. I was eating my microwave lunch. The students began to warn each other that the buns on their chicken sandwich were moldy. [Danni] said

> "Check ya buns. Mines moldy." [Chris] responds, "Good lookin' out. They all do a bun check. A couple patrons rip off small sections of mold and continue eating their lunch. No one complains or raises this issue to an authority. They simply eat the meal that was given to them.

Materiality is emphasized in this experience. Despite the mold on the sandwiches these patrons continued to eat because this is the free meal available to them. Working-class job seekers ate the food because of cost and availability, which is consistent with existing literature (Tiovonen, 1997). These patrons grew up in the foster care system and are now in the Residential Transitional Emancipation Program (RTEP). The WT program provides much of the food they eat from day to day. They do not have families or a consistent or sustaining source of income. This food sustains them in a material way and they eat it because of that sustenance. These meals will keep hunger from becoming a deterrent to their success in the job placement program. Participation in the job placement program is discursive, but WT job seekers cannot engage discursively until their material needs are met. Working-class job seekers are continually alternating the management of the material-discourse dialectic across poles in order to cope with joblessness.

Whenever food is addressed at Work Track it is almost always mentioned in relation to material reality. The staff emphasizes the necessity of food as a way to avoid hunger and to be able to focus. Material hunger must be managed first in the dialectic and then patrons can discursively engage their training with focus. These data illustrate how social class is dialectically manifest in the relation to food. The relationship job seekers have with food at Work Track is distinct because it is explicitly connected to material conditions, whereas at Executive Career Transitions food is explicitly connected to the discourse of networking.

Peripheral Role of Food: Facilitating Networking.

At ECT, food is primarily perceived as way to facilitate social interaction for the job search. Food such as coffee, lunch, and beverages or appetizers consumed during happy hour becomes a vehicle for networking. Meeting someone to coffee, lunch or happy hour are social events that take place at locales where food is consumed, but these social events never referred to as a way to avoid hunger. Middle-class job seekers ignore materiality and manage the dialectical co-construction of reality by focusing on discourse. In fact the consumption of food for job search purposes is seen explicitly as a way to facilitate networking communication. Many ECT members attend "brown bag" networking sessions at 1:30pm Fridays. The "brown bag" implies that lunch should be consumed, but no one actually brings food. The focus of "brown bag" meetings is to network. The way in which food is deemphasized suggests that middle-class job seekers are able to solely focus on discourse due to privilege. Because material needs are met, job seekers can strategically engage the job search through discourse. Scott is the Executive Director of ECT and an alumni member. He joined ECT twice when he was out of work in the 1980s. When I asked Scott what he thought ECT was particularly good at doing for its members he mentioned helping members' network.

> Scott: We help you build your network. You should be taking advantage of all the people you meet week in week out and be on their LinkedIn network, get together for coffee, do whatever, and you should be pressing our presenters for the same type of information and relationship.

Take note of Scott's reference to "coffee." From a middle-class job seekers perspective having coffee is nearly synonymous with networking. In this example "coffee" is listed in a series of explicit networking activities: social networking via LinkedIn, information seeking, and relationship building. Coffee as a way to facilitate networking is a consistent

message comes from ECT board members like Scott. Later on in our interview Scott referenced having coffee as way to facilitate networking again:

> Scott: [Our Monday morning speakers and career coaches]-these are all good people, I know them, I've known them for years. They're just good people. These are people that will help you. They'll take time to have a cup of coffee. They'll open up what they used to call the rolodex, they'll help you. But you have to help yourself.

In this comment Scott references coffee and people's willingness to open their "rolodex," which is where one might find a professional contact to give to you in a networking conversation. Scott typically recommends that ECT members reach out to the speakers to network. Note that the reference to drinking coffee has little to do with material conditions; instead having coffee is a way to participate in the discursive act of networking. Scott was not the only ECT staff member who mentioned the use of food in reference to networking. Ralph, a board member and former president of ECT, talked about ECT's annual Christmas party as a networking event.

> Angela: Are there any particular traditions or routines that the group has?
>
> Ralph: There's some traditions and routines that we have but one of those routines or traditions would be that we have an annual Christmas party. It's a nice event. Lots of food. Typically, it's an open networking session, so there's talk amongst members. We typically don't have a speaker, but it's a great session and so that's been a tradition.

Ralph references the Christmas party as an "open networking session." Food is mentioned but it is referenced in a peripheral nature. In Ralph's account food is deemphasized or part of the background. Comparatively, the way Work Track staff talk about food is central to the well-being of their organizational patrons. This is a distinct discursive shift that emerged in the data as I analytically compared the communication across the two organizations. Communicating about food as a vehicle to facilitate

networking also emerged in the interview data from ECT patrons. For example, Suzie Smith described her job search efforts by saying, “Also, I’ve been involved in doing coffees with networking contacts to find opportunities for different positions and things like that, so it’s good.” Her job search networking explicitly involved “doing coffees with networking contacts.” Being able to exclusively talk about food this way is a privilege because meeting basic needs are not a central issue. A former marketing professional, Sandy Wilson relocated for personal reasons and started reaching out to people she knew to make connections. Notice the way that food is referred to in our discussion:

Sandy Wilson:	And just um today a friend of mine from high school, her ex-husband works for a big engineering company and I was talking to her to get a [inaudible] you might know her. She’s been at [ECT].
Angela:	Yeah?
Sandy Wilson:	Um tall girl. Anyway, she was telling me that he had to go to trade shows and he was like he knew a few big companies and one of that my girlfriend’s ex-husband works for, he’s actually pretty high up, so she called him up Friday and he said, “Oh that’d be great. Just get us, you know, connected.” And he said, “Whatever I can do to help her. Um, have her give me a call.” So I gave him a call last night. I got on LinkedIn with him and he said, “Hey I have this temp position.” He said, “How about we meet for coffee,” you know. Um, so really it’s just that kind of stuff. I love it. And we met for coffee. Um, it’s just continuing networking and it’s been great.

Sandy explains that she “met for coffee” and then in the next sentence explains that she is “just continuing networking.” The juxtaposition of the words “networking” and “coffee” is dominant in the middle-class descriptions of job search experiences. This juxtaposition illustrates that food is merely a way to facilitate the discursive act of networking. Food is not referred to as sustenance. Lauren, a 51-year old former buyer and furniture retail store

manager, talks about networking in the grocery store. She told me a story about a conversation she had with a fellow job seeker:

> Lauren: I pulled her aside and I said, "This is what you've got to do. Make yourself go to the grocery store, you force a conversation with the person in front of you, and you figure out how to get a conversation started with the person behind you every place you go. If you do that for a week, you can do these networking things. If you're scared to talk to somebody, force yourself to talk to a stranger. People will always talk to you in the grocery line…" That's what they [ECT] need to teach these people.

Lauren's comments are interesting because her explicit advice tells her fellow job seeker to go to a public place, incidentally a grocery store where food is generally the main focus, and to strike up a networking conversation as a way to practice networking. In Lauren's description she gives an example where food is part of the background and networking communication is emphasized in the foreground. The act of networking is simply facilitated by a practice that involves food—grocery shopping. Deemphasizing materiality, such as food, and emphasizing the discursive reality of networking is commonplace at ECT. Fixating on discourse is how middle-class job seekers at ECT manage the material-discourse dialectic.

Emphasizing discourse strategically functions to facilitate social interactions that will ideally lead to jobs. Comments regarding food as a vehicle to facilitate networking did not just emerge in interviews. It was also present in many of the weekly meetings I attended. Networking over coffee or lunch is an explicit suggestion from both ECT staff and members. On April 29, 2013 during a Monday morning meeting the following exchange took place towards the end of the meeting between Scott, the Executive Director of ECT, and Seema, a 49-year old former pharmacist.

> Scott: That's right, change it up a bit. Get out and take a speaker to coffee. Network. Change it up a bit and get out of your routine. Set a goal to take

> someone out to coffee. Does anyone have anything else? [nonverbally acknowledges a raised hand]
>
> Seema: I went to a pharmacy conference and they had a suggestion: coffee, lunch, coffee. They said to set a goal for how many people you want to meet with per week. And then follow up. You have to start calling and meeting up with people. There was a website coffeelunchcoffee.com. Each week set a goal. I'm committing to 2 people a week. That woman met with 10 people a week. Coffee is $2 so even if you can't do a $10 to $15 lunch you can do coffee. We can do this.
>
> Scott: Thank you for sharing. That's great. You'd be surprised. Kindness, like buying a cup of coffee, can go a long way.

In this exchange you can see the explicit suggestion for the use of food as a way to facilitate networking communication. Furthermore, there is a website called coffeelunchcoffee.com (all explicitly food related words) that is solely about networking. This website is a textual resource that illustrates the discursive relationship between food and networking from a middle-class perspective. A similar suggestion happened on July 29, 2013. One of the ECT members, Brent, offered this suggestion, "I don't ask for a job. I ask for a 15-minute cup of coffee and I tell them I'm in a job search. And then I tell 'em I'm asking for their advice..." On August 1, 2013 during a job seeker accountability meeting, Rick, a former HR manager, instructed the group about how to land a job:

> You get a job by making connections and you don't want to negatively sway an HR manager. So you just need networking meetings. You want an HR manager to say I need someone who can do X, Y, and Z. Who was that person I had coffee with 6 months ago. Oh yeah. She can do this. Let me find her e-mail. That's how you land a job.

In this example having "coffee" and "networking" is identified as the way to find work. A week later on August 8, 2013 Rick said "Well you can't just apply for jobs you have to make connections. Sit down with people and get a cup of coffee." You can see that

members and leaders of this organization have a consistent message regarding the use of food as a way to facilitate networking connections during the search for work.

These types of suggestions permeated ECT's cultural landscape. In fact coffee was set out before each ECT meeting began. I took note of the refreshments cart during my observation on January 28, 2013:

> So I walked down a corridor and went down a flight of stairs and around a corner into a room that had a sign on it "[ECT] Meeting." Just outside the door was a small cart with orange juice, canister of coffee, small brown plastic mugs, napkins, creamer, stirrers and sugar. When I walked in the room a few people were chatting in the back and there were approximately 8 people scattered about sitting in blue chairs on the left hand side of the room. These people were either waiting patiently for the meeting to begin or quietly talking with their neighbor.

The food cart was not a focus of the meeting, but its presence mimicked a corporate feeling. The refreshments were part of the background at ECT. During two separate Board of Director's Meetings coffee was addressed. I documented this in my field notes on April 18, 2013. During the quarterly board meeting, several members discussed the price of the weekly coffee at the Monday morning meetings:

> Scott [Executive Director]: What's up with the coffee account?
>
> Bob [President]: You know who's paying for coffee. Me and [Ralph]. We're the only people who put a dollar in.
>
> Jack [General Board Member]: Now I stopped with bagels because no one was eating them. Now people like the donut holes and OJ, but no one's paying.
>
> Scott [Executive Director]: We'll cut 'em off at the ankles. I'm sorry to be so negative, but it's the principle. Don't be a cheapskate.

At the next quarterly board meeting I attended on July 11, 2013 cost of coffee was brought up again by the Board of Director's President,

> Bob: Well our financial money situation has gone from bad to worse…Now ECT pays $5 per week for 1 pot of coffee from [the church's] mission committee. And I don't think we should continue to pay this so I can talk to [Edward], who's in

> head of the mission committee about switching to just buying coffee or getting it donated and not paying to support the mission committee.

There was never a resolve to this issue during that board meeting. However, approximately one month later on August 12, 2013 the following change took place that I documented in my field notes.

> And there's a sign on the door announcing they're now charging for coffee, donuts and bagels. [ECT] has never before charged for these items. I assume that this is a decision that emerged out of the last board of director's meeting. See the picture below (image corrected to change the name of the organization to the pseudonym):

Figure 2: Charging for Food

Figure 2. ECT began charging for the cost of refreshments at the beginning of meetings.

Deemphasizing materiality for discourse illustrates one way middle-class individuals *do* social class. The cost of coffee, bagel, and donuts is perceived to be nominal from the perspective of the board of directors even for unemployed job seekers. There was never a discussion about the material needs of the unemployed job seekers. The ECT members that attend these meetings do not have a steady income and are searching for work. Yet, despite that material reality the Executive Director thought that people were being "cheapskates" because they did not donate to the organization for providing coffee. However, the presence of coffee is seen as a way to facilitate networking before and after the meeting, which could potentially help job seekers land a

job. Therefore the presence of coffee is aligned with the overall mission and goal of ECT. The relationship to food is deemphasized, not central to the survival of ECT members.

Food was trivialized during presentations with one of the ECT speakers. On January 28, 2013 and July 8, 2013 one of the speakers, Floyd Finley, rewarded members of ECT for their participation in his activities with PayDay® brand candy bars. The first time I saw Floyd present he tossed PayDay® brand candy bar to job seekers in the group who participated in the discussion. During the January 28 meeting his act seemed patronizing and was not well received. The irony here is, of course, that Floyd is tossing a PayDay® to someone who is literally seeking their next pay day. Yet, that material reality is not frequently addressed. Food in this example is a reward for participating discursively. Providing ECT patrons with a candy bar was not a way to meet physical needs. On July 8, 2013 the following took place

Floyd Finley: Would we have a competitive advantage?

Phil: No.

Floyd Finley: Excellent sir. Here's a Pay Day®. [tosses candy bar to Phil]

Phil: Hey it's a Pay Day®.

Floyd Finley gives an underhanded toss toward Phil with a PayDay® candy bar. I resist the temptation to roll my eyes, while some members of ECT chuckle.

The tone of Floyd's second presentation during my participant observation was more positive. I believe this is because several members knew he was going to bring PayDay® brand candy bars. I was personally irritated by the act because I felt it was patronizing to the job seekers, but their laughs during this second meeting signaled a bit of comic relief. The mood of the second meeting was lighter and less stressful when compared to his first presentation. It is important to note the connection to the theme: Floyd's provision of a

PayDay® brand candy bar was to facilitate communication, not to address hunger. In this example, the PayDay® brand candy bar is symbolic and has an implicit meaning. The emphasis on the use of a PayDay® as food is placed on its symbolism, not on its materiality as edible sustenance.

ECT also requires their members to purchase food from time to time. The organization hosts happy hours every two months and annually holds a number of events where food is served. Members are asked to purchase tickets to attend. One example of this is the Breakfast fundraiser. On April 22, 2013 this event was announced:

> Scott: We're going to have an [ECT] Breakfast. The cost is $10 per person. So bring your spouse and a friend. And we'll accept cash or check. The proceeds go to [ECT]. It's a great way to support [the church] who is a big supporter of [ECT]. The breakfast is on Saturday, May 18 at [local restaurant] on [address and cross street] near the [landmark]. It's put on by the Men's Club here at [the church].
>
> Ralph: We'll be selling tickets in advance.

No one at ECT voices a concern about the ability of their patrons to meet their basic needs. In fact, members are expected to purchase food as a way to support the unemployment organization they have already paid to join. The expectation to purchase food is another way the middle-class ignore materiality as part of the dialectical management strategy. ECT members do not have a source of income, yet that material condition is rarely addressed. The dialectic management strategy is employed because the middle-class choose to ignore the material side of the dialectic in favor of discourse.

Summary: Sustenance v. Networking

The foci of dialectical management regarding materiality and discourse changes across social class lines regarding food. From a middle-class perspective, food is a strategically exploited conduit for communication. ECT members ignore foods' material

presence in lieu of its discursive power. In contrast to the way food is discursively constructed at Work Track, the emergence of social class is starkly different within the organizational walls of ECT. Being able to emphasize discourse over materiality is a privilege revealed by the way food is used to facilitate participation in communication. Work track centralizes the role of food as a way to avoid the material condition of hunger. In order to survive, working-class job seekers manage the material side of the dialectic first before alternating to the discursive side of the tension. The organization provides two meals on weekdays and groceries to each job seeker on Fridays. These examples illustrate the way that food is deemphasized as a material condition and perceived differently for the middle class when compared to the working-class conceptualization of food as a prioritized material necessity. In addition to attire and food there are also class based differences regarding the artifact of organizational space.

Organizational Space: Corporate and Institutional Atmospheres

The last way social class permeated the cultural artifacts of both organizations was in the use of space, particularly in the way members were either regulated or autonomous in organizational spaces. Communicative interaction influences and is influenced by organizational space within both organizations. Social class is connected to organizational space (Allen, 2011) and during my research this connection manifested in the amount of control patrons had over the organizational space. The differing levels of control within organizational space, suggests that spatial relationships to the material-discursive dialectic is largely connected to social class. The way space is used empowers/disempowers the organizational members' communication. Organizational space includes three major components: fixed factors (physical structure, layout of

building), semi-fixed factors (furniture, décor), and ambient environment (temperature, light, air quality) (Baldry, 1999). All of these components combine to represent social choices that constrain and enable interaction and communication (Baldry, 1999). ECT members managed the dialectic by creating a material space that focused on discursive interaction. ECT members largely ignored material conditions until discursive interaction was disrupted. In contrast, WT members focused on the material constraints of the space, which impacted their ability to engage the program discursively. The key difference is that organizational members at WT are disempowered and controlled within the space, while organizational members at ECT are empowered to construct their own spaces.

Constructing a Corporate Atmosphere.

ECT members socially and materially constructed a corporate atmosphere for each meeting to take place. These middle-class job seekers had agency within the space and were empowered to focus on the discursive reality of social interaction. Note the consistency of the middle-class management of the dialectic between materiality and discourse, as seen in the previous subtheme. Materiality is largely ignored in favor of discourse. There are three elements regarding the organizational space at Executive Career Transitions (ECT) that I highlight in this section: meeting areas, presence of publications or texts, and the disruption of a corporate atmosphere. ECT members create a business like environment in the multipurpose room of a church for their meetings. At each meeting there are various resources and texts that are addressed, which is connected to the text worker orientation of the job seekers. Furthermore, when the corporate atmosphere is interrupted for church activities organizational members tried to emphasize their social interaction over the interruption.

Organizational members at ECT are empowered and take control of the space. ECT has their weekly meetings (Monday speakers, job seeker accountability meetings, and brown bag networking) in the basement multi-purpose room of two separate churches. The space of these multi-purpose rooms is transformed into a middle class corporate space for the meetings. Below is an excerpt from my field notes that describes the setup of the space for nearly every Monday morning meeting:

> I walked down a corridor and went down a flight of stairs and around a corner into a room that had a sign on it "ECT Meeting." Just outside the door was a small cart with orange juice, canister of coffee, small brown plastic mugs, napkins, creamer, stirrers and sugar. When I walked in the room a few people were chatting in the back and there were approximately 8 people scattered about sitting in blue chairs on the left hand side of the room. These people were either waiting patiently for the meeting to begin or quietly talking with their neighbor. Just to shake things up I sat on the right side of the room. This basement room had brown carpet, white walls, and brown wooden trim. There were two tables set up at the back of the room, and 40 blue cushion chairs set up with a row down the middle. In total there were 5 rows with 4 chairs and a center isle was down the middle. The speaker had a laptop hooked up to a projector with a screen.

The artifacts mentioned in this excerpt illustrate the way in which space is used to establish a corporate feel that emphasizes discourse. It reminds me of a corporate training I had been to during my time working in the advertising industry. All of the chairs are facing toward the projector and screen so that the speaker can communicate with the audience. During my time at ECT, all of the presenters except for one used PowerPoint as an audiovisual aid. Members frequently greet each other with firm handshakes and address each other by first name that is listed on a laminated name tag. The members and staff of ECT move about this space freely. Behind the last row of chairs there is an open area where members approach each other and talk in hushed to moderate tones. They almost always exchange business cards when someone meets a new person. The emphasis at all ECT meetings is on social interaction and communication. Middle-class

job seekers at ECT are privileged to rarely think about the way material space co-constructs their organizational reality along with discourse. Ignoring materiality is how ECT manages the dialectic.

Textual resources, such as publications, are also a part of the organizational space. These resources are available and distributed to ECT job seekers at every meeting. In addition people frequently recommend texts, books, articles, and websites among other textual resources. At the back of the room there is a table that I described in my field notes from January 28, 2013:

> At the end of the meeting, I gather my things and then wander to the back table. There are small piles of job descriptions that are sitting under the following headers that are taped to the table on neon lime green paper: General, HR, Management, IT, Engineering, Admin., Sales and Marketing. Several people go to this table to look. On another table there are a bunch of different documents and publications sitting.

The publications are always available at the end of each meeting. There is a resource chair named Marian Stanley. Marian is a member who volunteered to serve on the resource publication committee and at the end of each meeting she strategically lays out publications such as the small business monthly, chamber of commerce newsletters, the local women's journal, and more. Marian frequently tries to incentivize members to take home multiple publications. Her announcement at the end of the meeting on June 10, 2013 was no exception: "I'm the resource chair and I've put out some publications for you. If you pick up five you can get a free gift card for free coffee or $5 to [local office supply store]." Note that one of her incentives is for free coffee, which supports the ECT notion, expressed in the previous subsection of this chapter, that having coffee is a way to facilitate networking. The resource library and available publications also support a text worker orientation. These texts support the overall job search and are constantly available

within the space of ECT. Access to relevant periodicals is another way middle-class job seekers emphasize discourse in their material space. Members are recommended and incentivized but never required to read or take the literature.

Both the job seeker accountability meetings and the brown bag networking meetings have a similar corporate feel and focus on discourse. I describe the scene in my field notes from July 12, 2013 at an industry brown bag meeting:

> The meeting takes place in the church basement. There are long rectangle tables and chairs. Part of the basement seems to be used for storage and other social activities for the church. The format is more of a discussion and support group.

The spatial orientation of members along rectangular tables and chairs contributes to the corporate atmosphere. These meetings always have a designated leader and we typically always have people seated around a rectangular table similar to that of a conference room. The use of space in these meetings allows for the members to voice their experience and advice for one another. The tone of the space encourages people to socially interact. Emphasis is placed on conversation, networking, and advice giving. During these meetings job seekers' material needs are rarely mentioned. The feeling of a corporate space is consistent at all three types of meetings (Monday morning presentations, accountability meetings, and brown bag networking). This space is socially and physically constructed by the members of the organization, however at times the space can be disrupted.

There are times when the corporate atmosphere of ECT is compromised. For example, disruption of the corporate atmosphere happened twice during my participant observation due to funerals taking place in the church. I documented elements of these

funerals on both June 10, 2013 and July 8, 2013. Here is an excerpt from my arrival on June 10, 2013:

> As I pulled up to [the church] at 8:57am I noticed that the parking lot was unusually full. At first I thought there was a large turnout for ECT, but then I continued to observe. People were dressed up in dark colors. There were large flower arrangements and a hearse. There was a funeral. As I parked and walked in the building I could hear organ music playing. It added a bit of a somber tone to the beautiful weather today. I walk in and gave the funeral attendees a small smile. I sign in, grab my name tag and go downstairs. As soon as I walk in Johnny Slowhand says to me, "Angela what are you still doing here? Isn't school over?" I immediately thought: I wish it worked that way. I replied, "Not for doc students. We go all year round."

On Monday mornings ECT meetings are usually the only activity in the church. The presence of a funeral was a visual, audible, material reminder that we were not in a corporate atmosphere.

While ECT members typically focus on social interaction during the meeting, the presence of a funeral meant that material conditions forced their way through and were emphasized. In this instance, ECT members could no longer ignore materiality in their management of the material-discursive dialectic. In the middle of the Monday morning meeting on June 10, 2013 the meeting started with a typical corporate atmosphere. The following discussion was taking place:

> Erwin W. Schottlehaus: I don't want to sound like I have an ego, but if I could get in front of someone I'm sure I could convince them to hire me. My problem is I can't get in the door.
>
> Derek Hamilton: If I were coaching you I'd ask what your messaging is and also are you targeting an industry that's dead on a vine. You and I should talk offline 'cause there's a gentleman you should talk to.
>
> Erwin W. Schottlehaus: Okay.
>
> Derek Hamilton: …You're writing for the job you want. Start with a functional résumé and then see how it needs to be adapted to fit what's out there.

> [Organ music starts playing again]
>
> Derek Hamilton: [speaks more loudly] Typically HR professionals, we typically don't hire you because of your résumé. We hire you because of the value you bring to the company.

Note that the content of the conversation above emphasized social interaction during the job search. Derek and Erwin talked about "messaging" and the "résumé" and a networking introduction. The disruption of the organizational space is interesting because most people tried to ignore the organ music. Ignoring the music is consistent with the way ECT members have previously managed materiality, by ignoring this pole in the dialectical tension. Derek simply starts talking louder, which is his attempt to more forcefully engage the group through discourse. However, the music is an audible reminder that we are not in a corporate venue. The next funeral was not so easily ignored. While members tried to emphasize the social interaction, the material conditions became prevalent and a disruption, which forced its way into the awareness of attendees. During his presentation on July 8, 2013 Floyd Finley started off his presentation:

> Floyd Finley: I want to start with a question. How many people believe that you're the right person for a job yet you've seen someone else get hired over you? [hands are raised] I've been working…
>
> At this point organ music from the funeral upstairs starts to play. It's pretty loud and the speaker is somewhat distracted by it you can tell because he starts looking up at the ceiling and is pausing and stuttering over his words. He tries to continue saying:
>
> Floyd Finley: …with ECT about 10 years. I came across this study. Some 2.5 million jobs have evaporated and is contributing to a gig economy.

Later in his presentation Floyd hit a tipping point with the organ music because it didn't stop. The following appears in my field notes from July 8, 2013:

> The organ music is still playing and at this point Floyd Finley breaks from his presentation and says:

> Floyd Finley: Can we stop that music?
>
> Suzie Smith: It's – It's a funeral.
>
> Floyd Finley: Oh never mind, never mind. [Laughs]. Ok, let's uh look at an application. The ability to engage, listen and understand is your competitive advantage.

This was interesting because the presenter, Floyd, felt as if he had the agency to verbally communicate and ask for "that music" to stop because it was disrupting, until he realized that there was something more important than his presentation that warranted organ music. This sense of agency is an important element within the organizational context. It seems that feeling as though one has the agency to change material conditions is a classed privilege. This excerpt also shows his mindset; Floyd is presenting in a professional capacity. During ECT meetings the emphasis is nearly always focused on discourse; however, when the discursive space is disrupted by audible noise organizational members become frustrated with the need to focus on the physical space because it breaks the corporate illusion. This is likely because people from the middle-class are accustomed to ignoring the material side of the dialectic. Organizational meetings at ECT emphasize a socially constructed corporate discursive reality where members are empowered to speak and act. The organizational space at Work Track also influences and is influenced by interaction; however, this working-class organization emphasizes the way material conditions impact social interaction.

Constraining Choices in Institutional Atmosphere.

WT members experienced an institutional atmosphere where their behavior was regulated and restricted. These working-class job seekers described power being exercised over them as a result of the restrictions. The working-class members'

descriptions of the organization's atmosphere emphasized material conditions and organizational control. Spatial movement around Work Track's Westside location is continually regulated and controlled. There are three elements of the organizational space that are relevant: locked areas, restricted eating areas, and the newly implemented bell system. Allen (2011) argues that physical and material aspects of workspaces are connected to social class. Class biases appear in many routine organizational practices, such as the regulation of space, because lower level personnel at employing organizations tend to have less privacy and spatial agency within organizations (Allen, 2011). These findings ring true for the patrons at WT because they have a restricted use of organizational space. The constraint exercised in spatial regulation forced working-class organizational members to manage their material conditions before engaging the organizational members discursively. In fact, the construction and use of physical space impacted relational dynamics between the staff and job seekers at Work Track, which illustrated their alternating dialectical management strategy.

This restriction is exercised through locked doors. The moment one enters both the Northside and Westside locations you are in an enclosed lobby. The lobby area has a glass partition where individuals can speak to the front desk employee or volunteer. This person is a gatekeeper. They have the power to open the door for visitors or to tell a person to wait in the lobby area for a full-time staff member who will serve as an escort through the facility. If you are a patron of Work Track then you are required to sign in, receive a visitor's pass, and then the door is buzzed open for you. All program participants wear visitor's passes daily, each time they are on the premises. Volunteers and employees of work track, myself included, are either given a badge that opens the

locked doors or are buzzed in without question. At first I was required to sign in and receive a visitor's pass. After a couple of months, a simple simile and wave opened the front door for me every time I entered the Westside location. The doors to the bathrooms are also regulated through locked doors.

Patrons are not allowed to go to the restroom without permission. Once these individuals received permission they go to the front desk employee to get a key for the restroom to unlock it. The key had to be returned at the end of their use. Staff and volunteers have a separate restroom that remains unlocked at all times. The door to the staff and volunteer restroom is labeled with a sign that designates who can and cannot use it. The patrons are not particularly fond of this regulation of their behavior and of space. Keon, a 22-year old, former Houseman at a local hotel, expresses his frustration when I asked him how this program compares to others he has taken part in:

> Keon: It's better because you working with your GED and you getting trained and all that--you getting paid for it, all the training is free, but it's worse because like...in any other adult education program if you wanna get up and go to the bathroom, you wanna just...step out and call somebody or...you can do that, like here you can't—you can, can't nobody stop you from doing it, but...they got this point system and all that shit and you only got two breaks all day...

While Keon says that the program is "better," he also explains that he cannot move around in the space in the way he would like. Keon has to ask permission to "get up and go the bathroom" or "step out and call somebody." Keon expresses frustration with the regulation of his behavior in the organizational space. He then mentions the regulatory "point system" that WT has in place for all patrons. Keon is familiar with other adult education programs and he is aware of the control being exercised over him. Other WT patrons talked about the regulation of space in their interviews. I asked Omarion, a 25-

year old former janitorial worker, what he thought WT could improve. He commented about the regulation of his behavior similar to what Keon mentioned:

> Omarion: The bathroom thing, I think they need to cool it with that, man. You know what I mean? I don't think you should have to raise your hand...I mean 'cause you got grown—you got full grown men in this building, man...
>
> Angela: Right.
>
> Omarion: And females, excuse me. I mean, so...I don't feel like you should have to raise your hand and be like 'Can I use the restroom?'
>
> Angela: Right.
>
> Omarion: That's crazy. It feels like...it feels like I'm in prison again or something, I mean...
>
> Angela: Yeah.
>
> Omarion: ...it's just...it's crazy, man.

Omarion compares the regulation of his space and behavior to his time in "prison." Comparing the regulation of space at WT to "prison" illustrates the institutional feel of Work Track's physical space.

Despite the reality that many patrons are seeking and training for working-class occupations, patrons feel disrespected by the extent of organizational control over their space and actions. I asked Carlos, a 21-year old former food handler to describe the atmosphere and environment at Work Track. Much of his response refers to the physical space of the organization:

> Angela: Right. Um, describe the atmosphere or environment at [Work Track]?
>
> Carlos: Really, it look like jail...you know what I'm sayin', grey doors, and white walls, and...[pause] I don't like the environment of [Work Track], we're just now fixin' that, like we-

Angela: Okay.

Carlos: -did landscaping out in the front, you know what I'm sayin' make it look a lil' fancy...put some new lil' mulch and [makes an animated noise]-

Angela: [laughs] Okay.

Carlos: -outside. You know, painted the walls, I don't know if you noticed that, you know put the lil'-

Angela: The, um hmm

Carlos: -hard-

Angela: Hardwoods, yeah.

Carlos: -floor, yeah.

Angela: What about um, like the feeling makes it like jail when you walk in here?

Carlos: [high-pitched exclamation] Yeeeeeeeaaaaaaaaaahhh...yeah.

Angela: [laughs]

Carlos: Sometimes, you know what I'm sayin'. Sometimes we can't pee, when we need to pee, and it's like "Hold your pee!?" and I'm like, why would we hold our? That's a medical, you know what I'm sayin'? You're not supposed to hold your pee.

Angela: Right.

Carlos: That's not, what you're supposed to do, you're a crazy lady.

Angela: Um hmm.

Carlos: You know, but uh, it-it's more like...it feel like a detention center sometime, and sometimes it feels like, a family. Most of the times it feel a family-

Angela: Okay.

Carlos: -but sometimes it can feel like a detention center.

Angela: Okay.

Carlos: Like, I-I just...feel like, you know...y-you act like grownups, the teacher will treat you like grownups.

Angela: Um hmm.

Carlos: You know? Which I understand that...but, you know what I'm sayin', I'm grown so, I'm a treat myself like a grown up.

In our discussion Carlos gave a more elaborate comparison to a correctional facility. At the beginning of Carlos' response he said the space looks "like jail," then Carlos describes physical attributes of the organizational space that are comparable to "jail." He listed "grey doors" and "white walls." These physical attributes contribute to an institutional spatial environment. In the previous weeks the lobby had been refurbished by the members of the CC program. These material changes at WT impacted the overall feeling of the lobby area. Faux hard wood floors were added and the lobby walls were painted tan. The group also changed the landscaping outside the building. While these cosmetic changes improved the lobby the rest of the facility remained like a "detention center." Carlos began by describing the décor and feeling of the space; he then specifically mentioned the organizational control exercised over his behavior. When Carlos was asked what made it feel like jail he immediately addressed the regulation of his movement through the organizational space. Carlos expressed frustration because he is required to ask to use the restroom. He says that using the restroom is a "medical" need, which emphasizes a material condition. The bulk of Carlos' description focuses on materiality that constructs an institutional space. This is not the only way that space is regulated during the day.

The space where CC patrons can eat is also regulated during the day as well. Lunch is served at 12 noon. On April 24, 2013 I documented the lunch time routine:

> At 12 noon the classroom door is unlocked and opened and the line of people walk through the classroom and into the adjacent kitchen to retrieve lunch….The line continues to filter through the classroom to the kitchen. Lunch today is lasagna and garlic bread. The CC patrons are not allowed to eat in the classroom. Instead the staff eats in the classroom or conference room and the patrons have to find another place to eat. Today, I sat in the classroom while the staff eats lunch. Ms. Lena explained to me that the patrons used to be able to eat in the classroom, but they couldn't handle that responsibility and keep from making a mess. So now they have to find another place to eat. Many of the patrons eat outside or crouch down in the hallway or lobby to eat. I forgot to bring my lunch today and the smell of it all makes my stomach growl. Mr. Wanfeather walks in and gives me a piece of garlic bread.

Restricted eating areas are an interesting cultural ritual for two reasons. First, the classroom where the staff eats is always used as a space for patron training and GED preparation *except* during lunch time. The lunch break is only 30 minutes, which does not give patrons enough time to leave the location and come back. Yet the patrons in the CC program are spatially displaced during this break time. In the description above patrons find a place to eat outside or in hallways. Restricting eating areas is punitive because patrons are displaced since they could not handle the responsibility of eating in the classroom without making a mess. Work Track operates on a system of control. The use of space during lunch breaks and the regulation of time during lunch restrict patrons and is a form of organizational control. The patrons are not fond of these restrictions and the control exercised over them. In addition, Omarion comments on the limited time frame for lunch.

> Omarion: [exhales] They can, they can, they can lighten up on this 30 minutes for the lunches; they can give us like, an hour—you know what I'm sayin'?
>
> Angela: Right.
>
> Omarion: 'Cause some of us, man can't eat some of the stuff that's out here, and then a lot of time we do make it to a McDonald's® or a Taco Bell®, the time is too late.

Angela: Right.

Omarion: Gotta come back or we late, you know what I mean?

Angela: Right.

Omarion: I think they need to…I think they need to stretch that out.

Omarion is frustrated with the time restrictions. Because lunch is only 30 minutes long, it generally requires that patrons stay on site. If patrons try to leave and have lunch offsite they are generally late returning to the Westside location and are punished by the point system. Another patron of Work Track, Rico, a 21-year old former cleaning staff, also explained to me that if he does not arrive on time he is not allowed to eat breakfast.

Angela: And then...when you get here, what time do you get here?

Rico: It's usually 'bout like, 7:30.

Angela: Do you eat the breakfast?

Rico: If I can.

Angela: Okay.

Rico: 'Cause sometimes they...close the door and then I can't eat.

Breakfast is served at 7:30am and the workforce training programs begin at 8:00am. The door to the kitchen is locked shortly after breakfast has been served. Locked doors are a form of spatial regulation. All of these types of spatial control are connected to social class. While the patrons do not appreciate these types of structural control mechanisms (i.e. locked doors, restricted areas, point system), they follow the policies for the most part. I believe that the WT patrons perceive their voices do not have agency within the organization. Many of them have experienced similar types of organizational regulation

at previous jobs or even in prison or jail. These types of spatial regulations are also connected to the regulation of time, which dictates patron movement around and within the organization's walls. Baldry (1999) explains, "The way space is structured also has a symbolic message, conveying codes of conduct, which are meant to be decoded and understood" (p. 537). Based on Baldry's research, spaces communicate. The space at Work Track (i.e. locked doors, displaced lunch areas, institutional décor etc.) communicates an authoritarian hierarchy and institutional feel. Because emphasis is placed on control over material reality, the use of physical space at Work Track influences social interaction as well. Thus, material conditions construct discursive interaction.

During one of my last visits to Work Track to conduct a semi-structured interview, I noticed Work Track implemented a bell system. The bell is a series of loud audible tones that sound when training sessions and breaks begin and end. All of the job seeker programs are regulated by the bell system. When the bell rings all staff and patrons should report to designated areas in the building. One of the staff members, Maximus Constructionist, commented on the bell system when I asked him about organizational routines:

Maximus:	The routines around here are designed into the program, just like we added the bell system.
Angela:	Yeah, it threw me today. I have been gone for a couple of weeks.
Maximus:	Gary is sold on structure and I agree. I've experimented ... They give us leeway here as instructors. We can see what works and what doesn't. Yeah, his 22 years of experience are correct. That structure works the best.
Angela:	Well, there is no structure outside of here usually?
Maximus:	Exactly.

Angela: So, the bells ring for break time, lunchtime, and what else? At the end of the day?

Maximus: Yes, there is a five minute warning and then the actual bell, which is two different sounds.

Angela: Okay, that makes sense. They were giving tardies today because people missed the bell, but I didn't know what that ...

Maximus: It is the first week of the bells so it is going to be tough.

Angela: Yeah, well it is different.

Maximus: But it is good.

The staff overall has a positive perception of the bell system. Maximus Constructionist states that it provides structure and explains that he believes implementing structure for the patrons' works best. Implementing the time/space regulation socializes WT patrons for working class jobs. This type of organizational control mirrors a clock-in/clock-out system that is commonplace in many working-class jobs. The bell system contributes to an institutional atmosphere because it is another control mechanism that restricts movement around the organizational space. When the bell rings people either leave or return to designated rooms within the building. Harper, another WT staff member, also thinks that the new bell system is good, but only if enforced:

Harper: Uh, and now we have the bell situation which I think is really good for them, but it's only good if we enforce it.

Angela: Right.

Harper: We got instructors that are like, "Oh, we're running late."

Angela: Right.

Harper: Okay. Um, can you give them a little more? Just encouraging them for being on time or something, you know, we gotta get them in the roll of it, but overall, uh, I think the building could be more welcoming.

Angela: Yeah?

Harper: Uh, and I think it just kinda bland. It doesn't make you think of a school environment ...So they don't think of a school environment. And as much as they wanna say, "We're not really a school, we're a training-.." No, we're a school. We're a school and we need to appreciate these students as students …

Angela: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Harper: And hang up some of their stuff, have, you know, encourage them to do work so we can put it on the walls.

Angela: Right.

Harper: So they can say, "Hey, look what I did."

Angela: Right.

Harper: Because as much as they think peo- people don't like that, they strive off of that.

Angela: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Harper: You've just patted their back and said, "Good job."

Angela: Right.

Harper: And that's all these students need.

Harper thinks that the bell system is a positive addition and should be reinforced positively, such as an encouragement for the patrons to be on time. Harper expresses that she does not believe lateness should be tolerated. Note that Harper also addresses the physical space as "bland." She talks about the organization using the metaphor of a school and argues that some of their accomplishments should be hung up on the wall. Harper believes this would create a more "school" like or educational environment.

While the staff seems to have positive perceptions regarding the new bell system, none of the patrons spoke positively about the bell system. Rico was particularly expressive about the bell system during his interview:

Angela: Um, and then how, do you think that [Work Track] could do better...for its students, like, what could it--improve on?

Rico: Yeah, that's what we's...talkin' about earlier, just...treat us like we go—like we grown. I mean...that's all I ask for, for real. Look at me like a older person, not a lit—lil' dude or somethin'.

Angela: Right, right.

Rico: I can just tell that they good people.

Angela: Okay...but then sometimes you don't like how they act?

Rico: Yeah, sometimes, just-only...only thing I don't like 'bout them just how they…like, we ain't grown, like we little kids—you know, you treat this program like-like it's a school, a high school—

Angela: Um hmm.

Rico: -it makes me mad. It's supposed to be a program [long pause]

Angela: For adults?

Rico: Yeah, not-a program for kids.

Angela: Yeah, but the whole bell system thing is...

Rico: Yeah, that's crazy. And then we gotta have a pass to go somewhere. Like, we grown, like it mak-this, it just make me not wanna come sometimes, 'cause I just, feel like...I don't know. I feel like they don't respect our age. We all grown.

Angela: Right. And then why do you think they do that, or why do you think that's part of the program?

Rico: Me personally, I think it's, uh...'cause they know they can get away with it.

Angela: Okay.

Rico: That's me, though. I could be wrong, but I feel like...they know that we...they know that we gonna listen to 'em.

Angela: Um hmm.

Rico: Or they know that we gonna ha—we gonna comply or we gonna have to leave. So, man I just they—they know they can get away with the shit.

Angela: Okay.

Rico: Excuse my language.

Angela: You're fine.

Rico: That's how-that's what I feel.

Rico expresses his frustration with the "school" like atmosphere and argues that he is treated like a child by the staff when he would prefer to be treated like an adult. This "school" metaphor and its implications are covered in more detail in the last theme reviewed in this chapter. It is important to call attention to the way that the material-discursive dialectic is manifest relationally at Work Track. I asked Rico why he thinks Work Track implemented things like the bell system. Rico states that he believes it is because the organization knows patrons have to comply or leave the program. In short, he believes the organization exercises their power because they have the ability to do so. From Rico's perspective, Work Track exercises an abuse of power over its patrons, while the staff view it as a functional and use way to implement structure for patrons. There is a relational power dynamic that is co-created by material and discursive reality. The organizational members of WT are continually managing this dialectical tension.

The patrons at WT are not given autonomy in the organizational space. Buzzanell and Lucas (2013) explain that personal autonomy is related to dignity. Dignity includes two elements: self-worth and respect from others. When autonomy and agency are removed from people they feel undignified (Buzzanell & Lucas, 2013). I believe this is what patrons at WT are feeling. Feeling undignified is exemplified when Rico says, "they don't respect our age." When individuals experience constraint on their level of autonomy, control over oneself and choices, it feels undignified. The way space is regulated and controlled at WT removes autonomy.

Summary: Corporate and Institutional Atmospheres.

Organizational space constructs and is constructed by social interaction. Buildings are not passive containers (Baldry, 1999). My interview questions never asked about the physical space. While I asked about atmosphere, responses emphasizing physical space emerged in interview answers from Work Track participants. The physical atmosphere at Work Track is described using institutional language. For example, Harper, a staff member, described WT as "bland." Patrons like Carlos described the space "like a detention center, like jail, with grey doors and white walls." Omarion, another patron, stated that the atmosphere reminded him of his time in "prison." Use, regulation, and control of space communicate something about social class. The spatial regulations are implemented as a way to provide structure and socialize working-class job seekers for their future occupations, but the control mechanisms in place strip away the dignity from the WT participants. Work Track patrons are continually managing the tension between the constraint of the material space and the symbolism of their limited agency due to their social class status. ECT participants were empowered to have control over their space. The members constructed a corporate atmosphere where publications and other textual resources were always available. Furthermore, only when the corporate atmosphere was disrupted did members become more focused on materiality instead of discourse. The disruption of the atmosphere revealed their dialectical management strategy where middle-class job seekers typically have the privilege to ignore material conditions and place primacy on discourse.

Conclusion: Symbolism of Social Class through Artifacts

Social class emerged in the organizational culture of both unemployment organizations through artifacts such as attire, food, and space. This theme illustrates the way that social class permeates the cultures of unemployment organizations and is manifested both discursively and materially. Please note that the members of each organization manage both material and discursive realities, which exist in tension with one another. However, the dialectical management strategies change across social class lines. Working-class job seekers start by managing material conditions and then struggle to alternate and manage discursive communication. Middle-class job seekers are typically privileged enough to ignore material conditions and prioritize discourse. Ignoring one pole in the dialectical tension is one dialectical management strategy, while alternating between poles is another (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996)

Individuals physically mark their bodies through the use of attire. There is an appropriate dress code at each organization. At Executive Career Transitions the norm for attire is business casual or full business attire. ECT's dress code is never explicitly stated, but rather understood. In contrast, acceptable attire at Work Track is explicitly communicated, regulated and controlled. The majority of members of Work Track are told to wear a specific uniform on a daily basis. Connecting back to the web-of-power, the organizational training that takes places at both WT and ECT illustrate the way that social class is physically unmarked and illustrates how individuals mark their bodies and display social class. A similar contrast existed in regards to the function of food within the organizational context.

Organizational food is emphasized or foregrounded as a basic material need at Work Track. Food is deemphasized or backgrounded as a part of discursive reality at Executive Career Transitions. Work Track's primary focus on food is to meet the physical needs of its job seekers. After working-class job seekers are able to manage the material condition of hunger, they then alternate to manage the discursive reality of their job search. The staff understand the material conditions that patrons might not successfully find work if they are not fed daily. At Executive Career Transitions, food is seen as a way to facilitate a networking conversation. Thus food (primarily coffee, lunch, and happy hour) is strategically used as a way to facilitate social interaction (i.e. networking conversation/connection). Food becomes synonymous with networking for the middle class. Middle-class job seekers are able to ignore material conditions and manage the dialectic by simply focusing on one pole—discourse. In one organization food is a central feature and basic necessity. In the other organization it is peripheral and only seen as a means to a communicative end—networking. Being able to emphasize discursive reality while deemphasizing material reality, is a manifestation of middle class privilege (Dougherty, 2011). Connecting back to the web-of-power, social class is a dialectic between the material and discursive. WT illustrates the emphasis on first managing materiality for the working class. Members of the working class are more likely to emphasize material reality out of necessity before engaging discourse. ECT illustrates the emphasis on discourse for the middle class. Members of the middle class are more likely to emphasize discursive reality due to privilege. Job seekers relationships to food reveal the tension between material conditions and discourse across social lines within these organizational cultures.

Baldry (1999) explains that organizational physical environments are socially constructed and operate as “subjective mechanisms of control and subordination” (p. 536). The spatial regulations at Work Track operate in the way Baldry (1999) describes. The following three practices of restricted organizational space exercised control and power over the job seekers: locked areas, restricted eating areas, and the newly implemented bell system. When I asked about the atmosphere during my interviews, material space was emphasized during the Work Track conversations. The regulation and control over space is symbolic of a lower status on the organizational hierarchy, which made the patrons feel like “children.” Work Track patrons are aware of the power being exercised over them, which was a relational manifestation of the material-discursive dialectic. ECT members had complete control over their organizational space. Movement about the space was never regulated or controlled. In fact when the discursively constructed corporate atmosphere was interrupted, members felt they had the agency to stop that disruption. Only during a disruption of the discursive interaction did middle-class job seekers recognize and verbally articulate the need to manage the material side of the dialectic. Autonomy and agency granted in organizational spaces is symbolic of dignity.

Text and Body Job Search Practices

Patrons of both organizations used their memberships in unemployment organizations to aid in the facilitation of the actual job search. However, what is more telling about the function of patron memberships in these organizations is the way that job searches mirror job seekers’ previous occupational practices. Dougherty’s (2011) conceptualization of body workers and text workers is an explanation of how work

differs across social class boundaries. The differing characteristics of body/text work also manifest in the discourse and materiality of job search tactics.

Text workers (e.g. academics, advertisers, policy developers) in a sense disembody and displace their work into a text with the use of literate practices (Dougherty, 2011). A similar practice happened during former text worker job searches. The disembodiment of the job search allowed text job seekers to transcend spatial and temporal boundaries. For example, online profiles allowed job seekers searches to continue when they were not actively applying for jobs, which created certain advantages.

Body workers (e.g. laborers, farmers, construction workers) embody their work in primarily a physical way through manual labor (Dougherty, 2011). Similar embodied labor happened during body worker job searches. The embodied job search binds unemployed working-class temporally and spatially. For example, when working-class job seekers were not physically searching for work their searches stopped, which created certain disadvantages.

This is not to say that text job seekers did not use their body and body job seekers did not use their words. However, there is an emphasis placed on the use of the body or the use of text to find work. This emphasis is seen across social class lines and is evident in the way people searched for work. Text versus body worker job search practices illustrates the way reemployment efforts mirrored the previous occupational experience of the workers. Furthermore, there are temporal and spatial advantages tied to the use of text to search for work and disadvantages tied to the use of the body to find work. In

short, I observed parallel text/body job search efforts among the former text/body workers that produced unparalleled results regarding job search activity.

Text Job Search Practices

Former text workers conducted text based job searches as they attempted to find and secure employment. Dougherty (2011) extends Marvin's (2006) notion of text class by deriving the terms text work and text workers. Simply explained, text work is characterized by creating messages through the use and manipulation of words/texts that are detached or disembodied from a person (Dougherty, 2011). These messages become the work that text workers produce and are one way social class is constructed. Text job seekers used literate and discursive practices as a primary means to execute their search for work. For example, they documented job searches on accountability reports, intentionally used key words online and in job search documents, and gleaned information from word clouds to find employment. The members of ECT were all text workers. They held former positions such as human resources manager, senior financial analyst, pharmacist, hospitality industry sales manager, insurance adjuster, public relations project manager, marketing coordinator, among many others. Using and manipulating texts and words in the job search is an extension of what job seekers did professionally.

During weekly job seeker accountability meetings an accountability report is distributed. Every Thursday at 9am Michael, an ECT member, runs a job seeker accountability meeting. Many, but not all, of the ECT members attend this meeting. At every meeting a job seeker accountability report is passed out. The use of this report is

one way text job seekers use literate practices in their job searches. Figure 3 below is a copy of the report that is distributed weekly:

Figure 3: Accountability Report

ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT
WEEK OF

How many people did you meet?			
Name of individuals			
How many networking events did you attend?			
Name of events			
How many one on one conversations did you have?			
Name of individuals and where			
Did you have any phone interview?			
Name of company and name of individuals			
Are there any phone interviews coming up?			
Name of company and name of individuals			
Did you have any face-to-face interviews?			
Name of company and name of individuals			
Are there any face-to-face interviews coming up?			
Name of company and name of individuals			
Did you prepare for any phone or face-to-face interview?			
Practice interview questions, STAR answers			
What type of research are using for interviews?			
Name of sources			
Did you add additional connections to your LinkedIn account?			
Name of individuals			
Are you aiming for a certain individual or company?			
Name of company			
Name of individuals			
Did you apply online for any companies?			
Name of company			
Name of company			
Did you send cover letter / resume to any companies?			
Name of company			
Name of company			
How many hours were you behind the computer?			
Job search hours - postings, research, applications, etc.			
Did you read any articles or books?			
Name of book or articles			
Did you exercise or any hobbies?			
Type of exercise or hobby			
Did you take a nap or rest?			
What was your most favorite part of this week?			

Figure 3. Text workers documented job searches as a way to manage the absence of work.

This report documents the job search of each text job seeker. In this way the job search is disembodied into a text or report. Job seekers are also given this document electronically so that they can update it on a weekly basis. On August 1, 2013 Suzie Smith explained the function of this report for her search, “If you don’t have a particular method you use to keep track of your job search this is a good method to use. I’ve customized this to my specific search.” An oral status update of everyone’s search is shared at these meetings

and members communicate guidance and suggestions to one another. On August 15, Michael passed out the report and offered the following advice to the group,

> Michael: Here's an accountability report you can use for the week. It'll help you to keep track of your job search. So here are some references. A book *301 Smart Answers to Tough Interview Questions*. And [Derek Hamilton] has these cards. These are good to practice with. Have stories you can share in a STAR format, Situation, Task, Action, Result. Now if you have a phone interview. Make sure you have your résumé and a job description in front of you. And if you can pull up the person's LinkedIn profile so it's like you're looking at them and having a conversation.
>
> Anna: Yeah, psychologically that's a help.
>
> Allison: Yeah, to feel more professional.

Note the various texts that Michael refers to in his list of suggestions. Not only does he distribute the accountability report, but he also recommends a book, and passes out cards from Derek Hamilton, a local career coach. The cards have practice interview questions and answers that Derek sells for approximately $25.00. Michael has been given permission by Derek to pass copies of these questions and answers for free during his job seeker accountability meetings. The various texts help text workers facilitate the job search process and train for interviews. At the end of the excerpt above, Michael also references texts for the phone interview process. He suggests that the job seekers should have their résumé and job description in front of them and have the interviewers LinkedIn profile pulled up during a phone interview. The advice Michael communicates suggests the creation and use of texts are a way to manage, prepare for, and facilitate the job search process for former text workers. The job search accountability report helps ECT members strategically use texts to track their job search by documenting who they network with, what jobs they have applied for, and when they follow up on job opportunities. The books and interview question/answer sheet are a way to train for future

interviews. Many times during meetings members will practice asking and answering interview questions with one another while offering constructive criticism. These former text workers use their literate and discursive skill sets to manage, prepare for, and facilitate the job search process. Another way text workers facilitate the search for work is through online social networking.

Making networking connections online is a primary way that unemployed text workers at ECT went about their job search. According to my field notes, LinkedIn, a professional social networking website, was mentioned at 73% of the meetings I attended over an approximate 7 month period. The use of a LinkedIn profile to network is a way to develop an online textual representation of oneself as a job seeker. This text based technology is primarily used to build one's network and social capital. Social capital is a concept established by Bourdieu (1987) that explains one's network of social connections. Having access to a larger network of people also provides increased advantages. For example, many career opportunities are passed on through social contacts (Bolles, 2009). ECT job seekers are increasing their social capital through the use of text based networking through LinkedIn. ECT members strategically attempt to network and make themselves attractive candidates online by using the key words in their textual documents. This came out during in a number of conversations and presentations. For example earlier at the August 15, 2013 job seeker accountability meeting the following conversation emerged from the group:

> Michael: So, how's everybody's job search coming?
>
> Russ: Not too good. I was on one site and it was like 52 pages of what you should do with your résumé. So I've got a lot of work to do. It's been 6 weeks since I lost my job.

> Grant: Have you gone through the résumé review at [ECT]?
>
> Russ: Well, I did one online.
>
> Grant: Well, this is better because it's a live person.
>
> Jonathan: Is it hard copy or online?
>
> Grant: Hard copy.
>
> Jonathan: Well, I'm reading that you need two. I went to résumédojo.com. It's seven steps the and the first four are free. The last three you have to pay for, but it's worth it. So employers are not waiting for people to come to them they're preemptively searching. So this site helps you with key words and it'll help you with that kind of stuff so that you're coming up in their searches.
>
> Michael: Key words are important and you can use LinkedIn that way. Yeah, résumés and key words are different. You can change them up and differentiate them based on the position. So be sure to go to [ECT's] meeting and take advantage of the résumé review. What feedback did you get? Was it helpful?
>
> Grant: Well, their main feedback is to sell myself more. They want me to use more adjectives and flowery words to brag a little bit more, which is what I did for a living, but never about myself. But these folks have a lot of years in HR so it's gotta count for something.

In this conversation you can see the focus on the text as a strategic tool for the execution of a strong job search. The unemployed members of this accountability group are using texts as references to construct textual messages (i.e. résumés, LinkedIn profile, etc.) with words in order to find a job. In the above excerpt Jonathan describes search optimization when he says, "So employers are not waiting for people to come to them they're preemptively searching. So this site helps you with key words and it'll help you with that kind of stuff so that you're coming up in their searches." Using key words strategically with the intention of increasing visibility in an online search optimizes one's online presence so that a job candidate's information is more easily accessible to potential employers. Manipulating text is integral to middle-class job searches similar to the way

former text workers used texts in their previous full-time positions. During another job seeker accountability meeting on August 8, Russ, a former collections professional who is approximately 70 years old, asks for help with making connections on LinkedIn.

> Russ: I have question. How do I find people on LinkedIn?
>
> Rick: Put in key words in either a LinkedIn search or Google, so like collections. Search for key words that relate to the type of work you're looking for or the titles people would have in your industry that might hire you like maybe credit collections manger.
>
> Russ: Okay so look through LinkedIn or Google or both?
>
> Anna: What's your schedule like after the meeting?
>
> Russ: I'm free.
>
> Anna: I'd be willing to sit with you and go over all these things.
>
> Russ: Okay. That would be a help.

In this exchange the use of key words is suggested as a way to create connections. The way middle-class job seekers use key words is consistent with existing literature, which maintains that verbosity and words are commonplace in middle-class homes (Lareau, 2003). In the excerpt above the use of "key words" are suggested as a way to increase social capital. Marvin (1994) explains that text class members have access to "powerful literate currencies" (p. 130). In this example the manipulation of key words is used as a way to capitalize on the power of "literate currencies." The use of words and texts is a constant theme that emerged from my data collected onsite at ECT. This theme came out in a unique way on August 1, 2013 during another accountability meeting.

> Kurt: It seems like most companies are using behavioral questions now.
>
> Rick: Yes, research shows those are more predictive of your behavior on the job. And those questions are generally based on the job description and what's required for that position.

Suzie: I've used Wordle.net as a way to determine what ideas and words the description has most prominent and you can craft a cover letter from that.

Stuart: So what is it?

Anna: What it is, is you can copy and paste a job description into Wordle.net and Wordle will tell you which words are popping up most frequently. It'll help you determine what's most important to them [looks at Rick] right?

Rick: Well in theory.

Anna: Then you could put your résumé in Wordle to see if the same words that they're looking for are in your résumé and other documents.

Rick: It's helpful, but depends on their applicant tracking system. Sometimes an automatic system is scanning all the applicant résumé and cover letters because one hiring manager can't possibly look at all the résumés. So it's a platform.

Stuart: So in the past I haven't used a program like this, but I'll use words from the job posting in my cover letter. So it's the same idea?

Lauren: I've heard where people have said at the bottom of your résumé in white text you can put in key words from the job posting so when the HR system scans it, it can pick it up.

Angela: Yes. [spoken simultaneously with Sandy]

Sandy: Yes, we heard of that. [spoken simultaneously with Angela]

The previous discussion reveals job search methods that literally manipulate texts. Note Lauren's comment where she discusses manipulating the HR technology system by using "white text" to saturate the blank spaces with "key words." Thus, the text job seekers heavily emphasize words as a primary way to find work.

The use of word clouds is also a way to textually execute the job search. According to the Wordle.net website, "Wordle is a toy for generating "word clouds" from text that you provide. The clouds give greater prominence to words that appear more frequently in the source text." (Feinberg, 2013, para. 1). The website is not intended to be used functionally for a job search. In fact, in the description provided on the website

refers to it as a “toy,” yet the job seekers in ECT are very intentional about the use of this online tool to create texts for the purposes of their job search.

In sum, ECT members, who were previously employed as text workers, disembody their search for work through the creation and manipulation of texts. The texts they use include: accountability reports, résumés, cover letters, online profiles, key words, word clouds, and accountability reports. All job search texts are used and shared technologically as a way to execute an effective job search. Ballard & Ramgolam (2009) explain that the use of certain technologies reflect certain spatiotemporal goals. Similarly, Yates and Orlikowski (1992) explain the emergence of technology in organizational communication allows messages to be exchanged by people who are geographically distant or unavailable at the same time. One of the job seekers’ spatiotemporal goals for the use of text and technology is to communicate with potential employers at any time without being physically present. The use of social networking technology and texts in the job search results in a disembodied job search. The culmination of these text based efforts attempt to increase the personal network or social capital of the text worker’s job search. Disembodying the job search from individual job seekers allows their search for work to transcend time and space. Simply put, job seekers do not have to be physically present at a particular time. Their profiles are accessible to potential employees and communicate their job search intentions. The transcendence of time and space is one reason why a text job search and text work is preferred by businesses in American society (Yates & Orlikowski, 1992). As business industries globalize, asynchronous communication technology liberates communication from being bound temporally or spatially, which is an advantageous way to grow a business. Middle-class job seekers

capitalize on the same advantages by transcending time and space via technology and texts. These advantages did not manifest in physically embodied job search strategies.

Body Job Search Practices

In contrast to the primarily text based execution of the job search process at ECT, the unemployed members of WT who were looking for work executed their job searches in a more physical way. Dougherty (2011) extends Marvin's (2006) notion of body class by deriving the terms body work and body workers. Simply explained, body work is characterized by the accomplishment of labor through use and expenditure of one's body, which is a physical manifestation of our being (Dougherty, 2011). Body workers used job search practices in ways that embodied the job search experience. Job Seekers in the Workforce Reunification (WR) program embodied their job search by going door-to-door on foot to potential employers and completing handwritten applications. This was a preferred mode of job searching for body workers. The program did require the creation of texts (i.e. résumés, cover letters, etc.) and use of technology at times, but these modes of job searching were met with resistance. Body workers resisted what they perceived as the excessive use of texts and certain technologies because they were not socialized to work with texts or word-processing technology.

During my time at the WR program there were designated "job development" days. I observed one job development day on February 6, 2013.

> I was confused when Tina Crawford said, "after you get back." So I raised my hand and asked where everyone was going. Tina said, "I'm not going anywhere. They're going to do job development." I had a confused look on my face. Mr. Brown looked at me and said, "We're job hunting." I said, "Oh okay." Tina continued with her instruction, "When you walk in say hi my name is Tina Crawford. I'd like to speak to a hiring manager. Don't ask if they are a felon friendly employer. The local unemployment center was telling people to do that. Don't do that! Tell people that you'd like to discuss that in an interview. If they

> continue to ask you about it ask them, is this an interview? Does everyone have their résumés?" Everyone nodded. "Use them to fill out your applications," said Tina. All of the patrons left at 9:13am. On his way out Mr. Brock told Tina he was taking the bus and that he wouldn't be able to come back until 1pm based on the bus schedule. Tina Crawford said okay and asked if he needed another bus voucher. She told Mr. Brock that she was working on getting him some gas cards too. He told Tina that he had bus vouchers and thanked her for working on the gas cards on his way out the door.

On job development days the members of the WR program leave and search for work from approximately 9am until 1pm. When they leave they take a folder filled with copies of the résumé they created during WT's program, copies of their list of convictions, and a sample mock application that they are required to complete at WT. Please note that the job search by these former body workers is not void of text; members of all WT programs create a résumé and mock application. However, the facilitation of the job search at WT is an experience that is more centrally focused on material reality. These job seekers are physically leaving the building, walking into potential employers' brick and mortar locations, and asking to speak to a hiring manager. As you can see, in the passage above, bus vouchers or gas cards are provided to the participants in order to facilitate transportation. When the job search is an embodied experience the material reality of transportation is an integral part of the one's ability to search for work. Not all of the WT members have a personal mode of transportation and the ones who do usually do not have the financial resources to put fuel into their vehicles. Work Track is cognizant of material need and provides support for transportation via bus vouchers and gas cards.

After the majority of the WR members left Ms. Jensen comes in late explaining that she over slept and tried to call. I documented the following exchange:

> Ms. Jensen pulls out her phone and shows it to Tina Crawford. Ms. Jensen says, "See" pointing to her mobile phone screen. "Look there's your number, [Joe Brown]'s number, your number again, the front desk. I've been tryna call all

> morning." Tina says, "okay, okay. Well, I wanted you to do job development today since it's supposed to rain tomorrow." At that point Mr. Swanson walks in at approximately 9:20am. TC looks at him and says, "Take Ms. Jensen with you. When you go into the place ask for a hiring manager. If they're not hiring ask for an application anyway and bring it back. After lunch we're going to go over to the [job fair].

This passage highlights yet another material aspect of an embodied job search: the weather. When searching on foot it is necessary to consider the outside conditions. After job seekers get off at a particular bus stop, they are then on foot walking from door to door completing applications. If the weather is inclement a job seeker's appearance could be compromised, which might impact one's ability to secure employment. On days when the weather is inclement jobs cannot easily be applied for in person by individuals who rely on public transit. Thus, material conditions impact the embodied job search in ways that are removed from text worker job searches. There are other aspects of an embodied job search that impact the job search in material ways.

Physical labor, time, and space are part of embodied job searches. For instance, later that afternoon I returned from lunch to see what our job seekers had accomplished during their 4 hour search. I was able to talk to two of the job seekers. First, Ms. Jensen told me that she set up an interview for the next day to be a cashier at a local bakery. Mr. Brock shared that he applied for three positions and was excited to report that he found out a local plastic factory would be hiring in the next two weeks. He thought his application at the plastic factory was the most promising opportunity of the three. Their accomplishments during this day's job search draws attention to the material reality that physical labor that is restricted by time and space are part of an embodied job search.

The number of jobs a person can physically apply for is limited because an embodied job search creates a demand on physical resources. This creates a systematic

disadvantage to an embodied job search. Not only does a physical job search put a strain on your material resources (i.e. transportation, physical exertion) but it also decreases the number of positions and connections a person can access within a given time period. This material reality constrains body workers' ability to increase social capital. An embodied job search is bound by time and space, whereas a text based job search transcends time and space. Ballard & Ramgolam (2009) explain that when organizational members experience connection via communication they are likely simultaneously present in space and available in time. Temporal and spatial simultaneous presence is part of a body worker job searches. An embodied job search incorporated spatial co-location and temporal synchronicity with hiring managers. Simply put, embodied job searches are bound in time and space. The requirement of simultaneous spatial and temporal co-presence constrains the ability of body workers and produces a systematic disadvantage for the job seekers at Work Track because it physically limits the number of jobs they apply to in a given time period.

While the job search for these patrons was primarily physical, all WT programs also require participation in text-based activities to facilitate their job search. As previously mentioned each member of the WR program created a résumé, cover letter, and mock application. All of the programs at WT required the patrons to create job search documents in an onsite computer lab, which means they included text based activities in their organizational experience. However, these training sessions focused on the basic mechanics of document creation similar to the way that working-class job seekers were trained in the mechanics of middle-class speech. Many of the job seekers at WT had never developed a résumé before. During my time with the WR program, the instructor

Tina Crawford and I assisted each patron individually as they created their résumés. The level of assistance required depended on their computer literacy skills, which varied greatly. I documented my first experience in this role January 30, 2013.

> Tina Crawford tells the class to move into the computer lab so they can finish their résumés. We all migrate into an adjacent room, and the students all select a computer. I'm not quite sure where to put myself so I awkwardly stand in a corner near another door that leads into a different classroom. That was the wrong place because then CC traffic started going in and out of that door. So I move to an empty computer and take a seat. Ms. Crawford tells the whole class to log in and connect to the server and then find their folder and open their résumés. Several of the patrons state that they can't remember how. Ms. Crawford goes to each patron individually to help them connect to the server. On the server each patron has a folder with the résumé they started to previously create. I can tell that many of these students are not comfortable working on the computer, while a few others seem more comfortable. After observing for a time Tina Crawford tells me that I can pitch in wherever I feel like helping. I observe the patrons. Based on the way he was staring at the screen and moving the mouse it appeared as if Mr. Joe Brown needed the most help, so I ask him if I can sit next to him and help. He says, "Sure." All of the students are using résumé templates from Microsoft® Word 2010. I'm a little unnerved by the amount of color each résumé has because it seems unconventional to have a lot of color. Joe Brown's résumé is a dark teal green design. He has his contact information, an objective, a listing of skills, and 3 job entries. The job entries are construction, fencing, and framing. The job entries are brief and not very descriptive. They stop around 2007. I ask him what he did before the last job listed. He said he was a meat cutter and a detailer. So I tell him okay let's add those. So he starts to types them in one l-e-t-t-e-r at a time. Very slowly, he types in the information. Joe is typing each word with his index finger and he looks down at the key board and then up at the screen after almost every letter typed. When he looks up he notices that the format of his new content doesn't match the other entry. He tries to fix it, but can't figure out how to change the font. He kept moving the mouse around and clicking on various parts of the document. I say, "Here let me show you." I put my hand on the mouse and Tina Crawford jumps up and says, "No, he can do it. But he doesn't know how so you have to explain it slowly." I let go of the mouse quickly and say, "Okay." I felt as if I'd overstepped by bounds. Mr. Joe Brown looks annoyed yet again and shoots Ms. Crawford daggers. She yells, "Oh no, you didn't look at me with that tone! You can do this. You'd better fix your face." Joe Brown retorts back, "I don't work on computers. I don't know this stuff. I work with my hands." Tina looks at him and says, "Do you want a job? Then this is what you need to do." Joe turns red and grumbles. He is frustrated. I start telling him where he should put the mouse and how to click to change the formatting. We walk through it step by step.

Working with words is not a commonplace experience for many of the former body workers at Work Track. Working with word-processing and internet technology is also a foreign experience for many of the WT job seekers. After all, their entire livelihood is primarily earned through physical labor. Their expertise was never honed in a computer lab with word processing software. Sitting at a computer for hours and working with words created an unfamiliar, disconcerting experience for patrons such as Mr. Joe Brown. The time spent in the computer lab was generally tense and filled with one-on-one instruction. The necessity for one-on-one instruction created a bit of a challenge as well because there were two of us and approximately 10 patrons. I wondered how Ms. Crawford handled it all alone. The intense assistance needed by some patrons monopolized our attention and we were not able to get to everyone quickly. When I sat with a patron to assist in the creation of their résumé I started by asking them questions about previous work history, them explaining their experiences and expertise to me, and together we discussed and agreed upon specific nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs that documented their expertise and experience. As a text worker my experience with words helped me serve WT job seekers as we co-constructed their résumés. At the end of this process Tina Crawford reviewed our drafts and suggested additional changes.

Many of the body workers complained about the time in the computer lab creating résumés and cover letters. They argued that using technology was wasted time when they could be out physically searching for work. The patrons did not feel productive, but rather defeated, during the process of text creation. The challenge is that trends are changing in the job market and online application processes are increasingly common for all industries (Suvankulov, Lau & Chau, 2012). Ms. Crawford draws attention to the

reality of this online move within the job market when she says to Joe Brown, “Do you want a job? Then this is what you need to do.” In this comment Ms. Crawford is highlighting the way larger societal structure privileges text and technology, which works against many working-class professionals. Many body worker jobs now require a résumé, cover letter, and an online application process. During other sessions in the computer lab patrons searched for body work online. They were able to apply to many jobs by submitting their cover letter and résumé electronically. Research suggests that technological access and literacy is largely beneficial to job seekers regardless of social class status and that a disadvantage exists for the unemployed who do not have regular technological access or know-how regarding the technological search for work (Beard, Ford, Saba & Seals, 2012). Limited access to technology and the inability to easily navigate the digital job market contribute to the divide between classes and the ability to maintain an active job search (Beard, Ford, Saba, & Seals, 2012). Work Track provides regular technological access, but the technological learning curve is steep for many WT patrons.

Despite the frustration with the résumé and cover letter creation process, the body workers saw the utility in the process at the end and were proud of their documented accomplishments and experiences upon completion. For example, on February 20, 2013 one student expressed pride in his résumé.

> Tina Crawford finishes helping Mr. Stark with his résumé and she prints it and asks him to look it over. Ms. Crawford then walks over to two WR patrons and she asks them if they’re okay. She offers one WR patron suggestions for revising his objective. One of the construction instructors, Mr. Nelson starts walking from computer to computer looking over the shoulders of the patrons. Mr. Stark picks up his résumé from the printer and hands it to Mr. Nelson. Mr. Stark smiles and asks, “Would you hire me if I gave you a résumé like *this*?” I look up and see Mr.

> Stark with a large grin. You can tell Mr. Stark is proud of his new résumé. Mr. Nelson smiles and nods his head in approval.

In the next hour or so Mr. Stark reviewed and practiced interview questions he found on Monster.com. After that he spent the next two hours diligently searching and applying for jobs online. He applied to one dishwashing position at a local chain restaurant, two stocker positions at two competing distribution warehouses, one night shift position at a local hardware store. He also found several positions on craigslist.com and wrote down contact information. The creation of résumés and cover letters served a function for the WT job seekers. These documents helped WT patrons navigate the shifting trend to an increasing online job market. Please note that WT job seekers did carry hard copies of their job search documents during their physical job search when they went door to door applying for jobs.

Conclusion: Text and Body Job Search Practices

This theme illustrates the dialectic between material and discursive reality that exists between social class groups. Members with upper and middle class status have the privilege to focus on discursive reality more so than material reality. During my time at ECT I observed job searches that were primarily executed through discursive acts via the use and manipulation of words or texts. For example, the former text workers at ECT used accountability reports to track their job searches, referenced books and other text based resources, used key words and word clouds to facilitate the creation of strategic job search documents, and engaged in professional online social networking by developing a textual representation of self through online profiles. Text job seekers use of literate discursive practices advantageously allows them to conduct job searches with asynchronous communication across geographical space.

Members with lower social class status do not have the privilege of primarily focusing on discursive reality; instead former body worker have to emphasize material reality. During my time at WT I observed job searches that were primarily executed through material acts such as physically going door to door and completing handwritten applications. These former body workers experienced job searches that were more demanding on personal resources, like access to transportation or technology. Embodied job searches are also more constrained by material conditions (i.e. weather) and access to resources (i.e. money for fuel, public transit, or online computer technology).

When comparatively analyzing job search processes across social class lines, disadvantages for embodied job search practices emerged. Embodied job searches bound working-class unemployed to time and space requiring spatial co-location and synchronous communication. Furthermore, the job market is increasingly being moved to technological formats (Suvankulov, Lau & Chau, 2012). In short, more and more job opportunities are being posted online rather than in offline formats. Body workers who have less access to technology and less training in computer literacy skills are at a disadvantage because of the job market's migration to digital formats. The move to online formats is one way middle-class norms are privileged in society and in the same vein is one way working-class norms are marginalized. Privilege awarded to discourse over materiality constructs disadvantage around embodied job searches, which put more demands on material resources from the working class who has less access to material means.

Managing Intersecting Stigma in the Absence of Work

This fourth theme, *Managing Intersecting Stigma in the Absence of Work*, reveals the way stigma operates against the unemployed. Meisenbach (2010) argues that stigma emerges out of the relationship between material conditions and social constructions. For my participants stigma is manifest from and coupled with material and discursive obstacles to employment. Job seekers from all social classes struggled to manage stigma because of the obstacles it creates to employment. The stigma job seekers dealt with was complex and connected to attributes of their individual job search situations. Both organizations taught job seekers how to engage in impression management as a way to communicatively respond to the stigma (Goffman, 1959, 1963). Through formal training job seekers learned information control as a form of impression management (Goffman, 1959; Miller, 1986), which constructs a more positive projection of self during the job search (Goffman, 1963). Job seekers stigmatizing experiences at both ECT and WT are multi-layered. There are many reasons why a person might experience stigma and the more complex and varied the stigma, the more challenging it is to find work.

Stigma is part of larger power structures that manifests in discursive reality and carries implications for well-being. Dougherty's (2011) theoretical conceptualization of the web-of-power can help scholars understand how many power-laden societal structures work against job seekers. Stigma works for and against social groups based on their social class, age, race, sexuality, among other characteristics. But each dominant and non-dominant category a person falls into has the potential to be impacted by stigma. Stigma has been defined as a discrediting mark on one's identity that represents a questionable moral status (Meisenbach, 2010). Stigma communication spreads messages

that identify stigmatized populations, place blame and responsibility for the questionable status, and provide warning to those who are outside the stigmatized identity (Smith, 2007). Stigmatized populations are largely disgraced in society (Goffman, 1963). Meisenbach (2010) theorizes about the co-construction of stigma management and maps out possible cognitive and communicative responses to stigma. Meisenbach's (2010) theory looks at two dimensions: 1) individual's attitude toward the validity of the stigma and 2) a challenge or acceptance that the stigma personally applies. Previous literature regarding stigma assumes that people accept stigma, but that is not necessarily the case (Meisenbach, 2010). Stigma messages are communicated to job seekers and discussed among members of each organization. Some of the job seekers accepted the stigma is valid while others did not. Organizational messages implicitly instructed job seekers to assume the stigma was true. At Work Track responsibility to "transform" stigmatizing obstacles to employment fell on the job seeker. At ECT members were continually struggling to manage contradicting paradoxical elements of their job search.

Stigma: Experienced and Available *not* Old and Unemployed

For the middle-class job seekers, socially constructed obstacles of stigma and discrimination were rooted in the material reality of age and joblessness. While age is a material condition, the negative discursive connotations surrounding age and its meaning worked against middle-class, middle-aged job seekers. Not having a job is also material condition, but the stigma associated with unemployment in society is a negative social construction. Stigma regarding unemployment intersected and was coupled with stigma about being middle-aged. Middle-class job seekers were caught in a pragmatic paradox (Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967) because that which made them ideal job

candidates also made them undesirable job candidates. Pragmatic paradoxes put people in an everyday inescapable dilemma because it is not possible to act logically in an illogical context (McGuire, Dougherty, & Atkinson, 2006; Quinn & Cameron, 1988; Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967). ECT job seekers are caught in dual pragmatic paradoxes because that which is stigmatized (age and unemployment) is directly connected to that which brings value to the job search (experience and availability). The pragmatic paradox emerges between undesirable job candidate traits and their inevitable connection to desirable candidate traits. These middle-class job seekers were caught in an ongoing struggle to simultaneously manage their stigma and value during the job search process.

This theme reveals the way ECT job seekers navigate desirable and undesirable attributes during their job searches related to work experience, age, availability, and unemployment status. The stigmatized attributes triggered job seekers to train in impression management due to possible discrimination (Goffman, 1959, 1963). Stigma related to their age and unemployment status negated the perceived value job seekers saw in their wealth of experience and availability to work. In the American context, age is socially constructed as a pathological condition, which is the result of a deficit model of aging and to the way youth is valued (Allen, 2011). On the job market, age discrimination creates a barrier to securing employment for middle-aged job seekers (Eriksson & Lagerström, 2012) Unemployment is also stigmatized in the United States and the longer one is unemployed the more powerful this stigma becomes, which decreases the chances of finding work (Vishwanath, 1989). Stigma related to age and unemployment status intersects to create powerful, multi-layered processes that contribute to an ongoing struggle for the middle-class job seekers at ECT. Discrimination based on age and

unemployment status during the job search can be conceptualized as strands in the web-of-power that can trigger downward social mobility.

This theme also reveals the way interconnected, intersecting stigmas are talked about within ECT's organizational context. Speakers at ECT convey organizational messages that continually reminded their patrons of their stigmatized identity as middle-aged people who are out of work. These messages problematically imply that job seekers accept the stigmatizing messages about themselves as true and manage them communicatively. Messages rarely talked about the larger social structure and its bias. Some ECT members struggled with the direction to accept stigma because they saw their wealth of experience, desire, and availability to work as positive attributes they brought into the job search. Unfortunately, age and work experience are correlated, as one increases so does the other. Similarly, ECT patrons' eagerness and availability to work exists in part due to their joblessness. All of these attributes create a pragmatic paradox that ECT job seekers struggled to continually manage.

The members of Executive Career Transitions face a set of obstacles to their employment. These obstacles are stigmatized. The average age of the patrons I interviewed for this study at ECT was 54.6 years of age with a range of 44 to 64 years. The large majority of people who join ECT have 10-30+ years of work experience. These members have a wealth of industry experience and professional expertise, but it comes with a social cost. Allan (1990) researched former managers and professionals who were unemployed and 40+ years of age. His findings revealed that the number one perceived barrier to reemployment was age and the second was over qualification (Allan, 1990). The perceptions of ECT members were the same. The tension that emerges for these

middle-aged job seekers was grounded in the reality that work experience and age are correlated. The more time a person spends working in an industry and increasing her/his level of expertise, the older that person becomes. Patrons were aware of their age and the age of other organizational members. Erwin W. Schottlehaus, a 64 year-old former Subcontract Manager and Procurement Specialist, discussed his awareness of age during his first time attending an ECT meeting:

> Erwin: The first time I ever got laid off was in 2009. I don't remember how I heard about [ECT], but that's when they had it up in the auditorium …
>
> Angela: Okay, yes, because it was right in the recession.
>
> Erwin: … with 250 people probably there. I ran across three other guys that I worked with in the past. All four of us are sitting there and go, "Look around, guys. What's the average age of everybody in this room?" We agreed it was somewhere around 55. In 2009, my company and probably half the companies in the country took it upon themselves [to let us go]. I worked hard all my life, got my promotions, learned my job, got my skills, and priced myself out of the market. I'll never make the money I was making in 2008. Don't even plan to. Recruiters say, "[Erwin], they're afraid to hire you because they can't afford to pay you what you're worth. As soon as you get an offer that will pay you what you're worth, you'll jump ship."

Erwin describes barriers to his job search. In the midst of his career he thought he was doing everything right. But Erwin's failed job search makes him feel, as he put it, that he "priced himself out of the market." There is a perception among hiring managers that older employees are more costly due to the perception that they will command higher salaries and higher cost in healthcare benefits (Allen, 2011). Erwin's vast qualifications and years of experience that should hypothetically set him up for a successful job search now seem to be working against him. While work experience is generally perceived as a good thing on a job interview, in this case it brings a negative effect: age discrimination,

which can be reframed as over qualification. Erwin expressed a similar frustration during an ECT meeting on April 22, 2013:

> Erwin: I've been unemployed for 15 months. I've searched everywhere. I've been told I'm overqualified. And I tell them it doesn't matter that I'll just do anything to provide for my family. And I get depressed, but then I pick myself back up.

In this statement Erwin references two elements about his job search that may draw from both age and unemployment related stigma. Erwin is 64 years old and has been unemployed for nearly 1.5 years. Researchers have maintained that discrimination among older job seekers who have a longer tenure of unemployment receive significantly less opportunities to interview for jobs (Eriksson & Lagerström, 2012). Erwin shared with me in our interview that his former co-workers are concerned about competing with younger generations:

> Erwin: At least once a month, I get a call from a past co-worker that he got laid off. We're talking about architects and engineers. I talked to a couple of architects. One is going to try to sell real estate. The other one, he said, "I've had to learn my craft three times." He learned it in architecture school with pencil, paper, and T-squares, and triangles. He said then CAD came along, computer aided drawing, had to learn that. Now it's RIM and BIM and all this other stuff. So, I think I'm a dinosaur. I think I'm out of the [pauses and his eyes well up with tears] The one guy, he's getting out of it. He says he learned it on pencil and paper. The kids coming into school now, they're all computer geeks. They pick this stuff up.

Erwin refers to himself as a "dinosaur." He marks himself with this aging metaphor. Using Meisenbach's (2010) stigma management communication model Erwin acknowledges that the stigma exists and accepts that it applies to himself by disclosing his perception of himself as a "dinosaur." There are potentially multiple outcomes that could result in the acceptance of a social stigma, such as impact on health, achievement, self-esteem, among others (Meisenbach, 2010). In the excerpt above Erwin became emotionally upset in our conversation when his eyes welled up with tears.

Unemployment literature consistently reports that job loss negatively impacts mental health (e.g. Lin & Leung, 2010; Paul & Moser, 2009). Yet, factors like optimism, self-efficacy, perceived control, and high self-esteem are predictors of job search success (Wanberg, 1997; Wanberg, Kanfer, & Rotundo, 1993). If Erwin feels like a "dinosaur" and his peers are discouraged about younger competition, then they likely have lower self-esteem or less perceived control over the job search, which according to research would predict a lower likelihood that they would successfully find work. The stigma has material implications for the job search. Perceived competition with younger generations, which is out of the control of job seekers, is a common fear among ECT members. For example on March 18, 2013 Kerry Rousch a former Registered Nurse expressed her frustration during at meeting:

> Kerry: I have a dilemma. I went to college for a year and a half then I dropped out and had my daughter. Then I finished my associates' degree in applied science. I've been working as an RN for 11 years. I've always worked. I'm not lazy. Now I've found myself a divorced empty nester. I did work again and left to take care of my mom who died. Since then I've been juggling part time jobs for the past several years. I'm in my mid-40s. It's getting old [juggling these part time jobs]. I feel like I should be more marketable. I've got experience. I've finished my childrearing and I'm single. I'm an ideal worker. But I feel like these people are only hiring new RNs, you know, graduates over me, which doesn't make sense because they need to be trained. Everybody says they need more nurses, but I can't find work.

Kerry believes she is in an ideal situation to work because as she puts it, she is a "divorced empty nester." However, Kerry expresses that she feels she's being passed over in favor of new college graduates, which does not make sense to her and seems illogical. Kerry's pragmatic paradox emerges between being experienced and available to work, yet being older and unemployable. Kerry believes her situation sets her up to be of value to an employer and she cannot logically make sense of why she is not able to find

work. She says, “I’m an ideal worker,” which reveals the belief in herself and why Kerry is having a hard time understanding why she cannot find work.

There is also an intersection of gender and social class in Kerry’s situation. Her gendered reality is triggering downward social mobility. She served as caretaker, which took her out of the workforce for years. Many women have either opted to leave or felt obligated to leave the workforce for a variety of caretaker roles (i.e. childcare, eldercare, spousal care, or self-care) (McGinn, Brown & Adrien, 2006). However, when women leave their careers for any extended period of time it is increasingly difficult to get back in and many only find part-time work (Conant, 2007). Kerry’s experience is consistent with many women who are ready, willing, and qualified to work, but cannot secure full-time employment. In addition, Kerry is dealing with gendered age related employment obstacles. Organizational communication scholars have written about the mid-life experiences of professional women articulating that there is a master narrative of decline (Trethewey, 2001). Kerry does not seem to buy into this stigmatizing narrative because she knows that she does not “need to be trained,” while new graduate hires do. Kerry does not believe her age should be a barrier, yet it is a barrier. In Kerry’s experience age and gender related stigmas working against her search because they co-existing with her valuable expertise and availability to work. Kerry’s situation puts her in a pragmatic paradox. Connecting to the web-of-power, various stigmas intertwine like powerful strands in a spider’s web that can potentially entrap a person.

Age related concerns were not unique to Kerry or Erwin. These concerns continually emerged during ECT meetings. On February 11, 2013 the speaker Dane Birsch talked about generational differences during the job search:

> Dane continues, “The odds are you’re going to interview with a different generation than who you are.” A man in the back raised his hand and Dane called on him. The man asked, “How do I compete with my 22-year-old son on the job market?” This question is representative of a fear I suspect many people in the room have. Dane says, “You can but you have to understand while you’re not on the cutting edge of technology you are on the cutting edge of business understanding and know-how. That’s what you are bringing to the table.” That was the first encouraging thing Dane Birsch has said during this presentation.

The question posed to Dane reveals a perception of age-based competition in the job market. The content of Dane’s presentation centered on the way technological advancements have impacted the job market. Stereotypes of older workers include fears that they are technologically incompetent (Allen, 2011). Dane highlights the struggle by stating that members’ ages disqualified them from being on the “cutting edge of technology,” yet their experience put them on the “cutting edge of business know-how.” Dane’s words reveal the dual positive/negative perceptions of these middle-class, middle-aged job seekers. There is a wealth of experience that lies in ECT’s unemployed members. But work experience and age increase together. All of the members at ECT have taken the time to develop their expertise in service to employers, which consequently means they have also aged. Unfortunately, the stigma of age made ECT job seekers increasingly aware of age discrimination. For example, at the end of the ECT meeting on May 13, 2013 a discussion surrounding all of these issues emerged:

> An ECT patron I’ve never seen before raised her hand. She was wearing a purple button down blouse. Her name is [Denise Dandridge]. She said, “Can I ask a question related to my job search? What do you do when you’re highly educated? If you have more education than the people you’re interviewing with? I have interviewed at places like [local fast-casual restaurant] and I interviewed there. I get turned down.” Denise continues, “So people say, ‘Why would you apply for an entry level job in payroll?’
>
> Rick: From their perspective in a bad economy they think you won’t stay long term.

Denise: Should I hide it? Or people have asked me "how would you be with blue-collar workers?

Scott: Is it money?

Denise: No we made sure that the salary expectations are similar. I made a change from HR to payroll seven years ago.

Rick: But it's a mindset. If you go in expecting to be sabotaged that's going to come across.

A different ECT patron adds to the conversation by saying, "You're going in as a sales person. How many sales people are going to love their job if they get to sell gold for the price of led?"

Denise: It's not me. It's these people. There's a lot of discrimination. Hello, I worked in HR. There's discrimination against highly educated people.

Yet another ECT visitor chimed in on the situation saying, "I mean we've all heard, "you're overqualified." Or we've experienced age discrimination. I don't think it's that. You need to quit disqualifying yourself. Think of WIIFM. Tell them what's in it for me. Tell them why they should hire you and what type of value do you bring."

At this point the tone of the conversation is heightened. It's getting a bit more tense in the room.

Denise: You'd think, but they get scared I'm going to take their jobs. To put yourself through school and to be told you're intimidating.

Johnny Slowhand: If you want to feel better I applied to [local fast casual restaurant] and never got a call back.

Bob: Let me tell you, I served as president of a company that was sold. So I interviewed for several controller positions and people asked me why are you stepping down? I talked about my passion for numbers and how I'd love to be an advisor of a president.

Scott: See, Bob changed the conversation.

The ECT visitor said, "You should be telling them that I'm not interested in management that you want to work behind the scenes and help make them successful. Plus this is just one lady [at the fast-casual restaurant]."

Terry: You should follow up with the lady. You've got nothing to lose.

Suzie Smith: One time I got screwed over a great job, but you don't want to work there anyway.

> Denise looked at Suzie, touched her arm and said, “Thank you my friend.” Suzie’s comment seemed to deescalate the conversation. It seemed as if Denise was just looking for someone to commiserate with her situation. Suzie said aloud, “That’s why ECT is a good place. We’re you’re support system.”

Feeling discriminated against because of one’s expertise, education, age, or any other reason is a troubling experience. Part of the power of age discrimination is that it is difficult to parse out when it is happening and why. In Denise’s experience age, education, expertise, social class, and salary compensation are all coupled together. Denise perceived that she had been discriminated against for several reasons. She begins by mentioning discrimination against highly educated people. Then she questions why she was asked, “how would you be with blue-collar workers?” This implies that Denise sees her social class status as a possible reason for discrimination. Finally, Denise mentions that she perceives the fear that she may take someone’s job. The other members of the group speculated about salary compensation. Others suggested that she draw upon entrepreneurial discourse by recommending she start “going in as a sales person” and “tell them why they should hire her and what type of value do you bring.” Several of the conversational members implied that the situation Denise is in is her own fault because she did not change her mindset, attitude, or re-frame the conversation. This suggestion implies that Denise should engage in impression management. Age, over qualification, education, and expected compensation all intersect to make the middle-class job search more challenging for ECT members. Denise’s experience reveals her ongoing struggle. She is caught in a pragmatic paradox because the very attributes she perceives as logically valuable (i.e. education, experience) now seem to be illogically and unjustly working against her (i.e. overqualified). Potential employers make logical and illogical assumptions that impact decisions about job candidates.

ECT job seekers struggle to navigate discrimination and stigma, while also articulating the value they bring as candidates. Johnny Slowhand is a 59-year old former insurance adjuster. He comments on the age of the members in ECT and the strategies that he has learned on how to manage the stigma associated with age.

> Johnny: They [ECT speakers] have given some tips that you never think of, although some of that stuff is online too …. Sometimes they are real big on … If you notice, there are a bunch of old people. It's old people and they would talk about doing all kinds of things to hide your age.
>
> Then I hear it the other way. One lady said, "Oh no, we want experience." I missed one day of work since 1996. I just go to work. I'm not late…. Nothing against you but my daughter and all kinds of young people, there isn't that commitment like [from] younger people to the organizations. Of course, there is no real commitment by the companies by their employees anymore so why have that? My résumé has everything from when I graduated high school in '72 to what I did because…I think that everything I have done has led to what I am now. I really don't want to hide my age and all.

Johnny has heard conflicting messages about how to manage his age in the job search, which puts him in a pragmatic paradox. First, Johnny shares that job seekers have been instructed to hide their age. Using Meisenbach's (2010) Stigma Management Communication framework, this direction implies that job seekers should accept the stigma exists and challenge the stigma as it applies to self because job seekers are directed to communicatively manage stigma within their search by avoiding or hiding information. Accepting stigma can be problematic because it requires job seekers at ECT to view age in a negative light and then to communicatively omit or dodge age during the search for work. Hiding age also implies that job seekers conceal the number of years they have been in the work force. Johnny Slowhand then shares with me that he is uncomfortable hiding his age in the search process. His discomfort points to the

pragmatic paradox he is attempting to manage. Johnny does not want to accept the stigma of age because his hiding his age negates his effort to share his years of experience, which are of value to him as a job candidate. Johnny's discomfort is a sign of resistance. According to Meisenbach's (2010) typology Johnny challenges the public understanding of the stigma and accepts that the stigma applies to self by using the transcendence or re-framing strategy. Meisenbach (2010) explains this strategy: "transcendence reduces a stigma's offensiveness by calling attention to how the stigma attribute can be a means that leads to a valuable end" (p. 283). Johnny has also been instructed that his experience is desired. Note the shift or reframing of his language use from "age" to "experience" in Johnny's excerpt above. This shift illustrates the tension between age and professional expertise/experience. Johnny believes that everything he has done has led to what he is now and implies that there is a value in that. Johnny was not the only one who was instructed to hide his age.

Lauren, a 51-year old former buyer and furniture retail store manager, shares an experience she had with a recruiter during our interview:

> Lauren: Everyone was like, take your graduation date off your résumé. You don't want them to know you're going to be 51 years old. This recruiter was like, "I'm looking at you, and you're not 51. How old are you?" I am. He looked at me. He goes, "is this right?" I'm like "[yeah]"... he was kind of laughing, he goes, "man you're older than me." He goes, "I don't mean that in a bad way," he goes, "you look really good." So I was like, "well thanks." He goes, "take those dates off. If you're in a face-to-face interview, they don't need to know that." It was validating…

Johnny and Lauren's experiences show the discursive reality that surrounds age within the job market. In Lauren's account you can see the Master Narrative of Decline (Trethewey, 2001) emerge. The recruiter told Lauren, "I don't mean it in a bad way…you look really good." This statement confirms that the recruiter's expectation is that a

woman who is 51 years of age will look like she has declined in some way. Since Lauren does not appear to have declined, the recruiter is surprised. Furthermore, the recruiter and others instructed Lauren to take her dates off of the résumé as a way to conceal age. This type of instruction is problematic because it implies that the job seeker negatively accept the stigma of age and apply that stigma to self. Instead recruiters and unemployment support practitioners could educate job seekers about discrimination and biases in the job market so that they do not negatively internalize stigmas and stereotypes. Then teach job seekers how to manage the biased system with the understanding that it is not something personally wrong, but rather the social construction of age that is problematic. Stigma creates obstacles to securing employment for ECT members. ECT is conscious and aware of this obstacle and yet the very thing job seekers have on their side, a wealth of experience, is directly correlated with age that is stigmatized. This is a frustrating reality ECT members navigate as they search for work.

ECT members are not just facing unemployment due to the stigmatization of their age and perceived over qualification. They, like all unemployed people, face the stigma of being unemployed. Scott, the Executive Director of ECT addressed stigma and chronic unemployment during our interview.

> Scott: Mm hm. We have people down there who're unemployed for 2 or 3 years. We always had that segment in the people we had, but—and I can't substantiate this—I would just say the average [ECT] member has been unemployed longer than [compared to our membership] 4 years ago. I don't know what the numbers are. It's just a feeling that I have, because you see them again and again. I guess the second part is—this is a very sensitive issue—is as you become chronically unemployed, what's the potential of you becoming employed? I'm kind of dancing around this, but are you employable? That's really what I'm saying, let's be honest about it. I don't know the answer to that….You're less attractive when you're not working…And you also have career people, people are more cognizant of their careers. What does that mean for people that are unemployed? What it means is you have people who are transitioning careers without ever being

> unemployed. They're applying for positions and they're far more marketable. They're marketable for a number of reasons. Number two, they've never been unemployed, and it's still a stigma, no matter what anybody says. I don't know if that's in your paper, but I believe it. I believe that with all my heart, that it's still a stigma. It always will be.

Scott wonders if the long term members of ECT are employable. He talks about the stigma of being unemployed that all jobless individuals face. There is a false perception among hiring managers that the longer a person is unemployed the less likely they will be a productive employee (Vishwanath, 1989; Oberholzer-Gee, 2008). This stigmatizing thought process negatively impacts people who are searching for work and converts people who are unemployed and actively searching into long-term unemployed or discouraged workers. Long-term unemployed people have been actively searching for work for a minimum of 27 weeks (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014. Discouraged workers are people who want and are available to work, but have given up the search for a job (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). Vishwanath, (1989) concluded that stigma has a deteriorating effect on one's job search. When I asked Kat, ECT's personal counselor on staff, about a negative organizational experience she mentioned the impact unemployment has on discouraged workers in connection with age:

> Kat: Knowing that there are some people that have given up on themselves and it could be that they may have too much to go on, too much going on that almost getting a job is secondary because they have so much going on. Or people, particularly those in a certain age bracket, who feel like it's useless. They are tired of putting themselves out there and getting rejected. That in itself is really hard. They stop attending meetings and number one, you don't necessarily know what happens to them but number two, a lot of them we to assume that they gave up on the job search.

Kat provides a level of support to members "in a certain age bracket" dealing with routine "rejection." However, it is not motivating or helpful to be reminded of stigma and the notion that when one is out of work their job search becomes increasingly

challenging. For example, the first time I heard a message that hinted at the stigma of being unemployed was on February 11, 2013. The speaker, Dane Birsch, was a recruiter and his presentation was titled, *What's going on with the job market?* Toward the beginning of his presentation he made this comment,

> "Now, I'll be honest. You're not the people I'm typically recruiting. I only recruit people, who are actually working, but I'll still pass on your information, and once you're working then I can help." The mood in the room shifts. It becomes really quiet. I was offended by his statement and I'm not unemployed.

Dane is a professional recruiter and many of the people at ECT use recruiters. The message that he, as a recruiter, is not interested in helping the unemployed find work is stigmatizing. Unemployed job seekers come to ECT for support, this message is not supportive, especially since Dane stated that he would only help ECT members once they were working again. This logic supports the rational herding phenomenon that economists and management scholars have studied (Anderson & Holt, 1997; Banerjee, 1992; Oberholzer-Gee, 2008). Rational herding is a logical fallacy relevant to unemployment. This fallacy maintains that if a candidate was qualified they would have been hired by now, and when job seekers experience long term unemployment it is because they have been interviewed by others and not deemed a strong candidate. When hiring managers use rational herding they are inferring the behaviors of unknown, third-party managers (Oberholzer-Gee, 2008) and systematically discriminating against the unemployed.

Unfortunately, stigma against the unemployed was repeated during other sessions as well. On May 6, 2013 Fred Daniels, another local recruiter, was presenting about networking.

> Fred: So today we're going to talk about networking. Let's start with ads. What percent of jobs do you think are found through ads [in the paper or classifieds]?
>
> Group Responses: 5% [pause] 2%
>
> Fred: Less than 2%. This is not a good place to spend a lot of time. I'm not saying don't look, but look at this as how to divide your time… How about recruiters?
>
> Group: [Silence]
>
> Fred: Less than 5%. We have a problem with recruiters for people in this room. Recruiters are not interested in unemployed folks. Recruiters aren't paid to help people find jobs. They're paid to fulfill positions. Don't spend a lot of time with them. Now what about Networking? More than 85%. You have to broaden your personal network to find work. Typically it's 3 social circles removed from where you are. It's not enough to only deal with people in your circle. What's the number one mistake people make when networking? Asking for or talking about a job. This is a critical change in your mentality. You have to ask people to introduce you to other people. When you ask your contacts for a job you make them uncomfortable. Be careful what impression you're putting out. You have to sell yourself so they know what you're an expert in and the type of people you want to meet. Don't be a telemarketer bugging people and try to sell something they don't want to buy. People will try to get off the phone.

In this discussion, Fred tells the group that recruiters are not a fruitful avenue for their job search because unemployed people are not attractive candidates to recruiters. This echoes recruiter Dane Birsch's earlier comment. I argue that the unemployed professionals at ECT should be the focus for these recruiters. Not only do ECT job seekers offer expertise, but they are available to work now. Being unemployed and being available to work are correlated, yet one is stigmatized and the other is valued. Fred states that during networking conversations asking for a job can make you seem like a "telemarketer bugging people." This type of language and metaphor reveals the stigma connected to unemployment and reminds job seekers about that stigma. Fred was not the only speaker who communicated that message.

Another example, took place on August 12, 2013. The Monday morning speaker, Derek Hamilton, was giving his presentation titled "From Roadkill to Roadmap." Derek's

titles always imply that unemployment is a highly stigmatized state at the beginning, but ends with a positive spin on that unemployed state. His titles are symbolic of the struggle ECT job seekers are navigating. In this title he directly implies that being unemployed is like being "roadkill" but that with his guidance the job seekers will have a "roadmap." Other presentation titles he used were: From Desperation to Deal, From Fish story to Success Story, and From Frustrated to Focused. The titles and messages of his presentations begin by revealing the stigma associated with being unemployed (i.e. road kill, desperate, frustrated). Derek is a local career coach in the area and he presents more frequently at ECT than any other speaker. He is highly regarded in this organization because of his work history in Human Resources. Derek also writes for the local newspaper in a column about job searching and career management, which contributes to his credible reputation within the culture of ECT. On this particular day he was in the middle of his presentation and Derek was explaining that certain interview questions are designed to assess a candidate's fit within the potential employers' organization. The following exchange took place:

> Derek: When someone asks you what's your leadership style, that question is seeking to assess fit. They want to see if your style fits theirs. So you answer that question based on what you've learned from their employees. You know when I talked to the admin she said X and I also lead this way.
>
> ECT Member: Yeah, but what if my style doesn't fit them. I wouldn't want that, right?
>
> Derek: Right, but if you need a job you need a job. And honestly you're 5 times more employable once you have a job. If you do that [take this job] just know this is a one night stand and not a marriage.

Derek gives a relational metaphor (one night stand v. marriage) to explain why unemployed job seekers should take a job even if they do not think it is a good fit for them. This advice highlights the pragmatic paradox (Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson,

1967; Quinn & Cameron, 1988). If a job seeker takes a job they are not interested in they are no longer immediately available to work. However, due to the stigma of being unemployed job, seekers are then more likely to find a job they want. Pragmatic paradoxes are challenging to manage and rationalize because by definition pragmatic paradoxes require a logical decision in an illogical context (Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967; Quinn & Cameron, 1988). Derek communicates to the group that they are "5 times more employable once they have a job" and are out of unemployment, which is consistent with scholarship in this area (e.g. Oberholzer-Gee, 2008; Vishwanath, 1989). However, this persistent message that ECT members hear from multiple sources is problematic because reinforces the stigma associated with unemployment and negates the benefit of being available to work. It is likely challenging for job seekers to be confident as candidates if they continually hear messages reinforcing stigma about unemployment.

Members of ECT are in an ongoing struggle as they manage stigmas of age and joblessness along with their value of expertise and availability. These stigmas are obstacles to employment that are interwoven and powerfully operating against middle-class, middle-aged job seekers. While the speakers at ECT perpetuate stigmatizing messages, the organization does provide a resource of support against discrimination. Aaron is a legal advisor on the staff of ECT, who has served with ECT on a volunteer basis for approximately 8.5 years. He has presented to the group in the past and makes himself available for one-on-one sessions as well. Based on age related stigma I knew ECT members were grappling with, I decided to specifically ask Aaron about legal issues regarding age discrimination.

> Angela: I was wondering how often it was questions about age….discrimination were really coming up? Is that something that is frequent?

> Aaron: Age, all the time. With the economy, and at least since the economy fell hard in 2008, that has dominated the conversations there. It is frankly because the increase in dismissals of people were clearly, they will not admit it, that were clearly based upon age has been unmistakable.

Aaron has provided guidance to people on how to pursue issues of age discrimination legally. Having a legal advisor available to ECT members is undoubtedly helpful and a much needed service, but does not solve the dualistic pragmatic paradox the unemployed are grappling with during their search for work. The obstacles to employment ECT members are facing emerge as stigma, which results from a relationship between material conditions (age and joblessness) and discourse (being perceived as pathologically old and unemployable). WT job seekers also managed obstacles to unemployment. Their obstacles were rooted in both materiality and discourse as well. As a whole, WT job seekers were also stigmatized.

Transforming Stigma, an Individual Responsibility

Working-class job seekers struggled to manage both material and discursive obstacles to unemployment. The material obstacles Work Track members managed included challenges such as lack of transportation, housing, clothing, food, and drug addiction. All of these material conditions made the job search more challenging to execute. Thus material obstacles negatively impacted the job search for working-class job seekers, also in part because they are stigmatized. Working-class job seekers grappled with the fact that they did not have socially legitimated education or skill sets, which are also stigmatized. The various stigmas create complex and layered discursive obstacles that result in systematic discrimination and inequality. Due to the extensive scope of obstacles to unemployment, Work Track is structured to “transform” individual lives by providing a holistic range of services. The onus of transformation is placed on the

individual to transform because larger social structures manifest in individual lives. It is challenging to articulate structural inequality as the cause of one's obstacles to employment. Thus, working-class job seekers assumed individual responsibility for their obstacles to employment.

The data that emerged to support this theme reveals the way working-class obstacles to employment manifest both materially and discursively. Work Track is a program that attempts to holistically assess and addresses an individual's unemployment situation. Many times the obstacles for the working-class unemployed are both material and discursive. Nearly all of the issues, whether they are rooted in material or discursive reality, result in stigma. Being stigmatized is a discursive reality and is one way in which power is exercised and accomplished in contemporary society (Dougherty, 2011). Working-class job seekers are stigmatized for many reasons and the judgment passed on these job seekers is multi-layered and powerfully overbearing.

This theme also reveals the way WT organizational members communicate about stigmatizing obstacles. Work Track's staff believes in "transformation" as the solution to their job search. This theme describes how the organizational culture at Work Track values patrons' "transformation" and believes that this is the key to overcoming obstacles to unemployment. "Transformation" is the language WT staff continually use to address the many changes that need to happen in their patrons' lives in order to make them a viable job candidates. Transformation happens both materially and discursively. Work Track job seekers frequently needed to manage a plethora of challenges in their lives that inhibited employment, including: education level, amount of work experience, training skill sets, drug addictions, familial relationships, emotional health, and prior convictions.

All of these conditions are stigmatized. What is interesting is that WT members accept the stigma and require the individual to change and meet societal expectations. Brantlinger (1993) found that despite the awareness and criticisms lower-income youth had about the social class structure they still internalized the stigmatizing messages about lower class groups by blaming themselves for their academic failures and social class status. Smith (2007) echoes the self-blaming aspects of stigma. In her argument she believes that stigma communication implies a personal responsibility for membership in a stigmatized group and the consequences associated with that stigma (Smith, 2007). I fear that WT patrons also internalize the message that they need to be “fixed” and that they need to “transform” because they are solely at fault for their circumstances.

During my interview with Hammer, a 32-year old Work Track Job Developer who works out of the Northside location, he mentioned stigma twice. His response below was shared when I asked him how he describes Work Track:

> Hammer: [Work Track] is a non-profit that matches job seekers to specific employers and specific positions. Uh, we do so for folks facing obstacles into employment. Back in the 60’s, when we first started, we worked exclusively worked with folks with developmental disabilities. Over the years we have broadened our services to address a wider variety of obstacles. Among them a lack of education, legal history, any injury that forces a career change. Yeah, that is what I do. Go hang out, meet people, and figure out where they ... figure out where our folks fit in with you….Yeah, I covered most of the bases. I get to slip in legal history without freaking anybody out. Jump right back to "an injury that forces a career change." That is safe, right? That’s not stigmatized [sarcastic tone]. Then again, that’s how I do it if somebody asked me quickly. I don’t know.

Hammer lists the myriad of material and discursive obstacles: developmental disabilities, lack of education, legal history, and injury. He specifically highlights the stigma associated with legal history. Many of the patrons at Work Track have prior convictions, which Hammer notes is stigmatized through his sarcasm. The reality is that all of these

obstacles to employment Hammer listed are stigmatized. Hammer engages in impression management on behalf of Work Track patrons. Earlier in his interview, Hammer described the mission of Work Track in way that highlights the stigmatized perceptions of his work and WT patrons. Many theoretical strands in the web-of-power that maintain social class status or force downward social mobility on their working-class patrons are manifest in Hammer's description of the chronically unemployed, who are in his opinion stigmatized:

> It's very difficult to communicate our mission statement quickly, I have determined because you know basically, we're helping the chronically unemployed. And [pause] employers are terrified of the chronically unemployed. They're terrified of it. There's no romantic stigma to that type of service. There's none, zero. At one point, our company had been able to unite our services under the banner of disability services. Real-focused brand, right? Now, the thing that ties our candidates together, just as fundamental, but [pause] a little more intimidating, our candidates face obstacles to employment.

Hammer describes the common thread that brings their patrons together as *obstacles to employment*. This is what he describes as the "fundamental" tie to the population Work Track serves. Hammer also implies this common tie across WT patrons is stigmatizing when he describes it as "intimidating." Intimidation would also fall in line with Smith's (2007) argument that addresses fear, social avoidance, and rejection as possible effects of stigma communication messages. Furthermore, scholars have articulated that fear about the body class has been socially constructed (Dougherty, 2011; Marvin, 1994). Fear of the body class coupled with fear of stigma weave tacit power-laden set of obstacles to employment for many working-class job seekers. Patrons at Work Track use their memberships to help manage the large scope of obstacles they face to employment. Sociologist have analyzed the consequences of economic inequality and assert that individuals with lower social class status are more likely to have negative outcomes

regarding health, education, crime and incarceration, social relations, and politics (Neckerman & Torche, 2007). The patrons at Work Track are not an exception to Neckerman & Torche's (2007) findings. Furthermore, the negative societal consequences to lower social class status create obstacles to securing employment. Each patron at Work Track accesses WT's organizational services in an attempt to holistically transform their employment situation.

The staff is aware of the intersecting obstacles that impact their patrons' lives and entrap them into unemployment and thus a lower social class status. The programming at Work Track attempts to address the barriers to employment in a holistic fashion. When the staff talks about the organization's philosophical approach they use the word "transformation." Transformation is a cultural buzz word at Work Track and captures the way WT staff conceptualize their organizational mission. For example, Bo, Assistant Director at the Westside location, talked to me about transformation:

> It is a transformational–at least our piece. You're saying [Work Track], but I have to speak specifically to [CC]. I say more so [CC] because that's the larger chunk of what I do. It's a transformational piece that yes, it gives you job skills. We give you job skills. We give you job placement assistance after those job skills have been instructed…. In my professional experience, that doesn't work [only providing job skills and placement assistance]. To me, I would say it's a transformational program that says not only will we give you skills for a job and we're going to help you find a job, we're also going to help you understand how your life should transform as well. For this particular population, being unemployed is not an isolated situation. It's systemic. There's a whole bunch of other factors that contribute, whether education, learning disabilities, whatever it might be. There's a whole lot of things that feed into the unemployment piece that we try to attempt to address as well. It's the new term. It's the buzz term I guess for us now, but I think it's a transformational program. It's job readiness, it's job skills, it's job placement assistance. It's all of those things, but it's also a more refined you. I think that's what it is on a very generic, loose scale.

The transformational process that Work Track attempts to facilitate for its patrons addresses many barriers to employment. These barriers exist both materially and

discursively. In Bo's quote above he talks about the importance of addressing obstacles to employment with a holistic transformational philosophy. Bo elaborates the necessity to deal with *all* of the obstacles a job seeker faces. Note in his explanation Bo says unemployment is "systemic." His language use reveals the structural nature of obstacles to employment. Social class inequality across the globe result in many obstacles to employment, such as sickness, crime, incarceration, and little to no social capital (Neckerman & Torche, 2007). While Bo articulates the structural processes, he shifts his language from addressing a collective problem and shifts to an individual solution. For example, later in the excerpt above Bo implies that it is individual's responsibility to transform when he says, "your life should transform" and "it's also a more refined you." His words reveal a tension between a collective problem that requires an individual solution. Bo draws from a common American cultural discourse in "meritocratic individualism," which posits that it is an individual's responsibility to transform his/her situation (Newman, 1988). This type of individualistic rationale is also tied to stigma communication, which blames the stigmatized for the stigma and its consequences (Smith, 2007). He explains that the WT programming would be ineffective if it only tackled one obstacle, such as the lack of a trade or expertise. If WT only provided workforce trade skills training, then the other obstacles would still exist and potentially prevent employment. Taking a more holistic transformation approach attempts to break down the various types and processes of power that are working against the working-class in the web-of-power. For example, in the RJ program an Individual Employment Plan is created:

> Eddie: We have a checklist that we attempt to govern the student's progress off of. In Week 1 we assume that you are going to

complete orientation within that allotted time. Then Week 2 we start to assess your potential and your career interest through various activities and then assessments. We come up with an IEP.

Angela: What does that stand for?

Eddie: It's Individual Employment and I'm forgetting the last word. It will come to me eventually.

Angela: It's okay. I have a list of acronyms I could probably look at that.

Eddie: Once we have that then we start to really get rolling with programming, the counseling piece kicks in. Of course we are going to continue with the education depending on how you come to us in the program. If there was any addiction issues we start addressing that by Week 3. Then you are actively engaged the community service projects along with our life-skills and career development as we try to move you closer to your end goal.

In Eddie's description you can see a systematic approach at tackling both material and discursive obstacles to employment. The Individual Employment Plan (IEP) is the way Work Track facilitate its programming for each patron. The first step is to assess potential career interests, which is then vetted by activities and assessments. The activities are developed to build work-related skills sets. The second step Eddie describes deals with counseling and addiction issues. The final step incorporates civic engagement through community service and life skills training. WT's approach to managing the obstacles to employment is an effort at changing the many negative consequences of social inequality. I agree with WT's holistic approach. However, I critique the individualistic assumptions that that the negative consequences of social inequality are an individual responsibility to transform.

The subtext of WT's individualistic message hints at the scholarly notion of "meritocratic individualism," which is an ideal that each person is responsible for her/his own fate (Newman, 1988). Belief in the American Dream and a meritocracy functions by

providing a sense of comfort and control over one's life and future (Lamont, 2000). Newman (1999) describes a hope that the working-poor use because it provides something greater that people can aspire towards. I see a similar story that is woven into the "transformation" rhetoric at Work Track. The American Dream persuades us to ignore the structural forces around us and points our attention to merit as the single driving force of our fate, which Hochschild (1995) argues is wholly untrue. There is evidence that American systems and structures work to the distinct advantage of some and the disadvantage of others (Hanson & Zogby, 2010), yet people at Work Track believe transformation is a personal responsibility, an ideal closely aligned with the American Dream. Social problems manifest at the individual level, which allows people to ignore the structural nature of problems like unemployment.

Work Track's holistic, transformative approach to programming is described by Gordon, the Director of the Westside location:

> One of the aspects of [Community Construction] is a five point process. It's an education program. We are also a construction trades program. We are counseling program because most of our students come here with issues, and that is a true rubber band that holds them from progressing, is that. The rest of it we train them on GEDs; that's lipstick.
>
> We need to turn the pig into something more desirable. We do that by letting them work through this PTSD that 25-30% of our students have. Let's work through these actual abuse issues, which 90% of youth males have, believe it or not surprisingly enough. Let's work through all of these other issues that are really affecting your progress. Because what happens is, we have so many students who graduate.
>
> They make it and they're doing great, then they're back here because the rubber band got tight. We never cut it. We've never dealt with the underlying issue that causes my behavior to revert back to the same things that is done before. I've never dealt with the real problem.

Gordon outlines many of the challenges that Work Track job seekers have, not only a lack of socially legitimized education and skill, but also underlying emotional trauma. The challenges Gordon describes manifest in the lives of Work Track patrons both materially and discursively. All of these collective social conditions operate against the working-class and intertwine to entrap individual lives in unemployment because the working-class unemployed are stigmatized. Metaphorically the strands in the web-of-power collectively work against members of the working-class. Gordon hints at individual responsibility as well when he says, "I've never dealt with the real problem." Social inequality and its consequences have a lot to do with the larger societal structure (Neckerman & Torche, 2007). Because social inequality manifests at the individual level it is easy to overlook and instead place sole responsibility on individuals. It would be helpful if Work Track called attention to the larger social structure at play in individual circumstances because it would help to re-frame the struggle for employment by shifting some of the responsibility toward the larger systems and structures at play. Ideally this would function to reduce self-blaming in marginalized and stigmatized populations.

Work Track patrons are aware of their situation and of the various obstacles that they face. They frequently took personal responsibility for their struggles. Many of these patrons expressed gratitude during our interviews for the program and the attempt to transform themselves and their situation. Brianna, an 18-year old Work Track patron in the Restorative Justice (RJ) program, described her experience this way:

> Brianna: I—I've actually learned a lot, um...especially a résumé, I had no clue how to do [laughs] a résumé. Um, I learned some new websites to get like, jobs off of that's hiring...Um...I've learned some new math, that I'm not too good at. Um...
>
> Angela: Like what?

Brianna: The equations.

Angela: Okay.

Brianna: I don't like them.

Angela: [Laughs] Okay. Um, anything else...can you think of...that you've learned? Have you learned anything about yourself?

Brianna: Uh, yeah, I've changed a lot since I've been here. Um, I had a pretty rough past before came...

Angela: Um hmm.

Brianna: ...but everybody's [pause] everybody's proud of me, I've changed a lot...since what I used to be.

Angela: How—how so?

Brianna: Which was—which was I had like, anger problems. I didn't control it very well, but--I've changed a lot [inaudible].

Angela: So, you feel like you have better control over that?

Brianna: Yes, like I use coping skills, like reading. Here it'll be reading and writing, but mainly it's music for me...I have other options.

Brianna discusses both vocational and personal changes since she started the RJ program at Work Track. She explains that she now has better options for coping with her anger. Anger management is one of the many life skills that Work Track incorporates into its programming. Patrons like Brianna, who were brought up in the foster care system, did not learn middle-class communication skills such as anger management partially due to the absence of family structure. Lack of a familial support structure is a material reality that results in material and discursive obstacles to employment. Brianna explains that she has learned how to discursively cope with anger through the use of writing, reading, and listening to music. The lack of anger management can be an obstacle to employment because of how middle-class communication norms are privileged in the workplace. Jackman and Jackman (1983), explain that individuals who are lower on the social class

strata have a tendency to communicate in ways that carry greater emotion. Kramer and Hess (2002) outline socially constructed appropriate emotional display rules for professionals, which follow middle-class communication norms. Highly emotional communication has a tendency to violate middle-class politeness (Mills, 2004) and volume (Morris, 2007) norms, which result in workplace stigma (Lubrano, 2004). Thus, Brianna's new anger management skills will help her navigate the workplace because workplaces are generally biased and structured to privilege middle-class communication norms. Her anger management training removes an obstacle to employment, but she internalizes it as something that was wrong about her. This emerges in the data when she says, "I had an anger management problem." Her communication is seen as a problem because of the system and how it is structured to privilege middle-class communication norms.

Other education efforts that are part of the programming cover topics such as parenting skills, financial literacy, leadership skills, relationship building and maintenance, street life, drug and alcohol use, among others. You can see that the gamut of services provided address a myriad of stigmatized material and discursive obstacles. In another interview I asked Omarion why he chose to join the program at Work Track.

Angela: Why did you choose [Work Track], or how did you hear about it?

Omarion: I actually, uh...you know um...I was goin' through some things back in the city, and I got in a little trouble...you know what I mean, so…my cousin actually graduated from this, uh program, yeah. He told me about it...told me it was…it was calm and cool up here, you know what I mean, like slower—it's slow—it's slower, but it's been keeping me out of trouble, you know what I mean, so...

Angela: Okay, cool. What city? You said you were getting in trouble in 'the city'?

Omarion: Aww, yeah, yeah, [major Midwestern metropolitan city]. It's hectic out there.

Angela: Is it?

Omarion: Yeah, I—be honest with you I was gonna end up in dead or in prison if I didn't move here.

Omarion articulates the gravity of his situation saying if he did not join he would have either been "dead or in prison." He is a parent of two boys, one that is five years old and the other is five weeks old. He explained to me that one of the reasons he was going through with the program was for them. Omarion was heavily involved with crime before he relocated to join Work Track. Omarion relocated from a major Midwestern metropolitan city that is known for its high rates of unemployment and crime. Western's (2006) research notes that a rise in economic inequality and high unemployment lead to an increase in criminal behavior and incarceration. Western (2006) argues that increased rates of incarceration and crime exacerbate social inequality for marginalized populations, namely racial minorities in poverty. Omarion was caught in this cycle and had to physically relocate to escape. Being in the program is a way for Omarion to "transform" his situation, learn a trade, and secure employment that will not result with him ending up "dead or in prison." With the support of WT, Omarion is individually transforming his obstacles to employment. Work Track is positively impacting his material reality because he is no longer on the road to "end up dead or in prison." When I asked Rico to tell me something positive that has happened as a result of his joining Work Track he shares the following accomplishment:

Rico: I graduated Drug Court.

Angela: Hmm. That's positive. How'd that make you feel?

Rico: It just—me—it just [pause] it took a big burden off my shoulders, man.

Angela: Um hmm.

Rico: Like, I had a—I had a lot of weight on my shoulders.

Angela: Yeah?

Rico: Um hmm. Now, I'm cool. I ain't stressin' or nothin'.

Angela: Um hmm.

Rico: I'm still gonna stress, of course, but...I just—I just felt like I...did somethin' really great.

Rico struggles with drug use and every time he tests positive Work Track is legally required to restrict his use of power tools and machinery on the work site. In our interview he discloses that one of his proudest moments is when he finished his probationary period and did not test positive for drugs. Drug use and addiction is a material obstacle to employment. Work Track supports these patrons by providing drug rehabilitation and counseling to overcome drug use and addiction. Drug use and addiction is also stigmatized (Bailey, 2005; Reith, 2004). I later ask him what he has learned since he joined the WT program and he addressed overcoming several discursive obstacles to employment:

Rico: Um...I think...my authority, like...'cause I don't like authority for real—I think I'm gettin' better at that.

Angela: Do you think that's gonna help you in the long run?

Rico: Yeah, 'cause I don't like people telling me what to do.

Angela: Um hmm.

Rico: Uh...I think uh—I got—my vocabulary has increased tremendously. See how I'm talkin'?

Angela: Yeah. You're doing good.

Rico: Um...[pause] and I'm kinda like...I'm respectful more towards people...

Angela: Um hmm.

Rico: ...like, I'm not very judgmental no more, it's--I'm just a totally different person.

Angela: Yeah?

Rico: Besides the...drug use and all that. But I have changed a lot comin' through this program. Yeah, it is. It's been a long journey.

Rico describes the changes he perceives in himself: higher levels of respect towards authority, increased vocabulary, and feeling less judgmental. These changes in Rico's situation are manifest discursively. As a working-class job seeker, Rico has managed obstacles both discursively (e.g. vocabulary, perceptions of authority) and materially (drug addiction). The patrons of Work Track articulate many of the obstacles in their lives that are inhibiting their job search and their ability to maintain employment. Note the individualized responsibility of his description. Rico uses the word "I" in nearly every element of his account above. The onus of transformation and the fault of the employment barriers seem to fall solely on the individual. It is important to note that I am not implying people should not have a personal sense of responsibility, but rather that our life trajectories are not simply a direct result of individual choices. Individual life trajectories and opportunities are impacted by structural forces that constrain and enable social life, and job seekers should be mindful and cognizant of those forces and their impact. Unemployment in particular is connected to larger structural powers (e.g. economic, political, racial, gender, etc.) that constrain individual opportunity.

WT patrons also note positive transformation of their material and discursive situation and themselves, which they attribute to the program. I close this section with a quote from Carlos. He describes the transformation that he has seen of other patrons and then talks about how Work Track is helping him as he dually manages material and discursive obstacles to employment:

Carlos: I seen people come up here, literally in shambles. And leave this building with good paying jobs, cars—you know what I'm sayin', just doin' really, really well for themselves.

Angela: Um hmm.

Carlos: And those are the same people that came up here with patches in they shirts, and--you know what I'm sayin', ripped up jeans, shoes worn out, but they actually put initiative to make themselves [pause] better than that. You know?

Angela: Um hmm. How has [Work Track] helped you?

Carlos: Hmmmm [pause] 'Cause One: it's helping me get my GED; Two: it's giving me something to do, keeping from bein' out here [in the streets].

Angela: Okay.

Carlos: Three: I'm getting paid. May not be getting paid much, but I'm gettin' paid.

Angela: Something, right?

Carlos: Yeah. And three it's helping me network. It's—it's a good networking process, so.....like I said, I had those two references from here, Ms. Garth and Ms. Harper, and they both referred me to that AmeriCorps thing. Which I feel like the references, really were great.

Angela: Um hmm.

Carlos: So, I have a good chance to LEAVE [this state].

Angela: Okay.

Carlos: You know? They giving me that opportunity, so I'm trying to take advantage of that, so...they helping me out in a lot of ways…

Carlos sums up the aim of the "transformational" process. He said he saw people come to Work Track in "shambles" and then left the program successfully "doin' really, really well for themselves." Carlos highlights material changes of transformation as he describes someone joining with "patches in they shirt" and "ripped up jeans" then leaving the program with "good paying jobs" and "cars." This program is providing support that will allow working-class job seekers to ideally overcome many obstacles to employment. Materially, Work Track helps to meet the needs of patrons by providing food, clothing, transportation, and offering a stipend. Discursively, Work Track helps increase the level of education and skills training. These are just a few of the support services Work Track provides that allow patrons to overcome and manage the many stigmatizing issues they face as barriers to employment. Taking part in the services at Work Track, gives the working-class unemployed person a chance to avoid total entrapment by the strands in the web-of-power. However, WT employees should call attention to the larger biased social structures that contribute to the stigma and barriers of employment for working-class job seekers.

Conclusion: Managing Intersecting Stigma in the Absence of Work

The web-of-power is a theoretical metaphor and frame work that reveals how a multiplicity of power operates in society. Stigma is one type of power that is rooted in and intertwined with other barriers to employment. These obstacles to employment create a system of disadvantage for job seekers.

Members of Executive Career Transitions are trying to manage a tension that emerges between stigmatized and valued attributes. These job seekers are continually stigmatized on two fronts due to their age and jobless status. This stigma is a discursive

reality that is continually reinforced through messages they hear at the very organization they come to for support, ECT. Messages that reinforce the stigma of age and unemployment imply that the patrons of ECT should accept these stigmas, apply them to self, and learn to communicatively manage them. Stigma is a power-laden obstacle to employment. Experiencing unemployment threatens downward social mobility and thus is connected to social class status. The longer ECT members stay unemployed the more likely they are to lose ground on the social class hierarchy. The stigma of joblessness and downward social mobility becomes another strand in the web-of-power. ECT members are available to work and have a wealth of work experience. These attributes should be value to their job search, not barriers to employment.

Work Track is trying to "transform" the employment situation of lower class and chronically unemployed individuals. In order to effectively escape the entrapment of social inequality job seekers at Work Track have to individually "transform" by increasing their education, gaining work skills, overcoming addiction, and manage their survival of tough past lives that have commonly resulted in post-traumatic stress disorder, among other challenges. At WT the onus of transformation is placed on the individual, which is consistent with stigma communication literature (Smith, 2007) and belief in a meritocracy (Newman, 1999). Attention is rarely if ever drawn to the oppressive systematic structures of power that operate against social groups and produce social inequality (Neckerman & Torche, 2007). Working-class job seekers must manage both material and discursive obstacles to employment that result in stigma. Work Track attempts to holistically support individuals so that they can secure and maintain employment.

Metaphorical Assumption: Dependent Children and Competent Entrepreneurs

This section of my analysis critiques the underlying assumptions of each organization using a comparative approach. Each organizational culture operates on basic assumptions that guide thinking, behavior, decision-making, and other aspects of organizational life. Schein's (1992) model of organizational culture explains that each culture is grounded in basic assumptions. Assumptions are taken for granted beliefs that are deeply held by organizational members. Schein (1992) argues that assumptions are implicit, abstract, and subtle. My interpretive critical analysis will use metaphor as a way to draw out and articulate underlying assumptions for each organization.

The use of metaphor to study organizations and organizational communication is a way to foster meaning and understanding. Organizationally focused scholars across disciplines have identified a large body of different metaphors to analytically theorize about and explain organizational life (for examples see Alvesson, 2002; Deetz & Mumby, 1985; Putnam, Phillips, Chapman, 1996; Alvesson, Smith & Turner, 1995). Metaphors have the potential to provoke thought by infusing careful theoretical analysis with linguistic or poetic creativity (Inns & Jones, 1996). Alvesson, (2002) identifies four advantages to the use of metaphor for the purposes of studying organizations. The advantages of using metaphor include: 1) ability to develop new ideas and guide analysis in novel ways, 2) can communicate insight and facilitate understanding, 3) draws attention to the previous limited ways of understanding, and 4) may facilitate an examination of basic assumptions underlying social phenomena (Alvesson, 2002). The use of metaphor in this theme will contribute to this chapter by providing an interpretive

critical critique of the underlying assumptions for both Work Track and Executive Career Transitions.

Metaphor: Working class as Dependent Children

This theme reveals the way Work Track operates on a metaphorical assumption that the working-class unemployed are like *dependent children* who need a *caretaker*. Social interaction at Work Track is guided by the power of this tacit metaphorical assumption. This metaphor is simultaneously enabling and constraining because it operates both productively and destructively for the members of Work Track. The critique of the metaphor reveals the way that Work Track attempts to empower its job seekers through control mechanisms. I overview and critique this underlying metaphorical assumption by first discussing what the metaphor is, then revealing how the metaphorical assumption is enacted within the organizational culture of Work Track, and finally overviewing the dual productive/destructive outcomes of the metaphorical assumption. In this section I reveal the complex and contested nature of this organizational metaphor and its manifestation of power that results in both care and control of the working-class unemployed.

The organizational culture of work track operates on the assumption that working-class unemployed job seekers are like *dependent children* who need a *caretaker*. This metaphor emerged during my analysis of observed social interaction, organizational talk regarding staff/patrons' roles/responsibilities, organizational policy, and in communication that describes and defines what Work Track is and what Work Track does. The metaphor is revealed in consistent and cohesive child-oriented language used by organizational members.

I first heard this metaphor during my initial orientation meeting at Work Track. The training and educational components of WT are often referred to as a school, which is a metaphor organizational members frequently use. School related language is part of organizational life at the Westside location. For example, words like students, discipline, graduation, and principal are embedded into the culture of Work Track. On January 23, 2013, I scheduled an initial meeting with Gordon, Director of WT's Westside location, and Mike the Director of Rehabilitative Services. The school metaphor was explained during this meeting. Gordon was giving me an overview of each program and we discussed how my participant observation could be logistically divided amongst the various programs at WT. Gordon was reviewing a document that broke down the timeline and benchmarks for the CC, WR, and RJ programs. I recorded our conversation in my field notes:

> At the end of each program there are arrows that point to a big box that says "EMPLOYMENT". Gordon said, "Our whole goal is employment. We want them to secure employment, maintain employment, and succeed in employment." He looked at Mike. Mike looked back and Gordon said that's why we're called [Work Track]. We're here to help [track down work]. Then Mike said, "Everything has the end goal of employment." At this moment there seemed to be a climatic crescendo. I could tell they were both passionate about this cause and their work. Gordon continued, "We do that by basically running a school. We have classes, training, lunch breaks, teachers, counselors, homework, tests. And Mike chimed in, "We have DISCIPLINE and this [holding up Gordon's hand] is the principal." We all laughed. I said, "Well yeah." Gordon explained that their goal was to "help people who sometimes can't get ahead."

During this meeting Gordon and Mike introduced me to the school metaphor and explicitly laid out the components behind it. School language permeates the micro-level organizational discourse at the Westside location. The school metaphor is used as a framing technique to talk about the organizational mission: helping job seekers find employment. Communicating about WT as a school provides a framework of language

for organizational members to draw from when they think and communicate about WT's programming efforts and structure. It is important to note that the notion of school Work Track employs is similar to a primary or secondary educational institution because Gordon referenced a "principal" in the excerpt above. In the American cultural context, "principal" is the commonplace title for the top authority figures at primary and secondary educational facilities. Note that primary and secondary educational facilities are for children or adolescents who are dependents, not for independent adults.

The school metaphor emerged again during my interview with Bo, the newest Assistant Director, at Work Track who had been working there approximately three months at the time of our interview. He explained that the school metaphor was used as a way to explain his role at the organization when he was hired.

> Bo: My first week here, someone had to be sent to me for disciplinary referrals. I'm like, okay, now what? This first one, no one ever really showed me what was…what is the process….I was told that when I was hired by Mr. [Gordon], he was like, you can look at this way: You're the principal and I'm the superintendent, or you're the assistant principal and I'm the head principal…. However, any principal or any administrator or any disciplinarian has some sort of a policy or a continuum of, strike one, strike two kind of a thing. Not knowing what that was, the first couple of times, I really kind of turned into a counselor, so to speak. I was like, what's going on, what's the problem? That's how I think in terms of—I really believe especially in environments like this, you tell me to take my hat off and I explode, it's not about the hat. It's not about you telling me to do this—it's something else. It might be about the fact that you just got kicked out last night or you failed another drug test or….it has nothing to do with that. So I'm trying to peel back the layers.

Bo was instructed that he should conceptualize his role as an "assistant principal." Communicating about his role as an "assistant principal" draws from the school metaphor, which incorporates an implicit assumption that the people attending his "school" are like children. Bo explains that he did not understand the process of "disciplinary referrals" the first time someone was "sent to" him. Part of the Assistant

Director's literal job description is to manage "disciplinary referrals," which uses child-oriented, school language to refer to the process of managing policy violations.

The underlying metaphorical assumption is that working-class job seekers are like children in a school. The school operates as a caretaker for children ideally with their best interest in mind. Below, I overview how the metaphor is enacted. The metaphorical assumption constructs an asymmetrical power dynamic between Work Track patrons and staff. The metaphorical assumption constructs a relational, asymmetrical power dynamic between Work Track patrons and staff that is enacted in daily organizational life.

The child metaphor is enacted in a number of different positive and negative organizational behaviors and norms. For example, In Bo's earlier description he explains how he took on a *caretaker* position. His description reveals a positive organizational behavior. Instead of implementing a punitive "strike one, strike two, kind of thing" he explains that he "turned into a counselor." The counseling conversation that Bo describes reveals his level of care for the people he serves. He said he was trying to "peel back the layers" and really understand "what's going on?" and "what's the problem?" The caretaker role is positive because it allows Bo to extend a level of care and compassion to people struggling with unemployment. Bo's role as a counselor promotes understanding.

The dependent child metaphor is also enacted through organizational policy. Work Track operates on a complex point system that functions as a structure of control. Once a patron has received 20 points they are unable to progress to the next phase of the program and may potentially be kicked out, suspended, or required to begin the program again. During my interview with Ms. Lena, Adult Education Literacy Instructor for the CC program, described the point system to me:

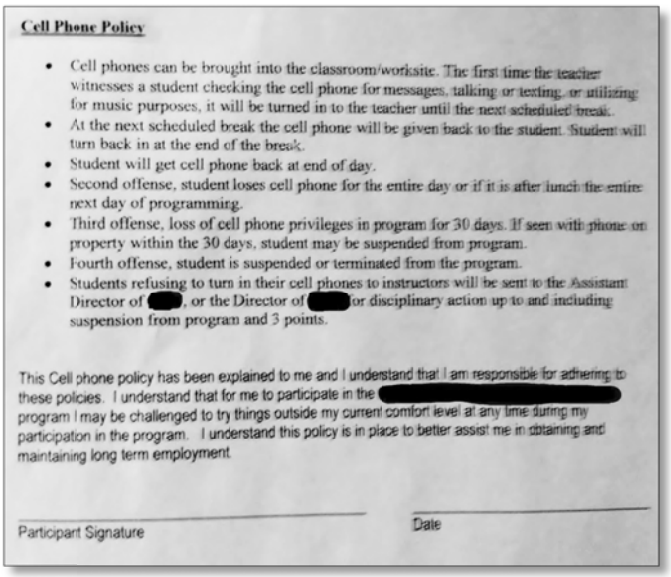
Lena: They get one point if they're tardy and then if they leave during the day, they get three points or if they don't show up, I think they get three. If they call in and don't come in, I think they get two. The point system doesn't quite work like the handbook says it does. I don't know.

Angela: Then at some point, there's a monetary consequence?

Lena: Yeah, I'm not sure. Well, they get a stipend. They earn a stipend while they're here in the classroom, but if they are like on their cell phone, if they do anything that's against the rules, I'll dock them on their stipend. Well, they get indignant. "You took my stipend." I say, "You just didn't earn it." This is the only place I know of in [the city] that they get paid to come into an adult ed program and work on their GED. I think that that word has gotten out so some are like, "Oh, yeah, go there and get paid to be there," but then they don't want to abide by the policies.

In Ms. Lena's description she reveals he punitive nature of the point system. Patrons are given points if "they're tardy and then if they leave during the day." Patrons are even given points "if they call in advance and don't come in." Figures 4 and 5 below include two images of documents that explain the point system regarding attendance and cell phone use, which were hanging the WT hallway on July 5, 2013.

Figure 4: Point System Cell Phone Policy



Cell Phone Policy

- Cell phones can be brought into the classroom/worksite. The first time the teacher witnesses a student checking the cell phone for messages, talking or texting, or utilizing for music purposes, it will be turned in to the teacher until the next scheduled break.
- At the next scheduled break the cell phone will be given back to the student. Student will turn back in at the end of the break.
- Student will get cell phone back at end of day.
- Second offense, student loses cell phone for the entire day or if it is after lunch the entire next day of programming.
- Third offense, loss of cell phone privileges in program for 30 days. If seen with phone on property within the 30 days, student may be suspended from program.
- Fourth offense, student is suspended or terminated from the program.
- Students refusing to turn in their cell phones to instructors will be sent to the Assistant Director of [redacted], or the Director of [redacted] for disciplinary action up to and including suspension from program and 3 points.

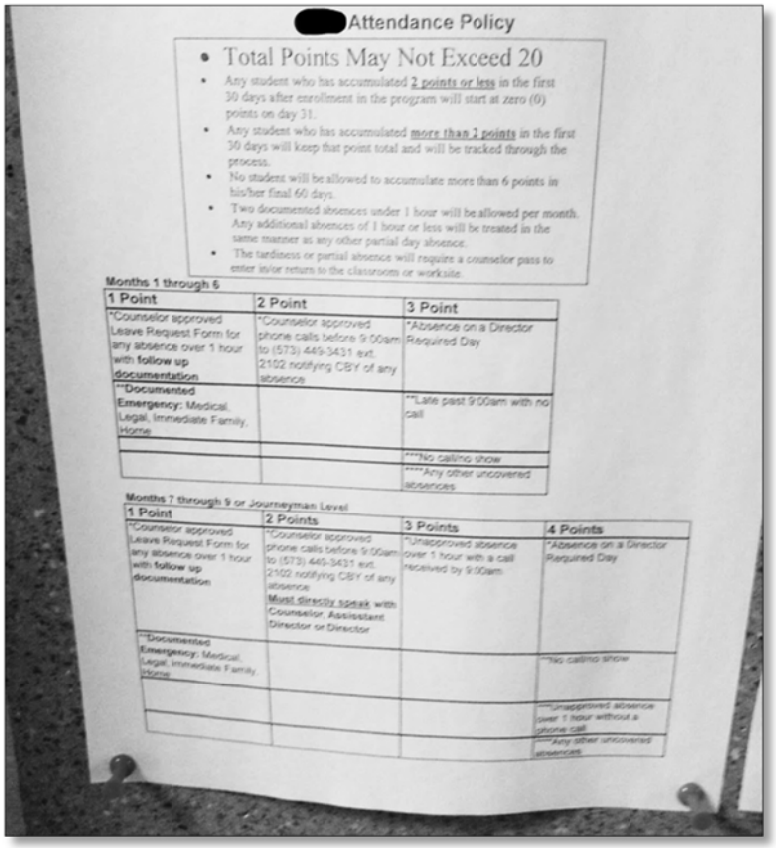
This Cell phone policy has been explained to me and I understand that I am responsible for adhering to these policies. I understand that for me to participate in the [redacted] program I may be challenged to try things outside my current comfort level at any time during my participaton in the program. I understand this policy is in place to better assist me in obtaining and maintaining long term employment

Participant Signature

Date

Figure 4: Organizational point system enforced to control cell phone use

Figure 5: Point System Attendance Policy



[redacted] Attendance Policy

- Total Points May Not Exceed 20
- Any student who has accumulated 2 points or less in the first 30 days after enrollment in the program will start at zero (0) points on day 31.
- Any student who has accumulated more than 2 points in the first 30 days will keep that point total and will be tracked through the process.
- No student will be allowed to accumulate more than 6 points in his/her final 60 days.
- Two documented absences under 1 hour will be allowed per month. Any additional absences of 1 hour or less will be treated in the same manner as any other partial day absence.
- The tardiness or partial absence will require a counselor pass to enter in/or return to the classroom or worksite.

Months 1 through 6

1 Point	2 Point	3 Point
*Counselor approved Leave Request Form for any absence over 1 hour with follow up documentation	*Counselor approved phone calls before 9:00am to (573) 449-3431 ext. 2102 notifying CBY of any absence	*Absence on a Director Required Day
**Documented Emergency: Medical, Legal, Immediate Family, Home		**Late past 9:00am with no call
		***No calling show
		****Any other uncovered absences

Months 7 through 9 or Journeyman Level

1 Point	2 Points	3 Points	4 Points
*Counselor approved Leave Request Form for any absence over 1 hour with follow up documentation	*Counselor approved phone calls before 9:00am to (573) 449-3431 ext. 2102 notifying CBY of any absence. Must directly speak with Counselor, Assistant Director or Director	*Unapproved absence over 1 hour with a call received by 9:00am	*Absence on a Director Required Day
**Documented Emergency: Medical, Legal, Immediate Family, Home			**No calling show
			***Unapproved absence over 1 hour without a phone call
			****Any other uncovered absences

Figure 5. Organizational point system enforced to control attendance and tardiness.

The point system is creates a structure of punishment and control. The policy documents explicitly use the following metaphorical school language: student, teacher, offense, disciplinary action, and suspended. As Ms. Lena points out the consequences of the point system are not strictly organizational consequences. In other words, consequences to the point system impact material conditions for working-class patrons because money earned during the training program can also be “docked.” Monetary consequences happen when patron behavior falls outside the organizational policy. The dependent child metaphor underlies the construction of these organizational policies and reveals the assumptions of Work Track’s organizational culture.

Material conditions of working-class job seekers have been addressed throughout this chapter. Working-class unemployed people have a lack of material resources, which speaks to the context surrounding the monetary consequences of the point policy. One of the construction instructors, Maximus Constructionist, talked with me about how he thought the monetary consequences should be changed.

> Maximus: The students, they do get a stipend. They start out at about $3 a day. At the end of the nine months I think they are at about $6 a day. Then the hours that they are doing construction they make minimum wage. They get paid every two weeks, every other Friday. Same as staff. They get two checks: a stipend check and a wage check.
>
> Angela: Okay, so they can see how it falls out.
>
> Maximus: Now, they can lose stipend by infractions during the week, like no uniform, sagging, using the "N" word, showing up late, and disrupting the classroom.
>
> Angela: It is like the consequences to actions?
>
> Maximus: That is not working well, so we are going to talk about something different this week. What I am going to suggest tomorrow in our staff meeting is that at three infractions in one day you would lose a day at the job site.
>
> Angela: Which is a bigger?
>
> Maximus: That is six times $42, not $1. The whole stipend thing, the using that for consequences, doesn’t work. They are like "Take my dollar, I don’t care. I’m going to wear my bling."

This instructor explains that the existing system of control is not working and should be more severe. During the next staff meeting Maximus Constructionist planned on suggesting a more stringent financial penalty. The lack of material resources available to working-class job seekers means that enacting a more stringent financial penalty could be detrimental to their well-being, which seems counter to the overall mission of Work

Track as an unemployment support organization. The enactment of the dependent child metaphor is complex and results in both positive and negative outcomes.

There are multiple positive outcomes that emerge from the dependent child/caretaker metaphorical assumption. This dependent child/caretaker relationship provides working-class job seekers with a sense of stability, structure, and responsibility, which are positive outcomes. The organization also helps patrons feel successful because job seekers are able to take advantage of second chances and future opportunities. These positive outcomes illustrate the widespread level of compassion and care Work Track has for the working-class unemployed.

Work Track cares for its patrons similar to the way that caretakers care for children. Arguably, parental roles should include the responsibility of providing opportunity for children. Opportunity-orientated language frequently emerged when I talked to various members of the WT staff. The staff strongly desires to provide opportunity to patrons who have had few opportunities and privileges in life. When I asked Eddie Kane, the Assistant Director of the RJ program, what he thought WT was particularly good at doing for its members he said:

> Eddie Kane: Still back to the opportunities and second and third chances, we deal with the population that the world has already determined what they should be. We give them a chance to redefine what could be. That's the great thing about being here and being a part of [Work Track].

Eddie Kane appreciates the chance to provide unending support to WT patrons and he sees it as a great thing. His sentiment reveals the good intentions behind the belief system. Like a parent or caretaker, Eddie seeks to provide opportunity. In Eddie's response he recognizes the stigma and labels that have been placed on the people he serves when Eddie says, "the world has already determined what they should be." Eddie

sees his role and the role of the staff he manages as one that facilitates a better chance in life, one that allows people to thrive and with opportunity, not to simply survive. This is one way that the metaphorical assumption results in positive outcomes for the patrons. Hammer echoes this sentiment in our interview.

> Hammer: I think we do a fantastic job making people feel like they've got some [pause] they've got a chance. I think that's what we do best. I think people who come in here consistently feel they've got [pause] like there's a possibility. I wish that paid the bills.

Hammer also uses the word "chances" and instead of opportunity he says "possibilities." Work Track supports a population that has little to no support. This organization attempts to facilitate long-term futures full of "opportunity" and "possibilities." Organizational support systems that produce positive outcomes, such as Work Track, are needed in society.

Another way that Work Track positively cares for their patrons is by helping their patrons feel successful. One way Work Track symbolizes success is through the graduation ceremony. Graduation ceremonies are a ritualistic part of Work Track's organizational culture that symbolizes success for Work Track patrons. Please note that this ritual is a positive outcome that is directly connected to the school metaphor and underlying assumptions of the organizational culture. Gordon described this ritual to me during our interview.

> Gordon: We have graduation twice a year for all programs. What we do is…have people walking twice a year.
>
> Angela: Right.
>
> Gordon: It's really simple, even if you go out and get your job in March you get to come back to graduate and walk through. You're going to get your certificates now but we're going to do the formal ceremony. It's important because so many of our students never got to walk

the first time. Their family has always labeled them as "You're a troublemaker. You're never going to amount to anything. Blah, blah." Here they get to stand in front of the world, even if family doesn't attend. You stand in front of the world and say "I accomplished this."

Angela: Right.

Gordon: For many of our students it's the first time they've accomplished something that they consider positive that they have been a part of. So the graduation ceremony is so important. Everyone goes "Well, you guys give so many certificates out there." Yes, and if I could come up with 20 more, I would come up with 20 more. [Laughs] We could just call one person up and give them their stack of [certificates] and this that, and the other. No, I want that student that earned seven certificates to walk up there seven times in front of the world. Hear their name announced seven times. The whole graduation ceremony lasts an hour and 15 minutes. We give an hour and 15 minutes to our students to clap for them, stand up, and say "Job well done." It's something that they will talk about for years to come. Yes, we can do that. Yes, we do that in our graduation ceremonies …the guest speaker. We have the robes, the caps, and the gowns.

The graduation ceremony is a powerful cultural ritual at Work Track. It allows the working-class job seekers to feel successful. Gordon explains that Work Track patrons are people who are routinely stigmatized when he says, "Their family has always labeled them as "You're a troublemaker. You're never going to amount to anything." The patrons' pasts make the symbolism of success important. Gordon cares about the people Work Track serves and wants them to succeed and to feel that success. Gordon explains that each patron deserves to "hear their name announced" and have people "clap for them, stand up, and say, "Job well done." Sara, the Vice President of Work Track, echoes this sentiment when I asked her what Work Track is good at doing for its patrons. In her response Sara said, "Showing them or having them experience success. So many of our

folks have not experienced that and that's so sad." Later in our interview Sara elaborated that graduation was a way they facilitate feelings of success.

> Sara: Westside location has graduations twice a year, but [other locations] have a graduation after every class… whenever a student graduates, yeah, those are a big tradition. It's important for our staff to attend those [graduations] because you get lost in the weeds and boy, to see them [the patrons] nine months, six, nine, twelve months after they come in, to be proud and have a GED and have portable credentials, you can't put a price on that….I would have to say yeah. I think that's … I can't think of anything better than that success, helping them to experience success. So many people I've heard say "I never finished anything in my life" or "I never thought I could do this."

Sara explains that helping patrons to experience success is one of the most positive outcomes Work Track cultivates for the working-class unemployed. This is an invaluable outcome that emerges from the underlying assumptions of Work Track. The organization and its staff care about their patrons, which is why the organization not only provides transportation, clothing and food, but they also try to provide a "chance" for their patrons to cultivate future "opportunities" and "possibilities." All of these descriptions cumulate to reveal the positive outcomes of the larger metaphorical assumption.

In addition to staff, WT patrons articulated the positive outcomes of the program. For example, Keon shared with me that the program helped him by giving him structure.

Angela: Um, how has this program helped you, at all?

Keon: Um...[pause] Kinda gave me a little bit of structure.

Angela: Yeah?

Keon: I would say like comin' on time, doin' certain things that I need to do...knowin' that I got a certain amount of time to promote and I gotta get a certain amount of things on a checklist done to promote...

Angela: Um hmm.

Keon: ...so it kinda make me, responsible...more responsible.

Angela: Um hmm.

Keon: And like, just take on challenges...and different tasks.

Angela: Okay. And, do you think the structure is good?

Keon: [short pause] It's good to have structure.

Angela: Did you not have it before?

Keon: Yeah, but...it's kinda like, in a different way...[pause] kinda like, um...uh, 'cause like, I ain't been in school since 2008, so it's like...comin' here every day and all that is hard 'cause I'm not used to...bein' in school, and comin' to school and workin' and bein' here from 8 to 3.

Angela: Right.

Instilling structure and responsibility was beneficial to WT patrons. Thus the outcome of the underlying assumptions is not always negative. There are many positive experiences and results that patrons have due to their organizational membership. These positive experiences and results are connected to and supported by the underlying cultural assumption that working-class job seekers are like dependent children who need care.

The tacit caretaker-child assumption continually emerged. For example, when I asked Eddie, Assistant director at the Westside location, how he would describe the participants in his program the child-caretaker metaphor emerged.

Angela: How would you describe the patrons or your students?

Eddie: Difficult at times but looking for something because a large portion of our population comes from the foster care system where they have been bounced from place to place. Right now we are that stability. The same love and care that we share for each other as staff trickles over into the classroom almost to the point where we have created an atmosphere that they [the students] don't want to leave.

Angela: Which is good and bad?

Eddie: Good and bad. [Good] that we are also passionate about what do. Bad in the sense that we could potentially be crippling the progress. We have to continue to work and redefine how we manage that, so that we can encourage the transformation process that we are geared to promote.

Eddie uses language that exemplifies the cultural assumption when he talks about the atmosphere of “love and care” and providing “stability” to their participants. Again, I would like to point out that the intentions behind WT services are good and many of the outcomes are positive. Providing stability to a group of people who has never had structure is supportive. However, as Eddie points out, there are also potential negative consequences. Eddie explained that “WT could be “potentially crippling the progress” of patrons with their approach. This is one of several negative outcomes that emerge from the relational dynamic at Work Track.

The ultimate goal of the organization is to empower their job seekers to find long term employment. At times WT’s model empowers patrons though the use of control. Empowerment through control emerged during a semi-structured interview I had with Maximus Constructionist about his work.

Maximus: You just have to repeat yourself a whole lot around here, but that is okay. I think even if they [the patrons] don’t know it, they are looking for structure. You got to be really structured, almost military style with the uniforms, the sagging, the "N" word, and the continual just professionalism to try every day.

The asymmetrical power relationship is revealed when Maximus says, “even if they don’t know it, they are looking for structure.” His statement implies that the staff knows better in some respects. Please note that the underlying assumption assumes a position of care that is in the best interest of the patrons. However, the outcome produces a troubling relational dynamic because these patrons are not dependent children, they are adults.

Later in his interview Maximus Constructionist elaborates on why he believes a "military style" of control is necessary.

> Maximus: All of those routines are designed to help transform the students, to get them ready for life. We do have to get up every day and we show up. We suit up, so being responsible.

The logic that Maximus Constructionist uses to justify his use of control is that developing routines and giving structure both aid in the positive transformation of the patron to prepare them for life outside of Work Track. You can see in his language that the intent is similar to that of caretaker over a child. Maximus says he wants to instill "responsibility" and "structure" for his "students," which are all very positive outcomes. The final result is positive, but the control mechanisms used to reach the end result are problematic. The way WT staff interacts with patrons manifests an asymmetrical power relationship where staff exercise *power over* job seekers in order to aid them with reemployment efforts. Exercising power over patrons seems to be dominant way responsibility, care, and structure is organizationally provided for working-class job seekers.

One of WT's newer employees questioned the organizational policies. During my interview Harper, a new employee of WT, described the point system as "overpowering."

> Angela: Right. Um, how about you describe the general atmosphere environment?
>
> Harper: They can be a little overpowering sometimes. Um, I think the, some of the rules are a little too (pause) strict for this, um, population.
>
> Angela: Yea?
>
> Harper: The point system I think is a little too strict for this population, um,

> (pause) as far as how it's done. Now I think that they need a point system to an extent. But saying in nine months' time they can only miss seven days is not gonna happen.

Harper explains to me in her interview that WT rules are too strict and unreasonable. She uses the language "overpowering," which is indicative of the culture because the staff regularly exercises *power over* the patrons. The culture of control is manifest in the underlying assumption that their working-class patrons are like *dependent children*. During this chapter various excerpts from interviews and field notes have metaphorically compared WT to a school, jail, detention center, and military. All of these metaphors include an asymmetrical power relationship where someone dominates and controls another. These metaphors are problematic and illustrate the way that WT patrons and staff conceptualize their relationship to one another. Thinking of WT, an unemployment support organization, in these terms is unhelpful and ultimately serves to constrain the reemployment efforts of the patrons. The cultural atmosphere of Work Track at times exemplifies pedagogy of poverty.

Haberman (1991) overviews the pedagogy of poverty that is commonplace in low-income urban schools. WT's culture is characteristic of pedagogy of poverty because similar to low-income schools WT operates on a system of authority and compliance (Haberman, 1991). In schools where the pedagogy of poverty exists teachers attempt to serve their students by using directive communication and expecting compliance. Using directive communication is one way that teachers in lower-income schools require "appropriate" behavior. The point system at Work Track mimics the pedagogy of poverty because staff use the point system to exert authority and force compliance from their working-class patrons. When behavior falls outside the limitations set by WT policy,

patrons are then disciplined. The resistance on behalf of the student is the one way they can exert agency in the organization. Working-class patrons resistance at WT is also reminiscent of students in low-income schools who resist the pedagogy of poverty. Haberman (1991) states,

> The authoritarian and directive nature of the pedagogy of poverty is somewhat deceptive about who is really in charge. Teachers seem to be in charge, in that they direct students to work on particular tasks, allot time, dispense materials, and choose the means of evaluation to be used. It is assumed by many that having control over such factors makes teachers "decision makers" who somehow shape the behavior of their students. But below this facade of control is another, more powerful level on which students actually control, manage, and shape the behavior of their teachers. Students reward teachers by complying. They punish by resisting. In this way students mislead teachers into believing that some things "work" while others do not. (p.292)

When the staff exerts authority through control it begins a power struggle between them and their patrons. Power struggles are problematic, especially since the patrons at WT have limited personal support systems, limited financial resources, and a high need for material resources. Punishing patrons like children strips away their dignity because it removes their autonomy. Having autonomy includes having the agency to make choices, to be in control of oneself, and permits freedom to engage in personal decision making (Buzzanell &Lucas, 2013). Autonomy is closely tied to dignity.

Work Track's control mechanisms remove the autonomy and dignity from working-class job seekers. Several of the patrons alluded to this during their interviews.

Ultimately, the working-class members of WT are aware of the staff's good intentions, but feel caught in an asymmetrical power relationship. The patrons articulate negative responses regarding the power being exercised over them and specifically said that they felt they were treated like children. Rico explicitly uses the school metaphor. During our interview, Rico shared his belief regarding the staff's perception of him as a child. His explanation reveals the negative power relationship that exists despite the fact that he sees the good intentions of the staff.

Angela: How would you describe the [Work Track] staff?

Rico: I mean, they...they good people, I can't say [pause] I can't lie about that, but...but what I don't like about 'em is that they treat us like we...like we stupid, or like we young, or little kids. Sometimes they belittle us...

Angela: Um hmm.

Rico: ...and it makes me mad...but other than that, they cool.

Angela: Okay.

Rico: They support me.

Angela: How do you know they're good people?

Rico: Just how they talk, and how they carry they self, you know, how they--you know, and I know they...care for me. And I mean...they wouldn't be lettin' me come back to the program, or... I just obser—I'm an observant person, so I can, I can tell if you a good person or you not.

Angela: Um hmm.

Rico: 'Cause I can see right through you.

Angela: Okay.

Rico: I can just tell that they good people.

Angela: Okay...but then sometimes you don't like how they act?

Rico: Yeah, sometimes, just--only...only thing I don't like 'bout them just how they treat us like we ain't grown, like we little kids

Angela: Um hmm.

Rico: You know, you treat this program like—like it's a school, a high school [pause] it makes me mad. It's supposed to be a program [long pause]

Angela: For adults?

Rico: Yeah, not a program for kids.

Rico expresses his frustration with the staff. He articulates that he generally feels that they are "good people" and that they "care for" him, which illustrates the positive attributes of the organization and good intentions underlying the organizational assumptions. However, Rico states that the staff's actions "belittle" him. He states the way he is treated like a "little kid" or like he is "stupid" makes him "mad." At times the metaphorical *caretaker-child* relationship backfires. The staff's use of discipline, control, and condescending communication with patrons result in them feeling belittled. While the intentions may be good and the staff may be trying to instill a sense of "responsibility" and "structure" they also offend and strip away dignity from working-class job seekers, which is contrary to the organizational mission.

Unlike Rico, for some of the patrons the system of control contributed to the perception that the staff does not care (which I do not believe is true). Despite their good intentions, the staff's actions speak otherwise. In my interview with Keon he specifically shares his perceptions of various staff members.

Keon: Like, they just feel like since they're staff, we just supposed to drop what we doin' and do what they say and, you know [pause] it's just [pause] they not considerate for real, they just here to do they job, they don't really care about us. It's certain ones that do, and there's certain ones that don't.

Angela: Okay. And so, the ones that do, how do you know that they do care?

Keon: Like, Mr. [Bo], ‘cause he always...pushes you to do certain things and, you know what I’m sayin’, influence you, like...if you havin’ a bad day and you come to him and tell him you finna leave or whatever and woo-woo-whop he’ll try to...you know, just calm you down, Sit in my office, stay and do this or do that’ like, you could tell him and like, Ms. [Harper] cares and they try they best to try to...you know, do certain things, but like Ms. [Crawford] and Ms. [Lena], they—man, they don’t care.

Angela: Um hmm.

Keon: You know what I’m sayin’, they’ll just be like ‘Oh well, well do it then, you—you wanna be somewhere shovelin’ shit the rest of your life? Like, they don’t care for real. Especially like, and then they rude about it. They don’t know how to like, come to us. Like...they don’t know how to talk to us, so...that’s why they always get the response that they do.

Keon begins his statement by addressing the power-laden relationship between him as a patron and the staff. He explains that when the staff asks for something, he perceives the expectation is that he should immediately follow their request like an order or demand similar to the way children are treated. Keon then specifically uses the word “considerate.” He desires consideration. I interpret his use of the word “consideration” as his desire for dignity. Keon argues that the staff is not considerate to the patrons and he interprets a lack of consideration as a lack of care about him and other patrons. Keon then clarifies to say that he perceives some staff care and others do not based on his previous interactions. Keon juxtaposes various staff behavior and argues that Ms. Tina Crawford and Ms. Lena are two people who do not care and Mr. Bo and Ms. Harper as two people who do care.

It is insightful to know that Mr. Bo and Ms. Harper are new employees to WT. Mr. Bo and Ms. Harper had been working full time for approximately 3 months during the time of my interviews with them. They were hired at the same time and had not been fully socialized into the culture of the organization. Ms. Tina had worked for WT for

approximately 2 years and Ms. Lena had been working there for approximately 1.5 years. The culture of control was less familiar to Bo and Harper, which is likely why Harper perceives the cultural practices as “overpowering.” In both Keon’s and Rico’s descriptions you can see the child metaphor emerging. There is an inherent resistance to the organization as caretaker. While job seekers see the benefit of their participation, it comes with the cost of submission to organizational compliance and control.

Summary: Working Class as Dependent Children.

The metaphorical assumptions that undergird the culture at WT simultaneously function in both productive and destructive ways. Conceptualizing Work Track as a school implies that their patrons are like children and the organization is like a caretaker. There are many positive outcomes that emerge from the existing organizational culture and structure. First, patrons leave the program with a sense of structure, stability, and responsibility. All of these positive attributes are a result of the level of care that Work Track provides to its patrons. The holistic philosophy and commitment that Work Track uses in it programming supports working-class job seekers in commendable and largely beneficial ways. For example, many patrons graduate the program feeling successful with new jobs and workforce certifications.

However, there is also a dark side to the organizational culture and structure at Work Track. Perceiving working-class adults as dependent children is reductionist and undignifying. The patrons resist the control being exercised over them because of how they are treated. The asymmetrical power relationships at WT are characterized by an ongoing power struggle. While goals and intentions of the organization are genuine and positive, many behavioral actions of daily organizational life produce negative outcomes

for patrons. Work Track operates on a system of control that is primarily executed through control mechanisms. This system is frustrating to patrons and exists in tension with the organizational mission. Inherently, the system of control constrains reemployment efforts because patrons feel belittled and mistreated. This organization is attempting to train people to operate in a larger oppressive societal structure and in order to do this they recreate that oppressive structure within the organizational walls. Ultimately WT tries to empower their patrons through control, which is problematic.

Work Track can cultivate structure, responsibility, and stability without the childlike implementation of control mechanisms. Work track should eradicate the use of the school metaphor and re-frame the language they use to talk about the organizational work, mission, and service. Work Track is an unemployment support organization that serves resilient adults. The job seekers at Work Track have survived persistent hardship in their lives. The relationship between Work Track and its patrons should be seen as a mutually beneficial partnership that is characterized by autonomy and dignity.

Metaphor: Middle class as Competent Entrepreneurs

This theme reveals the way Executive Career Transitions operates on the tacit metaphorical assumption that their patrons are competent entrepreneurs who should be independent and self-sufficient. Literature on entrepreneurial discourse has described entrepreneurs and entrepreneurialism using the following descriptors: individualism, wealth creation, freedom, control, autonomous, perseverance, innovative, aggressive, risk-taking, exploitation of opportunity, pursuit of growth (Cohen & Musson, 2000). Furthermore, characteristics and ideals associated with entrepreneurs and entrepreneurialism are connected to middle/upper social classes (Cohen & Musson, 2000;

Gill, 2014). Many of these descriptors emerged in the underlying assumptions at ECT. Patrons are expected to know how to best manage and control their job search and use the organization as they see fit. The competent entrepreneur metaphor is empowering at times because it allows job seekers autonomy to manage their careers opportunities and to promote the entrepreneurial self on the job market (du Gay, 1996). However, the underlying assumption also operates as a disservice to middle-class populations because of the expectation that these individuals should always be able to help themselves by taking entrepreneurial initiative. Social interaction is guided by the power of this tacit metaphorical assumption. The consequences of this assumption and metaphor sometimes constrain the job search efforts of middle-class job seekers and dismiss their need for support and guidance. At other times the organization provides what patrons need and enables them to find work.

Many ECT members perceive the atmosphere and other organizational members at ECT as supportive and encouraging, which enables their job search efforts. For example, when I asked Barbara, a 64-year old former VP of Human Resources, to describe the atmosphere at ECT she said,

> Barbara: It's supportive. I think that would be the number one. They work at keeping it upbeat but it's not that dynamic. It's supportive. It's encouraging but not setting expectations. It validates people who get interviews or who go out and make a connection, as opposed to who got a job offer. It's structured very well. The people who run it understand their audience, understand what's needed, and I just have the greatest respect for everyone's that involved in that.

Barbara describes the support as encouraging because it does not set expectations. A supportive environment is important to the members of ECT so that they feel motivated to take advantage of the organizational resource. The "upbeat" atmosphere Barbara describes contributes to that motivation. Suzie Smith, a 44-year old former sales

manager, also describes a feeling of support and guidance she has received as a result of her ECT membership.

> Suzie: I think that just the direction that [Scott] has even given in utilizing your resources at your disposal. Just taking advantage of working with [Rick] and [Barbara] [during mock interviews], even though I seem to freeze, which does not make sense, but at least the encouragement that they have given me has been a great help; and I'm of the mindset, Angela, where almost every presentation I've been to at the [ECT], I take away at least one to two things new that I've learned. Whether it's a new way to network that's effective, or a new approach to the job search, or revamping my elevator speech.

Suzie specifically addresses the volunteer staff member Scott who serves as Executive Director. Suzie says that Scott has encouraged members to utilize the resources "at your disposal." This implies that members should take initiative and charge of their job search. For Suzie, this was helpful guidance. Like an entrepreneur she has taken initiative and capitalized on resources, such as the mock interview services at ECT. Rick and Barbara, are unemployed members of ECT who volunteer their expertise because they previously worked in human resources. Rick and Barbara help the other members of ECT by conducting mock interviews and Suzie took advantage of that process. Furthermore, Suzie addresses the informational support that she takes away from each Monday morning meeting where she learns content relevant to her search for work. ECT provides a wealth of informational support that is largely given to the members via the weekly presentations and various published resources. It is up to members to leverage these organizational resources and services like entrepreneurs in business for themselves. For many ECT members this level of support is sufficient. However, others need additional levels of support.

Despite the reality that ECT is a place where members come for help when they are out of work, many of the volunteer staff state that it is not their job to help their

members find work. Often during the newcomer orientation, the volunteer president of ECT, Bob Wilson, describes the organization as a, “self-help, self-directed organization.” He stated that on January 28, 2013 and again on March 18, 2013. Bob the president gave the following introduction at the beginning of the newcomer orientation on March 18, 2013:

> Bob: Welcome to [ECT]. My job is to tell you what we will and won’t do. We won’t find you a job, but we’ll help you in your search. We are a self-help organization with all the resources we have available. I’ve been in your place two times and ECT helped me through. We’ve been around for 40 years. Frankly I’ll tell you when or if you join you should get as involved as you can. It’s a numbers game. The more people you reach out to and talk with the better. The competition is out there.

Bob shares with visitors that ECT is a “self-help” organization. Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2014) defines self-help as, “the action or process of bettering oneself or overcoming one's problems without the aid of others” (para. 1). This definition implies that the members should independently overcome their joblessness without the aid of others. The notion of a self-help organization seems to negate the purpose of ECT because it is an organization developed to help people during career transition. Helping one’s self and directing one’s self is connected to the entrepreneurial belief in individualism, control, and autonomy. Furthermore, the expectation that a job search is solely a personal responsibility is problematic. People need help when they are out of work, which is why organizations like ECT exist. The expectation of self-sufficiency and independence emerged again on February 11, 2013 during a conversation I had with Scott, the Executive Director of ECT. I documented this conversation in my field notes:

> After the meeting adjourned, Scott and I walked upstairs together. He asked me what I thought of today’s meeting. I told him I thought it was a doomsday message. He clapped his hand and said, “yeah, doomsday, but why is that? Why is the energy so low? Why aren’t people engaged? When I asked what people were

> doing for their job search no one has anything to say." I told him, "If you don't have anything planned then that question can be condemning." Scott aid, "You think so? But why don't they have anything planned?" I replied, "I don't know, but that I'd be discouraged after today's presentation." Scott and I then have a discussion where we compared energy levels across the past three weeks. The first week I was here was the worst. Last week was much better and this week was not as good as the last. I told him I thought it had to do with the speaker's tone, people reporting successful job search activity (i.e. scheduling interviews, people announcing they have offers). Scott agreed. I said, "If you want people to make a weekly plan then give them a challenge to create one." I told him to make a worksheet that had M-F listed out and have people write down goals and bring it in. Scott raised his voice and said, "No! That's hand holding. That's ridiculous. I'm not going to do it for them. They need to take the initiative." I was taken aback by his response. I said "Well, sometimes that's what people need to get moving."

Scott is troubled by his perceived apathy of the ECT membership. The energy and atmosphere of some meetings is low, but that is likely because unemployment has been found to negatively impact mental health (Gallo, Bradley, Teng, & Kasl, 2006) Scott asked me why the job seekers at ECT did not have interveiews or networking meetings planned. I did not have answers for him, but suggested he challenge the members by giving them a worksheet where they could document weekly goals. Scott's refusal and use of the langauge "ridiculous" and "hand holding" reveals the tacit, but strong assumption that these job seekers should be competent and independent.

Other members of the ECT staff echoed this metaphorical assumption that members should take individual responsibility for their circumstances. Jerry, one of the ECT volunteer staff says that the organization needs a tougher approach,

> As I said earlier I think we need to do some tough love. We need to get people to do some hard introspection into, "Why I'm I out of a job? What is my responsibility in my having a job?"

Jerry thinks that the members need some "tough love" because he perceives they are not participating in "hard introspection" about their job loss. Furthermore, Jerry suggests that

they need to reflect on why they are out of a job and what their responsibility is in obtaining work. Jerry's language use relies on assumptions that are individualistic. Individualism is an entreprenurial attribute (Cohen & Musson, 2000). In the excerpt above, Jerry perceives that the members should be solely responsible for the job loss and their job search. Times of economic recession are a recurring part of our nation's economic landscape (Newman, 1988). Job creation and elimination are part of a larger compelx system. Thus, finding and losing work should not simply be perceived as an individual fault or reponsibility, yet in the American cultural context the perception is that maintaining successful employment is solely within the control of an individual. This assumption connects back to belief in a meritocratic system.

The American Dream is strongly tied to the notion of "meritocratic individualism," which is an ideal that each person is responsible for her/his own fate (Newman, 1988). In the three excerpts above that capture comments from Bob, Scott, and Jerry the assumption subtly emerges that job seekers need to participate in a "meritocratic individualism" in order to overcome unemployment. The notion of independent merit comes out when Bob describes ECT as a "self-help" organization and when he says, "It's a numbers game. The more people you reach out to and talk with the better." This comment implies the notion that your job search success is completely within an individual's control if they are actively networking with enough people. The notion of self-sufficiency and individual merit emerges when Scott says, "I'm not going to do it for them. They need to take the initiative." Taking initiative is entrepreneurial language. Scott implies that the members should not need his help and that the job search is solely one's personal responsibility. Jerry's language use suggests that the members have not

taken individual responsibility and that they need “tough love” in order to do so. Jerry suggests that members need to ask themselves, “Why I’m I out of a job? What is my responsibility in my having a job?” All of these comments are made by volunteer staff members and they reveal the underlying metaphorical assumption that middle-class job seekers are competent entreprenurers who should be self-sufficient, independent, and in control. Ultimately, this assumption contradicts the need for assistance in the job search and is harmful to members who need help managing their unemployment.

The underlying assumption that members are competent entrepreneurs that should not need help resulted in a lack of intervention. Entrepreneurs are perceived as people who are in control, have the freedom to craft successful futures, are autonomous, and can persevere in the pursuit of growth and opportunity (Cohen & Musson, 2000). These underlying assumptions resulted in a type of neglect. There were several members of ECT who became long-term fixtures of the organization. These members were not able to overcome unemployment by themselves. Instead of joining ECT, learning job search strategies, and securing employment, many members became regulars of ECT. These members needed additional support, but were not given it because of the underlying assumption that they should be able to help themselves.

There were about approximately 25 dues paying members during my data collection period with the organization and approximately 4 of them were long-term members. Erwin W. Schottlehaus is a 64 year-old man and a long-term member of Executive Career Transitions (ECT). Erwin used to work in procurement for a construction company, but has been looking for full-time work for nearly 1.5 years. Every Monday morning at 9:00am Erwin attends ECT’s weekly seminar to seek job

search advice. Unfortunately, nothing was working for Erwin and he was not the only member in this situation. Johnny Slowhand is a 59-year old former insurance adjustor. He had been looking for full-time work for approximately 4 years at the time of our interview. Johnny is also a long-term member of ECT. During our interview Johnny noted that there were only a few of them that had been around so long that they heard repeat presentations at the Monday morning seminars.

> I've heard him [an ECT Presenter] at least four times in the year plus, year and a half that I've been there. Some different speakers [would be good] but I understand that. Obviously it is not made for long term education. You should be able to be there three or four months, learn what you need to know and go get your damn job but it hasn't worked that way for me.

Johnny is aware that long-term membership is not the goal of ECT. The weekly seminars are a form of support, yet Johnny is starting to hear repeat information because he's become a regular face at the organization. The speakers are on an approximate 6 months cycle. In the seventh month of my participant observation I started hearing repeat presentations as well. At this point there is little new informational support that an ECT member can gain from their attendance at the Monday morning meeting. Thus, the self-help model is failing Johnny. The assumption that all members are self-sufficient competent entrepreneurs is harmful to people like Johnny and Erwin among other long-term members who need more hands-on support.

Long term membership is something that is not a goal of the organization. This became clear during one of the newcomer orientations. All first-time visitors of ECT are welcome to attend a newcomer orientation. Bob Wilson, the volunteer President of ECT generally runs these orientations. On February 11, 2013 Bob started the orientation by introducing himself and the mission of ECT:

> Bob: I'm an alumni of ECT. Now I'm retired and president, so they pay me the big bucks. [pause] Just kidding. [laughs] I'm a volunteer. I'm committed to volunteering here. And ECT's goal is to get rid of you.
>
> Scott: That's right we go for zero membership. We want everyone to find work.

Scott, ECT's Executive Director, points out an interesting thing about ECT. They aren't recruiting; they're trying to eliminate their membership. People like Erwin and Johnny with a long tenure in the organization symbolize ECT's failure to reach this goal. Becoming a familiar face at ECT is a sign of a failed job search. Yet, because of the assumption that members should be independent competent entrepreneurs, the organization's staff will not provide additional support despite their awareness that several of the members are not able to overcome the job search alone. Scott, the Executive Director of ECT explains that he is knowledgeable of the long-term members and he calls these members "chronically unemployed,"

> We have people down there who have been unemployed for 2 or 3 years. We always had that segment in the people we had, but–and I can't substantiate this–I would just say the average [ECT] member has been unemployed longer than [our members] 4 years ago. I don't know what the numbers are. It's just a feel that I have, because you see them again and again. I guess the second part is–this is a very sensitive issue–is as you become chronically unemployed, what's the potential of you becoming employed? I'm kind of dancing around this, but are you employable? That's really what I'm saying, let's be honest about it.

Scott and the other members of the volunteer staff are aware that there are regulars in their body of members. Yet, no one takes the time to reach out to these individuals because they believe onus of finding a job is an individual responsibility. Despite the reality that ECT is a place where members come for help when they are out of work, many of the volunteer staff state that it is not their job to help their members find work.

Summary: Middle Class as Competent Entrepreneurs.

Informational support is sufficient for many organizational job seekers at ECT. They are able to come learn job search strategies, train on networking skills, and find work within a relatively reasonable time period. These job seekers feel motivated and encouraged in their search for work. The metaphorical assumption of the middle class as competent, independent, self-sufficient entrepreneurs operates in an enabling and empowering way for these job seekers because they feel in control and in business for themselves. However, other job seekers need more individualized service and instrumental support. Help is not given to these individuals because of the underlying metaphorical assumption that job seekers are competent entrepreneurs who should be independent and self-sufficient. Erwin and Johnny are examples where additional intervention could have better supported and enabled their reemployment efforts. The metaphorical assumption entraps them into long-term unemployment leaving them feeling discouraged. ECT exists to support and aid people during the absence of work. They should not withhold support when people need additional, more individualized service. Instead dignified intervention and support can be granted to people like Erwin and Johnny who are entrapped in unemployment.

Conclusion: Metaphorical Assumptions

Unemployment organizations are complex systems that have espoused values to support job seekers. These complex systems simultaneously enable and constrain job search efforts. While both organizations operate on good intentions, provide a source of support, and enable job seekers, they both operate on assumptions that can simultaneously constrain job search efforts.

Work Track provides a wide range of services and support to its members. And in general the staff of WT means well and wants to support their patrons in a way that would promote long term well-being, success, stability, care, and upward mobility. However, there are several elements about WT culture that constrain patron success in the search for work. First, the culture of WT is institutional. The use of discipline and control offends patrons and contains their sense of autonomy at a place where patrons come to be supported. This organization is trying to prepare their patrons to successfully work in existing societal structures. In order to do so the WT staff uses pedagogy of poverty and works off of the metaphorical assumption that their patrons are like dependent children. This assumption contributes to the creation of oppressive structures within the organizational context.

Executive Career Transitions provides a wide scope informational support. For the majority of members, ECT provides what job seekers need. However, despite the wide scope of services and support other members cannot find work. Several individuals became long term members of ECT and no one intervened by offering more individualized help. Instead ECT allowed people to go through the motions of a failed job search for years because it operates off of the metaphorical assumption that their members should be independent, self-sufficient competent entrepreneurs. This underlying assumption is rooted in the belief of an “individual meritocracy.”

The assumption that working-class job seekers are like dependent children and middle-class job seekers are like competent entrepreneurs presents a troubling dynamic within the social class structure. Working-class job seekers deserve to be treated with dignity and respect and middle-class job seekers deserve to have support and assistance

when needed. Both underlying assumptions are problematic because they allow control to be exerted over one population and help to be denied to another.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

This chapter begins with a summary of each major thematic finding. Then I explore the research questions and their connection to the various themes. Next implications for theory and practice are shared. A review of the limitations and opportunities is presented before a discussion of future research opportunities. The aim of this chapter is to provide concrete answers to the research questions, an overview of the contribution, strengths, and limitations of this project and to outline a future research trajectory.

The purpose of this project was to explore the lived experience of unemployed individuals across social class lines through the analysis of unemployment support organizations. Specifically, this study revealed how people manage the absence of work through their memberships in unemployment organizations. The research sought to answer the following three research questions: RQ1) how are the cultures of unemployment organizations classed?, RQ2) how do individuals from varying social classes manage unemployment through memberships in unemployment organizations?, and RQ3) how do the cultures of unemployment organizations constrain and/or enable their members' unemployment experiences and reemployment efforts? In order to answer these questions, a critical, comparative ethnography was conducted. The methods included 155.36 hours of participant observation across two unemployment organizations, forty semi-structured interviews including both job seekers and unemployment practitioners, and compilation of 122 documents/artifacts. Analysis included a dualist critical interpretive inquiry of the data, meaning that the analysis

process was two-fold. The interpretive analysis process promoted understanding and the critical process critiqued issues of power within the organizational settings

Summary of Themes

The findings revealed five major themes: 1) The Middle-Class Imperative: Learning the Language of Privilege, 2) Symbolism of Social Class through Artifacts, 3) Text and Body Job Search Practices, 4) Managing Intersecting Stigma in the Absence of Work, 5) Metaphorical Assumptions: Dependent Children and Competent Entrepreneurs. The thematic findings are summarized below.

Theme 1: The Middle-Class Imperative.

The first emergent theme *The Middle Class Imperative: Learning the Language of Privilege* reveals the way social class is communicatively marked. Middle-class ways of communicating are privileged in American society and those privileges emerged in the data as I observed the way both working- and middle-class unemployed people trained to communicate during their job search. The working-class members of WT were trained in the basic mechanics of middle-class speech. The current speech patterns of working-class job seekers were criticized and they were instructed to change their communication behavior to more closely emulate the middle class. The result of criticism and speech training at WT reinforced the dominant communicative privilege of the middle class by presenting middle-class communication as the “right” way to speak. Working-class job seekers learned that their existing communication behavior was bad or wrong. The data illustrate the way working-class speech patterns are devalued and marked in society.

The middle-class members of ECT are trained to strategically engage in networking communication. Networking is a middle-class discursive act that allows job

seekers to communicatively manage the job search process. The strategies taught to middle-class job seekers drew from dominant entrepreneurial discourse. Middle-class job seekers were trained to develop elevator pitches and marketing sheets that promoted their abilities, similar to the way business owners would promote entrepreneurships. Self-promotional efforts of middle-class job seekers drew from the "entrepreneur of self" discourse and allowed middle-class job seekers to network and leverage social capital. This opportunity allowed them to maximize the strengths of weak ties in their middle-class social circle (Granovetter, 1973). Middle-class job seekers are able to more strategically search for work when compared to the working class. Middle-class talk during the job search allowed them to engage in identity work (Ibarra, 2003) by pulling from entrepreneurial discourse. In contrast, Work Track job seekers were neither taught networking skills nor to how manage their identities. Instead networking was done on their behalf by a staff member. Having a WT staff member network on their behalf is a form of organizational support, but ultimately removes job seeker agency and voice in their search for work. Teaching working-class job seekers to network would not solve this problem because the working-class do not use their words the same way the middle class people do. In addition, training working-class job seekers to network like the middle class would also reify the existing structure and contribute to the marginalization of the working class. The larger social structure privileges discourse, which is why the middle class can more strategically network when compared to the working class. The emergent theme, *The Middle-Class Imperative: Learning the Language of Privilege*, reveals the way that social class was communicatively marked and revealed within the cultures of these two organizations.

Theme 2: Symbolism of Social Class through Artifacts.

The second emergent theme is called *Symbolism of Social Class through Artifacts*. This theme addresses the classed experiences of organizational membership in connection with artifacts, which manifested differently across the two organizations. Specifically this theme focuses on the relationship organizational members had with organizational attire, food and space. The way relationships with attire, food, and space differed illustrates how everyone exists in dual material and discursive spaces, yet the emphasis on one reality changes as you consider each social class group. Reality is co-constructed by both materiality and discourse that exist as a dialectic. People from different social class backgrounds managed this dialectic differently. Working-class individuals necessarily focused more on material conditions before managing discourse and middle-class individuals had the privilege to focus almost solely discourse. At ECT, middle-class job seekers were able to manage the material-discourse dialectic by largely ignoring materiality and the way that it shapes their lives, even during unemployment. Ignoring one pole in the dialectical tension is a dialectical management strategy (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). ECT members are able to ignore materiality due to middle-class privilege (Dougherty, 2011). At WT working-class job seekers managed materiality first before being able to engage their joblessness discursively. Working-class unemployed people managed the material-discourse dialectic by alternating between poles.

Attire is both material and symbolic. Attire is a way people physically mark social class on the body. At Executive Career Transitions the understood dress code was business casual. ECT organizational members were never explicitly told to dress in a particular way, but all of the members owned appropriate organizational attire and

regularly wore this attire, likely because of their common social class background. Middle-class job seekers are expected to be able to maintain their wardrobe and wear appropriate organizational attire despite their jobless status. The dialectical struggle for the middle class is to symbolically appear to be middle-class despite the material reality that job seekers are out of work. Because job seekers are from the middle-class, continuing to wear symbols of wealth was not an issue because in their previous careers they were able to invest in middle-class wardrobes. Conversely, the majority of WT organizational members were required to wear uniforms. Uniforms were provided, free of charge to all patrons, as a form of material support. Wearing uniforms is common for many working-class jobs (Allen, 2011). WT socializes their patrons for the body work they seek by requiring uniforms. Whenever members did not wear uniforms properly they were formally policed through reduced stipends, which primarily emphasize material conditions. When WT patrons attended job fairs and wore their own personal clothing, they were caught in a discursive struggle. Their attire did not discursively symbolize their dignity as a job candidate. Working-class job seekers must first tend to the material side of the dialectic and then try to manage discursively. Wearing attire symbolized class belonging and is a method of physically marking social class status. Similar observations emerged in organizational members' relationship with food.

Food is also both material and discursive. The emphasis regarding individual's relationship to food changed across the social class groups. Work Track staff and patrons talked about food as a way to avoid the material condition of hunger. The emphasis for working-class individuals always existed in relationship to material reality. The dialectical struggle is that patrons must have food before they engage their job loss

discursively. After patrons ate then they were able to focus on training. This reveals the way working-class job seekers alternate between poles to manage the dialectic. WT provides food to their patrons each day they are on the premises for training. In addition, groceries from the local food bank are also provided on Fridays as a way to support the material needs of job seekers over the weekend. At Work Track food provided sustenance and was central to the well-being of the patrons. The emphasis shifted when I analyzed the relationship middle-class job seekers had with food. At ECT food was only referenced in a peripheral manner. When members talked about food it was always connected to networking. ECT members frequently talked about getting coffee and having lunch with others to facilitate a conversation that would develop or leverage social capital. Food was never addressed as a material need at ECT. Food was always addressed as a way to facilitate participation in the discursive act of networking. Middle-class job seekers are able to ignore the way materiality co-constructs reality due to privilege. Food is another example of how middle-class job seekers are able to manage the dialectic by focusing on one pole in the tension—discourse. In fact members were charged for food frequently and expected to pay despite their jobless status. The material-discourse dialectic existed in the way organizational space was managed and created as well.

The use and control of organizational space changed across the two organizations. ECT created a corporate atmosphere while WT created an institutional atmosphere. Organizational members at ECT had few restrictions on their use of space. In fact, ECT members constructed a corporate atmosphere by setting up a church multi-purpose room with artifacts such as: chairs, projector and screen. The focus of the corporate space was to facilitate micro-level discursive participation including training and networking.

Publications, like the local business journal, were always available in the space, which illustrates a text worker orientation to job seeking that is covered in the next summarized theme. There were times when the feeling of a corporate atmosphere was disrupted, for example during funerals. Organizational members at ECT attempted to exercise their personal agency to overcome the disruption to the corporate atmosphere. At ECT members are able to ignore the material side of the dialectic until a disruption occurs. The typical dialectical management strategy of ignoring the material pole works until the co-construction of material is so disruptive that members had to pay attention to it. In contrast, Work Track constructed an institutional atmosphere. Organizational members at Work Track were restricted in their use of space. For example, many doors were locked and members had restricted eating areas. Work Track also implemented a bell system that signaled when organizational members should report to designated areas. WT patrons Carlos and Omarion and Harper, a staff member, compared the atmosphere to a "school, jail, prison, and detention center." The power exercised over Work Track members contributed to an institutional atmosphere in the organization because it limited their autonomy. The use of space reveals the shifting emphases between materiality and discourse in relation to social class. Social class differences also emerged in the search for work.

Theme 3: Text and Body Job Search Practices.

The third theme that emerged is *Text and Body Job Search Practices*. Patrons of both organizations used their memberships in these unemployment organizations to aid in the actual job search. Text and Body Job Search Practices illustrate the way the actual search for work mirrored the previous occupational experience of the workers. In sum,

former text workers managed and facilitated their job search through the use and manipulation of words and texts. Text job searches included the use of accountability reports to track job searches, reference books and other textual resources, key words and word clouds to facilitate the creation of strategic job search documents, and networking through professional online social media by developing a textual representation of self through online profiles. Using technology allowed text job searches to transcend the boundaries of time and space. For example, recruiters and hiring managers could access professional social media profiles of middle-class job seekers at any time of day and from any geographic location, even when job seekers were not physically applying to jobs. In contrast, former body workers participated in embodied job searches that included visiting physical locations of potential employers and completing handwritten applications. Embodied job searches are impacted by material constraints such as a lack of personal resources (e.g. personal transportation, access to technology) and the weather. A physical, embodied job search is bound by time and space and required synchronous communication between co-located job seekers and potential employers. This limits the scope of the job search based on what is physically possible. Body job searches were not devoid of text, in fact Work Track required all of their patrons to search for jobs online and to create a résumé, cover letter and mock application. Working-class job seekers are accustomed to working with their physical bodies, not with word-processing or internet technology. Due to low computer literacy skills members were frustrated throughout these text-based practices and felt that a door-to-door search would be more productive for them. The trending migration to jobs online creates a systematic disadvantage for

unemployed body workers. This was just one of the many obstacles that emerged in the search for work.

Theme 4: Managing Intersecting Stigmas in the Absence of Work.

All of the job seekers used memberships in unemployment organizations to manage various stigmatizing obstacles to employment. The fourth theme, *Managing Intersecting Stigmas in the Absence of Work*, reveals how job seekers dealt with stigmatizing issues that impacted their ability to secure their next job opportunity. Stigma is a social construction rooted in material reality (Meisenbach, 2010). Stigma is associated with issues of disgrace and discrimination (Goffman, 1959, 1963). ECT job seekers faced stigma related to their age and jobless status. Age discrimination and perceived over qualification made the search for work difficult for ECT members. Middle-class job seekers were stigmatized because of age, yet needed to leverage the value of their years of experience during the job search. Trying to navigate the two created a pragmatic paradox (Quinn & Cameron, 1988; Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967). One communicative response to managing this pragmatic paradox was impression management through information control (Goffman, 1959; Miller, 1986). Members were taught to hide their age in the job search process. This instruction implied that members should accept the negative age stigma as true and apply it to self. All job seekers faced the stigma of unemployment. ECT Members were continually reminded of this stigma, which was challenging. Research shows that employed people are much more likely to find employment due to the stigma of unemployed people. Job seekers were instructed to take jobs they did not want in order to find work they do want, which creates a pragmatic paradox for ECT job seekers as well. Work Track job seekers also faced stigma.

Working-class obstacles to employment were varied and, in the words of the staff, required a complete "transformation" to overcome. WT job seekers dealt with issues such as low education levels, little work experience, no socially legitimated work skills, drug addictions, emotional trauma, and prior convictions. The working-class unemployed took individual responsibility for the necessity to transform their obstacles to employment. Furthermore, working-class job seekers and never addressed the larger social structures at play, which contributed to their obstacles to employment. Instead there was an underlying belief in a meritocracy, which closely aligns with the American Dream. Regardless of social class status, obstacles to employment are stigmatized and intersect like the strands in the web-of-power. These strands operate against the unemployed and also illustrate the tension between material and discursive reality. The power of social class was also revealed as I analyzed the underlying assumptions of each organizational culture.

Theme 5: Metaphorical Assumptions.

I used metaphor as a way to analyze the organization's cultural assumptions. The assumptions undergirding organizational cultures are implicit and tacit (Schein, 1992). Yet, the underlying assumptions of these organizations' cultures operate as powerful guides (Alvesson, 2002). Cultural assumptions within ECT and WT impact decision making and social interaction. At Work Track the underlying assumptions reveal that working-class job seekers are like *dependent children* that need the organization to operate as a *caretaker*. This assumption positions an asymmetrical power relationship between the organization and its patrons. In some ways the patron-organization relationship enabled the job search and produced positive outcomes such as structure, stability, future opportunity, and feelings of success. However, there were also negative

outcomes that emerged from the asymmetrical power dynamic that exists between the organization and the patrons. For example, this power dynamic contributed to an institutional atmosphere where power was exercised over the patrons limiting autonomy and stripping away dignity. The patrons and staff at Work Track described the organization using the following language: school, detention center, jail. The intentions of the organization are good and aimed at providing support and a holistic level of service, but the action of the organization reinforce and mirror structural oppression that exists in society. Work Track attempts to empower its patrons through control. Conversely, at Executive Career Transitions the underlying assumptions reveal that middle-class job seekers are like *competent entrepreneurs* that should be independent and self-sufficient even when unemployed. On a surface level the cultural assumptions of ECT seem empowering and imply that job seekers should take entrepreneurial initiative and control of their job search. For some ECT members this assumption worked well and allowed individuals the opportunity to manage the absence of work. However, the competent entrepreneur metaphor also resulted in the denial of services to long-term ECT members who needed individualized support. ECT fashions itself as a “self-help” and “self-directed” organization, which implies that members should be able to overcome unemployment on their own merit. Individualism is another concept that is closely tied to entrepreneurialism (Cohen & Musson, 2000). The assumption that people should individually overcome joblessness is connected to ideological beliefs of a meritocracy and U.S’s individualistic culture. Conceiving of the members as self-sufficient and independent competent entrepreneurs negates the support that is needed by ECT members. ECT tries to empower its members through a “tough love” approach and

operates on the belief that one's job search should be solely a personal responsibility. The underlying assumptions at both organizations are tacit and operate to simultaneously enable and constrain the ability of participants to find work. Next I explore each research question and address how these findings answer those questions.

Exploration of the Research Questions

The themes that emerged in this study collectively answer RQ1) how are the cultures of unemployment organizations classed?, RQ2) how do individuals from varying social classes manage unemployment through memberships in unemployment organizations?, and RQ3) how do the cultures of unemployment organizations constrain and/or enable their members' unemployment experiences and reemployment efforts?

Research Question One.

RQ1: How are the cultures of unemployment organizations classed?

The cultures of organizations are classed both materially and discursively. Social class emerged in artifacts, values, and underlying assumptions of both organizations' cultures. In addition, social class emerged between members. In other words, the cultures of unemployment organizations were classed because of the way social class shaped social interaction by influencing how people communicated and treated each other within unemployment organizations. Social class emerged in all of themes and cross cut the cultures of these organizations.

Non-dominant groups are marked or othered in society in relation to dominant groups (Brekhus, 1998). Dominant groups are socially constructed as normative and are thus unmarked (Brekhus, 1998). In the United States, working class people are marked because of the way they are compared to upper/middle-class people, who have been

socially constructed as normative. When compared to the dominant group, working-class people are seen through a deficit model. My findings are consistent with this reality and show how working-class people are marked. For example, the first theme revealed the way that working-class job seekers are told to assimilate and conform to middle-class communication norms. Communicative training revealed in the theme *Mechanics of Middle-Class Speech* shows efforts to assimilate working-class communication.

Social class also emerged in the emphasis Work Track puts on materiality. This emphasis emerged in two themes. First, materiality emerged in the theme *Symbolism of Social Class through Artifacts*. Work Track was classed in part because of the way it controlled materiality such as food, attire, and space. Food was provided as sustenance to hungry job seekers. Clothing was given to job seekers because it removed the financial burden to buy clothing and because it socialized them into future occupations. Spaces were created in ways that controlled movement and behavior of organizational members. The working-class unemployed struggle with the ability to sustain and maintain basic well-being. Managing the lack of material resources foregrounds the material struggle of the working class because it is imminent and, if not managed, threatens survival. Working-class job seekers had no input on these material aspects of the culture at WT. The materiality of Work Track's culture was classed in ways that limited the autonomy of the working-class unemployed. Second, materiality emerged in the theme *Text and Body Job Search Practices*. Work Track's culture was also classed due to the materiality of working-class job searches. Working-class job seekers were much more likely to physically execute their job searches on foot, going door to door and filling out handwritten applications. Embodied job searches put working-class job seekers at a

disadvantage because they took longer and required the use of material resources. Working-class job seekers were also at a disadvantage because of the trend moving job openings/applications online. Thus Work Track required working-class job searches to use text and technology to find work. Job seekers did not have a choice in this element of their job search if they wanted to remain part of the program. Using technology to conduct the job search also put a strain on working-class job seekers due to their computer literacy skills. All of these classed factors (i.e. lack of material resources, low computer literacy, time and space constraints of embodied job searches) combined and worked together against WT job seekers, which made the search for work more arduous.

Each classed element of WT's culture is undergirded by the metaphorical assumption that the working-class job seeker is like a dependent child that needs care. The theme *Metaphorical Assumptions: Dependent Children and Competent Entrepreneurs* reveals the way working-class unemployed are seen as a group of people who cannot do for themselves, similar to *dependent children*. As a result of this perception, organizations like Work Track are asked to step in and take control of working-class situations with the aim of supporting and empowering job seekers to do better for themselves. The structure of Work Track does help many working-class job seekers and allows them to transform the many obstacles they face to employment. Work Track provides a holistic level of informational, emotional, and instrumental support. But individuals must comply and lose autonomy in order to overcome joblessness through Work Track programming. Thus, the underlying dependent child assumption also contributes to a classed organizational culture at Work Track.

Restricted autonomy is connected to issues of dignity, which working-class scholars address in their research (e.g. Buzzanell & Lucas, 2013; Lamont, 2000; Lucas, 2011a). When autonomy and agency are limited, dignity is stripped away and results in a loss of control and a constraint on choice. The culture of Work Track is classed in part because of the way it limits choices and leans toward institutional norms and structures.

Being middle class in the U.S. is socially constructed as a dignified place on the social landscape. People at ECT were treated with dignity. They had autonomy and agency and were empowered to take control of their joblessness. Social class also emerged in the culture of ECT through communicative training. Because society and the job market privileges middle-class communication norms, job seekers at ECT strategically managed entrepreneurial discourse. Instead of assimilating themselves like the working-class were required to do, the middle-class job seekers refined their existing discursive skill sets. ECT cultivated text job search practices where members of ECT used their existing discursive skills sets to find work and train for job search activities. The move to online job searching produced an advantage for middle-class job seekers. ECT members were able to take advantage of online job searching and professional social networking because they have access to personal technology and computer literacy skills that allow them to leverage technology during the search for work.

The culture of ECT was also classed through its emphasis of discourse over materiality. Basic needs were never addressed explicitly. Instead there is an underlying expectation that the middle-class unemployed should have and be able to do certain things for themselves. For example, everyone was expected to have and to wear business casual clothing. Second, food was never referenced as a way to avoid hunger, but instead

as a way to facilitate networking. Furthermore, ECT members' movement was never policed and they had personal autonomy to take control of the organizational space. If members were in a material struggle to physically survive, it was rarely discussed. In middle-class milieus material struggle is discursively concealed. Middle-class material struggles exist in the absence of communication. It is rarely mentioned or communicatively addressed. Material struggle was only verbally addressed twice in my seven months of participant observation, which suggests that it is there but not openly disclosed. Members at ECT openly discuss and focus on the discursive execution of the job search. The middle-class material struggle is not managed publicly through unemployment organizations, but more likely in private spaces. ECT's culture was classed in the way that material conditions were backgrounded and deemphasized in favor of discourse.

However, along with dignity came a certain expectation for self-sufficiency. Members are expected to have control over their joblessness and to take individual responsibility. Giving additional, personalized help that went beyond the services offered was seen as "spoon feeding." ECT's culture is undergirded by the metaphorical assumption that middle class job seekers are competent entrepreneurs that should be independent and self-sufficient. While this underlying cultural assumption at Work Track empowered some job seekers to take control of their jobless situation, it also operated as a disservice to others because it denied additional, individualized support.

In sum, four of the themes revealed the way the organizational cultures of ECT and WT are classed. The cultures were classed in both material and discursive ways. The first theme, *The Middle-Class Imperative: Learning the Language of Privilege*, illustrates

the way that organizational cultures are communicatively classed. The training at both organizations posited middle-class communication it is seen as the "right" way to find work. Both organizations' cultures are also classed materially and discursively through attire, food, and space, which emerged in theme two, *Symbolism of Social Class through Artifacts.* Theme three, *Text and Body Job Search Practices*, showed the way class influences the search for work by emphasizing the body or text. Theme five *Metaphorical Assumptions: Dependent Children and Competent Entrepreneurs* exposed the way people are treated and perceived differently based on their social class status. For example, Working-class job seekers were seen as dependent, while middle-class job seekers were seen as competent.

Research Question Two.

RQ2: how do individuals from varying social classes manage unemployment through memberships in unemployment organizations?

Unemployed job seekers from varying social classes join unemployment organizations to facilitate the job search and manage obstacles to employment. Joining an unemployment organization allowed people to manage the absence of work. Losing work is an inherently disorganizing experience. Thus, joining unemployment organizations is a way to manage the struggle of reorganizing and restructuring life. Regardless of social class status the memberships in unemployment support organizations give people a resource to help manage job loss and the search for work. As shown in RQ1, social class deeply impacts and changes the job search as well as the obstacles people face when they are out of work.

Middle-class job seekers received a large amount of informational support through their memberships at ECT. This informational support provided guidance and advice on how to textually and discursively manage the job search. Members drew from entrepreneurial discourse, used text-based and technological resources, created job search documents, and manipulated language through key words and word clouds. Joining ECT allowed them to strategically search for work and to leverage their social capital discursively. ECT members also used their organizational memberships as a way to textually navigate stigmatizing obstacles to employment. For example, members were instructed and discussed ways to conceal their age. At the same time, they were also managing the stigma of being unemployed. Joining an organization made people feel emotionally supported because they were not the only person struggling with job loss. While, the stigmatizing attributes (age and unemployed status) of ECT members were connected to material conditions, all of their obstacles were managed discursively through talk or in text.

Working-class job seekers received a large amount of information and instrumental support through their memberships at Work Track. This support provided a roadmap on how to search for work and how maintain employment. Members learned how to communicate about themselves as job candidates like the middle class, how to construct a résumé, how to search and apply for work online. Members also search for work using their bodies by going door to door filling out handwritten applications. In addition, working-class job seekers used their WT memberships as a way to manage imminent material obstacles to their employment, such as hunger, drug addiction, lack of transportation, and lack of technological access. Joining Work Track allowed working-

class job seekers a way to temporarily survive until they were ready to work and found work. Patrons of WT used their memberships as a way to manage discursive obstacles to employment as well. For example, many job seekers did not have a résumé, e-mail address, cover letter, or computer literacy skills, which present discursive obstacles to employment. Thus, their membership in Work Track allowed them to facilitate the job search and manage obstacles to employment both physically and discursively.

Theme three, *Text and Body Job Search Practices*, and theme four, *Managing Intersecting Stigma in the Absence of Work*, reveal the answer to research question two. These two themes show how job seekers used their memberships to manage the absence of work by structuring their search for work and by managing various obstacles that hinder their ability to secure work.

Research Question Three.

RQ3: How do the cultures of unemployment organizations constrain and/or enable their members' unemployment experiences and reemployment efforts?

Each organization dually enabled and constrained members' unemployment experiences and reemployment efforts. Organizational practices were strategically designed to support job seekers, which enabled them. Each organization shares information and advice that communicate how job seekers can navigate the existing job market. Simultaneously both unemployment organizations also incorporated practices and beliefs that ultimately constrained unemployment experiences and their reemployment efforts.

Both organizations enabled job seekers by serving as an organizational resource. Executive Career Transition is structured to disseminate helpful information to people

who are out of work and in “career transitions.” The weekly meetings facilitate this communicative goal for the organization and enable people to search for work, network, and manage their obstacles to employment. ECT also has accountability meetings that provide emotional support and a space for advice giving, which members find helpful. These attributes enable reemployment efforts and are supportive as ECT members manage joblessness. Comparably, Work Track is structured to train people how to work and how to search for work through various programs. Each of the programs develops an individual employment plan that allows the organization to holistically assess and address job seeker opportunities and challenges. These programs allow people who have been stigmatized in society a chance to succeed. People who come to Work Track have survived atrocities in their lives including incarceration, violence, drug addiction, homelessness, and poverty. Many of the people who come to Work Track have few organizational resources that they can go to for instrumental, informational, and emotional support. In this way Work Track enables job seekers to manage unemployment experiences and to facilitate reemployment efforts.

Both organizations constrained job seekers in unique ways. Executive Career Transitions perpetuated stigma by implying that job seekers should accept negative stigmas about themselves, as revealed in theme four *Managing Intersecting Stigmas in the Absence of Work*. Organizational members struggled with the direction to accept stigma and did not know how to manage issues of stigma and discrimination in the job search process. Accepting and personally owning stigmas constrained job seekers’ ability to be confident in the job search. Furthermore, ECT neglected to provide additional, individual support to long-term members who had been out of work for nearly 18

months, which was revealed through theme five *Metaphorical Assumptions: Competent Entrepreneurs*. ECT allowed people to enter into long-term unemployment and to remain a part of the organization, which also constrained the reemployment efforts of long term members. Allowing members to become long-term members of ECT was undergirded by the assumption that people should be independent and self-sufficient and that to offer help would be an inappropriate intervention. In distinct ways, Work Track also constrained job seekers unemployment experiences and reemployment efforts. Work Track continually removed personal choice and autonomy from job seekers, which emerged in themes two *Symbolism of Social Class through Artifacts* and five *Metaphorical Assumptions: Dependent Children*. Removing choice and restricting autonomy was discouraging to patrons and produced power struggles. When patrons attended WT's programs they were caught in a power struggle that left them feeling belittled and like children. The power struggle is rooted in the organization's assumption that working-class job seekers are like dependent children. While the organization tried to care for them they showed this care through control, which left patrons feeling undignified.

Both organizations could do a better job serving their patrons if they called attention to the larger systems and structures at play (i.e. stigma, stereotypes, discrimination, privilege, etc.). Simply communicating about these structures would allow people to see how society is structured in a way that creates certain demands for people in the search for work. Mindfulness and awareness of larger structures of power can keep patrons from internalizing stigma/negativity and restructure the job search in a way that supports the unemployed without devaluing them.

Theme three, *Text and Body Job Search Practices*, and theme four, *Managing Intersecting Stigma in the Absence of Work*, reveal the answer to the first part of research question three. These two themes show how unemployment organizations enable and support reemployment efforts and unemployment experiences. Themes two (*Symbolism of Social Class through Artifacts*), four (*Managing Intersecting Stigmas in the Absence of Work*) and five (*Metaphorical Assumptions: Dependent Children and Competent Entrepreneurs*) collectively show how both organizations constrained overall efforts in complex, contested ways, answering the second part of research question three.

Implications for Theory

There are two major contributions to Dougherty's Web-of-Power theoretical framework. The first emerged from the use of the theory in novel ways that reveal how the various strands, types and processes of power, intersect and work together outside of the employment context. The second is the preliminary development of a new strand in the web-of-power—(im)mobilizing agency.

This study employs the web-of-power in a new organizational context—unemployment organizations. The web-of-power was designed as a theoretical framework to explain the way different types and processes of power work together both for and against social groups. This study applies the theory to empirical data gathered from unemployment organizations. This is the first time the theory has been used outside of Dougherty's (2011) own work. The application of the theory reveals that it has explanatory power even in contexts outside of employment. The research data reveal how these strands in the web-of-power operate in nuanced ways comparatively across two organizational sites.

One of the four tenants in the web-of-power is that social class is communicatively marked and physically unmarked. The theme *The Middle-Class Imperative: Learning the Language of Privilege* reveals the way that middle-class communication is privileged in the job search process. Both working-class and middle-class job seekers deliberately trained themselves to speak in middle-class ways because middle-class communication norms have been socially constructed as the "right" way to communicate when searching for work. The social construction of middle-class speech as normative reveals the way social class is communicatively marked and how power operates against people who do not speak like the middle-class. Working-class job seekers had to learn the mechanics of middle-class speech in order to secure working-class positions. This strand in the web-of-power illustrates the way discursive reality creates a systematic obstacle for the working-class unemployed to secure employment. The privilege of middle-class communication in society allows middle-class job seekers to more strategically search for work. The communicative strategies used by middle-class job seekers empowered them to draw from entrepreneurial-self discourse. Using entrepreneurial-self discourse empowered middle-class job seekers to leverage and build their social capital in the search for work. This study revealed the nuanced way power communicatively operates during the job search through the marking of social class. The contribution of this finding to the web-of-power theoretical framework is through its application to organizational life by using its premises to explain and understand what is happening in my data. My research reveals the application of the theory in novels ways. Furthermore, by connecting the findings the communicative potential for a new theoretical strand in the web-of-power, (im)mobilizing agency, emerged.

The theory explains the way micro- and meso-level organizational communication integrates in power-laden practices that reinforce powerful macro-level structures in society. Applying this theory to the unemployment and job search context reveals the intersecting ways that communication intertwines with social class by crosscutting social life from micro to macro manifestations. Macro social structures such as middle-class privilege and working-class marginalization are manifest in the meso-level, organizational training at unemployment organizations. In turn, the training programs and services, which operate at the meso-level then communicatively connect macro structures to individuals at the micro-level. The theoretical contribution of my research findings opens up an opportunity for an extension of the theory. The findings presented in chapter four reveal the way that concrete job opportunities have the potential to facilitate (im)mobilizing agency, which is communicatively created for particular social groups according to social class status. I argue that (im)mobilizing agency is an additional strand in the web-of-power. The term (im)mobilizing agency contains two notions: mobilizing agency and immobilizing agency. Mobilizing agency is characterized by agency to engage social class through privileged communication. Immobilizing agency is characterized unproductive agency that does not produce progress, which happens as a result of engaging social class through marginalized communication.

The concept of immobilization is rooted in the Structural Divergence scholarship of Nicotera and colleagues (e.g. Nicotera & Clinkscales, 2010; Nicotera & Mahon, 2013). Immobilization happens when two incongruent meaning structures intersect and create unresolvable conflict that produces immobilization, which diminishes agency. Nicotera and Mahon (2013) clarify that immobilization is not inaction, but rather that the action

does not produce progress. Logically then, mobilization is agency that does produce progress. In the organizational settings of Executive Career Transitions and Work Track we can see structural convergence and structural divergence respectively. Working-class job seekers' agency was immobilized in many ways because of structural divergence. The structure of the working-class is incompatible with the demands of the middle-class structure, thus their job search required them to assimilate to a structure to which they did not have access. Access to resources and knowledge about a particular structure agentically empowers people (Sewell, 1992). When the middle class engages the middle-class job market structure they are more likely to be empowered with agency that is mobilizing or productive evidenced by progress in their job search. Logically then, because the working class has limited access to resources and knowledge about the middle-class job market structure they are more likely to be empowered with immobilizing agency that is unproductive. Agency is never nonexistent; however, not all agency gains traction enough to mobilize or create progress (Nicotera & Mahon, 2013).

Because all job seekers, despite social class status, are trained to follow dominant group communication patterns, individuals from the dominant group are imbued with mobilizing agency to navigate the social structure at micro, meso, and macro levels. In other words because the social structure privileges the middle class, middle-class unemployed people have an ability at the micro-level to engage the job search strategically through discourse. Strategic engagement of the job market through discourse allows unemployment organizations to empower most middle-class job seekers at the organizational level to take entrepreneurial control of their work trajectory and ideally produce social mobility. Being empowered to tackle joblessness through strategic

middle-class discursive is a privilege that produces mobilizing agency. The inability to do so produces immobilizing agency. Organizations like Executive Career Transitions encourage people to leverage their agency. (Im)mobilzing agency reifies social class and social structures like middle-class privilege through communication.

In contrast, because social structure privileges the middle class, working-class unemployed people have an inability at the micro-level to engage the job market strategically through discourse. Working-class people at Work Track instead attempted to engage the job search in embodied ways or through training that gave them a limited use of discourse; however, the structure works against them as they try to engage the job market. The job market structure is developed to respond to a strategic use of discourse. The job market structure is not developed to cater to materiality or a limited use of discourse. Yet, working-class job seekers foreground materiality due to working class status and working-class structures are not fully compatible with middle-class structures. For example, the job listings are moving to online technological formats and most working-class job seekers have limited access to online technology and lower computer literacy skills (Beard, Ford, Saba & Seals, 2012). Working-class job seekers have primarily worked with their hands and cannot navigate technology the way middle-class job seekers do despite the reality that working-class jobs are also online (Beard, Ford, Saba, Seals, 2012). Working-class job seekers at Work Track were trained and required to use middle-class communication and computer-mediated communication for their job search, so they had agency. But that agency was immobilizing agency because they could not gain traction in their job search using middle-class ways of communicating. Engagement of the job search market through incompatible structures produces

immobilizing agency and a lack of control over job search success their future work trajectories. Working-class job seekers searched for work in a structure that was not built to privilege them, which produced difficult job searches and an unresolvable incongruence for the working-class unemployed in a middle-class job market. (Im)mobilzing agency is a strand in the web of power that reveals the way communicative power work for the middle class by reifying privilege and against the working class by reifying disadvantage.

Implications for Existing Literature

This research contributes to several bodies of literature that include the following topical areas of scholarship: unemployment and social class; stigma and impression management; networking and social capital. Below I overview the ways in which this study enters into conversation with existing interdisciplinary scholars and their work.

Unemployment & Social Class Scholarship.

The findings of this study largely explicate the role of communication in the job search process, unemployment experiences, and social class. This dissertation research makes two contributions to unemployment and social class scholarship. My first contribution lies in the explanation of how social class is embodied in organizational formats. By analyzing the cultures of these organizations the findings reveal the ways that organizational artifacts, assumptions, and social interaction are classed in the context of unemployment support organizations. In nuanced ways this study reveals how social class is done at the micro level within organizational contexts. My second contribution largely lies in the data analysis, which reveals how job search communication is classed. Linguistic literature has maintained that middle-class speech is privileged. Job search

literature teaches people how to communicate on the job search. My research connects these two bodies of literature and critiques the way communication powerfully creates classed advantages and disadvantages for job seekers. Both contributions are explained in more detail below.

My first contribution is a result of using empirical data to reveal the way organizations embody social class materially and discursively by analyzing social interactions at the micro-level. Social class is reified in the cultural artifacts, social interactions, and assumptions of these organizations. The findings reveal how social class is produced and maintained at the micro-level. Tangible, audible, and visual aspects of the culture convey social class positioning. For example, the use of organizational attire, food, and space reveal social class privilege of the middle class and struggle of the working-class. These micro-level manifestations of social class privilege and struggle mirror larger macro level issues that impact micro-level reproductions of social class scale up to meso-level organizational practices, which contribute to macro level structures such as the social class structure. The study of unemployment organizations reveals nuanced ways in which this process begins at the individual level, is perpetuated through organizations, and is manifest in structural, systematic issues of joblessness and social mobility. All of this is achieved, in part, through communication.

My second contribution emerges from the analysis of divergent communication training across social class groups at unemployment organizations. Unemployment organizations teach people how to communicate like the middle class during the job search. But the way job search communication is taught is inherently classed, and until now that has not been problematized. My findings reveal the way communication

operates structurally in the search for work to create work-related opportunity or rejection. Communication is the mortar for social class (Dougherty, 2011) in the job search because communication is how people attempt to secure work, which leads to both upward and downward social mobility. The ability to speak like the middle class can make the job search either more or less challenging depending on one's social class positioning. Working-class people do not communicate like the middle class and thus are inherently disadvantaged, even though they are seeking working-class labor. Middle-class people communicate using middle-class norms and thus are able to search for work in more strategic ways. These findings produce nuanced knowledge that explains one reason why statistics consistently report that people from lower social classes and other non-dominant groups experience higher levels of unemployment. It is more difficult for working-class people to secure work because the language of the job search privileges middle-class communication.

My research complements the vast body of post-positivistic scholarship on unemployment. Research suggests that unemployment organizations are frequently ineffective (Gregg &Wadsworth, 1996; Jacobson, 2009). My findings reveal a more nuanced picture showing the ways these organizations are largely helpful, but could improve their organizational cultures by changing their communication framing and being more aware of the assumptions embedded in their organizational cultures. Both organizations are largely effective at providing informational support to patrons. The unemployment organizations studied also provided a space and instrumental resources for people to actively engage their job search. However, the underlying assumptions of each unemployment organization constrained reemployment efforts in the lives of my

participants despite the intent to enable job searches. Conceptualizing working-class job seekers as people who are dependent constrains their agency during the search for employment. Work Track exercised power over working-class job seekers, limiting their agency in the job search process. Conceptualizing middle-class job seekers as people who are entrepreneurially independent and who should be self-sufficient denies them support in the search for work. Executive Career Transitions allowed members to fail in their job searches for years. Instead of intervening ECT leaders rationalize the existence of long-term members with the logic that members should take personal responsibility and help themselves, as if unemployment is an individually created problem. There is a tension across social class lines that emerged in my data. These two competing metaphorical assumptions reveal the ways unemployment organizations can fail patrons whom they exist to support. These two metaphorical assumptions also reveal underlying social structures that permeate social life and the manifestation of social class in America. Contrasting classed based experiences also contribute to what we know about stigma and impression management.

Stigma & Impression Management.

There is a wide body of stigma and impression management literature that largely stands on Goffman's (1959, 1963) scholarship. Organizational communication researchers have analyzed the role of communication in the perpetuation and communicative management of stigma in relation to work (e.g. Agne, Thompson, & Cusella, 2000; Ashforth, Kreiner, Clark, & Fugate, 2007; Meisenbach, 2010; Miller, 1986; Smith, 2007). This body of literature spans a wide scope of communicative stigma management strategies. Furthermore, unemployment literature has looked at the stigma of

joblessness specifically during the search for work (e.g. Oberholzer-Gee, 2008; Vishwanath, 1989). Hiring practitioners discriminate against the unemployed due to stigma (Oberholzer-Gee, 2008; Vishwanath, 1989), which makes the job search more challenging for out of work individuals and the role of impression management vitally important. My contribution to this body of literature complicates our understanding of stigma during the absence of work by considering the way that stigmas intersect and are managed during the job search process.

The findings of this study reveal the way that multiple types of stigmas work together. Goffman (1963) explains three different types of stigma: abominations of the body (e.g. physical deformity), blemishes of individual character (dishonesty, addiction, unemployment, etc.), and tribal stigma (race, nation, religion). Goffman (1963) identifies unemployment as a blemish of "individual character" (p. 4). In addition, Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) recognize the following three types of taint that may result in the stigmatization: moral, social, and physical. Unemployment would be considered both a social and moral taint. All of my participants made sense of, navigated, and communicatively managed unemployment as a blemish of individual character and are tainted morally and socially. However, there were various other stigmas, in addition to unemployment stigma, that my participants managed the impression of during the job search. For example, while all participants dealt with the stigma of unemployment many also dealt with stigmas associated with age, illness, disability, addiction, criminal history, among others. I propose the notion of intersecting and multi-layered stigmas as a way to better explain how multiple types of stigma intertwine and create powerful barriers in the job search specifically and in society at large.

The empirical data illustrate the way communicative framing and language was used to make sense of these intersecting stigmas and to manage them during the job search. The members of ECT were managing the stigma of joblessness and age. Age would be considered a physical taint or tribal stigma (Ashforth & Kriener, 1999; Goffman, 1963). Due to these stigmas ECT job seekers experienced a communicative struggle. Members of ECT did not know what information to conceal or reveal. ECT members talked through these decisions with other organizational members. ECT job seekers were taught strategic ways to manage their image during the job search by presenting a stylized promotion of self made possible by drawing on entrepreneurial discourse to promote the self.

The data from Work Track reveals the way a wide scope of intersecting stigmas prompted the job search practitioners to use "transformation" language. Transformation language was used by WT practitioners as a way to frame the job search task in front of working-class job seekers due to the myriad of stigmas with which working-class job seekers grappled. Goffman explains that stigmatized people often try to correct an "objective failing of self" by engaging in a "transformation of self" in order to become a person who has "corrected a particular blemish" (p. 9). This was evident at Work Track, only the job seekers needed to transform multiple stigmatizing issues in order to succeed at the search for work (i.e. gain education, learn a trade, etc.). Using a critical lens in the analysis revealed the way job seekers faced and managed intersecting, multi-layered, powerful stigmas. Goffman (1963) maintains that stigma and discrimination work together in tandem to impede life chances. Communication is used to navigate and

manage stigma and when stigmas intersect communication processes, such as impression management, become more complex.

The communicative strategies used by job seekers to manage multi-layered stigmas reveal the way that impression management can trigger upward and downward social mobility. Impression management concepts provide an explanatory framework for the way job seekers perform the ideal candidate during the job search and interview process (Kacmar & Carlson, 1994; Miller, 1986). However, impression management can be tricky when intersecting stigmas are in play. Goffman (1959) explains that the "machinery of self-production is cumbersome…and sometimes breaks down." The findings of my study reveal the way that middle-class job seekers are advantageously prepared to successfully engage in impression management because their communication norms are privileged in the job search. This allowed middle-class job seekers at ECT to employ a strategic use of entrepreneurial discourse in order to manage their impressions. The transformation that was required of working-class job seekers at WT required a challenging impression management task because they needed to transform their situations in order to become viable job candidates and to be able to communicate positive impressions of self using middle-class speech norms. In short, the findings of my research reveal the way that social class is relevant to our understanding of intersecting stigmas and impression management. Another class based communication difference regarding the job search manifested in the ability of job seekers to network and leverage social capital.

Networking & Social Capital.

This study also contributes to literature about networking and social connections. First, using a social class lens, the emergent findings complicate our understanding about the function of networking as a communicative behavior across social class lines. Second, using a social class lens also permits scholars to have a more complicated understanding of social capital and one's ability to leverage such resources through networking.

Much of the networking literature stems from a sociological understanding of network analysis. Granovetter (1973) presented a compelling argument that revealed the power of weak ties to disseminate information across social groups. Strong ties are bonds between individuals that are defined by: a) long relational tenure, b) high emotional intensity, c) mutual disclosure or intimacy, and d) reciprocity (Granovetter, 1973). Strong ties create cohesive groups and inclusion. Sociologists explain that strong ties are generally characterized by friendships, family, and frequent interaction (Granovetter, 1973). Weak ties do not capture the same characteristics and are instead understood as a bridge across social groups, whereas strong ties create insulated social groups. Granovetter's (1973) argument proposed that weak ties were perhaps more functional and useful to share information across social groups because they served as bridges that connected insular groups made up of strong ties.

Granovetter's (1973) arguments are particularly relevant when considering the role of social capital in regards to social mobility. Bourdieu's (1987) notion of social capital, which he defines as a network of connections, illustrates the way that people can leverage connections in order to find work. Weak ties (Granovettter, 1973) and social capital (Bourdieu, 1987) are two concepts that can be married to understand the way that

people network in order to find work opportunities. My dissertation research begins the theoretical process of marrying the two scholarly concepts of strong/weak ties (Granovetter, 1973) and social capital (Bourdieu, 1987) together. I connect these two concepts as a way to better understand the networking communication differences across social class groups.

This dissertation research contributes to existing knowledge because it provides a nuanced understanding of how social class positioning impacts one's ability to network during the job search. I offer the notion of vertical and horizontal networking as a way to better understand and talk about networking communication as a classed phenomenon. I argue that networking from a middle-class standpoint allows one to leverage vertical weak ties. Middle-class job seekers at ECT had previous professional exposure to individuals with higher social class positioning than they did. This access and exposure allowed them to leverage the social capital of those who were positioned vertically higher up on the social class hierarchy in order to exploit weak ties as networking connections. The exploitation of weak ties up the social class hierarchy leads middle-class job seekers to information regarding job opportunities and allows them to communicate their availability and career aspirations to those who were in a position to help. Furthermore, middle-class job seekers helped one another network by making introductions via technology such as telephone, LinkedIn, and e-mail. Expanding one's network of connections by leveraging vertical weak ties operated effectively for middle-class job seekers because it spread information regarding their qualifications and availability across several social groups within the metropolitan area. This spread of information increased job seekers knowledge about opportunities and allowed the network to

advocate for them as they attempted to secure work. A different networking experience emerged for the working-class job seekers at Work Track.

Based on my conversations with Work Track job seekers, they largely did not have strong support networks they could lean on during joblessness. The few who were able to name someone in their support system mentioned a family member (mother or child) or gave the name of a practitioner at Work Track or another social services organization. Limited social networks for working-class job seekers at Work Track carry implications for networking and job seeking. Their experiences ring true with social class literature that explains people from lower social class standings have tight insular networks that are segregated from other social groups (e.g. Massey & Denton, 1993). Working-class people network in ways that create strong ties; however, these strong ties are used in ways that promote survival and cannot be leveraged to exploit social capital. The working-class job seekers from this study were not able to network vertically because most of the people in their networks had a similar social class standing. This is not to say that working-class job seekers did not network, but they cannot leverage the social capital of vertical weak ties the way middle-class job seekers can because they use strong ties to survive. In short, working-class job seekers networked horizontally. The few people who mentioned family members as a part of their social support network referenced them as people who provided housing or transportation. While this type of strong tie networking met material needs, it did not lead to job opportunities and did not spread information about their qualifications and availability to work. Theme one, *The Middle Class Imperative: Learning the Language of Privilege*, also explains that networking was done on the behalf of working-class job seekers. The third party

networking done by Work Track employees on behalf of working-class job seekers mimicked the way middle-class job seekers were able to leverage vertical weak ties. The findings of this study that speak to networking differences across social class lines regarding social capital and strong/weak ties is a contribution to the existing literature because it connects the scholarly notions of strong/weak ties (Granovetter, 1973) and social capital (Bourdieu, 1987) in order to nuances our understanding of job search networking.

Implications for Practice

This study carries heuristic value for unemployment practitioners at these two specific organizations, as well as at other organizational sites. First, these practitioners can read the stories of jobless individuals as they articulate their struggles and obstacles to employment. Having knowledge of unemployment experiences across social class lines would broaden the scope of understanding practitioners have as they support unemployed job seekers.

Managing stigma is an obstacle that all unemployed job seekers face. Organizations taught members to manage stigma in problematic ways that implied they accept negative stigma as true and apply it to self. Instead practitioners should call attention to the bias and discrimination that exists within the job market, interviewing, recruitment, and selection processes. Then practitioners should teach job seekers how to manage and challenge stigma. This shift in organizational training will help job seekers to understand that the flaw lies in structural bias and not in them personally. Stigma was related to job seekers' age, jobless status, education level, skill level, among other attributes.

Overall, failures to adequately articulate how larger social structures are at play negatively impact people's ability to understand and navigate their jobless situations. The unemployed are caught in a larger web-of-power where social inequities manifest in individual lives. Feeling solely responsible for one's job loss and unemployment leads to depression and frustration (Feather & Davenport, 1981; Hamilton, Hoffman, Broman, & Rauma,1993). In fact some literature reveals that job seekers internalize self-blame, which negatively impact job search activity (Martin, Bies, Brockner, 1995). If individuals feel solely responsibility and blame self for the absence of work then important predictors such as self-efficacy, reemployment efficacy, and self-esteem for job search success are likely impacted in a negative way (Eden & Aviram, 1993; Wanberg, Zhu, Van Hooft, 2010). Other studies have shown that positive self-concept repair during unemployment can serve as a source of motivation for the job search (Garrett-Peters, 2009). I argue that being able to articulate the larger social inequities such as stigma and discrimination would allow job seekers to shift responsibility solely away from themselves, decrease self-blame, and have more confidence in themselves as they engage the search for work.

Practitioners' at Work Track and Executive Career Transitions specifically can benefit from seeing how good intentions are misaligned with organizational action. The underlying metaphorical assumptions, while meant to empower and enable reemployment efforts, also constrain the search for work. The staff at Work Track should recognize the capabilities of their patrons and allow them to have more agency within the job search process. The staff at Executive Career Transitions should not dismiss or frown upon the need for more instrumental or individualized support when members become long term. With that said this research has both strengths and limitations.

Strengths

One of the strengths of this study is the comparative analysis. Brekhus (1998) argues that studies that solely focus on marked populations contribute to epistemological ghettos. Thus, he calls for research that has a nomadic analysis where the researcher analytically travels to study both marked and unmarked populations, resisting the tendency to study a phenomenon from one single vantage point (Brekhus, 1998). My research employs a nomadic analysis by comparatively studying the phenomena of organizational unemployment experiences across two different social class groups. My analysis of one organization informed the analysis for the other and vice versa. The knowledge produced in this study could not have emerged by studying one organization at a time. The analytical rigor of my study is robust due to my use of a nomadic analytical approach. Much of the social class literature makes claims about one social class group or another, but infrequently uses empirical data to analyze the nuances and produce comparative localized knowledge. These studies contribute a wealth of knowledge and are very valuable to scholarship. However, one of the strengths of this study is that I have the comparative data to take my class-based claims a step farther due to the comparative nature of my research.

Another strength of this study is the contribution I make to organizational communication literature specifically. To my knowledge there has not been a study within our discipline that takes a comparative, critical ethnographic analysis to unemployment organizations. Understanding the role of communication within these organizations and how they translate to employment opportunities reveals the importance of the study of organizational communication and the power that communication has in

the lives of individuals searching for work. The inability to communicate in privileged ways can literally threaten the survival of people and promote downward social mobility and even poverty. This knowledge reveals the way social class operates subtly through communication and can entrap a person into poverty.

Limitations

Despite the strengths of this research there are limitations that should be acknowledged. The methodology used in this study is biased towards my academic text worker orientation. I used interviews as one of my methods of data collection. While some of the interviews were revealing, the majority of Work Track's working-class job seekers struggled to articulate their experiences in words. I should have been more sensitive to this as a communication and social class scholar. However, this limitation did not become evident to me until I was in the midst of data collection. The interview process is an ineffective way to gain knowledge from body workers. As a social class scholar I am aware of the linguistic differences, but it was not until this project that I realized asking body workers to use their words to describe their experiences is a biased way to conduct research. I do strongly believe in the truthfulness of my findings and can say this because of the triangulation of data. Due to the limitation of interviews as a method of data collection I leaned more heavily on the data derived from participant observation to offset the use of interviews for body workers.

The localized knowledge produced in this study was derived from two non-profit unemployment organizations. The findings are specific to these types of organizations and there are many different types of places people can go for support in the job search

process: career coaches, temporary staffing agencies, governmental career centers, vocational rehabilitation, college/university career centers, and professional recruiters, among others. Future research will need to vet other organizational contexts. Furthermore, one of my organizations was a volunteer run non-profit organization and the other was a non-profit business. The implications of these differences in management did not fully emerge in the findings and is outside the scope of this research. But this is an important distinction. I would need to re-analyze the data and potentially collect more to understand how volunteer and paid unemployment practitioners comparatively approach their work.

Another limitation centers on the demographic of the participants. Age definitely plays a role in the job search and these participants age ranges differed. The mean age of the job seekers I interviewed at ECT was 42.5 and the mean age of the job seekers I interviewed at WT was 28.4 years of age. There are experiences of working-class, middle-aged job seekers that were not represented in my data. There are also experiences of younger middle-class job seekers that were not represented in my study. Furthermore, there are many seniors from both social class groups whose unemployment stories will tell a different narrative account than the experiences represented here. Race is certainly another demographic characteristic that intersects with social class. While race emerged in my data, a completely separate analysis using critical race theory would have resulted in a different set of findings. The racial demographic makeup of each organization is distinct and that mirrors the structural oppression that works against non-dominant members of society. All non-dominant racial minority groups except for those of Asian descent experience a disproportionate amount of unemployment and poverty in the

United States. An analysis focused on race could more fully illuminate the intersection of race, social class, and unemployment more explicitly. Furthermore, the majority of the members at unemployment organizations were male. I would like to focus on the intersection of gender and class as well. A comparative study of masculinity and femininity during joblessness might reveal a different or similar story comparatively.

Future Research

Social class is more recently becoming part of the scholarly conversation in the organizational communication discipline. If I intersect the three major areas of interest from this study (social class, organizational culture, and communication), there are multiple avenues for future research. Below I highlight potential research that could analyze: support messages, stigma communication management, cross-class communication, and the classed nature of for-profit/governmental/volunteer organizations.

First, I would like to more closely analyze the support messages that people received when they are managing unemployment. In my previous research and in my dissertation research I heard a few people share instances of "backhanded" support messages. Comments like, "I can't believe you're still looking for work? I was sure you'd have something by now" could be considered backhanded support. These messages are undergirded by assumptions regarding unemployment experiences and social class. Studies designed to analyze these messages could problematize ideological concepts regarding the expectation to work.

Another possible avenue for future research could explore stigma communication and unemployment. Few studies have analyzed how the stigma of unemployment is

communicatively managed in the job interviewing process. Specifically I would like to analyze stigma from the perspective of both hiring managers or recruiters and job seekers. Such research could reveal the way stigma communication perpetuates negative connotations regarding unemployment and how job seekers cope in actual job interviews. Ideally as a critical researcher I could suggest alternative forms of communication that would help job seekers challenge stigma.

This present study analyzes non-profit organizational contexts and reveals how social class emerges in the cultures of these organizations. I would also like to conduct ethnographic studies to see how social class is performed in the cultures of other types of organizations. I am specifically interested in larger for-profit organizations that include a social class laden hierarchy in their organizational structure. Studying the emergence of social class in corporations might a reveal a new story. Also, volunteer organizations might be a fruitful avenue for future research. Specifically in the context of volunteer organizations I could study cross-class communication. Many volunteer organizations in the United States serve populations in poverty. Future studies could analyze nuances of cross-class communication as middle-class volunteers serve those from lower-class populations.

Conclusion

In this study I comparatively analyzed the cultures of unemployment organizations across social class lines. The findings of this research reveal the way social class is marked communicatively across social class lines and how middle-class communication is privileged and used to secure employment opportunities. Furthermore, the analysis illustrates the way social class is a dialectic of material and discursive reality

(Dougherty, 2011). The findings also show the way text based practices are embedded in the emphasis middle class people place on discursive reality. Comparably, the data that emerged in this study reveals the way embodied action is embedded in the emphasis the working class places on material reality. From a critical perspective the emphasis working-class populations necessarily place on material reality puts them at a disadvantage due to the privileging of discursive reality and literate practices in society. The structural inequality of American society systematically disadvantages people from lower social classes and privileges people from middle and upper classes. Societal disadvantage and privilege is mirrored in the organizations researched for this project.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol for Unemployed Patrons

Time of Interview: _____

Date of Interview: _____

Place of Interview: _____

Interviewer: _____

Interviewee (Pseudonym): _____

Position of interviewee: _____

PURPOSE STATEMENT: This research seeks to better understand the communicative relationship between unemployment organizations and their members
Before interview: Please pick a pseudonym that you can go by. This is to protect your identity by keeping it confidential.
Semi-structured Interview Questions

Unemployment Experiences

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Describe your last job.
3. Tell me about the day you found out you were going to be unemployed?
4. Tell me about a typical day in your life, now that you're unemployed.
5. Tell me about your support system.

Organizational Experiences/Participation

1. Why did you choose Work Track/Executive Career Transitions?
2. Describe to me the programs you've participated in here.
3. Tell me a story about something positive that's happened to you here.
4. Tell me a story about something negative that's happened to you here.

Unemployment Organizational Culture

1. Describe the people at Work Track/Executive Career Transitions. Staff? Patrons?
2. Describe the atmosphere/environment here.
3. Describe how Work Track/Executive Career Transitions is similar/different to other organizations you've been to.

Help or Hindrance in Job Search/Development

1. Tell me about what you've learned, if anything, since you've been here?
2. How has Work Track/Executive Career Transitions helped you?
3. What do you think Work Track/Executive Career Transitions could do better?

Appendix B: Interview Protocol for Staff/Volunteers

Time of Interview: _____

Date of Interview: _____

Place of Interview: _____

Interviewer: _____

Interviewee (Pseudonym): _____

Position of interviewee: _____

PURPOSE STATEMENT: This research seeks to better understand the communicative relationship between unemployment organizations and their members
Before interview: Please pick a pseudonym that you can go by. This is to protect your identity by keeping it confidential.
Semi-structured Interview Questions

Background & Organizational Experiences/Participation

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. How did you come to work at Work Track/Executive Career Transitions?
3. Describe your role/job responsibilities here.
4. How are people here evaluated on their performance?
5. Tell me a story about something positive that's happened to you here.
6. Tell me a story about something negative that's happened to you here.

Unemployment Organizational Culture

1. How do you explain Work Track/Executive Career Transitions to newcomers?
2. Describe the people here. Staff? Patrons?
3. Describe the general atmosphere/environment.
4. Describe any particular traditions or routines that you have? (i.e. annual team building, birthday celebrations, regular staff meetings etc.)
5. Describe how Work Track/Executive Career Transitions is similar/different to other organizations where you've worked or volunteered.

Help or Hindrance in Job Search/Development

1. What do you think Work Track/Executive Career Transitions is particularly good at doing for its members?
2. What do you think Work Track/Executive Career Transitions could do better for its members?

Appendix C: Recruitment Script

Hello, my name is Angela Gist and I was told that you might be interested in participating in my study titled Managing Unemployment: A critical ethnographic analysis of unemployment organizations. The purpose of this study is to better understand how people from different backgrounds manage unemployment through organizations. The population I am interested in studying is unemployed adults, and you are being invited to participate because you are:

- at least 18 years of age
- currently affiliated with an unemployment agency/organization

If you agree to participate, you will need to agree to be interviewed in a one-on-one conversational format that will be recorded. When you arrive, you will be asked to fill out a simple demographic survey, review and sign a consent form, and participate in the interview. Your total participation should take between 45-90 minutes depending on what you have to say.

Your answers will be kept completely confidential. Your participation will help further understanding about the ways deal with unemployment. Are you interested in participating in this study?

Appendix D: Consent Form

Researchers: Angela Gist is a doctoral candidate and the primary researcher and Dr. Debbie Dougherty is an associate professor and the faculty advisor for this study within the Department of Communication at the University of Missouri.
Purpose: We are conducting this study to better understand the relationship between unemployment organizations and their members. The following two qualifications should be met by all participants: (1) be at least 18 years of age and (2) must be affiliated with this unemployment agency. Your participation entails completing an audio recorded interview with the primary researcher and filling out a short demographic questionnaire. I will also be asking some of the participants to give feedback on the analysis later in the process. You may choose to participate in that phase of the research as well but are under no obligation to do so.
Time: In total, participation should take between 45 to 90 minutes, depending on how much you choose to participate and on what you have to say. Again, I remind you that the interviews will be audio taped.
Voluntary: Your participation is voluntary. You may quit at any time and you may refuse to answer any question without consequence.
Risk: There is minimal risk involved with the study. There is no more risk than you would experience in your daily interactions.
Benefits: The results of this study may help to promote understanding about unemployment experiences.
Confidential: Your identity will not be revealed in transcripts, written documents, or verbal presentations of the data. The following steps will be taken to protect your identity

1. Consent forms will be separated from the data.
2. Personal identifying information will be eliminated from transcripts and any reporting of the data.
3. Your name will be changed on the transcripts to further protect your identity.
4. You can refuse to answer any question asked.
5. Audio files will be password protected.

Contact: If you have questions, please contact Angela Gist at (678)463–8082.You may also email at angwy6@mail.missouri.edu or DoughertyD@Missouri.edu.

Questions: If you have questions about your rights, contact Campus IRB:
Office of Research - 483 McReynolds Hall Columbia, MO 65211 - (573) 882-9585

Thank you for your participation! Signing this consent indicates that you understand and agree to the conditions above.

_____ _____
Name Date

Appendix E: Demographic Survey - Patrons

What is your birthdate? _____/_____/_____

What is your gender/sex? _____

How long have you been unemployed? _____

What was your previous occupation? _____

What was your previous salary/compensation? _____

How long have you been a part of this organization? _____

Racial/Ethnic Identity - please circle all categories that you would use to describe yourself:

- American Indian / Native American
- Asian
- Black / African American
- Hispanic / Latino
- White/Caucasian
- Other: _____

What is your current marital status? _____

Have you ever been married? _____

How many dependents (i.e. children) do you have? _____

What is your highest level of completed education_____

What is your living situation (i.e. rent, homeowner, etc.)? _____

How many bedrooms are in your current home? _____

What's your primary mode of transportation? _____

Do you own a vehicle? If so, how many? _____

Appendix F: Demographic Survey – Staff/Volunteers

1. What is your birthdate? _____/_____/_____ (mm/dd/yyyy)

2. What is your gender/sex?
   _____

3. How long have you been a part of this organization?
   _____

4. Racial/Ethnic Identity - please circle all categories that you would use to describe yourself:

   - American Indian / Native American
   - Asian
   - Black / African American
   - Hispanic / Latino
   - White/Caucasian
   - Other: _____

5. What is your current marital status? _____

6. How many dependents (i.e. children) do you have? _____

7. What is your highest level of completed education_____

8. What is your living situation (i.e. rent, homeowner, etc.)? _____

9. How many bedrooms are in your current home? _____

10. What's your primary mode of transportation? _____

11. Do you own a vehicle? If so, how many? _____

Appendix G: Interview Participant Demographics

WORK TRACK STAFF

Pseudonym	Organization & Role	Title	Length of Membership	Age	Gender	Race
Charles Phillips	WT Paid Staff	Adult Education Literacy (AEL) Instructor	1 month	33	M	Black
Eddie Kane	WT Paid Staff	Assistant Director of RJ	1 year & 7 months	29	M	Black
Bo	WT Paid Staff	Assistant Director of CC	3 months	40	M	Black
Gordon	WT Paid Staff	W. Location Director	13 years	48	M	Black
Wanfeather	WT Paid Staff	Career Advisor	20 months	39	M	African/ Kenyan
Hammer	WT Paid Staff	Job Developer/ Business Consultant	off and on for 8 yrs	32	M	White
Sara	WT Paid Staff	Vice President	27 years	59	F	White
Lena McGee	WT Paid Staff	AEL Instructor/ Curriculum Specialist	17 months	60	F	White
Maximus Constructionist	WT Paid Staff	Construction Instruction	3 years	54	M	White
Harper	WT Paid Staff	Transformation Specialist	3 months	31	F	Black
Averages/Totals:			Average: 5.625 years	Avg: 42.5	Men:7 Women:3	Black:5 White:4 Kenyan:1

WORK TRACK PATRONS

Pseudonym	Previous Position	Length of Unemployment	Previous Wage	Age	Gender	Race
Brianna	n/a	4 months	$7.25 hourly	18	F	White
Rasheeda	n/a	1 month	$6.35 hourly	21	F	Biracial: Black & Native American
Omarion	Construction/ Janitorial	6 months	$7.25 hourly	25	M	Black
Rico	Cleaning out Debris	1 month	$10.00 hourly	21	M	Black
Keon	Hotel Houseman	12 months	$8.00 hourly	22	M	Black
Carlos	Food Handler	18 months	$7.35 hourly	21	M	Black
Shawn	Under the table jobs, Remodeling	30 months	unanswered	21	M	Biracial: Black & White
Paris	Cashier	3 months	$7.50 hourly	19	F	Black
Steve	Cook	3 months	$7.35 hourly	49	M	White
Cherry Pie	Data Entry	36 months	$7.25 hourly	67	F	Black
Averages/Totals:		Average: 11.4 months	Average: $7.59 hourly	Avg: 28.4	Men:6 Women:4	Black: 6 White:2 Biracial:2

EXECUTIVE CAREER TRANSITIONS STAFF

Pseudonym	Organization & Role	Title	Length of Membership	Age	Gender	Race
Ralph	ECT Volunteer Staff	Former President & Board Member	9 years	70	M	White
Kelly	ECT Paid Staff	Administrative Assistant	12 years	58	F	White
Bob Wilson	ECT Volunteer Staff	President	3 years	73	M	White
Scott	ECT Volunteer Staff	Executive Director	2 years	66	M	White
Jerry	ECT Volunteer Staff	Board Member	17 years	unanswered	M	White
Aaron	ECT Volunteer Staff	Legal Advisor	6 years	62	M	White
Kat	ECT Volunteer Staff	Personal Advisor	2.5 years	48	F	White
Larry	ECT Volunteer Staff	Financial Advisor	4 years	54	M	White
Horseman	ECT Volunteer Staff	Entrepreneur Committee Leader	8+ years	68	M	White
Jack	ECT Volunteer Staff	Board Member	8+ years	77	M	White
Averages/Totals:			Average: 7.15 years	Average: 64	Men:8 Women:2	White:10

EXECUTIVE CAREER TRANSITIONS PATRONS

Pseudonym	Previous Position	Length of Unemployment	Previous Wage	Age	Gender	Race
Michael	Senior Financial Analyst	15 months	$65,000	57	M	White
Rick	HR Management	30 months	$45,000	54	M	White
Seema	Pharmacist	4.5 months	$100,000	49	F	Indian
Suzie Smith	Sales Manager	5 months	$90,000	44	F	White
Erwin W. Schottlehaus	Subcontractor Manager & Procurement Specialist	18 months	$95,000	64	M	White
Barbara	Vice President of HR	48 months	$140,000	64	F	White
Johnny Slowhand	Insurance Adjuster	18 months	$55,000	59	M	White
Grant	Public Relations	7 months	$80,000	54	M	White
Sandy Wilson	Marketing Coordinator	5 months	$50,000	50	F	White
Lauren	Retail Store Manager/Buyer	4 months	$60,000 + bonus	51	F	White
Averages/Totals:		Average: 15.45 months	Average: $78,000 annually	Avg: 54.6	Men:5 Women:5	White:9 Indian:1

VITA

Angela Gist was raised in St. Louis, Missouri. In 2003 she graduated from Ohio University with a Bachelor of Science in Journalism with an emphasis in advertising and a double minor in French and African American Studies. Angela then pursued a Master's Degree in Mass Communication, with an emphasis in advertising at the University of Georgia. Upon graduating from the University of Georgia in 2004, Angela dreamed of one day earning her Ph.D. However, after the completion of her first graduate degree Angela began a short-lived professional career in the advertising industry. This professional industry experience gave Angela a particular interest and insight into organizational communication. During her advertising career Angela also began working with interns and recent college graduates that were new hires, which stirred her interest in working with students. In 2009, Angela decided to pursue additional graduate studies in organizational communication. She began by taking a summer course about identity that would begin her five-year pursuit of a Ph.D. at the University of Missouri. Originally Angela was interested solely in researching organizational culture; by her third year Angela developed an interest in studying issues of social class in the organization. This would permit Angela to combine her research interest of organizational communication with issues of social justice. She has accepted a tenure-track, assistant professor position in the Department of Communication Studies at University of Kansas. Despite the historical rivalry between MU and KU, Angela is excited to begin her new academic career as a Jayhawk! It is her hope that she can help to construct a more egalitarian institution of higher education that empowers people from all backgrounds to be ethical organizational citizens through teaching, research, and service.