


Spring 5-15-2016

American Undergraduates Undone: Social and Intellectual Dysfunction on Campus

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WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY IN ST. LOUIS

University College
Liberal Arts

American Undergraduates Undone: Social and Intellectual Dysfunction on Campus
by
Noelle P. Jones

A thesis presented to the
Graduate School of Arts & Sciences
of Washington University in
partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree
of Master of Liberal Arts

May 2016
St. Louis, Missouri

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Acknowledgments

A special thanks to my thesis advisor, Stamos Metzidakis, for his consistent, helpful input and generous encouragement throughout my work on this project.

Much appreciation is due to my father, Kevin Jones, without whose support I would have been unable to attend and complete my master's program.

And finally, I did it!

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May 2016

1: Introduction

The pivotal, formative years of typical undergraduates, ages 18-22, represent a time when students mold their distinctive identities, social personalities, and intellects more intensively than during any other period of their lives. Developmental theorists Arthur W. Chickering and Linda Reisser call this process “journeying toward individuation—the discovery and refinement of one’s unique way of being—and also toward communion with other individuals and groups, including the larger national and global society” (35). In today’s college climate, students flummox and astound parents, professors, and researchers due to their individual immaturity and disengagement with learning. Although these complaints identify nothing new in America, the fact that these issues remain, centuries after the formation of the country’s colleges, shows both their current and historical relevance. Within the undergraduate realm, the continuation of outmoded social and intellectual traditions has led to adverse outcomes for generations of students. Continual cultural nostalgia for four (or more) years of adolescent mischief and self-indulgence encourages class after class of college students to put peer activities as first priority and academics far behind their society bids, alcohol-fueled parties, and sexual conquests. Moreover, even after decades of pedagogical and learning studies, today’s classroom practices do little to amend ineffective curriculums or combat cheating epidemics, grade inflation, and the diminished value of a college degree.

In the adolescent mindset, emotions hold the strongest influence over the formation of the individual as they succeed in altering one’s self-image during this internally tumultuous life stage. The parents, socioeconomic backgrounds, and genetic dispositions of adolescents all guide their individual development, but these factors take a subordinate position to the emotional

experiences of social interactions during the undergraduate years. Although peer relations are also influenced by parenting, background, and personality, the herd-like quality of the undergraduate social realm demands a new type of self-asserting that must transcend precollege identities in order that students may find their places among the masses. As undergraduates attempt to navigate circuitous paths of self-adjustment and social acceptance in college, they must also meet educational expectations. Intellectual development that occurs within the undergraduate academic environment does help to define the interests and future career pursuits of students. But these discoveries, in combination with the structural failings of the university system and the often self-defeating cultural framework at play in the college atmosphere, generally fail to provide students with adequate preparation for successfully managing their adult lives.

Patterns of dysfunctional behavior in the lifestyles of American undergraduates have been expressed throughout the past century in several important novels devoted to the college experience itself. These works reveal the sociocultural issues and educational flaws within the country's destructive college environments. Inner turbulence of the typical college age individual fluctuates in accordance with the perceived successes and failures of his or her social interactions during this critical period of self-adjustment and identity formation, and writers who depict these struggles discerningly connect fact and fiction. As F. Scott Fitzgerald's Amory Blaine observes in *This Side of Paradise* (1920), from city to city across America, college youths create "one vast juvenile intrigue"—a uniquely defined subculture of American life informed by the nature of its colleges (67). In another fictional voice of appreciation for the collegiate culture, Dink Stover relishes in the beauty of the quintessential late-adolescent experience that awaits him as he steps onto Yale's campus in Owen Johnson's 1912 novel, *Stover at Yale*:

They had begun at last—the happy, care-free years that every one [sic] proclaimed. Four glorious years, good times, good fellows, and a free and open fight to be among the leaders and leave a name on the roll of fame... ‘The best, the happiest I’ll ever know! Nothing will ever be like them—nothing!’ (13)

This inaugural American college experience novel of the twentieth century evokes the idea of the undergraduate years as a boisterous battleground for the most able-bodied and strong-willed of young bucks embarking on a new, campus way of life. The conquests of students’ freshman year pinpoint a particularly important initiation period within the transition from youth to adulthood.

When speaking of the college experience as a sole entity, however, an important distinction must be made between a “college” and a “university” to clarify the location of the happenings. In *College: What It Was, Is, and Should Be* (2012), Andrew Delbanco defines a college as a place involved in “transmitting knowledge of and from the past to undergraduate students so they may draw upon it as a living resource in the future” (2). A university, on the other hand, consists of “an array of research activities conducted by faculty and graduate students with the aim of creating new knowledge in order to supersede the past” (2). While these definitions point to “colleges” as bastions of the past and “universities” as forerunners of the future, a true examination of the undergraduate experience shows how both places subscribe to a common American ideal of the campus lifestyle. Crossovers that occur in casual conversation cause ongoing confusion between the terms for those not directly involved in the operations of one or the other. This leads the majority of Americans to loosely (or even randomly) associate one term or the other with a rough idea of what each indicates. In addition, the discordance between what a college or university actually is and does, versus the image it projects to the general public, generates a slew of controversy over its “mission” for the student population, the

surrounding community, and finally, society as a whole. For the purposes of this study, from this point on, the term “college” will refer to the broader, cultural idea of both four-year colleges and universities in terms of social and intellectual specifics not related to their fields of study and/or research, unless otherwise indicated.

Colleges seem unable to create or, more importantly, to adhere to the claims of the mission statements they produce, other than through very generalized, marketing-fueled blurbs about their powerful goals of unrelenting dedication to true teaching and learning. According to Delbanco, it should go without saying that “every college has an obligation to make itself a place not just for networking and credentialing but for learning in the broad and deep meaning of that word” (24). However, the purpose of turning out as many successful graduates as possible seems much more important to college administrators than any other single task, since good statistics are the way to top the annual college rankings of *U.S. News & World Report*. Unfortunately, as Delbanco argues, the “criteria we use to assess the quality of a college—number of publications by its faculty, size of endowment, selectivity in admissions, rate of alumni giving, even graduation rates—tell very little about what it does for its students” (2).

While post-secondary institutions need to cater more to the overall welfare of their student populations within the social and intellectual spheres, the degree to which colleges take over the role of parenting and/or promote standards of moral and ethical behavior potentially calls upon the ideological aims of the original, more religious-minded colleges. Yet Cardinal John Henry Newman’s seminal work, *The Idea of a University* (published in two parts in 1852 and 1859, then together in 1873), established as early as the mid- to late-nineteenth century that higher education should be “intellectual, not moral,” even from the perspective of a theologian (3). His reasons for dividing general and religious education can be attributed to his intended

audience and purpose as a controversially appointed, newly converted Catholic Cardinal on the path to found a university for Irish Catholics. However, this sentiment began a tradition of educational institutions that were centered on secular demands rather than religious devotions.

As a result, the establishment of the college degree as a necessity for professional pursuits took shape in America and contributed to the growth of commercial interests as the primary concern of the economy, politics, and the job market. What has been at stake ever since is Newman's argument that vocational training should maintain its own arena, completely separate from the site of "knowledge[,] which is its own end" (83). The more humanistic view of Newman's constituents, that "At its core, a college should be a place where young people find help for navigating the territory between adolescence and adulthood" has fallen by the wayside (Delbanco 3). The social climate of campuses continues to suffer as a result. Colleges also often forego one of the original goals of higher learning—"training [students] to fill their respective posts in life better, and of making them more intelligent, capable, active members of society" (Newman 5). As a nation with a tradition of glorifying individualism, the U.S. pushes collective cooperation and intellectual alliance to the background in favor of singular achievements, especially when starkly divided views maintain as a mere unrealized ideal the unification of citizens.

According to the extensive studies of college students across the nation by psychosocial theorists Ernest T. Pascarella and Patrick T. Terenzini, "[W]hat happens to students after they arrive on campus has a greater influence on academic and social self-concepts than does the kind of institution students attend" (184). Whether enrolled at a low-ranking regional university or an Ivy League school, students' interactions and experiences more accurately predict post-graduation confidence and self-awareness than the characteristics of the school where they

obtained their degree. Examining the quintessential American college experience involves a study of late-adolescent undergraduates who live on campus at least one year while enrolled at four-year colleges or universities. “With a few exceptions,” Delbanco writes, “the residential college is virtually unknown outside the Anglo-American world,” which makes dorm life a uniquely American realm of adolescent experience (55).

Commuter and graduate students constitute two wholly different types of students from the typical undergraduate. The former usually does not share in the on-campus, parent-free, peer-informed environment, whereas the latter is simply not in the same 18-22 year-old age group, a pivotal period of self-adjustment. On the same note, graduate students generally seek an educational lifestyle with more directed and academically pointed end goals, whereas the typical undergraduate samples a broad offering of core curriculum required for degree completion. While colleges independently boast of the results of a well-rounded education at their particular institution, the lack of resources or support for a truly effective, intellectually stimulating, multidisciplinary core curriculum in Newman’s sense of the term “liberal arts” leaves extensive space for improvement in any American post-secondary school. The idea of “diffusing good” by means of a “general culture of mind” seems long gone from the U.S.’s commercial market—a market that demands primarily career-based training built upon the convenience of readily applicable knowledge (Newman 117-18).

Learning-based studies continually balk most obstinately at the lack of “critical thinking” development during the undergraduate years. This focus on an often arbitrarily defined intellectual capability obscures the significance of socially destructive forces at play in the environment that college experience novels do so well to reveal. College campuses negatively affect the development of the individual by functioning within circumstances that cause identity-

morphing and social casualties. Yet, parents and educators possess the ability to minimize the detrimental effects of these social disturbances. So why do they let the status quo persist? One answer stands stalwartly with the traditions entrenched in the undergraduate lifestyle. Student shenanigans, more than just indicators of immaturity, are expected as part of the hazing-style spirit of either becoming “gentlemen” (in Newman’s Oxbridge-informed definition) or fully liberated young women (in a post-Sexual Revolution, “Girls Gone Wild”-type of rollicking, reckless freedom, which Tom Wolfe emphasizes in his 2003 novel, *I Am Charlotte Simmons*). After parents send their teens off to college, they may feel inconsequential in the shaping of their children’s late- to post-adolescent identities. As a result of both their physical and emotional distance, parents allow the undergraduate realm to provide primarily peer-centered guidance, which takes the form of unstable influences such as RAs, student-run clubs, and Greek life organizations.

Although each post-Sexual Revolution generation believes that the disposition of its young people has escalated to a horrendous new level of waywardness, the voices of many more generations since the founding of American colleges have proven that the academic “problem” is merely a continuous one, and that it takes on newly disturbing forms following each social, political, economic, or other major revolution. Strongly supported opinions of the past, like that of Joseph Wood Krutch, who interviewed the “provost of one of the largest and most honored institutions in the United States” for a 1960 *Saturday Review* article, echo the fear of moral failure in raising the era’s college students: “[A] sense of the supreme importance of purely personal honor, honesty, and integrity,” Krutch vows, “seems to be declining” (qtd. in Stroup 197). This claim, part of an exposé on undergraduate cheating at the time, sounds like Newman’s complaint that a lack of a properly executed liberal arts education results in worthless years of

college study. Much like students who cheat on exams and assignments, Newman identifies that “when their period of education is passed,” disconnected students often “throw up all they have learned in disgust, having gained nothing really by their anxious labours, except perhaps the habit of application” (107). In this way, students easily stumble through college without a meaningful intellectual experience.

The problems consistently present within higher education today come from a far greater sphere than that of students’ ethical standards. While cheating runs rampant on campuses, professors may find that its roots grow from “student anxiety stemming mainly from lacks in the precollege educational background” (Ellison 184). To look back to secondary and even primary education’s inadequacies spreads the blame not only to a larger group of teachers, school administrators, and government officials who define the expectations for those schools, but also to parents, the first and most present educators in a child’s life. As Jean Piaget notes in his 1948 treatise on the future of education, *To Understand Is To Invent*, “A close relationship between teachers and parents...leads to much more than mutual informational exchange: these exchanges are reciprocally advantageous and often lead to a real improvement in [teaching] methods,” both at home and at school (84-85). The personal insecurities, identity adjustments, and social expectations of precollege adolescents, when not dealt with properly by the guidance of parents and teachers, leave incoming freshman undergraduates extremely vulnerable to the pressures of college life. A chronic fear of judgment by peers, professors’ grades, and oneself makes the insecure student a victim of impulse and anxiety when attempting to fit in and find the right way. These weaknesses cannot be attributed solely to the parents’ or the student’s character; instead, they reflect a pattern of dysfunctional behavior in the intellectual and social lives of American undergraduates that is fueled by educational and sociocultural flaws of a longstanding, often

debilitating college environment. The broader framework of capitalistic standards and economic realities within which universities must operate exacerbates the epidemic of college student dysfunction.

College experience novels of the last century recapture the insecurities of students trying to assert their place in the hierarchy of undergraduate social life while balancing those personal trials with a confusing proliferation of academics. These novels consistently echo the findings of psychosocial research and express the same truths that theorists have studied and catalogued for over a hundred years in America. Since “literature, history, philosophy, and the arts provide a vocabulary for formulating ultimate questions of the sort that have always had special urgency for young people,” college experience novels effectively evoke the feeling of trying to find the answers to those “ultimate questions” within their unique, bizarrely restrictive, self-contained universe of personal exploration and peer scrutiny (Delbanco 99). Susan Allen Toth recounts her time at Smith in her novel *Ivy Days: Making My Way Out East* (1984), with an acknowledgment that “We had had that indulgence college students seldom recognize, to focus without guilt only on ourselves and our own concerns” for that special, magical period of four years (*xvii*). The authors of memoir-style college novels portray themselves as misfits in a particularly personal genre of writing. Such authors, like Toth, reflect on and process collegiate navel-gazing, both as it happens in novels and in imaginative retrospection. As another representative of the mostly autobiographical-style college novel, Fitzgerald allows his character Amory Blaine to stand in for his undergraduate self at Princeton. “I do believe he’s a bit eccentric,” Amory’s friend appropriately labels him (85). In the tradition of “tr[ying] conscientiously to look both pleasantly blasé and casually critical” in front of their peers and superiors, anyone who challenges the acceptable and accepted modes of conduct stands out (43). The discomfort of writers like Toth

and Fitzgerald became powerfully disturbing at the time of their college experiences and remarkably poignant later on.

Fear caused by initiation with the college atmosphere is offset by the bravado of self-confidence once students feel their identities and behavior have been affirmed by peers. This allows for social groupings that have the dual power to help and hurt students' perceptions of themselves, depending on whether or not they perceive peer approval. In this way, the undergraduate community controls the scale of delicate balance between internal uncertainty and external assurance. The fictionalizations of these struggles affirm that "college myths and memories have long been an important part of America's sense of what young adulthood is all about" (Delbanco 152). From Owen Johnson's 1912 *Stover at Yale* to Tom Wolfe's 2003 *I Am Charlotte Simmons*, a century of traditional American college stories sustains a tone of personal misgivings, peer scrutiny, and intellectual detachment. Overall then, changes that occur during the college years significantly affect the person that each student becomes, which is evidenced by the novels that speak with undergraduate voices. While real-life students suffer through analogous emotional journeys associated with personal maturation and intellectual development as they immerse themselves in the collegiate culture, they also experience the opportunity to use those challenges to shape strong, informed selves. A study of more than a hundred years' worth of the country's college experience novels, however, reveals the various personal, social, and intellectual factors that impede student development and exposes the potential harm carried out by ineffective parenting, lackluster pedagogical approaches, and damaging American cultural ideologies.

2: Who Am I Tomorrow? Self-Discovery and the College Student Lifestyle

Individual development during the college years often falls victim to the emotional impulses of adolescence as undergraduates attempt to find their places among a complex mixture of maturity levels in the social environment. The undergraduate atmosphere invokes an extremely adjustable array of adolescent identities, particularly in less secure individuals, as students struggle to find comfortable personas that align with both their precollege and newly-formed personalities. When students respond to social stimuli, they engage in atavistic and frequently animalistic behavior promoted by a dominant group mentality that provokes aggressiveness and competitiveness. As a result, the challenges of living on one's own for the first time are counterproductively accompanied by an equally demanding group dynamic. The peer influence thus delays individual development by encouraging students to revert to childish behaviors at a time when their living situation demands otherwise.

In the 1991 study by psychosocial and cognitive theorists Pascarella and Terenzini, undergraduates led them to the conclusion that “progress is made toward the development of personal identities and more positive self-concepts” during the college years (563-64). However, this one-sided claim fails to acknowledge the disturbing impacts of the social environment on students' self-concepts and self-confidence. One must consider, though, that Pascarella and Terenzini's research involved student surveys, which inevitably earn unduly positive responses, especially when solicited from graduating seniors who seek the assurance of having learned something during the past four or more years.¹ The research team does admit that the “findings

¹ See page 44 for further discussion of the “herd instinct,” which drives inaccuracies like those found by Coles and Stokes in *Sex and the American Teenager* (1985).

of such studies [of ‘freshman-to-senior change’] tend to mask individual differences in patterns of change” (565). How can a study titled *How College Affects Students*, which claims to focus on individual development and improvement, maintain its legitimacy when it errs on the side of obscuring distinctions from within the student population? If undergraduates form their identities through their roles within peer groups, they are highly likely to be misguided. College experience novels provide deep-set evidence of these effects through their authors’ messages.

Toth’s memoir-style novel of her undergraduate years at Smith highlights the covert, individualized struggles of adjustment felt by a humble, small town girl in an Eastern money atmosphere. While she acknowledges the beauty of her perspective-enhancing education in which she was able to “pic[k] up glasses to see worlds I hadn’t known existed,” she also admonishes the feelings of estrangement created by group living: “There were so many of us, living so closely together,” and “[f]ew of us knew how the others felt” (82; 57; 62). Wolfe’s Charlotte portrays an equally exuberant attitude about college academics as she proclaims that “Yes! She had found the life of the mind and was...*living it!*” (285; italics in orig.). But loneliness—so acute, so isolating—is enough to make her lose the confidence of her precollege self and eventually forego her convictions. Alternately, when insecure students like Susan and Charlotte succeed in the peer popularity game, they display an exaggerated bravado of self-assurance. When Charlotte feels she has trumped the fraternity and sorority crowd’s critical gaze through her sex appeal and charisma at her love interest Hoyt’s winter formal dance (with the assistance of alcohol, it is worth mentioning), she quickly transitions from feeling “defeated and sad—sad about her own amateurishness, her shortcomings as...a girl” to having “a wonderful time...mesmerizing guys with her looks and, now that she felt more confident, her personality. In a short time she had *woven* herself into the very *fabric* of the formal (441; ellipses in orig.;

455; italics in orig.). But just like the false view of her situation created by the alcohol in her system, the façade of popularity proves to be a fallacy when Charlotte gets cast aside, post-coitus. Whether it temporarily boosts or jarringly harms a student's self-image, the relevance of social interaction in an undergraduate's life is made consistently apparent through the reflections of protagonists in college experience novels.

The emotional fluctuations of undergraduates upset more than just individual students within the college community. Chickering and Reisser go so far as to state that "All members of the college community are affected by the emotions of the students as they live out their dramas inside and outside of the classroom" (84). As undergraduates work through self-reflective and socially-adjustable journeys of emotional responsiveness, they can seem volatile to their surrounding community members. Adolescents who "successfully" mature during their college experience are said by Chickering and Reisser to exhibit: "awareness of the causes or sources of feelings, acceptance of feelings as valuable sources of information, and [having learned] the consequences of acting on impulse" (88). In fact, "managing emotions" makes up one of these researchers' developmental vectors, which as a group indicate growth and improvement toward a complete concept of identity. In keeping with the idea of emotional satisfaction as a guide of undergraduate outcomes, Mary Grigsby's post-collegiate identity categories in *College Life through the Eyes of Students* (2009) focus on students' "confidence about their ability to have a fulfilling future through their present path" (11). By making conscientious personal choices that allow for the management of individual development, fully developed students satisfy their self-created goals while adhering to the demands of their social network.

The Princeton boys of *This Side of Paradise* get caught up in conflicted feelings over their position as undergraduates, as they strive to be youthfully blithe and simultaneously cool,

composed, and confident. “I feel so sad these wonderful nights,” Amory reflects; “I sort of feel they’re never coming again, and I’m not really getting all I could out of them” (Fitzgerald 92). In a contrarian spirit, his friend Alec quickly interjects, “What a waste these nights are!” (92). While Amory indulges in the temporality of the boys’ spring outings together, his wistfulness translates into Alec’s playful bitterness. Back and forth the boys continue, pulling back from their responsibilities and giving way to youthful impulses at the same time that they aspire to be diligent students and future adults of repute. Unable to decide which persona best suits them, Amory and his comrades fluctuate between the wiles of adolescence and the impending realities of adulthood.

The overall goal of college for the majority of students—to “make something” positive of themselves—causes personal and external pressure throughout the undergraduate years. Expectations plague student consciences and haunt them in the form of tests, grades, social obligations, club alliances, and personal standards. Although this perpetual stress is expected as part of the college experience, when combined with the emotional fluctuations of the adolescent years, it also pushes undergraduates’ thoughts and behaviors toward rebellion, inaction, and/or self-destructive identities. As the individual’s confidence wavers, the maintenance of supportive peer relationships feels not only comfortingly reassuring but also necessary to one’s emotional health and academic success. Adults involved in the student’s life should encourage positive relationships and fill in any gaps with their support as well.

One injurious type of reaction to college pressure is haughtiness or an air of apathy toward the entire experience. In Amory’s dispirited view of the proper mode of conduct, “being personally conspicuous was not tolerated, and the influential man was the non-committal man” (Fitzgerald 51). This anti-response tactic of conviction in inaction rejects the ongoing conflict of

defining the self by failing to acknowledge the importance or, at times, the existence of the struggle. A mindset of indifference easily gains a foothold in the academic (and social) community when students band together in shared perpetration of this attitude. Ambivalence spreads readily in today's cynical, post-modern society where everything is constantly (or already) critiqued. As with other fringe identities, loudly declaring one's adherence to the proposed way of thinking helps to legitimize it to both followers and onlookers of the approach.

Student indifference shows through their attitudes in the classroom, on campus, in social situations, and back at home in front of parents. When Hugh Kennedy's Alex meets his unconventional dream-girl and future companion Jill Lanigan in *Everything Looks Impressive* (1993), she determines college to be "one of the only places left in the country where you can come and be an insufferable, self-involved artiste for four years without provoking general ridicule" (12). As a former good-grades martyr and newly-crowned collegiate good-timer, Alex constantly toys with the balance of study and play during his freshman year. An undergraduate such as Alex, on the brink of adulthood with minimal ability to manage his own lifestyle, should be a disturbing concern to parents. Unfortunately, as parents take steps back from the typically more intensive parenting of the high school years, they might misread their child's degree of remove as a normal progression toward independence; instead, it can reveal uninterest, apathy, or even defeatism. Alex shows his disconnectedness in a set of journal entries from the same month, "one beginning with and the other closing with the sentence, 'I have to make a new start'" (109). Alex realizes he is stuck in an official college rut—well-aware of it, in fact—but feels unable to change his situation. Without a parent to guide him for the first time in his life, he discovers suffering at his own hand.

The often unacknowledged main component of adolescent indifference to collegiate responsibilities, though, is fear: fear of acknowledging the gravity of actions as they truly weigh on the student's life; fear of taking on a responsible, adult role; fear of adopting any other persona than the current, dysfunctional, self-defeating one; and fear of judgment and/or rejection by peers. Upon first arriving at Dupont, Charlotte is plagued by the fear of being alone in a new, as-yet unpredictable environment. After joining a group of peers for a dorm meeting, she muses that "Actually, standing in the center amid so many other girls and boys made her feel almost...whole again. [Her peers] certainly did not look intimidating. In fact, with all their shorts, flip-flops, and T-shirts, they looked like large children" (Wolfe 79; italics in orig.). Considering the students' innocent appearances and herd mentality, "large children" aptly describes them; it is only through mutual reliance that undergraduates, and specifically freshmen, survive the fear of facing their new lives as college students and quasi-adults with quasi-adult responsibilities. Charlotte's R.A. tells her group of freshmen charges, "The university no longer plays the role of parent...and certainly I don't. You're on your own" (80). The period of time to which the R.A. refers when she says "no longer" seems to speak to Wolfe's overarching argument that a more extreme loss of innocence occurs on today's undergraduate campuses than during the era of more harmless hijinks, perhaps that of Wolfe's own college experiences.

Student actions stem from the foundations laid by their upbringing, so the parenting received during childhood sets the stage for conduct during the college years. In the opinion of Coles and Stokes, whose 1984 study examined teens' sex-related beliefs and behaviors, adolescents generally need a strong hand to guide them, and they crave that level of authority if they are not getting it. Teens interviewed during the research expressed, in many ways, that they sought "an adult to respect" (10). As a literary representative of this problem, Fitzgerald's

Amory suffers from the influences of a worthless, absent father and a disturbed, worldly mother, who struggles with what she sees as the uncultured banality of life in the States. She coddles her only child in order to feed her ego with the comforting belief that she raised a delicate prince of America. While Amory finds his mother's willingness to cater to his every need a pleasing whimsy, the secondhand information he receives regarding his father's difficulties serves as a haunting reminder of the weak masculinity and professional ineptitude that Amory aims to avoid at all costs in his own life.

In following the school of thought of Coles and Stokes regarding parenting approaches, teens need a heightened sense of guidance and security, and not as much independence as post-Sexual Revolution parents might be inclined to provide. Piaget argues that parents and educators "carefully...avoid frustrating the developing child in any way" (6). This non-parenting, laissez-faire approach to dealing with youth "led to an excess of unsupervised liberty which ended in generalized play without much educational benefit" (6-7). The undergraduate campus life serves as a perfect example of letting students run amok as immature, unformed revelers. When faced with their own vulnerability in the absence of parental safeguards, adolescents may act out in the form of rebellious, self-destructive activities. A lack of consistent parental and adult direction gives students an excess of freedom to make poor choices. In light of Amory's experience with dysfunctional parenting, he feels "resentful against all those in authority over him," which translates into a "lazy indifference toward his [school]work" (Fitzgerald 31). With inhibitions that hover somewhere between childlike fears of the unknown and adult-like hesitations toward responsibilities, adolescents like Amory respond to their uncertainty with antipathy toward those who seem to hold power above them.

Self-defeating behavior can be prevented when teens respect the authority figures in their lives, and Coles and Stokes believe that maintaining a stable household from early on in a child's life establishes a pattern of reliability, thus securing the adolescent's comfort level. Since the research of Coles and Stokes explored teen sexuality, it is important to recognize here that the "routines and rituals of teenage sexuality and abstinence are the preeminent ground on which kids confirm or discover the ethical and moral standards they will carry with them into adulthood" (32). This gives the findings of Coles and Stokes special consideration and conclusive weight when examining the late adolescent, undergraduate mindset in relation to family background. In the study, parents' marital status directly affected teens' sexual activity (77). Teens of divorced parents were much more likely to engage in sex earlier, which shows that instability at home leads to riskier behavior at a time when the child is less likely to be mentally prepared to deal with the consequences of such behavior (77). In contrast, "children brought up by parents who are reasonably stable and in control of themselves will have learned the same capacity from the first years of life" (200). It follows that a positive parental influence yields a positive result in the adolescent's outlook and ability to cope with the challenges of young life. As the study emphasizes, a lack of sexual education and/or misinformation from parents leads to more sexual activity among teenagers, which brings about a whole new set of complications. Even a bit of preventative learning could help keep teens out of trouble. Coles and Stokes found that "almost half the [surveyed] teens (45%) reported that their parents taught them *nothing* about sex" (36; italics in orig.). It is parents' responsibility not only to set standards but also to leave room for youthful exploration, inevitable mistakes, and then learned corrections. This method of parenting allows teens to form their own beliefs in light of solid parental guidance.

In any household, however, parental disapproval can be a stimulus for teens to rebel, specifically in regards to parents' expressed concerns and/or assumed conservativeness regarding sex. Misinterpreted parental standards easily misguide teen behaviors whether they over- or underestimate the concern. At times, being too liberal disqualifies the value of parents' opinions to teens. A fifteen year-old girl interviewed by Coles and Stokes admitted that, after telling her mom that she was no longer a virgin, "I was more embarrassed than she was" (97). Post-Sexual Revolution parents have often opened the communication relationship with their children to invite more discussion of controversial issues and taboo topics while teens grow and learn, but "parents who choose the route of openness take a difficult path" (98). Getting the respect of skeptical teenagers can be the most challenging aspect of edification, especially since young people may be out of touch or indifferent to their parents' expectations. Whether parents send messages which are too strong or too weak regarding behavioral expectations, these extremes cause teens to respond in the extreme as well. It becomes a more severe problem when parents' views have been belittled in the teens' moral code, developing in them a general indifference toward authority. Overall, when parents make their attention and support known on matters like sexual knowledge and behavior (but avoid bombarding their children with didacticism), adolescents take notice of it and respond with acknowledgement of and respect for parental messages and standards.

A mentoring figure also helps to smooth the transition from childhood to adolescence, particularly when a parent (or both) is (are) unavailable or unable to provide needed guidance. Coles and Stokes encountered many teens who were "very much bothered by not having someone to talk to" (99). College experience novels frequently turn to this character device when ineffectual parents leave the young protagonist unsure, confused, or at a loss. Fitzgerald uses

Amory's mother's long-lost, lover-turned-cleric, Monsignor Darcy, as the only adult who seems to be on the same intellectual plane as Amory. The Monsignor functions as a confidant and voice of experience-to-come for Amory. Nearly half a century later, Toth's Mrs. Stevens elicits respect from Susan after she tries to pull the lonely freshman out of her depressed, homesick funk. As Susan comes to realize that Mrs. Stevens is content to live unmarried among the girls and serve the important purpose of caretaker to students like herself, she learns that there are more career options than the pre-established paths she was raised to believe in and follow. In a twenty-first-century example, Miss Pennington's big dreams of success for her small town protégé Charlotte give the girl the push she needs to leave the mountains of Sparta, North Carolina and enter the Ivy League world of the fictional Dupont University. As Wolfe explains about Charlotte's relationship with her mother, after hitting puberty, "a curtain closed between them" (24). Thus, Charlotte feeds off of the mentor-figure status of Miss Pennington whenever her mother's closeminded conservatism elicits more fear than encouragement.

Offering regular, healthful doses of advice and an open ear for listening to problems should never be overlooked as a parenting or mentoring tactic, even in light of its failure, at times, to capture the mind of the rebellious or frivolous adolescent. When adults encourage students to set goals, their odds of reaching higher levels of competence significantly improve. Additionally, with increased expectations from adults, students develop higher standards for themselves. "[P]lans for higher education," note Coles and Stokes, "are generally associated with lower sexual activity" (78). Among those who were celibate, eighty-seven percent reported never having used alcohol, compared with only thirteen percent of "nonvirgins" (79). Teen goal-setting thus becomes not only an indicator of future achievement, but also an effective deterrent of risky behavior.

Parental influences weigh heavily on students' abilities to adjust to new environments like college campuses, to express themselves in social situations, and to affirm their identities. Experimentation with and/or affirmations of new gender and sexual identities can also be simplified by parents' and other adults' support. When adolescents feel repressed by the adults in their lives, they close crucial doors of communication. Kennedy's Jill Lanigan does not even consider sharing her bisexual identity with her uptight, upper class parents. "Mr. and Mrs. Lanigan sounded like the kind of jet-set parents whose children were fucked up until at least the age of twenty-eight," narrator Alex presumes (144). In Jill's case, her parents give her yet another reason to put up a protective shield from potential judgments and wear a mask of normative sexuality.

Alternately, some characters purposely evade normalcy, or the conditions considered as the standards for social acceptability, in response to parental repression. This could involve touting an anti-establishmentarian ethos and establishing intentional social boundaries. In Chip Kidd's *The Cheese Monkeys* (2001), when snarky Professor Winter Sorbeck encounters the self-proclaimed "David David" in his classroom, he recoils in disgust and warns him, "[Y]ou've forsaken your family's good name in a sadly misguided exchange for a false identity even more dull and conformist than the one you think you're escaping. At some point you will grow up, and the very notion of it will make you wince in your sleep" (144). David's attempt to free himself "from the tyranny of a bourgeois societal abattoir that brands its cow-like subjects with meaningless labels in order to more efficiently herd them" just makes him a different kind of "cow" (143-44). Much like Himillsy, the novel's young feminist, when nonconformist, fringe kids like David willingly deem themselves postmodern casualties by means of spirited, rebellious harangues, they "moo" to their own detriment. All in all, student attitudes and

behavior during college can be greatly altered by the parenting they receive before embarking on such a formative period of adolescence. Whether or not positive parental guidance results in favorable outcomes for students' later lives is left to a combination of student interpretations and personal decisions.

Professors like the fictional Sorbeck hold a stance that allows for them to play uniquely influential roles in the formation of undergraduates' consciousness. Though not as personally instructive as a parent, a professor can mold student intellect and confidence from a safe, respected distance. In the classroom, course topics and teaching tactics that acknowledge the special, formative period of the undergraduate help to ease the transition from high school immaturity to capable young adults. "Assignments that invite students to engage emotionally as well as intellectually," Chickering and Reisser explain, "can assist them with the management of emotions, which must first be brought into awareness before they can be given powerful expression," or even validity, in students' minds (61). In learning to cope with emotional changes and maturation in multiple arenas of the student lifestyle, the undergraduate builds familiarity and comfort with newly formed ideas of the self. Since the undergraduate is completely on his or her own for the first time,

Each must learn to exercise self-regulation—not the controls inherited unwittingly from parents, not the controls called for by peers or by the dominant culture, but controls reconstructed as one's own, linked to personal purpose. As self-control and self-expression must come into balance, awareness and integration ideally support each other. (90)

When having to confront emotional difficulties as described by Chickering and Reisser, students may be distracted from the learning environment and feel incapable of social adjustment. Even

one influential professor's support can fulfill the desire for guidance in the confusing, complex process of self-actualization.

In an uncharacteristic but effective manner of professorial instruction, Winter Sorbeck makes students respect his authority with an overtly dismissive, tough-love approach. He challenges his prospective pupils from the start of their first class, as he makes it clear that he only wishes to teach those who he deems worthy on an as-yet undeterminable scale. In this way, he acknowledges that the students (who stay) in his course are the choice specimens of the neophyte class. Sorbeck's assignments consistently buck expectations as he dares students to relate the discipline of graphic design to their lives at the same time that he leads them to think far beyond the limits of their encapsulated campus world. What could be more "relatable," for example, than a stick of Wrigley's Doublemint gum to protagonist "Happy" and his classmates at State University? Hap's "mission" to discover that Sorbeck is actually the designer of the Doublemint wrapper, though self-absorbed on Sorbeck's part, makes Happy assert himself by not only doing "field" research, but also learning his position in relation to his teacher and the larger realms of commercial art and graphic design. "You see fit to chew the gum," Sorbeck grumbles, "but couldn't give a tinker's damn about the poor son of a bitch who has to figure out what it looks like, only so you can cast his efforts onto the trash heap" (Kidd 189).

The larger lesson, that the beauty of graphic design, particularly the art created by Sorbeck himself, goes unappreciated on a daily basis by an unobservant, commercial marketing-barraged public, aligns with the more commonplace message of many college experience novels relating to flashy covers: 1. that behind any cover could be an unexpected person/creator, 2. that even an image that registers in the (consumer) mind and whose purpose proves successful can be revealed as false, or at least not what was expected, and 3. that putting up a front or cover is only

a temporary fix for the issues that lay beneath. Sorbeck knows his stuff, as any respectable instructor should. He even professes his appreciation of artistry and inventiveness as loudly and obnoxiously as possible. What better way to make students hear a lesson than to out-radicalize their own rebellious beliefs and actions? The problem for Sorbeck's method arises when he has to come to terms with the members of the bland, conventionally ineffectual academic community around him. Limits of the intellectual realm on American college campuses will be discussed further in chapter 4.

3: Fighting the Demons of the Social Scene

Social forces guide student beliefs and behavior during the undergraduate years more significantly than any other source of influence: enough so as to drown out the voices of parenting and personally held convictions. The special atmosphere of a college campus intensifies the group's sway as students live together in parent-free, libidinous excess. The pull of group thinking, or the herd mentality, functions penetratingly on the impressionable minds of adolescents and appropriately categorizes their shared behaviors as animalistic. As undergraduates try to find their places within the collegiate culture, a uniquely male preoccupation with game-playing and fighting instincts promotes a battle-like atmosphere that pits all students against each other in the competition for popularity and social dominance. Romantic relationships often create issues of exploitation or codependency, which puts partnerships at odds with one's self-image as well as with the process of asserting one's independence. Additionally, when students become members of designated, campus-approved groupings, such as athletics, clubs, and societies, their involvement can exacerbate the negative effects of misguided peer messaging and encourage substance abuse.

College serves as the final, youthful playground and inevitable realm of sin before the innate responsibility of adulthood sets in, even from Newman's perspective as a clergyman. "Knowledge," he explains, has "a natural tendency to refine the mind, and to give it...a disgust and abhorrence, towards excesses and enormities of evil" (131). As young men indulge in the creation of their gentlemanly personas through a college education, they will inevitably break free from their ties to adolescent frivolity. Because he speaks of a specifically religious education, Newman believes that man must participate in "his rescue from that fearful subjection to sense which is his ordinary state," whereupon "it is only by sudden impulses and, as it were,

forcible plunges that we attempt to mount upwards” (130). He acknowledges the necessity of falling before rising to the duties of life, and of self-indulgence to promote the awareness required to better the self.

While Newman suggests religion as the truest catalyzing force, he also finds that intellectual pursuit in and of itself transforms the individual—a concept that aligns with his ongoing mantra, “Knowledge is its own reward” (127). Newman admits that the “intellectual cultivation” he identifies “does not supply religious motives,” but rather, “It expels the excitements of sense by the introduction of those of the intellect” (131). In other words, exercises of the mind serve as a means of “rescuing the victims of passion and self-will” (131). His description of impulsive hedonism certainly reflects the temperament of adolescent college students, but his hopes over-idealize the capabilities of undergraduates’ self-discipline and willpower. Newman’s theory ultimately fails, however, due to a lack of student and teacher accountability. With minimal academic expectations and a dearth of mature guidance on campus, undergraduates bask in adolescent wiles. The intellectual transformations of which Newman dreams remain impossibilities unless standards change toward the promotion of consistent learning and responsible behavior in the undergraduate realm.

As students learn to live together at college, they form communities bursting with adolescent energy and burgeoning independence. Residential life on campuses has earned a bad reputation for being a hotbed of teenage pranks and promiscuity, and rightly so. Beyond necessary but frequently minimal schoolwork, campuses, but more specifically dorms, easily compare to “adolescent playpens” where students overindulge in the recreational activities of large, careless children (Kirk 19). This protected and seemingly isolated, self-contained universe, a microcosm often snuggled within its own “college town,” serves as a refuge for the blithely

ignorant; avoiding the draining drags of attending classes and doing coursework becomes many undergraduates' full-time fixation. The preference of studying over socializing seems like an abnormality to the typical, lackadaisical student. As they bask in ostensible isolation, an attitude of complacency abounds, and lofty collegiate aspirations become a farce of their pre-campus pasts. Although undergraduates devote back-to-back, labor-intensive hours to cramming before exams and speed-writing final papers, these episodes begrudgingly occur only on an as-needed basis at what they consider the expense of their social lives. As David Boroff writes of Toth-era "Smithies," their professors are "deeply offended by [the students'] tendency to sell themselves short and settle for drab goals (151).

In contrast, a devotedly intellectual student like Toth finds that "Being 'in the swim' is hard work. That was how I felt about social life in college" (112). Adapting the customary, overly eager attitude toward playtime seems more like a chore to Toth than her studies. The confusing rules of the social realm frighten the studious bookworm, who triumphs in intellectual challenges, but falls flat in the competitive arenas of popularity and romance. "Most of us probably did not know what we wanted, or how to look for it if we did," Toth assesses their co-ed conquests; "I think I knew less than most" (137). But that never stopped her or any other student from putting their most dedicated efforts toward getting "in the swim." The Ivy League provides no exception when it comes to the dominance and importance of social successes to students.

The Gothic splendor of classical campus architecture, particularly when accompanied by Ivy League grandeur, creates misty views of what students truly face. Wolfe's Dupont University "conjured up a picture of a fortress whose interior drill ground has been magically transformed into an idealized, arboreal, floribunda landscape" (63). In a cheeky homage to deflated

Classicism, David Lodge names California college-town landscapes after Greek philosophers in *Changing Places* (1975). He boasts of a seemingly flawless setting, where “the air was cool and sweet, perfumed with the sub-tropical vegetation that grew luxuriantly in the gardens of affluent Plotinus” (156). The only price to pay for this deceptive paradise is the giant fault that runs through the town and creates mudslides, all too appropriate for the misleading glamour of a big-name, west coast university deemed Euphoric State, but built on a sludgy, political substructure.

At another mythical campus, the Princeton of Fitzgerald’s youth, his protagonist Amory Blaine observes, “The night mist fell. From the moon it rolled, clustered about the spires and towers, and then settled below them, so that the dreaming peaks were still in lofty aspiration toward the sky” (61). Everything Amory aimlessly hopes for seems attainable when he gazes upward; he finds that “through the shell of his undergraduate consciousness had broken a deep and reverent devotion to the gray walls and Gothic peaks” (61). His collegiate adoration takes shape outside of his adolescent cynicism as a result of his need for the affirmation that comes from attending a powerful university. The “Gothic peaks” also lead to Amory’s darker ruminations on “all they symbolized as warehouses of dead ages,” along with the “transiency and unimportance of the campus figures except as holders of the apostolic succession” (61-62). His antagonistic visions of requisite idolization versus empty idolatry represent his internal battle between paying his dues to fit in and balking at convention.

For Dink Stover, the first well-known, fictional collegian of the twentieth century, the splendor of the campus landscape embodies the beauty of the prospects that lay before him. Seated on Yale’s library steps, he sees “all the lighted panorama of the college and the multiplied strewn lights against the mysteries of stone and brick—lights that drew him to the quiet places of a hundred growing existencies [sic]” (Johnson 24). His “misty reflections,” signified by steadfast

structures and dancing lights, call up the success that follows him from prep school to the campus and the type of notable personage he pledges to become. Although the Ivy League appears to offer an ideal setting for self-actualization through social and intellectual prowess, it contains the same confounding setbacks as any college.

Once a student delves into residential life, the dreamy picture of classical magnificence quickly becomes a stark reality of cramped dorm life. Charlotte's outdated dorm room, "crawling with dust balls," reveals its musty undercoat of the tumbleweeds of students past beneath window frames arched with promise (Wolfe 65). As the dusty floor gets covered with her roommate's proliferation of possessions, it creates a visual of college life representing just another commodity to rich girls like Beverly. An air of established academic prestige seems passé to Beverly as she holds her cell phone to her ear, making plans for her new social-climbing lifestyle. In a similar spirit of "out with the old and in with the new," Kennedy's Yale freshmen boys dash off to wealthy classmate Brook's family estate to take some retired attic furniture off the family's hands. They struggle down a narrow, winding staircase with a large couch, eager to subsidize the standard-issue dorm furniture with a bit of upscale flair inherited from Brook's parents. Though the boys long to make the dorm their own personal creation, they still manage to carry the trail of dusty, outdated privilege with them into their newfound bachelor pad.

Wolfe's fictional Dupont encapsulates all of the reputation-building ingredients and accompanying student bravado of any real Eastern, top ten, big-leaguer, as a "stronghold" where "one of a charmed circle" can "feel its invincibility" (11). The brazen belittling of both their Ivy League competitors as well as the rest of the nation's underprivileged, post-secondary nobodies fuels the perpetual aura of self-importance internalized by Dupont's select breed. Wolfe describes the atmosphere as an "elite playground where they played for four years with bright,

and for the most part, wellborn people like themselves” (126). The importance of upper class students’ feeling of living and learning among those of their own kind allows money to function as a means of pooling one type of student confidence into a unified force. “Part of my seduction by the East,” admits Toth, “was undoubtedly its siren song of money” (11). Knowing the power and privilege of such an environment lures students from lesser economic backgrounds to crave the status and success it can provide.

Another force that helps to sustain the namesake of Ivy League preeminence comes from male students individually aspiring to be the embodiment of, for example, a “Dupont man” (Wolfe 8). While each Ivy League school’s definition of such a “man” varies in the details of the credentials, the obligatory attitude of superiority and undisputed distinction elicits a slew of egomaniacs who tote imaginary crowns and all believe, “I am one special, limitlessly capable individual among a small, select group of young men who will make unsurpassable contributions to society through my awesomeness.” In considering both the “elite playground” and the “Dupont man,” the attribution of the childlike verbiage of “playing” to the collegiate activities carried out by “men” creates an interplay of youth and maturity that appropriately symbolizes the conflicting personalities of late adolescence. As Wolfe’s super-inflated stallions magnify the behavioral, social, and academic atrocities of jock life, frat life, and all-around privileged life, they accentuate the painfully stark contrasts between the haves and have-nots, the “playas” and virgins, the big men on campus and the losers or nobodies. Additionally, the lewd girls “with fifteen hundred SATs [who] cry out, ‘I need some ass!’” take pride in eschewing prim propriety and displaying their bawdiness (150). Though Wolfe’s characters stem from sundry backstories of primarily upper class familial dysfunction, as students of Dupont, they all eagerly exhibit variations of the same self-aggrandizement.

Similarly, Kennedy's young "Yalies" also bask in an air of dominance as they make their way through college as choice specimens of young adulthood. Protagonist Alex, caught between a modest upbringing and expectations of male bravado on campus, gets lost his first day on campus because he was "too preoccupied looking bored" to pay attention to anything besides the nature of his attitude (4). Though Alex struggles to find a comfortable identity amid the Yale elite, Kennedy pushes the idea that as a sympathizer of both the lowly and the privileged, Alex holds a prime spot to drift among various levels of collegiate social hierarchies, while other students must subscribe to one group and stay put. Alex's experience affirms Grigsby's notion that millennial students relentlessly emphasize their acceptance of others (64-65). Roger Kimball would call this behavior a response to political correctness, because students are too scared to show their intolerance; this fear then causes them to open up to people and situations they would not otherwise embrace (*xxvii*). On the contrary, Grigsby finds that as a result of students' desire to fit in with everyone, they start to feel "that it is necessary to accept intolerance and lack of respect for women, racial and ethnic minorities, rural people, and others deemed 'different'" in order to exhibit the normative attitude and mimic the type of person who holds it (64). The self-defeating nature of this practice calls into question the legitimacy of student "acceptance." Alex's confusing and undefined relationship with anti-establishmentarian Jill shows him how a student can socialize in shared-interest groups as well as on the fringe of campus life norms; however, this social positioning is not widely tolerated unless a student denies membership in other groups while spending time with any specific one.

Peer stereotyping and the pressure to uphold Ivy League glory function much differently in young women's lives, both on campus and in their "real world" futures. While Toth simultaneously admires and resents what it means to be a "Smithie" with its "intimations of

glossy superficiality” and “undeniable elitism,” Wolfe’s Charlotte searches for an outlet through which to assert herself amid the letdown of Ivy League illusions and brutally isolating student cliquishness (Toth 168). At the outset, Charlotte naively believes that Dupont, unlike her North Carolina mountain town’s high school, will allow her to connect with others who care first and foremost about studying and their intellectual welfare. Pre-Dupont, as she watches her high school classmates make foolish ploys to impress each other, she longs for their acceptance but still manages to smartly assert, “Why should [I] be an outcast for not doing stupid, aimless, self-destructive things?” (Wolfe 19). Charlotte soon finds that the same exclusiveness of high school cliques rules the social circles at Dupont, but with a new level of money-backed elitism. Toth, on the other hand, manages to keep academics at the forefront of her college experience, and even mentally competes with other girls who intellectually excel. Although she feels socially behind and even backward at times, her most intense identity-defining moment at Smith occurs when she finds out whether or not she made Summa Cum Laude as a graduating senior. To the typical, less brainy undergraduate, however, the fact remains that outside of the classroom, intellectual prestige means little to nothing in the social world, where students are on a mission to fit in. As a respondent of an academic (dis)honesty survey² explains, “Students are parts of a system in which the attainment of knowledge has become secondary to the completion of a prescribed course which our culture demands,” namely, the college degree is a requirement for job placement (qtd. in Stroup 198-99). The respondent’s general argument follows that “education has lost its vitality, is swamped in sterile routines, [and] has become mechanized to the point of depersonalization” (199). As students look for personal connections with their peers, they ironically become distanced from the college system that keeps them in that environment.

² qtd. by Krutch, Joseph Wood. *The Saturday Review*. July 1960. in Stroup, Herbert. “The Touchables.” Bellman 196-202.

Recognized social positions give students the leverage and elevated confidence they need to shape the group mentality of a campus. In a positive sense, these identities help students to understand their goals, but more negatively, they trap them within a predetermined ideological framework that guides their beliefs and actions. As “[m]ost students want to claim that they are having a ‘real’ college experience,” they embrace the collection of personas offered to them by their peers, since it is easier to select an identity from an array of pre-established choices than to uniquely create one (Grigsby 53). The inability of the majority of undergraduates to break the mold of titles such as student athlete, fraternity brother, or Gay-Straight Alliance member causes them to perpetuate stereotypes and the biases and/or beliefs that usually accompany them. Additionally, the fight for one’s identity is complicated by the spirit of combat espoused by college boys and reinforced (both directly and indirectly) by the girls around them. As they find it beneficial to control the destiny of both themselves and their peers, young men promote a “Warrior culture” that has carried over from a cultural idolization of the hero figure (Pearson qtd. in Chickering and Reisser 67). This reaffirms the prominence of traditional concepts of idealized and romanticized masculinity, which brazenly stomps on the weak and upholds the physical merits of the strong.

In the tradition of college sports’ eminence, the student athlete holds a hallowed, uniquely male status of power and privilege. Primed, perfectly sculpted young bulls assert their dominance over each other at the devoted admiration of cooing coeds. They take their self-confidence off the field or court to lead others in revering and serving their social and sexual desires. At a party or in a chance encounter with an athlete, any regular student only hopes for the approval of such inner circle pacesetters, who often dictate social norms. Wolfe describes the student athlete at a Big Ten school as “the usual case of the high school sensation who arrives at

college brash, aggressive, and accustomed to VIP treatment, obsequious praise, and houri little cupcakes with open loins” (37). Involvement in sports indicates not only physical strength but also a fighting instinct that takes command over inhibitions and the athlete’s attitude toward others. “Males may be taught that aggressiveness is fine, especially in competition,” Chickering and Reisser note (93). In following such mores, “[f]emales are rewarded for yielding” to asserted male dominance, which then encourages the pattern to continue (93). The physical fighting element of sports characterizes the combative social stance that male students often find themselves taking; every situation they encounter at college is thought of as a battle they must win, including the courting of females.

Even in the early twentieth century, athletic team membership earmarked collegiate social success. “Athletics,” swoons Fitzgerald’s Amory, “was the touchstone of power and popularity at school” (10). His early realization drives him to “furious, persistent efforts to excel in winter sports” while he comes of age in Minneapolis and anticipates the requirements of making a name for himself at Princeton (10). Another Ivy League student of the early 1900s, Dink Stover, pronounces his vow to excel not only at football, but also the challenges of college life. “I’ll play the game, and I’ll play it better than they will...I’ve got my eyes open, and I’m not going to throw away a single chance. We’ll see who’ll lead!” (Johnson 96). In contrast to Stover, the fact that Amory fails to make it as a Princeton football player proves him unable to compete in the athletic realm; this failure only adds to the list of major areas where Amory will remain an outsider, thus leading to his ultimate demise as a student. Fitzgerald’s message regarding the impossibility of making it in the collegiate world without excelling in athletics reinforces the power of the sportsman’s ideology, which indicates that without physical dominance, a man lacks the very essence of manliness, and subsequently, all other strengths diminish. When

Wolfe's Division I basketball star Jojo loses his starting position to an up-and-coming freshman, he is a "dishonored knight surrendering his sword and suit of mail" as he switches jerseys with his replacement (235). To give up the status of a successful athlete mimics admitting defeat in a battle. "[M]ale humiliation," then, is akin to being "unsexed" (245).

When college athletes excel, however, they top the hierarchy of student social rankings. With athletics as their primary and often sole reason for being on campus at all, stars like Jojo see the accompanying fame "consciously...[as] their duty as public eminences. Unconsciously...an addiction" (43; ellipses in orig.). Their obligation to provide entertainment to a crowd even larger than their peers creates an employment-type responsibility that subsequently boosts their self-importance. Thus, no question arises as to where student athletes get the confidence to hold such sway over their peers. The separation between non-athletes and athletes takes on a visual form when basketball players drive around the Dupont campus in "program"-funded, celebrity-appropriate vehicles like Jojo's giant "Annihilator" SUV—just "one more thing that isolated them from ordinary students and ordinary mortals generally" (54). With a tank-like status symbol, Jojo feels primed to do battle with any force that might challenge him, from students to professors to competitors on the court or in the street.

Exempt from normal Ivy League academic rigors, Jojo learns early on in his college career that "He didn't have to apply himself and develop his mind and all that stuff. He was of a higher order of student. He was a basketball star" (55). The controversy associated with college athletes' coursework opens a line of debate that questions whether or not athletes should even be allowed to attend rigorous schools if they cannot keep up academically without significant assistance from tutors and "athlete-friendly" professors. Even before the whirlwind of college athletics programs took shape, Newman posited, "[I]f a healthy body is a good in itself, why is

not a healthy intellect?" (115). The value of physicality should not supersede that of the intellectual demands of a college education, even among athletes. Jojo gets caught in his own trap when his ethically principled history professor calls him out on a paper that his tutor Adam wrote for him. To prove his point that athletes should not be allowed to get away with indolent plagiarism, Professor Quat plans to prosecute Jojo through the university judiciary, but in the end, the athlete wins after all; in effort to spare Adam his Rhodes-bound college career, Quat drops the charges, and as a result, lets Jojo slide. Though Quat originally sought to do right by wronging adherents of the system, the fact that Jojo still escapes unharmed permits the continuation of student athletes as an "institutional farce" who never have to suffer for their wrong doings (Wolfe 125).

In addition to avoiding suspension or expulsion from the plagiarism scandal, Jojo also consistently scores while off of the court. One of the most coveted benefits of being a successful student athlete is the availability of girls. "Anybody on the basketball team could point at any girl on campus and have her in his room in ten minutes or close to it," Jojo muses (59). Groupie sex partners are as disposable as deflated basketballs after being given a rough workout. Even though Amory circled in peer groups outside of athletics, he still "found it rather fascinating to feel that any popular girl he met before eight [p.m.] he might quite possibly kiss before twelve" (Fitzgerald 68). Given the similarity of Jojo's and Amory's sentiments, and taking into account a generationally appropriate shift in the outcome of their coed interactions, one is led to believe that the mindset of the girls makes the game effective; without all players operating by a predetermined and well-understood set of rules, the game would fall flat. Coincidentally, among Amory's friends, they call social pairings being "coached" for each other, which creates a game-playing metaphor appropriate to the courting behaviors of the student athlete (73).

Jojo's ultimate win of snagging Charlotte as his girlfriend emphasizes a new standard of multifaceted, quasi-moral victory. Wolfe implies that as a result of Jojo's burgeoning interest in academics (via encouragement from a few brief encounters with Charlotte), he succeeds in having the best of both worlds—sports and smarts—to the displeasure of his stalwart coach, Buster Roth, who stresses that “If you want a great university, you damn well better have a great athletic program” (Wolfe 192). After Jojo regains his starting position on the team by proving himself on the court (following a period of what Buster considers intellectual distractions), he stands invincible to the usual derisive attitude toward academically-inclined athletes. Additionally, Jojo's choice of a monogamous relationship with a brainy girl further underscores his stance as a dictator of social rules rather than a follower of repressive norms.

The type of athlete matters minimally to the girls who sniff them out as status-boosting, hook-up partners. Lacrosse players reign control over gaga-eyed girls almost as intensely as basketball players at Dupont, with their hard-bodied, burly mystique. Though they enjoy less fanfare in public and college media, to drooling, meat-hungry freshmen like Charlotte's roommate Beverly, lacrosse players devastate their hearts with temptation, similar but not equal to Division I basketball players. Girls' obsessions lead them to act out in desperate attempts for attention. A sloshed Beverly admits to Charlotte, "That's the only time [lacrosse players] *talk*--when they're drunk!" (269). After she forces Charlotte to drive her to a particular player's dorm, Beverly collapses in exasperation and disappointment at the boy's feet, as she drowns in a boozy sea of tears. “Your roommate's got an issue,” he complains to Charlotte, with good reason; these young women dispose of peer- and self-respect for the thrill of attention from players, which the girls perceive as social acclaim until they find themselves alone in consequent rejection (274).

Just as the boys' role of game-playing sportsmen demands, they only toy with the girls' affections until they feel they have emotionally won them over.

Part of the female desire to be approved company of student athletes stems from a romantic view—that of pairing up with the epitome of a strapping young man of enviable strength, stature, and social influence, who picks the starry-eyed dreamer as his particular brand of partner. As one of Jojo's groupies explains, "Every girl wants to...fuck...a star....Any girl who says she doesn't is lying. Any girl" (595; 1st and 2nd ellipses in orig.). The social facility of being associated with a college celebrity bolsters such girls' reckless courage in pursuit of recognition, even if it comes in the form of a sleazy reputation. Similarly, another part of the thrill simply comes from venerating a trend. "It was a fashion, these muscles," Wolfe comments, "just like anything else you put on your body" (247). The girls idolize the boys who can put on the most muscle, thus proving their fashionable, masculine prowess. Admittedly, these superficially-defined impulses guide attractions outside of college life as well, but as a result of the intensity of competition-driven behavior among undergraduates, students abide by an unflinching adherence to such social codes.

Similar to the predatory deftness of the student-athlete, the Saint Ray fraternity boys time their ability to coax co-eds into their seedy rooms. "Okay, Hoyto, seven minutes, and the clock is running!" Hoyt's fraternity brother tells him as he escorts Charlotte on a thinly veiled "house tour" (208). As Nicholas L. Syrett writes about "brothers" in his book *The Company He Keeps* (2009), the boys act out of character in order to maintain fraternity membership, thus forcing themselves to choose between participating in or becoming victim to "social snobbery, conformity, peer pressure, and domination" (xii). Male chauvinism, reckless violence, and verbal/physical discrimination and/or abuse could all be added to Syrett's list of harmful

behaviors carried out in the name of brotherhood. Syrett takes care to establish the necessary distinction between twenty-first-century manifestations of the fraternity concept and the early days of young men's clubs in terms of their accepted ideas of masculinity, which discredits the over-the-top wayward behavior of the majority of contemporary Greek groups. Syrett also disputes the “boys will be boys” philosophy, “a logic that insists that young men’s actions are somehow beyond their control and removed from the social and cultural circumstances in which they are enacted” (xi). More aptly, the actions of fraternity boys should be considered a “struggle over...just what it mean[s] to be a man” (54). Fraternities were founded throughout the 19th century on the principle of creating “a model for manhood in keeping with the changing ideals of the nation” (60). The lasting burn of fraternity degradation and peer ruin results from a general lack of individualized identities within the groups.

The exclusivity of social societies has caused young men to behave out of character and sell their souls to organizations within hundreds of thousands of graduating classes. Early twentieth-century Princeton clubs, where “[u]nknown men were elevated into importance when they received certain coveted bids,” relied upon the glorification of their members’ “poses” by underclassmen and outsider devotees (Fitzgerald 81). Although Amory “resented social barriers as artificial distinctions made by the strong to bolster up their weak retainers and keep out the almost strong,” he still cannot resist the lure of the club, where he believes he can relish in doing “no more than to drift and dream,” but still get by as a student (49; 82). The encouragement of loafing propels academic failure, although in Amory’s day, a good deal of intellectual squabbling did take place on the clubs’ porches and in their houses’ parlors. Regardless of regular instances of their best attempts at highbrow debate, the class as a whole emitted an “air of struggle” that Amory claims “never ceased, that breathless social system, that worship, seldom named, never

really admitted of the bogey ‘Big Man’” (49). And how does one become a “Big Man” on campus? By maneuvering into the most sought-after positions, like board member of the newspaper, or drama club president, both of which Amory achieved during his brief reign as a “Big Man.”

The coolness-defining social positioning power of today’s fraternities ingratiates lewd, animalistic behavior that not only demeans their female peers but also perpetuates the classic double standard of sexism. Although this is no new news and fraternities have been engaging in good-ol’-boy antics since their rise to destructive elitism in the mid-1800s, the fact that millennials promulgate this primal debasement of their fraternity’s name as well as their own status as college students reveals the backward-thinking nature of most members. Even though traditions of supposed manliness have always run rampant in fraternity houses, new levels of disrespect for propriety and human decency have been achieved in the post-Sexual Revolution world of do-all and tell-all. Wolfe explains how old timers from the Saint Ray fraternity of yore furnished their now dilapidated castle, and the current class desecrates it with layer upon layer of spilled beer and refuse. These careless marks of disrespect reveal a generally held disregard for the value of property and propriety. To Hoyt Thorpe, superficially-crowned king of the Saint Rays, “Fraternities were all about one thing, and that one thing was the creation of real men” (96). The boys, clearly not men in any sense of the ideas of maturity or refinement, possess a so-called “habit of mind, a take-no-shit *instinct*” that guides their actions (97; italics in orig.). With Hoyt as their captain of conduct, the expectation of doing what they want when they want is accompanied by the right to get what they want when they want it.

The rights to behave according to house rules give the code of conduct an exclusive quality accessible only to fraternity members. Syrett explains that “secrecy itself had a

function...but that the secrets were only meaningful if outsiders were aware of them; their existence had to be publicized in order for those in the know to reap their benefits, benefits largely tied to the exclusion of others” (33). As with other social patterns among college students, the utility of pumping up one’s self-confidence by pushing others down creates a game of proving one’s superiority that nearly everyone finds it a necessity to win. While groups like fraternities should pull students together into the comfort and closeness of communities, they instead lead to discriminating exclusion and the dissolution of outsiders’ confidence in their own identities.

By way of the socially destructive forces of the alpha males of fraternities and athletics, "little" guys like working class brain-child Adam Gellin feel powerless and inferior, or, as Jojo pegs Adam, “a male low in the masculine pecking order” (Wolfe 122). Hyper-masculinity, a longtime obsession of adolescents, takes on a demeaning power as it ignores what one might think of as what it means to be a good person, whether male or female. An unhealthy attitude of combative self-assuredness can destroy the confidences of those upon whom it looks down. In the same vein, views of non-normative gender and sexual identities become tainted by skewed definitions of “male” and “female,” because students’ perceptions of conventional gender personas fail to acknowledge the significance of the role of empathy and human understanding in the character of a respectable person, regardless of gender.

Overall, fraternities (and sororities) function as typical, collegiate social groupings in which the individual becomes lost and his (or her) identity gets obscured by the dominating influence of the group's mentality. Grigsby explains that "Men in the Greek system generally miss out on the residence hall experience, which is the place where most students report experiencing exposure to diversity and learning to get along with those from different

backgrounds and those who hold different values” (69). As a result of fraternities and sororities specifically choosing their members as representatives of a certain social standing and personality type, they close themselves off from interaction with nonmembers, thus promoting homogeneity and a limited sociocultural perspective, if not intolerance as well.

Events set up by residential life coordinators, campus social committees, and even university administrators emphasize the freedom of living on one’s own without any adult responsibilities. By hosting dorm activities meetings, club and student organization fairs, finals week cram-fests, and weekend-long homecoming festivities complete with parades, football games, and fraternity/sorority formal dances, schools show students how they should overindulge in the fun, freewheeling side of their unencumbered single lives. Traditions of the campus crossover between social and residential life (with downplayed academics in the process) can be seen in the early days of Oxbridge where, “at least during the first half of the nineteenth century, *intellectual* improvement was not the essential point of an undergraduate education at Oxbridge”; instead, it was “more of a socialization process” toward becoming the “gentleman” to which Newman so often refers (Garland 268).

Student social groupings also tend to perpetuate an attitude of invincibility commonly associated with the teenage years. While a healthy amount of peer assuredness gives students a push to act beyond their instinctual anxieties, a shove in the wrong direction easily leads to academic missteps, social rejection, and addiction problems. When studying these complications at an Ivy League school, the problems often seem to have multiplied in proportion to the net worth of each student. Where there is more money to spend, there is farther to fall for the privileged princes and princesses of the wealthy. As prep school preparations and expectations of following in the family’s footsteps demarcate a seemingly guaranteed path to success, the

inability to live out the predestined plan gives more of a letdown for a big-name family than those who must rise up to success from lowly beginnings. Wolfe has a fair amount of fun portraying these golden children in their worst lights, such as a scene of Beverly's drunken desperation, her stilettos snapped and her hip-hugging designer jeans revealing every crack in her façade and rear (276). These students' unwarranted senses of self-importance make their convictions a joke to the outside reader, but adhering to the coolness standard engenders a very real, biting fear within these desperate characters' (and their real-life equivalents') psyches.

The hearty dose of group mentality absorbed by all college students manifests itself in the formation of all clubs, whether they are longstanding, campus-wide social realms like Greek life or small groups of friends like Charlotte, Bettina, and Mimi, unofficially known as the "sexiled" trio (Wolfe 144). Camaraderie certainly builds confidence and gives students a sense of belonging, which is especially important at large universities, with freshman classes numbering in the thousands. However, Grigsby notes that "Some students describe feeling as if they have to spend more time socializing than they should because they fear being left out of the group if they do not" (69-70). Additionally, when the atmosphere turns unsupportive and/or breeds unsavory behavior, which it so often does, a brainy student like Charlotte, or a representative of the "academic college student cultural orientation ideal type" of Grigsby's categorizations, might best be left unscathed by social influence (97). For Charlotte, her mental and emotional undoing occurs as a direct result of her social involvements.

As a consequence of the need for belonging among peers, the burn of loneliness never fails to unearth a beastly hunger for companionship. "So gutted, disemboweled, scoured out had she been, by loneliness, she had all but forgotten the Force: *I am Charlotte Simmons*," her mantra, her attempted claim to superiority, her book's title (Wolfe 147). While she lives away

from home for the first time, Charlotte's solitude feels magnified, even though she had experienced similar detachment from her peers during high school. Charlotte is compelled to open herself to new social situations in which she never would have considered taking part before the onset of college loneliness. Embarking upon the eye-opening adventure of her first fraternity party, Charlotte seems like a "little soldier about to plunge, feebly equipped, into a dangerous battle for no other reason than to keep up with some girls she knew" (200). The feeling of isolation pushes Charlotte to lose herself in the crowd and eventually forego her moral convictions. Students are consistently sucked in by the "herd instinct," which Coles and Stokes found to mentally sway the responses of their survey participants, based on what the teens thought their peers would say or want them to say (Coles and Stokes 196). The herding concept also perfectly fits Wolfe's animalistic metaphors of describing student behaviors.

In unintentional preparation for the circus of college socializing, Charlotte's rowdy, male high school peers showed her how a few bad seeds could bring everyone else down to their level of the "coolness" standard during their relentless attempts to one-up each other in boorishness. Her mentor Miss Pennington recoils at such attitudes, and explains to Charlotte that when it comes to showy, misguided boys desperately trying to prove themselves, "Their sole satisfaction is bringing down people above them, seeing the mighty fall" (Wolfe 30). This social positioning tactic gets its power from the masculine fighting impulse previously discussed along with the belittling of others, and it proves successful in impressionable adolescent circles. For Charlotte, she "felt almost as much guilt as triumph" about her scholastic accomplishments, since being brainy rarely seems cool or attractive to teens. Beneath the surface, though, she modestly accepts and values the appreciation of the people who truly matter in her life (15).

Little “Sue Allen from Ames, Iowa” looks to the admiration and respect of her professors and especially her mother for both comfort and a realistic image of her self-worth (Toth 96). In regard to her mother’s opinion of her intelligence and academic feats, Susan admits, “From some deep inner place that had no connection with how often she told me she was proud of me, I felt that nothing I could do was ever enough” (156). Feelings of ineptitude seep into her conscience as a result of constantly comparing herself to her peers, and they plague her perception of her mother’s admiration. Her uncontrollable desire to assert her success by becoming a “Summa” at graduation uncovers her compulsive need to intellectually justify herself in not only her own mind and her mother’s, but also in the view of her professors and main student competitors. Upon entering their respective universities, both Charlotte and Susan, the two small town smart girls, fit in better with the adults they encounter than in trying to adapt to the expectations of their fellow collegians.

The jarring recognition of reality versus expectations when joining the campus lifestyle ranges from mild cases of insecurity to severe overhauls of identity. Students with the luxury of having their amenities already paid loll in self-reflection on how to best live up to the current and local standard of “coolness.” Although Charlotte only has five hundred dollars of spending money to get through her first semester, she deems the purchase of hundred dollar Diesel jeans a worthy investment in the name of self-expression. The message she transmits, though, is that the perfection of her toned little butt is unique enough to splurge for the same designer jeans as everyone else on campus with an eye for what is “cool.” While she stares down her roommate Beverly with loathing for her superficial focus on appearance and materiality, Charlotte secretly longs for the means to adhere to every standard of maintaining a cool reputation as Beverly does. Perhaps because they only have each other to guide their actions, students spend considerable

effort following peer standards. As they learn best by experimentation, as Piaget suggests, they try on various unfamiliar personas in attempted adjustment. The purposes of “primitive...ceremonies of initiation,” Piaget posits, involve “submission to social conformism and total conversion to collective standards” (88-89). Just as adolescents of tribal cultures familiarize themselves with the expectations of their societies, so do undergraduates find ways of mimicking each other’s tastes and behaviors according to social mores. As they engage in social experimentation and play off of each other’s limits, their connections create relationships based on unstable, flexible identities.

Since adolescents’ romantic relationships operate in opposition to the self-serving behaviors of immaturity, each partner suffers from the other’s hedonistic preoccupation with identity formation. As a consequence, student relationships must confront the emotional fluxes of adolescence along with the challenges of the campus social climate. Dink Stover’s and Amory Blaine’s early-twentieth-century college student relationships present examples of the range of values (or lack thereof) on which partnerships are based as well as the impact of adolescent emotions. Stover courts a young woman who respects dignity and challenges him to maintain his integrity while competing for top status at Yale. “I wonder how *real* you will be in your success,” the honorable Jean Story, daughter of the reputable Judge Story, dares Stover (Johnson 194). Amory prefers musing over a superficially romantic type like Rosalind. While both boys fancy a classmate’s younger sister, the contrasts of the personalities they desire reemphasizes Stover’s consistent aspiration to better himself versus Amory’s perpetual aimlessness.

A general lack of respect for the opposite sex in collegiate culture perpetuates destructive sexual behavior. Both males and females are guilty of objectifying each other in the battle to snag a “good catch.” Stover’s pal McCarthy decides to throw himself out as bait: “Well, I guess

I'll dash off a few heart-throbs to the dear little things," he jokes as he pulls out some stationery (199). McCarthy's patronizing terminology exposes his disrespect toward adolescent girls and his inability to consider them as worthy, equal partners. Nearly a century later, Charlotte finds that proving she can successfully interact with college men is the only way to earn the respect of her female peers and justify her identity as a young woman. After catching Hoyt's eye, "she had become a new person in [her female companions'] eyes, an interesting person, a person to be reckoned with—and jealous of—a pretty girl very much *on the scene*...all because some *hot guy* had gone to the trouble of chasing her, no matter how perfidious his motives" (Wolfe 232; italics and ellipsis in orig.). As a result of the longstanding social constructions at play on campus, females often perpetuate the problem with self-defeating expectations for each other. The collegiate culture cannot be blamed as the sole source of sexism, of course, and the larger cultural context of American life must be held accountable for its traditions of inequality as a framework for the small-scale model represented by any given college campus.

The ill-fated nature of most adolescent pairings echoes the stress of student interactions with their parents, their schools, and even their society. An inevitably high failure factor and low retention rate of more contemporary student mates can be found in Coles and Stokes's chronicling of "doomed relationships," which they claim to result from an overeager desire to explore sexuality in the safer and more acceptable confines of a partnership (106). Alternately, boys may "plainly perceiv[e]," like Stover, that pursuing a mate is "the thing for a man to do" as part of assuming an adult standing (Johnson 198). Both scenarios create too many couplings for the wrong reasons. Regardless of the stimulus behind relationship-seeking, the internal, psychological conflict between the needs for both independence and socialization causes a push and pull effect that puts added stress on relationships and makes them difficult to maintain.

In the twenty-first century's post-hippie, post-disco, post-"power-suit," post-grunge, millennial world, the current level of disrespect for traditions of modesty and courting feels appropriately inevitable—what manifestation of wooing and young sexual exploration could be left to try? Disenchantment, disillusionment, and distancing lead to the inevitable outcome that sex and love are no longer tied except by conscious effort. Does this result from a loss of motivation, loss of a moral compass, or something external that affects students' behaviors? Have students themselves pushed the current sexual atmosphere into being, or have campuses' attitudes and practices allowed the post-Sexual Revolution mindset to sink-in too deeply? Much like turning the other cheek to the existence of sexuality during the conservative 1950s and early 1960s, today's university administrators ignore the invigorated blasé attitude of casual sex that constantly sets a standard of "coolness" for all impressionable on-campus undergraduates. In many instances, schools even encourage sexual freedom and exploration. College "Sex Weeks" have drummed up years of controversy, even though their main goal is to promote sexual health and awareness through student activities and fairs.

In the heat of the Sexual Revolution in Lodge's novel, students are known for their destructive devotion to the flesh. Visiting professor Phillip Swallow from Britain explains:

everyone knew [the students] had lots of sex...it tired them out, distracted them from their work, they got pregnant and missed their examinations, or they went on the Pill and suffered side effects. But he envied them the world of thrilling possibility in which they moved, a world of exposed limbs, sex manuals on railway bookstalls, erotic music and frontal nudity on stage and screen. (20)

Feeling wistful for a freedom he never knew as a college student, Swallow sets out to have some promiscuous adventures during his revisited adolescence—his second trip to the U.S., ever. The

fact that he finds more than he was hoping for, including a loaner-wife during his time overseas, speaks to the sexualized American (campus) culture that has continued from then into the new millennium.

In contrast to the brash sexual bravado of Lodge's late-sixties sex-pit, Toth feels repressed, sheltered, inexperienced, and shy during her time at Smith a decade earlier. "Perhaps if I had been able to talk openly with some of my friends at college about sex—how I felt, how *they* felt, what I knew, what *they* knew—I might have better understood what was going on with Dugal, or Bob," or any of the emotions into which she catapults in the midst of her confusion over boys (143). Her emphasis on "*they*" reveals her exclusion from the group, particularly the fast movers, with whom she shares little and understands even less. The hold-ups were crippling in hindsight, and she posits that "our lives literally changed direction because of what we didn't know or learn in those college years about men, sex, and our own needs and feelings" (144). In Kennedy's novel, student unfamiliarity with sexual lifestyles hurts Jill through her peers' blind intolerance toward non-heterosexuality. Education and awareness could have saved a life in Jill's case, since her death resulted from injuries incurred during an intolerance-fueled physical attack.

Similar to Toth, Charlotte's unfamiliarity with relationships and sex places her in the "Virgins Club," which both threatens and vindicates her position in the campus social hierarchy (Wolfe 156). "Girls will come right out and ask you—in front of other girls—if you're a V.C., a member of the Virgins Club," she tells her friend Laurie from back home, "and if you're stupid enough to say yes, it's an *admission*, like you have some terrible character defect" (156). If Charlotte embraces her membership in the imagined club and flaunts her belief in her convictions, she can get by on being known as someone who exists on a different plane of a higher order, though she would still be excluded by many other student groups. Alternately, if

she lets the “V.C.” affiliation gnaw away at her self-image, which she does, and which most undergraduate girls do when being swayed by group-think, then she admits inferiority and sexual defeat.

The differences between the male and female college experiences uncover layers of longstanding double-standards and reveal a disparate set of perceptions. As Kennedy expands the scope of perspectives to include the experience of students with non-normative sexual identities, he touches upon the discrimination to which they are subject as a result of closed-mindedness, misunderstanding, and ignorance. Homosexual fear, especially among boys, breeds bigoted behavior and hatred. Coles and Stokes found many cases of misunderstood hatred of homosexual males during their teenage interviews on sexuality. A fifteen year-old boy presents a typical case of confusion and fear related to homosexual males: “It’s not normal, I think,” he supposes; “There are so many of them and they’re all sissies and they talk funny and they dress funny and they look funny and they act funny, you know. It just doesn’t seem right” (136). When this type of thinking carries over into the college atmosphere, stances against homosexuality become more pronounced, and considering the combative stance of most males, in which “all men are potential rivals, the exposure of vulnerability will come back to haunt one” (Douvan qtd. in Chickering and Reisser 170).

Wolfe’s clever but painfully accurate portrayal of a campus pride event, “Stand Up Straight for Gay Day,” gives Hoyt and his “homo”-bashing brothers an excuse to cause a scene during the day’s rally. While everyone else wears long blue jeans in support of the event, the Saint Rays show up in khaki shorts and construction boots, chanting an easily misconstrued incantation that turns out to be “GOD’S YUCCAS” (Wolfe 598). This vulgar display of intolerance typifies the toxic ideology supported by large groups of males and furthered by its

members, such as those in fraternities. Out of fear—not of homosexuality as much as of rejection by their frat-mates—they all loudly shout along with the bigotry, no matter how much they believe or disbelieve it. As Adam tells Charlotte, “It’s a group mentality, and it’s dangerous because as long as you’re in their midst, they try to create an atmosphere of...of...of, you know, our way is the only cool way, and you’re a total loser if you won’t laugh at the moronic rubbish we laugh at” (567). The powers of such exclusionary, isolationist threats are enough to control the masses that adhere to fraternities’ social rules in their imprudent bids for acceptance.

The college experience for young women presents a picture of repressed feminine power eager to be expressed. While millennial girls tend to rely on over-the-top bawdiness to cover up insecurities and attempt to assert their feminine power, the twentieth century offered them a long ride to get to such misappropriated confidence. As a voice of the early 1960s campus climate, Toth describes how even at a women’s college, the girls “led two different lives” (42). This disparity between public and private selves engenders a feeling of wearing masks, physically represented by the makeup they wore for dates on out-of-town trips to boys’ colleges. An important question surfaces when considering the perceived need for young women like Toth and her fellow “Smithies” to act as their carefully posed social selves when they step off the grounds of the college. Are they pressured by the young men they encounter to act a certain way, or do they experience a self-created pressure to fit in with the expectations of other girls? Either way, or even with a combination of both reasons, it is clear that an unhealthy desire to fulfill social standards generates specific behaviors, just as fraternity boys strictly adhere to the morale of the brotherhood.

Similarly, Kennedy plays with the idea of masking one's identity when he addresses Jill and Alex’s very different sexual selves. After Alex agrees to accompany Jill to a formal party

hosted by the Alliance for Sexual Progress, he gets fixed up in “war paint” by Jill—eyeliner, mascara, and blush—and they lavish in androgynous delight as they look in the mirror after the preparations, a pair costumed to perfectly confuse onlookers as to who is who and which is which (127). Later, in her apartment, Jill walks around naked, giving Alex the impression that she has finally removed her various layers of public pretenses and strides before him openly, honestly, and confidently. On the contrary, Alex finds that Jill’s disrobing was only another one of her manufactured personas, which ironically hides her lack of interest in having sex with him. “Would I ever be able to tell when she wasn’t wearing a mask?” he worries (141). Jill’s sexual confusion concealed by a misleading front bewilders Alex into a funk of rejection.

The theme of masks runs through many college novels (and admittedly, many novels in general that address identity exploration), as the metaphor perfectly depicts the impression of the real self hiding behind what is presented to others. When self-confidence runs low, which happens to college students at the pace of a time-lapse recording of the tides’ ebb and flow, it becomes vital to preserve one’s appearance and “save face” by putting up an emotional and metaphorical front. In particular, those with non-normative gender and sexual identities more often find themselves on the defensive to protect their definitions of themselves. Jill, so overly focused on remaining on the fringe of social expectations, designs, in turn, yet another form of assimilation; her identity depends so heavily on her persona as an outsider (but in the company of others like herself), that rather than simply bucking normalcy, she succeeds in fitting into a niche of fringe characters. She typifies not only the defensive attitude often required to withstand the discrimination against non-normative sexual preferences, but also that of a bullheaded young woman trying to assert herself in a society ill-prepared for her assertiveness.

Himillsy, too, covers her insecurities as a young woman with “warpaint” and a shield of hardened feministic authority (Kidd 140). Soft, Southern debutante Maybelle Lee, whose name is a few letters off from a cosmetics brand, acts as Himillsy’s foil, allowing the two to represent a pair of femininity-spectrum bookends. As a book jacket graphic designer himself, Kidd offers up a colorful sampling of “covers,” or masks, through his characters, at least as much as one can with a group of disconcerted, white college kids of the 1950s. Much like Kennedy’s early 1990s adaptation of the feminist struggle for acceptance, Kidd’s loudly female characters have jumped to the conclusion (along with the author, perhaps) that the easiest way to combat the harrowing discriminatory effects of a traditional feminine identity is to assume a collection of brash, stereotypically masculine traits and scream them into awareness at an unsuspecting audience. If Kennedy believes that this type of young woman cannot subsist in the 1990s—he kills off Jill as soon as she reveals too much vulnerability peeking out from underneath her carefully crafted armor—then she surely could not have made it in the June Cleaver era of the 1950s in which Kidd places Himillsy. As a result, Himillsy meets her fate at the hands of her influential curmudgeon of a graphic design professor, Winter Sorbeck, and her own artistic responses to both his ill-intentioned personal and classroom demands.

Lodge also punishes his “progressive” female characters of the Sexual Revolution era, but he strikes the hand of God (or Plotinus—his Greek ghosts, emblematic of a former, higher epoch of education, seem divinely influential) upon all of his immoral, self-absorbed, dissatisfied characters, both female and male. His main point revolves around more than gender roles, however, as he shuns an ineffective and disconcerting college system within an even more troubled American society of the 1960s-70s. Lest we forget that colleges should have goals greater than simply passing students through their doors, Newman reminds us that if a “practical

end must be assigned to a University course, I say it is that of training good members of society” (125). Amid descriptions of dysfunctional student and professorial lifestyles, college experience novels generally tend to underscore Newman’s call for a greater good resulting from college education. Beyond the punishment of wrongdoers, writers also include moral messages about ideal graduates as “men of brains, of courage, of leadership,” and the romantically esteemed place of their education as “a great center of thought, to stir the country and bring it back to the understanding of what man creates with his imagination, and dares with his will” (Johnson 386). Traditions of collegiate grandeur have continued into the twenty-first century, as Wolfe appeals to the “knowledge that [the Dupont students] were among that elite minifraction of the youth of America” through Charlotte’s naïve optimism (Wolfe 285). The hallmark of the contemporary era, however, is the obliteration of the brilliance of that status.

Instead, the hodgepodge battle of animalistic urges within the pack of young male college students perpetuates a killer, dog-eat-dog, competitive instinct. Wolfe continually describes his male collegiate protagonists as various bestial sorts, from the “dogs” of Jojo and his Division I basketball brutes (39) to the “black-and-white Holstein bulls” of Hoyt and the grind-dancing Saint Ray frat fools, dressed to get lucky at their winter formal (470). A “big ugly bear” bully in a drunken tailgating brawl vies for the attention of a girl, none other than the prize virgin, Charlotte Simmons in the flesh (310). Sexual conquest riles the beasts most heartily, and they find loss intolerable and emasculating. When Hoyt steps in to fend for Charlotte’s safety and proves victorious, he creates a campus-wide legend of his battle bravery. This allure of combative bravado and its accompanying “rescuer” mentality ultimately goads Charlotte into further interaction with the bawdy frat boy, leading to what she later believes to be her complete demise—the loss of her virginity.

Females are not exempt from animal portrayals, either, but as they play the role of helpless and/or confused victims, they take on more innocent, compulsive forms—“dumb, frightened, rich rabbits, chronically, desperately, in heat”—who act as if their natural urges reigned over their actions (151). Additionally, the “freshmen girls go around in little ‘herds’”, like helpless young creatures that must stick to each other’s sides to survive in the wild (151). On the darker side of experience, Charlotte’s roommate, the “Besotted Beverly” of one-night stand notoriety, stumbles back to their dorm in a walk of shame before falling in defeat as the “big high-heeled creature on all fours” (269). Beverly’s social positioning thus takes a temporary dip as she allows herself to appear as vulnerable as a four-legged animal.

With boys fighting each other over girls and girls fighting for boys’ attention, social interactions take on the form of a constant battle scene. The challenge of letting instincts generally guide their behavior keeps students either on the prowl or the defensive at all times. While this ongoing tension reveals nothing entirely new about adolescent sexual drives, what hits the reader hard is the in-your-face nature and over-the-top openness of the students showing their every desire and intention of pursuit. Wolfe pronounces, “Sex! Sex! It was in the air... The whole campus was... in a state of around-the-clock arousal with it” (127). Not only the feeling of arousal but also the stimulation of “The *hunt!* The *hunt!*”, and specifically for girls, “The boyfriend! Necessary as breathing!” feed the unrelenting tension of the primal chasing grounds (355).

By including the imagined cat experiment³ at the book's opening, Wolfe blends scientific fact and social fiction to show the methodology behind his tactic: should the experiment be

³ Along with the creation of a fictional Nobel Prize-winning neuroscientist, Wolfe fabricates the details of the scientist's famous experiment. A group of “thirty amygdalotomized cats and thirty normal cats” were able to observe each other’s behavior, with the former engaging in reckless copulation and the latter merely watching (Wolfe 3). When the “normal” cats began acting like the “amygdalotomized” cats, Starling’s team coined the idea,

carried out, it would surely produce similar results, because it already does among human adolescents on college campuses. The connection between humans and lower beings, and even non-beings, becomes clear when examining their shared behaviors and properties. As Emile Zola explains in “The Experimental Novel” (1893), “Science proves that the existing conditions of all phenomena are the same in living beings as in inanimate; and from that time on physiology assumes little by little the certainty of chemistry and medicine,” hence Wolfe’s “conscious little rock” analogy in his quotations from Starling’s neuroscience classes” (Zola 16). In the sexual arena of college campus life, screams of excitement and conquest explode from girls’ throats in the company of boys, just like the manic reactions of cats in the experiment. Charlotte ranges from fear to disgust to jealousy upon hearing “girls expressing their hilarity, genuine or otherwise, over something stupid and juvenile some boy was doing” (88). After weeks and then months of enduring the self-respect-numbing noise of flirtation, Charlotte’s reactions become dulled by her overwhelming longing to be one of the jolly campus criers, distinguished as an individual by voice, but recognized as desirable company within a peer group just the same.

Charlotte references the concepts of her worldview-changing neurobiology course—taught by the same fictional, Nobel Prize-winning neuroscientist whose most conveniently applicable work Wolfe describes in detail at the novel’s opening—and applies a theory to the behavior of her peers who dance and seduce on display at the hottest local underage club: “Specimens, lab animals they were, in a neurobiological environment that triggered certain stimuli, causing them to infuse their mucous membranes with alcohol and nicotine, so

and “pervasiveness[.]...of ‘cultural para-stimuli’” (4). The parallel to the succeeding college experience story involves the fact that the cats, like the students, “had become so thoroughly steeped in an environment of hypermanic sexual obsession that behaviour [sic] induced surgically in the amygdalotomized cats had been induced in the controls without any intervention whatsoever,” thus proving that “a strong social or ‘cultural’ atmosphere...could in time overwhelm the genetically determined responses of perfectly normal, healthy animals” (4).

overwhelming was the urge to...*belong*” (355). The lure of the group mentality draws in victim after powerless victim in facing their fears of exclusion. How can the root cause and effect of peer pressure be weighed, though, between humankind’s intentional choices and his/her biological destiny? Charlotte’s Professor Starling instructs that Darwin

obliterated the cardinal distinction between man and the beasts of the fields and the wilds. It had always been a truism that man is a rational being and animals live by ‘instinct.’ But what is instinct? It’s what we now know to be the genetic code an animal is born with. In the second half of the last century, neuroscientists began to pursue the question, ‘If man is an animal, to what extent does *his* genetic code, unbeknownst to him, control his life?’ (283)

While Wolfe suggests through his characters’ actions that forces of genetics and biology cause uncontrollable hormonal urges that guide behavior, sociological theorists and psychologists alike often point to a different type of brain chemistry to explain emotional shifts. “Emotions arising from sexual impulses,” write Chickering and Reisser, “offer the most pressing challenge to flexible self-control, the greatest provocation for either repression and asceticism or preoccupation with pursuit and gratification” (96). This wording takes the blame off of genetics and biology and places responsibility directly into the hands of students’ “flexible self-control,” an idea with which Charlotte battles on a moment-to-moment basis at Dupont.

Bouts of bored loneliness and repeated exposure to the conditions of coed student interaction transform Charlotte’s underclassmen initiation phase into a craving akin to her female classmates’ lusty hunger for sexual recognition. After an otherwise uneventful hang-out date, she allows Hoyt to caress her with Wolfe’s serpentine words of movement, so that, as they play with each other’s physical limits in the front seats of Hoyt’s car, “[S]*treak* the hand leaped back up to

the rib cage...Slither slither slither slither went the tongue” (Wolfe 369). The primal, nursery-rhyme quality of the words and the notoriously devilish implications of the snake complete the metaphor of innocence lost. Left uncontrolled by the autonomic inner weaknesses of her body’s responses, Charlotte feels that “it was as if the cord between her will and her central nervous system had been cut and there was even something about the big slug that had entered her mouth that now seemed part of her” (369); hormonal, biological impulses have taken over for a moment, lapsing her better judgment. Although Charlotte scolds Hoyt “like a dog” this time, later, when she experiences her fall from grace, she yearns to “have him eager for her, like an animal. That was what made her...*thrill* inside. He was a beautiful animal at the peak of his rude animal health” (369; 473). Post-coitus, Charlotte mentally travels back to the original sin story of her staunchly religious upbringing, and the snake winds his way into a win in her life as well; the virgin has succumbed to the devil, and she is just another animal, like the rest of mankind. As the victorious tempter and his cohort of evil-doers whisper about the matter, Charlotte realizes, “That was what her losing her virginity in such a squalid way meant to them: a few chuckles about knocking the dust off a musty up-country *beaver*” (494). Both metaphorically and physically, she has joined the animal kingdom by way of her pubic hair.

Throughout the novel, Wolfe continues the idea of young men as heathen, animalistic predators and the primary instigators of the instinct-driven foolish behavior of both themselves and their female counterparts. However, the power that women hold over men, that is, their ability to make men act out of character due to sexual longing, functions as a sign of female dominance in the biological process of succumbing to seduction. When Charlotte induces a “flow” of lust within Jojo during their conversation about the beginnings of philosophy, she recognizes, “She couldn’t very well let that continue. Nevertheless, her very loins were astir with

the power” (183). Although Charlotte retains the upper hand in the sexual power dynamic between them, her own desires move her and demonstrate the presence of a hormonal call to action. Such impulses later guide her through the entire Hoyt experience, then back to the comforting, raw eagerness of Jojo, a less threatening way of surrendering to her ongoing craving for male attention, peer acceptance, and popularity.

In evaluating the source of dysfunction in late adolescent relationships, perhaps the limited choices of male mates in late adolescence lead young women to make do with the offerings available to them. With boys commonly resorting to base, animalistic behavior and girls playing by the rules of the boys’ predatory courtship games, a natural admission of compensation settles into their relationship expectations. To his jaded but admiration-hungry lover Isabelle, Amory “summed up all the romance that her age and environment led her to desire” (Fitzgerald 72). In attempt to find what they so eagerly seek from each other, namely, affirmation of their own desirability, they follow the same set of misguided notions of romance, of whose pretenses they pretend not to be aware.

When Fitzgerald addresses women through the eyes of Amory, he adapts a less aggressive verbiage than Wolfe. Amory discovers the character of a woman to be like “a new animal of whose presence on the earth he had not here to fore been aware” (17). The recognition sounds like Biblical Adam as he innocently encounters Eve for the first time, not ravenous and bestial but curious and naïve. This soft-hearted tone concedes that Amory, unlike the ruthless beasts of traditional masculinity, possesses a sensitivity to which he falls victim. “I’m so spineless,” he confesses, “that I wonder how I get away with it” (95). Amory is befuddled by his own inability to match up to the “Big Men” around him, and he opens himself fully to the experience of lost love.

Contrary to Amory's atypically effeminate sensibility, evidence from Coles and Stokes demonstrates that breakups are more likely to create an impact on girls' emotions than boys, with survey results showing that "79% of girls said they had loved their most recent sex partners, but only 58% of boys claimed to" (101). Focusing on research from Gilligan (1982) and Douvan and Adelson (1966), Chickering and Reisser explain that "adolescent males push for autonomy through separation, individual rights, and playing by the rules, while adolescent females define who they are through their attachments to others, seeking ways to preserve harmony rather than fight for competitive advantage" (116). Again the boys partake in dominance-asserting, game playing, and fighting in order to find their adult masculine identities. Because of the greater desire to connect to other people through closeness and repeated interaction, women more consistently seek relationships than men, and women expect more of an emotional connection from a relationship, especially a sexual one. This also increases the vulnerability of women when they become involved in relationships. Thus, Charlotte is inevitably ripe for heartbreak when she dips her toe into the world of adolescent dating.

Hookup culture marks another manifestation of the directionless lifestyle by which today's college students allow themselves to float. Unlike the "pinning" of mid-twentieth-century courtships, through which students hoped to tie down a mate, today's adolescents attempt to have a connection, most often physical, without committing to any sort of outward, defining terms pertaining to the relations. Even prudish Charlotte finds mental justifications to legitimize and excuse sexual experimentation. She ends up using the theory of her more impetuous friend Laurie to rationalize her spontaneous sexual behaviors. "[C]ollege is like this four-year period you have when you can try anything—and everything" Laurie encourages her, "—and if it goes wrong, there's no consequences," or so Charlotte is misled to believe for a short

while. In the “ethical temperament of a civilized age,” bemoans Newman, “. . .that very refinement of Intellectualism, which began by repelling sensuality, ends by excusing it” (141). He blames this phenomenon on the power of “Philosophy,” which he considers to be “exhibitions of truth under one aspect, and therefore insufficient” (140). To Newman, morality must be based on the higher principles of religion, not just a discipline that he believes to be a manmade science. By contrast, Wolfe’s neuroscientific basis for human-created beliefs credits science for the choices made and convictions followed.

In his staunch critique of the “All-Round Girl,” whom he identifies as the ideal archetype of the pre-Sexual Revolution Smithie, David Boroff finds that even the most idolized, intellectual American princesses succumb to the stresses of college life in a common way: “The small defeats in the classroom, the exacerbations of family, the ever-mounting pile up of work, the stuttering terrors of sex—all those are washed away, cleansed, in the ceaseless amber flow of beer” (155). On and off every campus, the delusions of impairment seem like a necessity to students who buckle under the peer- and self-imposed pressure to adhere to social norms. Toth affirms Boroff’s assessment of Smith’s finest, having suffered through her own alcohol experimentation. Though drinking seems inherently distasteful to her, she realizes after her first awkward trip to the local bar that “Holding a drink, one can always sip instead of talk” (Toth 110). As a confidence-boosting elixir, Toth upholds the drinking glass for creating an “invisible wall to lean on” whenever a casualty of a crowd needs an obligatory hitching post (110). Charlotte operates under the same rule that “Holding a drink was certification, however low-grade, that you were part of the party and not hopelessly adrift” (Wolfe 206).

Alcohol familiarity leads to countless chronic problems for undergraduates, not only for the repercussions of underage drinking, but also for the gateway then opened toward other illegal

activity. Charlotte runs a pretend conversation through her head as she waits in line to sneak into a bar with a fake ID: “Everybody does it, Momma,” she half-heartedly convinces both herself and her imaginary, newly-liberalized mother (349). She has become part of “that creature of the herd, ‘everybody,’” as she hears additional justification from her friend that “If they went after everybody who used a fake ID, everybody at Dupont would have a record” (349). Someday such things could happen, Charlotte, but not on today’s watch. The most imminent danger for a crackdown on undergraduate drinking would be inflicted upon fraternity members, known for their binge drinking and well-attended, underage parties. The individual effects, however, touch the emotional health and development of students, with the most intense inflictions on the particularly vulnerable personalities of college experience novel protagonists.

Wurtzel and Zailckas, memoirists of *Prozac Nation* (1994) and *Smashed* (2005)⁴, respectively, represent over a decade’s worth of both “Gen X” and Gen Y” college partying mishaps and their deleterious results on the female perpetrators. The two young women form committed relationships with their alcohol consumption as part of a troubled-girl panacea of reckless indulgences. When female undergraduates feel helpless within the social scene, they seem to take comfort in beliefs like Toth’s, that “Bourbon... put a woman on an even par with a man” (114). Anything that levels the playing field is fair game to travel down the throats of adolescents, but young women in particular fall victim to a devotion to alcohol in order to assert dominance. Toth, with her Smith cohorts, begins preying on men while in social situations that involve drinking—an especially revealing sign of the perceived clout of alcohol from a usually shy, women’s college A-student. “It was an anesthetic that dulled my senses,” she explains, “making me care less what I said or what he said,” referring to interactions with any guy she

⁴ Wurtzel, Elizabeth. *Prozac Nation*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1994. Print. and Zailckas, Koren. *Smashed: Story of a Drunken Girlhood*. New York: Viking, 2005. Print.

might encounter at the popular local watering hole (115). Coles and Stokes found that drinking is frequently used as an excuse for undesirable sexual behavior and involves “a certain amount of self-deception on the girls’ parts” (117). After all, it is only after Charlotte gets drunk for the first time that she surrenders her coveted virginity. The physiologic knowledge that women are generally unable to drink as much as men without experiencing detectable, physical results stands in opposition to the idea of alcohol as a gender power-equalizer. Once again, as with sexual impulses and urges, science works against undergraduates, but in the case of alcohol, the problem is uniquely feminine.

The connection between alcohol and relationships can range from poignant to devastating for young men as well. Amory drowns unbearable thoughts of his beloved, lost love Rosalind in a multi-day bout of drinking, the extremeness of which fits the syrupy, romantic courtship they pursued for a handful of intense months. As Amory works through truly painful loss for the first time with cup in hand, Kennedy’s Alex experiences his initiation to college drinking through a game called “cups,” which functions as one occasion during which to binge and bask in manliness with his new, wealthy, good-ol’-boy companions. “The enthusiasm felt forced,” Alex admits, but that fails to stop him from slamming cup after cup in effort to fit in (19). In another display of belligerent undergraduate drinking, a visiting alumnus of Wolfe’s Dupont, on campus to tailgate for a football game, reckons with the current state of college alcohol consumption and the accompanying distasteful behavior: “Jesus Christ, collegiate was collegiate,” he laments, “but this was...indecent—*immoral* was the term that crossed his mind, but the very word had become obsolete” (303). He assesses the whole scene around him as “four acres of...beer and...piss” (303).

The presence of alcohol in Amory's life takes the personified form of a devil who resurfaces in dark moments of vulnerability as a haunting reminder of his friend's drunken driving death. As Amory grapples with the demons and temptations of which Monsignor Darcy had warned him, he sees the city of New York in a new shadow, and his former cavorting companion becomes "only one of the evil faces that whirled along the turbid stream" (Fitzgerald 133). In throwing off the protection of faith, Amory must wrestle the evil at play in the world unassisted, and for the first time, during the aforementioned New York street scene, the thought makes him weak and physically ill. He takes a step toward maturity as he loses the conviction of blind confidence in himself. Amory "wanted people, people, some one [sic] sane and stupid and good"; he craves more substance in people and yearns for "good" in humanity, but he feels let down (133). As he faces adult life unadorned and unhallowed by the camaraderie of classmates, an intense fear settles in. What will he do with his future in light of the trite, trivial goals of his newly awakened but still collegiate self? The big city suddenly represents the stifling crowd of the disappointing masses. At the end of his horrid visions, he returns to Princeton, which gleams friendly and triumphant to him once more (134). A chapter of college-age mirth and carelessness has closed, however, and for the first time, he and his friends "began questioning aloud the institutions that Amory and countless others before him had questioned so long in secret" (136). With the veil finally, officially lifted, Amory admires "earnestness" for the first time (139).

Post-graduation, the deflated, still-innocent Susan Toth muses, "I had envisioned college as an effervescent brew of academic work lightened by social frolics," but the struggle to stay "in the swim" and keep up with her peers' dating experiences led more often to inferiority complexes than enjoyable relief from rigorous academics (Toth 52; 112). Grigsby notes that of

the students involved in her research, many “gained academic, interpersonal, and self-knowledge and confidence during their [undergraduate] years,” but twenty-five percent

were primarily engaged in status and gender identity work among peers and had little investment in other aspects of college life beyond wanting to get a diploma... These students focused, almost desperately at times, on becoming men or women through peer culture involvement at the expense of their broad intellectual and social development.

(170-71)

The all-too-common, unforgiving focus on “peer culture” that Grigsby identifies speaks to a dysfunctional, late-adolescent, peer-centered ideology present specifically in and heightened by the undergraduate experience.

Chickering and Reisser’s research tirelessly attempts to implicate college’s positive results on student identity formation. When they come to a case where they absolutely cannot idealize the negativity, they concede only in the sense that those particular results indicate an example of an underdeveloped self which college is incapable of cultivating at all. However, the reality displayed by many college novels shows a disconcerting blend of immaturity through adolescent hijinks and painful, adult-like realizations of the effects of those often harmful actions. Interestingly, the changes from Chickering and Reisser’s original 1969 edition of *Education and Identity* to the second edition of 1993 give heed to the relevance of social interactions. They include “more emphasis on the importance of interdependence,” because in actuality, student-to-student relationships provide much more insight into the effects of the college experience on the individual than they admit, even in the later edition (40). Additionally, they offer a more intense focus on the significance of interpersonal relationships “in the formation of [students’] core sense of self” (39). Underscoring the social influence provides

enhanced credibility to what otherwise reads like a testimonial of research success. They also incorporate “anxiety, depression, anger, shame, and guilt” as added emotions over which students must triumph in order to reach maturity, which credits the presence and impact of negativity in the peer environment (39).

Although “individual students can experience the same environment differently, based on their own level of development,” the norm is an unhealthy leaning toward group preferentialism, regardless of the implications on the self (Chickering and Reisser 5). In fact, students generally prefer to find a “self” that is grounded in the pre-established identities and feedback of peers. Only through the personal accounts of literary college characters does the complicated collection of undergraduate pressures feel justly fleshed out. Chickering and Reisser explain that “The road to emotional independence begins with disengagement from the parents, proceeds through reliance on peers and role models, and moves toward a balance of comfort with one’s own company and openness to others, without the need to cling” (122). This entire process, however, interferes with and detracts from what many might consider to be the main purpose of a college educational experience—to improve the intellect through study.⁵

⁵ See “Appendix” for a condensed, graphic representation of the argument of the preceding chapter.

4: Limits of the Intellectual Realm

4.1 The Need for an Intellectual Upheaval

As they find their way through the social turmoil of the college experience, undergraduates must also navigate the daunting prospects of the academic environment. Although coursework and intellectual pursuits should dominate the minds of students, the overwhelming concerns of personal emotions and peer interactions invariably take precedence at the expense of academics. Just as students depend on each other within their own social support systems, the interplay among a college's standards, principles, and most importantly, faculty determine the quality of students' intellectual experiences there. The school attended should unquestionably take command of the education of each undergraduate, as the institution is most directly responsible for student outcomes. However, according to discordant opinions of American educators, administrators, and college boards, ideas on how best to formulate the intellectual experience range from pushing students to speed through a barebones curriculum to promoting the formation of well-rounded scholars.

While students are more likely to err on the side of quick and painless course completion and professors and school administrators to favor lifelong enrichment (in theory), the reality of the academic situation at many colleges leaves much to be desired in the way of quality teaching and learning practices. As Delbanco notes, the "instructor-for-hire, whose job is to monitor standardized content over some 'delivery system,' is becoming the new norm" in a disconnected, dispassionate educational structure of cost-cutting at the expense of both student and faculty experiences (154). Funding considerations aside, the need for community among students, scholars, and the entire academic system in promotion of a shared commitment to learning, teaching, listening, and experimenting becomes disturbingly apparent as students fail to produce

the desired results of four or more years spent at college. Recent literacy test results from the National Survey of America's College Students (NSACS) found that more than half of the undergraduates surveyed had less than "proficient" levels of prose, document, and quantitative literacies on a scale of "below basic," "basic," "intermediate," and "proficient" (Baer 19). This comes as no surprise when one considers that "for many undergraduates today, being asked to read 'a whole book, from A to Z, feels like a marathon unfairly imposed on a jogger,'" as professor and *Chronicle* critic Carlin Romano remarks (qtd. in Delbanco 21). Such disappointing statistics stress that four-year institutions are letting down America's students of higher education, causing them to lose respect for the system.

Exit exams, terminal projects, and cumulative portfolios often represent proof of student learning, but their value comes into question when institutions fail to use such tests to implement changes in curriculum and teaching practices. In *Not for Profit* (2010), Martha Nussbaum cautions against "teaching to the test," which "neglect[s] the activities that enliven [students'] minds and make them see a connection between their school life and their daily life outside of school" (141). By forcing primarily test-specific knowledge onto students, receptiveness decreases as they feel the burden of overly-standardized and uninspired teaching practices. Although this problem is paid more public concern in primary and secondary education, the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) of January 2014 points out that "In 2013, about 84% of all colleges and universities had adopted stated learning outcomes for all their undergraduates, an increase of 10% from 2009" (Kuh 3). While students may be getting tested and/or evaluated, if no adjustments are made to improve future results, the statistics become meaningless. Again, the question of implementation toward positive, schoolwide change remains the more problematic issue.

For those who view college degrees simply as qualifications for profitability in the job market, the expectations of employers must weigh into the evaluative process of graduates. If job preparedness is to serve as a standard by which to measure undergraduate learning, students still fall behind job market demands. While a college degree is a much more necessary asset in the job search than even a decade ago, partly due to the 2008 recession, the value of the degree has decreased as more Americans have become degree-holders. The *Times* reported that in 2012, “33.5 percent of Americans ages 25 to 29 had at least a bachelor’s degree, compared with 24.7 percent in 1995, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. In 1975, the share was 21.9 percent” (Rampell). As befits this rise in graduates, the work done and the courses taken to earn that degree have taken on a speed and tone appropriate to the increasingly commercialized workforce and commodified educational world. Nussbaum agrees that, “[t]hirsty for national profit, nations, and their systems of education, are heedlessly discarding skills that are needed to keep democracies alive” (2). The selfish, career-hungry outlook of many college-educated Americans destroys the integrity of the nation’s educational goals. “We tend not to remember, or perhaps half-deliberately to forget,” Delbanco laments, “that college was once conceived not as a road to wealth or as a screening service for a social club, but as a training ground for pastors, teachers, and, more broadly, public servants” (65). As humanism is rendered irrelevant in the typical American mindset, Nussbaum pushes for worldwide re-implementation of a solid liberal arts education. She regrets that instead of encouraging the creation of a responsible citizenry of any nation, schools “will soon be producing generations of useful machines” (2).⁶

The prevalence of the machinery metaphor throughout over a century’s worth of college literature calls attention to the postindustrial and periodically postwar mood of twentieth-century

⁶ Although she argues for higher educational reform in “democratic societies” in “nations all over the world,” Nussbaum focuses her threat of the deleterious results of a lack of reform on the U.S. in particular, as compared to other nations (2).

America: streamlined, commercialized, and efficiency-driven, often to a self-destructive degree. Dink Stover complained in 1912 that “he was only a part of the machine of college, one of the wheels that had to revolve in its appointed groove” (Johnson 233). Almost a hundred years later, Tom Wolfe’s mild philosophical assessment of how humans (sub)consciously operate has Charlotte Simmons wondering “whether or not the ‘mind’ is in any way autonomous,” or if it is just “the ghost in the machine” (228). Clearly, the Marxian idea of each member of the population functioning as a unique mechanical part of the whole has easily transferred into the educational realm. Specialization took its roots in academia and has held onto its status as the prevailing way of maintaining alliance among disparate departments under a single college’s name. Separating people to do only the work for which they are most acutely prepared discourages the intermingling of ideas that is so important to students as they form their worldviews and lifelong habits of learning and exploration. Piaget cites “instruction which aims at specialization but which ends in compartmentalization” as the main result of the “failure to understand that all thorough specialization necessarily involves relationships between many fields” (26-27). The lack of interaction induced by the separation of disciplines thus undermines the educational outcomes of both faculty and students.

For-profits and online-based degrees create additional arenas for the distancing of instructors and students. However, these colleges’ and programs’ variance from the traditional four-year undergraduate experience separates them from an examination of the social interplay of on-campus students and faculty. Instead, they present a new type of foe for typical four-year institutions in competing for students’ academic business, as for-profits and online degrees heavily market their programs as painless alternatives to the usual work involved in pursuit of a college degree. Although one could argue that these alternative offerings appeal to a different

type of student who would not have considered a standard, four-year program anyway, damage still occurs to a certain ideal of undergraduate education.

Considering their much lower retention rates than all other four-year institutions, for-profits encourage the common but misguided collegiate mindset of aimlessness and lackluster dedication. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reports that in the 2012-13 school year, for-profits retained 62.8 percent of first-time undergraduates compared to 71.4 percent for public schools and 80.3 percent for nonprofits.⁷ Similarly, *U.S. News & World Report* finds that “The largest online schools vary wildly in their ability to retain students, though the averages among the largest 10 online institutions are below the national averages for all schools—traditional and online—among both full-time and part-time students” (Burnsed). In terms of educational effectiveness, the divide between for-profits/online schools and traditional, on-campus, four-year programs obviously represents a style of program that is injurious to student learning and degree completion; in this regard, the popular term “distance learning” appropriately coins the nature of the student experience in these programs.

Another downside for many online degree-seeking undergraduates is that they fall under the category of part-time students, so they may have a harder time obtaining scholarships and thus accumulate more loans. The situation worsens when adding in the for-profit college model; National Public Radio reported in 2010 that “Over the last decade, the dollar amount of loans going to students enrolled in for-profit colleges has expanded by nearly 700 percent, from \$4 billion in 2000 to \$27 billion in 2010” (qtd. in Delbanco 210). With money continually pouring

⁷ “Table 326.30. Retention of first-time degree-seeking undergraduates at degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by attendance status, level and control of institution, and percentage of applications accepted: 2006 to 2013.” U.S. Department of Education. Institute of Education Sciences. National Center for Education Statistics. *Nces.ed.gov*. Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Nov. 2014. Web. 11 Nov. 2015.

into institutions focused on profit rather than student gains, the value of the four-year college degree once again declines.

The individual educational goals of any college student should align with those of the institution he or she attends. However, in today's post-secondary institutions, the inability of students to identify with the overall mission of their colleges creates a glaring roadblock that interferes with this partnership. Specialty schools and programs, like those in the fine arts or medical sciences, for example, make use of faculty specialization by closely directing student learning through professional training. Alternately, since a "focus on academic freedom makes it difficult to find shared 'ultimate values,'" other institutions, including everything from large public universities to small liberal arts colleges, struggle to delineate clear, unified purposes for their undergraduate student bodies as a whole (Delbanco 90). More often, detailed, department-specific questions arise, such as funding and faculty leadership issues. Furthermore, colleges frequently debate admission and degree requirements, such as those for a B.A. versus a B.S., and a major point of contention may be whether or not the first two years of coursework should be the same for all undergraduates.

One long-upheld perspective maintains that the path to completing a degree should involve basic preparation in many fields while becoming trained to specialize in one. General studies, also referred to as general education courses or core curriculum, typically make up all or part of the first two years of undergraduate coursework. Classes often fall under the categorization of liberal arts, but identifying which courses qualify as liberal arts has been debated since before Newman's conceptualization of the term. Many colleges consider liberal arts as synonymous with general studies, but universities generally include lower-level science courses as part of the core curriculum as well, since their pool of undergraduate majors consists

of a much broader range of disciplines. From either standpoint, the concept of a liberal arts education implies an intellectual well-roundedness and versatile knowledge base imparted to its graduates. In considering the classical nature of liberal arts teachings, which find their basis in Western arts, culture, and philosophy, critics of the entire model argue that it may not be contemporary enough to hold its ground, especially since liberal arts curriculums have roots in medieval trivium and quadrivium educational models. Educators in the sciences and information technology push for readily applicable knowledge that is required for career placement or advancement, which includes minimal use of liberal arts coursework, such as rudimentary writing and reasoning skills. A comprehensive liberal arts education is called for much less often outside of humanities academia, thus creating a need to quantify their merits rather than speak to their quality. As humanities departments struggle to defend their legitimacy, the feasibility of providing what many might consider extraneous, outdated knowledge becomes less manageable as funding goes down.

Academics and administrators alike have traditionally pointed to respected references like Newman's *Idea of a University* to both outline and justify the course of study for a general education or core curriculum component of the undergraduate degree. The concept of incorporating the basic tenets of a well-rounded sampling of liberal arts disciplines ideally contributes to an informed, well-educated individual with a worldview built on a comprehensive array of intellectual perspectives. But what perspectives should colleges teach to undergraduates to give them the best foundation for a respectable education? Controversy over canonical versus contemporary texts, classical versus modern cultural criticism, and established versus inventive instructional methods give rise to politically-fueled debates within and across both sides of the argument. Since Newman, along with the founders of America's earliest colleges, underscored

the importance of a college education in creating strong contributors to society, cultivating the presence of a social consciousness and humanistic outlook in the character of a college graduate should be a primary concern of any general studies program, and not just within the specifics of a liberal arts program's content.

Particularly disturbing to the merit of the country's institutes of higher education are the Ivy League colleges. Where scholarship should be at its peak, undergraduates still carry on in the same distasteful adolescent social dynamic as at any far less accredited school. If Ivy League campuses represent a carefully filtered selection of the most elite students, their educational precursors, preparatory schools, need critical examination as well to determine why their students are no more mature than elsewhere. "New England, the land of schools," proclaims Amory Blaine, under the guise of the assumption that everyone knows an adolescent should "go east" to get the best education in America (Fitzgerald 26). The aura of the renowned, Ivy League colleges has historically drawn in not only the academically elite but also the country's richest and/or most heavily "prepped" adolescents. The best eastern prep schools, which attempt to share a mission with the best colleges, are "all milling out their well-set-up, conventional, impressive type, year after year...their vague purpose set forth in a hundred circulars as 'To impart a Thorough Mental, Moral, and Physical Training as a Christian Gentleman, to fit the boy *for meeting the problems of his day and generation*, and to give a solid foundation in the Arts and Sciences'" (26; italics in orig.). Just as Newman hoped and professed, Amory's early-twentieth-century, college-prep domain aims to create "gentlemen" with a well-rounded education in the liberal arts. Post-Industrial Revolution and Pre-World War I, familiarity with the more technical sciences had become increasingly important, but schools still held a dedication to classical knowledge.

Skeptics of a “traditional” education could be found in Amory’s and the young Fitzgerald’s day. When Amory prepares to head off to prep school, the respected scholar, examiner, and man-about-Boston, Thornton Hancock, advises, “But his education ought not to be intrusted to a school or college” (29). Admittedly, the only aspect of higher education that attracts Amory is the prestige associated with attending: “Princeton drew him most, with its atmosphere of bright colors and its alluring reputation as the pleasant country club in America” (41). Amory pictures himself getting by on a big name without having to do much actual work, which is a common misconception for good reason; not only has Amory been taught by his parents and his experience at prep school that he can sail through almost any situation with charm and money, but he also falls victim to the Eastern money attitude of privilege wherever it can be paid for. While the Ivy League schools brag that they provide the best education, students like Amory find that the real way to the top of one’s class is a matter of attitude. For colleges, the goal of manufacturing good appearances in order to maintain their prestigious reputations and get funding functions just like their students, who maneuver through campus life to achieve higher social status. Amory warns his friend about the pull of the Princetonian afterglow, and how “wherever you go now you’ll always unconsciously apply these standards of ‘having it’ or ‘lacking it.’ For better or worse we’ve stamped you; you’re a Princeton type!” (95). The problem with these schools’ lofty attitudes and exclusivity for those outside of their cherished circle is that they cultivate a tiny subset of the American population to remain the biggest money-makers. In light of this fact, a proper college education for all still seems like a longshot, especially when considering the limited exposure that American undergraduates have to the best available educational experience.

To any responsible citizen and learned American, a liberal arts education for the entire undergraduate population remains a sensible and beneficial obligation. If educators take charge and assume the responsibility of providing such an education to America's college students, they must be supported by a network of college administrators, boards of trustees, parents, government officials, voters, and those who really hold power, the one percent of Americans with far more than the majority of the funding. However, since such an extensive chain of command creates an overwhelming plan for reform, on a smaller, more intensive, and immediate scale, the responsibility falls on those who are lucky enough to have the students in their hands—the professors. The 2014 NILOA report states that “if there is one matter on which almost everyone agrees—administrators, rank-and-file faculty members, and assessment scholars—it is that faculty involvement is essential both to improve teaching and learning and to enhance institutional effectiveness” (Kuh 34). With weekly classroom interaction, professors can take advantage of their stance and make their courses as transformative an experience as the students' minds will open up to and allow. This type of change involves overcoming departmental specialization and schoolwide conflicts of interest by teaching what should matter to young Americans as perceived by their educators. Professors must work together cohesively in order to defend the magnitude of work done in their classrooms.

While much of the responsibility falls on the professors who actually do the teaching and share the physical classroom experience with students,⁸ successful learning outcomes depend on a combination of professorial influences and academic components. Both the college social atmosphere and the family background that students bring with them to campus combine with classroom practices to elicit a unique, accumulative response in each student. An issue that needs intensive review, however, is the effectiveness of said response on general college graduate

⁸ The non-physical classroom and its merits and drawbacks will be addressed later in this section.

intelligence levels. How much can one fault the system and its constituents versus the students themselves? Has society undergone a paradigmatic change that discourages commitments to learning and fosters negligence and ignorance? If so, who and what is to blame, and how can those ideas and factors be altered in favor of a renewed appreciation of learning? A return to Newman's way of thinking would uphold knowledge as the most coveted attainment of human society. While compromise is the key to advancing the goals of education, "stipulate they must," Newman insists, "that Knowledge itself is not compromised" (28). Personal responsibility on the parts of individual students, professors, administrators, parents, and others involved in the educational chain of command must enact principles and policies that supersede the generalized lack of concern for quality education by groups of ambivalent money-holders. American glorification of individualism must move above and beyond selfish interests and aim to better each college graduate, and subsequently, his or her contribution to society.

Overall, an incomplete general education along with a weakly defined, poorly implemented liberal arts curriculum leaves students with an insufficient education to function at levels high enough to find careers that will allow them to live without debt in the U.S. While one's perceived economic value within a vocational network serves as merely a superficial determinant of societal worth, an effective, alternative route to personal career advancement and moneymaking can be reached through networking, sometimes excepting educational qualifications. However, the means to a successful and well-rounded American life still come from a solid education, regardless of one's ability to wind his or her way to the top of a job ladder. This comprehensive focus on effective education must begin during early childhood and be carried to full development by undergraduate institutions.

4.2 A Call for Professorial Responsibility

The practice of using specialized research as the central guiding force behind universities' funding, faculty activities, and accreditation began to take shape after the Civil War, when society addressed the need for professionalization among a newly industrialized workforce. Congress's land grants of the 1862 Morrill Act allowed states to build colleges that would "teach such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts," thus shaking the foundations of religious colleges (qtd. in Delbanco 77). This step toward practicality allowed for a significant movement away from the Classics and the "gentleman's" knowledge of Newman and the "Renaissance man" idealists. Additionally, the infiltration of the applied sciences in the workforce gave a nationwide push toward vocational instruction. With new options for paths of study, more departments formed, and specialization established its roots as schools instituted advanced training in numerous fields.

Prior to the secularization of American higher education, the move away from the centrality of religion in society circled around the proliferation of Darwin's ground-breaking, scientific ideas. Readers of Darwin's *Origin* who grew to doubt the steadfast truths of religion became much less likely to seek out the education available to them at one of the many religious colleges which had previously dominated the market. As the expansion of perspectives regarding the origins of man's existence and his earthly purpose transcended religious convictions, the desire to study alternate explanations demanded a new kind of educational experience. It is no coincidence that just as Delbanco alludes to Darwin as a turning point away from the teachings of "old-time colleges" and "their resolute Protestantism in a society of increasing religious and ethnic diversity," so does Wolfe use Darwin as historical, scientific backing for his neurological argument regarding human behavioral tendencies (Delbanco 76; Wolfe 283).

Post Darwin, popular feeling grew for a need to split colleges into specialized fields for more concentrated study. The time period's significant turn toward secular higher education encouraged the formation of not only career-minded students but also vocationally preparatory programs. Delbanco also explains how "regulatory authority over higher education shifted from the churches to such academic associations as the Modern Language Association (founded in 1883), the American Historical Association (1884), and the American Mathematical Association (1888)" (80). More clearly defined specialization in the form of discipline-based organizations functioned as a dividing force that increasingly distanced one department from the next. George M. Marsden argues that the "fragmentation of knowledge undermines the possibility of a coherent ideal for a university," and sets scholars and their separate departments at odds with each other (304). And yet there is a bit of merit to a "dabble" theory—that students should learn a little bit of everything through multi-disciplined, comprehensive, general education—because "it is not every science which equally, nor any one which fully, enlightens the mind in the knowledge of things" (Newman 42). By means of that argument, Newman deemed it possible to convince the non-religious that religious education was just one of the lenses through which the educated should learn about the world.

In his essay comparing "Newman's University and Ours," Frank M. Turner identifies that "Faculties not infrequently find their responsibilities to students and especially undergraduates an obstacle to research and to reputation and financial gain beyond the walls of the university" (292). When professors and their superiors focus primarily on research and its accompanying funding capacities, they further a longstanding pattern of disrespect for undergraduate learning needs. As Clark Kerr, the founder of the University of California, noted over half a century ago, "[A] superior faculty results in an inferior concern for undergraduate teaching" (qtd. in Delbanco

3). Such selfish, single-minded thinking snubs the fact that every brilliant academic was an undergraduate at one point. Purposeful oversight of the demands of undergraduate education also denigrates the central goal of any institution of higher learning—to educate its students, whoever they may be. Students are entitled to their four years of undergraduate study, no matter where they seek their degrees. The problem of having a research-centered faculty manifests itself most fiercely in highly selective schools, where the pressure to publish can severely diminish the amount of time and effort able to be spent on undergraduate lesson plans and interactions. Since critical and peer-reviewed acclaim come from research results and not teaching efforts, there is an overdue shift of awards toward teachers who give full, enthusiastic attention to their course loads. This would appropriately honor them with monetary gains, promotions, and publicized approval for their classroom successes. Admittedly, many fine teaching accolades already exist, but mostly in the form of endowed chairs, which again shine a light of approval upon big-name research successes.

Course topics that fail to positively affect student development, specifically in the first two years of undergraduate study, are those that fall victim to the problem of over-specialization. In his 2014 *Chronicle* article, “Engaging Students Requires a Renewed Focus on Teaching,” Russell A. Berman addresses the potential of special topics courses to cover an engaging span of general, thought-provoking knowledge. A tiny area of very precisely gathered research does not warrant the eyes of freshmen and sophomores who still need to broaden their perspectives and ask “big picture” questions before defining a particular area of interest for their own further study. For example, a tenure-track history professor who aims to teach a thought-provoking, freshman honors-level seminar should stay away from a miniscule area of his or her research devoted to a specific time period. Even though such a focus would offer more detailed, in-depth

information, the professor should favor a set of readily accessible historical perspectives that work from the present day backward. Asking students to question first their current world's situation allows them to closely connect to course concepts before examining and evaluating the issues' historical origins.

On a larger scale than big picture courses, colleges regularly engage in false advertising in admissions propaganda to snag student interest and seek a higher standing in competitive rankings. Richard M. Gummere, Jr. describes the deep-seated troubles of the “Wandering Scholar,” or transfer student, of the mid-twentieth century in a 1961 *Harper's* article. As Gummere explains that students are “often seeking something that does not exist: a college such as we describe in our catalogues,” he reveals how the marketed image of big names, big brains, and big rooms leads to a letdown when students realize that the idealized college experience exists only in a glossy, residence life brochure (44). In today's terms, a misleading sampling of campus photos on a college's website exemplifies how the problem of a bells-and-whistles-, rankings-obsessed college world has not come very far. As an admissions director, Gummere viewed firsthand how “few colleges...try in the catalogue or any other way to describe accurately that which most of all determines the quality of its education: the campus life” (44). Since students are so heavily influenced by their social experiences as undergraduates, they deserve to know what actually awaits them.

America's commercialized collegiate market serves up an array of inaccurately portrayed, American Dream-worthy educational idealism. Even considering the schools far removed from the transparently targeted TV ads of for-profits, technical colleges, and many online degree programs, this falsely perceived positivity later contributes to the disillusionment of the college years and students' subsequent negative behavioral outcomes. David Lodge

caricatures how top-notch American universities put on over-the-top displays of wealth and prestige with such outlandish campus ornaments as a “replica of the leaning Tower of Pisa, built of white stone and twice the original size...but restored to the perpendicular” (8). This historical fabrication tactic of right-angling the wrongs of an architectural relic in favor of superficial perfection reflects the spirit of disenchantment experienced by attendees of such schools as they discover the truth beneath surface-level flawlessness.

Colleges’ businesslike role of producing an educational product that must satisfy its student consumers transfers into the professorial realm as well. Lodge describes how the fight for a position during the transition from graduate student to tenure-track professor can feel like dealing on Wall Street. As with most major businesses’ employment decisions, entering the world of academia involves the embellishment and prostituting of one’s desirable characteristics. After years of being “burnished and tempered in a series of gruelling [sic] courses and rigorous assessments,” Lodge’s American professor, Morris Zapp, “makes an individual contract with his employer, and is free to sell his services to the highest bidder” (10). Although Lodge sarcastically exaggerates the trials and tribulations of paying one’s dues in academia, the reality of fierce competition undoubtedly leads to the “killer instinct” emitted by Zapp (10). Faculty competitiveness proves that students are not the only campus inhabitants exhibiting belligerent, animalistic behavior. Notably, British professors in the novel possess no such brute aggressiveness (since, according to Lodge, “tenure is virtually automatic in British universities”), until Zapp replaces a particularly quirky English department head on the fictional British campus (10). In this case, the stigma of losing status to an American becomes the most undesirable of academic circumstances. When one considers how academics’ job security in the U.S. is often based on the quality of one’s self-pimping and bidding abilities, the British department head’s

views seem completely natural. An academic community that functions around such principles is unfocused on students' best interests and ill-equipped for effective undergraduate education.

Furthermore, the entire premise of Lodge's novel, the cross-continental professorial swap, occurs only after Zapp works a "deal" with his Dean of Faculty (33). Anxious to get out of Southern California due to marital troubles, Zapp hears of a last-resort position in Rummidge, England that has already been filled. Zapp coaxes the dean to forego his word to the other professor: "Tell him he can't have it after all. Tell him you made a mistake" (34). After a mild rebuttal from the dean, Zapp throws out an unwarranted proposal: "Give him accelerated promotion to Associate Professor. He won't argue" (34). Lodge's blatant display of how academic titles can result from professors' desperate pleas and "getting in good" with the dean severely discredits the authority of university positions. In this regard, professors earn no more credit than students in maneuvering to get what they want out of their time at post-secondary institutions. If students get blamed for their lack of academic dedication, the professors should lose distinction over their business-style dealings to get ahead. It is no stretch to call such practices a form of professorial academic dishonesty. Additionally, since the "proffered rewards of academic life—promotions, raises, leaves—have nothing to do with demonstrated concern for students," an emphasis on such employment incentives misappropriates the use of college funds (Delbanco 166).

A renewed focus on the educational needs of undergraduates requires a call to action for faculty members and the administrative boards who employ them. Since students more often than not receive their general education courses from adjunct faculty (with only 35 percent of instructors considered full-time), at the very least, schools must facilitate collaboration among those instructors (Delbanco 153). If schools already choose to employ a significant number of

adjuncts for undergraduate teaching, they should increase the course load for each adjunct instructor to engender more consistency within the representative undergraduate classroom. The costs of employing more full-time instructors would be outweighed by: employing less part-time adjuncts; lowering rates of employee turnover; and creating a more united faculty. In any professional environment, a workforce superfluously spread out over too many individuals causes disunity and unpredictability; the academic domain serves as a textbook case of this problem.

Additionally, since adjuncts' "assessment is heavily dependent on classroom success," they are more likely to "have a material interest in the quality of their teaching" (Berman). Changing current adjuncts to full-time employees would lead to more consistent teaching of a dependably solid quality. Unfortunately this arrangement relies on the hiring and retention of a worthy and reliable adjunct staff, which may be too difficult to expect in the current academic state of affairs. A solution to this challenge could involve consistently filtering master's students directly into the full-time adjunct faculty with the understanding that they would be doing so from the outset of their degree work. Although sometimes advanced degree students already end up working for the school where they studied, more often they end up elsewhere in non-academic jobs, feeling that their degree work was nearly all for naught in such a competitive but fruitless academic job market. Master's or doctoral students entering a program with the intention of securing a position at the same college (or another school affiliated with their degree-to-teach program) would eagerly approach their studies and gear them more toward the development of teaching expertise if they knew that their work was pointed directly toward a full-time career. Again, a payoff awaits schools that choose this more challenging path in that collaborative teaching efforts within cohesive departments would be easier to coordinate and

maintain. As a result, the school's reputation would go up along with the respect of its students, prospective students and their families, as well as the academic community. It is past time to pay adjuncts their dues in terms of salaries, job security, and accolades.

In light of these changes for the betterment of undergraduate education, graduate teaching assistants could adhere to new requirements of observing both tenured faculty as well as adjuncts for perhaps a year before venturing into their own classrooms. As early as possible in graduate study, but certainly on or before the halfway mark to degree completion, graduate students should be expected to declare their intended post-graduation goals in order to appropriately focus their studies within the program. Those who express interest in college teaching would then take pedagogical methods courses to prepare them for the process of deconstructing and reconstructing their own learning for its transmission to undergraduate students. Additionally, in the experimental spirit of learning advocated by Piaget, fledgling instructors would start to adapt the idea that the teacher "cease being a lecturer, satisfied with transmitting ready-made solutions; his role should rather be that of a mentor stimulating initiative in research"—research, in this case, referring to the learning process that takes place in the classroom (Piaget 16). Also keeping in mind the goal of creating teachers who are valued for their effectiveness, "teaching must be weighted more highly in the tenure process than is currently the case, and it points toward the need for greater emphasis on teacher preparation in graduate programs" (Berman).

Collaboration on teaching methods needs to travel beyond the interactions of faculty and administrators of a single college or university, or even the entire collegiate system of the U.S.—all levels of education should be in contact and cooperation with each other to form nationwide educational alliances. In order to effectively educate America's young adults, the country must first educate its children. Starting in the primary grades, both interdisciplinary study (in

preparation for the breadth of a proper, undergraduate liberal arts education) and the use of investigative, applied learning methods should be fully implemented. Consistency in the use of these methods will create a solid knowledge base and set of learning practices for students' future schooling and career training. Piaget enlists the proof of a scientific study in his work *To Understand is to Invent* (1948) to emphasize that interdisciplinary education promotes and improves aptitude by strengthening versatility (14). He places the responsibility of utilizing its power on instructors, who should present not only diverse material, but must do so in a variety of methods. "What is needed at both the university and secondary level," he stresses, "are teachers who indeed know their subject but who approach it from a constantly interdisciplinary point of view" (29). Piaget also underscores that the "use of active methods which...require that every new truth to be learned be rediscovered or at least reconstructed by the student, and not simply imparted to him [or her]," strengthens knowledge acquisition (15). A comprehensive use of these principles—interdisciplinary and experiment-based education—engenders the most substantive effect in students of all ages, but it is best to start as early as possible in the schooling process to ensure positive development of learning habits.

Since interdisciplinary study and "critical thinking"—the ever-popular term for investigative learning—are two of the cornerstones of frequently used models for college instruction, the crossover should be easier than generally admitted when educators of all age levels communicate and collaborate on teaching methods. Some college professors seem to think themselves above the lower rungs of teaching (elementary, secondary, and esp. early childhood), and consequently fail to communicate or collaborate with anyone outside of the university about teaching practices. However, the college system cannot fix itself without the support and cooperation of the others, thus lending to the importance of an ongoing, multi-level, educational

conversation. After all, a “multidisciplinary situation,” when not properly melded by educators, “leaves it up to the student to make the syntheses himself,” which cannot be done effectively without a natural talent for drawing connections (Piaget 29). Consequently, Piaget suggests “team research which is not supervised by a single professor but by representatives of neighboring fields working closely together” in order to improve students’ knowledge comprehension, analysis, and synthesis (37).

When trying to start a dialogue among professors of a single college or university, required weekly departmental meetings and monthly interdepartmental meetings, when utilized effectively, facilitate enhanced communication. The NILOA of January 2014 found that “faculty meetings or retreats” were most effective in communicating student learning outcomes to members of the college faculty and staff (Kuh 19). Such meetings ranked at a 73 percent rate of effectiveness as a means of sharing student statistical and survey data, which was fairly close to the second-ranked means (62 percent) of “assessment committees,” but much higher than any other less personal methods, like “website,” “email updates,” or “newsletter” (19). As Berman also emphasizes, “In the research-university environment, small faculty gatherings held to discuss teaching and learning issues offer one effective way to help make this transition” of “rethink[ing] their assumptions about teaching and plac[ing] student-learning needs at the center of their efforts” (Berman). The value of face-to-face contact through in-person meetings proves once again that social interaction produces human change.

Additional mutual understanding among professors could come from attending at least one session of an outside department’s faculty member’s class each semester to get an idea of what other professors are doing in the classroom and potentially gain new methodical insight. This practice would be applied to all faculty, regardless of title or tenure. “While we may know

the titles of the courses our colleagues teach,” Berman relents, “we often have little idea of what really goes on in their classes, so we cannot structure our own classes in ways that would support longer-term student growth” (Berman). In example, at the University of Florida’s Center for Teaching, Learning and Assessment, professors engage in “peer mentoring” by observing the teaching of someone outside of their discipline, which Berman sees as a way of “shift[ing] attention toward teaching effectiveness and away from intradisciplinary debates” (Berman). Although these observation sessions could feel like an infringement on the privacy of fellow professors’ pedagogical practices, it should only be done with the mindset of expanding one’s sense of the wider teaching atmosphere at his or her college or university. Rules should prohibit any negative commentary surrounding these classroom visits, unless academic integrity or student safety or respect is at stake. The positives of collaboration far outweigh any potential negatives, as the University of Florida found that “Those involved report that the process has built trust, fostered better collaborative relations, and resulted in a more clearly articulated curriculum” (Berman). At this stage, voluntary participation in such efforts undoubtedly leads to more positive outcomes; however, mandatory involvement through school-wide (or even department-wide, as a starting point) implementation forces increased communication, even if it is done so begrudgingly by resistant faculty. At least everyone’s voices are given some attention in this arrangement.

Undeniably, the number one goal of any professor while holding center stage on the classroom floor is to keep students’ attention and interest. Many schools are desperately in need of “more interactive, student-centered learning techniques to lectures, discussion sections, and labs” in order to consistently stimulate undergraduate minds (Berman). Without a stimulating classroom environment, teaching falls flat; instead, the teacher must provoke the student to learn

by discovering. “A student who achieves a certain knowledge through free investigation and spontaneous effort,” Piaget notes, “will later be able to retain it; he will have acquired a methodology than can serve him for the rest of his life, which will stimulate his curiosity without the risk of exhausting it” (93). With ongoing teacher collaboration, it becomes easier to find effectual ways to evoke this behavior in students from one classroom to the next.

In 2014, Stanford planned to try out new student course evaluations with a renewed focus on the effectiveness of the teaching. The process was described as such: “Faculty members will enter specific learning goals for each course on the customizable evaluation form, and students will be asked how well the course helped them achieve each of the goals” (Berman). This technique not only helps students feel involved in the way they are being taught, but also provides professors with more applicable answers to “How am I doing?” when it comes to the presentation of their course material. The relationship between instructor and student at the undergraduate level should mimic, in some ways, that of the competent parent at this stage of life—at a distance from the personal life of the student, but influential in the presentation of ideals, as well as effective at provoking mature responses in the student’s life and learning practices. Piaget echoes this ideal relationship in his claim that “only social and educational interactions will transform [students] into efficient behavior patterns or destroy them totally” (55).

5: Cultural Implications and Conclusions

The current state of education in the U.S. reflects an abysmal ambivalence toward ignorance, as evidenced not only by figures from such publications as NSACS, but also by the actual lives of college graduates. While the reality of recession-related job loss, joblessness, and a lack of job opportunities makes primarily vocational knowledge practical for economic self-preservation, on college campuses, students who are provided with the privilege of focusing solely on their studies should receive a quality education. The absence of a cohesive, national standard for all levels of education only causes the situation of higher education to worsen. Without effective “missions,”—not counting the idealistic mission statements that most colleges promote—the job of determining what America’s young adults should learn is left up to department heads who have little or no support from outside voices in assembling an effective curriculum in their subject areas. Frank M. Turner agrees that a bulk of today’s problem lies in the inability of universities to define and adhere to a unified sense of purpose across the spectrum of disciplines. “The general absence of interaction and institutional bonds among the various parts of the university,” he argues, “accounts for the absence of shared vision and in turn for the internal confusion that many universities confront in establishing priorities and clarifying their mission” (Turner 295).

Another issue defying unity stems from the broad variety of definitions of the concept of “social and intellectual development.” As a result, educators, students, and the general public possess very different ideas about how such growth should be nurtured and promoted nationwide. Liberal arts schools tend to push diverse general studies classes that evoke a dip of the toe in the knowledge of many fields, but it usually dries right out after finals, if not sooner. Newman acknowledged the potential problem associated with his broad-based curriculum,

stating that opponents may find that the “theory of University Education, which I have been delineating, if acted upon, would teach youths nothing soundly or thoroughly, and would dismiss them with nothing better than brilliant general views about all things whatever” (9). In today’s undergraduate programs, are students getting anything “brilliant” out of their two years of core curriculum, let alone a cohesive set of multidisciplinary perspectives? Based on previous evidence of students’ substantial preoccupation with social concerns, they absorb much less than the basis for the views to which Newman would have them aspire.

At the core of the liberal learning problem, though, is the lack of a widespread, cultural respect for a higher level of intellect than that received by a mediocre high school’s curriculum. In Stover’s day, his classmate Regan, who serves as a voice of reason, remarks at the “extraordinary lack of reverence to things that traditionally should be revered” (Johnson 183). In contemporary society, reality television, which has taken a beating by media and cultural critics, continues to prove on an hourly basis how American culture glorifies ignorance and asinine behavior for entertainment purposes. While TV can sometimes work as a learning and/or parenting tool, it can also function as education’s worst enemy (Coles and Stokes 148; 158). As a result of the infiltration of technology in society, it has become far too easy to be disconnected in a world of connections.

Digitization seems to be equated with decreased scholarly activity among undergraduates. The availability of information via the internet requires far less mental accumulation of knowledge to access the factoids needed for any given assignment. Smart use of tech tools in the classroom supplements learning rather than prohibits it. An enlightening documentary that probes the student consciousness or even a silly commercial that causes students to critique their own culture works wonders to silence cell phone noise during class. By

staying inside one's own little digital world rather than engaging in discussion and interactions with live people, college students cut themselves off from learning. This issue highlights another drawback of online or "distance" learning. Grigsby notes the importance of "[p]rograms with active clubs, extracurricular activities, mostly small classes and faculty who advise students in their programs as well as teach the core courses" to build the social connections that students so highly value as they navigate the college experience (72). In contrast, an overly tech-friendly society encourages a damaging degree of remove between students, instructors, and the sensory experience of the physical classroom.

Identifying the importance of peer relations and approval to students reveals that their educational goals lack the same dedication and drive as social conquests. Student inaction and apathy toward their studies partially results from a common belief that they hold no real power. David Riesman laments in a 1961 *Atlantic* article that the "relation of students to the curriculum has a certain alienated quality, in the sense that the students do not believe they have any control over their own education" (Riesman 237). Although more recent reports would suggest that many contemporary curriculums offer a wealth of options for study, including interdisciplinary work, the disconnected nature of students to their actual coursework during the foundational courses of undergraduate study prove otherwise. In a broader sense, the visible effects of both corporate interests and political gridlocks on the functioning of the U.S. make students, like many Americans of all ages, feel that they have little control against the money machine that runs the country. College student defensiveness builds up against sociopolitical circumstances just as it does in the teenager protecting his or her individual rights and personal beliefs against parental power and other authority. When Riesman questions students whether or not they have

taken any action toward changing the issues that trouble them, “they are surprised at the very thought that they could do anything” (237).

Historical holdovers of American defiance toward large ruling groups go back to the country’s split from England, but when it comes to the relevance of and need for a college degree for individual economic opportunities, Americans conform to the standards set before them at the expense of a quality education. As more and more colleges turn out record numbers of degrees, the commodification of education shows its dark side—the demand may have gone up, but the quality has gone down as a result. Students of all ages and backgrounds can be found “paper-chasing” the degree. This academic epidemic produces a limited focus on personal intellectual enrichment, and instead, a race to graduation. With speed comes sloppiness, and with disconnected learning via online and/or accelerated courses comes an inferior “product”—the commodity that is now a college degree.

As a result of lingering, freedom-seeking sentiment from the original fight for American independence, a unique spirit of liberation and individuality permeates the relationships of residents to their country, society to their government, and students to their colleges. Unlike British universities, where Lodge’s Philip Swallow says, “Somehow I can’t think of anything seriously revolutionary happening [here],” college campuses like UC-Berkeley, on which “Euphoric State University” is based, provide an ideal, small-scale community where individuals can test the effects of social upheaval (228). Progressive students and professors challenge administrators and the university community just as the American colonies challenged England. The lasting spirit of liberation has long-implanted the ideology of the American Dream—the ability to succeed through free enterprise—into the country’s shared principles.

The American Dream sets the bar at an overly optimistic, broadly unreachable standard of personal achievement, which leads to the inevitable letdown of post-collegiate adulthood. Because students are generally taught throughout their youth that they can do anything in America, they develop shields of invincibility along with the notion of preconceived entitlements that they expect to fall into their laps as they progress through their careers and adult lives. Conversely, the underprivileged are prone to developing bitterness toward the lack of entitlements endowed upon them and subsequently fail to adjust by either expecting nothing out of life or wasting time and energy on a façade of anger. In either case, Americans habitually distance themselves from reality and true experience by maintaining a mental block against the truth.

Behind the successful front of Susan Toth's Summa Cum Laude rival lays a painful, mid-life disappointment proportionate to the promised results of an Ivy League education. "You know, Sue," a now overweight, beer-guzzling Chris Morgan divulges, "my problem is that I had everything I ever wanted by the time I was twenty-eight. And now I'm thirty-five" (166). Two sentences later, she's dead. Echoing Toth's sentiment, Lodge says of his American protagonist that "At the age of forty, in short, Morris Zapp could think of nothing he wanted to achieve that he hadn't achieved already, and this depressed him" (34). The missing afterglow of post-dream-attainment life leaves achievers distraught and ironically unsatisfied.

Lodge sets up an appropriate *Gatsby* comparison as he adapts Fitzgerald's theme of a flashy, grand heyday followed by inevitable failure. The two tales remind readers that the country breeds a misguided spirit of superficiality, doomed to pay the consequences of embracing wealth and power too wholeheartedly. As he paints a shimmering, colorful picture of the town containing Euphoric State, seemingly open to endless, glorious possibilities of personal

satisfaction, Lodge constantly reminds the reader of the precarious nature of the “Euphoric State,” explaining how the “unique and picturesque landscape” results from a “huge geological fault running through the entire State” (47). Both Lodge and Toth punish their overly-greedy dream-seekers as proof of the idealism’s fallacy—one with perpetual dissatisfaction, the other with death. Even as merely a visitor, British professor Philip Swallow endures a mucky landslide at the house where he resides, leading him to shack up with the wife of his professor-swap counterpart. The landscape continuously serves as a physical representation of a land of milk and honey gone sour.

While the American Dream falls flat in the lives of individuals, the university stands as a setting of sociopolitical unrest in Lodge’s novel. As helicopters circle the controversial community garden in the fictional town of Plotinus, the war-like fight for something as simple and peaceful as a piece of shared land elicits armed response from the forces that hold power. Considering the timing and backdrop of the book, its Vietnam-Era imagery alludes to a widespread misuse of authoritative force, everywhere from the campus to the battlefield. The politically confused youth who help both the U.S. government and the university administration to combat the continuation of the community garden are depicted as “young men who had only joined the National Guard to get out of the Viet Nam War anyway” (157). Again, the superficial façade of American invincibility sucks in its losers, starting with highly impressionable, draft-age boys. The war exists, then, not only overseas, but also on the home front—between the vulnerable and the established, or simply, the young and old.

The commonly cherished, idealistic principle of reward(s) by means of hard work gives false hope and an unrealistic sense of entitlement to Americans as society keeps dream achievement unreachable to the majority of people. But these letdowns never seem to stop the

pervasiveness of dream-attainment ideology in the messages fed to each new generation. Amory Blaine provides an early-twentieth-century example of inflated self-confidence as he “wonder[s] how people could fail to notice that he was a boy marked for glory” (Fitzgerald 20). However, “It was always the becoming he dreamed of, never the being” (20). He longs to be the face of success among his peers, and consequently, he proves that the act of making a name for himself lures his interest much more than actually living the stable life of the self-made man. Just as Amory “marked himself a fortunate youth, capable of infinite expansion for good or evil,” so does Hoyt Thorpe deem himself attractive, socially enthralling, and mentally sharp in Wolfe’s modern example, although Hoyt practically flunks out of his courses (20). Like Amory, Hoyt misappropriates his youthful bravado for success, thanks to the “stronghold” of Dupont’s Ivy League reputation and his confidence-building status as a fraternity brother; Hoyt believes he is in “the fraternity of those who have been chosen to hold dominion over...well, over everybody” (Wolfe 11; ellipsis in orig.).

When they need to find the drive to succeed at school, though, boys like Amory and Hoyt come up short on motivation. Every undergraduate discovers when facing a particularly difficult challenge that he or she “possess[es] neither courage, perseverance, nor self-respect” after having been encouraged to believe that he or she is the most amazing person with the most potential ever to have entered college (Fitzgerald 21). Amory and Hoyt’s “top dog” instinct pushes them to “‘pass’ as many boys as possible and get to a vague top of the world” (21). Neither of them has any idea what waits for them in their futures, but they imagine that they will somehow make it there by means of an enviable reputation. Overall, cultural expectations like the American Dream soil the educational system and spoil the merits of its students.

A striking difference to note from early college experience novels to contemporary ones is the omnipresence of disillusionment and defeatism. While *Stover* ends on a hopeful note, *Charlotte* concludes with the abandonment of her conscience's parental voice of guidance and of her belief in love. In such instances with idealism dead, a postmortem postmodernism "decenters"⁹ the student from his or her journey of satisfying self-actualization and instead affirms the degree to which American life operates askance. Wolfe uses the metaphor of "the ghost in the machine" to signify a modern-day equivalent of the illusion of the "soul" (as his Nobel Prizewinning neuroscientist Starling explains it) operating in society (674). To students and their professors in novels like Wolfe's, the only satisfying affirmation while partaking in the demands of the collegiate world is the ability to acknowledge that it is all a game based on the materialistic demands of American society, much like the social games that students play with each other.

In the thrill of the game, Jojo represents a romanticized college stereotype—the all-star athlete. Like any successful hero, he exceeds the original expectations of those around him and becomes more than what he started as by learning something (or by learning anything, in the case of college athletes). At the story's conclusion, however, Jojo is still a pitiable oaf who relies on the strengths of a smart woman to subsist at the status he has reached. If a true hero's transformation had taken place in either member of the power-couple, Jojo would not be codependent, and Charlotte would not feel that she needed someone "to assure her that she was a very lucky girl, after all" (674). The patronizing tone of this falsely comforting assertion from Charlotte's conscience gives heed to the fact that she has settled, "after all."

⁹ Piaget discusses the importance of "decentering" students to build "independence and reciprocity" when working toward formation of the personality and overcoming egocentrism (111-12).

The presence of mutual reliance within undergraduate relationships proves the power of social sway. As students rely on one another for affirmation, the approval they receive informs all other decisions. In Charlotte's example, she went off to college in search of intellectual achievement with no perceived interest in the social sphere; once immersed in the collegiate culture, her former convictions no longer held any control over her subsequent actions. Her character peak occurred at the novel's opening, when she exists on a plane above all of her classmates—a virginal brainchild of rural America. Charlotte's fall from grace illustrates the strength of the undergraduate social atmosphere to savagely, salaciously devour her confidence like a wayward beast and spit her back out, deflowered. The reincarnated Charlotte, Jojo's girlfriend, is a savvy young woman who has surrendered, by will of the social forces that be, the "keys to the kingdom, to the very laboratory wherein the human animals' new conception of themselves was being created"—not only Dr. Starling's lab, where she was offered the opportunity to study, but also the campus ground on which she walks daily as an undergraduate (639). That "conception" is a dirty kick in the face for college students; those who chose the path laid before them by so many boozed up, popularity-starved, social climbers suffer as they conform to the demands of the stereotype. As Piaget explains:

In the degree that the individual is self-centered, he creates an obstacle by his moral or intellectual egocentrism to the inherent relations of reciprocity that all evolved social living contains. Whereas, on the contrary, the part of an individual that is a 'person' freely accepts some kind of discipline, or contributes to its creation, by voluntarily subjecting himself to a system of mutual 'norms' that subordinate his liberty in respect to that of others. (90-91)

While Piaget cites this shift as central to the development of personality, the “personality” to which he refers is a mutually beneficial being, and not a social leech.

Other college experience protagonists traverse similarly hilly paths of self-discovery in pursuit of social dominance. Stover goes into freshman year with the highest of aspirations: to be athletic, intelligent, and adored by all. After feeling let down by the superficiality of the society circle and the less-than-ideal position he must play on the football field, he removes himself from both roles and makes a fresh start as an independent thinker. In the tradition of the classic American hero story, however, Stover makes his way in the end. He regains his academic footing, snags the worthy girl’s attention, and gets to join the exclusive Skull and Bones society, perhaps more so because Johnson chose to focus on the spirit of individualism and feared letting down his readers than because the conclusion realistically followed.

Amory Blaine flounders in every conceivable way, engaging in frivolous friendships, sports, and romances, before reconciling to his fate as a permanent, post-Princeton drifter. Constant references to his artistic nature mirror the propensities of college-age Fitzgerald, who semi-autobiographically writes himself into Amory’s character in effort to relieve himself of his burdensome adolescent burns. Fitzgerald perfectly captures the sentiment and restless, communal voice of a disgruntled youth culture appropriate to the time in America.

The quintessential girls’ school experience of Susan Toth reveals the unique, quiet struggle of adolescent women to fill the distinct roles of desirable, romantic playmate and studious, responsible classmate, student, and daughter. As Susan initiates herself with the norms of college academics, dorm life, and social pretenses, she demystifies the magic that she always thought surrounded such things when she imagined her life at Smith. Although her graduation is filled with collective, affirming cries of, “We can fly! We can fly!” Susan still “wondered if

everything since high school had been a mistake” (172; 187). The self-doubt evoked by unfounded college social expectations and societal demands of women eats away at her confidence and convictions, just as Charlotte endures nearly forty years later.

Kennedy explores both the male and female Ivy League college experiences of the late twentieth century with the added complication of peer prejudices against non-normative sexual identities. In an arena of unending social judgment, characters like Jill, who not only dare to be different but also define their sexuality differently than typical frat boys and jocks, hear hurtful slurs and undergo spiteful attacks, sometimes even physical. Alec’s self-defeating study habits and issues of fitting into the money-backed world of Yale elitism pale in comparison to the ongoing challenges of Jill’s precariously balanced emotional state and fight for recognition of the legitimacy of her identity. The cold, cruel scorn of classmates makes the replacement of parents with peers a disconcerting initiation into a quasi-adult society where students put sex and wealth on display as brazenly and as often as possible.

In a retro setting with a modern recognition of disillusionment, Kidd’s Happy stumbles upon an oddly fulfilling career path under tutelage of a misfit, brilliant professor at his local state university. Hap’s experience initially highlights the lackadaisical nature of many students’ college experience, as he admits that he “put as little thought into it as possible” (5). Ironically, Happy’s lack of enthusiasm earns him his nickname as he stands in contrast to dark little nihilist, Himillsy. Bonding over their chronic inability to please their abrasive graphic arts professor, Winter Sorbeck, the pair toys with flirtation but more importantly, they independently indulge in fantastical relations with Sorbeck. In following with the gender codes of the 1950s in which the story is set, Hap retains his footing but Himillsy stumbles in response to Sorbeck’s authoritative power plays. Sorbeck ends up representing part of “an enemy we were united against”—the state

university, the pretentious ideas of modern art, the social mores of undergraduates, and the disjointed nature of American culture (50). Kidd, through the voice of Hap, sees everything as a creation of the design world, or a materialistic ploy to please someone. As Hap and friends try to convince Sorbeck that they possess some ingenuity, they represent students who market themselves to their professors for a grade. This dynamic can be applied to nearly every relationship in the commercial world, as Americans find themselves having to “sell” their personal “brand” in the workforce and beyond, no matter the context.

Lodge’s novel is full of gender codes as well, but as a work of the Sexual Revolution era, it revolves around breaking codes and challenging normalcy. As a story of the experiences of college professors rather than students, it gives an inside look into the often widely corrupt system of tenure and awarding. Lodge points to the customs of the American educational system as the ruinous reasoning for such problems. He harkens back to an appeal for classical learning in the town of Plotinus, as he describes students who are the unfortunate products of their society: Mary Makepeace, the Catholic schoolgirl aboard an abortion-bound flight to the UK; Charles Boon, a free-spirited, free-thinking loafer who, along with the rest of the “Department’s Teddy-Boys” in fictional Rummidge, England, “showed no deference to the social and cultural values of the institution to which they had been admitted” (27); and Melanie Zapp, the Euphoric State professor’s daughter who sleeps with her dad’s British counterpart before taking up with Charles Boon. Ongoing adultery soils the morale of all the main players, and the behavior of the adults involved seems to indicate that American culture promotes a prolonged adolescence and irreverence toward maturity. After all, the culture of constant navel-gazing leads Philip to find that he “did a lot of looking into mirrors lately. Hoping to surprise himself, perhaps, in some revealing explanatory attitude or expression” (155). Just as students seek “real” experience by

trying on variations of their identities, Philip opens himself to the American way of life and comes up short—he forgoes his British wife, job, and even his very Britishness in the spirit of wanting everything new that he can get his hands on.

In turning back to Zola and his “experimental novel,” it becomes apparent why he compares social and scientific determinism as elements of the experience that is recreated through the novelist’s experiment (17-18). For all of the college experience novelists, the “social condition unceasingly modifies the phenomena [‘of the thoughts and the passions’]” (20). Furthermore, the novelists’ “great study is just there, in the reciprocal effect of society on the individual and the individual on society” (20). Investigating this relationship in the undergraduate community in the tradition of Zola (and Claude Bernard’s) great “experiments” reveals that novelists who study *how* students are being affected by their interactions can begin to understand *why* they act in the ways that they do (22). Wolfe follows this pattern of thought as he points to behavioral science to explain not only the actions of lab animals but also human, college-student specimens. Zola quotes Bernard in summation of these ideas: “Science has precisely the privilege of teaching us what we are ignorant of, through its substitution of reason and experiment for sentiment, and by showing us clearly the limit of our actual knowledge” (22). As students give in to their instinct-driven social impulses, their colleges continue to limit their knowledge acquisition through ineffective methods of teaching, learning, and social control. From the sidelines of this spectator sport, scientists, novelists, and American society as a whole will continue to watch the “play of the animal machinery” (28).

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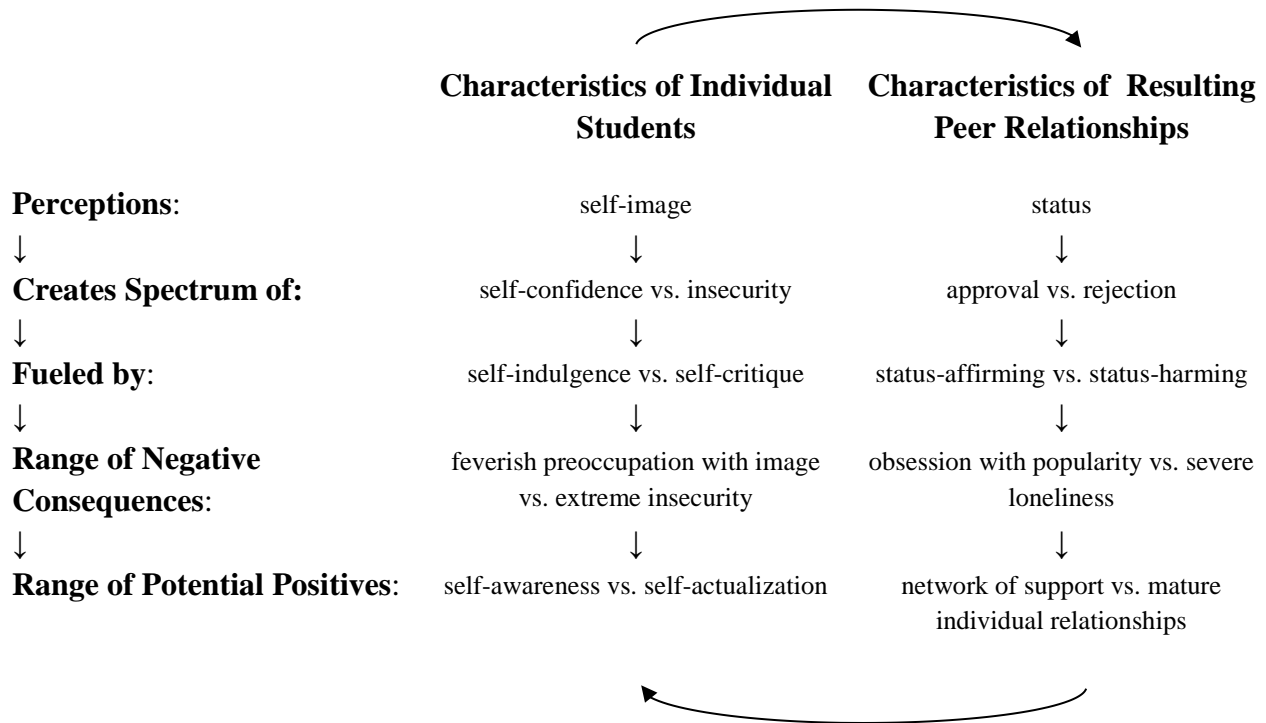
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Appendix

Individual-to-Peer Reciprocity



Strong connections exist not only between individual students, but also between the characteristics used to define both the individual undergraduate student and his or her relationships to peers. Success or failure in peer relations thus determines the nature of the individual's characterization of him- or herself on internal and external levels, as well as the individual's subsequent behavioral expressions and adjustments.