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As institutions of higher education prepare students for their careers, there is often a focus on teaching students how to demonstrate professional behavior to secure employment. Yet, definitions of professionalism may vary across contexts, and many reflect hegemonic norms, which are not reflective of the realities of low-income students. As such, teaching these students about professionalism may highlight the tensions between framing higher education as a lever for social advancement while it concurrently serves as a tool of social reproduction. Acknowledging these tensions, this constructivist qualitative case study examined how a comprehensive college transition program designed to serve low-income students socialized these students to notions of professionalism. Drawing from observational data collected over 4 years, we found that the program largely framed professionalism as essential for students' social mobility and used programming to provide information about professional dress, communication, and interactions through a lens that reflected middle-class, gender normative values. Complicatedly, the program also at times described professionalism as a tool that could be used to advance one's abilities as a leader and to serve one's communities. Our findings have implications for educators working to support low-income students' career preparation and to promote their success.

Keywords: low-income students, professionalism, career preparation, socialization

For low-income students, higher education is often sold as a tool for social mobility given its potential to increase graduates' access to careers, earned income, and social networks associated with the middle-class (Brown, 2012; Haveman & Smeeding, 2006; Martin, 2015). While there is some evidence that higher education can lead to increased earnings for college graduates (Mayhew et al., 2016; Perna, 2005), social mobility is not guaranteed since higher education is also a tool of social reproduction. For example, low-income and working-class students are far less likely to attend elite institutions than peers. Chetty et al. (2017) found that students with parents in the top 1% of income distributions attended Ivy League institutions at rates 77 times higher than those from the lowest quartile. This exclusion means that many low-income students do not benefit from the pathways to elite careers that cater to graduates from these institutions (Rivera, 2015).

Furthermore, low-income students may be saddled with student loan debt given the rising costs of higher education (Grinstein-Weiss et al., 2016; Houle, 2014; Soria et al., 2014). The realities of student loan debt make it increasingly difficult for individuals to reap the monetary benefits of attending postsecondary education. While addressing access to elite institutions and the implications of student loan debt is vital, framing these issues as the primary barriers to social mobility for low-income students obscures how reproducing classism in higher education also upholds racism, sexism, and heterosexism given the interlocking and systemic nature of oppression (Combahee River Collective, 1977/2017). In particular, discourse focused solely on the economic implications of college can draw attention away from how higher education propagates the White, middle-class, masculine values that undergird the academy and many workplaces to reproduce systems of oppression (Haveman & Smeeding, 2006; Rivera, 2015; Stephens et al., 2012; Torche, 2011).

Social mobility for low-income students requires more than earning a college degree. To reap the full rewards of higher education, low-income students are expected to learn rules, values, and ways of being that reflect hegemonic norms to succeed in and after college (Hurst, 2010; Stephens et al., 2012). Notably, prior literature focused on low-income students has highlighted how they learn the aforementioned norms as they navigate college, and the tensions they may experience as they do so (Jack, 2019; Stephens et al., 2012; Stuber, 2006). For example, scholars have examined how students are socialized into White, middle-class ways of communicating through courses and how this may signal to students that they do not belong on campus if their language differs (Bloom, 1996; Duff, 2010). For low-income students, hegemonic ways of acting and being are also communicated through everyday interactions with peers, faculty, and staff members, which can influence the salience and meaning of students' social class identities (Bettencourt, 2020a; Martin, 2015; Stuber, 2006).

Given the focus on curricular and interpersonal interactions as means to socialize low-income students to the White, middle-class, masculine values of the academy, there has been less attention to how

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students may (un)intentionally learn these concepts from programs designed to support their success. For instance, do career preparation programs that emphasize professionalism to support social mobility also reinforce hegemonic ways of thinking and being? Professionalism is contextual and has varied definitions (Evetts, 2003); yet, constructions of professionalism generally reflect images and norms associated with being White, middle-class, and masculine workers (Acker, 1990; Hodgson, 2005). Programs that teach low-income students about the nature of professionalism are often designed to make hidden rules about dress, language, and behavior more opaque. Knowing the "rules" of professionalism can be invaluable to low-income students as they seek employment opportunities and ultimately for many, social mobility. However, when programs teach normative constructions of professionalism, they may center dominant ways of knowing and being. In this regard, preparing low-income students to work in White, middle-class, masculine workplaces can serve to both contest and uphold interlocking systems of oppression.

Acknowledging the potential benefits and constraints of professionalism in enabling individuals' social mobility, our research examined how low-income students learned about this construct. Specifically, we explored how the Thompson Scholars Learning Community (TSLC), a comprehensive college transition program (Hallett, Kezar, Perez, et al., 2020), taught the low-income students it serves about professionalism through its various academic, career, and professional development programs. We were particularly interested in uncovering if and how TSLC contests and upholds hegemonic definitions of professionalism as it supports low-income students' social mobility. Our inquiry explored the following questions:

1. What messages about professionalism did the TSLC program convey to students?

2. How did the TSLC program teach students about professionalism?

Review of the Literature

To situate our study, we provide a brief overview of three bodies of literature that informed our inquiry. First, we examine literature that explores professionalism as a social construct. Then, we review studies related to professionalism and career development in higher education. Finally, we explore scholarship that attends to low-income students' experiences with class and classism in higher education.

Constructions of Professionalism

Professionalism is often used to describe attitudinal and behavioral expectations in many workplaces (Evetts, 2003; Hodgson, 2005). Yet the exact definition of what constitutes professionalism, and in turn appropriate attitudes and behaviors, may be elusive since "The behaviors and dispositions that constitute professionalism vary by individual, organization, and profession" (Perez, 2021, p. 323). Scholars have argued that the lack of consensus about the nature of professionalism allows groups, organizations, and communities of practice to (re)create their own definitions of the construct and in turn to determine the rewards and penalties for different engagement (Evetts, 2003; Freidson, 1970; Hodgson, 2005). Accordingly, many relevant studies are situated in fields such as medicine, nursing, law,

teaching, and other helping professions, where enacting professionalism is essential to being viewed as a qualified practitioner (e.g., Cooper, 2019; Perez, 2021).

While the idea of professionalism can be beneficial in situating expectations and defining qualifications for practice, it can also be used to constrain individuals. Professionalism is not a power and identity neutral construct, and how it is defined and reinforced often reflects hegemonic ideas of the ideal worker (Acker, 1990; Evetts, 2003; Hodgson, 2005). Gray (2019) noted that professionalism often includes:

> white and Western standards of dress and hairstyle (straightened hair, suits but not saris, and burqa and beard bans in some countries); in speech, accent, word choice, and communication (never show emotion, must sound "American," and must speak white standard English); in scrutiny (black employees are monitored more closely and face more penalties as a result; and in attitudes toward timeliness and work style. (para. 3)

While there are some variations in the definition of professionalism, the associated dress and behavioral expectations are typically reflective of being White, middle-class, cisgender, and/or a man (Cooper, 2019; Gray, 2019; Hodgson, 2005; Rios, 2015). Those individuals whose appearance, language, and ways of being are not aligned with these dominant norms are urged to conform in order to be perceived as professional by others and to receive the benefits of being viewed in this way. However, performing professionalism is not without cost to those who are minoritized since these individuals may feel like they cannot be their full selves, that their identities are not valued, or that they do not fully belong to a group, organization, or institution (Cooper, 2019; Gray, 2019; Rios, 2015).

Professionalism and Career Development in Higher Education

Career development programming is one forum through which students learn about professionalism in higher education. Dey and Cruzvergara (2014) noted that over the course of time, career services have moved away from vocational guidance and toward a focus on professional networking, partnerships with employers, and creating career focused communities among students and alumni. Furthermore, they assert that career services need to strongly attend to branding and reputation. While teaching students about professionalism has always been an important component of career preparation, the need to attend to it has been heightened given the strong emphasis on networking, branding (i.e., image), and reputation. In other words, career development educators have become increasingly cognizant about the need to teach students the norms of professionalism to support their abilities to enter, navigate, and succeed in workplaces that may be rooted in hegemonic constructions of professionalism.

While teaching students about professionalism can be advantageous as they seek employment, some scholars have noted the limitations of doing this work in an identity evasive manner. Accordingly, they have advocated for more identity-conscious approaches to career development that decenter White, middle-class norms (Garriott, 2020; Muzika et al., 2019; Stebleton, 2007). For example, Stebleton (2007) asserted that the career development programing for Black immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa should attend to these students' lived experiences. Specifically, educators should be conscious of (a) the impact of

colonialism, enslavement, and racism on these students' lives; (b) these students' experiences of uncertainty; and (c) the conflicting messages these students receive from African cultures rooted in collectivism and Eurocentric cultures focused on individualism. Garriott (2020) and Muzika et al. (2019) pointed toward the need for more class-conscious career development since students' choices are often constrained by their lack of class privilege. However, class conscious career development does not require a deficit approach to working with low-income students. Accordingly, Garriott (2020) urged educators to draw upon students' cultural wealth while acknowledging structural constraints as they serve low-income students.

Low-Income Students' Experiences With Class and Classism in Higher Education

Higher education scholars have used an array of measures to define low-income students that center on parental income (e.g., estimated family contribution [EFC], Pell Grant eligibility, income below poverty line). Additionally, researchers have explored how low-income students conceptualize their social class identities and may come to see themselves as poor or working-class (Ardoin & martinez, 2019; Bettencourt, 2020a; Martin, 2015). While the definition of low-income students may vary across the literature, what has been consistent is the recognition that higher education has not been designed to serve this group of students since they encounter a myriad of barriers to their success (Bettencourt, 2021; Langhout et al., 2009; Perna, 2015; Stephens et al., 2012). For instance, many activities that have been demonstrated to support student engagement, retention, and success (e.g., study abroad, internships, organizational membership) may be difficult for low-income students to participate in if they have high associated costs or if they conflict with work or familial obligations (Ardoin & martinez, 2019; Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013; Jack, 2019). The difficulties of navigating college are amplified for low-income students who are first generation (i.e., parents/guardians have not completed a bachelor's degree), racially minoritized, immigrants, caregivers, or older than their peers (Chen & Nunnery, 2019; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Jack, 2019).

While institutions have been attentive to increasing access and support for low-income college students, they have often been less engaged in how social class and classism affect these students' collegiate experiences (Ardoin & martinez, 2019; Bettencourt, 2020b, 2021). Despite the absence of discourse, class is "always in my face" (p. 478) as one participant in Martin's (2015) study of White, low-income, first-generation college students stated. Across the literature, low-income students have described being keenly aware of how their clothing, language, and experiences differ from their middle-class and upper class peers (Bettencourt, 2020a, 2021; Hurst, 2010; Martin, 2015; Stuber, 2006). For some low-income students, the pervasiveness of class has led them to try to mask their class to fit in with their peers (Ardoin & martinez, 2019; Barratt, 2011). While for others, the heightened awareness of class has increased the salience of their identity as a low-income student and their pride in it (Ardoin & martinez, 2019; Bettencourt, 2020a; Martin, 2015).

Given the omnipresence of class and the lack of discourse about it in higher education, students must often learn White, "middle- and upper-class cultural norms, unwritten codes, or 'rules of the game'" (Stephens et al., 2012, p. 1178) in order to succeed. These "rules of the game" are regularly taught and reinforced in courses as students learn what it means to be a "good student." For instance, Bloom (1996) asserted that writing courses, which are often required of all students, are pivotal in teaching middle-class ways of communicating. They noted that middle-class values such as respectability, moderation, efficiency, good manners, and punctuality are taught since "composition is taught by middle-class teachers in middle-class institutions to students who are middle class either in actuality or in aspiration-economic if not cultural" (Bloom, 1996, p. 656). In effect, low-income students are taught that good writing and ways of speaking are reflective of the middle-class and that their language may not be appropriate or valued in college. At many institutions, being a "good student" also requires becoming an independent thinker, engaging with faculty, and seeking help when needed (Bettencourt, 2021; Jack, 2019). However, these markers of being a good college student may be more difficult for low-income students who have been in school settings where deference to authority was expected, help seeking was discouraged, and/or resources for support were unavailable (Calarco, 2018; Duff, 2010; Jack, 2019).

The centrality of middle-class and upper class students' values and their experiences is also apparent as students navigate their lives outside of class. For example, the notion of leisure or free time outside of classes may be unfamiliar to low-income students who did not have the luxury to eat out, join social organizations, or attend parties given their need to work or to provide support to their families (Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013; Bettencourt, 2021; Martin, 2015). This is not to say that low-income students are not engaged on college campuses. Many low-income students work on campus, participate in student organizations, and hold campus leadership positions. That being said, their motivations and their abilities to get involved may differ from their peers with more financial resources. For some low-income students, campus employment and involvement can help them meet their financial needs (Ardoin & martinez, 2019; Bettencourt, 2021; Jack, 2019). Thus, low-income students are compelled to weigh the benefits and costs of campus involvement differently than their peers. Ultimately, for some low-income students, the cost of trying to connect with peers and to get involved on campus is too high as is the stress of trying to learn the "rules of the game." The effects of class marginality for low-income students can manifest in high degrees of stress, lack of belonging, and doubt in one's abilities to succeed (Ardoin & martinez, 2019; Bettencourt, 2021; Langhout et al., 2009).

Acknowledging the barriers to low-income students' success, institutions have created an array of supports to decrease financial stress and to facilitate positive transitions into and out of institutions (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Perna, 2015). Some of these initiatives have included career development programming as a means of advancing low-income students' employability, and in concept, their social mobility. Scholars have found that low-income students have benefitted from interventions (e.g., programs, courses, advising) that use holistic, asset-based, and validating approaches (Bettencourt, 2020b; Kitchen, 2021; Kitchen et al., 2021; Perez et al., 2021). Equally as important, low-income students have indicated that support from educators is meaningful when they acknowledge the daily realities of class and classism in the academy, and they actively work to change systems (Bettencourt, 2020b). Accordingly, our study explored the messages TSLC sent about professionalism, and how those messages

were conveyed as the program worked to support low-income students' employability and social mobility.

Theoretical Framework

To understand how TSLC staff conveyed messages related to professionalism to the low-income students they serve, we use socialization as a framework to inform our inquiry. Socialization refers to how individuals learn the norms, values, culture, and practices of a group they are entering (Thorton & Nardi, 1975; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979; Weidman, 1989, 2006). Some perspectives on socialization attend to the structure or the organization of the process with the idea that socialization can be purposefully designed to foster specific outcomes, such as knowledge and values acquisition, organizational commitment (Ashforth et al., 2007; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979), and in our case an understanding of TSLC's construction of professionalism. Within the higher education literature, organizational perspectives on socialization have frequently been used to understand how graduate students learn the norms and standards of the disciplines and fields as they prepare for careers in the academy (Austin, 2002; Gardner & Mendoza, 2010; Perez, 2021). Yet, socialization within higher education does not begin when people pursue graduate degrees, nor does it solely focus on learning disciplinary or field-level norms.

Accordingly, Weidman (1989, 2006) argued that undergraduate students' socialization to their institutions influenced collegiate outcomes. Drawing from Astin's (1984) inputs-environments-outputs model, Weidman (1989) created a model of undergraduate student socialization that attends to students' background characteristics (e.g., social class, beliefs) and communities outside of college (e.g., family, friends), which inform how they engage in college. Undergraduate socialization occurs in academic and cocurricular settings through formal (e.g., classes, programs) and informal (e.g., interpersonal interactions) processes, and may send messages that are aligned or in conflict with messages learned from students' communities outside of college. As students make sense or interpret the messages they receive about what is normative in college, they assess their "fit" (Weidman, 1989, p. 309), which influences their sense of belonging and the extent to which they believe they can succeed. For example, as low-income students engage in courses and programs designed to support their career aspirations, they may receive messages that confirm or contradict their prior understandings of what constitutes professionalism. When prior and current messages about professionalism are consistent, low-income students are more likely to see themselves as a good "fit" for college and their chosen career. Conversely, when there are misalignments between messages about professionalism or low-income students do not see their ways of being reflected in the concept, they may have doubts about their "fit" or may feel pressure to conform to new norms. Given its attention to normative pressure in collegiate environments, Weidman's (1989) undergraduate socialization model highlights the pressure on students to assimilate to the dominant culture and norms that guide an institution if they are to persist and to ultimately achieve their goals.

Notably, Weidman (1989) was attentive to career preparation in creating their model. For example, they noted that employers are a reference group that may shape socialization processes at institutions and that students may feel normative pressure from them to learn and to perform notions of professionalism if they are to be perceived as employable postgraduation. The attention to external

stakeholders' influence on undergraduate students' socialization highlights the role of higher education in conveying more widely held, and often hegemonic views, of professionalism, in service of a particular definition of student success (i.e., employability).

Weidman also asserted that postsecondary education has a "hidden curriculum" or set of "unspoken and unwritten rules" (p. 307), which may include notions of professionalism. Though Weidman (1989, 2006) named social class as relevant to socialization, they did not explicitly link class and the hidden curriculum to systems of oppression. This omission was critiqued by Garcia et al. (2020) and Winkle-Wagner et al. (2020), who argued that the socialization of Latinx and Black college students respectively needs to attend to their racialization, their cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), and the effects of White supremacy. While critiques of Weidman's (1989, 2006) framework have attended to race and racism, more exploration of how class and classism shape and constrain undergraduate students' socialization is needed.

Accordingly, our study examines the explicit and implicit messages low-income students are sent about professionalism as they engage in a program designed to support their success. In particular, Weidman's (1989, 2006) model was well suited to helping us understand how TSLC used formal and informal structures to convey messages about professionalism. Furthermore, the acknowledgment of external influences and normative pressures within the model allowed us to critically examine the definitions of professionalism taught to low-income students and to consider the extent to which these definitions reflected hegemonic ways of being that centered those who are White, middle-class, cisgender, and/or men.

Method

Our research drew data from the Promoting At-Promise Student Success (PASS) project, a longitudinal mixed-methods study of the TSLC, a foundation-funded program designed to serve low-income students at the three University of Nebraska campuses (Kearney, Lincoln, Omaha). Students who have graduated from high school in Nebraska, are attending college for the first-time, and have an EFC of $10,000 or less are eligible to apply for a scholarship from the Susan Thompson Buffett Foundation. This scholarship covers the cost of tuition and fees for up to 5 years and is well known given the foundation's active outreach to high schools across the state. Students who receive the Buffett scholarship and choose to attend one of the University of Nebraska campuses participate in TSLC. Across the three campuses, TSLC welcomes approximately 700 new first-year students each year. Approximately 40% of TSLC students are racially minoritized, and 66% are first-generation college students.

As TSLC scholars, students receive 2 years of structured support (e.g., advising, peer mentoring, shared academic courses) designed to promote their academic, social, and personal success. While the foundation provides financial support for career development activities, it does not require the TSLC programs to host events related to professionalism. Rather, the TSLC staff on each campus are empowered to tailor their programs to best meet the needs of students. The purpose of the PASS project was to understand how students experienced and were affected by the combined financial and programmatic components of TSLC. The PASS project team received institutional review board approval to engage in the research described below.

The qualitative component of the PASS project used constructivist case study methodology (Jones et al., 2014; Merriam, 1998) to

develop a deep understanding of the TSLC program (Hallett, Kezar, Kitchen, et al., 2020). A constructivist approach reflected our desire to understand how participants experienced TSLC and our commitment to using "understanding for improved praxis" (Jones et al., 2014, p. 21). According to Merriam (1998), "case study is a particularly suitable design if you are interested in process[es]" (p. 33). While the larger study explored processes within TSLC that supported low-income students' success, this inquiry examined the process of socializing TSLC students to notions of professionalism.

Each campus served as a unique case or "bounded system" (Merriam, 1998, p. 27) within a larger programmatic case study. We developed thick, rich descriptions of each campus using program documents (e.g., reports, social media), observational data, interviews with TSLC faculty, staff, and stakeholders, and longitudinal video diaries and interviews with students. We collected data for four academic years (July 2015 to May 2019) to develop a holistic understanding of the program and participants' experiences within it.

Positionality

As scholars using a constructivist approach to inquiry, we were attentive to how our identities and our lived experiences have informed our engagement in the research process. The lead author is a second-generation, cisgender Asian American woman who was raised in a middle-class household. Her parents were initially factory workers before transitioning into laboratory work in the same company, and her early learnings about professionalism reflected being a good worker who contributed to the team. These messages were reinforced in her educational and work experiences; however, the pressures to dress to reflect business professional norms were amplified. She was actively involved in collecting and analyzing data throughout the PASS project.

The second author is a cisgender White woman who grew up in a working-class household where her father, a Portuguese immigrant largely without a formal education, worked as a dairy laborer. Though her mother completed a bachelor's degree, she passed away in the author's early childhood; thus, the author identified as a first-generation college student. Her perceptions of professionalism were both classed and gendered, as women were expected to be primary caregivers in the family and work exclusively in helping and service fields. Though the author identifies her background as working class, she does not consider herself to be low income due to the social mobility her family achieved through inherited wealth. She was not involved in collecting initial PASS data.

The third author is a cisgender woman of South Asian and African descent who grew up with two working parents who immigrated to the United States from the small Caribbean island of Trinidad. While her mother did not have the opportunity to pursue higher education, her father graduated from college and was able to help her throughout the process. Socialized by the norms of a former British colony, the author's parents often aligned professionalism with the politics of respectability throughout her childhood-a belief system that she had to unlearn throughout her educational journey. Though she was involved as a research analyst on the quantitative, survey analysis segment of the PASS study, she did not collect qualitative data.

The fourth author is a cisgender White man who grew up in a low-income household and was a first-generation college student. His mother waited tables, and his father was a security guard. His early understanding of work focused on preparing for similar jobs as an adult, and it was not until college that he began to learn about professionalism associated with career preparation. He was actively involved in collecting and analyzing data for the PASS project.

Collectively, our varied positionality and engagement with the PASS project enriched our abilities to understand the definitions of professionalism and how it was conveyed. In particular, we were sensitized to how racism, classism, and sexism shape constructions of professionalism, and the varied ways people are constrained by professionalism. Yet, we have also reaped the benefits of enacting professionalism in our work, and we actively socialize students to this concept as higher education faculty members. In this regard, we were also cognizant of the tensions of teaching, if not reinforcing, constructions of professionalism in our practice. As a collective, we consistently wrestled with the tensions of what it meant to critique professionalism and how it is taught to low-income students knowing that there are material consequences for not learning or ascribing to hegemonic definitions of it. Those of us who were involved in collecting data also grappled with our complicity in upholding hegemonic constructions as we engaged with students, staff, and faculty during the research process. We were conscious of how our dress, language, and etiquette often reflected the business norms we critique and that these norms also afforded us opportunities to engage with the TSLC community. Accordingly, our team created space for discussing the challenges of our work given its inherent tensions. We held that professionalism can concurrently benefit and constrain individuals, including ourselves, and we worked to reimagine more validating, affirming approaches to defining, teaching, and discussing it in higher education.

Data Sources

To examine how educators in TSLC socialized students to notions of professionalism, we drew from our observational data. These data were well suited to exploring the explicit and tacit messages TSLC educators sent about professionalism and how those messages were conveyed. PASS team members conducted over 200 hr of observations at each campus (~600 total hours) over the course of 4 years. We observed formal events (e.g., orientations, programs, courses) that were identified by TSLC staff and students as being important to supporting students' success. These events included career preparation programs, such as mock interviews and etiquette dinners. We also observed informal interactions among TSLC students, staff, and faculty in TSLC program spaces (i.e., offices, residence halls).

The students, staff, instructors, and stakeholders were made aware of the research project, which enabled us to take notes during the events as passive observers (Spradley, 2016). For more formal events (e.g., orientation or courses), the researcher often sat at the back of the room with a notepad or computer taking notes while the event happened. For informal events (e.g., meetings in offices), the researcher listened closely to the conversation and then recorded detailed reflections as soon after the event as possible. The PASS researcher assigned to each campus had a digital journal, where all observations were recorded and then posted on a shared drive. Our field notes documented insights related to physical space, activity content, interpersonal interactions, explicit and implicit messaging, and our behavior in the space. Although our observations were not designed to specifically collect information about professionalism, they contained rich information

about how students were actively socialized to constructions of professionalism in formal and informal settings over the course of time.

Analysis

Initially, case studies of the TSLC program at each campus were developed based upon inductive analysis of qualitative data in conjunction with the larger project (Boyatzis, 1998). These case studies suggested that tensions existed in how the programs engaged in socialization related to professionalism, which led us to a deeper inquiry to understand the nature of these tensions. During our first cycle of coding for this inquiry, we analyzed our field notes using an inductive approach (Miles et al., 2014). We independently read one set of field notes from each campus to develop initial or provisional codes related to definitions of professionalism and how this definition was conveyed, documenting our insights in a memo (Miles et al., 2014). Subsequently, we shared our memos and came to consensus about a coding scheme for reviewing the remaining field notes. Sample codes included professionalism as "appropriate dress," "networking," and "impression management" and teaching professionalism through "formal events" and "formulas." We used our coding scheme to review the remaining field notes, and each author documented insights across field notes in a memo. During this first cycle of coding, we remained open to identifying new codes and refining the existing codes.

After all the observations were coded, two of the authors engaged in a second cycle of coding and looked for patterns across the field notes and memos to more fully understand how the TSLC programs across the three campuses defined professionalism and subsequently how the program conveyed this definition to students (Miles et al., 2014). We organized the most salient patterns in themes with narrative description (Miles et al., 2014), then we used our coded materials to support and nuance our interpretations (Guest & MacQueen, 2008). Our approach allowed us to develop rich descriptions of each theme grounded in the data. Subsequently, we met as a full author team to review the emerging themes identified to look for disconfirming evidence and identify our initial findings. As a final step, the authors presented our findings to the full PASS research team to get their feedback before finalizing the findings presented below.

Limitations and Trustworthiness

While the design of our study allowed us to better understand how the explicit and tacit messages TSLC sent students about professionalism, our inquiry was not designed to examine how students subsequently interpreted these messages. Given the overarching aims and design of the larger PASS project, we also did not interview staff to ask explicitly about their views of professionalism and how they made decisions about conveying their views of this construct to students. Our data are also reflective of various PASS researchers' sensitivities in that we did not follow a strict observational protocol and as such our field notes documents insight that the researcher found to be noteworthy.

Acknowledging the limitations of our study, we worked to enhance the trustworthiness of our work through prolonged engagement and member checking (Jones et al., 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The study design involved prolonged engagement with the TSLC programs for 4 years at three different campuses. We had the

opportunity to observe the events discussed in this article, and how they have changed over time. In addition, we utilized member checking with the TSLC staff to strengthen the trustworthiness of the study. Since we could not share the raw data with participants without violating confidentiality, we shared our article with TSLC staff to get their feedback. These member-checking conversations allowed us to correct factually inaccurate information (e.g., number of events per year) as well as to hear their insights related to our emerging findings. The participants affirmed the findings related to socialization and professionalism that follow.

As previously noted, we benefited from the diversity of perspectives in our group of authors and among the larger PASS research team, which was compositionally diverse in terms of gender identity, race/ethnicity, social class of origin, and first-generation college status. We regularly consulted with the full PASS research team which allowed for differing perspectives of what was being observed and a deeper level of analysis during the sensemaking process. Furthermore, we benefited from having collaborators in our author group who were deeply involved in the qualitative data collection process and others who entered the project at later stages, which pushed us to more clearly ground our insights in the data rather than in our experiences collecting it.

Findings

Our inquiry was designed to uncover the messages that the TSLC program conveyed to students about professionalism and how those messages were conveyed. We found that the program socialized students to professionalism in two ways: (a) by messaging what professionalism is in alignment with their constructions of success and (b) by teaching students to be professional in highly prescriptive ways.

Messaging Professionalism Through Constructions of Success

Educators in TSLC strongly conveyed that learning and demonstrating professionalism was essential to achieve success via social mobility. There were two key framings of success related to professionalism. The first framing suggested that the low-income students in TSLC needed to learn how to be professional and, to do so, they needed to compete with peers or to make sacrifices in order to stand out. This construction of professionalism was individually oriented, prioritizing achievement. The second framing, which was less prominent, connected professionalism to leadership and serving one's community.

Professionalism as Competition, Learned Behaviors, and Sacrifice

Considering our first research question, the findings indicate that the TSLC program shared explicit and implicit messages about professionalism often related to its importance for achieving success. TSLC staff sent messages that if students developed the skills associated with professionalism, they would graduate with a degree credential and with the necessary social and cultural capital needed to enter, and potentially surpass, the middle class as a pathway to social mobility. Therefore, students in the TSLC program had the opportunity to participate in many events that helped advance their

academic, social, and career-related skills. The ways in which the program staff organized and facilitated these sessions sent messages to students about what professional skill sets made success possible. In other words, TSLC staff tried to teach students the "hidden curriculum" of professionalism to support a particular form of success.

When offering examples of what such constructions of professionalism might look like according to the program, students were largely given the norms of traditional business environments in ways that amplified the need for making oneself a competitive applicant for professional opportunities. In resume and interview preparation workshops, students were commonly instructed how to "present" and "sell" themselves to potential employers. Even their involvement in TSLC was seen as a potential commodity, as students were encouraged to, "[sell] it as being a part of a community with a grade point average (GPA) that is higher than the rest of the university." Rather than simply applaud the assets and abilities that allowed students to do well academically as TSLC scholars, workshop participants were encouraged to be competitive by speaking about how their group performed better than others on their campus. Even though students were majoring in and pursuing a broad range of careers, all students attending these kinds of events were told that professional attire tends to be business attire—a point defined in more detail in response to the second research question. The program's use of particular language and its drive toward competition emphasized TSLC's alignment with business logics and norms as being representative of professionalism, and ultimately, what they believe to be the keys to success.

In addition to narrowly defining professionalism as congruent with business contexts across students, the staff also tended to send messages about professionalism that were framed as skillsets and ways of being that students did not yet possess but could develop through TSLC support structures and programming. For example, events such as a resume workshop began with a staff member sharing, "From my experience, some students really struggle with this." They went on to detail examples of the mistakes that students made in the past. Beyond presuming students might face difficulty, some staff also used teaching strategies that emphasized what students should not do, rather than what they should do. When explaining what makes a strong resume, the facilitator placed a resume on the screen and asked the audience, "Why is this not a good sample?" Rather than express students' capacity for completing the task or learning from exemplars, students received the message that creating a professional resume would be a difficult task for them based upon the mistakes of others.

This deficit perspective was reiterated through a variety of forms. When discussing the ideal time for offering students an etiquette dinner during their college career, a staff member responded with "the sooner the better." He added that for a group like TSLC in which many students are first-generation college students, the earliest possible time would be best because these students cannot get this information from their parents. Rather than consider how students might have learned skills related to how to share a meal with others in respectful and thoughtful ways, the staff member presumed this would be a new skill the program would have to facilitate. Ultimately, TSLC students were given subtle messages that the skills needed to be professional were often ones they needed to learn and develop, rather than skills they may already have in different contexts.

Given that students were presumed to need support with skills related to professionalism, the process through which students would

need to develop these skills were presented as necessary sacrifices to be made to garner future opportunities for success. At an orientation event for second-year students, a staff member told students they would need business professional attire and if they did not have it currently, they should start planning ahead by saving money and looking for sales. In another example, a student told a staff member that she was planning to buy a new dress for an upcoming TSLC event. The staff member discouraged this, knowing it would be financially difficult for the student's family. The student responded that it would be okay since her mom had put money aside for this. Though the staff member in this scenario tried to assure the student she did not need new attire, students might have felt like they were receiving mixed messages about needing business professional clothing that they were presumed to not necessarily understand or own.

Professionalism as Leadership in and Service to Community

While TSLC tended to send the message that professionalism included a set of abilities students had not yet acquired, the staff also made efforts to expand traditional notions of success beyond business logics based upon competition and lucrative salaries, to also include qualities such as leadership and service to and with others. As one facilitator explained at a new student orientation for a peer mentorship program, the goal was that students would be grooming themselves to be leaders.

In addition to helping students envision themselves as leaders, the staff expanded traditional notions of success beyond fame and fortune. Rather than exclusively pursuing careers for acclaim and wealth, staff encouraged students to consider their future legacies by choosing careers based upon their ability to foster "passion," "love," and "make a difference." When discussing majors, one of the session facilitators described that students' selections would not just be for the purposes of job training but would also strengthen their capacities as informed and engaged citizens. To reiterate these points, a facilitator, who was also a faculty member, stated that they would want to write a letter of recommendation for the student who has a good GPA and is a good citizen over someone with a very high GPA. While this faculty member encouraged engaged citizenship and giving back to one's community, they concurrently framed the benefits as being instrumental (i.e., access to recommendations) in service of achieving personal goals. In other words, the specter of individual achievement remained present even when more expansive notions of success were offered.

Nonetheless, perspectives that attempted to expand beyond competitive, business-oriented definitions of success continued to be shared years later in an event that occurred toward the end of the formal TSLC program at the close of their second year. Here, staff emphasized both academic and personal success as being composed of traditional qualities like GPA, as well as becoming a good citizen and following a passion in your future career. While degree completion is a central goal of the program, at this event the staff ensured students that it was okay if their path took longer than the traditional 4-year trajectory. When speaking about the program's effectiveness in supporting students to pursue these broader definitions of success as previously described, speakers at the event emphasized how this happened through the program's ability to foster friendship and community early on. These examples from the events that bookended TSLC students' experiences indicate how program staff

attempted to add more asset-based, community-driven definitions of success through their messaging.

Teaching Professionalism as Rigid Formulas

Regarding our second research question, students were taught professionalism through constructed, rigid environments that were aimed at sharing formulas for success. These largely took the form of specific events within the programs that occurred throughout the year, such as etiquette dinners, mock interviews, and resume reviews. The events were specially allocated for professional development and separated from the other events within the TSLC programs; thus, the socialization process was formally organized with explicit outcomes. For example, though the programs regularly served food at events, it was only at the specific etiquette dinners that students were expected to use the prescribed protocol. In these professionalism-focused events, there was a clear agenda and expectations to be followed that included preparation, conduct at the event, and follow-up. In one type of event, mock interviews, there was a set routine in which each student was graded by an employer based on their interview and resume. Researchers noted that "the interviewers gave the students' feedback and provided them with ratings on things such as clarity of speech, ability to respond to questions, hand gestures, and posture."

The purpose of these events was largely to convey the formulas of professionalism that students were expected to master as previously established to secure success. These formulas were presented as universally applicable across students and professional situations. There were set processes for almost everything, from holding a drink and appetizer plate in one hand to free the other for handshakes to tips for introducing oneself. In a very clear example of a formula, we observed a session presenter describing how students should shake hands with others.

> Before beginning with the dinner etiquette, [the presenter] had the students switch their name tags from their left sides to their right sides. He explained that the name tag needs to be on the right side because when shaking hands with someone the person needs to be able to see the name tag. He then asked a student to stand up so that they could demonstrate a proper handshake. The presenter said, "shake once, shake twice, and disengage."

The example shows the rigidity of the formulas provided, right down to the number of movements one should include in a handshake. Students were taught to adopt these formulas at face value in order to be successful; modifications or alternative approaches were largely undiscussed, and the origins of the formulas were unexamined.

Since these formulas were prescribed and unquestioned, they often reinforced hegemonic expectations for professionalism rooted in racism, sexism, and classism. Specifically, students were given very explicit messages about how they should engage in professionalism according to gender in the form of expectations for attire. Options for apparel were described in terms of a gender binary that dictated what men and women should wear. In one session, slides were projected with suggestions for clothing and grooming specifically for men and women labeled "Dressing Right." Women were told that "dresses should not be too short … no more than about an inch above the knee" and "to keep 'this region' (she waved her hands over her chest) covered." Moreover, women were instructed that if they were wearing a sleeveless top, they should wear a cardigan or jacket. The expectation

was removed from context of weather or other norms, as evidenced by a student's subsequent follow-up:

> A student asked what to do if she got hot. [The presenter] said that it would be fine to take off the coat if a male or if the female had sleeves. If not, the female should excuse herself to go "air herself out" and then return to the table.

Notably, these expectations were much more restrictive for women than men and offered no recognition of trans*, genderqueer, or gender nonconforming individuals. There was no discussion of how standard dress style may not be accessible across cost, body types, availability, and disability accommodations. Instead, the expectation was often that students would find a way to conform to the expectations regardless of their limitations or differences.

The end result was that professionalism was taught in a way that was largely disconnected from students' lives. For example, the goal of the etiquette dinners was to convey how to navigate multiple courses and corresponding silverware. However, many students did not have previous exposure to the types of food presented, much less the idea of multiple courses. In a powerful example, one researcher observed that a student "mentioned that this was going to be the first time she ate a salad." Later, the same researcher noted:

> All of the plates had asparagus. Two of the students had never had asparagus before. Neither of them seemed too impressed by it. We talked about how many of the students at the table had limited exposure to food, especially fresh vegetables.

Students were routinely told that the events were not about the food, a statement seemingly at odds with the fact that low-income students are disproportionately impacted by concerns such as food instability. In fact, at one event a researcher noted that several students seemed hungry to the point of largely being unable to concentrate until they were able to eat at the event. Even students' experiences at college were largely disconnected from these professional environments. One TSLC staff member shared that they had trouble finding a restaurant to cater the event in the surrounding area because most local establishments did not engage in the requirements of a formal etiquette dinner (e.g., fork sizes for meals, meal courses).

While the curriculum regarding professionalism was largely disconnected from students' previous experiences, there was also a sense that individuals need to conform to these expectations to obtain success in college and ultimately, social mobility. Simply put, students were expected to mute their personalities to fit the formulas provided and access the described gains. In addition to the clothing and grooming expectations, there was a focus on choosing colors that were neutral, appropriate, and natural while avoiding colors and distinctive patterns. Students were directed to not have conversations about age, race, religion, marital status, or political affiliation. Perhaps most notably, during an interview session, students were directly told, "don't be Nebraska nice." Rather than building upon their individual personalities and attributes, professionalism was often seen as constructing an ideal persona removed from students as individuals if they were going to appeal to employers and achieve social mobility.

Discussion

In their model of undergraduate student socialization, Weidman (1989) noted that institutions often use employers as a reference group to guide how they prepare students for work after they

matriculate. Accordingly, institutions convey normative workplace expectations (e.g., hegemonic constructions of professionalism) as they prepare students for employment. Weidman (1989) assumed that grounding socialization in normative expectations was helpful to undergraduate students, but their work has been critiqued for not attending to how oppression operates in and outside of higher education (Garcia et al., 2020; Winkle-Wagner et al., 2020) to the detriment of racially minoritized students.

Our study further illustrates the tensions of grounding socialization in normative workplace expectations. Specifically, we highlight the tensions of teaching or socializing low-income students to hegemonic constructions of professionalism as a means of enhancing their employability and social mobility. TSLC's programming was an intentional way to meet some employers' expectations, particularly those in the business sector. While helping low-income students understand the norms that guide many middle-class workplaces can enhance their ability to access and navigate these environments, these students may also unintentionally receive messages that are deficit oriented (Garriott, 2020; Muzika et al., 2019; Stebleton, 2007). Specifically, professionalism is something that they may not possess and that they need to conform to in order to succeed.

In effect, there are unintended consequences of socializing low-income students to hegemonic notions of professionalism. Supporting individuals' social mobility has the potential to reproduce existing social inequalities if there is limited attention to how notions of professionalism center White, middle-class, cisgender, masculine norms (Cooper, 2019; Gray, 2019; Hodgson, 2005; Rios, 2015). Furthermore, centering professionalism as a mode of social advancement perpetuates the idea that low-income students must abandon or cloak their social class to advance rather than viewing this aspect of their identity as an asset or strength in the workplace. In this regard, attempts to teach and to reinforce hegemonic constructions of professionalism can contribute to the class marginality low-income students experience in higher education (Ardoin & martinez, 2019; Bettencourt, 2021; Martin, 2015).

Centering business-focused constructions of professionalism also reflected the assumption that all TSLC students had the desire to work in environments that used these norms. Additionally, the TSLC staff seemed to assume that there is a monolithic definition of professionalism (i.e., business norms) though constructions of professionalism are contextual (Evetts, 2003; Freidson, 1970; Hodgson, 2005; Perez, 2021). By using a single definition of professionalism and not providing students with the opportunity to reflect upon what it might mean to enact professionalism in their field of interest, the TSLC staff unintentionally limited students' scope of possibility (Muzika et al., 2019). There was little space to think about what professionalism meant to them given their social identities, experiences, and aspirations and what they might want professionalism to be as they sought future employment opportunities (Garriott, 2020; Stebleton, 2007). Furthermore, TSLC students received implicit messages that fields and organizations that use business norms are more valuable than workplaces that do not. In this regard, TSLC programs conveyed normative expectations about what work was valuable and how to best engage in desirable forms of work (Weidman, 1989). Given TSLC's approach, students who did not aspire to work in settings that used business-focused constructions of professionalism may have wondered if career goals were laudable.

One inherent contradiction is the fact that TSLC programs largely act as sites of validation for students that challenge deficit framing and recognize the inherent strengths these students bring to higher education (e.g., Kitchen, 2021; Kitchen et al., 2021; Perez et al., 2021). Thus, while students are largely encouraged to engage with their own prior knowledge and experiences to fuel their success on campus, messages and teachings about professionalism largely assume students need to absorb a set of externally defined practices to succeed. The professionalism approaches conveyed by TSLC educators supported low-income students' success in their college and career experiences by attempting to make the "hidden curriculum" (Weidman, 1989) of the middle-class and upper class more explicit. However, this approach does not acknowledge the underlying classism that creates and continues class-based discrepancies (Bettencourt, 2020b), nor does it equip students to recognize and contest classism should they desire to do so. In other words, low-income students may better learn the "rules of the game" or professionalism scripts to navigate business-oriented environments; however, they may not come to recognize their potential to change the rules or to rewrite the script itself.

That being said, we found that programs like TSLC can also be sites of resistance when they redefine who and what is viewed as professional. While educators in TSLC predominantly defined professionalism using business norms, there were some efforts to expand notions of professionalism to attend to leadership and give back to one's community. Discussing various perspectives on professionalism can allow low-income students to explore how they are affected by and can contest systems of oppression with programmatic support. Furthermore, creating more expansive definitions of professionalism that are grounded in low-income students' identities and realities, creates opportunities to support students' goals while honoring their lived experiences (Garriott, 2020; Stebleton, 2007). For example, working-class students often see a strong work ethic, responsibility, and dedication as attributed to their social class background (Bettencourt, 2020a; Martin, 2015). These attributes provide an excellent foundation to help bridge students' own experiences with a critical examination of the professional expectations they might encounter.

Implications

Given our findings, helping students to critically examine messages about professionalism can empower them to make active choices about how they wish to engage. For example, students may not want to wear muted colors or tone down their stylistic expression for a variety of reasons. Encouraging them to do so without consideration can result in self-policing and potentially a mismatch in a career field or workplace. Instead, practitioners could share that some workplaces may value a minimalistic expression and help students to think for themselves how they might navigate that expectation. Educators can also use case studies with students at career preparation events to help students to draw upon their knowledge and experiences to develop a plan for how they might engage if in different circumstances. Rather than emphasizing one right approach, such an exercise could help students practice identifying their values and prioritizing what is most important. Approaches that allow for more direct engagement with the classist, racist, ableist norms embedded within professionalism can help

students to consider not only how might they navigate, but how they might actively resist and promote change.

Additionally, educators can help students identify examples of professionalism in their home communities to build upon their prior knowledge, rather than framing career development as absent from one's background (Garriott, 2020). For example, educators might engage with students to examine how they have seen professionalism manifest in the lives of their home communities and what lessons might be drawn for their own lives. Rooting curriculum in personal experiences and identity is powerful for the development of low-income students (Perez et al., 2021). These practices help students to make connections between their home and school communities rather than feeling the two are disjointed (e.g., Garriott, 2020; Hurst, 2010; Stebleton, 2007). Furthermore, this approach can reinforce the idea that the definition can vary (Evetts, 2003; Freidson, 1970; Hodgson, 2005; Perez, 2021) and that those dominant views of professionalism center the realities of those that are White, middle-class, cisgender, and/or a man (Cooper, 2019; Gray, 2019; Hodgson, 2005; Rios, 2015).

Our research also suggests several future areas of inquiry. For example, scholars can work with low-income college students to better understand the messages they receive about professionalism, where they receive these messages, and how they affect or influence them. Relatedly, it would be beneficial to understand how students understand and negotiate the messages they receive about professionalism across home, campus, and work environments to create their own understanding of this concept. Researchers should also engage in inquiry to understand how practitioners that serve low-income students define professionalism and how this informs their work with these students. More broadly, scholars could explore constructions of professionalism across student services areas (e.g., admissions, career services, housing, etc.) to understand the various ways and settings in which low-income students receive messages about how to enact professionalism. Finally, researchers can engage with low-income educators and social class allies to illuminate how these individuals may be negotiating and contesting hegemonic views of professionalism and their potential effects on students. Across these future areas of inquiry, we encourage the use of identity and power conscious approaches to research, which may further illuminate how individuals' understandings of and pressures to perform professionalism may be informed by their socially constructed identities, their roles within organizations, and systems of oppression.

Conclusion

Taken together, our inquiry highlights the tensions of socializing students to constructions of professionalism that are hegemonic in nature. While learning these rules may help low-income students access opportunities and advance in their careers, it may also contribute to their class marginality. In this regard, using professionalism to achieve social mobility is not without costs to low-income students. To better support low-income students, we encourage educators to engage with the notion of professionalism more critically and how it shapes and constrains individuals. In doing so, we may contest one way that classism operates in higher education and validate low-income students' backgrounds and their experiences while supporting their success.

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