1998

Stepping Around the Mop Water: Views of Status and Occupation in University Custodians and Students

Hope Hoffman

Illinois Wesleyan University

Recommended Citation
http://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/socanth_honproj/20

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by The Ames Library, the Andrew W. Mellon Center for Curricular and Faculty Development, the Office of the Provost and the Office of the President. It has been accepted for inclusion in Digital Commons @ IWU by the Faculty at Illinois Wesleyan University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@iwu.edu.

©Copyright is owned by the author of this document.
Stepping Around the Mop Water:
Views of Status and Occupation in University Custodians and Students

Honors Research by Hope Hoffman

April 24, 1998
I. Introduction

Fieldnotes March 10, 1997

George

Things sure are getting off to a rough start ... I saw George (he's the most approachable—I've talked to him a couple of times before, he's very easy-going and friendly, with a mild sunny sort of disposition) coming out of his janitor's closet. We said "Hi" and "How's it going." But then, here's how the dialogue went:

Author: I was wondering if—

George: I thought you were going to ask me something like that [I'd been following him along into another room during the greetings].

H: I'm doing a paper for class about people's jobs and what they're like, how they feel about them, that kind of thing, and I was wondering if I could sort of shadow you and ask questions for a while.

G: No! [smiling but emphatic]

A: Why?

G: 'Cause that's weird!

A: Why's it weird? [pleading and maybe pathetic-looking, very confused]

G: ... What, are we like rats? Is there cheese at the end of the maze? ... You'll get me fired.

A: No one will read this but my professor [he looked like I was pulling his leg, kind of rolled his eyes ], and it can be totally anonymous ...

G: Another student, Peter, he tried to do this before, he said he wanted to spend a day with me on the job, he said something like "I just want to find out what it means to be you [he sounded ambivalent and uncomfortable and slightly sarcastic]. And I said, go to the house, you'll find out. But he was doing just two people, Minor Meyers [the president of the university] and me, it was supposed to be one
from each end of the spectrum at Velour [he didn't sound at all happy with this].

A: [shocked and horrified and flustered again and mad at Peter] That's awkward.

G: So what class is this for, a sociology class? I think that's what his was for.\(^2\)

A: Anthropology. [Stupid move! Next time, say "ethnography" and then explain what it is, I didn't realize that "A" word could make people feel like foreign islanders under my eye—]

G: Isn't anthropology like monkeys or something? ... Islanders and stuff like that.

A: That sort of thing is how it got started, but work recently has been on people closer to home—I mean, people these days study their neighbors.

G: That cuts down on the cost of travel, doesn't it? You don't have to go to an island? [We're laughing, I think a little nervously, at least I am.]

A: Yeah ... Um ... So is it OK for me to hang out with you? I mean, are you comfortable with it?

G: Yeah, sure [looking sort of unsure but just as friendly as ever]. Just stop by ... And I'll study you too, ask you what it's like to be a student [jokingly but not facetious].

A: Great! That sounds good [kind of flustered by the idea, not expecting it. My role as the researcher, with its inherent power that caused such an embarrassing mess, was pulled out from under me unexpectedly at this moment. I wasn't conscious of the sort of symbolic "upper hand" I had until he introduced the idea of reversing our roles.] ... It's not so much a scientific study as journalism. [He was moving to the other side of the room to put some bags outside the door, and I followed him. I was disconcerted and felt I had to convince him this was more story than study]

G: From now on I'll think of you as a reporter—I'll say, "There she is." [He mimes scribbling on a reporter's pad of paper. I laugh and am happy with his revelation, and more relaxed. I like this. I should present myself that way ... as doing a story, real-life vignettes that illustrate life. That's a much better way of explaining it. But it's too late—boy, have I screwed up ... We are laughing as he goes out the door ... But he said No!]

My first attempt to interview a custodian, transcribed above, confirmed all my worst fears. Before going into the field (a space which, of course, I could not escape in the first place since custodians clean every campus building), I spent a lot of time thinking about the issues that arose,

Hope Hoffman
Honors Research
such as my role, purpose, and status as a student and how it seemed to conflict with and contradict a custodian’s situation. It took me almost a month just to get up the courage to approach any custodian about this project. I had carefully rehearsed speeches explaining what it was about, which never came out quite right when speaking to a prospective informant. Most of all, I worried about what they would think of me when I approached them. Would they think I was a snob? Would they think I was using them to further my own agenda as a student? Would they think I was studying them because they were “lower” than I? My conversation with George exposed issues which I had been hoping to gloss over. Since George and I both have concerns about our education level and class, I feel that my proposition probably boiled down to: “Hi, I’m a student and you’re not, so I’m going to study you.” As a researcher with the power to represent the informant, I felt as if I were part of an uncomfortable power relationship. This is largely because in the classic or stereotypical case, anthropologists or ethnographers do fieldwork in worlds which are different from their own, usually in a non-industrialized society, implying that the subjects of study are both “Other” and inferior to the researcher (see Clifford 1990). Also, the most closely and commonly associated field, sociology, often reproduces the paradigm of the educated, “professional”-class researcher studying less educated, “disadvantaged” social groups such as the urban poor.

Though I didn’t feel like a professional at the time I did this research, I did feel that my life goals and outlook would be significantly different from custodians’. I worried that I wouldn’t be able to connect with them or have enough in common to carry on conversations, but this proved not to be a problem (custodians would ask me about my schoolwork and boyfriends, and I would ask them about their families, Halloween costumes, and other topics unrelated to occupation). I also expected them to be disappointed with their occupation, as I would probably be disappointed if I were a custodian. And, I admit to sometimes trying to avoid custodians in residence halls because the work they were doing seemed so foreign and undesirable to me. Watching someone clean the floors does make me uncomfortable; it feels like a threat to my motivations for attending VU. My motivations include learning skills which will enable me to work in intellectually oriented
occupations, and this end goal and the process I am going through to reach it seem completely incongruent with custodial work. Overall, my biases cause me to privilege the perspective of the academically oriented, if not especially upwardly mobile, VU student.

After speaking to George, I asked custodians Kate, Ted and Harold to participate in my study (but didn't dare use the term "study" after the incident with George). While I was uncomfortable talking to them, all the custodians were very friendly and personable towards me. Their ease in conversation contrasted with their discomfort as objects of study; all but Harold said that their supervisor might disapprove, and I felt this might have been merely an explanation for a very personal ambivalence towards the project. I also felt that they felt obligated to participate because their reluctance might have caused me to get a bad grade on the project.

Kate and George let me assist them with their tasks, such as mopping and sweeping, and I spent many hours basically listening to them talk without interruption. I conducted formal interviews with Ted, Kate, three students who work part time as custodial assistants, and two other students about their education, occupational goals, and student/custodian relationships. I also interviewed the custodians' supervisor about training, hiring, and upward mobility. More students' informal, impromptu remarks about custodians and custodial work are also included in my fieldnotes. This ethnographic analysis offers a unique perspective on a common but often unrecognized situation: the complicated intersection of the distinct yet overlapping fields of a university's custodians and students. The situation I am studying is an unusual relationship between people in contrasting, yet intimate, social spaces: custodians, whose occupation is assumed to result from a lack of higher education, working at a prestigious university in the same institutional space as students whose assumed occupation is to prepare themselves to avoid doing blue-collar, low-status labor such as custodial work. The implications of each occupation for members of the other are problematic; if the custodial workers had gone to college, and the students had not, the students might end up serving the people who are now custodians. Since level of education is perceived as the main factor determining which people do which kind of labor—"illegitimate" manual labor or legitimate, "professional" college-graduate work (the
"legitimacy" of which will be explained shortly)—the very fact that the custodians I studied work at a establishment for higher education puts them in a more awkward and provoking cultural space than if, for instance, they cleaned a factory after-hours (where the people for whom they provided this service were also blue-collar workers, and there was no personal interaction, and therefore no "occupational confrontation" or tension).

Silence about alumnus' lower-status occupations, along with the omission of lectures and courses about certain jobs such as manual labor, is key to the university's reproduction of a particular kind of cultural capital and to the symbolic violence it exercises against holders of those "invisible" occupations—specifically, its custodians. Overall, the university system is an acting out of Bourdieu's theory of symbolic violence, in which systems of symbolism and meaning (i.e. culture) is imposed upon groups or classes in such a way that they are experienced as legitimate (Jenkins 1992 : 104, emphasis added). From this, it follows that if a group or class lacks the "legitimate" cultural capital, it experiences its own capital as illegitimate. Institutionalized education is one way in which symbolic violence is exercised (Jenkins 1992: 105), and this is inseparable from Bourdieu's' observation that "One of the most important characteristics of institutionalized educational systems is their role in reproducing the conditions of their own existence. They have to reproduce themselves ads distinct fields, differentiated form other fields" (Jenkins 1992: 109).

Bourdieu notes that "since what is being inculcated is the dominant cultural arbitrary, excellence and scholastic achievement will naturally be defined in terms of that arbitrary cultural paradigm." (Jenkins 1992: 112). Since academically based exercises, not physical labor, have been determined by the educational system to be the "right" kind of cultural capital, and manual labor as not, a person who does manual labor, no matter how excellently he does it, will lack this "right" kind of capital.

Class and education are consistent themes in student and custodial narratives. More specifically, these narratives deal with the occupational status of custodial work, their niche in the university, and the purpose of education. The theories of Pierre Bourdieu (1990), Magali Sarfatti Larson (1977) and Max Weber (1994 [1947]) are useful in framing these themes. Larson

Hope Hoffman Honors Research
discusses how an occupation's prestige increases with the amount certification and skill required (a doctor's job requires more training and schooling than that of a dishwasher). A college degree is a form of certification, and the more prestigious one's alma mater, the more culturally and economically valuable the degree. "Cultural capital" is Bourdieu's term for an asset which is valuable in a particular cultural "field" (Macdonald 1995: 49). For example, knowledge of gang signs would be valuable capital on the streets of Los Angles, but not at Oxford University; upper-class mannerisms and clothing would be valuable cultural capital at a queen's charity ball, but not at a Chicago Cubs baseball game; an VU degree would be beneficial in obtaining a managerial position with State Farm and possibly as a credential at the charity ball, but would not be useful at stock car race.

Attending a prestigious university is a different cultural investment than attending a community college, or even no college. A degree from VU is an investment in both human capital, which increases one's value as a worker, and in cultural capital. Its graduates are expected to gain jobs which require a college degree, utilize high levels of skill, and carry a high degree of prestige; they are likewise expected to maintain a middle-or upper-class social status. In contrast, as this paper will demonstrate, it is often assumed that custodians lack the certification of higher education, that this prevents them from getting a more "professional" occupation, and that they are therefore relegated to a job which presumably requires little skill and has little prestige.

The "habitus" — where cultural assets, or cultural capital, is stored— is Bourdieu's term for "the set of internalized dispositions that govern people's behavior" (Macdonald 1995: 49). Each habitus is a set of habits, ideas and values which comprises a culture/class, and works as a dialectic between individual members and the society which is comprised of habituses. Collectively, informants' narratives show that contrasting educations and occupations situates students and custodians in different habituses or social spaces.

**Thematic intertextuality and authorial power**

I situate custodial and, to some extent, student narratives at the center of this analysis.

Hope Hoffman                      Honors Research
Issues which naturally arose are reinforced and elaborated on by supplementary discussion and theory. I have purposely compromised some of my power as an author to dissect informants' accounts, choosing to take the space and time to present the issues in their original context—one in which key narratives have a strong tendency to intertwine, weave in and out of one another, and become entangled in conversation. My intent is to discuss the issues which informants have presented to me without getting in the way of the voices themselves; I retain and reveal the polyphony (multiple voices) and thematic intertextuality (interweaving of narratives from different sources with common themes) of my subjects' voices. I allow the varied content of these conversations to determine the paper's movement from topic to topic, with the aim of illustrating, in the most real sense, relationships between them.

Themes common to the narratives are as follows: Custodians and their work being unnoticed and unappreciated, custodians' struggle for (or dismissal of) a "professional" or legitimate image, their marginalized role in the university, their impersonally intimate and sometimes companionable relationship to students, students' negative attitude towards custodial work, the importance and meaning of higher education for both groups, and how the lack of it is often perceived as the reason one becomes a custodian. These discourses are couched in informants' consciousness of contrasting class identities as they interact in a single cultural space. They color abstract relations between students and custodians but do not seem to get in the way of inter-group friendships.

The following passage from my fieldnotes exemplifies the degree to which informants' narrative threads are naturally and often inextricably interwoven. It reveals George's views of students in their actual context—a collage of themes in a flow of commentary:

"Oh, hi, you can help me clean bathrooms," said George as soon as he saw me. He rolled out his large caddie of brushes and bottles, and we began his daily bathroom-cleaning routine. Opening the door to the women's bathroom a few inches, he called out, "Anybody in there? Janitor!"

"You call yourself 'janitor'?" I asked. "Or, 'member of the custodial crew'?"

"It's all the same. Janitor, custodian—cleaning lady," he laughed. "I don't sit with them at breaks anymore ... 'cause I'd have to tell them they're dumb ... they
talk about the same thing week after week, and it just gets old. Like, "It's so cold out today," he mocked their whining tone of voice. "Well, when it was winter, it was cold out every day—I'd hear that over and over all the time. And then in the summer, they'll say, 'It's so hot out.' So I don't go [sit with them] anymore ..."

"What do they usually talk about, in that group?" I asked. (I could see how he would be frustrated with such conversations, since most of the interactions with students he had mentioned focused on "deeper" topics, such as their class projects, philosophy, and other involved discussions.)

"Oh, the usual," he replied. "What their kids are up to, if they're having trouble with the wife or husband, the weather of course, what sports teams are doing, news, it's your whole potpourri of things."

As he showed me how to clean the toilets, I asked, "Are we really that messy?"

"Some are," he said. "Not most kids, but it only takes a few to make them all seem bad, you know. Like taking shit out of the toilet and flinging it on the walls, you know, that's pretty bad, they should know better."

While I awkwardly scrubbed the sinks under his direction, he told me in a confidential tone, "They don't need so many custodians here. If all the students took responsibility, and cleaned up after themselves, and maybe on each floor of a dorm someone would be in charge of cleaning the toilets for one week, then they'd get a sense of taking care of their own, they'd say, 'Hey, this is my bathroom, don't mess it up.' They would get a better education if they learned to be sensitive and responsible, and wouldn't need to hire nearly so many custodians. But then, I might be out of a job."

Heading towards the men's bathroom, he continued, "There are so many service jobs, people nowadays pay people to do things they just don't want to do, like what I do. That's why you see so many restaurants these days, people don't really cook anymore, there are so many jobs in the service industry now ... I've seen it in my own life! I mean, look what I do, and I've flipped burgers for a while."

Deftly swishing cleaning fluid around inside a urinal, he remarked, "Now those deodorizer things over the drain ... I don't touch them ... sometimes they get hair in them, and ugh—I" he shudders.

While joking about how the men's bathrooms had the extra accessory of urinals, while the women's bathroom featured only little feminine product boxes, I exclaimed, "Gender inequality!"

"Do you know anyone involved with the feminist groups?" George replied,
"cause there was this girl reading a book about it, and I came up and started asking her about it ... I told her, it's not a feminist issue or a gay issue or a race issue—it's a people issue ... and if you just worry about one, you lose focus of everyone else's issues." He presented me with a very long, involved treatise on this subject, and concluded with, "This is the kind of stuff you think about when you have all this time on your hands, cleaning toilets ..."

Getting some Sudafed from his closet, he remarked, "Health services, nice people. They got me out of trouble once. They stood up for me. That Lonny, he was a lion, he was framing me and a bunch of other people ... and I said to Dave [his supervisor], 'If you don't want me, or don't like what I'm doing, just fire me. Just fire me!' I told him. 'There's a million ways I can fuck around. And if you're going to get on me for taking break five minutes early, or lunch ten minutes early, what's the difference—if I'm sitting in a room doing nothing some afternoon for the same amount of time?' ... I got in a lot of trouble a long time ago ... for shooting my mouth off, saying things I shouldn't. But they fucked us over on sick leave, and sick pay, and stuff like that. So I just said what I thought ..."

After talking at length about his, he finally went over to the water fountain and took his medicine. "I wouldn't want to be a boss," he said.

I asked, "What would you want to be?"

He looked surprised, and considered this for a moment. "I've got it pretty good here," he answered. "I'd stay here, there's good benefits, and it's not that hard of a job. I'd like to be on the maintenance crew, swing a hammer and fix things; it's really boring here" (fieldnotes 4/14/97).

Custodial and student informants, as well as the custodial supervisor, agreed that maintenance work is more prestigious than custodial work. David Shiers, VU's custodial supervisor, said he had the impression that some custodians "don't aspire to be that the rest of their lives, and are hoping to be promoted up ... [Custodians] will come and talk to me and say they'd like to do maintenance ... There's a stigma attached to [custodial work], no one can deny that" (interview 3/12/98). Maintenance crew members include a painter, an electrician, and others with specific skills recognized by their job title. These specialized skills seem to be key to the maintenance crew's higher status.
II. Education

The prestige of an occupation increases with the amount of expertise, training, and certification required to perform or enter it. Education is often a key form of certification or measurement of skill, and a measurement of social status. Collins observed that

by continually telling the public that its education led to elite positions, and offering the opportunity for social mobility, [the university system] attracted most of the members of the populace who had any chance to reach elite positions ... having attracted most of the upper-middle and upper classes ... it could point out that the elite positions were now increasingly filled by college men ... college education had become the norm for many positions for which no such education had before been required (1971: 102-103).

This trend generally leaves the lower paying, less desirable jobs open to those without a college degree, and, as my research below indicates, student informants perceive custodial work as so undesirable as to only be performed by those who have no other options—whose lack of education makes them ineligible for any more skilled or prestigious work. Lack of education is cited by both students and custodians as a reason for doing custodial work. "People are like, 'Who wants to be a janitor? Do good in school or you're gonna be a janitor,'" a student informant said. "These people [custodians] didn't make it, like, that's why he's pushing that mop" (interview 3/27/97).

One's education doesn't just affect one's eligibility for jobs, but is also part of one's cultural capital, an important cultural distinction which defines classes. The same student remarked, "I don't think people [who do manual labor] are too well received in our society ... they're not pillars of the community the way they've gotten the way they are" (interview 3/27/97).

Collins remarked that "college education, once an incidental accompaniment of high status," has become "the prerequisite of mere respectability" (1971: 102-103). Since custodians' occupation implies a definite lack of higher education, they lack this respectability. The difference between students' and custodians' experience in education puts them in different social positions, one having projected prestige, the other lacking any.

VU students' social space is described and prescribed partially by the university. From its

Hope Hoffman

Honors Research
selection of certain types of student for admission, to its public relations work, the university maintains the discourse that VU graduates will have prestigious jobs and mid- to upper-class lifestyles. A prospective student is "sold" the VU degree partly by the impression she gets visiting the school: upper-class surroundings with fine furniture, well-groomed landscaping, and Yale-echoing brick architecture. When prospective students visit the admissions office, they will find the following publications displayed on elegant coffee tables: *Sports Illustrated*, VU's *Titans* sports magazine, *Velour University Magazine*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *U.S. News and World Report*’s graduate school issue, and the *Wall Street Journal*. Collectively, these features of VU's public face present an image of wealth, worldly knowledge, and middle and upper-class values which is a familiar discourse to its students. The university also maintains a discourse about the value of its degree through printed materials sent to prospective students, and the VU magazine sent to prospectives and alumni. These materials feature business, science and other high-paying occupations, and only occasionally profile alumni in, or mention careers in, less prestigious jobs such as community service (from *Velour University Magazine* and VU's 1998 admissions brochures). This omission of certain occupations, and the lack of programs in certain areas, is a form of symbolic violence against those omitted.

It was George who first led me to think of a degree as a literal "ticket" into a job, a piece of paper one buys and displays in order to be admitted. He called the high school diploma he lacks "that little piece of paper" that "opens doors" of opportunity, and advised me to "go [on to graduate school] and get more little pieces of paper" (fieldnotes 3/12/97 and 3/26/97). Student informants either supported or were familiar with the belief that an VU degree is an investment and a "ticket" into a prestigious or high-paying occupation. Matt, a student custodial assistant, said, "My dad did manual labor most of his life ... he's always said, 'Get a job where you work with your head, not your hands,' always said to get an education." For him, an VU education is a form of insurance against doing manual labor after graduation. Matt also said that "there's more of a potential with a [VU] degree than a custodial position would afford" (interview 3/25/98), implying again that the degree would free him from the constraints of having manual labor as his only option. Toby, a

Hope Hoffman

Honors Research
student custodial assistant, said that after graduation he would "get a better job" than custodial work. When asked why he chose to attend VU, he said, "I know that if you graduate from here it's easy to get a decent job and make some good money ... they [admissions representatives] told us [prospective students] that a lot of heads of corporations have graduated from Velour, so you can contact them and they'll be partial to you because you went to Velour too" (fieldnotes 3/24/98).

**Custodial narrative as a measure of concern with education and occupation**

Custodians' dialogues reflected their degree of concern for their own education, for their children's education, and for VU students' education. Also, their responses to and attitudes towards the study seemed to correlate with both their comfort with their education level *and* their desire for appreciation and recognition. (Recognition of their work relates to its prestige. More prestigious occupations are more visible and are “recognized” with devices such as certificates, titles such as “Dr.” and the deference of less skilled or knowledgeable people.) George, who was highly sensitive to his lack of formal education as the cause of his occupational status, and who did not bring recognition of his work during conversations, was initially opposed to the study and spoke often about education. On the other hand, Harold, who was comfortable with his education (though he wanted "something better" for his children) and was already recognized and appreciated, was agreeable to the idea. In fact, he seemed the most interested in the process of writing up the paper, probably because he is a writer of short stories himself. Ted, another custodian, was not concerned with education levels in an academic but impersonal sense. Though notoriously shy, he spoke at length about his experiences in an interview and expressed pleasure at being given the attention of this project. Kate, who did not include educational issues in her narrative and who most urgently sought recognition of her work, was the most eager, serious, and involved in the study. She gave me a formal tour of "her" building, introduced herself to people as my "understudy," and consistently asked me about the progress of this paper. However, she was not so passionate about my education in general. I baited her numerous times with mentions of quitting school, but all she ever said was, "Well, then you might think you've wasted all these
years." Another custodian, according to her student (work-study) assistant, "asks me about school and all that stuff... [the custodian] said, 'It's a good thing you're in school at least, I didn't want to do this all my life, I wanted to do lots of different things.' And it seems like she's gonna do it, too, I think maybe she's taking classes somewhere" (interview 3/29/97).

Harold believes that education is essential, and cited his lack of education as a reason for doing custodial work. He confirmed these views during the following conversation:

When I first saw Harold today, he said, "So are you going to get the cameras rolling, get out the typewriter?" He led me over towards his closet, which is more like an office, a large room with a desk and chairs. He got a chair for me and took it out into the main room and set it by the window, near the wall where students had painted, "Harold Memorial Rec Room, 1995, It's all right."

The collection of memorial paintings on the wall prompted him to talk of how some students returned to visit this residence hall after graduation. Some came to see him, he said, and ask him how he's doing, "and it's good to see them come back, especially if they do good, you know, because some don't make it—they're—failure, and then they end up with a job like me."

"All my children went to college," he continued. "I put them all through college... 'cause I wanted them to do better than I did... My baby girl, she's graduating as a doctor from ISU, medical school, so I'll have a doctor around if I need one," he chuckled.

"My son, he was going to De Paul, studying law, and he was driving home on the weekend... and a drunk driver killed him... I wrote a song for him, and a man in California is putting it on record... And I put this in the song, how my son played basketball, and my youngest son said, 'It's like he dropped the ball and I'm going to pick it up for him,' and so he got busy and played ball, and was with the Globetrotters for a while... now he's back in college, 'cause you need a college education no matter what, and he has an office at State Farm.

"See, I grew up in Alabama, and I got just a high school education, and no one went to college, high school was all you needed to go out and get a good job. And there was a brickyard there, where all the people worked who didn't have a college education..." (fieldnotes 4/9/97).

Ted, who has cleaned a fraternity house for nearly twenty years, had a broad view of education. For him, its essence involves the opening of the mind more than academic skills and
knowledge. He framed his discussion around his expanded worldly knowledge gained through working at the university, after being brought up in a strictly religious home where he wasn't even allowed to watch television.

"I used to be — what do you call it when you can't read? Illiterate. I mean, I was still on Dick and Jane, at a second or third grade reading level. I'm a high school dropout ... coming here has influenced me a lot ... In one of the books I've read [with a hint of pride in his voice] it said how in the fifteenth century they used to burn people at the stake, as witches, and I think they did this because they were afraid, because those people were different from them. And I think that's how I used to be ..." (interview 4/17/97).

George spoke passionately about the education of his sons, both of whom are high school dropouts, in this field experience:

I found George by poking my head around the corner of a doorway. Just as I crossed the threshold and said, "Hi," he said:

Hi! Here's our little anthropologist! [he was mopping, close to the door]...

When I saw you last, there was something I could have told you ... I hadn't slept the whole night before ... that's why I kind of blew you off ... My 16-year-old dropped out of school, and I was really upset about it, really ... [with steady strokes of the mop, keeping a rhythm to go along with his steady stream of talk] I'd laugh at my friends who were going off to college, and say, 'Look at you with all those books and pages of reading, I could learn all that without books.' And I have learned it ... I'd hang out with them and mooch off them, because I was sort of a loser back then ... but that little piece of paper, it opens doors.

A: [Trying to make a connection with his situation and wondering if he would say more about education] My sister was having troubles like that for a while, and my parents were all worried ...

G: Are things better now?

A: They're OK.

G: Good.

George continued talking about his son, revealing a link between lack of education and responsibility for status, explaining his own history in terms of a struggle to raise his (and his children's) socioeconomic status.

G: My son was staying with this guy in a trailer, and that guy's thirty years old at least, and by then he should have an apartment, you know? ... And now my son goes and drops out, and he wants me to help him ... anyone else, I'd bend over
backwards for them ... but if I help him out, that's like saying that everything I told him and raised him by is a load of crap, and so I can't help him out ... I left home when I was sixteen ... and I never called and said, 'I'm broke, send me some money,' because I made that choice. And I was starving sometimes. I was sleeping in the backs of U-Hauls. And when you're sleeping in the backs of U-Hauls, well, you're sleeping in the backs of U-Hauls and you put yourself there. And when you're hungry, you don't steal, or rob, because that was your choice ...

At first, my wife and I, we were bums almost. I mean, we used to have a really old car. When my son was in grade school, about third grade, when he'd started to notice and figure out what was cool, he said, "You aren't dropping me off at school anymore, I don't want you dropping me off, 'cause we have this really cheesy car." And eventually, you know, a bigger screen TV appeared, and another car, and things like that ...

And now my son says to me, "Well, you're doing all right, and you're scum, so it's OK if I'm scum." But he doesn't get it, they don't get it. They don't get that it's not that we're scum, it's because we worked hard, really hard. It's because we grew up ... We weren't put here to have a good time, you know ... it's overcoming the challenges that makes it worthwhile... It's like that shitty paper you have to write and you stay up all night and it's terrible and you go through all this ...

A: Yeah, that makes it more valuable, 'cause you worked for it.

(adapted from fieldnotes 3/12/97)

George was strikingly concerned with my own education, I think because he wants this sort of education for his children and regrets not having it for himself. He once told me, "Education is like ammo ... and I've shot all mine" (fieldnotes 3/26/97).

Once, to see how he would respond, I told him, "I don't want to go to grad school. And all my friends are complaining and saying how much they hate their lives and just want to leave and go do something else."

"No, you should go. Stick with it," he said immediately. "You go and get more little pieces of paper ... I think a high school diploma means what graduating from eighth grade used to be, and a college degree is what high school used to be, so you need to go on in school to get enough. ... What do you want to be? A writer?" He went on to explain in some detail the process of amassing a portfolio and getting published (fieldnotes 3/26/97). I was surprised that he showed
this degree of interest and nurturing—more than many of my professors. "And don't slip," he
advised me another day. "Once you don't do those few pages of reading, and then a few more, and
end up with whole lot you haven't done, it gets worse and worse, and then you're screwed"
(fieldnotes 3/12/97).
III. Social Spaces at the University

Perceptions and implications of custodial work; contrasting habituses

One's cultural community is what Weber terms a "status group" (Collins 1971: 9-11). These groups feel a common identity and culture, and share a common lifestyle. Examples are ethnic groups, families, friends, neighborhoods, and the category of intellectuals (Collins 1971: 9-11). In the informal social space of cultural communities, the dynamics of interaction are based on a status group's tendency to associate intimately only with its own members. Divisions of personal association are found at parties (who is and isn't invited), exclusive country clubs (who is and isn't admitted), and bars (who hangs out where, and with whom). Collins notes that since status groups are usually based on occupation, occupation can be used as an indicator of class (1971: 12).

Students' disdain for the custodial profession has to do with their habitus, which often focuses on upward mobility, conflicting with the custodians' habitus, tends to be lower-class.

"We [custodians] think of it as a totem pole," said Kate. "And we're on the bottom" (interview 3/12/98). So where do students fit in, status-wise? Because the basic goal of higher education is to raise one's economic status (i.e., get a “better” job), students are easily perceived as social and economic climbers. Custodial informants, as well as several student informants, recognized or confirmed the discourse that VU students are “rich kids” trying to get ahead and climb the corporate ladder using this private, expensive, image-conscious university as the first rung. Though students have varying views of the reality and truth of this situation, they are generally familiar with the discourse and are in some way influenced by it. Many students would agree that the purpose of attending the university is to raise our starting salaries and our status (and, in particular, to avoid ending up with a job that involves manual labor).

For students and some custodians, being a custodian means that one has failed to climb past the bottom of that totem pole—failed to get a sufficient education, to "make it" (i.e., get a job that is perceived as requiring more brain power, training, or wealth)—in short, failed to do precisely what university students are supposedly doing. This causes students to see custodians
particularly as symbols of failure, especially of their own potential for failure. The underlying attitude of students towards custodians as symbols of a profession is to say "I don't want to do that," or "I don't want to be like that." Because the way custodians "ended up" professionally is so irreconcilable with the students' aspirations, students have an especial aversion to custodial work. "I've walked down the hall and seen a student pushing a broom, and think, 'Man, he's just got some bad-ass luck,'" remarked a student informant (interview 3/27/97). Custodial work is cited by students as the least desirable student employment option, along with work on the grounds crew (which transports garbage and keeps up the lawn) and in food services. Within the university, as a reflection of societal norms, custodial or manual labor is viewed as a "last resort." The worst part of students doing custodial work, according to a student informant, is that they "get to be seen cleaning up after your fellow students." This indicates that service-oriented tasks, especially cleaning up contaminated materials, imply not only the embarrassment of an illegitimate profession but the stigma of servitude, being marked as "lower-class."

**Recognition and roles in the campus community**

Kate valued my project as part of my education, but mainly as a gesture of recognition of her profession. When I asked her how she felt about being part of the study, she responded, 'It's neat, because some people say custodians are looked down on here. Some of the office people who are all dressed up, they look down on us and go 'Oh,' 'cause we're in jeans and clean up all the gook. But we dress for our job just like they dress for theirs. We can't have holes in our jeans or anything, and try to keep up to date, but we can't dress up 'cause what if we spill chemicals on ourselves ... but they turn up their noses at us. Someone said that 'custodian' is a bad name, but I'm proud of my job ... some, they think they're more important because they've got the brains and we're cleaning toilets. We make more money than some of the secretaries, so I don't see why they have their noses up in the air. It bothers some of the custodians a lot. They're happy when they get moved to the grounds crew and get a different name. There's an awards dinner that the school pays for ... but besides this dinner, otherwise they stick up their noses at us, they're like, 'One night a year you're appreciated, and otherwise, forget you' (interview 3/12/97).
Hearing her talk about this made me realize that as a student, I have never felt unappreciated. It is impossible to; everything at the university (at least theoretically) is geared towards my benefit, comfort, convenience, entertainment, health, safety, and every other aspect of my life—my existence here is surrounded by a nurturing staff of university employees all being paid to serve me. This service institution even sent me a birthday card from the Dean's office complete with a chocolate candy emblazoned with the VU seal. This went into the scratch paper pile, and ended up covered with fieldnotes. It is strange to look at this card, one side covered with scribbled, marginalized voices, the other with a color-laser-printed token from the administration. It is important to remember that while I am lavishly showered with attention, custodians feel the administration doesn't notice them. This idea leads to a larger schematic conceptualization of custodian's "niche" in the university. Students have described them as "not student-oriented," "outside that whole school thing," and "as a kind of accessory, always there ... and no one really notices them ... Office workers aren't a part of the education part, but you have to actually interact with them" (interview 3/29/97). Custodians are marginalized, put on the periphery of the "school" sphere. Again, students and custodians are perceived as experiencing different habituses.

**Relationship to students: Intimate space and the status gap**

Though students believe custodians play a peripheral role, the student-custodian relationship is strangely intimate; social spaces overlap out of sheer physical proximity and familiarity. In residence halls especially, custodians and students live and/or work in the same space, and are intimately connected. "They're the ones who know how we poo and pee," one student informant noted. Kate knows when certain women menstruate, and which shower stalls are favored by which residents. Like some other female custodians who work in residence halls, she calls residents "my girls," and feels in tune with the rhythms of their lives—when they acquire or break up with a boyfriend, and when they have to study a lot. She says she feels like a mother to the women who live in the areas she cleans.

Proxemics play a major role in custodians' relationship with students. Their occupation
circumscribes a space which students are ambivalent about entering and sharing. This space is not only physical, but psychological (as implied in previous discussion of status, education levels, and students not wanting to be, like custodians, a "failure"). Cleaning up the students' bodily fluids and personal messes, and meeting them in the early morning (when not many people like to be seen by anyone) puts custodians very close to the students—and also at a severe distance. A student informant said that because of the "contamination factor," students might not be comfortable being near them. Another noticed that students "sometimes go overboard trying to stay out of the janitors' way, making bi-i-ig circles around them as they're mopping." Custodians also must avoid students; it is unacceptable to clean a space if a student is occupying it, or to do work which would disturb a student nearby. They must sometimes go to special lengths to avoid interfering with students; when Kate showed me a carpet sweeper, she explained that she uses it in the morning instead of a vacuum cleaner so as to not wake up residents. She even acted out a scene in which a student came out of her room rubbing her eyes and whining, "Could you be a little quieter?" and Kate apologizing sincerely.

Custodians don't have a high-visibility job; because they try to complete most of their work, especially in more public spaces, before students get up in the morning, students don't see them very often considering the fact that they are in the same space as students all day. A custodian, according to one student informant, is "like a fairy that comes and you don't really think about it." Another student described the custodial worker as a "secret helper," which implies both a personal, devoted servant and an invisible entity whose identity is never recognized. Even the act of greeting them can be problematic. Matt said that unlike himself, other students are "apathetic about [student-custodian relationships] ... My roommates say, 'Yeah, we should say hi to the janitors' ... as long as the bathroom's clean they don't care ... walking down the hall with my buddies, it's me who says, 'Hey, Gary, how's it going.' Then, everyone behind me will say, 'Oh, hey Gary.'" (interview 3/25/98).

Sometimes, though, students and custodians develop close personal relationships. Harold, who is recognized by many students as a minister, counsels some students and has them over for...
dinner. Ted said of the students he cleans for in a fraternity house, "I like to hang out with these guys ... I want to be a part of them ... They're so good to me, for Christmas they gave me one of those extra-extra thick VU sweatshirts, and a $70 gift certificate .... and last year they gave me the transistor radio I use." This gift-giving is a form of symbolic violence because the act of giving the gift marks the students as higher in status, and puts Ted in a position where he owes the students something. Student custodial assistant Matt told of his classmates giving a custodian Christmas presents, qualifying his anecdote with, "If you do them a favor ... they so me favors ... maybe they'll clean the bathroom a little better instead of saying, 'Oh, those stupid kids'" (interview 3/25/98).

Along with a sense of fellowship and intimacy, Ted also expressed an uncomfortable status consciousness. "I feel strange sitting up here [in the lounge area, which fraternity house members usually occupy]; it's a privileged place, like it's an honor, and that I'm not privileged enough. I don't see myself as as privileged as the guys here, I don't feel like an equal, I feel sort of like their servant" (interview 4/17/97). George's status in relation to the students in his building is raised to a near-equal level in two ways — first, he takes the initiative to ask them about their studies, interests, and projects, which builds a mutual bond of intellectual and personal respect; and secondly, the faculty encourages and teaches him to use some of the same equipment the students use for his own projects. Matt described his supervisor as a "good friend" (interview 3/25/98). The custodial supervisor remarked that a residence hall custodian was regularly invited to play football on weekends with the residents, and that it was not uncommon for custodians to attend the graduation ceremonies of students they knew (interview 3/12/98).
IV. Professionalism and student views

Professionalism and custodial work

"Professionals"—such as lawyers, accountants, and doctors—have completed a long period of schooling and have been certified by the state. They are defined by E.C. Hughes (Men and their Work, 1958) as "those with special expertise, based on broad theoretical knowledge and an extended training" (Derber 1982: 13).

"By gaining control over the production and dissemination of knowledge underlying the profession and over the 'production' of the professional himself through specialized education and certification, different professions have ... asserted exclusive authority over their own members. The professionals have claimed autonomy as the key to the integrity of professional practice and work. Implicit in this claim is the argument that professionals must be granted special rights and working conditions not accorded to other workers, namely, the relative or absolute freedom from external authority and the privilege of peer or self-supervision." (Derber 1982: 13)

Professionals' knowledge and authority them power over their clients (Derber 1982: 3), and also more abstract kinds of power. Larson extends professionalization into the economic sphere, noting that "Professionalization is ... an attempt to translate one order of scarce resources -- special knowledge an skills — into another — social and economic rewards ... The focus on collective social mobility accentuates the relations that professions form with different systems of social stratification; in particular, it accentuates the role that educational systems play in different structures of social mobility .... (Larson 1977: xvii)

Because custodial workers are so stigmatized as unskilled and under-educated, their occupation is the antithesis of a "professional" occupation. Therefore, it is difficult to create and maintain custodians' "professional" (in this case, meaning "worker with high standards") image. "There's a policy to counteract the perception of us as lazy," Kate said. "They don't want us standing or sitting around during breaks because then it looks bad, it appears that we're not doing anything ... it's not as professional." Although custodial supervisor David Shiers said there was no such policy, and the workers could go wherever they liked on their break time (interview

Hope Hoffman

Honors Research
many custodial workers stay in their closets when not working, and eat lunch there. George sometimes sits in deserted classrooms during his work hours; he jokingly calls this "hiding." However, Kate made it clear that to her, her work is legitimate and professional. She revealed this through her rigorous work ethic, her great personal pride in her work, and her account of how she arrived at her present position:

This is what I've been doing all my life. Sometimes I think I came out of the womb with a broom in one hand and a johnny mop in the other. My mom was real big on cleaning and I guess I picked it up from her. I loved to clean around the house. I'd tell my brothers, move your feet offa there, I've got to clean, and they'd say, 'What, is President Nixon coming over?' ... So when I got a job in the cleaning field [emphasis added], that experience helped a lot ... I was on a program in high school where you went to school half the day and worked the other half, and I didn't want to work in a grocery store or anything, I thought the only one I'd be good at was cleaning (fieldnotes 3/17/97).

By designating her work as part of "the cleaning field," Kate brings her work to a "professional" level by putting it in the same terms as jobs which are conventionally perceived and labeled as "professional"—i.e., "the public relations field," or "the biochemistry field." Kate's present position seems to satisfy her career goals just as a management position might satisfy a stereotypical VU graduate's career goal. Her stories about her passion for cleaning sanction her work as a personal interest, leisure activity, or hobby. This legitimizes her work by raising its status to that of a career interest that is strong enough to be worth following, far from the "last resort" mentality of other custodial workers:

I go to my mom's house, and you know how the toilet paper holders are set into the wall, and there's that sort of ledge, and it catches stuff off the toilet paper, and makes a kind of lint, and I'd see that and say, "God, Mom, when's the last time you dusted?" ... When we first moved to Bloomington, we went to a restaurant and sat in a booth, and I felt the divider and there was dust on it, and I said, "I don't want to eat here, these people are dirty!" ... And once I went to a bowling alley, and ran my hand along the top of a ledge, and said, "What IS THIS?" Now, I don't get so irate ... I go into a bathroom and think "I'm here to use the toilet, not to— inspect (fieldnotes 3/18/97).

When asked how most students would estimate custodial workers' work ethic, student

Hope Hoffman

Honors Research
custodial assistant Alexis replied that students are "coming to school to get a job in a field that's so different from that, I don't know if they'd consider it work ... It's manual labor" (interview 3/29/97). Students especially measure the status of work by the amount of mental exertion it apparently takes to do the required tasks. Alexis cited other manual labor jobs, such as maintenance engineers and chimney sweeps, as requiring more "brain power" than cleaning work (interview 3/29/97). This view is confirmed by custodians themselves; work on VU's maintenance crew is perceived as one status level up from custodial work, because of the more specific, specialized skills required. The more "brain power" used, they seem to imply, the higher the status of the job. Therefore, students' almost exclusively academic tasks and activities raise their occupational status to one of the highest at the university. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, their projected or potential status after graduation is assumed to be high due to their use of this "brain power."

So, how does one become a custodian? Default vs. vocation

The Bureau of Labor Statistics lists "janitors and cleaners, except maids and housekeeping cleaners" under the category "service occupations" (as opposed to "professional, paraprofessional, and technical occupations") (Bureau of Labor Statistics, March 12 1998). Their average salary is $7.90 an hour, which is more than I will be making as a VU graduate next year. According to Bose (327-328), custodians' occupational status is higher than that of a rag picker (4.6), a person living on welfare (8.2) and a yarn washer (11.8) but lower than a laundry worker (14.7), a box packer (15.1) and a house painter (39.7). Physicians had a prestige rating of 95.8, a stock broker of 81.7, and an administrative assistant 67.8. Student informants consistently expressed the concept that custodians "fell into" the job because they weren't successful at or qualified to do anything else.

When students do perform manual labor side by side with custodians, they are put into an uncomfortable cultural space. Not only are they entering the blue-collar sphere which they supposedly came to the university in order to avoid, but their identities as students and their
supposed higher level of skill and knowledge are challenged. The following scene describes how I felt doing custodial work for the first time.

Author: [to George] Is there anything I can help with? I want to get a feel for what this work is like ...

George: Is it like a Zen thing? Become one with the work? ... Do you want to come in early and do the bathrooms, do you want to clean up after girls? You could mop the next room. [I follow him out the room down the hall a couple of feet and into the adjacent room, he bringing the mop and bucket. When we get to the middle of the room, he sees a student working at the far end of a table at the other side of the room] ... Let's let her work.[we exit the room and go down the hallway to look into the next room down. There are a lot of people in there. He looks in the doorway and tells me to mop the hallway outside this room] ... You go in figure-eight patterns, so you don't miss any, and kind of block out the space [he shows me how to do this, running the mop along the wall] ... and [showing me how to squeeze out the excess mop water] you bend from the knees.

A: So you don't hurt your back?
G: Yes [moving out of the way of the mop].
A: It's heavier than I thought.
G: That's right, you should put that in your notes, that the mop was heavier than you'd thought it would be [he stands a few feet away and watches, kind of smiling and not giving advice].
A: Do I need to wet it again?
G: I would've dunked it in there three or four times by now, but that's OK. You're just moving mud there now. [At this point I feel really inept and unskilled, and have gained a definite appreciation for cleaning labor, because I'm not sure I could do it—at least, not very well at all.] (fieldnotes 3/12/97)

Narratives about student workers offer a revealing twist to the paradigm of custodians as academically inept—it turns out that students are viewed as inept at cleaning. Relating her experience as a student custodial worker, Alexis said, "when my supervisor took me there the first day, he told the lady I was working under that I couldn't do hard stuff like cleaning the bathroom ... so all I do is sweep and dust and help her carry the trash downstairs ..." (interview 3/29/97). Kate confirmed that students tend to be inept at cleaning, saying of student custodial workers, "Sometimes I'm like, 'Get 'em outta here before I strangle them ... They just don't know anything. I mean, I don't mean you guys are dummies or anything, but it's
like if you sat me down and I tried to do your schoolwork, I would be sort of dumb at it. I mean, I wouldn’t know what to do with a computer, or something like that. And when you guys work for us and try to learn something, it’s hard to do. We keep thinking, did I forget to tell them this, or did I not explain clearly enough, or did I talk too fast ... it’s so hard to explain my job to someone ‘cause its’ all up here [she taps her head] and I've been doing it all my life” (fieldnotes 3/18/97).

Kate explored the notion of students doing custodial work while she did academic work, but ended up most comfortable when these boundaries are not crossed, and the work is performed by the conventionally appropriate party.

Sometimes a student will come into the bathroom and say, 'I have this big test to take,' and I'll say, 'Do you want my job?' [The threat, "Do good in school or you're gonna be a janitor" resurfaces here.] Or they'll say, 'Oh, finals are coming up,' and I'll say, 'I'll take your final, but I may not do well on it and you might not get to come back next year.' And I'll ask them, 'Do you know how to clean?' and they'll say [in a tentative tone of voice], 'Well, I clean the house for my mom sometimes,' and I'll say, 'You stick to your job and I'll stick to mine.'

**Student attitudes towards custodial work**

Because VU students are products and reproducers of a dominant ideology in which custodial labor is made illegitimate, their performing custodial work can seem like a betrayal of the university system and an inappropriate cultural practice. Student workers claimed that cleaning work is "not something that needs to be taught" (interview 3/25/98) and noted that "it's not something you go to college to learn how to do" (interview 3/24/98). The lack of academic elements in custodial work, and the perception that custodial workers are under-educated, prompts students to renounce it. Student custodial assistant Alexis said, "If [custodial work] was all I was doing, not taking any classes, I'd just feel stuck. ...and I'd probably have to do more yucky stuff, like clean the bathroom and touch the trash" (interview 3/29/97). Her response reveals her rejection of the occupation as a class issue, and also crystallizes the idea that the work is stigmatized as lower class partially by the contamination factor (in a loose sense, custodians are the American version of India's untouchables, the lowest in the caste system). This ties directly into economic
status—upper class people tend to hire maids or "cleaning ladies" to "touch the trash," paying often lower-class people to do work they wish to avoid.

Custodians have noticed this class tension; the first day I offered to help Kate clean, her initial response was, "What you're wearing is fine." She said she talked to her supervisor about my working along with her, and that the primary concern they discussed was whether I would sue them if chemicals spilled on my clothes. I was offended that they expected me to make such a petty complaint. However, after hearing more of her views I realized that this perception of students as uncooperative and negative about doing custodial work was grounded in her experiences, as well as in the discourse that VU students are upper-class and elitist. Kate later expressed both factors. "We had one girl work for us who dressed up to go to class and then would complain 'cause when she swept the stairs she got dust on her clothes and in her hair," she said. "But if she's going to do this kind of work she needs to dress for it" (fieldnotes 4/17/97). Later, when I asked her why students were at this university, she replied, "To get a, quote, 'better' job than, say, one like mine ... They want to go straight to the top, go up to State Farm or somewhere and be an executive there, and make the big money right away ... They don't want start at the bottom like where I am. This is something they wouldn't stoop to doing" (fieldnotes 4/17/97). Students' often negative attitude towards custodial work is evident in their frequent absences from that job. Matt, a student who assists custodians as his work-study job, said the custodian he works with once said he never wanted to see another student worker again, that they seldom stayed on the job more then three weeks, and that though he didn't report these absences to the custodial supervisor, he asked not to be sent any more student help. Toby, another student custodial worker, said that he sometimes didn't show up for work and implied that his supervisor felt this was normal. When I asked Matt why he thought students didn't keep their jobs with custodians, he replied that students "wouldn't get up [to go to work that early in the morning] ... I don't know if it's justifiable to say they feel too good to do that work, but ..." (interview 3/25/98).
V. Conclusion

At VU, people holding lower-class and potentially high-class occupations meet in the same buildings day after day. While custodians and students occupy the same institutional space, they experience a wide gap in status—while students are highly visible products of the university system and the dominant ideology, custodians are intimately and invisibly situated in an institution whose mission fails to provide for a way to affirm their occupation.

Because custodians and students automatically have an intimate relationship based on the knowledge custodians have of student's personal habits, custodians are closer to students and more fully positioned in their space than most VU staff. Custodians and students project class issues onto one another; custodians are concerned with my education inasmuch as it reflects their wish that I don't "end up like them." Likewise, I project my fear of not obtaining the prestigious or intellectually challenging occupation VU's discourse promises, and of ending up "like them." Discourses such as "VU students will succeed in obtaining upper-class occupations and lifestyles" and "Custodians obtained their occupation by default, because their lack of education prevents them from finding a higher-class job" do not hold true in reality—and the way they play themselves out in everyday interactions is not simple. It is complicated not only by deviations from the discourse, but by the appreciation and antagonism students and custodians feel when viewing one another. The intersection of their class consciousness, in many ways the meeting of "opposite ends of the spectrum," produces an awkward swirl of relationships rich in social issues.

Though student-custodian relationships entail relatively subtle interactions, they embody an extreme model of symbolic violence and cultural reproduction. Because the university is a reproducer of a cultural capital which custodians are often viewed as lacking, and even as betraying, its mission includes acts of symbolic violence against manual laborers. Embodiments of manual labor are made invisible; through a discourse (manifested in administrator's speeches, publicity material, and its programs) which ignores and so denies manual labor occupations,
Velour relays a strong, though seldom recognized, message that these topics and occupations are illegitimate.

Working alongside George, I received some truly disdainful glances from passing students. These made me feel freakish, defensive, and, at the very least, out of place. I imagine that custodians experience this feeling to some degree every day, and that they must somehow negotiate their identities to deal with being victims of these seemingly minor but deeply hurtful symptoms of symbolic violence. Kate seems to gain respect by doing her job as well as it can possibly be done; Ted and George by building a positive peer relationship with students; and Harold through his ministry both in and outside the university’s social sphere. However, both student and custodial views of custodians’ work are greatly affected by the ideology of the university system, and their personal relationships are colored obliquely yet powerfully by the institution in which they both work.

Fieldnotes March 4, 1998

George

I was asking Vince if he’d seen George, and was just explaining to Vince that the project was "about social stratification and class and education," and Vince said "stratification" and nodded and then said, "There he is," and George was behind me. I said "Oh, hi, I was just talking about you and stratification," very jovially, and he was also jovial and very happy to see me.

"I thought you were gone," he said. "I hadn’t seen you ... so what are you going to do, out there in the world?"

"I'm looking at being a Montessori teacher's assistant."

"What's the first part?"

"It's a whole different theory of education where instead of the teacher going blah blah and the students writing it down, it's all hands-on, a big room full of materials ... I went to a preschool like that."

"Well, it must have worked, I mean, they don't let dumb people into this school." He laughed and backed away nervously. "—I don't know if that's the right way to put that, but ...

"This job, it pays like crap though," I said. "Like, ten thousand."

George tilted head and said, "Ten thousand, well ... I remember when I was living on that"
... I remember working two jobs, as a cook, I'd get breakfast and lunch and then dinner, at least I had food ... I lived in some pretty nasty hotels, but at least it was mine ... so are you thinking of maybe after next year, going on in school, not living on ten thousand the rest of your life?"

"Yeah, I might want to go to grad school in this ethnography stuff."

"This project, what do you learn in it?"

I was flustered. "Umm—how to do this kind of research, I guess."

He smirked in a good-humored way. "Well, can you go on and be a professor and teach that stuff, sort of pass it on down the food chain and say, 'Here you go, suckers!'"

"Yeah, I could."

"—Get a nice cushy job. The professors here get paid pretty well."

"Really? I've heard them say it isn't that much."

"Yeah, well, I've seen a [pay] stub where it shouldn't be, and they grumble ... but I couldn't think of what to do with all that money ... I'd find something, I guess ... I've been asking a bunch of seniors how they feel about graduating, whether it's scary, or sad, or exciting, and they say it's a little of each."

"Yeah, it is ... Well, is it OK to have the committee read the paper?"

He shook his while saying, "Yeah, that's fine."

I asked, "Do you want to read it?"

"Will it make me cry?" he replied, chuckling.

"Well, you said some pretty deep stuff in it—" I put my fist to my heart. "But, no, I don't think you'll cry."

"I was just joking ..." He shifted his weight and sent me on my way with, "Well, it's good seeing you again. If you need to ask anything else, just stop by—if you ever want to do some mopping, you know where to find me."
Endnotes

1. The names of all informants, and the name of the university, have been changed to protect their anonymity.

2. I asked Peter what kind of class project he had approached George about that made him so unwilling to participate in mine. Peter said that his research was in occupational sociological theory, or "how people get into different occupations." He never asked George directly about his occupation, but used what he'd heard George say over the years as data. George "didn't really do anything after high school," Peter said, "and he's very content at his job. Also his mannerisms, how he's got his ... Led Zeppelin tee-shirt and flannel and ripped jeans and rides a motorcycle."

   Peter cited George's dressed-down appearance and elements of a lower-class lifestyle, in contrast to the president's three-piece suit and upper-class dinner parties, as a factor in his becoming a custodian. Peter seemed to be examining the president's and George's occupations as a function of class.

3. The secretary of the admission office, who assisted in my collection of printed materials, said that the brochures about VU's biology and business programs are the most frequently distributed. This is significant because Out of all VU's programs, these are the fields most easily recognized as associated with high-paying occupations, such as marketing and medicine.


5. Some custodians are more visible in the larger community which contains the university, and maintain a distinct self outside of their custodial occupation. Harold is a minister; he is in the process of setting up his own church, is very active in ministering to the community, has a local television show, and has performed in VU's Martin Luther King festival. Also, the custodian who cleans the athletic center "enjoys camaraderie" talking about VU's basketball team with community members.

6. It is interesting to note that the custodian in Holmes Hall, where the admission office is located,
wears slacks and a button-down shirt of his own accord; his supervisor did not suggest this style of dress (interview 3/12/97). Most custodians wear jeans or slacks, tee-shirts and other less dressy items.

7. It should be noted that Kate considers her work ethic to be atypical. When asked whether other custodians feel the way she does about her work, she replied, "they think I do too much, that I don't take enough time to go "ahh" and blow it off. I'm picky in my work ... some people put things off when they're dirty, [but I don't]" (interview 3/18/97).


9. Ratings listed in this paper are Bose's results for workers of undetermined gender.

10. The custodial supervisor said that training for VU custodians is on-the-job; less experienced workers are paired up with more experienced staff. Custodians are selected for job interviews by temporary agencies, which screen applicants but do not train them.
Works Consulted


Clifford, James. "Notes on (Field)notes. Sanjek 47-70.


Gouldner, Alvin W. "The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class." Grusky 711-


1972.


