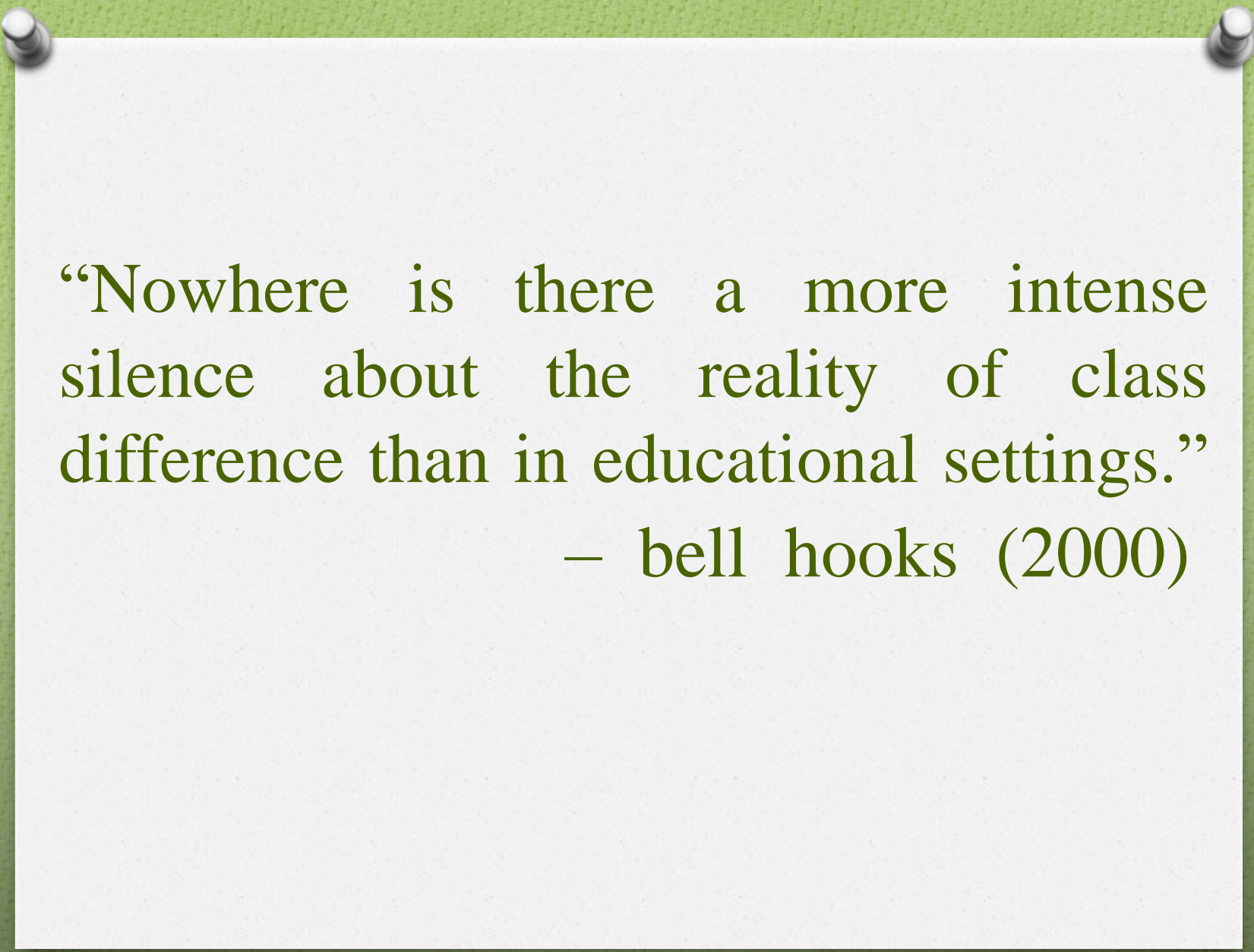





*Skipping Class:  
Systematically Neglecting  
the Working-Class in  
Higher Education*

Jackie Gabriel



“Nowhere is there a more intense silence about the reality of class difference than in educational settings.”

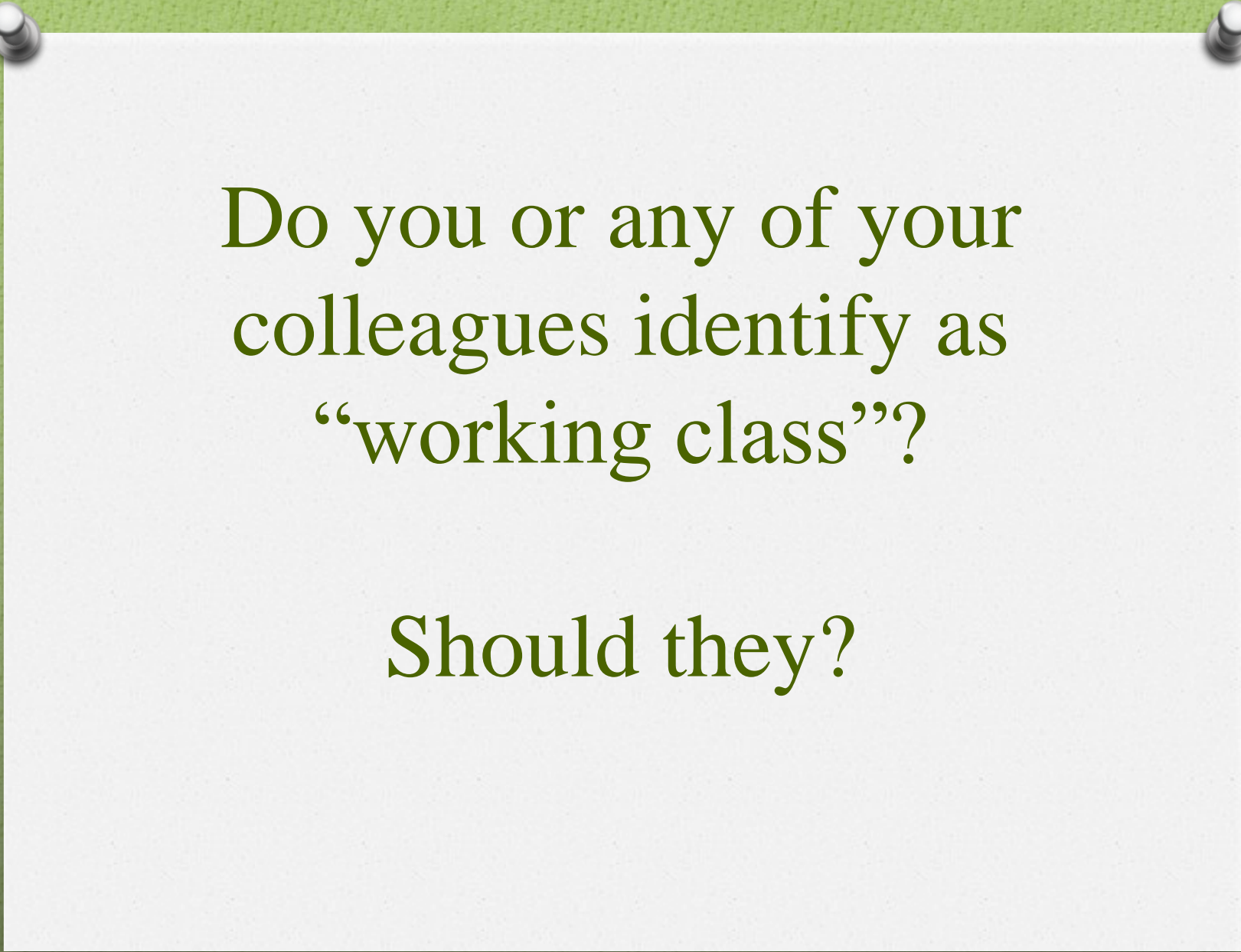
– bell hooks (2000)



What is the *social class*  
composition of your classes?



What about the faculty in  
your department?



Do you or any of your  
colleagues identify as  
“working class”?

Should they?

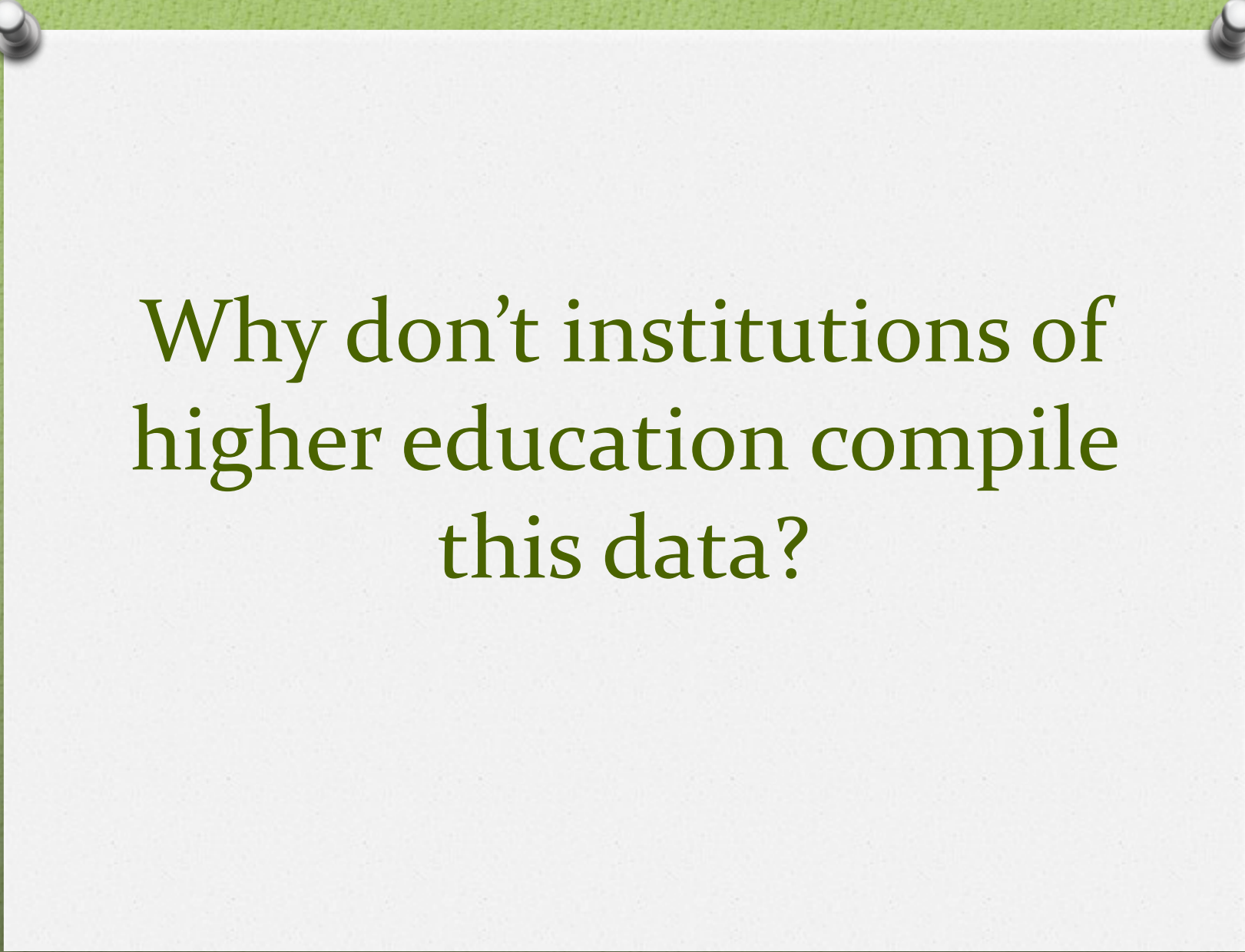
# Do universities track these #s?

- o Campus Profile...

<https://www.western.edu/mission-statement-and-campus-profile>

- o National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES)...

<https://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/?id=128391#enrolmt>



Why don't institutions of  
higher education compile  
this data?

# Several Arguments:

- o Social class is a taboo subject in the U.S.
- o There is a lack of consensus about how social class is defined & thus it is difficult to measure.
- o It is not in the institution's best interest to track social class.

# Ranking System

- For colleges that seek to climb in the rankings, there may be disincentives to acknowledge and/or increase the socioeconomic diversity of their campuses.
- Working-class students' college entrance exam scores tend to be lower on average & they are less likely to graduate within four years than their more privileged peers. These are criteria relevant to the ranking system” (Warnock 2016).

“Working class students may lack institutional recognition & support because their very existence challenges the bottom lines of their schools. They cost more to admit & sustain, and their lower test scores & poorer graduation rates punish schools in the arms race of the hallowed college ranking systems.”

– Robert Francis (2018)

# Why it matters...

- o If we are truly committed to creating more diverse & inclusive institutions we must consider social class.
- o By disregarding social class in conversations regarding diversity & inclusion we are further marginalizing working-class students & faculty.
- o Knowing who is on campus allows us to develop policies & practices that will help our students succeed.

# Diversity Discourse

- o This discourse glosses over certain forms of diversity.
- o Social class is not as prevalent as race, ethnicity, sex, and increasingly gender identity & sexuality, in this discourse.
- o “The diversity education industry has framed diversity in certain ways...race/ethnicity and gender take center stage while class is often neglected” (Will Barratt 2011).

## The literature suggests:

- o The culture of higher education does not cultivate a sense of belonging for most working-class students.
- o These students struggle in areas related to social integration & engagement.
- o They report feeling isolated & marginalized by their fellow students, faculty & staff.
- o They are harder to retain & less likely to succeed.

## Soria & Bultmann (2014)

- Surveyed nearly ¼ million undergraduates across the U.S & found that working-class students reported:
- a lower sense of belonging on campus than did middle- & upper- class students;
- a less welcoming campus climate based on social class; and
- less social involvement on campus than peers that self-identified as middle class.

# Suggestions

- o “Higher education is failing our students by ignoring social class” (Barratt 2011)
- o We need to collect better data (Francis 2018)
- o We need to open up a discussion about class on campus & reconsider our conceptualization and commitment to “diversity”
- o Like we discuss male privilege, white privilege, we should also be discussing class privilege

# We Need to Consider:

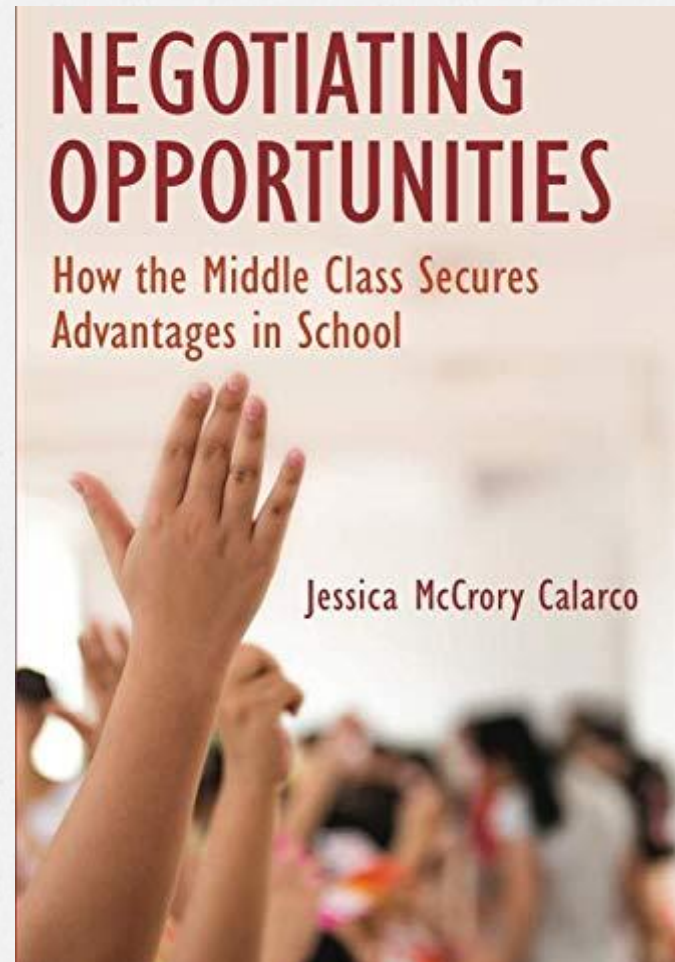
- o Students financial circumstances and how financial aid & holds affect their registration
- o Textbook costs (Course Textbook Adoptions, Open Education Resources, Library Reserves, etc.)
- o Acknowledge & respect students' employment (when offering tutoring, study sessions, extra credit, etc.)
- o Internships & extracurricular opportunities & experiences vary by class

# Student/Teacher Interactions

- Working-Class students experience anxiety about communicating with faculty, staff, and campus peers.
- Also report being intimidated in the classroom and one-on-one with their professors & advisors
- NPR...<https://www.npr.org/2019/10/05/678815966/college-students-how-to-make-office-hours-less-scary>
- Discard the alphabet soup that is higher education acronyms

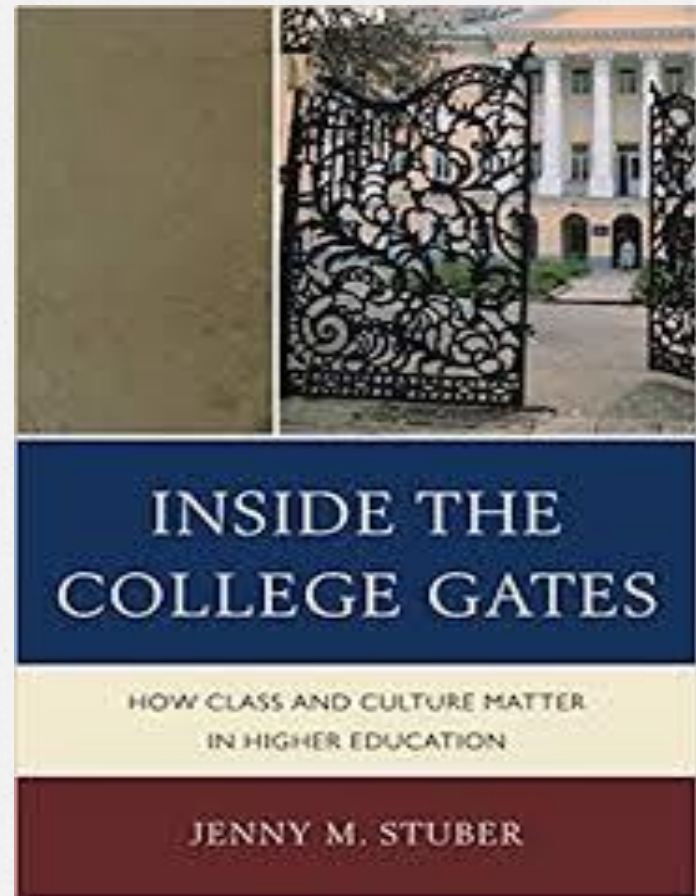
## Jessica Calarco (2018)

- Working-class students are less likely to feel entitled to help & therefore less likely to ask for help
- Middle-class students' assistance-seeking behaviors give them an advantage



# Stuber's Research

- Examines how social class mediates students' social & extracurricular experiences
- Extracurricular activities in higher education reproduce class inequalities



# Working-Class Faculty

- o “The single most likely avenue of support for working-class students is faculty members who come from similar backgrounds” (Casey 2005).
- o Students can’t identify with what is not apparent
- o Closeted faculty need to “come out”
- o Growing literature on working-class faculty experiences (i.e., Border Crossing, Class Straddling, etc.)
- o ASA’s New Task Force on First-Generation & Working-Class People in Sociology

“On college & university campuses, everyday practices & policies are embedded with unexamined class assumptions, and individuals experience classed norms in powerful ways. Yet there is little consciousness about how class affects campus climates and individual lives. In order to improve our educational settings, we must identify the class-based norms embedded in how we conduct business and organize curricula...By recognizing our biases, we will create more inclusive learning environments governed by more complex understandings of diversity.”  
– Susan Borrego (2008)

Author of “Class Matters: Beyond Access to Inclusion” & “Class on Campus: Breaking the Silence Surrounding Socioeconomics”