A Thesis

entitled

A Social Psychological Perspective on Student Consumerism

by

Justin M. Sinicki

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Master of Art Degree in

Sociology

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May 2017
An Abstract of
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With colleges and universities functioning more as businesses, students have been conceptualized as consumers and customers of the “products” and services “sold” by higher education institutions. Anecdotally, a considerable amount of college students have consumer-orientations. This rise in student consumerism has not only transformed student ideologies regarding the purpose of higher education, but its negatively impacting student behavior and learning processes inside the classroom. However, empirical studies have yet to support the suggested prevalence of student consumerism. Additionally, no study has attempted to understand student consumerism at the social psychological level. Using an electronic survey administered to undergraduate students at a public university, this pilot study shows that student-consumer orientations are moderate at best, and many students do not agree with certain beliefs or behaviors that are attributed to consumer-orientations. At the social psychological level, multiple regression results indicated student consumer attitudes are significantly associated with social exchanges or activities involving academic costs. Furthermore, the results suggested that males find academic activities or exchanges more costly than females, and males also find putting off academic work for non-academic social exchanges or activities more rewarding than
females. In using a social psychological perspective on student consumerism, this pilot study will contribute to future research that explores students educational decision-making processes.
I would like to dedicate this thesis to my family, friends, and professors. Without their support during my educational endeavors, this project, and many of my accomplishments, would not have been made possible. I’d specifically like to dedicate this thesis to my late uncle, Thomas Sinicki.
Acknowledgements

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my thesis chair, Dr. Patricia Case, for diligently working and guiding me through this process. Her hard work, insight, and support throughout my graduate endeavors, and this thesis, allowed me to overcome unexpected challenges and obtain my goals. I would also like to thank my thesis committee, Dr. Karie Peralta, Dr. Barbara Coventry, and originally, Dr. Dwight Haase. They equipped me with the necessary tools, knowledge, and support to complete this project. Dr. Haase sparked my interest in student consumerism and also provided me with an immense amount of support throughout my graduate endeavors.

I must also acknowledge Dr. Amanda Garrison, Dr. Katherine Rosier, and Dr. David Kinney; they influenced me to embark on the sociological path, and to a great extent, shaped my sociological imagination. Without their knowledge, ability to profess, and willingness to engage in sociological conversations with me, I again, would not be where I am today. Perhaps my greatest praise goes to Dr. Garrison and Dr. Rosier. Dr. Garrison always provided me with impeccable wisdom and support, and she greatly influenced my approach to teaching. Without Dr. Rosier, my graduate endeavor would not have been made possible, and her classroom pedagogy also greatly influenced my teaching style.

Lastly, I owe a huge thank you to my loved ones. My parents, Kevin and Sue Sinicki, my sister, Amber Sinicki, my grandparents, Thomas and Melody Bukowski, and my close friends, Erik Sinicki, Kyle Matuszewski, and Andy Glowiak. Without their love, support, and patience, my ability to stay motivated and remain on this sociological path would not have been made possible.
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List of Abbreviations

SET ............................. Social Exchange Theory

CL .............................. Comparison level

CLalt .......................... Comparison level of alternatives

SPSS ........................... Statistical Package for Social Sciences

M ............................... Mean

SD ............................. Standard deviation

n.................................. Sample size
List of Symbols

\( \alpha \) ........Cronbach’s Alpha

\( B \) ........unstandardized coefficient

\( t \) ........t test statistic

\( p \) ........probability value

\( F \) ........F statistic
Chapter One

Introduction and Literature Review

Introduction

Neoliberal ideologies have been manifesting themselves within higher education institutions throughout the past four decades (Saunders, 2014; Laing & Laing, 2016; White, 2006). Research suggests this has led to declines in government funding (White, 2006; Harrison & Risler, 2015; Serenko, 2010; Laing & Laing, 2016), shifts in government regulations (Bunce et. al, 2016; Serenko, 2010) and cultural re-conceptualizations regarding the purposes of higher education (Giroux, 2010; White, 2006; Saunders, 2014). In turn, it is argued that post-secondary institutions are now orienting themselves like corporations (Harrison & Risler, 2016). Some scholars consider this trend the commodification of higher education, whereby tertiary institutions increasingly treat their services, artefacts, events and people as products and purchasable commodities that primarily provide extrinsic economical value to their consumers (White, 2006; Saunders, 2014). Consumers, in this context, are students. It is this very relationship that shapes the concept of student consumerism.

At the most basic level, student consumerism is the idea that students function as customers and consumers of their higher educational institutions (Bunce et al., 2016; Harrison & Risler, 2015; Laing & Laing, 2016; Saunders, 2014; Serenko, 2010; White, 2007). This theory argues that colleges and universities sell “products” and “services” such as classes and degrees, to students who purchase these products and services by paying tuition and other fees attached to their education. The concept of student
consumerism and its association with students’ reward perceptions regarding social exchanges and activities in college are the primary concern of this study.

**Statement of the problem**

The “rise of student consumerism” is a growing concern for many scholars as they argue it is having negative impacts on student learning and higher educational institutions as a whole. Higher education institutions are also facing criticism for turning into corporate like entities; a concept considered the commodification or commercialization of higher education. The commodification of higher education is oftentimes discussed in combination with student consumerism. Although the commodification of higher education is important, this study’s primary concern is student consumerism.

Researchers discussing the concept of student consumerism claim that when students act as customers or consumers of higher education, their concern for learning has decreased as they have become grade-oriented consumers (White, 2007). Moreover, students have become primarily concerned about the external benefits of college, they are less willing to partake in rigorous educational activities, and more willing to make demands inside and outside of the classroom (Bunce, Baird, & Jones, 2016; Saunders, 2014). Scholars further argue that when students act as customers or consumers they become entitled to satisfactory educational outcomes because they are paying customers, and paying customers demand satisfactory products.

In essence, students have transformed into persons functioning within a higher educational industrial process, whereby students are no longer learners but career-focused consumers purchasing educational services and products to sell in the job market (Bunce
et al., 2016; Saunders, 2014; White, 2007). These latter claims are only a few of the issues that scholars claim erupt when students carry consumer mentalities within higher education. Interestingly, many of these accounts are anecdotal. The empirical studies--although few in number--that do exist have indicated that students do not perceive themselves as customers or consumers, or their customer/consumer orientations vary from student to student (Saunders, 2015). Importantly, and contrary to anecdotal research, the empirical evidence does not show a prevalence or pervasiveness of student consumer mentalities. Furthermore, no studies have set out to understand this phenomenon at the social psychological level. Many scholars associate student consumerism and the commodification of higher education to a rise in neoliberal ideologies which is empirically, difficult to prove. So this study asks, to what degree does student consumerism exist and if so, what kinds of student consumer orientations or attitudes are prevalent? If student consumerism does exist, what social psychological processes are quantitatively related to student consumer mentalities?

To fill these gaps in the research, (1) this study takes a quantitative approach to understanding student consumerism, and (2) this study utilizes Social Exchange Theory to explore the social psychological processes that may influence student consumer orientations. By administering an electronic survey to undergraduate students, this study can obtain empirical evidence that sheds light on student consumer attitudes and it can also provide empirical evidence for how students perceive the rewards and costs of certain academic and nonacademic social exchanges or activities. Using this data and evaluating it through linear multiple regressions, this study hopes to garner further
empirical evidence for the issues that need to be addressed when studying student consumerism.

**Sociological relevance of student consumerism**

Education is an integral component of society. Without it, our societal systems would not function appropriately. Our society relies on education and most importantly, our society relies on the graduates colleges and universities are supposed to provide. For example, democracy relies on having educated persons who can make educated decisions about what should or should not exist within a democratic system. Education provides persons with opportunities to makes a better life for themselves and those around them. Institutions such as government, healthcare, business, education, family, and others, rely on college graduates who are innovative, able to think critically, and who are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to help these institutions function. The benefits of a college education abound in our capitalist system. If student consumerism is hindering the college graduates being produced, and if it is negatively impacting higher education, the issue needs to be addressed.

Building off of Saunders’ (2014, 2015) work on student consumerism, the sociological relevance of this study stems from (1) a need to better understand the concept of student consumerism and (2) a need to understand how it may be impacting individual students and their decision making processes that either hinder their educational outcomes or promote them. A primary assumption of this study is that if students are consumer oriented, they will spend less time focusing on important academic activities and they will place more emphasis on non-academic activities or exchanges that
hinder their educational outcomes. If the latter assumption holds true, it will allow academics to address these issues and develop important strategies to alleviate some of the pitfalls hindering students within higher education.

**Literature Review**

In order to explore the relationship between student consumerism and students' reward perceptions about their social exchanges and activities in college, it is important to understand the social influences that have led to student consumerism. It is also important to understand how student consumerism impacts student beliefs, values, and behaviors while in college. An evaluation of this relationship is important because it fosters an understanding about how students perceive their education and how these perceptions can influence or discourage their success in college. Therefore, the literature review has been developed to address why student consumerism exists, why it perpetuates itself within higher education, how it characterizes our students, and how--at the micro-sociological level--it impacts their academic decision making processes. Equally important, the following discussion highlights the prevalence of student consumerism, or lack thereof.

**Neoliberalism**

Some researchers argue neoliberalism has been the catalyst for the higher educational transformations that have taken place throughout the past four decades (Hon, 2015; Laing & Laing, 2016; Saunders, 2014; White, 2007). Neoliberalism, in the most narrow sense, is a re-working of 19th century, early 20th century classic economic liberalism. Classic economic liberalism is also considered free-market capitalism,
whereby proponents of this system believed that all persons have a right to secure their economic culminations, and that government interventions should not interfere with market processes that allow individuals to build their economic successes (Thorsen, 2010). Due to the Great Depression and the widespread social inequalities that existed thereafter, Keynesian economic policies were utilized (Saunders, 2014). Under this regime states were more willing to intervene with business cycles as they worked to reduce the social inequalities that were attributed to a poorly managed capitalist system (Saunders, 2014). Once these inequalities were reduced and the economy became “stagnant,” conservative economists began cultivating the idea that classic liberalism could be re-vamped. By doing so, economic prosperity could once again persist. In turn, “individualism” and free-market logic were re-ignited and neoliberalism became the dominant ideology.

Oftentimes, neoliberalism is an ambiguous term as a specific definition of it is difficult to find and the multitude of elements used to describe it vary depending on the sources discussing it. Since neoliberalism and all of its complexities are not the primary concern of this thesis, I focused on three elements presented by Saunders (2014) to describe it. Saunders (2014) described neoliberalism as:

….coalescing in three major areas (a) the roll-back of Keynesian economic policies and programs (b) the extension of market logic to cultural, social, and political spheres, and (c) the conceptual redefinition of the individual from a citizen to an autonomous economic actor. (p. 201)

Since neoliberalism is multifaceted, so too are the impacts it has had on higher education. The higher educational transformations that have resulted are great in number but only a
few of them will be discussed in this thesis, specifically in terms of how they impact higher education at the institutional level and the student level. At the institutional level such transformations have lead to what scholars consider the commodification of higher education (Harrison & Risler, 2015; Giroux, 2010). At the student level similar transformations have lead to what scholars consider student consumerism (Delucchi & Korgen, 2002; Fairchild et al., 2007; Serenko, 2010). Since the transformations at the meso-level and micro-level are similar, the connection between the commodification of higher education and student consumerism is elaborated upon.

Neoliberalism and government cutbacks

When Keynesianism was replaced with neoliberalism, government financial support for public services, such as public education, started to decline (Saunders, 2014). For example, when Oliff, Palacios, Johnson, and Leachman (2013) compared state funding in 2008 to 2013, they found that nationwide, “states have been spending $2,353 or 28 percent less per student on higher education” (p.1). In thirty six states, funding was reduced by more than 20 percent and in eleven states, funding was cut by more than one-third (Oliff, et. al, 2013). Although a more recent article has suggested that nationally, there has been a 2.8 percent increase in per-student funding (Mitchell, Leachman, & Masterson, 2016), in large, colleges and universities have been forced to adjust to these declines.

Neoliberalism, free-market logic, and economic actors
Another precept of neoliberalism, as stated by Saunders (2014), is that market principles now dominate our cultural, social, and political spheres. Free-market logic has become normalized in daily discourses and it shapes how social groups and actors within those groups interact and make decisions (Giroux, 2010; Saunders, 2014). As Slaughter & Rhoades (2004) suggested, free-market logic has made its way into colleges and universities and it plays a substantial role in terms of how higher educational institutions operate (Hon, 2015). When coupling this with nationwide declines in government financial support, colleges and universities have been coerced to orient themselves in ways that allow them to survive in a competitive market. Conceptually, this does two things. (1) Colleges and universities start to function like corporations or for-profit entities competing in the market (Saunders, 2014; Harrison & Risler, 2011; White, 2016; Laing & Laing, 2016) and (2) when colleges and universities employ corporate perspectives they become increasingly commodified, and students are increasingly treated as economic actors in an industrial process (White, 2016; Saunders, 2014).

The commodification of higher education

The commodification of higher education refers to post-secondary institutions treating their services, artefacts, events and people as products and purchasable commodities that primarily provide extrinsic economical value to their consumers and the institutions themselves (White, 2007). As previously outlined, colleges and universities have faced declines in government financial support. Therefore, institutions have become increasingly commodified, in part, to incur the necessary revenue that allows them to both function and improve so that they can remain competitive within their market. As
many scholars suggest, this has had unfortunate impacts on higher education (Bunce et al., 2016; Harrison & Risler, 2015; Hon, 2015; Laing & Laing, 2016; Saunders, 2014; White, 2007). For example, it has caused colleges and universities to become overly concerned about revenue generation and economic efficiency (Bunce et al., 2016; Hon, 2015; Saunders, 2014) which has threatened tenured systems (Saunders, 2014). It has caused colleges and universities to allocate more resources to advertising regimes, sporting expenditures, luxurious dorms and any or all other products that can be purchased and turned to profit (Bunce et al., 2016; ). It has caused institutions to seek out private sources of funding and it has caused faculty to view their scientific endeavors and publications as products to be sold to external organizations (Saunders, 2014; White, 2016). Quality assurance is no longer based on educational or academic achievements, but it is based on enrollment numbers, graduation rates, alumni donations, job placement rates and student satisfaction (Laing & Laing, 2016; Serenko, 2010). Teaching and the quality of teaching is no longer exemplified by what faculty members actually teach their students and how they have helped to advance learning, it is exemplified by grade distributions, dropout rates, student rating inventories, and for research institutions, how many publications can be produced (Bunce et al., 2016; Laing & Laing, 2016; Saunders, 2014). Each of the latter examples only touch the surface of how higher education has changed and each one is enveloped with its own intricacies and implications. However, most important to this thesis is how the pairing of the commodification of higher education and neoliberal ideologies has led to socio-cultural re-conceptualizations about the purpose of higher education and how it is impacting our students.
The commodification of higher education and education as a private good

In general, the commodification of higher education is the idea that colleges and universities are functioning like corporations and education is the product they are selling. As previously mentioned, when colleges and universities commodify themselves all artefacts, persons, events and services in which they provide are turned into products being sold to their customers, which in this context are primarily students. In turn, this perpetuates the ideology that education is a private commodity to be purchased by students and that their relationship with colleges and universities is based on customer/service relations, where in the end, students should leave with a degree and other skills that will supplement them in the workforce and which lead to greater employment and financial successes.

When combining this with, or understanding it through neoliberal ideologies, socio-cultural conceptualizations regarding the purpose of higher education is grounded in the extrinsic economic outcomes that going to college can produce. For example, in 1971 and 1972, less than 40 percent of freshman at the University of California at Los Angeles considered “being very well off financially” an essential or very important objective of their educational endeavors (Berrett, 2016). On the contrary, in 1971 and 1972, well over 60 percent of these students considered “developing a meaningful philosophy of life” an essential or very important objective (Berrett, 2015). When prompting 2013 freshman with the same items, over 80 percent of them considered “being very well off financially” essential or very important while slightly over 40 percent considered “developing a meaningful philosophy of life” an essential or very important objective (Berrett, 2015).
This study, in part, supports the idea that traditional purposes of higher education have either been replaced or greatly abandoned. Arguably, colleges and universities used to develop critical thinkers and citizens who could benefit democracy by engaging in critical discourse about society and its common welfare. However, current cultural conceptualizations about college abandon such values as certain agenda’s emphasize colleges as pipelines to employment (Mourshed, Farrell, & Barton, 2012). Thomas Jefferson once proclaimed, a broadly educated populace should strengthen democracy. Unfortunately, educational processes, activities, and outcomes are now conceptualized in terms of their economic exchanges and benefits (Bunce et al., 2016; Harrison & Risler, 2015; Hon, 2015; Laing & Laing, 2016; Saunders, 2014; White, 2007). As Giroux (2015) eloquently stated:

Public spheres that once offered at least the glimmer of progressive ideas, enlightened social policies, non commodified values, and critical dialogue and exchange have been increasingly commercialized or replaced by private spaces and corporate settings whose ultimate fidelity is to increasing profit margins. (p. 2)

It is important to note that in the United States students have always exchanged money with their higher educational institutions (Saunders, 2014). They have always spent money to obtain a degree which then leads them to some career afterwards. But the importance doesn’t lie in the literal financial exchanges. The difference is that before,
college students and their institutions did not primarily understand their exchanges as that of customer and that of service providers. Throughout the past four decades however, students have become increasingly understood as consumers or customers who are purchasing a degree and institutions have increasingly structured themselves around what it means to be economically efficient and profitable service providers to their consumers and their institution (Bunce et al., 2016; Harrison & Risler, 2015; Hon, 2015; Laing & Laing, 2016; Saunders, 2014; White, 2007). Metaphorically, customer/service relations are the new engine that drives our institutions to where they need to be in an age of market fundamentalism. When using this engine, in this era, student satisfaction is the most efficient route institutions can take to reach their destinations, career-focused agenda’s fuel the engine, but the muffler—although important—reduces any noise that needs to be made about how it is impacting our students inside and outside of the classroom and society at large. Such economic rationalities is the important difference.

**Student consumerism**

The concept of student consumerism is ambiguous. Some studies provide a narrow definition of student consumerism (Delucchi & Korgen, Fairchild et al., 2007; Serenko, 2010) while others describe it as a concept with variable components (Saunders, 2014). Oftentimes, the concept of student consumerism is reduced metaphorically to “student-as-customer” (Bune et al, 2016; Laing & Laing, 2016; Saunders, 2014; White, 2016). None of these are wrong per se, but Saunders (2015) pointed out the concept of student consumerism, or as he calls it a “student customer orientation” is complex and contains variable characteristics that empirically cannot be ascertained by using one item.
Therefore, I find it important as a researcher to delineate the concept so that it can be understood clearly and objectively. With a clear definition and empirical understanding of student consumerism, there will be practical applications that persist, such as understanding how to better engage college students with their academic endeavors and how to improve learning processes. At the institutional level, higher education institutions can use the concept of student consumerism to better understand how they should market education to future and current college students.

I define student consumerism as a socio-cultural ideology whereby students are considered both customers and consumers of higher educational “products” and through such purchases and consumption, students values, attitudes, and beliefs about education are grounded in the economical benefits it is supposed to offer; impacting how students behave throughout their educational endeavors. Current research on student consumerism either situates students as customers or they describe them as consumers (Bunce et al., 2016; Delucchi & Korgen, 2002; Harrison & Risler, 2015; Hon, 2015; Laing & Laing, 2016; Serenko, 2010; Saunders, 2014; White, 2006). However, I believe a definition of student consumerism should include both.

Students are “customers” when they pay tuition and fees for educational services. Students are also “customers” when they pay for on-campus housing, books, university clothing, or other goods available to them at their institution. Students act as “customers” when they pay for any of the latter examples but also have expectations affiliated with those purchases. For example, if a student pays for a class and they finish the class, they expect a grade, and oftentimes a good grade (Bunce et al., 2016; White, 2007). If a student pays for on-campus housing, they expect a dormitory with comfortable living
conditions that meet their basic needs. If a student pays their way through the entirety of college and they meet the necessary credentials to receive a degree, they expect a diploma and they expect that diploma to provide them with satisfactory returns such as a successful career and other extrinsic economical outcomes (Saunders, 2014).

But students are not just customers, they are also consumers. Being a “customer” implies the act of purchasing a good, but being a customer does not encompass how that actor uses that good. Understanding students as “consumers” fills that void. By implication, conceptualizing students as consumers means conceptualizing how they use the product or service that they have purchased. For example, a student is a customer when they pay for a class but they are a consumer when discussing how that student uses the class and its available resources. I find this to be an important distinction because many of the characteristics used to describe student customer orientations or student consumer orientations, and their impacts on students within college, are not a product of either or, rather, they are a result of both customer mentalities and consumer mentalities.

For example, a common characteristic of “students-as-customers” and “student consumerism” is that students emphasize grade goals (Bunce et al., 2016; Delucchi & Korgen, 2002; Saunders, 2014; White, 2006). Grade goals is a term used to describe students who are primarily focused on obtaining a grade, typically a good grade, regardless of what they have “learned” and regardless of the effort put forth to achieve that grade (Bunce et al., 2016). This characteristic contains both customer mentalities and consumer mentalities. The customer mentality should be conceived as “I paid for this class (the product) and therefore I should receive this grade” (a satisfactory return for purchasing the product). However, this narrow definition leaves out the processes
involved from the time of the purchase to the time of its return. When discussing the components of “learning” or “grade goals” there is always work/effort exerted by the customer (student). This implies how students are using the product or service and these processes should be affiliated with how students function as consumers.

When discussing grade goals or any other characteristics of student consumerism, students are not just customers or consumers, they are both. This is why it is necessary to have a conceptual definition that integrates and describes students as both customers and consumers. Once either of the terms is abandoned so to are some of the values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that make-up these concepts. If describing student consumerism or student-as-customer as a complex concept made of up many elements (Saunders, 2014) I argue that the term “student consumerism” should be used over the metaphor student-as-customer because in order to be a consumer, more often than not, a consumer must also be a customer. Conversely, considering students only as customers is one sided as it doesn’t involve the processes in between the purchase and return. Therefore, in this study I use the term student consumerism as it involves both customer and consumer orientations.

**Characteristics of student consumerism**

Student consumerism is a concept made up variable characteristics rooted in values and beliefs that shape how students function within colleges and universities. Values are shared judgements about what is desirable, right or wrong, good or bad. Beliefs, in the context of higher education, are ideas held about education, the way educational systems work, and how persons fit in the world of education. The broader
characteristics of student consumerism can be conceptualized as values or beliefs that are interrelated. For example, students go to college because they desire a degree, applicable workforce skills, a successful career, and other economical returns (Bunce et al., 2016; Giroux, 2010; Saunders, 2014). These are values students have going into college and throughout their college careers. Such values are interrelated with their beliefs about college. By implication, students believe college is a means to a good job and economical returns (Bunce et al., 2016; Giroux, 2010; Saunders, 2014). They believe college is a medium for gathering applicable workforce skills and although college is expensive, it is a necessary cost if they wish to compete in the market and land a job.

As scholars suggest, these values and beliefs inherent to student consumerism are driven by neoliberal ideologies that guide our public lives and higher educational institutions (Giroux, 2010; Hon, 2015; Laing & Laing, 2016; Saunders, 2014). Education is now affiliated with training (Giroux, 2010; Saunders, 2014), knowledge is perceived as a product to be purchased (Giroux, 2010), students are situated as the customers and consumers of educational services, while teachers and other persons of higher education are the service providers (Bunce et al., 2016; Delucchi & Korgen, 2002; Hon, 2015; Laing & Laing, 2016; Saunders, 2014; White, 2007). Institutional policies, procedures, and operations are formulated through free-market logic, whereby colleges and universities function more as businesses than as public entities that are supposed to educate, enlighten, and provide persons with values and intellectual capacities that lead to civic engagement and address the social issues that impact democracy and our nations as a whole (Giroux, 2010; Saunders, 2014). These broad values and beliefs are only a few characteristics of student consumerism but they are interrelated with other values and
beliefs that critics argue are impacting how students interact with their educational endeavors.

*Commodities, grade goals, and easy courses*

Another characteristic of student consumerism is the idea that students view and treat educational artefacts, services, and persons as purchasable commodities (Bunce et al., 2016; Delucchi & Korgen, 2002; Hon, 2015; Laing & Laing, 2016; Saunders, 2014; White, 2007). This is affiliated with students functioning as customers within higher education and its closely associated with commodification of higher education. When functioning with student-customer rationales they perceive degree programs and courses as products they are purchasing from their institutions (Bunce et al., 2016; Delucchi & Korgen, 2002; Hon, 2015; Laing & Laing, 2016; Saunders, 2014; White, 2007). With each purchase they expect a return and the return is akin with economical benefits. For example, students may choose degree programs because they believe the degree, which they pay for via tuition, will provide them with a lucrative career (Bunce et al., 2016; White, 2007). No longer are degree programs chosen because a student is interested in gaining the knowledge of that field (albeit this is not always true). Rather, they perceive the knowledge they will obtain as a product or commodity transferable to the marketplace in which they can start a career, or at least, be seen as appealing to future employers. The same can be said about courses. Students are no longer choosing courses because they are truly interested in the knowledge it can provide them. Instead, courses are seen as a product they are purchasing to (1) fulfill graduation credits, (2) receive a grade that allows them to graduate, and (3) can provide them with instrumental skills that allow
them to succeed in their careers (Hon, 2015; White, 2007; Saunders, 2014). Again, when students function as “customers,” degrees, courses, or other educational services and artefacts are analogous to commodities which are supposed to provide them with extrinsic economical benefits. Such rationalities also influence how they function as “consumers” of these products.

Two additional characteristics of student consumerism are students preoccupations with grade goals and the appeal of choosing easy courses. As mentioned before, grade goals is a term used to describe students who are primarily focused on obtaining good grades regardless of the effort necessary to achieve those grades and without concern for the intrinsic learning outcomes courses can provide (Saunders, 2014). Research on student consumerism argues that students have lost interest in learning and are less willing to partake in rigorous coursework. Students have become lazy, entitled, study only when it is convenient, and want to be rewarded liberally for their academic efforts even if their work is poor (Hon, 2015). This lack of willingness to work hard, and preoccupation with good grades is what gravitates students towards selecting easy courses. As Delucchi & Korgen (2002) found in their survey of students at a mid-sized university, 73.3% of respondents claimed they would take a course where they learned little to nothing but received an A. Coupled with institutional desires to keep students satisfied, some teachers feel pressured to inflate grades and withhold constructive criticism which correlates to the recent upticks in grade inflation (Hon, 2015; White, 2007). Such consumerist attitudes are not only detrimental to learning but they perpetuate student beliefs that college should be convenient, satisfying, and
entertaining. Since students are paying “customers” they also believe they have a right to make demands about the grades they receive, and how courses are structured or taught.

**Student satisfaction and student demands**

Student satisfaction is another characteristic of student consumerism. As customers and consumers of education, students believe their payment of tuition should provide them with satisfactory results in the classroom. Courses and teachers have become pre-packaged goods with commercial expectations such as quality, convenience, and efficient service (Hon, 2015). Quality is affiliated with teachers needing to hold the attention of their students instead of students needing to hold their own attention (Hon, 2015; White, 2007). Coursework, lecture notes, or PowerPoints should be available on online course management systems such as Blackboard, Moodle, or eLearning regardless of whether students were in class or not. Grades should be kept by teachers and routinely updated for the sake of convenience and efficient service. No longer do courses or teachers fit into the lives of students, rather universities should conveniently fit into their lives (Hon, 2015). Coursework should be relevant, applicable to the workforce, and relayed to students in “easily digestible” ways (Hon, 2015). The duties and responsibilities of students become that of the teachers (White, 2007). It is no longer the student's responsibility to learn course content through reading, studying, or critically engaging with the material. Instead, it is the teacher's responsibility to teach them what was supposed to be read and studied. Further, the personal needs of students are paramount to their teachers and the courses, and they are believed to be excusable regardless of the reason. If any of the latter go unmet, students become dissatisfied and
teachers can easily pay the price for their dissatisfaction by way of poor student evaluations or their willingness to make demands (White, 2007).

The final characteristic of student consumerism is student willingness to make demands. As scholars argue, students now contain an incredible amount of power within higher education (Smith, 2000). When students do not receive a grade they felt they deserved, they are not afraid to confront their teachers or other administrators about it. If students are not satisfied with how courses are structured, organized, or being taught, they are willing to engage in negotiation tactics that provide satisfactory returns (White, 2007). This consumer/customer attitude is argued as detrimental to higher education because students are there to learn, and by no means should they have more authority than their teachers when it comes to educational processes (Laing & Laing, 2016). Especially since students, oftentimes, lack the necessary skills and knowledge needed to succeed in higher education, how is it sensible to have those that need to be taught deciding how they should be taught?

**Criticisms of student consumerism**

It is important to note that not all scholars agree with the concept of student consumerism. For one, research on this concept is heavily anecdotal (Giroux, 2010; Harrison & Risler, 2015; Laing & Laing, 2016; Saunders, 2014; Smith; 2000). The empirical research that does exist has been unable to produce data indicating the suggested prevalence, pervasiveness, or omnipotence of student consumerism. For example, Saunders (2015) survey involving first-year students at a large public research university indicated that only 28.9% of respondents expressed customer orientations.
However, as Saunders (2014) argued, although students may not perceive themselves as consumers/customers this does not mean they do not possess customer/consumer mentalities. Rather, these ideologies are so embedded into student and cultural consciousness, even before entering college, that students lack the ability to understand the specific implications such ideologies have on their lives (Saunders, 2014). As I see it, students are like fish in water. If they have only swam in water they do not understand what water is. If students are never provided with the vocabularies, ideas, or implications of consumerist attitudes they will never see themselves as functioning in those ways. That is the power of ideologies becoming embedded and normalized in our everyday lives. Until prompted with tools to critically understand them, they remain unseen and unquestioned.

Other scholars argue that how students currently function is not a result of student consumerism or the commodification of higher education, it is more related to increased enrollment numbers; whereby educational landscapes are now composed of highly diverse populations (Baiocco & DeWaters, 1998). First-generation students, students from all socioeconomic statuses, and racially diverse groups of students now shape college populations and these variable factors influence the ways students situate themselves within higher education, and how they address learning. Some scholars also argue that to an extent, colleges and universities can benefit from giving students a voice because it allows educators to understand what is helping them, what is working for the betterment of educational processes, and what issues, concerns, or processes need to be changed (Greenberger et al., 2008; Laing & Laing, 2016; Saunders, 2014). Therefore, and much like any sociological approach to understanding human social behavior, it is
important to understand the vast amount of complexities shaping social behavior, and to remain mindful that one theoretical approach cannot nor should not be used as the only way to conceptualize why human social behavior plays out as it does.

**Objectives of the proposed study**

The literature outlined argues higher education has transformed in substantial ways throughout the past few decades. Neoliberal ideologies have modified socio-cultural understandings of higher education, higher educational institutions have been forced to adjust to these modified understandings by way of commodifying and commercializing themselves, and students entering college are now equipped with educational values and beliefs far different from the traditional values and beliefs affiliated with higher education. Their current values and beliefs can be conceptualized as what some scholars consider the rise of student consumerism or student-customer orientations. Based on pre-existing research I defined student consumerism as: A socio-cultural ideology whereby students are considered *both* customers and consumers of higher educational “products” and through such purchases and consumption students values, attitudes, and beliefs about education are grounded in the economical benefits it is supposed to offer, impacting how students behave throughout their educational endeavors.

The primary objective of this study is two-fold. (1) This study empirically explores the prevalence of student consumerism. To this date, many studies advancing this topic are anecdotal and few have produced empirical support for the actual pervasiveness of student consumerism. Therefore, this study collects data from a
midwestern public research university that empirically explores whether or not students actually have student consumerist attitudes. (2) This study applies a social-psychological theoretical framework to explore the relationship between student consumerism and how students perceive rewards and costs affiliated with academic and non-academic social exchanges and activities. Neoliberalism has been the prominent theory for advancing student consumerism, however, I find it important to explore the concept at the social-psychological level as it can foster insight on student’s academic decision-making processes. Moreover, by understanding the social psychological implications of student consumerism, I believe it can provide researchers, administrators, and professors with important information regarding what drives students to succeed during their educational endeavors. By understanding what students find rewarding and costly, professors or other persons involved in education can better adjust their curriculum and pedagogies to help students learn, and idealistically, help reduce dropout rates that plague many universities and colleges.
Chapter 2
Theoretical Framework

Social Exchange Theory

This study uses Social Exchange Theory (SET) as the theoretical framework for examining student consumerism on the social psychological level. Since student consumerism is rooted in neoliberal ideologies whereby actors interpret and function within their social worlds by way of free-market logic and economic rationalities, social exchange theory and its emphasis on “rational” decision-making processes is a suitable theoretical framework for this study. Central to social exchange theory is the idea that actors choose social interactions or activities that provide them with maximum personal outcomes and minimal costs (Chibucos, 2004; Griffin, 2013; Homans, 1958; Lawler & Thye, 1999). Current representations of social exchange theory are far more complex than what was originally proposed in the early works of Homans (1958) and Thibaut and Kelley (1959). Although all representations of Social Exchange Theory are important, this thesis focuses on four exchange equations that are based on the work of Homans (1958) and Thibaut and Kelley (1959). These equations are as follows:

1. Outcomes = rewards - costs
2. Satisfaction = outcomes - comparison levels (CL)
3. Dependence = outcomes - comparison level of alternatives (CLalt)
4. Power = an external actors dependence / the actor's own dependence.

Throughout this chapter each equation will be related to components of student consumerism, however, the first equation, which evaluates rewards relative to costs,
receives greater attention in this study. Blau’s (1987) work on social exchange theory also becomes relevant as he critiqued Homan’s reductionistic approach to social behavior and took into consideration the influence of social structures and microeconomic reasoning.

**Historical Perspective of Social Exchange Theory**

Oftentimes, Social Exchange Theory is credited to the work of Homans (1958) “Social Behavior as Exchange” and Thibaut and Kelley’s (1959) “The Social Psychology of Groups.” However, before the social exchange framework—as it is currently understood--grew in popularity, Simmel (1907) was the first to pair interaction and exchange. Simmel (1907) argued that persons partaking in interactions have interests at stake and that actions within these interactions have reciprocal effects on the persons involved. Therefore, all interaction is exchange whereby persons reciprocally attempt to procure a greater summation of material or non-material values that may have not existed before the interaction. In doing so, every exchange then acquires profits or losses to the persons involved because in order for an actor to gain something of value other values “must always be offered up” by any given party (Simmel, 1907). Although this is a basic and rather narrow conceptualization of Simmel’s work, the latter ideas went on to guide Homans (1958) theory on exchange. More often than not, Homans is dubbed the “first sociological theorists to focus on interpersonal exchanges” (Cook et al., 2013). However, it is important to remember that Simmel’s concept of interaction and exchange served as the foundation for what is now considered Social Exchange Theory.
After the work of Homans (1958) and Thibaut & Kelley (1959), the social exchange framework was elaborated upon by Emerson (1976) and Peter Blau (1964, 1987). Homans theoretical perspective was grounded in behavioral psychology and focused on informal dyadic exchanges (Homans, 1958). He used operant psychology and five reinforcement propositions to introduce the idea that social behavior and social interactions can be understood as an exchange of material or non-material goods and activities between actors (Homans, 1958). With each exchange actors incur rewards and costs and those payoffs shape the social behaviors of actors.

The first proposition, known as the success proposition, refers to the idea that behaviors with positive outcomes will be repeated by an actor. The second proposition, the stimulus proposition, states that an actor’s behavior that has been rewarded in past situational occurrences will be repeated in similar situational occurrences. The third propositions is considered the value proposition. This refers to the idea that when an actor’s action is conceptualized as valuable to them, the likelihood that those actions will be performed again increases. The fourth proposition, the deprivation-satiation proposition, refers to the idea that actors who receive recurring rewards for a particular action start to perceive additional rewards of the same nature as less valuable. The fifth proposition considers an actor’s subjective emotional responses to reward situations. If an actor does not receive an anticipated response as a result of an exchange, they are likely to become angry, while actors who receive more than they anticipated will be content or happy with the exchange. These five propositions advanced by Homans (1958) served as the building blocks of Social Exchange Theory but Thibaut and Kelley (1959) also
advanced some important propositions regarding social exchanges which will be discussed shortly.

Homans (1958) and Thibaut & Kelley’s (1959) advancements of Social Exchange Theory were both guided by psychological discourse. Although their conceptual schemas were different, and different in important ways, Emerson (1976) stated those very differences converged to formulate a strengthened general exchange approach. One of the similarities between their works, and perhaps the most important aspect of social exchange theory as a whole, is the examination of observable costs and rewards materializing out of a social interaction and shaping an actor’s perceived outcome.

*Outcomes, costs, and rewards*

Costs can be described as aversive stimuli, opportunities and rewards foregone, or any other factors working to discourage the performance of certain behaviors (Homans, 1958; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Rewards are the pleasures, gratifications, and satisfactions that an actor receives during interactions (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Likewise, rewards are not only the result of prior interactions, they are also anticipated benefits which can be symbolic or concrete (Cook et al., 2013). As shown in the equation “outcomes = rewards - costs,” outcomes are a product of an actor’s evaluation of the rewards and the costs that form during any social interaction. According to SET, actors will re-enact social behaviors (Homans, 1958) and gravitate towards future social exchanges that provide them with desirable personal outcomes (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959; Blau 1964). On the contrary, if the outcomes are poor due to high cost and little reward, actors will, for the most part, attempt to stay away from those social exchanges.
**Humans as rational**

Such evaluations made by actors emphasizes another important component of social exchange theory; the idea that all actors or persons are “rational” beings and that they act out of self-interest (Cook, Cheshire, Rice & Nakagawa, 2013). “Rational” in this context does not imply that human beings always act “logically.” Rather, it describes the idea that human beings reason within themselves and make decisions based on their capacities to evaluate circumstances which leads them to choosing social behavior X over social behavior Y. The equation of “outcomes = rewards - costs” and the premise that humans are rational and act out of self-interest have been the building blocks for social exchange theory. Yet, Thibaut & Kelley (1959) complicated Social Exchange Theory in important ways and added some propositions which vary from those of Homans (1958).

**Interdependence and reciprocity**

Some primary differences between the work of Homans (1958) and Thibaut & Kelley (1959) were Thibaut & Kelley’s emphasis on the interdependency of actors, the variability of interdependence, and the application of Social Exchange Theory to small groups. As Emerson (1976) noted, Thibaut & Kelley started their conceptual framework by focusing on the psychology of individuals. From there, they moved up to dyadic exchanges, and then advanced to small groups. This was different from Homans (1958) because he focused less on groups, focused more on informal dyadic interactions and applied reinforcement principles to explain them (Emerson, 1976; Homans, 1958). Homans used a reductionist approach--a primary criticism of his work--and Thibaut &
Kelley (1959) moved in the opposite direction. Although Thibaut & Kelley (1959) supplemented Homans regarding their discussions about rewards and costs, they added a few propositions that explain the interdependency between actors; albeit they discussed interdependency in terms of triads or small groups. This interdependency is very similar to what current social exchange theorists consider the reciprocity of social exchanges, which has served as an equally important building block in SET.

Reciprocity refers to the idea that since actors are attempting to maximize their self-interest they enter social interactions with an expectation that each party is exchanging something of value (Blau, 1964). Indeed, outcomes are subjective and are a product of how actors perceive them. However, outcomes and their affiliated rewards cannot always be obtained alone. Actors gravitate towards certain social situations and their ensuing interactions to achieve goals or to access valuable resources that are only provided by another actor (Blau, 1964; Simmel, 1907; Thibaut and Kelly, 1959). This idea grounds Thibaut and Kelley’s (1959) comparison level (CL), the comparison level of alternatives (CLalt) and power. An actor’s satisfaction is influenced by their comparison levels and an actor’s dependence on a social exchange is influenced by their comparison level of alternatives. These formulate two equations that can be added to “outcomes = rewards - costs.” They are: “satisfaction = outcomes - comparison levels” and “dependence = outcomes - the comparison level of alternatives.”

*Comparison levels*

Much like an actor evaluates the costs and rewards of social exchanges to produce an outcome they also have a comparison level--an evaluative process determining
satisfaction or dissatisfaction (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Comparison levels can be conceived as a reference point set on an outcome scale representing what an actor perceives they deserve. This reference point is what the social exchange is evaluated against (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). If an actor’s outcomes exceed their comparison level, the exchange, or the behaviors within that exchange, are likely to be satisfying. If an actor’s outcomes fall below the comparison level they are likely to become dissatisfied with the exchange. As Thibaut & Kelley (1959) mentioned, comparison levels result from past experiences, they can be shaped by what an actor has seen others experience, and if looking forward, they can be influenced by idealization. Therefore, an actor’s satisfaction regarding social exchanges or activities is not purely a result of the rewards relative to the costs, it also a result of their perceived outcomes relative to what actors believe they should be receiving in any given exchange.

The comparison level for alternatives

Actors can also be dissatisfied with an exchange but still participate in them because of their dependency on such exchanges (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Simply, the comparison level for alternatives is an evaluative process influencing dependency (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Thibaut & Kelley (1959) described the comparison level for alternatives as the lowest level of outcomes a member will accept in light of available alternative opportunities. Much as a comparison level can be conceived as a reference point on an outcome scale, so too can the comparison level for alternatives. The difference is that the CLalt represents what an actor believes they can obtain from other actors, social exchanges, or activities. For example, if an actor partakes in a social
exchange with another actor because that actor provides them with valued goods or resources, they can become dependent on that actor. Additionally, if an actor believes that those goods or resources cannot be obtained elsewhere, but only through the other actor, their dependence on that actor and its exchanges increase. Therefore, an actor’s satisfaction is not purely correlated to the continuation of social exchanges (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Rather, the continuation of social exchanges is influenced by whether or not an actor believes their outcomes in a current exchange are lower or higher than what an alternative can provide. Social exchanges become disrupted when actors perceive there are alternatives that can provide similar or higher outcomes (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). When this happens, actors also become less dependent on other actors involved in the social exchanges (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Hence, satisfaction is a result of outcomes relative to comparison levels but dependence results from outcomes relative to the comparison level for alternatives.

Power and resources

Another important contribution made by Thibaut & Kelley (1959) is that of power and how it exists within social exchanges. Both Emerson (1976) and Blau (1964, 1987) went on to provide more popularized conceptualizations of power and social exchange, but arguably Thibaut & Kelley generated the first application of it. At the most basic level, power can be understood through the equation of power = an external actors dependence / the actor’s own dependence. The more dependent an actor is on another actor, the less power that actor will have. Therefore, actors in a social exchange who have the least to gain in terms of meeting their ‘needs’ during that interaction have the most
power. Additionally, the actor who possesses the most valuable resources within an exchange can be said to have more power than other actors who wish to obtain or receive such resources. Resources, as described by Emerson (1976) are not necessarily possessed goods or attributes of individual actors, rather, they are attributes of the relationship between actors. Attributes signify a quality or feature regarded as a characteristic or inherent part of someone or something (Emerson, 1976). This general definition of power, in the context of social exchange, has been advanced by both Emerson (1976) and Blau’s (1964) book on exchange and power. Blau’s (1967,1986) work on social exchange theory also contains some important components that pertain to this thesis as he took into consideration social structures and how actors use microeconomic reasoning during social exchanges.

Utilitarianism and the reciprocal exchange of extrinsic benefits

Cook et al. (2013) described Peter Blau as one of the first exchange theorists to apply economical utilitarianism to social behavior and he was the first to create a social exchange framework that connected micro-sociological exchanges with macro-sociological exchanges. Although utilitarianism is philosophical in nature, Blau used it to create the idea that actors act in terms of their anticipated rewards that benefit them. Simply put, and contrary to Homans (1958) actors are forward looking and they will choose alternative courses of action that maximize their benefits (Blau, 1964; Cook et al., 2013). One of the main premises made by Blau (1964) is that all social exchanges involve a reciprocal exchange of extrinsic benefits which he argued shapes the social structures that persons interact within. He also argued that the actions of actors are voluntary and
influenced by the returns they are expected to bring from others. Put differently, other persons provide an actor with something of value and in turn, the actor is expected to utilize that “something of value” in a way that fits the expectations affiliated with it. This creates a sense of obligation, albeit that obligation is not initially specified (Blau, 1964). As Blau (1964) argued, reciprocal exchanges involve general expectations regarding the future returns of any given exchange but the “exact nature is not stipulated in advance” (Blau, 1986, p. 93). These propositions were then heavily applied to dependence and power, and how these shape social processes at the meso-level. Blau’s (1986) work was one of the first attempts to extend micro-level social exchange to the meso and macro-level structures that actors interact within.

Once Blau (1967, 1986) and Emerson (1976) elaborated upon the influence of power in social exchanges, subsequent work on SET focused heavily on power and its influences. “The connection between the use of power and the structure of social networks became the central focus of a new generation of social exchange theorists” (Cook et al. 2013, p. 65). Since then, power, status, fairness, commitment, emotions, relational cohesion, solidarity, and a plethora of other concepts have been added to social exchange frameworks. This is the very reason Emerson (1976) stated that SET should not be understood as a theory but as a “frame of reference within which many theories--some micro and some macro--can speak to one another, whether in argument or in mutual support” (p. 336). But it is here this thesis withholds from describing the variable complexities which now exist within SET. They are outside the scope of this study. This thesis is concerned with how individual students perceive the costs and rewards of their educational endeavors, both inside the classroom and outside of it. Certainly, this a very a
narrow application of social exchange theory, but providing it has yet to be applied to such phenomena, this study must start somewhere. That somewhere is the original building blocks of SET offered by Homans (1958), Thibaut & Kelley (1959), and Blau (1967, 1986).

**Social exchange theory and student consumerism**

Central to Social Exchange Theory is the idea that individuals rationally evaluate the costs and rewards of social exchanges and gravitate towards activities, social situations, and social interactions that are perceived to provide them with beneficial outcomes (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959; Blau, 1964). Most social exchanges involve reciprocity and actors engage in social interactions because they provide them with something of value. Current social exchange theorists focus on dyadic social exchanges, and how social exchanges within groups and broader networks go on to shape social structures and change (Cook et al., 2013). Although important, this thesis goes back to the roots of Social Exchange Theory as advanced by Homans (1958) and Thibaut and Kelley (1959). Their theoretical perspectives focused, in part, on the psychology of individuals and their decision-making processes. Since this thesis seeks to understand student consumerism at the social psychological level, and since Social Exchange Theory has never been applied to student consumerism, it only seems right to start with the basics.

The basic premises used to explore student consumerism through Social Exchange Theory are as follows: (1) Social behavior and social interactions are shaped by the exchange of material or non-material goods and activities between actors
(Homans, 1958). With each exchange actors incur rewards and costs. The evaluation of the rewards relative to the costs formulate an actor’s perceived outcome which influences the social behaviors of actors. Actors will re-enact social behaviors and seek social exchanges that provide them with desirable outcomes (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1958; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). (2) An actor’s satisfaction regarding variable aspects of a social exchange is based on the outcomes relative to their comparison level. Comparison levels result from past experiences, can be shaped by what an actor has seen others experience, and can be influenced by idealizations (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). If an actor’s outcomes exceed their comparison level they are likely to experience satisfaction. If the outcomes fall below their comparison level they are likely to experience dissatisfaction. (3) An actor’s dependency on social exchanges is based on the outcomes relative to the comparison level for alternatives. The comparison level for alternatives is the lowest level of outcomes an actor will accept in light of available alternative opportunities (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). The continuation of social exchanges is influenced by an actor’s belief about whether or not beneficial outcomes in an exchange can be obtained alternatively. Social exchanges become disrupted when actors believe alternatives can provide similar or higher outcomes (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). When this happens actors also become less dependent on certain social exchanges, activities, or behaviors. (4) Actors are forward looking and all social exchanges involve a reciprocal exchange of extrinsic benefits (Blau, 1964). Further, the actions of actors are influenced by the returns they are expected to bring from others. This creates a sense of obligation for actors within social exchanges, albeit the general expectations regarding the future returns of any given exchange are not specified in advance (Blau, 1986). Each of these premises will be used
to explain why certain aspects of student consumerism exist and/or why it is perpetuated within higher education.

***Social exchange, commodities, and economical benefits***

A primary characteristic of student consumerism is students treating and conceptualizing their college degrees, educational services, and artefacts as purchasable commodities that should provide them with extrinsic economical benefits (Bunce et al., 2016; Hon, 2015; Laing & Laing, 2016; Saunders, 2014; White, 2007). Such economical benefits may be conceived as stronger employment opportunities, increased financial gains after college, and applicable workforce skills that help them obtain a reliable and successful career. It is argued that students entering universities or community colleges understand college as a utility that should provide them with skills and a degree that employers want (Bunce et al., 2016). Although the commodification of higher education arguably perpetuates these mentalities, it is important to understand such beliefs already exist within their psyches and worldviews. Scholars argue that these belief systems have resulted from the pervasiveness of neoliberal ideologies. Indeed, understanding how neoliberalism influences this phenomena is important, however, student consumerism should also be understood at the social psychological level. Social Exchange Theory provides a theoretical framework for doing so. By implication, understanding students perceived outcomes and the reciprocal exchange of extrinsic benefits becomes relevant.

Social Exchange Theory postulates actors seek social exchanges that provide them with beneficial outcomes. It also postulates that social exchanges involve a reciprocal exchange of extrinsic benefits and the actions of actors are influenced by
general expectations regarding the future returns of any given exchange. In the context of outcomes, students will evaluate the rewards and cost of attending college and this, in part, guides their future and current educational decisions. For example, students understand that attending college is expensive. They also understand that it is at least a four year commitment, which is not only a time commitment, but it adds to financial costs. On the contrary, they also understand the rewards affiliated with college. They believe that if they wish to obtain a ‘good’ job and acquire the skills to do so, they must attend and graduate from college. A “good” job to many students is a reward. Since a job is affiliated with stronger financial opportunities, this too can be perceived as a reward. Outside of the economical benefits, students may see college as an opportunity to meet new people, gain independence, foster new experiences, and to partake in activities not offered outside of college. These can also be conceptualized as rewards. Given the increases in college enrollment (Long, 2014) students, theoretically, find the rewards of college to be more salient than the cost. Therefore, college endeavors are perceived to be a beneficial outcome. Since actors seek out social exchanges that provide them with beneficial outcomes and extrinsic benefits with valuable future returns, students gravitate towards higher educational endeavors regardless of the cost.

Alternatively, some persons never attend college, start college but never finish, or choose alternative routes such as trade school. With spikes in tuition costs, this leaves many persons, primarily those of lower socioeconomic status, with less educational opportunities. Even if they understand the benefits of college, theoretically, the cost becomes more salient than the rewards, hence gravitating them away from educational
endeavors. Furthermore, the very thought of embarking in further schooling can become a cost that trumps the rewards for certain populations.

The latter examples exemplify the subjectivity of human actors, indicating that “beneficial outcomes” vary from person to person and are greatly influenced by social processes, social structures, and personal experiences. However, American culture greatly emphasizes the importance of a college education, specifically the economic opportunities it provides. This influences decision-making processes. When persons are forward looking and in pursuit of valued extrinsic benefits, college and all of its intricacies provides persons with beneficial outcomes. Arguably, beneficial outcomes are not typically conceptualized as cultivating knowledge nor a willingness to advance intellect. These can optimistically be perceived as supplemental intrinsic rewards. In the context of student consumerism however, the meaning of “beneficial outcomes” is rooted in economic rationalities. Degrees, educational services, artefacts and persons are seen as commodities because students are exchanging money and time with a general expectation that higher education institutions will reciprocate by providing them with extrinsic economical benefits. If the social exchange--between student and institution--were to not reciprocate such benefits, students may be less inclined to attend college.

Social exchange and student satisfaction

Another primary characteristic of student consumerism is student satisfaction. Scholars argue that student satisfaction has become more important to institutions, teachers, and students than learning. At the institutional level, colleges and universities rely on student tuition. If students become dissatisfied with their educational endeavors
this can have detrimental impacts on an institution's financial gains. Inside the classroom, it is suggested that students emphasize a need for good grades, prefer classes that lack rigorous coursework, believe that courses should be convenient, comfortable, and provide them with skills that can be applied directly to their future jobs (Bunce et al., 2016, Saunders, 2014). Additionally, faculty members should keep students entertained and it is the responsibility of instructors or professors to hold students’ attention (White, 2007). All of these examples go on to shape whether or not students are satisfied. Although these arguably contain some truth, for the most part they are anecdotal claims. By applying Social Exchange Theory, student satisfaction and those things that garner it, can be understood empirically and at the social psychological level.

Thibaut & Kelley (1959) suggested that actors become satisfied with social exchanges when their outcomes are more salient than their comparison levels. When outcomes fall below comparison levels actors become dissatisfied. By implication, perceived beneficial outcomes result when a actor finds the rewards, relative to the costs, as more salient. Given students prefer receiving good grades, a good grade can be conceptualized as a reward. Students, oftentimes, do not prefer rigorous coursework (Saunders, 2014). Rigorous coursework involves ample amounts of study time, the material can be challenging and invoke feelings of uncomfortableness (Harrison & Risler, 2015), and it can lead to worse grade outcomes. These can be conceptualized as costs. When evaluating these costs against the rewards, a student will conceive a subjective outcome. Additionally, they hold a comparison level which is described as a reference point for what an actor perceives they deserve. Comparison levels are fostered from past experiences, what an actor has seen others experience or obtain, and they are influenced
by idealization (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). A student's comparison level may be the expectation of a “good” grade without regards to the effort necessary for obtaining it. Again, any time a student's outcome falls below their comparison level they will become dissatisfied. So if a student gets a “C” on their exam, and their comparison level was set at a “B” or “A”, their CL goes unmet and in turn dissatisfaction occurs. Although this may seem straightforward or obvious, the need to keep students satisfied complicates how their CL’s are set, which further complicates their social behavior and willingness to partake in certain social exchanges.

As previously mentioned, institutions rely on students for tuition. When neoliberal ideologies gained momentum in the U.S, public universities and colleges had to battle declines in government funding (Saunders, 2014). Hence, most higher education institutions turned to increasing tuition to counteract the declines. Today, this still holds true and higher education institution do all they can to increase enrollment numbers, alumni donations, government support, or funding through private sectors. In the context of student consumerism, student satisfaction is suggested to increase graduation rates, enrollment numbers, alumni donations, and “better” graduates (Serenko, 2011). If students and alumni become dissatisfied with their institution it can hurt their reputation and impact their financial gains. At the meso-level, this arguably coerces institutions to become more dependent on students than students are on it.

According to Thibaut & Kelley (1959) dependence is a product of outcomes relative to comparison levels for alternatives. At the micro-level students depend on their universities for resources and valued extrinsic benefits which influence student actions. However, students can always seek out alternatives. They can attend other universities,
and within the university, they can seek out other courses, teachers, or degree programs that provide them with beneficial outcomes. When students believe alternatives can provide similar or higher outcomes they become less dependent on certain social exchanges, activities, or behaviors. The less dependence any actor has on social exchanges the more power they hold (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959; Blau, 1967, 1986; Emerson, 1976). In the context of student consumerism, students indeed hold substantial power over their institutions as they are equipped with vast amounts of alternatives that provide equally beneficial returns, while institutions remain very dependent on students and their satisfaction because their alternatives for fostering money are limited. Hence, at the meso-level, institutions are coerced to prioritize student satisfaction regardless of the impacts it may have on student learning, faculty members’ pedagogies, or other educational processes.

In the context of micro-level student exchanges, this dependence-power relation complicates learning and student-faculty relations because faculty members may feel inclined to keep students happy even if learning processes suffer. The idea that students are less dependent on any particular exchange, and the idea that they will seek out alternatives with higher valued outcomes such as good grades, entertaining teachers, courses with minimal work, or courses with instrumental learning processes that promote practical workforce skills, perpetuates the values, beliefs, attitudes and normalized behavior inherent to student consumerism. It also perpetuates another component of student consumerism; students willingness to make demands.

*Social exchange and student demands*
Another characteristic of student consumerism is the idea that students are more willing to make demands of their institutions and the educational processes that exist within it (Bunce et al., 2016; Hon, 2015; Smith, 2000). Since students pay tuition and institutions strive for their satisfaction, if students do not obtain outcomes they feel they should, they are willing to voice their thoughts about it and engage in bargaining tactics that can provide them with what they feel they are entitled to (Smith, 2000; White 2007). For example, if students do not receive the grade they want, they are more willing to demand that the teacher supplies it to them (White, 2007). Even in my own classroom experiences as a teacher, students enjoy trying to change course guidelines, assignments or exams, so that they receive beneficial outcomes such as easier exams and better grades. Under student consumerism, students believe they have a right to make demands just as any customer or consumer does in the market. When evaluating this through social exchange theory students are willing to make demands because (1) they are in pursuit of beneficial outcomes and take actions that provide them with such outcomes; (2) if their outcomes fall below their CL they become dissatisfied; (3) given satisfaction is important and they can seek out alternatives that provide them with better personal outcomes, students contain a level of power that allows them to voice their demands. Lastly, (4) social exchanges involve a reciprocal exchange of extrinsic benefits. Therefore, if a student has paid for their class, they may expect an extrinsic benefit such as passing the class or a good grade, regardless of what was done to obtain it. Hence, students make demands because they seek beneficial outcomes, satisfaction, a reciprocal exchange of returns, and they hold a level of power that allows them to make demands.
Chapter Three

Methods

Design and Population

This study took a quantitative approach to understanding student consumerism. The study was primarily exploratory as it sought to better understand (1) the prevalence of student consumerism and (2) if there is a relationship between student-consumer orientations and the rewards and costs of academic and non-academic social exchanges or activities. The administration of an electronic survey was the mode of data collection. The survey was distributed to faculty members teaching introductory sociology and anthropology courses at a public university. This was done because such introductory courses are required prerequisites for educational programs thereby allowing this study to capture participants from a variety of degree programs. Professors then distributed the survey, via email, to the students in their classes.

The site of the study was a public university. It is one of fourteen state universities and has the third-largest public university operating-budget in the state. The public university is populated by approximately 23,000 students from 46 different states and 82 different countries. This university also has a medical school and law school, and it is highly recognized for their engineering programs.

Using a sample from this university population, I examined two primary hypotheses: (1) student consumer attitudes will be positively associated with social exchanges high in non-academic type rewards, and (2) student consumer attitudes will be negatively associated with social exchanges or activities incurring academic costs.
Measures

Independent variable

In this study, “student consumer attitudes” served as the independent variable. The questionnaire contained a multitude of items that measured the extent of consumer orientations. Theoretically, no one item could serve as the independent variable because the construct of student consumerism is complex, containing many characteristics (Saunders, 2014). Moreover, depending on the participant, some of these characteristics may be more prevalent. For example, a student may strongly agree that they make academic decisions based on career prospects but simultaneously disagree that they have a right to make demands regarding academic decisions because they pay tuition. Both are characteristics of a consumer orientation but one--career prospect--can be more common to their ideology than the other. Therefore, the independent variable “student consumer attitudes” was measured as a sum score of 25-items. Higher scores represented higher student consumer attitudes.

Many of the items in the student consumerism inventory were developed from recent studies that discussed student consumerism, or how students act as customers in the context of higher education (Bunce et al., 2016; Delucchi & Korgen, 2002; Harrison & Risler, 2015; Hon, 2015; Laing & Laing, 2016; Saunders, 2014; White, 2007). The survey items used in this study can be categorized into four general student consumer characteristics:

- Students emphasizing grade goals as opposed to learning.
● Students who make academic decisions based on career prospects and emphasize the economic returns of college.

● Students who believe the college endeavor should be convenient, comfortable, and satisfying.

● Students who feel they have a right to make demands regarding academic decisions because they pay tuition.

The literature on student consumerism indicates that students are greatly concerned about receiving good grades and that learning processes are of less concern (Bunce et al., 2016; Saunders, 2014). The literature also suggests students prefer easy courses because good grades are more accessible (Delucchi & Korgen, 2002). To test these claims the following items were used in the survey: “Professors should offer some courses that are easy “A’s,” “Professors should avoid harming students’ GPA with bad grades,” and “Receiving a good grade is more important than the process of learning.”

The questionnaire also contained items that explored economic student consumer attitudes. As mentioned in the literature review, many students attend college for its economic benefits and students choose majors based on career prospects (Bunce et al., 2016; Giroux, 2010; Saunders, 2014). To explore these claims the following items were used in the survey: Obtaining a degree is important because they are economically advantageous; I would not attend college if I could earn a good salary without attending; Career prospect is an important factor when choosing a major; Career service from universities, which guides students through the process of finding a job, is more important than learning in the classroom.
In the context of student consumerism, scholars have argued that students believe the college endeavor should be convenient, comfortable, and satisfying (Bunce et al., 2016; Hon, 2015). To test these student consumer attitudes, the study incorporated statements such as “College classes should keep students entertained,” “College should be a comfortable experience,” “Students should feel happy while attending college,” and “A primary concern for universities should be student satisfaction.”

Lastly, scholars have noted that in the “age of student consumerism” students are more willing to make demands about their grades, how lectures should be structured or taught, and any other factors that pertain to students’ educational endeavors and outcomes (Bunce et al., 2016; Hon, 2015; Smith, 2000). This study explored the latter student consumer attitudes through the following items: In general, if a student’s tuition is paid they should have a say in how their grades turn out; All students have the right to change how classes are taught if they don’t believe it is being done well; If the school were to cover tuition costs, students have less of a right to make demands about how classes are conducted. The latter statement was added to the inventory because, again, current literature has claimed that students feel they can make demands because they are paying tuition (Bunce et al., 2016; Hon, 2015; Smith, 2000). Therefore, I found it pertinent to see if students still felt they had a right to make demands even though their university covered their tuition and the students, in turn, would not be characterizing themselves as “paying customers.”

In total there were 25 survey items used to explore student consumer attitudes. A 5 point-Likert scale was used to gage student’s level of agreeance regarding each item/statement. The categories of responses were 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 =
Neutral, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly agree. Providing a response indicative of neutrality was important for this scale (see Appendix A). According to Dillman, Smyth, and Christian (2008) providing “neutral” as a middle response is a better fit, categorically, for this type of scale because it shows a respondent neither agrees nor disagrees. Whereas, if the midpoint was “unsure” it wouldn’t be indicative of a level of agreement, rather, it becomes its own distinct category.

**Dependent variables**

Before discussing the dependent variables it is important to note, that in the context of Social Exchange Theory, “rewards,” “costs,” and what may be considered a “positive personal outcome” are purely subjective; whereby no one actor will perceive them the same way. However, in order to operationalize the dependent variables for this study, all attribute variables were designated to a construct based on (1) how “rewards” and “costs” have been defined in social exchange frameworks and (2) what literature on student consumerism has implied about current student ideologies regarding the higher educational endeavor.

*The reward construct*

One of the dependent variables in this study was the reward construct. In the context of a social exchange framework, rewards are considered the pleasures, gratifications and satisfactions an actor receives during interactions (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). To align this definition with student consumer ideologies, I built the reward construct by considering all non-academic social exchanges to be “rewarding” as
opposed to costly. Non-academic rewards were considered hanging out with friends or engaging in other social activities, working a job, attending sporting events, and using social media. There were also items that measured student attitudes regarding taking an easy class, and cheating on a difficult test or assignment. Although these items pertained to academic activities they were conceptualized as rewarding because cheating and taking easy courses reduce certain costs, such as study time, and may lead to more favorable outcomes, such as obtaining good grades.

Based on the premise that students prefer putting forth little school effort, they would be more inclined to partake in any activity or exchange that doesn’t involve large amounts of academic effort. By implication, students may desire taking easy courses, or cheating on exams or assignments if it leads to a better grade, more time to hang out with friends, spending time on social media, attending sporting events, working a job, or any other social activities available to students. Indeed, by partaking in such activities or social exchanges, there are costs incurred. For example, if a student were to put off school work to hang out with friends, they could receive immediate gratification but they would also incur the cost of having less time to study or complete an assignment. In turn this could lead to poor academic outcomes, making it more “costly.” However, recent literature associates student consumerism with preferences for instant gratification (Arnett, 2014). Even though research has shed light on the detriments of this preference in terms of education (Bembenutty, 2012; Zimmerman, 2000), if students contain a student consumer ideology, non-academic social exchanges should be conceived as more rewarding and a catalyst for preferable “personal outcomes.” This is why hanging out with friends, working a job, attending sporting events, using social media, taking easy
classes, and engaging in other social activities were the attribute variables used to build the reward construct. The following includes a detailed account of how the variables existed in the survey.

To test student attitudes about hanging out with friends, the following items were used in the survey: On a typical school day, how unrewarding or rewarding is it to put off school work to hangout with friends? On a typical school day, how unrewarding or rewarding is it to hangout with friends instead of partaking in school work?

To test student attitudes about working a job, the following item was used: On a typical school day, how unrewarding or rewarding is it to work at your job instead of partaking in school work (If you do not work, leave this question blank.) One item in the survey explored the use of social media by inquiring: On a typical school day, how unrewarding or rewarding is it to use social media instead of partaking in school work? Two items explored putting off academic activities for social activities. One item asked: In regards to a typical assignment or test, how unrewarding or rewarding is it to put forth minimal effort when it means more time for social activities? The second item asked: How unrewarding or rewarding is a class with rigorous and challenging material if it leads to less time for social activities?

Lastly, under the assumption that cheating academically is perceived as rewarding because it reduces costs such as time needed to study, one item asked: Considering a homework assignment or test is very difficult, how unrewarding or rewarding is it to cheat in order to obtain a better grade? A 5-point Likert scale was used to gage students’ attitudes about reward items. The categories of responses were 1 = Very unrewarding, 2 = Unrewarding, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Rewarding, and 5 = Very rewarding. In sum, the
previously mentioned items were utilized to explore non-academic social exchanges or activities that could be perceived as rewarding (reward construct).

*The cost construct*

The second dependent variable (cost construct) was a construct built upon attributes characterized by activities and social exchanges involving academic type costs. Academic type costs were considered attending class, studying, thinking critically, engaging in rigorous or challenging material, learning, challenging previous built knowledge, completing difficult assignments, reading academic material, and writing academic papers. Given all of these activities can require time foregone from social opportunities, the cost construct was rooted in the idea that maximizing social opportunities is more rewarding than partaking in academic activities that impede on social opportunities. Albeit, it is important to note that some, or perhaps all, academic activities can or do involve social opportunities.

As outlined in Chapter 2, “costs” can be described as aversive stimuli, opportunities and rewards foregone, or any other factors working to discourage the performance of certain behaviors (Homans, 1958; Thibaut & Kelley, 1967). Using this definition I then took into consideration student consumerism and any of its characteristics that academics have described as impacting student learning processes and ideologies within higher education. For example, Fairchild (2007) argued students are more interested in entertaining classes, are more willing to attempt altering teaching pedagogies through student demands, and prefer putting forth little school effort while expecting positive feedback and results. I conceptualized “school effort” as a student's
engagement with academic activities such as studying, completing assignments, reading academic material, and writing academic papers. As previously mentioned I took such conceptualizations about student consumerism and paired them with Social Exchange Theory’s definition of “costs” to build the construct. By implication, studying can become an aversive stimulus and it involves foregoing other opportunities and rewards such as social activities. Hence, it can be interpreted as a cost. Since it is argued that students prefer putting forth little school effort, school efforts can be conceptualized as “costly” to students in the sense that they may wish to avoid them (even though it, oftentimes, leads to greater academic outcomes). For this study, studying was not considered a “reward” because of the actual costs it incurs and its alignment with student consumer ideologies.

Attending class

The first inventory item used to capture a “costly” social exchange referred to how unrewarding or rewarding it was for participants to attend class. This was measured by asking: How unrewarding or rewarding is attending class? A 5-point Likert scale was used to capture this attitude: 1 = Very unrewarding, 2 = Unrewarding, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Rewarding, and 5 = Very unrewarding.

Studying, completing difficult assignments, reading, and writing

Utilizing the previously mentioned 5-point Likert scale, five inventory items were used to capture “costly” academic activities that exist outside of time spent in the classroom. One item referred to how unrewarding or rewarding studying was by asking:
How unrewarding or rewarding is studying? A second item measured attitudes regarding the completion of difficult assignments. This was measured by: Considering a homework assignment is very difficult, how unrewarding or rewarding is the process needed to complete it? A third item sought participant attitudes regarding external class readings by asking: Considering you need to read a chapter out of your textbook, outside of class, how unrewarding or rewarding is reading the chapter? Two items were utilized to measure attitudes about writing academic papers: Considering you have a 5 page paper to write, how unrewarding or rewarding is writing the paper? The following item asked: Considering you have a 10 page paper to write, how unrewarding or rewarding is writing the paper? Two writing variables were used because although a 5 page paper incurs costs, writing a 10 page paper incurs greater costs, such as more writing time. When I pre-tested the survey, each item incurred varying responses. Therefore, I found it necessary to keep both items as they hint to different rationalities regarding participants reward/cost perceptions.

Learning

Learning, in the most general sense, refers to the acquisition of knowledge or skills through experience, study or being taught. Research has suggested that learning can be supplemented by providing students with rigorous and challenging course material (Harrison & Risler, 2015; Saunders, 2014), challenging students previously built knowledge (Saunders, 2014), and getting them to think critically (Saunders, 2014). At the same time, studies have indicated that learning in general can be uncomfortable (Harrison & Risler, 2015), and the previously stated factors (rigorous/challenging course material,
challenging previously built knowledge, thinking critically) can make it all the more unpleasant (Saunders, 2014). Therefore, I conceptualized learning, and the three factors suggested to supplement learning, as costs due to their capacity to become an unpleasant event and because they require foregoing time that could be spent on other rewarding activities such as maximizing social activities.

The survey items that related to the theme of learning were: How unrewarding or rewarding is learning? How unrewarding or rewarding is taking a class with rigorous and challenging material if it leads to less time for social activities? How unrewarding or rewarding is it to take a class that makes you think critically? How unrewarding or rewarding is challenging previous built knowledge? A 5-point Likert scale was used with categories ranging from 1 = Very unrewarding, 2 = Unrewarding, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Rewarding and 5 = Very rewarding.

**Demographic variables**

In the social sciences it is important to consider numerous factors when attempting to explain social relationships. Therefore, in addition to student consumerism, demographic variables such as biological sex, race/ethnicity, parents’ education, age, GPA, college affiliation, and how students covered tuition were independent variables to explore during hypotheses testing. The following is a brief discussion on why these variables were explored and how they appeared in the survey.

Biological sex and/or gender are important factors when explaining human social behavior. Gender ideologies are important social constructs that greatly influence social processes and how persons behave in specific social contexts. For example, in the context
of higher education females typically perform better academically, and they have higher enrollment and graduation rates compared to males (Jacobs, 2002; King, 2000; Naylor & Smith, 2007). Since this study was exploring students’ values, beliefs, and behaviors regarding academic and non-academic social exchanges or activities, biological sex was an important factor to include as an independent variable. In the survey, biological sex was retrieved by asking: What is your sex? Respondents could click either “Male” or “Female.” Biological sex was also recoded into a dummy variable where Male = 1 and Female = 0.

Race and ethnicity are also integral social constructs that social scientists explore. Just as gender influences diverse human social behavior, so do racial constructs and ethnic backgrounds. Therefore, this study included race/ethnicity as an independent variable. Race/ethnicity was retrieved by using the following item: What racial/ethnic group do you consider yourself part of? Respondents could choose from the following: African/African American/Black; Asian/Asian American; Latin American/Latino/Hispanic; Middle Easterner/Arab American; South Asian/South Asian American; White/Caucasian. Respondents could also write in their affiliated race/ethnic group if it was listed in the available options.

Parents education was considered important because first-generation students, as compared to second-generation students, fare worse in terms of academic achievement and are less likely to graduate college (Covarrubias, Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, & Johnson, 2012; Pike & Kuh, 2005). Hence, this demographic was explored through two items: What is the highest degree your mother has? And what is the highest degree your father has? Each item made the following options available: Graduated High
School/GED; Some college, technical school or associate's degree; Undergraduate degree; Graduate degree.

Age and GPA were also retrieved in this study. Age was explored by asking “what is your age.” GPA was explored because arguably, students with higher GPAs may be more likely to engage in academic studies. Therefore, GPA could be associated with social exchanges or activities involving academic and non-academic type rewards/costs, and was utilized as an additional independent variable. GPA was explored by asking “What is your estimated GPA?” and respondents typed in their estimated GPA.

The last two demographics retrieved in this study were college affiliation and how students paid tuition. College affiliation was explored because recent literature on student consumerism has shown that students studying “Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics” have higher student-consumer orientations compared to other majors (Bunce et al., 2016). Therefore, a demographic item in this survey asked: What college are you affiliated with or anticipate to be a part of? Respondents could choose from the following options: Arts and Letters, Business and Innovation, Education, Engineering, Health and Human Services, Law, Medicine and Life Sciences, Natural Sciences and Mathematics, Nursing, or Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences. Payment of tuition was explored using the item: Please check all that apply for how your college tuition is paid: Full scholarship; partial scholarship with help from parents (or other family members); partial scholarship, student loans; partial scholarship, pay my own way; paid by parents (or other family members); student loans and help from parents (or other family members); paid through my own funds; other, whereby respondents could type in
another payment method. The following section includes an in-depth discussion on the explored hypotheses in this study.

**Hypotheses**

This study explores the relationship between student consumerism and students reward and cost attitudes in relation to academic and non-academic social exchanges and activities. This study argues that students with high consumer orientations will be more likely to seek out social exchanges or activities high in non-academic rewards while being less inclined to partake in educational activities or exchanges that incur academic costs. This study empirically explores this idea by testing two hypotheses: (1) Student consumer attitudes will be positively associated with social exchanges high in non-academic rewards; (2) Student consumer attitudes will be negatively associated with activities incurring academic type cost. The rationale for each hypothesis is explained below.

**H1: Student consumerist attitudes will be positively associated with social exchanges high in non-academic rewards.**

The main premise of Social Exchange Theory is that actors evaluate the rewards and cost of social exchanges and choose social exchanges or activities that provide them with the best possible outcomes. Therefore, I argue that students with high consumer attitudes will, more often than not, gravitate towards and partake in social exchanges that have valuable non-academic rewards. Non-academic rewards may be conceptualized as hanging out with friends, attending sporting events, using social media, or any other
activities or social exchanges that do not involve academic work or exchanges. If a student has a high consumerist attitude they will more likely perceive college as a commodity, whereby their purpose is not to focus on learning, but rather jump through the hoops to gain their degree and a job afterwards. Although grades are important to them, the processes of learning and the activities involved for receiving good grades will be less appealing. They will not want to partake in rigorous coursework nor spend ample amounts of time studying, reading, writing, or completing homework as they would perceive these as costly. The value of learning, critical thinking, and challenging previously built knowledge will be minimal while the value of getting a good job and a degree that is economically advantageous will be high. If a student has high consumerist attitudes they will more likely believe that college classes should keep them entertained, that college should be a comfortable and convenient experience, and that universities should be focused on their satisfaction. If the student pays tuition, they will believe they should have a right to voice demands, and have a stake in how classes are taught and how their grades turn out. Again, when a student is consumer-oriented academic activities inside the classroom and outside of it are not perceived as rewarding. They are perceived as costs that must be incurred to obtain their end goal--a degree and career. Since actors seek social exchanges and activities that provide the best personable outcomes with minimal costs, consumer-oriented students will shy away from intrinsic academic activities and exchanges, and they will seek out non-academic social exchanges because these are perceived to be immediately gratifying, rewarding, and they provide them with more preferable outcomes. Hence, the second hypothesis of this study is:


**H2: Student consumerist attitudes will be negatively associated with activities incurring academic type cost.**

In this study academic costs are considered attending class, studying, thinking critically, taking a class with rigorous or challenging material, completing difficult assignments, reading textbook chapters, writing 5 or 10 page papers, or engaging in any other school work related activities that take time away from social activities. Indeed, any of the latter costs could be considered rewarding and oftentimes are rewarding when they lead to academic successes. However, in the context of Social Exchange Theory and student consumerism they align with costs. Costs are defined as aversive stimuli, opportunities and rewards foregone, or any other factors working to discourage the performance of certain behaviors. Not only do the latter examples attribute to opportunities or other rewards being foregone, many of them can turn into aversive stimuli as they can be challenging, uncomfortable, or greatly disliked. Additionally, all of them can turn into factors that discourage the performance of academic behaviors. I would argue that if these very costs were never perceived as costly, the relatively high percentage of drop-out rates amongst many universities would greatly decline. However, providing that student consumer orientations are prevalent across colleges and universities, it only exacerbates the problem because many of the costs are affiliated with what scholars consider the intrinsic benefits of higher education. Unfortunately, if students have consumerist attitudes, they are likely to find more value in the extrinsic benefits and hence, such intrinsic benefits are, again, perceived as costs. Theoretically,
this is the very reason student consumer attitudes will be negatively associated with activities incurring academic costs.

**Survey Development**

This was a cross-sectional and non-randomized study. An online questionnaire was sent via email to professors teaching nine different “Introduction to Sociology” and “Cultural Anthropology” courses at a public midwestern university. The questionnaire link led students to SurveyGizmo. This was the online survey platform used to administer the questionnaire and collect participant responses. With the professors help, 1200 questionnaires were sent out to undergraduate students. Each questionnaire took approximately 20 minutes to complete. In the first two weeks few responses were returned. After the initial two weeks, follow up emails were sent over the course of another two weeks.

The study received clearance from the Institutional Review Board and information forms were provided to the students who participated. There was minimal risk for participating in the study. All participation was voluntary and refusal to participate carried no penalty nor loss of benefits to the students. All participants were informed of their rights to discontinue the questionnaire at any time without penalty. Each student was also informed that if they discontinued their participation, any information already completed may still be used in the study. All students were reminded that their identity as a participant was completely anonymous, and all data returned to the researchers was done so without identifiers. The data collected was password protected and only viewable by the researchers.
As previously mentioned, the survey for this study was built and administered through SurveyGizmo. Students clicked the link provided in their email which then led them to the survey items. From there, students were free to select answers that they felt best suited their attitude towards any particular item. These were then saved in the software and later used for data analysis. The questionnaire contained four sections, which measured student consumer attitudes, academic entitlement orientations, reward/cost perceptions, and demographics. Although this study did not focus on academic entitlement orientations, the survey still had a section dedicated to it for future research endeavors.

The study proposed to explore the prevalence of student consumerism and its association with how students perceive non-academic type rewards and academic type costs. In addition, the study explored demographic variables and their associations to the reward and cost constructs.

**Data Analysis**

To test the hypotheses of this study three constructs were created using confirmatory factor analyses. Since student consumerism is a complex construct that consists of varying student consumer attitudes (Saunders, 2015), a “student consumerism construct” was built by performing a factor analysis on 22 student consumer items. A factor analysis was also performed on 21 survey items that tested students reward/cost perceptions regarding non-academic and academic social exchanges or activities. A “reward construct” and a “cost construct” were built based on the factor analysis of the 21 reward/cost items.
The following factor analysis processes were used to build the three constructs. Using SPSS, and the principal components method, factors were extracted and retained using the Kaiser criterion, whereby eigenvalues greater than 1 were retained, and by examining the scree plot. Factors that explained less than 15% of the variance in the observed variables were discarded. Factor loadings were examined to determine which variables had the strongest correlation within the retained factors. Variables loading .5 or higher were considered meaningful loadings and then used to build the scales. Reliability tests were then conducted to test the reliability of the new scales. A Cronbach Alpha of .7 was used to determine which scales were reliable and which should be eliminated. Additionally, item-total statistics were examined to determine if items in the scale should be removed to improve the reliability. When items were removed, another factor analysis was conducted on the new scale, and the previously mentioned processes were repeated. The new scales were then computed into composite measures by taking the sum score of the items existing in each scale. An average score was then produced to create each construct. Hence, each construct was based on average response scores across multiple items. The constructs created were (1) student consumerism, (2) reward construct, and (3) cost construct.

To test the association between student consumer attitudes (student consumerism) and social exchanges or activities involving non-academic rewards (reward construct) a multiple regression was ran. Although student consumerism was the primary independent variable, demographic variables such as biological sex, age, and GPA were also included as independent variables. Multiple regression was used because it indicates what kind of relationship exist between multiple independent variables and a dependent variable,
which in this regression was the reward construct. Therefore, multiple regression was ran to explore how student consumerism, biological sex, age, and GPA affected the reward construct. Put differently, the regression was testing what kind of effect student consumer attitudes, biological sex, age, and GPA would have on students wanting to partake in social exchanges or activities involving non-academic type rewards.

Another multiple regression was ran to test the association between student consumer attitudes and social exchanges or activities involving academic type costs (cost construct). Student consumerism was the independent variable of interest, however, biological sex, age, and GPA were also included as independent variables. The dependent variable in this regression was the cost construct. In essence, a multiple regression was used to explore what kind of effect student consumer attitudes, biological sex, age, and GPA would have on students willingness to partake in social exchanges or activities involving academic costs.
Chapter 4

Results

This study used multiple regression to analyze two hypotheses. Data were collected through an online survey and SPSS—a statistical software package—was used to perform the multiple regressions. 79 students responded to the survey \( (n = 79) \).

Approximately 1200 surveys were sent out and with only 79 responses, the response rate was very low; 6.6%. This chapter focuses on the data results of (1) demographic frequencies, (2) student consumer attitudes, and (3) the multiple regressions used for hypotheses testing.

Demographics

Numerous demographic variables were explored in this study. The average age of respondents was 19.6; 12.7% of respondents were male \( (n = 10) \) and 49.4% were female \( (n = 39) \). Thirty participants did not respond to the biological sex item (See Table 4.1 and Table 4.2).

Table 4.1 Frequency distribution of Age

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Table 4.2 Frequency distribution of Sex

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</tbody>
</table>

This study also collected demographics on racial/ethnic groups, affiliated college, degrees held by parents, estimated GPA, and how tuition was paid. Participant data indicated 53.2% of participants were White/Caucasian (non-Hispanic). All other race/ethnicity responses contained frequencies of 3 or less and 30 participants did not respond. Table 4.3 shows the racial/ethnic group distribution of participants.

Regarding participants affiliated college, 12.7% of the participants were affiliated with the College of Health and Humans Services, and 8.9% were affiliated with The College of Business and Innovation, Nursing, or Arts and Letters. Approximately 6% of participants were affiliated with the College of Engineering. Participants were affiliated with several other colleges as well, although to a small extent. Refer to Table 4.4 for the college affiliation frequencies for all participants.

Table 4.3 Frequency Distribution of Race/Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White/Caucasian</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>53.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin American/Latino/Hispanic</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>03.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>05.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>37.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>79</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 4.4 Frequency Distribution of College Affiliation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health and Human Services</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business and Innovation</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>08.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>08.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts &amp; Letters</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>08.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>06.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>05.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Sciences and Mathematics</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>03.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>03.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>02.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicine and Life Sciences</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>01.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>37.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>79</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This study asked participants to report their parents’ level of education. Data on respondents’ parental degree obtainment indicated that 17.7% of mothers graduated high school or have a GED, 12.7% have an associate’s degree or have had some college and trade school experience, 15.2% have an undergraduate degree, and 13.9% of mothers have a graduate degree. 32 participants did not respond to the parents’ education item.

In regards to the education level of fathers, 11.4% graduated high school or have a GED, 22.7% have an associate’s degree or have had some college and trade school experience, 16.5% have an undergraduate degree, and 8.9% of fathers have a graduate degree. There were 32 missing responses for this item. The frequency distributions of parents’ education is outlined in Table 4.5 and 4.6.

Respondents’ reported GPA was also collected in this study and used as an independent variable in the multiple regressions. Data indicated an average GPA of 3.39. The frequency distribution of predicted GPAs is outlined in Table 4.6.
Table 4.5 Frequency Distribution of Parents’ Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mother</th>
<th></th>
<th>Father</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduated High School/GED</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College/Technical School/Associate's Degree</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>22.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate Degree</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Degree</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>08.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>40.5%</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>40.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>79</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.6 Frequency Distribution of Respondents GPA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GPA</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.60 - 2.90</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>06.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.00 - 3.50</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>26.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.60 - 3.80</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.90 - 4.00</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>41.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>79</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The last demographic collected was payment of tuition. Data indicated that 9.5% of participants paid for their tuition via scholarship. Sixty-seven percent of participants paid for their tuition with a partial scholarship and help from their parents, student loans, or in combination with their own funds. Seven percent of participants had their tuition paid by their parents or other family members, and eight percent of participants paid for their tuition through loans and some familial help. Seven percent of participants paid for their tuition through their own funds. Table 4.7 contains the frequency distribution for participants’ payment of tuition.
Table 4.7 Frequency Distribution of Payment of Tuition *(multiple items could be chosen)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Payment of Tuition</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full scholarship</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>09.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partial scholarship, help from family</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>23.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partial scholarship, student loans</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>26.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partial scholarship, paid my own way</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid by parents</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>07.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student loans, help from family</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>08.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid through own funds</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>07.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Student Consumer Attitudes**

This section focuses on the frequency results of student consumer attitudes. The mean student consumer score was 2.98 (*M* = 2.98, *SD* = .621). Interestingly, some student consumer attitudes were more prevalent than other attitudes. For example, 73.3% of students agreed or strongly agreed that college is a place to prepare students for the workforce (*M* = 3.97, *SD* = 1.12), while 78.3% of students believed degrees are important because they are economically advantageous (*M* = 4.22, *SD* = .940). Additionally, 81.7% of students agreed or strongly agreed that they chose a major based on career prospect (*M* = 3.97, *SD* = .963). These results can be found in Table 4.8.

Current research on student consumerism has emphasized that students feel they should be kept entertained, comfortable, happy, satisfied, and that college processes should be convenient (Bunce et al., 2016; White, 2007). Data results indicated that out of these characteristics, the belief that students should be happy was the most prevalent attitude (*M* = 4.16, *SD* = .922). Eight four percent of students agreed or strongly agreed
with the latter belief. The belief that student satisfaction should be a primary concern for universities was also rather prevalent as 66.1% of students agreed or strongly agreed with the satisfaction item (M = 3.79, SD = 1.04). Contrary to student consumer research, the belief that students should be kept entertained during class was moderate, with only 52% of students agreeing or strongly agreeing with this notion (M = 3.37, SD = 1.09). Data indicated that convenience (M = 3.68, SD = 1.16) and comfortableness attitudes (M = 3.61, SD = 1.21) were also moderate amongst students. These results can also be found in Table 4.8

Discussions regarding students concerns for grades and learning are common in the student consumer literature. Scholars have argued that students are no longer concerned about learning and that grade goals hold precedence over learning processes (Bunce et al., 2016; Delucchi & Korgen, 2002; Giroux, 2010). This study’s data results found the contrary. For example, 54% of students disagreed or strongly disagreed with the claim that professors should offer courses that are an easy A. In fact, only 18.6% of students agreed or strongly agreed with the claim (M = 2.54, SD = 1.16). Similarly, only 22.8% of students agreed or strongly agreed that a good grade is more important than the process of learning while 50.8% of students disagreed or strongly disagreed (M = 2.60, SD = 1.18). Perhaps the greatest contrast in the data compared to the literature was that 72.2% of students agreed or strongly agreed with the claim that students should expect to take part in rigorous coursework to receive an A (M = 3.92, SD = 1.02).

Literature on student consumerism has also indicated that since students are paying customers, they are entitled to certain educational outcomes or should have power regarding educational decisions (Bunce et al., 2016; Fairchild, 2007; Smith 2000). One
item in this study’s survey asked opinions on whether students that paid tuition should have a say in how their grades turn out; 63.8% of students strongly disagreed or disagreed with this idea and only 18.9% of students agreed or strongly agreed (M = 2.38, SD = 1.18). Responses to items such as: if the school pays tuition, students should have less of a right to make demands about courses (M = 3.02, SD = 1.21), and all students should have the right to change how courses are taught, resulted in moderate attitudes (M = 3.27, SD = 1.27). All student consumer item results can be found in Table 4.8.

Overall, and contrary to the anecdotal evidence on student consumerism, data indicated that student consumer orientations are only moderate to weak. Arguably, the strongest student consumer attitudes, or the ones that had the most prevalence, pertained to the economical benefits of educational endeavors.

**Factor Analysis**

Factor analysis results were used to create three constructs needed for hypotheses testing. To create a composite measure of student consumer attitudes 22 student consumer items underwent a factor analysis. Based on the Kaiser criterion, 7 factors were extracted, and explained 28.5%, 11.4%, 8.5%, 7.2%, 6.3%, 6.2% and 4.9% of the variance. Using the scree plot, as shown in Figure 1, there was a significant leveling off of the eigenvalues indicating a single factor solution. Arguably, a two factor solution could have been utilized as there seemed to be another leveling off of eigenvalues after factor 2. However, factor 2 only explained 11.4% of the variance which didn’t meet the 15% threshold. All eigenvalues that didn’t show 15% variance were dropped, leaving a single factor solution. The minimum coefficient used to determine if items loaded meaningfully on factor 1 was .5. As shown in table 4.8, 13 items loaded over .5.
A second factor analysis was ran on the 13 items that built the new scale. Based on the Kaiser criterion, 3 factors were extracted, and explained 41.4%, 10.8%, and 10.3% of the variance. Based on the scree plot shown in Figure 2 there was another significant leveling off of the eigenvalues, indicating a single factor solution. The minimum coefficient used to determine if items still loaded meaningfully on factor 1 was .5. The second factor analysis resulted in an elimination of two items as they loaded below .5. This left a scale that included 11 items. A reliability test was conducted on the new scale and indicated that no additional items should be eliminated from the factor. Results indicated the internal consistency of the 11 items was high (Cronbach’s Alpha = .871). In turn, the construct “student consumerism” was created by taking the average score of the 11 scaled items that showed strong internal consistency in the second factor analysis.

To create a composite measure of social exchanges or activities involving non-academic rewards and academic costs, 20 survey items underwent a factor analysis. Based on the Keiser criterion, 6 factors were extracted, and explained 23.8%, 17.6%, 12.0%, 9.3%, 6.6%, and 5.6% of the variance. Using the scree plot, as shown in Figure 2, there was a significant leveling off of the eigenvalues after factor 2, indicating a two factor solution. All eigenvalues that didn’t show 15% variance were dropped, leaving a two factor solution. The minimum coefficient used to determine if items loaded meaningfully on factor 1 and factor 2 was .5. As shown in table 4.9, 8 items loaded over .5 on factor 1 and 6 items loaded over .5 on factor 2.
Figure 1. Factor analysis scree plot on student consumer attitude items

![Scree Plot]

Table 4.8. Factor analysis pattern of items loading on factor 1 (student consumerism)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Factor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Career prospect is an important factor for choosing a major*</td>
<td>.473</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would not attend college if I could earn a good salary without attending.</td>
<td>.687</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College classes should keep students entertained.</td>
<td>.620</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professors should offer some courses that are easy &quot;A's&quot;.</td>
<td>.610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All students have the right to change how classes are taught if they don't believe it is being done well.</td>
<td>.526</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classes unrelated to a student's major should not require rigorous school work.</td>
<td>.728</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College should be a comfortable experience.</td>
<td>.739</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students should feel happy while attending college.</td>
<td>.791</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The costs of attending college should be lower.</td>
<td>.641</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A syllabi provided in class is a contract between the students and professor.*</td>
<td>.461</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A primary concern for universities should be student satisfaction.</td>
<td>.548</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students should be given a good grade as long as they focus on learning what is necessary to satisfy the requirements of the course.</td>
<td>.604</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

% of Variance = 40.61
* indicates items removed for the student consumerism construct; (Cronbach’s Alpha = .871)

A second factor analysis was ran on the 8 items loading highly on factor 1. Based on the Kaiser criterion, 2 factors were extracted that explained 38.6% and 20.3% of the
variance. Although the second factor explained over 15% of the variance, two of the items that loaded highly in factor 2 also loaded above .5 in factor 1, creating a 1 factor solution. A reliability test was conducted on the new scale and indicated that no additional items should be eliminated from the factor. Results indicated that the internal consistency of the 8 items was high (Cronbach’s Alpha = .757). In turn, the “cost construct” was created by taking the average score of the 8 scaled items that showed strong internal consistency.

A third factor analysis was ran on the 6 items loading highly on factor 2 in the original factor analysis. Based on the Kaiser criterion, one factor was extracted and it explained 52.8% of the variance. All items loaded over .5 in the factor. A reliability test was conducted on the new scale and indicated that no additional items should be eliminated from the scale. Results indicated the internal consistency of the 6 items was high (Cronbach’s Alpha = .812). Based on these results, the “reward construct” was created by taking the average score of the 6 scaled items that showed strong internal consistency.

In sum, three constructs were created: (1) student consumerism, (2) a cost construct, and (3) a reward construct. Each construct was an average score that could range from 1 to 5. As discussed below, student consumerism served as an independent variable in both hypotheses tested. The dependent variable in hypothesis 1 was the reward construct, and in hypothesis 2, the dependent variable was the cost construct.
Figure 2. Factor analysis scree plot of reward/cost survey items
Table 4.9. Factor analysis pattern of items loading on factor 1 and factor 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Factor 1</th>
<th>Factor 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How unrewarding or rewarding is attending class?</td>
<td>.693</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How unrewarding or rewarding is studying?</td>
<td>.645</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How unrewarding or rewarding is a class with rigorous and challenging material if it leads to less time for social activities?</td>
<td>.559</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How unrewarding or rewarding is learning?</td>
<td>.647</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considering a homework assignment is very difficult, how unrewarding or rewarding is the process needed to complete?</td>
<td>.649</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considering you have a 5 page paper to write for a class related to your major, how unrewarding or rewarding is writing the paper?</td>
<td>.634</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considering you have a 10 page paper to write for a class related to your major, how unrewarding or rewarding is writing the paper?</td>
<td>.602</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When you think about that the [University] has to offer you, how unrewarding or rewarding is the college endeavor?</td>
<td>.571</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considering a homework assignment or test is very difficult, how unrewarding or rewarding is it to cheat in order to obtain a better grade?</td>
<td>.683</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On a typical school day, how unrewarding or rewarding is it to put off school work to hangout with friends?</td>
<td>.691</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In regards to a typical assignment or test, how unrewarding or rewarding is it to put forth minimal effort when it means more time for social activities?</td>
<td>.560</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On a typical school day, how unrewarding or rewarding is it to put off school work to attend a sporting event?</td>
<td>.780</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On a typical school day, how unrewarding or rewarding is it to use social media instead of partaking in school work?</td>
<td>.589</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On a typical school day, how unrewarding or rewarding is it to hangout with friends instead of partaking in school work?</td>
<td>.627</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Factor 1: Cronbach’s Alpha = .757; % of Variance = 38.58
Factor 2: Cronbach’s Alpha = .812; % of Variance = 52.82

Hypothesis 1

The first hypothesis proposed student consumer attitudes (student consumerism) would be positively associated with social exchanges involving non-academic type rewards (reward construct). Biological sex, age, and GPA were added as independent variables\(^1\). The multiple regression results indicated there was not a significant

\(^1\) Ethnicity/race and parents’ education were demographic variables originally added to the model, but removed because they were not significant predictors, and overall, made the model weaker.
association between student consumer attitudes and social exchanges or activities involving non-academic rewards \((B = .334, t = 1.587, p = .121)\). Although the association was not statistically significant, the coefficient was in the hypothesized direction. Additionally, age was not significantly associated with the dependent variable \((B = .034, t = 7.08, p = .483)\). As shown in Table 4.10, the results indicated that biological sex was significantly associated with social exchanges or activities involving non-academic rewards \((B = .667, t = 2.567, p = .014)\). GPA was also a significant predictor of the reward construct \((B = .323, t = 1.788, p = .081)\). Overall, the model was a moderate predictor of the reward construct \((R^2 = .483)\) and statistically significant at the .05 level \((F = 2.962, p = .031)\).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>(B)</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Consumerism</td>
<td>.334 (.210)</td>
<td>.239</td>
<td>.457</td>
<td>3.029</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biological Sex</td>
<td>.667 (.260)**</td>
<td>.426</td>
<td>.408</td>
<td>.205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.034 (.048)</td>
<td>.110</td>
<td>2.081</td>
<td>19.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPA</td>
<td>.323 (.180)*</td>
<td>.262</td>
<td>.518</td>
<td>3.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-.952</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(R^2)</td>
<td>.483</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.10 Reward construct regressed on Student Consumerism, Biological Sex, Age, and GPA.

\(N = 44; b = \text{unstandardized regression coefficient with standard error in parentheses; Beta = standardized regression coefficient. } *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001\)
Hypothesis 2

The second hypothesis proposed student consumer attitudes (student consumerism) would be negatively associated with social exchanges involving academic type costs (cost construct). Biological sex, age, and GPA were added as independent variables\(^2\). The multiple regression results indicated there was a significant association between student consumer attitudes and social exchanges or activities involving academic costs \((B = -0.386, t = -1.794, p = .081)\), and the coefficient was in the hypothesized direction. Additionally, biological sex was significantly associated with the dependent variable \((B = -0.703, t = -2.939, p = .006)\). The results indicated that GPA was not significantly associated with social exchanges or activities involving academic costs \((B = -0.273, t = -1.652, p = .107)\). Age was also not a significant predictor of the cost construct \((B = -0.016, t = -0.364, p = .718)\). Overall, the model was a moderate predictor of the cost construct \((R^2 = .496)\) and statistically significant at the .05 level \((F = 3.102, p = .026)\).

Summary

Data on student consumerism revealed a slightly less than moderate consumer orientation amongst undergraduate students. Data revealed that economic attitudes, or the economic characteristics of student consumerism were prevalent, while concerns for good grades over learning processes were not prevalent. The multiple regression ran on hypothesis 1 indicated that biological sex and GPA were statistically significant predictors of the reward construct. The multiple regression ran on hypothesis 2 indicated

\(^2\) Ethnicity/race and parents’ education were demographic variables originally added to the model, but removed because they were not significant predictors, and overall, made the model weaker.
that student consumerism and biological sex were statistically significant predictors of the cost construct. Therefore, hypothesis 2 was accepted, indicating that student consumer attitudes are negatively associated with social exchanges or activities involving academic type costs.

Table 4.11 Cost construct regressed on Student Consumerism, Biological Sex, Age, and GPA.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Consumerism</td>
<td>-.386 (.215)</td>
<td>-.274</td>
<td>.417</td>
<td>3.909</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biological Sex</td>
<td>-.703 (.239)**</td>
<td>-.493</td>
<td>.412</td>
<td>3.059</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.016 (.044)</td>
<td>-.056</td>
<td>2.065</td>
<td>19.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPA</td>
<td>-.273 (.165)*</td>
<td>-.240</td>
<td>.517</td>
<td>3.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>6.487</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>.496</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 43; b = unstandardized regression coefficient with standard error in parentheses; Beta = standardized regression coefficient. *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001
Chapter 5

Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion

This study was conducted to explore student consumerism at the social psychological level. It was also conducted to provide empirical data on the concept of student consumerism. To this date many scholars have discussed student consumerism but most studies contain anecdotal evidence and lack empirical evidence (Fairchild, 2007; Giroux, 2010; Harrison & Risler, 2015; Laing & Laing, 2016; Smith, 2000). The few studies that have provided empirical data on student consumerism have arguably found little support for its prevalence (Bunce et al., 2016; Hon, 2015; Saunders, 2015). Regardless of the concepts legitimacy, it has become a highly discussed issue that concerns many researchers.

Oftentimes, scholars describe student consumerism as a pervasive or prevalent issue within higher education (Bunce et al., 2016; Delucchi & Korgen, 2002; Fairchild, 2007; Giroux, 2010; Harrison & Risler, 2015; Hon, 2015; Laing & Laing, 2016; Saunders, 2014, 2015; Smith, 2000). Scholars have argued that neoliberal ideologies have made their way into higher education (Saunders, 2014), transforming colleges into businesses (Giroux, 2010; Harrison & Risler, 2015; Hon 2015; White, 2006), and students into customers or consumers of their products and services (Bunce et al., 2016; Delucchi & Korgen, 2002; Fairchild, 2007; Giroux, 2010; Harrison & Risler, 2015; Hon, 2015; Laing & Laing, 2016; Saunders, 2014, 2015; Smith, 2000). This, in the most general sense, is argued to be the rise of student consumerism; whereby students now treat the educational endeavor as a business transaction. Through this transaction,
degrees, classes, grades, and other services provided by the college are perceived as consumable goods that should provide satisfactory external benefits. Particularly, they should equip students with the necessary utilities to succeed in the job market after they graduate. Scholars argue that when students conceptualize higher education this way it has detrimental impacts on student learning, student work ethic, and it diminishes the worth of the intrinsic values that higher educational institutions set out to provide (Bunce et al., 2016; Delucchi & Korgen, 2002; Fairchild, 2007; Giroux, 2010; Harrison & Risler, 2015; Hon, 2015; Laing & Laing, 2016; Saunders, 2014, 2015; Smith, 2000).

The aim of this study was to address some of the gaps that exist in the current literature on student consumerism. As previously mentioned, the concept of student consumerism needs more empirical support. Hence, one aim of this study was to find quantitative evidence of student consumerism. The second aim of this study was to foster a social psychological explanation of student consumerism. Outside of neoliberal ideologies, why do students--if they do at all--act as consumers? What social psychological mechanisms could be influencing consumer orientations? Two hypotheses were guided by such questions and Social Exchange Theory was the theoretical framework used to describe the social psychological processes that may influence student consumer attitudes. The remainder of this chapter discusses important findings, the implications of the findings, limitations, and it ends with suggestions for future research.

**Important Findings**

First, there were numerous important findings regarding (1) the prevalence of student consumerism and (2) the types of student consumer attitudes that were reported
more often. The data in this study suggested that student consumer attitudes were moderate at best \((M = 2.98)\). Similar to other empirical studies on student consumerism (Saunders, 2015), there did not seem to be a strong prevalence of student consumer orientations. Therefore, the suggested prevalence of student consumerism (Bunce et al., 2016; Delucchi & Korgen, 2002; Fairchild, 2007; Giroux, 2010; Harrison & Risler, 2015; Hon, 2015; Laing & Laing, 2016; Saunders, 2014, 2015; Smith, 2000) cannot not be supported.

Although student consumer orientations were moderate to low, data found certain student consumer characteristics were relatively prevalent. The data also contained some important results that deviate from the what the current literature says about student consumerist attitudes (Bunce et al., 2016; Delucchi & Korgen, 2002; Fairchild, 2007; Giroux, 2010; Harrison & Risler, 2015; Hon, 2015; Laing & Laing, 2016; Saunders, 2014, 2015; Smith, 2000). The most prevalent student consumer attitudes were economic in nature. For example, over 73% of students strongly agreed or agreed with the following statements: “The purpose of college is to prepare students for the workforce;” “Obtaining a degree is important because they are economically advantageous,” and “Career prospect is an important factor for choosing a major.” The latter findings indicated that the economical aspects of a “consumer orientation” are arguably highly prevalent ideologies amongst undergraduate students.

In contrast, some student consumer orientations described in the literature (Bunce et al., 2016; Delucchi & Korgen, 2002; Fairchild, 2007; Giroux, 2010; Harrison & Risler, 2015; Hon, 2015; Laing & Laing, 2016; Saunders, 2014, 2015; Smith, 2000) showed little prevalence. For example, a commonly argued student consumer attitude is that
students are more concerned about good grades and less concerned about learning (Bunce et al., 2016; Delucchi & Korgen, 2002; Fairchild, 2007; Giroux, 2010; Saunders, 2014, 2015). The literature has also argued that students seek out easy classes and prefer classes that offer easy A’s (Delucchi & Korgen, 2002). This study’s results did not support any of these claims. Eighteen percent of students agreed or strongly agreed with the item: “Professors should offer some courses that are easy A’s.” Twenty-two percent of students agreed or strongly agreed with the item: “Receiving a good grade is more important than the process of learning.” Additionally, 72.2% of students agreed or strongly agreed with the item: “Students should expect to take part in rigorous coursework to get a good grade.” The latter three findings indicated that contrary to popular belief, undergraduate students do not believe that grades are more important than the processes of learning and undergraduate students do believe that good grades are a result of hard work and should not be easily given out.

The multiple regression results of this study failed to support the first hypothesis. In the first hypothesis, a reward construct served as the dependent variable and student consumerism, biological sex, age, and GPA were the independent variables. Other demographic variables such as race/ethnicity and parent education were not included as independent variables because they made the multiple regression model significantly weaker. Although they were originally assumed to be important, data indicated otherwise.

The multiple regression did indicate that males, compared to females, were more likely to perceive non-academic social exchanges as rewarding. Non-academic social exchanges or activities perceived as rewarding in this context were: putting of school work to hang out with friends; putting forth minimal academic efforts to partake in social
activities; putting off schoolwork to attend a sporting events; using social media instead of engaging in schoolwork, and cheating academically in order to receive good grades. Although partaking in non-academic social exchanges may also be perceived as rewarding to females, the data indicated that females arguably find putting off school work, cheating, and putting forth minimal effort when it comes to their studies, as less rewarding. This would also indicate that females find it more rewarding to do well academically than males.

Additionally, GPA was a statistically significant predictor of the reward cost. Interestingly, this finding indicated that students with higher GPAs were more likely to perceive non-academic social exchanges as rewarding. Arguably, students with higher GPAs are likely to be both academically motivated, and socially motivated. Put differently, students with high GPAs are not only motivated to fulfill classroom responsibilities, but they are also motivated to partake in academic social activities such as clubs, sororities, fraternities, and non-academic social activities such as hanging out with friends or attending social events.

Contrary to the first hypothesis, the second hypothesis was supported. Multiple regression revealed that students with higher student consumer orientations were more likely to perceive academic social exchanges or activities as costly. Put differently, student consumer attitudes were negatively associated with social exchanges or activities involving academic type costs. Academic costs in this context were: attending class; studying; partaking in rigorous coursework which lead to less time for social activities; learning; completing difficult assignments; writing 5 or 10 page papers and participating in the college endeavor. Results also indicated that males, compared to females, were
more likely to perceive academic social exchanges or activities as costly. Indeed, academic costs could also be perceived as “costly” to females, however, the data results indicated that females find them less costly compared to males. Similar to the first finding regarding females finding it more rewarding to do well academically than males, this finding speaks to the same idea. In essence, the multiple regression results indicated that females are more willing to put off non-academic social exchanges or activities to engage in academic work and that females also find their academic work to be less costly and more rewarding compared to males.

In sum, the results of this study were as follows. (1) Overall, student consumerism showed little prevalence amongst undergraduate students, albeit the most prevalent student consumer attitudes were economic in nature. (2) Student consumer attitudes were not significantly associated with social exchange or activities involving non-academic type rewards but student consumer attitudes were significantly associated with social exchanges or activities involving academic type costs. (3) GPA was significantly associated with social exchanges or activities involving non-academic rewards. (4) Biological sex was significantly associated with social exchanges or activities involving non-academic type rewards and academic type costs.

Implications
Given the moderate to low student consumerism scores, this study suggests that students are not heavily consumer oriented. This study, in combination with the other empirical studies on student consumerism (Saunders, 2015), should persuade scholars to re-evaluate their conceptualizations regarding students and the concept of student
consumerism itself. Arguably, we may need to reduce the construct to a concept that contains fewer characteristics. The results showed that economic attitudes towards higher education were the strongest student consumer characteristics. Conceptualizing college as a utility for the workplace, obtaining degrees because of their economic advantages, and choosing majors based on career prospect were all prevalent attitudes that arguably fit the concept of student consumerism. However, these were only three of the twenty-two possible characteristics used to capture student consumerism. Many of the other characteristics had moderate loadings at best.

Based on this study’s results and other empirical studies on student consumerism (Bunce et al., 2016; Hon, 2015; Saunders, 2015), many of the characteristics used to describe students as consumers show diverse results. Saunders (2015) argued that this may be due to students carrying out the characteristics differently. Some students may have higher student consumer attitudes in one category while others are more consumer oriented based on a different category. Saunders (2015) also argued that students may not necessarily recognize that they are acting as consumers or customers. To academics, students may be viewed as consumer oriented but given students do not understand the ideology similarly, they would be unable to respond as consumer oriented. Such rationalities are arguably justifiable. On the contrary, academics may have biased interpretations of students. In other words, those students who act highly consumer oriented stick out more in the minds of academics, professors, or instructors, when in reality, a majority of students do not act in such ways. Outside of the bias, I would also argue that the self-fulfilling prophecy could be at play; influencing students to be “student consumers” and therefore making such expectations come true.
In the context of academic costs and non-academic rewards, this study’s results indicated gender impacts how students perceive academic costs and non-academic rewards. The multiple regression results indicated that females are more willing to put off non-academic social exchanges or activities to engage in academic work, and females also find their academic work to be less costly and more rewarding compared to males. The results were consistent with gender differences that already exist within higher education. For example, female college students perform better academically than males, they earn a greater majority of degrees each year, and females also attend college more often than males (King, 2000; Jacobs, 2002; Naylor & Smith, 2007). This research could argue that females, overall, tend to perform better in college because of their decision making processes. In the context of Social Exchange Theory, individuals evaluate the costs and rewards of social exchanges or activities and gravitate towards exchanges that are perceived to provide them with the best personal outcomes. Arguably, this data indicated that females perceive academic work as a more salient reward compared to males. Hence, females’ favorable personal outcomes, in the context of education, are rooted in those outcomes that allow them to succeed academically. Males on the other hand find academic work more costly and therefore gravitate away from those social exchanges or activities that involve academic work.

These gender implications, arguably, are constructed well before students enter college. In the context of adolescents and masculinity, males place a greater emphasis on sports, competition, or other “masculine” activities while in school (Eder, Evans & Parker, 1995). Performing well in school can be perceived by adolescent males as “not cool” and “effeminate,” while adolescent female gender roles embrace educational
success and can even foster a females “popularity” (Eder et al., 1995). Although there are many implications of how gender roles can shape a student, the point is that these gender roles that develop in the earlier stages of person's life can arguably go on to shape how they perform at the college level. Indeed, many male college students strive for academic success, but ingrained gender ideologies may persuade or dissuade students to partake in important academic activities. Further, they can shape the rewards and costs affiliated with non-academic rewards and academic costs. Hence, this study’s results reinforced, to an extent, the diversity in gender ideologies and performances that exist throughout all levels of education.

**Limitations**

This study has some limitations to address. First, the study used purposive sampling, a nonprobability sampling technique. The goal was to obtain participants (undergraduate students) from a variety of disciplines at the studied university. By sampling students enrolled in prerequisite courses, such as introductory sociology and anthropology courses, obtaining students from different disciplines seemed feasible and arguably would be more generalizable to the entire undergraduate population. Any time non-probability sampling is used, generalizability of the findings is always a limitation even if researchers have a large sample. Additionally, there was a low response rate and sample size (n = 79). Therefore, the results in this study are not representative of undergraduates at the university studied nor undergraduates in general. Since the sample size was small, the study can only be considered a pilot study. Furthermore, the data must
interpreted with caution. While the scale reliability is likely to be accurate, it is possible that a larger sample would provide different results.

Another limitation of non-probability sampling is bias. Arguably, all survey techniques contain some form of bias such as social desirability, nonresponse bias, voluntary bias or under-coverage. In particular, to this study, all of the latter biases were arguably present. The low response rate and small sample size increased chances for nonresponse bias, voluntary bias and under-coverage. The overrepresentation of females and white participants arguably exacerbated biased findings, and again, emphasizes that these results cannot be generalized to undergraduate students.

A third limitation of this study regards external validity. External validity issues often erupt in survey studies because researchers cannot control the external influences that shape participant responses. Arguably, since student consumerism is an already complex social phenomena influenced by a multitude of external social conditions, internal validity is difficult to reduce. The complexity of student consumerism does not only limit external validity, it also constrains the ability to empirically understand why student consumerism exist and whether or not it actually exists. Since the research on this concept varies from scholar to scholar, and study to study, operationalizing the components of student consumerism can be difficult. As Saunders (2014) has also noted, items and scales used in empirical studies on student consumerism may not (1) be fully embodied by students and (2) the complexity of student consumer characteristics may manifest themselves differently from one student to another. Therefore, a limitation of this study stems from the idea that some students may show strong consumer orientations related to one characteristic while other characteristics remain less salient. Hence, an
overall level of student consumerism can be difficult to discover and generalize to entire student populations because the concept itself is limited in terms of how it exists and can be expressed by students.

A fourth limitation of this study was survey length. The survey contained 75 items and it took approximately twenty minutes to complete. Existing research on survey length and participant dropout or sample size is mixed (Adams & Gale; 1982; Hoerger, 2010). For the most part however, longer surveys can impede gaining and keeping participants. Therefore, due to the length of this survey and the time needed to complete it, this should be considered another limitation of the study and its inability to capture a strong sample size.

**Future Research Directions**

This study was heavily influenced by Saunders’ (2014, 2015) work on student customer-orientations. His studies have provided comprehensive discussions on student consumerism, and he also produced a reliable measure that can be used to test the extent of customer-orientations amongst students at colleges or universities. Compared to Saunders’ (2015) study, this pilot study took a slightly different approach, both in its measure and in theory. Although this study was exploratory in nature and only served as a pilot study, it revealed interesting findings that need further exploration. Similar to Saunders’ (2015) findings, this study exemplified that many of the student consumer characteristics considered prevalent in the literature, are empirically, lacking prevalence. Put differently, academics may perceive students as being consumer oriented but students do not conceptualize themselves this way. Future studies could consider why these
conceptualizations vary, and what kind of impact these perceptions have on students inside the classroom.

Although this study was only a pilot study, the university, which the study was conducted at, could utilize the presented material to better understand how students function within their institution. As Saunders (2015) noted, students may not be heavily consumer-oriented in regards to academic ideologies. However, consumer-orientations may influence decision making processes outside of the classroom such as housing, consumption of certain university products, such as food, clothing or books, and it may influence how they decide to engage in certain university services that can help them succeed during and after college. Additionally, since this was a pilot study, it may be beneficial to reproduce the study with the hope that a larger sample can be obtained. By doing so the results could change, but it could shed light on other important findings that researchers can use to better understand how students’ social psychological processes relate to student consumerism and other academic decision-making processes.

Future studies could also evaluate other social psychological processes that impact student consumerism. This study found that student consumer attitudes, biological sex, and GPA can significantly influence academic decision making processes. How students perceive certain costs and rewards related to academic and non-academic social exchanges or activities is important for understanding why some students may succeed, while others struggle. This was only the beginning of understanding student motives in the context of student consumerism. Future studies can capitalize on the findings presented in this study and explore additional motives that influence academic behavior, values, beliefs, and norms.
Unexpectedly, this study found important gender differences that could be of benefit for future research endeavors. What do institutions, academics, instructors, and professors need to do to make academic activities and exchanges more valuable or rewarding for male students? Certainly, gender ideologies influence males’ academic decision-making processes, but in what ways can researchers and those who profess or instruct, help male students succeed as females often do? Based on this study, it is evident males do not find academic activities and exchanges as rewarding. If they do not find such activities rewarding, males will continue to seek out other exchanges that are perceived as more rewarding; perpetuating the academic gender inequalities that already exist in higher education.

One way I believe faculty can help improve males’ academic motivation is by relating their studies to competition. Based on gender roles, if male students hold competitive mentalities, which help them find motivation, I believe it is important to conceptualize such orientations for them and use it to motivate their studies. It may be important to help them understand that the job market is highly competitive, and if they wish to exceed in it, learning, studying, and becoming more engaged in their academic work will give them the necessary tools to succeed or stand out against their opponents.

Lastly, I plan to use the results of this study to further explore graduation inequalities. Not only for males, but for all students. Graduation rates across the board still need improvement. Outside of gender, there is an infinite amount of social complexities that hinder student success. With college being an expensive investment for most students, I believe academics should continue to seek solutions that can improve graduation rates so that students’ investments do not become a burden.
References


Delucchi, M. & Korgen, K. “We’re the customer—we pay the tuition”; Student consumerism among undergraduate sociology majors. Teaching Sociology, 30, 100-107.


Oliff, P., Palacios, V. Johnson, I., & Leachman, M. (2013). *Recent deep state higher education cuts may harm students and the economy for years to come*. Washington, DC: Center on Budget Policy Priorities.


Appendix A

Survey Questionnaire

Attached (next pages) is a copy of the electronic survey that was used in this study.
# Student Consumerism

1. The following series of questions ask you to tell your opinions on higher education. Please rate each of these questions on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 = "Strongly Disagree" and 5 = "Strongly Agree".

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The purpose of college is to prepare students for the workplace.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Obtaining a degree is important because they are economically</td>
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<td>advantageous.</td>
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<td>Career prospect is an important factor for choosing a major.</td>
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<td>I would not attend college if I could earn a good salary without</td>
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<td>attending.</td>
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<td>College classes should keep students entertained.</td>
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<td>In general, if a student's tuition is paid they should have a</td>
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<td>say in how their grades turn out.</td>
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<td>If the school were to cover tuition costs, students have less</td>
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<td>of a right to make demands about how classes are conducted.</td>
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<td>All students have the right to change how classes are taught if</td>
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<td>they don't believe it is being done well.</td>
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<td>Professors should offer some courses that are easy &quot;A's&quot;.</td>
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<td>Classes unrelated to a student's major should not require</td>
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<td>rigorous school work.</td>
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<td>Students should expect to take part in rigorous coursework to</td>
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<td>get a good grade.</td>
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</table>
2. The next series of questions continue to ask your opinions on higher education in general. Please rank each on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree.

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<tr>
<td>Students should be given a good grade as long as they focus on learning what is necessary to satisfy the requirements of the course.</td>
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<td>College should be a comfortable experience.</td>
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<td>Students should feel happy while attending college.</td>
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<td>Professors should avoid harming students’ GPAs with bad grades.</td>
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<td>Career service from universities, which guides students through the process of finding a job, is more important than learning classroom material.</td>
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<td>The costs of attending college should be lower.</td>
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<td>All processes affiliated with completing college should be convenient.</td>
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<td>Receiving a good grade is more important than the process of learning.</td>
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<td>A syllabi provided in class is a contract between the students and professor.</td>
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<td>Professors should adhere to their syllabi and refrain from changing them.</td>
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<td>A primary concern for universities should be student satisfaction.</td>
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3. Please rate your opinions on the following questions using a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 = "Strongly Disagree" and 5 = "Strongly Agree".

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<td>Good grades should be based more on my effort than on the content I was able to produce.</td>
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<td>I shouldn't be required to take courses that I don't like.</td>
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<td>As a student, I have the right to come late to class or leave early.</td>
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<td>If I am taking 12 credit hours per week, I should dedicate 24-36 hours to studying each week.</td>
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<td>A professor should be willing to lend me his/her course notes if I ask for them.</td>
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<td>If I have been very busy with what I think are worthwhile extracurricular activities, then I should be given an extension on assignment deadlines when needed.</td>
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<td>If I am not happy with my grade from last term, the professors should be obliged to let me do makeup work.</td>
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<td>A professor should respond to my emails with 24 hours of when they were sent.</td>
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<td>Professors who won't let me take an exam at a different time because of my personal planes (e.g. a vacation or trip that is important to me) are too strict.</td>
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<td>Sometimes professors give me lower grades than I deserve.</td>
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<td>A professor should be willing to meet with me at a time that works well for me, even if it is inconvenient for the professor.</td>
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<td>If I am given lower marks than others in my class, it usually is not my fault.</td>
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</table>
4. Please rate your opinions on the following questions using a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 = "Strongly Disagree" and 5 = "Strongly Agree".

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
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<td>If I don't do well on a test, the professor should make tests easier or curve grades.</td>
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<td>If I'm struggling in a class, the professor should approach me and offer to help.</td>
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<tr>
<td>It is the professor's responsibility to make it easy for me to succeed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professors should be responsible for capturing and holding my interest.</td>
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<tr>
<td>It is the professor's responsibility to provide me with motivation for studying in their class.</td>
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<tr>
<td>It is the professor's responsibility to inspire me to learn more.</td>
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<tr>
<td>If I cannot learn the material for a subject from lecture alone, then it is the professor's fault when I perform poorly.</td>
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<td>If I am taking 12 credit hours per week, on average, I am willing to spend no more than 15-20 hours studying per week.</td>
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</table>
5. This next series of questions asks you to consider how rewarding you find your educational experience. Please rate these questions on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 = “Very Unrewarding” and 5 “Very Rewarding”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How unrewarding or rewarding is attending class?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How unrewarding or rewarding is studying?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How unrewarding or rewarding is taking an easy class?</td>
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<td>How unrewarding or unrewarding is taking an easy class if you receive and A grade?</td>
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<td>How unrewarding or rewarding is it to take a class that makes you think critically?</td>
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<td>How unrewarding or rewarding is a class with rigorous and challenging material if it leads to less time for social activities?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How unrewarding or rewarding is learning?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How unrewarding or rewarding is challenging your previously built knowledge?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Considering a homework assignment is very difficult, how unrewarding or rewarding is the process needed to complete?</td>
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<td>Considering a homework assignment or test is very difficult, how unrewarding or rewarding is it to cheat in order to obtain a better grade?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Considering you need to read a chapter out of your textbook, outside of class, how unrewarding or rewarding is reading the chapter?</td>
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<td>Considering you have a 5 page paper to write for a class related to your major, how unrewarding or rewarding is writing the paper?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Considering you have a 10 page paper to write for a class related to your major, how unrewarding or rewarding is writing the paper?</td>
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<tr>
<td>When you think about that the University of Toledo has to offer you, how unrewarding or rewarding is the college endeavor?</td>
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<td>On a typical school day, how unrewarding or rewarding is it to put off school work to hangout with friends?</td>
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</table>
6. We are almost at the end of the survey. This next series of questions asks you to consider how rewarding you find your educational experience. Please rate these questions on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 = "Very Unrewarding" and 5 "Very Rewarding".

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<tr>
<td>In regards to a typical assignment or test, how unrewarding or rewarding is it to put forth minimal effort when it means more time for social activities?</td>
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<td>On a typical school day, how unrewarding or rewarding is it to work at your job instead of partaking in school work (If you do not work, leave this question blank.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>On a typical school day, how unrewarding or rewarding is it to hangout with friends instead of partaking in school work?</td>
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<td>On a typical school day, how unrewarding or rewarding is it to put off school work to attend a sporting event?</td>
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<td>On a typical school day, how unrewarding or rewarding is it to use social media instead of partaking in school work?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

7. What is your sex?
- Male
- Female

8. What is your age?
[ ]
9. What racial/ethnic group do you consider yourself part of?
   - African/African American/Black
   - Asian/Asian American
   - Latin American/Latino/Hispanic
   - Middle Easterner/Arab American
   - South Asian/South Asian American
   - White/Caucasian
   - Other - Write In

10. What college are you affiliated with or anticipate to be a part of?
   - Arts and Letters
   - Business and Innovation
   - Education
   - Engineering
   - Health and Human Services
   - Law
   - Medicine and Life Sciences
   - Natural Sciences and Mathematics
   - Nursing
   - Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences
11. What is the highest degree your mother has?
   - Graduated High School/GED
   - Some college, technical school or associate's degree
   - Undergraduate degree
   - Graduate degree

12. What is the highest degree your father has?
   - Graduated High School/GED
   - Some college, technical school or associate's degree
   - Undergraduate degree
   - Graduate degree

13. What is your estimated GPA?
    [Blank]