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A Gift We Can't Keep Giving: An Analysis of the Prevalence and Consequence of Educators' Unpaid Labor

Jared Martin Hanneman
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A GIFT WE CAN’T KEEP GIVING: AN ANALYSIS OF THE PREVALENCE AND CONSEQUENCE OF EDUCATORS’ UNPAID LABOR

by

JARED M. HANNEMAN

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2014
This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

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JARED M. HANNEMAN

Adviser: Professor Marnia Lazreg

Unpaid labor by educators is an important topic of social inquiry. With over half of all urban teachers leaving the profession within five years, it is of vital importance to examine the current U.S. educational system and take steps in minimizing the teacher burnout and attrition that is so costly to both students and the educational institutions. Most of the previous literature on unpaid labor focuses on domestic labor in the home rather than work performed by an employee above and beyond their ordinary contractual obligations - either by arriving early, staying late, or bringing work into the home. With over 7 million educators in the U.S., even small amounts of unpaid labor add up to very significant issues affecting the teachers, educational institutions, and the students. Education is among a class of occupations of human transformation where the work is, in principle, limitless. I am investigating a more effective method of measuring educators’ unpaid labor. National survey-based quantitative methods of measuring educators’ reported working hours have consistently underestimated the actual amount of unpaid labor being worked. I performed semi-structured interviews with a sample of primarily New York City
educators to more accurately assess the actual amounts of labor that educators are performing unpaid. I also examined the motivations and justifications educators offered to explain the significant hours of labor worked unpaid each week. Using classical and neo-classical economic theory and Marxist political economic theory to frame the phenomenon of unpaid labor was not sufficient. The theoretical perspective of gift and gift giving proved more fruitful. Educators misrecognize employer-employee labor relationships as having elements of gift relationships and frequently discussed a sense of gratitude after having been hired to their teaching positions. Educators reciprocate this misrecognized gift of employment through their performance of unpaid labor to meet their professional obligations and administrations’ expectations. The gratitude reported by educators fades over time, hastened by the structural deficiencies in the U.S. educational system. When faced with such systemic obstacles and administrative and parental performance expectations, educators frequently rationalized their unpaid labor by invoking a standard of professionalism. However, the rates of burnout and attrition among educators call into question the limits of professionalism as a practice rather than as pure ideology. Increasing occupational requirements, decreasing institutional support, and recent media accounts characterizing teachers as entitled bureaucrats that are coasting off an out-dated tenure system are poisoning the gift of an educational career. This poisoned gift de-motivates educators and contributes to increasing teacher attrition, especially among less-experienced teachers in urban school systems. With a more complete understanding of the explanations, motivations, and rationalizations of unpaid educational labor it is possible to better address educators’ work conditions and overall educational policy to increase teacher retention and effectiveness.
Acknowledgements

I owe great debts of gratitude in the course of completing this dissertation, many of which I will be repaying for years to come. Professionally, I want to thank my adviser Professor Marnia Lazreg for her tireless efforts and ceaseless expectations of theoretical rigor. Working with her was immeasurably helpful in bringing to light ideas I didn’t even recognize I’d had and improving those I did. Completing my dissertations committee were Professor Paul Attewell and Distinguished Professor Stanley Aronowitz, discussions with whom were always extremely productive and whose comments and feedback greatly improved this dissertation and gave significant insights and advice for the road ahead. My colleague in the sociology department at the Graduate Center, Cathy Borck, opened many doors to educators who participated in my research, and I’m very grateful for her assistance. Lastly, the path to a Ph.D. is long and winding, but our sociology department program secretary Rati Kashyap was always there to help me find my way through.

My family was my greatest source of support through my research and writing, and I’m very grateful for all that they’ve sacrificed. My parents were unwavering in their encouragement, even as I know they wondered what was taking so long. My children were mostly understanding of the far too many times I was locked away in the office and usually only knocked for a couple straight minutes. Each of them has been my greatest gift and hopefully our future holds no more closed doors. My wife Ali deserves my greatest appreciation of all. Without her, I’d have certainly struggled longer and harder and the work would have been the poorer for it. It’s because of her support and understanding that I was able to invest all the time required and because of her faith and vision for our family’s future that the work is done and we’re where we are today, and I’ll never be able to thank her enough.
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PART I: THEORETICAL ANALYSIS

Introduction

The educational system in the United States is flawed and rife with inequality. Numerous studies have analyzed a multitude of variables in education: studies that have focused on the comparative wealth of neighboring school districts and the outcomes on student performance, teacher retention, and graduation rates. Socioeconomic status and race are significant predictors of children’s success in education. Educational facilities, even within the same districts or geographic areas, can vary widely from brand new, with state of the art technology, to decrepit, vermin-ridden buildings, to prefabricated, temporary structures with inadequate heating and air conditioning.

Hunt and Carroll (2003) reported that in the United States over half of all elementary and secondary school teachers in urban school districts will leave the profession within five years. The teachers find themselves over-worked and inadequately prepared for the stresses and rigors of the day-to-day obligations and expectations of teaching in urban environments. This teacher burnout and attrition contributes to numerous negative consequences. They leave the profession and have to seek other employment in fields for which they did not spend four years of higher education in preparation. They will also have lost the advantage of a few years of job experience, requiring them to start again at the entry-level in a new career. In addition to the financial and career costs, there is a psychological impact as well. Teachers leaving the profession due to burnout experience disillusionment and carry with them a sense of professional failure.

The students in these schools are disadvantaged as well. An ever-rotating crop of new and inexperienced teachers leads to less-positive educational outcomes. Standardized test scores
are lower and the students are usually well-aware that their teachers are not going to be staying in the profession, leading to a classroom environment of instability – as if students are having a substitute teacher every day of the year.

Educational institutions are negatively affected as well. Administrators must perform a job search, meet and interview candidates, hire and enroll new teachers into the various systems and benefits programs, and oversee their initial years of teaching and classroom management, all of which absorbs finite time and resources. If teachers are not staying on the job, these costs in time and money are incurred year after year.

In higher education, colleges and universities are increasingly relying on contingent and adjunct labor for undergraduate instruction. Several public universities in New York are also utilizing adjunct labor to teach some masters level courses as well. This contingent labor is poorly paid, offers few if any benefits or healthcare, and is intrinsically unstable. While many adjuncts are conscientious and dedicated instructors, a great many are also inexperienced, sparsely-trained, and lack a practical knowledge of the bureaucracy and intricacies of the department, college, and university. As adjuncts come and go, so does any possibility for a stable departmental curriculum and progression. Many departments allow adjunct instructors to select their own texts and create their own syllabi – as they should – but as these instructors are changing from year-to-year, even semester-to-semester, it is too great a challenge to craft a major curriculum that builds on itself over four years of instruction. When long-term faculty members are teaching the same courses, updated for content as current events unfold, it is possible to have upper-level courses more closely reflect and build on the content of lower-level courses, which are more frequently taught by adjunct instructors. But when those lower-level courses are in a state of flux it is impractical to build on those foundations.
In Aronowitz’s (1998) “The Last Good Job in America” full-time and tenured faculty members in higher education were reported to have found their occupational responsibilities significantly changed over the most recent decades. The expectations for tenure and promotion have increased significantly, requiring many professors to dedicate increasing hours to research and publication rather than to teaching. In addition, these research, publication, and service requirements are important factors in transitioning from one grade to the next but are rarely factored significantly into the calculations that determine salary. The much-touted benefit of having one’s summers off in academia is a largely fleeting phenomenon. As salaries have stagnated, more and more full-time professors are teaching courses in the summer and winter breaks to supplement their incomes. As the summer is the time that most faculty members have increased opportunity to perform their research and the brunt of their writing, the necessity to take on additional classes can be a serious detriment to their prospects for tenure and promotion.

What all of these educators have in common, in K-12 and higher education, is the expectation and performance of unpaid labor. Elementary and secondary school teachers routinely work five, ten, twenty, thirty, or more hours unpaid each week during the school year. Most are also working many hours weekly during their “vacations” as well. In higher education, most adjunct instructors are paid only for their time spent teaching in the classroom. Any other responsibilities that go into developing and leading a course are entirely unpaid. Full-time and tenured faculty are devoting increasing number of hours each week on requirements for tenure and promotion, often at the cost of less time dedicated to teaching effective courses. Rather than examining this phenomenon of unpaid labor through a more traditional lens of political economics, labor relationships, or inequality I am utilizing the concept of the gift as a category of analysis.
Gift is both an object of study as well as a category of analysis through which we can study social phenomena. Gift is an organizing and fundamental component ubiquitously present in social relationships and premised upon perceived differences, typically manifesting as obligations, between givers and receivers. Like class, race, and gender, gift functions as a modality of social organization. Across all societies at all times, individuals are organized into a dynamic structure of mutual obligations and expectations. Where an individual is classified in the hierarchy of obligation significantly determines their class position and relative social authority. Within a gift relationship Darwin’s survival of the fittest may be more fundamentally understood as the survival of those to whom the most is owed - clout. The gift relationship is a primary way of designating relationships of power, a way of understanding who owes whom, which is well illustrated in Roy Cohn’s soliloquy from Tony Kushner’s (1993) play “Angels in America”:

… [Y]ou are hung up on words, on labels, that you believe they mean what they seem to mean. AIDS. Homosexual. Gay. Lesbian. You think these are names that tell you who someone sleeps with; they don't tell you that. No. Like all labels they tell you one thing and one thing only: where does the individual so identified fit in the food chain, in the pecking order? Not ideology or sexual taste, but something much simpler: clout... This is what a label refers to. Now to someone who does not understand this, homosexual is what I am because I have sex with men. But really this is wrong. Homosexuals are not men who sleep with other men. Homosexuals are men who in fifteen years of trying cannot pass a pissant anti-discrimination bill through city council. Homosexuals are men who know nobody and who nobody knows - who have zero clout…what I am is defined entirely by who I am. Roy Cohn is not a homosexual. Roy Cohn is a heterosexual man who fucks around with guys.

The above passage is a powerful illustration of the role that relationships of obligation play in social interaction. There are, of course, other categories of analysis that have been used to examine social relationships, such as class, race, gender, nationality, and the like, but with each
of these, there is always a remainder left over – some dimensions of social phenomena that remain incompletely or inadequately explained. This is true when using gift as an analytic lens as well, but gift allows us to uncover previously hidden aspects of inequality that remained buried when using only a class or gender lens. This theoretical undertaking has been influenced by Joan Scott’s (1986) article, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” in which she envisioned gender as a theoretical discourse to be applied to history in much the same vein as the methods of Marxism or cultural history. Gift, like gender, is a “primary way of signifying relationships of power” (Scott 1986). While not the only field, it has been up to now overlooked as a useful category of analysis for social phenomena. This is a significant gap in social theory. There is much to be uncovered through the use of gift as an analytic lens, not just in considering unpaid educational labor, but dimensions of inequality as a whole. I use the gift to show its pervasiveness and embeddedness in modern capitalist and post-industrial societies, rather than a vestigial relic left over from more primitive societies. This conceptualization of the gift has not previously been done systematically with regard to labor relationships, particularly unpaid labor. There have been numerous previous studies that have examined the question of the gift and the relationship between givers and receivers, but up to this point, those works simply tried to introduce gift as an additional variable rather than systematically using gift as a category of social analysis to examine the phenomena in question.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature on the gift and gift giving, ranging from the earliest Anthropological studies that focused primarily on pre-literate societies, to studies that examine the gift and gift giving from either an instrumental perspective or as an example of a moral economy, to studies that emphasize the concept of reciprocity and the misrecognition that is bound up in gift. Chapter 3 examines the various modalities of labor, specifically productive,
unproductive, surplus, and discretionary labor, and demonstrates the inability of any of those modalities to subsume the phenomenon of unpaid labor. Chapter 4 describes the method utilized in obtaining the data using in-depth face-to-face and telephone semi-structured interviews with educators in primary and secondary schools as well as full-time/tenured and part-time/adjunct faculty in higher educational institutions. Chapter 5 describes the phenomenon of unpaid labor as experienced by the research subjects. Unpaid labor manifested itself in different modes and intensities depending multiple factors, including the type of educational institution, the seniority of the educator, the resources available, and differences in the educators’ attitudes and perspectives to their occupational requirements, real or imagined. Chapter 6 discusses a description of the sample and compares a quantitative analysis of the respondents’ reported unpaid labor to the results obtained by large, national population surveys, including the American Community Survey and the Schools and Staffing Survey. Chapter 7, 8, and 9 are discussions of the themes and patterns observed in the interview data and an analysis of some of the consequences of the reproduction of a system of extracted unpaid labor amongst educators. Chapter 7 focuses on how educators perceive the work that they perform unpaid. Chapter 8 analyzes the educators’ motivations and justifications for working unpaid. Chapter 9 examines the structural problems and deficiencies inherent in contemporary U.S. educational institutions and strategies that educators employ to cope with systemic difficulties.

The discussion of consequences addresses the topics of how teachers are convinced to work such long hours for so little money. More pointedly, through what economic calculus does an educator determine that three months “off” per year adequately compensates for nine out of twelve months of low salary and (generally) deteriorating working conditions, benefits, occupational prestige, and professional autonomy? The gift allows for the clearer illumination of
the multiple mini-degradation ceremonies (Garfinkel 1956) – such as a respondent having their (unwanted by the administration) English as a Second Language course being assigned to a “converted” former bathroom, still complete with plumbing fixtures – that educators endure in order to pursue teaching. The use of gift as critical lens demonstrates the fallacy that at the basis of a system of exchange there is this generalized pretense that the system is fair when, at the core of it, it is decidedly unfair.
Chapter 1: Gift as Category of Analysis

Concepts of gift and gift ideology structure the perception of the way in which social and cultural lives are organized. This structural organization is relevant not just to the givers and receivers in a gift relationship, but gives form to a multitude of social structures and institutions, including cities, disciplines, nations, and so forth. All social actors are at least partially constrained by their environments, whether social, personal, ecological, political, and so forth. Given those confines, social actors must make decisions, must exhibit agency. Actors are crafting an identity, are forging interpersonal relationships, and are creating and reproducing structural social relationships. Human action doesn’t just happen – people make it happen, but they do so within their parameters and confinements.

Gift is much more integral to society than its most superficial representation - exchanges of presents, often on holidays - would lead one to believe. This project focuses on the gift and its influence on labor relationships, particularly between educators and educational institutions. In addition, the reach of the gift can also be observed in politics. Just as it has been in labor analysis, the role of the gift has been traditionally overlooked in examinations of social policy. However, there are several potential areas of study, some of which have received cursory examination, but none utilizing the gift as a category of social organization.

Yan Yunxiang (1996, 2002) studied the flow of gifts in rural Chinese villages, finding that the gifts generally passed from the less wealthy, even impoverished, villagers to the higher status political officials. There was still the expectation of reciprocity on behalf of the village officials, i.e. that they were obligated to give back, at least some degree of that which they had been given. Due to their higher social standing, it was observed that many officials failed to
fulfill their end of the gift relationship. While this failing was recognized and noted by the lower-
status villagers, they lacked the social authority and power to seek any redress. This exemplifies
some consequences of the intersectionality of gift and class. Additionally, because the items or
wealth given were considered gift, there is no overt or codified requirement to reciprocate,
although the social mores to do so are powerfully inculcated. These articles actually seem to
contravene my larger arguments on the binary opposition between givers and receivers - this may
be because of notable cultural differences between the U.S. and rural China; the more expected
and accepted culture of bribery in China (Smart 1993, Xin & Pearce 1996); and /or a
fundamental statement of the marginalization of the poor/receivers of social welfare in China, i.e.
that they may be recipients of other forms of governmental gifts/expenditures and that, due to
this lower-status position, they are unable to enforce/motivate ordinary obligations of
reciprocation.

There is a tendency for, usually conservative, U.S. politicians and news media
personalities to characterize criminals as parasites of society, as individuals who take but do not
contribute meaningfully and productively to society. The language used to describe individuals
who have been convicted of crimes frequently is such that it indicates a certain level of failing to
reciprocate the gifts that society had given them, whether it is a safe and stable state in which the
citizenry is protected by the constitution and the bill of rights or whether it is a capitalist
economic system in which the popular sentiment is that the American Dream of a home, family,
and economic security are available to all so long as they are willing to work hard for it.
Regardless of their specific failures, the overall sense is an undercurrent of resentment that some
members of society are apparently unappreciative of the perceived opportunities that these
criminals and parasites had been offered.
Even more pointedly, there has been a shift from socially marginalized individuals and groups being negatively portrayed using language comparing them to those persons who have failed to fulfill their obligated reciprocity when receiving a gift to being compared to any individual who simply receives a social gift or expenditure. As an example, consider the ways in which individuals who are utilizing their legitimately-obtained and appropriate social welfare benefits, such as disability, unemployment, or food stamps, are often characterized by politicians and political pundits: as social moochers or parasites. During the Wisconsin teachers' protests in 2011, numerous media outlets and elected officials used similar language in describing teachers engaged in political dissent as is used to describe criminals.

There has been similar impression management performed by politicians and media organizations when describing not just criminals, but labor union leaders and organizers, supporters of universal healthcare and/or the Affordable Care Act spearheaded by President Barack Obama (colloquially known as Obamacare), and recipients of social welfare benefits, often regardless of mitigating economic circumstances leading to the necessity and receipt of social assistance. An interesting avenue of research would be an examination of social welfare programs as mechanisms for the increased and aggressive marginalization of the underclass and racial and ethnic minorities through their allocation into the roles of receivers in gift relationships.

In recent decades, African Americans have frequently been portrayed in the U.S. as receivers of social expenditures without obligatory reciprocation. The stereotype of African Americans as lazy and shiftless is in part because of the perception of their place in the social structure that is organized by the ideology of the gift. More contemporary analyses, rather than dispelling this myth of African American culture and character, have noted the addition of other
social groups into this marginalized role: immigrants, particularly Latino, Hispanic and Caribbean immigrants, and especially illegal immigrants. Illegal immigrants who receive any measure of social welfare benefits or expenditures are especially excoriated because of the flawed perception that because of their illegal status they have no way to contribute to the social coffers. This is, of course, short-sighted since even if an illegal immigrant may not be contributing to payroll, social security, or unemployment through taxation as Browning (1978) describes, they are certainly contributing via state and federal sales taxes, which disproportionately affect the underclasses in comparison to the middle and upper classes.

In contrast to individuals and groups who are frequently cast as receivers or takers or moochers in society, the individuals or organizations in the capitalist class enjoy nearly universal positive public, political, and media perception, at least with respect to their role as givers of employment in society. In fact, even corporate misdeeds are often reported in counterpoint to the benefits that the corporation brings to society in the form of employment, as if jobs were created as some form of social welfare policy rather than one of the mechanisms through which corporate profits are created. As example of this, the financial collapse of 2008 precipitated largely through the improper extension and valuation of mortgages to borrowers with insufficient income or collateral led to a brief period of significant social criticism of the wealthiest members of society and corporate business practices, but this outrage was short-lived and had little lasting impact in mitigating social inequality. In fact, the designation of certain financial organizations as "too big to fail" virtually legitimized the necessity of large-scale financial and investment institutions.

Using the gift as a category of analysis, I examined the phenomenon of unpaid labor that is performed by educators. I analyzed the ways in which gift works on, orders, and gives
meaning to social organization. It is not my contention that the use of gift as analytical lens should replace other structures of social organization, such as gender, class, or race, but rather that gift acts alongside of and intersects with these analytical categories. Existing theoretical examinations of the labor relationship between educators and educational institutions fail to adequately explain the persistent inequality between educators and institutions. Previous examinations of labor inequality have ignored the role of gift in analyses of economics, power, and authority. Gift has been treated as a vestige of archaic and pre-literate cultures with little or no relevance in modern capitalist societies and, thus, has not been recognized as a significant category of analysis. The following chapter discusses how gift was subsumed by traditional neo-classical and Marxist economic analyses. The use of gift as analytic lens uncovers what had remained hidden using previous categories of analysis or systems of social organization.

I propose to critically examine the categories that are associated with gifts and with gift relationships. While many examinations of social inequality tend to focus upon the oppressed or marginalized segment, givers and receivers in gift relationships are inextricably linked. They can be separated for analytical purposes, but in reality there cannot be one without the other. In this project I examine the gift relationship as a structural whole. I begin with a review of the literature about the gift and gift giving. I then address the theoretical foundation for the use of gift as a category of analysis. Following the theoretical work I discuss the method used to select the sample of educators who were interviewed to provide the data that composed the empirical content that supported my theoretical assertions. I interviewed educators, the receivers as well as the reciprocators, in my theoretical schema. This occurred for several reasons. The first of which is that in this analysis, the institution as a whole is designated as the giver in the gift relationship. While it is possible for an individual to act as an agent for the institution, articulating its
positions on relevant issues, this does not lend itself to qualitative interviewing methodologies. Second, the receivers, as the disadvantaged role in the gift relationship, are more likely to be able to articulate their experiences of inequality, more so than educational institutions will be able to articulate their position of privilege. This is a phenomenon common in numerous social analyses (Carastathis 2008, Bansler & Kraft 1994, Wildman 1996). In gender studies, the male perspective is often seen as the default. Similar findings occur in studies using race as category of analysis in which white participants frequently are less able, at least initially, to recognize their privileged status.

Gift relationships, like race and class relationships, are designated systems for marking difference and organizing power. The identification of an individual as being a receiver carries with it the obligation not only to receive but also to reciprocate. This obligation casts the individual into a position of inequality, a position that is even more harmful depending on the size of the gift that is perceived to be reciprocated. In Mauss’s (1924) *The Gift* he discussed at length the concept of *potlatch*, a Native American practice marked by competitive exchange of gifts in which those who give the most are positioned to obtain the most prestigious political, religious, and kinship roles. One may argue that individuals could protect themselves from being placed into a position of coerced reciprocation by simply not accepting a gift in the first place. However, Mauss illustrates that there are three intertwined obligations in the gift relationship: (1) to give, (2) to receive, and (3) to reciprocate. In many cases, even when an individual recognizes the danger of a gift and would prefer to not accept it, she is bound by social or cultural obligations to both receive and to reciprocate.

In utilizing gift as a category of analysis to examine unpaid labor by educators, I am making an argument for methods and theoretical frameworks that permits the analysis of
signifying systems that construct, represent, and serve to reproduce gift relationships in society. It is processes of signification that produce meaning, and it is through meaning that experience is made – not the other way around. I examine the use of language in producing and representing gift relationships, particularly in a labor setting. As an example, the everyday usage of the verb *to give* when speaking of extending an *offer* of employment evokes a gift connotation. Job applicants may *receive* an employment offer from an institution. The labor relationship is ostensibly one between value neutral parties who have agreed the arrangement is mutually beneficial. There ought to be no hints of gratitude or beneficence from either party, but interviews with educators have demonstrated that this is not always the case. Through the use of language a gift-giving/-receiving identity is constructed. An individual’s identity as either giver or receiver is clearly not innate, but rather subjective or created constructs. With respect to gift relationships, the subject is always under construction. This continual process of construction motivates my inquiry into the processes through which the subject’s identity is created. I analyze the various mechanisms through which the binary roles in gift relationships are attributed, inculcated, and assigned.

An important foundational inquiry to address is how the gift may be used as category of analysis. Scott (1988) defined knowledge as “a way of ordering the world; as such it is not prior to social organization, it is inseparable from social organization” (pg. 2). Knowledge is *how* social organizations function and, indeed, creates the organization as society – as society in turn creates knowledge. In my analysis of face-to-face interview data I am not focusing solely on the actions and behaviors reported by research subjects, but also to the meanings that people, and their actions, acquire through social interaction. The educators’ performance and perception of
unpaid labor has meaning beyond that which the respondent may attribute or perceive, due to lack of awareness, perspective, standpoint, and so forth.

Gift relationships are not natural, but are a system of socially agreed upon distinctions. As with gender, race, and class there exists a binary opposition in which one group occupies a position of privilege and the other(s) a position of marginalization and disadvantage. The former in gift relationships are those that give gifts. The latter are those that receive them. These relationships exist through mechanisms of agreement, though the process may not be free of disputation. However the social consequences that arise from gift relationships are manifested through conflict rather than consensus.

Mauss (1924) demonstrated the relevance and ubiquity of the gift in all cultures ranging from the ancient to the pre-literate to the modern. His descriptions of the tangible items and types of goods and services that were considered gift may have varied from society to society, but the system of obligations that gift imposed on social actors was remarkably constant. In much the same way that Scott (1988) wrote when considering gender, gift relationships “as historical phenomena produced, reproduced, and transformed in different situations and over time” (pg. 6). These relationships are predicated on perceived differences, at minimum with respect to degree of imposed obligation, between givers and receivers. Comparative studies (Mauss 1924, Yan 1986, 2002, Parry 1986) have demonstrated that the role of the gift may be more conspicuous in some cultures rather than others but that the effects of the gift are recognized in all societies. In contemporary U.S, society there are numerous examples of gift and the effects of gift relationships. These include the frequent media characterization of criminals as social parasites and of capitalists and small business owners as productive social actors and institutions. There is a performative component to gift and gift giving as well. Terry Eagleton (2010) explained that,
“Knowledge is gleaned through active engagement, and active engagement implies faith. Belief motivates action, to be sure, but there is also a sense in which you define your beliefs through what you do.”

The immersion of the ideology into the culture is a primary foundation of the role that gift plays in explaining some social actors’ beliefs and behaviors. Terry Eagleton (2010) wrote, “Culture is what beds power down, interweaving it with our lived experience and thus tightening its grip upon us. An authority that fails to do this will loom up as too abstract and aloof, and thus fail to secure its citizens’ unqualified allegiance. If power is to win loyalty, it must translate itself into culture” (pg. 150). The existing literature of the gift demonstrates well the depth to which gift is rooted in culture. Its prevalence and reach is firmly entwined with individuals’ lived experiences across multiple societies and cultures.

Similar to Scott’s (1986) analysis of gender, I describe gift as a category of analysis as characterized by four interrelated elements. The first of the four interrelated elements is the utilization of symbols that are accessible to a culture’s social actors and that evoke multiple, sometimes contradictory, representations. Examples of this include the idealization and idolization of job creators in the media. Small business owners are perceived more fondly, but corporations are depicted positively as well, even in the wake of significant ethical or legal malfeasance.

This understanding and resonance has been visible in several recent national and international events. In the wake of the financial crisis of 2008, precipitated by the defaults of the mortgage-backed securities investments, there was a widespread media and publicity mantra that some institutions were “too big to fail.” The reasoning being that, even in a competitive capitalist economy, there were multiple investment and financial services institutions that needed to be
subsidized by public tax dollars to avert the publicized speculations that their failures and bankruptcies would destabilize the entire economic system. While Marx should be rolling in his grave for such a missed opportunity, the sentiment was sufficiently supported, if not outright believed, such that few financial institutions failed and even fewer financial executives faced any legal liability or action for such egregious mismanagement and, in many instances, willful ignorance and fraud. We need only contrast this to the vociferous, usually conservative, indictment of “welfare cheats and queens” and calls for decreases in funding to social welfare programs when an individual’s acts of fraud and larceny come to light.

The Deepwater Horizon oil spill, or the BP oil spill, in the summer of 2010 is another such example. This was an ecological disaster of unprecedented levels. The leak persisted for 87 days, spilling approximately 4.9 million barrels (210,000,000 US gallons) of oil into the Gulf of Mexico. Although the costs to the environment are not yet completely known, there were eleven lives lost, medical ailments were reported by over 150 clean-up workers and residents, deaths to marine life occurred in a thirty to fifty mile radius around the spill, and an economic cost – measured in BP expenditures on spill response, containment, relief well drilling, grants to the Gulf states, claims paid, fines and penalties – ranging from $37.2 to $90 billion.

While public outcry was strong during the three months that the oil was leaking there were few long-term policy or regulatory consequences, save for the financial penalties to BP as a corporation. Several BP managers faced criminal charges, which as of January 2014 are still unresolved. The C.E.O. of BP at the time of the spill, Tony Hayward, was eventually replaced, but only following a public relations incident in which he likened himself to the Gulf Coast residents as he had also been inconvenienced, remarking, “You know, I’d like my life back” (Mouawad and Krauss 2010).
Amidst the worst U.S. ecological disaster on record there was no significant, or at least successful, backlash against BP or outcry for more stringent regulations. Protests and boycotts were organized but were more harmful to the gas station owners than to BP as a corporation. Geman (2011) reported that spokespersons and lobbyists for the American Petroleum Institute continued to maintain that the spill was an isolated incident and that offshore drilling is a necessary industry for economic growth and job creation. In addition, ousted BP C.E.O. Hayward received an honorary degree from Robert Gordon University only three years after the spill. Again, when compared to the conservative media outcry when a welfare or Medicaid cheat is uncovered, the political fervor against BP was quite muted. The entrenched support for and idolization of business and corporate interests, i.e. givers, is significant and powerful.

The second elements adapted from Scott (1988) constituting the gift as a category of analysis are “normative concepts that set forth interpretations of the meanings of the symbols, that attempt to limit and contain their metaphoric possibilities” (pg. 1067). These concepts are manifested in the legal, political, educational, religious, economic, and scientific canons. They often take the form of binary oppositions that serve to assertively delineate what it means to be a giver and to be a receiver.

From a political standpoint, the characterization of recipients of state and federal welfare assistance or subsidization, particularly amongst the lowest classes, as parasitical is overt on many media programs and presentations. It is common practice, especially around presidential or congressional elections, to take easy shots at the poor, painting them as lazy, greedy, takers that give nothing back to society. At the same time, instances of corporate welfare are routinely overlooked. According to data obtained from the 2013 Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA), in 2012 the U.S. government spent nearly $50 billion on public service and social
welfare programs. That same year the government spent $92 billion on corporate welfare programs, tax breaks, subsidies, and grants.

For example, the largest U.S. retailer, Wal-Mart, pays sufficiently low wages that in the state of California approximately $86 million taxpayer dollars are used to provide health insurance and food assistance programs for many Wal-Mart employees. The state essentially subsidizing Wal-Mart’s wages in order to ensure that their employees have minimal access to healthcare and adequate nutrition. Weiss (2013) reported that the top five oil companies receive a combined $4 billion in tax breaks and subsidies annually. In 2012 the oil companies reported combined profits of $118 billion with a cash reserve of $42 billion. In the same time period, the Center for American Progress reported an 11 percent rise in gas prices, and the average household has a annual gas expenditure of $3,000.

From an economic standpoint, the owners of the smallest businesses to the largest corporations are frequently lauded as job creators and drivers of the national economy. Educational institutions have prioritized a vocational value, particularly in higher education, rather than the transformative value of a liberal education. As baccalaureate degrees have become increasingly necessary for even lower skilled occupations and the steep increases in tuition over the last two decades, students have adopted a much more consumerist attitude toward higher education. For many, rather than the opportunity to broaden their intellect across diverse subjects in the arts, humanities and sciences and to gain competencies in critical reasoning, many contemporary students view their postsecondary education as yet another costly and time-consuming hurdle to be cleared. A professor interviewed stated that upon asking several hundred of his enrolled students whether, if given the choice, they would have preferred to either obtain a well-paying, working to middle class career after graduating high school or to
pursue higher education to eventually obtain a somewhat higher paying career, only 25 percent of the responding students would have pursued postsecondary education. Although this is only a single anecdotal instance, it portends an ominous future for the state of higher education. More often professors, and particularly adjunct and part-time faculty, are relegated to roles of service providers routinely propagating a sanitized curriculum that is guaranteed to not challenge, and consequently not upset the paying customers, rather than roles of active and engaged educators guiding and mentoring young minds.

There has been significant influence exercised by corporate interests to shift higher education curricula such that college graduates are more prepared for entry level and middle management careers. The Miami Report (1999) discusses how Miami University in Oxford, Ohio has an endowed chair sponsored by AT&T as well as a partnership with Proctor & Gamble, which funded several technologically advanced classrooms in the business school. Just as in the last century high schools were structured in such a way as to prepare graduates for a life of factory labor – bells signaling the change from one class to the next and beginning and ending meal breaks – the present century is seeing similar changes in postsecondary education, where programs are structured to prepare graduates for occupational lives in the small business and corporate world and emphasizing those values and skills that are most desirable in a corporate environment.

Such changes are made at the behest of these same small businesses and corporations. Occupying a privileged position of gift giver, of those institutions offering and giving jobs to graduates, and justifying the necessity of obtaining the higher education diploma and, consequently, the necessity of paying ever-increasing tuition – whether through the application for student loans or through parental investment in education – business institutions have a
vested interest in the skills that their eventual employees will possess post-graduation. In much the same way that Wal-Mart has passed the costs of health insurance for their employees to the taxpayers, by paying their workers sufficiently low wages as to qualify them for Medicaid, small businesses and corporations subsidize the cost of their employee training by lobbying to have such skills included in the collegiate curriculum, bought and borrowed/paid for by the students themselves.

A third constitutive element notes that the gift and gift giving are not restricted to microlevel social interactions within household or kinship systems or ought to be considered as distinct and independent spheres, such as friends and family members exchanging holiday presents. Mauss skillfully demonstrated in *The Gift* (1924) that gift relationships are visible in kinship systems, labor markets, educational systems and institutions, and in politics. While the gift relationship is built and observed through economic systems, this is not exclusive, and gifts are also constructed in political and kinship relationships.

A last element of the gift as category of analysis is that identity is subjective. There is no inherent meaning to be discovered or attributed having either given or to have received a gift, but any meaning perceived is the result of social consensus. Gift relationship identities which may be adopted by or attributed to social actors are “substantively constructed and relate their findings to a continuum of activities, social organizations, and historically specific cultural representations” (Scott 1986, pg. 1068). Rather, as Scott (1986) advocates for gender, gift relationships are one of the several mechanisms through which relationships of power may be signified. The gift is “a primary field within which or by means of which power is articulated” (pg. 1069).

Although concepts of power may be built upon a foundation of gift and gift giving, they need not necessarily be literally about the gifts themselves. Gift, like gender or race or class, can
function as a banner under which power is exercised, consolidated, and transmitted. Influenced by Bourdieu’s *Le Sens Pratique*, Scott (1986) wrote concerning gender that, “Established as objective sets of references, concepts of [gift] structure perception and the concrete and symbolic organization of all life. To the extent that these references establish distributions of power (differential control over or access to material and symbolic resources), [gift] becomes implicated in the conception and construction of power itself” (pg. 1069). In this sense, gift has a legitimizing function for society’s structure and for power. This gives the necessary foundation to analyze whether gift is productive of inequality in society or whether it is reflective of it.

In *The Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche discusses the transition from an ethic of the master, embodied by holding up as virtuous the characteristics and actions of the nobility, to an ethic of the slave, which holds as virtuous such traits as humility, weakness, and suffering. Rulers in many societies have legitimized such actions and characteristics as domination, strength, control, authority, and power of rule as qualities that are possessed by the givers of gifts, for as Mauss (1924) described, gifts are often given as a demonstration of power and to create social relationships in which specific individuals or groups of receivers are beholden to the givers by virtue of the social obligation to both receive and reciprocate an impossibly large gift when it is offered. In contrast to the privileged position of the giver, individuals or groups in societies perceived as enemies, outsiders, subversives, parasites, and helpless are likened to receivers in the gift relationship, particularly those receivers who cannot or will not reciprocate that which they have been given.

Contemporary U.S. society has many examples of structural arrangements that favor givers over receivers. This privileged status can be seen in the legislation of favorable banking and investing policies and taxation codes. For instance, capital gains income is taxed at a
significantly lower rate than income from wages and salaries, even though only a small minority of the population obtains a significant portion of their income and wealth through investment in stocks and bonds. Charitable donations or gifts that are given by both individuals and institutions are also used to decrease the tax burden of the giver.

Gift and systems of gift relationships produce inequality, not only in kinship or microlevel interactions, as Mauss (1924) and many others discussed, but also in the polity, labor markets, and in the educational system. Gift and gift relationships legitimize inequality through the inculcation of perceptions of debt and obligation as well as through perceptions of generosity and giving. The category of the gift is an analytical lens that demystifies exploitation in the teaching profession. These educators are engaged in thinking professions and performing intellectual labor, which is analytically distinct from manual labor. Much of the classical examinations of the labor focused on manual rather than intellectual labor, and, while there has been research on intellectual labor, there was still much that remained obscured. The gift allows for a deeper unearthing of such hidden dimensions.

Use of the gift as analytic category to study social phenomena can provide the opportunity to redefine old questions in new terms. The relationship between capitalist and employee is theoretically well traveled, but less so is the relationship between ostensible givers and receivers in modern capitalist systems. Gift as a category of analysis makes the receivers of gifts, or debtors, visible as active participants in history rather than just the objects upon whom the givers in societies exercise their impetuses, desires, and choices to give. The gift as analytic category creates an analytical distance between what appears to be the immutable language of the past and that found in contemporary lexicons. The use of gift as an analytic category also depicts the gift in relation to other axes of difference or oppression.
For the above reasons, the gift is theoretically important to the discipline of sociology as a whole, particularly in the United States. There has been some recent work done in European literature, especially France, which has examined sociological and economic issues through the lens of the gift. Using a lens of gift and gift giving reveals that which is not observed when focusing instead solely on power and/or interests.

Because of the novelty of this approach, it is important to thoroughly address any potential issues of concern regarding the domain of sociology being appropriate for the utilization of gift, traditionally an anthropological concept, as a category of analysis. The earliest academic roots of the gift and systems of gift giving have been found in anthropology. The gift was researched by such notable figures as Malinowski (1922), Mauss (1924), Levi-Strauss (1949, 1950), and Godelier (1999). There are also numerous examples of gift in the sociological domain having been used to study contemporary phenomena. Pierre Bourdieu (1984) in “The Market of Symbolic Goods” discusses an analysis of Kabylia economy in which he demonstrates that the economic logic that underlies gift exchange is the logic of symbolic rather than financial capital. The literature review chapter discusses numerous examples of explicit or implicit applications of the gift (Sahlins 1972, Godbout & Caille 1998, Parry 1986, Weiner 1980, 1985, and Berking 1999).

Gouldner (1973, 1973a) utilized a neo-Marxist perspective when examining how capitalism ensures cooperation among the workers in the enterprise. He examined such gift examples as giving things out for free to workers, e.g. meals, junkets, company cars, and other perquisites. Another example of capitalist generosity was the giving of “second chances” to employees that had committed errors in the work place before being terminated or otherwise punished. A traditional Marxist approach to unpaid labor leaves out these relationships that seem
to be reciprocal and constrained, but Gouldner argued that capitalism rested on more than just reciprocity. However Gouldner’s conception of the gift was essentially bound up in corporate largesse. In emphasizing free travel, all-expense paid trips, and company cars he did not recognize the gift inherent, or at least perceived to be inherent, in employment itself. His analysis did not consider the baseline level of gratitude that an employee may feel by virtue of being employed. This sense of gratitude becomes even stronger in more difficult economic climates, periods of high unemployment, or among employees in fields with traditionally scarce vacant positions.

Examinations of gift and gift giving relationships also provide an analytical system intended to help uncover or reveal what lies behind the “cash nexus” – a term coined by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels to describe the depersonalized connection that exists between employers and employees in a capitalist society. Gift and structural relations of gift giving may play a large role in answering part of a major question levied to contemporary Marxists: Where’s the revolution? If workers are, in fact, being exploited and increasingly aware of the nature and extent of their exploitation, then why have there been no labor revolutions? A partial answer to this question can be found in the gift. A potential critique to the application of a Maussian approach to a contemporary analysis of the gift is that his empirical case studies were limited to pre-literate societies, which obviously differ significantly from recent U.S. culture. However, there is sociological precedent for the application of theories derived from the study of pre-literate societies to contemporary societies. In Erving Goffman’s (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, the concept of face has roots in Durkheimian analyses of pre-literate societies. One of the most enduring symbolic interactionist works has its roots in data obtained from pre-literate cultures.
Modern capitalist economies use the phenomenon of the gift as assuredly as pre-literate societies. Once applied as an analytical lens, gift shows the universality of what lies at the basis of social relations. The gift appears in different modalities in different societies, but a structural gift relationship is found across all cultures, whether pre-literate, bartering, agrarian, or post-industrial. Mauss’s (1924) *The Gift* employed an open, critical, and non-utilitarian examination of society. This project explores the consequences of gift and gift giving having a central position in contemporary exchange relationships, particularly those relationships between teachers and their educational institutions. The efficacy and function of the gift as category of analysis reveals that which other examinations or systems of organization that had focused on power/interests have failed to uncover. Among other questions, why do educators perform the work they do, so much of it unpaid, for so little economic reward?

Gift as analytic lens explodes the irrationality of a system where the assertion that teachers receive “three months off” is based ostensibly upon using this mode of exchange to secure teachers’ cooperation in the enterprise, in accepting and remaining in teaching positions, despite the apparent economic irrationality in doing so. The notion that teachers “get a lot of time off” is fundamentally a symptom of the issues that my utilization of gift as category of analysis demystifies.

The following chapter reviews the sociological, anthropological, and economic literature on the gift and gift giving. This analysis in part examines whether the gift is productive of inequality or whether it is a reflection of it. The literature review also provides the foundations to refine the discussion of the relationship between power and the gift. I begin with a general overview of the concept of the gift, particularly its earlier origins, not only in anthropology but also in philosophy and literature.
Chapter 2: Literature Review of Gift and Gift-Giving

Overview & History of the Gift

A review of the relevant literature of the gift and gift giving provides the necessary framework for the use of gift as a category of analysis through which social problems and issues can be examined. Anthropologists, sociologists, and other social scientists, historians, and philosophers have observed gifts and practices of gift giving for many centuries – including such a diverse group of thinkers and works as the Bible, Homer, Adam Smith, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Hélène Cixous. The gift was initially considered to be only significantly present and socially or culturally necessary in pre-modern and/or pre-literate societies. In Mark Osteen’s (2002) synthesis of interdisciplinary studies concerning gift he wrote that gift has been traditionally “either explained away as diagnosed self-interest or sentimentalized as a remnant of a golden age of pure generosity” (pg. 1). Alan Schrift (1997) in The Logic of the Gift wrote that the question of the gift “addresses fundamental issues of intersubjective interaction” (pg. 18). The gift is an immensely important subject for a more complete understanding of human social life. Many discussions of gender, ethics, economics, and social theory have focused on analysis of the gift. Osteen succinctly reiterates some of the key questions that literature on gift and gift giving seeks to answer. “To what degree are human actions motivated by self-interest? Is it possible to give without expectation of reward? When obligations are attached to gifts, what form do they take? Why do human beings give presents and to whom do we give them?” (pg. 1).

Bronislaw Malinowski (1970) wrote an early account of gift giving in his study of the Trobriand Islanders off the eastern coast of New Guinea. In “The Principle of Give and Take” he
discussed gift giving as occurring against a continuum of obligations of reciprocity, writing that “all rights and obligations are arranged into well-balanced chains of reciprocal services” (pg. 46). He identified two main categories of gift as bookending that continuum. The first type of gift was the “pure gift,” one that was not expected to be returned or reciprocated. The second type of gift is located on the opposite end of the reciprocity continuum. This type of gift giving is essentially bartering or exchange within the context of a type of market arrangement in which all interested parties are seeking the maximization of their profit. The gift of one type of gift rather than another is a function of the participants’ social relationships. As social distance between the participants decreases, so too does their likelihood to emphasize profit maximization. It was viewed as unseemly to give to a stranger or passing acquaintance in the same ways one would give to family and friends. Pure gifts are most frequently exchanged only between family members. However, Malinowski is careful to assert that there are aspects of “give and take” found even between exchanges of pure gifts. Even a pure gift was never fully pure. This is semantically intriguing in that as social distance increases, so does the acceptance of impurity in the relationship. The more impure a gift, the greater the potential for social sanctions in failing to pay it back. This early analysis of gift influenced the following examination of gift from ancient to modern societies.

In 1924 Marcel Mauss published *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies* – a seminal work examining gift giving in pre-modern societies and their enduring relevance to later literate, modern, and contemporary societies. *The Gift* was significant as the earliest beginning of contemporary discussions of gifts and gift giving. Mark Osteen (2002) writes that Mauss’s *The Gift* bears within it the seed of virtually every important study of gift-giving that has succeeded it” (pg. 3). Mauss recognized gift giving as both obligatory and
interested and observed that the objects exchanged could be concrete as well as intangible. A giver could just as easily give a daughter, a pig, objects of art, or time spent in labor. A key finding was his description of the non-utilitarian component in the exchange. At times the gift received would be destroyed, rather than being consumed for its use or exchange value. This destruction was accomplished to even more strongly demonstrate superior social position. Not only was the obligation to reciprocate incurred but also the loss of the original gift as well. This was a powerful statement of one’s advantageous social position. Mauss described a compulsion to give and receive, but that this compulsion was only recognizable after taking into account what the participants would say about the practices of giving, receiving, and returning.

Mauss defined the practice of exchange as a “Total Social Phenomenon.” This total social phenomenon engages all aspects of social life, including religious, economic, political, juridical institutions, and so forth. Within this social structure, gift giving encapsulates the complex essence of social life, which is that to give is to express one’s being and one’s superiority – that to give is to be. It is generally recognized that currency has replaced gift as a/the total social phenomenon in contemporary societies. I show in this project that while currency is important, the vitality of gift to the reproduction of modern capitalist societies cannot be underestimated.

Native informants from Polynesia reported that there was something in the object that impelled it to be circulated among the actors. The object contained the spirit of the individual that made or originally owned it, the giver. In the societies Mauss (1990) described, exchange was not governed by a monetary economy, not accounted for in a reckoning of credits and debits, and not felt by the actors as obligatory. However, the actors were no less compelled to participate. There was a social obligation to continually circulate the multiple spirits until finally they would be once again returned to their person of origin. The first and central question of the
gift is simply “What rule of legality or self-interest...compels the gift that has been received to be obligatorily reciprocated? What power resides in the object given that causes its recipient to pay it back?” (pg. 3). Theorists following Mauss have then questioned whether the essence of the gift resides in the object itself or within the system of social relationships governing a society? This spirit in the gift was referred to as “Hau” or “Mana,” a phenomenon reported by the native subjects that was accepted on its face by Mauss but which lead to an important critique by Claude Lévi-Strauss.

In *An Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss*, Lévi-Strauss discussed the importance of Mauss’s project, but also detailed many obstacles over which Mauss stumbled along the way. In *The Gift*, Mauss highlighted the importance of giving voice and primacy of perspective to the observer as a part of the world. As a facet of his methodological praxis, Mauss accepted the observed’s point of view. Mauss took for granted that the (native) informants adequately grasped the importance of the objects and relationships they observed and discussed with researchers about their societies. However, Lévi-Strauss contended that Mauss allowed himself to be misled by the informants. I endeavored to avoid the same errors when interviewing educators, particularly in their discussions on gratitude for being hired and their expectations, motivations, and rationalizations regarding working unpaid. For Lévi-Strauss, phenomenology was a theoretical orientation that should have been abandoned in favor of structuralism. Because Mauss accepted the reported accounts of the subjects of his inquiry, Mauss was utilizing a phenomenological method. Briefly, phenomenology is the philosophical study of phenomena as they appear to a subject, as they are perceived by and through the senses. Phenomenology studies conscious experiences from a subject’s first-person point of view. Mauss placed undue emphasis on the *hau* of the gift as the driving force of exchange rather than recognizing the giving-
receiving-reciprocating cycle more correctly as the structural relation of exchange that was responsible for the continual circulation of gifts. Structuralism is a different way of looking at the world; it is based on the foundation that the world is not comprised primarily of things or objects or people, but rather of relationships. An object or a person or a phenomenon may exist in the world, but the meaning that objects holds for us is determined by its place in a structural set of relationships, by its relation to the whole system of which it is only a single constituent part. In Totemism Today Lévi-Strauss (1963) wrote that, “Human societies, like individual human beings...never create absolutely; all they can do is create certain combinations” (pg. 160). Lévi-Strauss structuralism reverses Mauss’s methodology when asserting that it is not the gift that constitutes the element of exchange, but it is the structural relation of exchange that constitutes the phenomenon of gift giving.

Lévi-Strauss distinguishes between “Surface” structure and “Deep” structure. The surface structure is the social relations, the process of exchange as described by the participants and the observation of the passing of gifts from one social actor to another. There are universal truths that exist at the structural level. The minutiae of observable facts obscure these universal truths, except to those who are able to decode these observable facts. Lévi-Strauss relied heavily on Saussure’s linguistic perspective. The observable facts of a society can be likened to the components of its language. A native observer is born into these existing systemic structures and relationships. One can organize linguistic units in new or original ways, parole, in the sense of poetry or prose, but can in no way affect the underlying linguistic structure, the langue. The same is true of observable social facts. An individual can act and manipulate the observable social structures but is not in a position to affect, or even really be cognizant of, the deep structures. Lévi-Strauss was concerned that acceptance of Mauss’s analysis would lead to an
acceptance of phenomenology, of rampant subjectivism. He prescribed a methodology in which
the point of view of the informant is reduced through a number of procedures in order to access
the deep structure that impelled the natives to undertake significant actions of gift giving. The
natives’ conceptions must be reduced to be able to grasp the underlying social structure. In this
way, the object of knowledge becomes the subject of knowledge, and the subject becomes the
object. This process of *dédoublement* led to a re-experiencing of the experience of the other. In
performing this process, Lévi-Strauss claimed to understand the reality of the others (the native
participants) better than the others understood themselves. For Lévi-Strauss, Mauss stopped just
short of a significant breakthrough into structuralism, but instead took a phenomenological
detour by being taken in by the native informant(s).

Lévi-Strauss was not the only other social theorist to have critically examined Mauss’s
conception and utilization of the *hau*. Marshall Sahlins in *Stone Age Economics* equated *hau*
Raymond Firth found fault with Mauss in his confusion of the *hau* of the gift with the *hau* of the
giver; according to Osteen (2002) “it is not the object but the person giving it who frames the
obligations and rewards required” (pg. 3). Yan (1996) further argued that “the spirit *conveyed* by
the gift, not the spirit *of* the gift, constitutes its social force” (pgs. 216-17). Here we can see a
clear addressing of Mauss’s (1990) claim that “for primitive people,’ everything speaks…
Persons and things partake of each other… Hence, by ‘giving of oneself, and if one gives oneself
it is because one owes’ oneself – one’s person and one’s goods – to others”’ (pg. 44). In addition
to a critique of the concept of *hau*, theorists have also examined more closely Mauss’s
conception of reciprocity.
In *The Gift* Mauss (1990) describes a Native American ritual referred to as the *potlatch*, which involves three interrelated obligations: to give, to receive, and to reciprocate. “To refuse to give, to fail to invite, just as to refuse to accept, is tantamount to declaring war” (pg. 13); these “gifts” are obligatory. Potlatch is, for Mauss, a total social phenomenon; it is religious, mythological, shamanic, juridical, economic, and a phenomenon of social structure insofar as it brings together tribes, clans, families, and so forth. There are severe social, even metaphysical, consequences for an individual’s failure to fulfill any or all of the three obligations. A chief who fails to give is at risk of losing his prestige, which is to say, his very soul. An individual may not refuse to accept a gift or even an invitation for fear of demonstrating that he is unable or unwilling to reciprocate. Reciprocation must also include interest ranging anywhere from thirty to one hundred percent, and should one fail to reciprocate, there is a risk of enslavement to repay the debt.

In Godbout and Caillé’s (1998) *The World of the Gift*, the authors write “any exchange of goods or services with no guarantee of recompense in order to create or nourish social bonds between people is a gift” (pg 20). Their work powerfully sets the stage for my project through their discussion of the myriad ways in which gift and gift giving are still powerful binding agents to systems of relations in contemporary societies. They discuss the gift as a social connection that, in line with Mauss, creates an obligation between people. This obligation to another is examined in cases of blood and organ donation, the role of Santa Claus, volunteer work, and interactions between performer and audience and artist and society. Their definition of gift above, while concise, leaves unanswered a number of questions regarding the individual or social pressure that may exist to compel giving of gifts. It also fails to address questions regarding the motivation behind giving of gifts – are gifts given in a spirit of altruism or are gifts
given with some expectation of reward? Are gifts given through the motivation of receiving something in return actually gifts? To what degree do actors in a gift relationship recognize the obligation that they have incurred to reciprocate a gift given? Some of the works by Derrida and Bourdieu discussed later address the “impossibility” of the gift.

In an effort to give a more comprehensive definition of the gift, Helmut Berking (1999) in *Sociology of Giving* writes that an analysis of gift may be divided into four related but discrete components: 1. The gift object; 2. The sequence of giving and taking; 3. The actors’ own understandings of their acts and motives; and 4. The rules or principles governing their behavior (pg. 4). Berking further defines gift giving as “a ritual practice through which the current value of a relationship may be communicated and maintained” (pg. 5). Berking describes gift giving as an intersection of tangible objects/commodities/services and a system of social relationships with a patterned expectation of behavior among actors. However there is no sense as to whether the actors in a gift relationship are aware of their obligations to give, to receive and to reciprocate. Additionally, Berking does not offer further insight regarding the nature of these social relationships, specifically whether there is a distinction between gift giving and economic activity. Do market forces govern the practices of gift giving or are they governed by some other social system(s)?

Alvin Gouldner (1996) asserted that the “norm of reciprocity” is the pivotal “starting” and “stabilizing” mechanism for social interaction (pg. 65). For Gouldner, reciprocity plays a key role in both initiating new relationships and solidifying existing relationships. New relationships can be encouraged by fostering an attitude of reciprocity from those who have received gifts to those who have given gifts. Existing relationships rely on reciprocation to maintain the perception of parity between all parties, to ensure that one individual doesn’t feel more put upon
than any other. However, a number of the discussions below detail the multitude of situations in which there is a considerable and persistent imbalance in power and status between gift givers and gift recipients. While an ideal of equality between actors on either side of the gift relationship may be desirable, it seems to be just as probable as equality between employer and employee in labor relationships, which is to say not at all.

Following Gouldner, Marshall Sahlins expanded upon the concept of reciprocity and the social relations that are dependent upon each variation of reciprocity. Previous definitions of reciprocity were found wanting, being too vague to be of any conceptual or operational use, as Sahlins (1972) claimed, “everywhere in the world the indigenous category for exploitation is ‘reciprocity’” (pg. 134). Sahlins emphasized three distinct categories of reciprocity: 1. Generalized Reciprocity is usually observed within familial or close friendship relationships. Generalized reciprocity includes obligations that are implicit and which may extend for a time or even indefinitely; 2. Negative Reciprocity is “characterized by suspicion and exploitation; dominates interactions among strangers” (pg. 195); 3. Balanced Reciprocity is described as a mean between Generalized and Negative reciprocity. Within this schema transactions tend toward equivalence and the emotional connection between the parties tends to determine the nature of the interaction. As Sahlins explains, “if friends make gifts, gifts make friends” (pg. 186).

Jonathan Parry (1986) expounded on the assertion by Sahlins and Blau that “the gift is always an ‘Indian gift’ – that is, ‘for which an equivalent return is expected’ – and the notion of a ‘pure gift’ is mere ideological obfuscation ‘masking the’ supposedly non-ideological verity that nobody does anything for nothing” (pg. 455). Berking (1999) continued this critique, writing that “ethnography tends to reduce exchange to an ‘objective’ core of an economic truth which seems
to correspond more to the observer’s picture of the world than to practices under study” (pg. 40). This narrow conception of the gift serves to ignore the role of power and inequality in the determination of the nature of social relationships, focusing instead too heavily on phenomena of gifts and gift giving. Osteen (2002) elaborated on this criticism: “The problem may lie in the assumed definition of selfhood. Whereas Western thought represents exchanges as undertaken by autonomous individuals, in many other societies, as Mauss notes, it is not individuals but groups who carry on exchange, and the persons who exchange do so as representatives of ritualized positions or roles” (pg. 5). An examination of the unpaid labor of educators intersects interestingly with this critique. How much of the educators’ unpaid work is performed less from a sense of misrecognized obligation to the institution and more to the obligation to meet an idealized conception of what it means to be an educator? From where does this ideal type stem? After gratitude and goodwill have waned, the persistent obligation to work unpaid is shifted to occupational role fulfillment.

In an effort to avoid the problems of the subjectivism of Mauss’s phenomenology and the objectivism of Lévi-Strauss’s structuralism, Pierre Bourdieu grounded his theory of the gift in a theory of practice. For Bourdieu, the gift is “an act situated beyond the opposition between constraint and freedom, individual choice and collective pressure, disinterestedness and self-interest” (Bourdieu 1997: 236). Bourdieu agreed with Mauss that the gift giving observed in societies was uncalculated. More importantly, the obligatory aspect of gift giving must be unknown to the participants. It is only this misrecognition that makes gift giving possible. Osteen (2002) writes that “Derrida’s ‘forgetting’ closely resembles Bourdieu’s concept of ‘misrecognition’; each of them leads to the conclusion that giving gifts involves bad faith, that we lie to ourselves by choosing to ignore or forget our calculation of self-interest; that the
pleasure we gain in giving gifts is just self-gratification” (pg. 16). Osteen argues that “to understand the gift we must employ what Keats called ‘negative capability’: the capacity to entertain conflicting thoughts or interpretations without seeking to resolve them neatly. Gifts expose the truth that human behavior and the stories with which we attempt to account for it. The meanings of the gift, in short, expose the limitations of our categories. Hence, more adequate descriptions of its meanings require that theorists become flexible enough to embrace and emulate the gift’s own elasticity” (pg. 16).

Unlike both Mauss and Lévi-Strauss, Bourdieu claims that the element of time needs consideration in order to more completely understand the nature of gifts and gift giving. Even more, a time lag is necessary for conditions of gift giving to exist. According to Schrift (1997), Bourdieu’s logic of practice emphasis on an economy of symbolic, rather than concrete, goods confers two significant advantages. The first is that, “it can account for the ambiguity of the gift as it passes through time, and it permits an understanding of the agent of gift exchange neither as a phenomenologically construed intending subject nor as a structurally constructed and self-deluded follower of social rules” (pg. 13). For Bourdieu, a relatively harmonious gift giving relationship requires a “deferred and different countergift that is made possible by the individual and collective misrecognition of the social rules that govern the act of reciprocation” (pg. 13). Bourdieu (1997b) critiques Lévi-Strauss’s emphasis on the parity between giving and reciprocating, writing that such a relationship was not sufficiently nuanced. Such an equivalence makes difficult the possibility of distinguishing gift exchange from “swapping,” which occurs in the same social instant, from “lending, in which the return of the loan, explicitly guaranteed by a legal act, is in a sense already performed at the very moment when a contract is drawn up
ensuring the predictability and calculability of the act it prescribes” (pgs. 197-8). Jacques Derrida also emphasizes the importance of the element of time in the theorizing of the gift.

In the first chapter of Given Time, Derrida, sought to complicate the relationship between the gift and what he called – borrowing from Georges Bataille – the “restricted economy” of reciprocity. He asserted the impossibility of the gift, the gift as an impossible task that eventually results in its own annihilation. Once the gift has become recognized as a gift, it becomes, rather, an obligation. In order for a gift to remain a gift, all interested parties must have forgotten any hint of obligation or reciprocation. This process of forgetting means that the gift is to be located outside the logic of exchange. Derrida (1992) finds himself in a double bond: “Mauss reminds us that there is no gift without bond, without bind, without obligation or ligature; but on the other hand, there is no gift that does not have to untie itself from obligation, from debt, contract, exchange, and thus from the bind” (pg. 27). In the same work, Derrida defines the gift as “that which, in suspending economic calculation, opens in the circle so as to defy reciprocity or symmetry… and so as turn amid the return in view of the no-return” (pg. 7). Osteen (2002) argued that Derrida “never finds his way out of this aporia… his aim is rather to expose the limits of rationalism and empiricism, as well as to probe the limits of previous analyses of the gift… The gift is impossible; indeed, it is ‘the impossible.’ Why? Because a gift must be given freely, generously, without the expectation of a reward. And yet, at the moment that one even conceives of a certain transaction as a gift, or even conceives of giving something, the thought itself presupposes some reward. The gift is ‘annulled each time there is a restitution or a countergift,’ and there is inevitably even in the conception” (pg. 15).

Similarly to Bourdieu, Derrida’s analysis of the gift also necessitates a state of participant misrecognition. Derrida (1992) writes that, “…for there to be a gift, there must be no reciprocity,
return, exchange, countergift, or debt…It is thus necessary, at the limit, that he not recognize the gift as gift. If he recognizes it as a gift, if the gift appears to him as such, if the present is present to him as present, this simple recognition suffices to annul the gift…The simple identification of the gift seems to destroy it” (pgs. 12-14). For both Bourdieu and Derrida, true gifts are impossibilities because of the essential components of obligation that they entail when they are recognized as gifts.

When introducing The Question of the Gift: Essays Across Disciplines, Osteen (2002) writes, “Yet despite Mauss’s thesis that gifts are complex social practices governed by particular norms and obligations, in recent years they have usually been either explained away as disguised self-interest or sentimentalized as a remnant of a golden age of pure generosity” (pg. 1). Osteen also strongly critiques Derrida’s elaborate, overly complicated conception of gift giving. He argued, “Derrida’s premise is based upon a straw man… he adheres to an ideology of the ‘perfect gift’ that, as we have seen, rests upon the belief in the autonomous Western self who chooses rationally and unconstrainedly” (pg. 15). These theoretical variations have left open the question as to whether it is at all possible to define the gift – even to say definitively there is such a thing as the gift.

In The Gift, Mauss emphasized heavily the historical progression of the gift, discussing specific aspects of gift relationships, some of which remained the same and others that had changed over time. According to Parry (1986), Mauss seeks to write a “prehistory of our modern kind of legal and economic contract: a narrative of decline and fall from a world where prestations dominate to one where market and gifts are radically divorced” (pg. 457). The market has not supplanted the gift in modern capitalism, rather the gift is an intrinsic and necessary yet misrecognized aspect of the capitalist system. Systems of giving and the objects/services given
have changed over time, but the impetus to give, receive, and reciprocate persists. Mauss (1990) wrote that archaic gift practices are still found in contemporary times: “charity is still wounding for him who has accepted it,” and “things sold still have a soul” (pg. 65, 64). Mauss argues that individuals must recognize their connectedness with others, a suggestion that we are continuing to fail to successfully complete.

Helmuth Berking (1999) used ancient hunters’ food distribution rituals in order to shape his theory of modern gift giving: “Before giving, taking, and reciprocating, there is slaughtering, taking, and distributing” (pg. 54). Berking described how many contemporary gift giving norms and practices have revolved around the guest-host relationship, writing that the history of the guest is a “complete miniature of the anthropology of giving” (pg. 82). Through the presence of the guest as stranger, everyday, commonplace activities are seen from a different perspective. Hence “strangers who might be happily mistreated with impunity are turned into representatives of the ideal values of one’s own group, to be handled with respect, restraint, and ritual distance” (pg. 92). Instances of misfortune befalling those that fail to observe or respect norms of hospitality abound, particularly in classical literary works. In Homer’s The Odyssey, Penelope rebukes the suitors for overstepping their boundaries and reminds them that Zeus punishes those that fail to abide hospitality mores. Upon the eventual return of Odysseus to Ithaca the suitors are all slain - a chilling cautionary tale for those that would impugn social norms and conventions. In the Bible, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is often attributed to allegations of homosexuality and licentiousness, but alternative and more accurate interpretations imply that the destruction is done in retribution for the failure of hospitality offered to the divine emissaries. Lot and his family are spared not because he saved his guests from his rapacious neighbors, going so far as to offer to them his own daughters, but because he upheld the norms of treating
guests with honor and respect. Osteen (2002) expanded on the work by Charles Hinnant who had focused “on the patriarchal writing of Genesis showing that gift practices do not adhere to the strict division between the familial and extrafamilial forms of reciprocity and exchange outlined by Sahlins and others… the gift is treated – both in the events and by the later redactors – as a hybrid form that blends kinship and commodity exchanges” (pg. 12).

Parry continued with analysis of the gift from a specifically Judeo-Christian perspective that “tends to treat all exchange as versions of the unremittable debt that humans owe to God for the gift of life; all other gifts – whether between kin, between strangers, or between individuals and their communities – are simply faint echoes of this original endowment” (Osteen 2002: 12). Parry (1986) wrote on a Christian ethic that is wholly dependent upon an ethics of intention in that the “unreciprocated gift becomes a liberation from bondage… a denial of the profane self, an atonement for sin, and hence a means to salvation” (pg. 468). The acts of giving that are accorded the greatest worth in Christian societies are those that imitate the gift given to mankind by God and by Jesus through his sacrifice. Osteen (2002) expanded upon Parry’s *The Gift*, writing “No matter where they mark the dividing line, these histories generally describe a trend that runs this way: ‘as the economy becomes progressively disembedded from society, as economic relations become increasingly differentiated from other types of social relationship, the transactions appropriate to each become ever more polarized in terms of their symbolism and ideology’ so that now gifts are normally given ‘with the sole objective of cementing social relations’ (Parry 1986: 466-7)” (Osteen pg. 11). Natalie Zemon Davis (2000) in her work *The Gift in Sixteenth Century France* analyzed the Christian rituals in the Catholic mass as meant to “appease God and invite mercy…a model of close gift reciprocity between humans and God” (pg. 105).
Ralph Waldo Emerson (1997) wrote with great unease about the implications of a gift relationship: “the only gift is a portion of thyself. Thou must bleed for me… we do not quite forgive a giver. The hand that feeds us is in some danger of being bitten” (pg. 26). The unease around the gift is due to its being mired in risk. When one gives, there exists the possibility that reciprocation may not occur. To give is dangerous because one may not be given back. There is also the risk that if one is given, then reciprocation may not be possible. One may not be able to pay back what has been given, which is perhaps the most risky of all possible outcomes due to the often-serious consequences of failing to reciprocate.

Eun Kyung Min (2002) wrote that Adam Smith’s moral commerce is founded upon the principle of gratitude. “Smith’s ethics describes gratitude as an interiorized form of commerce in which justice is administered by the authority of ‘impartial spectators’ we create in our own minds. Thus Smith’s moral commerce, built upon the key principle of gratitude, is a hybrid construction lying somewhere between the market and the gift” (pg. 135).

Following Smith, Georg Simmel (1996) described gratitude as the foundation of social behavior, “the moral memory of mankind; without it, society would break apart” (pg. 45). Simmel argues against the possibility of a perfectly equal relationship between giver and recipient, a sentiment that is elaborated on in the next section by Yunxiang Yan in analyzing labor in rural China. “Gratitude is irredeemable, and inevitably generates or solidifies power inequalities between givers and receivers… Gratitude is both beautiful and dangerous” (Osteen 2002: 14).
Sociological Analysis of the Gift

Social theorists have generally approached an analysis of the gift by traveling one of two paths. The first is discussed by Aafke Komter (1996) and referred to as the “Moral Cement” approach, which emphasizes the role of gifts and gift giving in the creation and the maintenance of social bonds (pg. 107). The second is referred to by Osteen (2002) as the “Godfather Paradigm”, which emphasizes how gift giving can be used to increase and consolidate power within social interactions (pg. 17). David Cheal (1998) in *The Gift Economy* argued that gifts participate in and create a “moral economy: a system of transactions which are defined as socially desirable… because through them social ties are recognized, and balanced social relationships are maintained” (pg. 15). For Cheal this moral economy is distinguished from and subsumed by the dominant market economy within which it is said to have no significant role.

Gift may be crucial for the creation and maintenance of social bonds but is only a minor blip in the market economy. Komter (1996) reached similar conclusions in her work on gift giving in the Netherlands. She wrote that, “…despite most giver’s belief that they are acting altruistically, balanced reciprocity remains the most common paradigm for gift transactions, and that mixed motives – both generosity and a desire to be recognized – generally characterize both gift givers and receivers” (pgs. 110, 117).

Berking (1999) focused on the ambiguity of the gift giving relationship and the uncertainty that arises when acting in seeming discordance with social virtues of generosity and altruism. “Nowadays people who give feel the need to justify themselves in terms of the dominant ideology of self-interest… Contemporary Westerners are so uncomfortable with communalism and altruism that we tend to re-explain our generosity as self-interest. In such cases, our stories fail to account for the complexity of our motives. Instead we remold connected
selves into isolated consumers, and replace collective obligations with individualist gratifications” (pg. 145). I disagree entirely with this view of gift as insignificant in a market economy. Gift plays a pivotal role in the persistence of surplus labor and value and, thus, of modern capitalist societies.

My project more significantly utilizes the second theoretical path, the “Godfather Paradigm,” described by Osteen (2002) as the work performed by “theorists for whom collective obligations are sources of power or ‘symbolic capital’: when I give more to you or perform extravagant favors for you, I both enhance my prestige and engender deep obligations” (pg. 18). Barry Schwartz (1996) in his social psychological analysis of the gift wrote, “…personal gifts may likewise be hostile or presumptive: because a gift is imbued with the identity of its giver and codifies the giver’s perception of the recipient(s), to accept a gift is to allow someone to impose that version of self upon you – offers you can’t refuse” (pg. 70). The reverse is true as well; to refuse a gift is to refuse the identity of the giver which leads to a crippling or dissolution of the social relationship. According to Osteen (2002), “reciprocal exchanges are not always friendly, even among friends. Indeed, taken to its furthest expression, the ‘norm’ of reciprocity may encompass vengeance in which repayment for a service rendered or not rendered becomes violent or destructive. This is the gift as poison. To many theorists it is no coincidence that the German word for poison is gift; that the gift relationship is one fraught with potential for danger for a continuing, healthy relationship. But even within relationships that remain generally amicable, gifts can generate exploitation, manipulation, and a battle for control” (pg. 18). This battle for control is observed in this project in the form of the seemingly compulsory unpaid labor performed by educators.
Analysis of Reciprocity

Several theorists have written extensively on the inalienability of the gift. Although Mauss never specifically used the term “inalienability,” he made distinctions between various forms of property, which included certain objects that were never gifted outside of the family and were bequeathed with great emphasis on important rituals. An inalienable object is one that is never fully disassociated from its original owner(s). Chris Gregory made inalienable possessions the foundation of his gift system, expanding the demarcation between “alienability and inalienability into an ambiguous theory in which gifts and commodities embody two vastly different social systems and visions of identity” (Osteen 2002: 8). Annette Weiner’s (1992) gift giving system is founded upon a universal paradox: “how to keep-while-giving” (pg. 5). She emphasizes the power of inalienable possessions to function as a “force against change” by authenticating origins and kinship histories, and goes so far as to claim that inalienable possessions represent “absolute value”… what motivates reciprocity is really its “reverse – the desire to keep something back from the pressures of give and take” (pg. 5).

Maurice Godelier (1999), in The Enigma of the Gift, builds upon Weiner’s analysis of inalienability in his re-examination of Mauss’s description of the hau. Godelier described sacred objects as “inalienable possessions that give us back our own laws, mystified and idealized and therefore brooking no disagreement” (pg. 174). Some gifts are inalienable because they are associated with a specific person, usually the originator of the object, and this origination impels the object’s return. “If some power lies in the thing itself, it is merely the embodiment of ‘the relationship which binds it to the person of the giver’” (pg. 44). According to Godelier, one must not conflate ownership and possession, an error that he attributed to Mauss. The “personhood” of the originator of the gift is retained within the gift itself, so it is that owner’s identity, rather than
the object itself, which compels giving and reciprocating. Godelier wrote that he diverged from Mauss’s conclusions but that such divergence did not cause him to line up directly with Levi-Strauss’s critiques. “Mauss unintentionally fostered the illusion that exchange was the be-all and end-all of social life, thereby paving the way for the more sweeping secularizations of Levi-Strauss and his inheritors. The core principle behind gift exchanges therefore lies in the double nature of gift objects, which are simultaneously ‘substitutes for sacred objects and substitutes for human beings’… gift practices tell conflicting narratives: on the one hand, they expound a narrative of transfer and exchange, of hierarchy, aspiration, and freedom from history; and on the other, they retell a narrative of continuity with nature and the past, a story of human interconnectedness and humility before the transcendent” (Osteen 2002: 9).

Stephen Gudeman (2002) continued the vein of critiquing Mauss’s definition of reciprocity, seeking instead to deny it as the pivotal component of gift giving. He contends that “reciprocity is an expression of community” but that communal allotment “does not come ‘after’ reciprocity”; arguing instead that “moments of reciprocity or the gift are tokens of existent community…reciprocity is never contained within a community (pg. 467). The gift is a “probe into uncertainty” intended to expand the borders of a community… what lies behind reciprocity is really status or, what Bourdieu terms, “symbolic capital” (pg. 467). Reciprocity is problematic; it is “not the core of society but its expression… it is neither a primitive isolate nor the atom of society but its badge” (pg. 473).

The problematic and uncertain nature of reciprocity is a significant issue that is taken up by Jacques Derrida, discussed later below, and Alain Testart, who wrote that reciprocity is not universal. Rather, reciprocity is better represented as distinguishing between various forms of sanction on a scale from most to least coercive. Testart (1998) exhorted theorists to refine their
definitions of reciprocity, for failing to do so would “blur all the differences between gift and exchange” (pg. 104). Rodolphe Gasche (1997) critiqued the principle of reciprocity through a deconstruction of its tropes. “To explain the donor’s gift as a reciprocation is to bring him or her into the circle and thereby eliminate any motive or sanction other than reciprocity and desire for payment. By this model, there can be no first gift at all… if the circle of reciprocity exists regardless of the motives of individual givers, then the fixed point of departure – the beginning of the circle – disappears; if the autonomous individual exists prior to the circle of reciprocity, then gifts are merely a disguised form of debt” (Osteen 2002: 7).

Jacques Godbout and Alain Caillé (1998) propose a spiral, rather than a circle, as a metaphor for the gift: the original gift introduces a new element – something not previously there – thus it cannot be merely reciprocal. “Further, reciprocity explains why things are given back, but not why one would give back more than one receives” (pgs. 132-2). Godbout and Caillé assert that behind all discussion of reciprocity is an undercurrent of economism. They assert that, “We cannot hope to study what lies behind the obligation to reciprocate without seeing a primitive form of the law of book-balancing equivalence, a prefiguring of mercantile reciprocity governed by the law of tit-for-tat, or the first rough version of contracts” (pgs. 130). Osteen (2002), in “Questions of the Gift,” goes further in embracing Godbout and Caillé’s emphasis on economism stating that, “to discover the true nature of the gift, we must direct our gaze from reciprocity towards other principles and motives. When we do, a different set of norms emerges, a set founded upon spontaneity rather than calculation, upon risk instead of reciprocity, upon altruism in place of autonomy” (pg. 7). Derrida and Pierre Bourdieu discussed further difficulties with the gift and reciprocity, particularly questions of whether gifts are even possible.
Yunxiang Yan in “Asymmetrical Gift Giving in Rural China” (2002) argued, “The absence of reciprocity and the superiority of the gift recipient thus poses a double challenge to the existing anthropological theory of the gift” (pg. 68). Yan referenced Chris Gregory’s conclusion that the superiority of the gift giver is “a feature that is common to gift exchange systems all over the world” (1982: 47). Yan describes how unilateral giving in Xiajia, China has four features:

1. Gifts are given by subordinates to superiors without the expectation of an equal return;  
2. Due to the pyramidal structure of the social hierarchy, the number of donors exceeds that of recipients, which leads to an accumulation of gifts at the upper levels;  
3. Recipients remain socially superior and powerful, even though they fail to return the gifts; and  
4. The repeated one-way flow of gifts creates an institutionalized imbalance in exchange values between adjacent social strata, which in turn is regarded as another sign of status differences. All of these features seem to conflict with existing sociological and anthropological theories of social exchange” (2002: 75).

Typical occupational relationships are predominantly unidirectional. The ability to strongly encourage, if not outright compel, the commodity of unpaid labor rests solely within the educational institution as employer. On one hand, a new teacher may be required to decorate her classroom in brightly-colored bulletin boards and posters, but may not have the opportunity to do so during working hours due to classroom teaching or preparation duties. The only other times available may be in the evenings or weekends during non-teaching hours. A teacher interviewed indicated that the assignments of each teacher’s classes were not even handed out until a day or two before the start of the term. Given the classroom decoration expectation, the only option is to volunteer unpaid labor in order to satisfy the institution’s requirements. Even the use of the term “volunteer” is misleading since while there may be no overt directive given from employer to employee, there frequently exists an unstated, yet still transparent, expectation that the required labor be performed somehow or another. In many ways, Marx’s analysis of the reserve army of
the unemployed fits well in this instance. Educators are aware that there is competition for teaching jobs and that while, again, overt pressure may not be applied, a tacit acknowledgement exists nonetheless. The existence of a pool of unemployed teachers from which the institution may hire decreases an educator’s job security, can contribute to decreased starting wages and diminished yearly pay increases, and may lead to a decrease or cessation of employer-sponsored health care coverage.

On the other hand, this relationship does not extend in the opposite direction. A teacher who determines that in order to most efficiently perform her lesson plans and curriculum development she requires a computer may not simply take one from the school for her own use at home – even if it will be used only for school duties. The authority to compel time, labor, resources, or any other commodity exists within the employer. Resources and commodities owned by the school, unless provided specifically as directed for teacher use, are private property and any misappropriation can be grounds for sanctions against the employee, even if compensation were to be offered after the fact.

The performance of unpaid labor serves as the functional equivalent of the gift. That labor may be a commodity given or received is made abundantly clear in literature on the gift. Mauss described how if an individual from specific cultures fails to reciprocate a potlatch without interest, then the recipient faces enslavement in order to make appropriate reciprocation and restitution. The labor power of the giver is a commodity with a set value – to both the giver and the recipient. Marx (1849) defined this explicitly in “Wage Labour and Capital” writing, “…the more he works the less wages he receives, and for the simple reason that he competes to that extent with his fellow workers, hence makes them into so many competitors who offer themselves on just the same bad terms as he does himself, and that, in the last resort he competes
with himself, with himself as a member of the working class” (pg. 215). Marx described the manner in which capitalists pay for labor power as if it were a commodity. However, once labor power for most U.S. workers has been commodified, it is paid really very little. Within the same system of commodified labor some workers are extremely affluent and others are poorly-paid. However the great majority of workers fall into the latter category while the former is significantly smaller. Labor power is elastic, in that most workers essentially give the capitalists free “surplus” labor. However, I assert that this “gift” is essentially compelled by the worker’s misrecognition of labor relationship as gift relationship. By perceiving employment itself as a gift, of sorts, the employees enters into a system of obligation which she is then obligated to repay, or reciprocate, that gift. This is most simply done through the act of working unpaid. It is this free labor that I am incorporating into a theoretical elaboration of the gift.

The gift of unpaid labor in modern capitalism shares much in common with gift giving in rural China as described by Yunxiang Yan (2002), “… the obligation of reciprocal payment, which is the basis of all forms of gift giving, according to Mauss, was overshadowed by the existing inequality of social status between the two parties. The received structure of social relations neutralized obligations of reciprocity” (pg. 76). The giving of unpaid labor is a relationship between the individual educator and the structural educational institution, albeit most frequently personified by principals, superintendents, department chairs, and deans. This relationship is one of inequality. As in Yan’s analysis of rural China, I elaborate the similar phenomenon observed in contemporary educational institutions. Within the social relationship between educator and institution one finds inequality of power and authority. This inequality leads, as it does in China, to the negation of reciprocal payment within a system of gift giving, particularly in the giving of unpaid labor. Even further, “… The gifts in ceremonial situations are
considered the obligatory dues villagers owe to cadres, not the potential sociocultural debt that one must pay back. *Gift giving in this hierarchical context works only as a passive strategy adopted by the subordinates to protect themselves from being discriminated against by their superiors* [italics mine]” (pg. 77). The above passage aptly describes the prevalence of unpaid labor performed by educators. As the expectation of unpaid labor has proliferated, those educators who opt to not volunteer their labor power may find themselves the object of discrimination for failing to be a “team player.” Yan continued:

> There are many ways by which cadres can express their anger toward those who fail to fulfill the obligation to give gifts, such as giving a bad job assignment in collective work or, in the case of the bureaucracy, withdrawing support for the cadres in inferior positions. The possibility that their relationship with their superiors will deteriorate already constitutes a negative sanction upon subordinates and is sufficient to keep them engaged in upward gift giving. That is why the majority of people continue to offer gifts to leaders, even though no specific return can be expected (pg. 77).

From Marx we can extrapolate that the unpaid labor performed by even a single educator leads to significant reverberations throughout the educational system as a whole. A new standard of occupational expectations becomes set as more and more individuals “volunteer” their labor power.

*Misrecognition & The Gift*

When discussing jobs and job searches, a common turn of phrase is to be “given a job” or to “give someone a job.” This use of the word “give” implies that the job is a gift that is given by the employer to the employee. Job “offers” are extended to newly hired employees; employees “accept” employment from employers. This language strongly connotes a gift relationship
between employee and employer, rather than a relationship of straightforward, value-neutral economic exchange. As corroborated by most researchers on the gift, the components of the gift exchange relationship are obligations of giving, receiving, and reciprocating. The first component occurs when an employer *gives* a job to an employee. There is an inherent inequality in many employee/employer relationships – an argument further explored above. Vacant positions can receive tens to hundreds if not thousands of applications; in periods of high unemployment these numbers may be even higher. Employers typically interview multiple candidates for a single position, allowing them to be able to occupy a dominant position in the relationship. Additionally, as it is no secret that a newly-hired employee is chosen from multiple candidates, many individuals will feel a sense of gratitude toward the employer, even if simultaneously feeling, usually correctly, that she was hired based on her merits. The fact that that is true does not mean there were not other similarly qualified candidates. In accepting the job, the employee fulfills the receiving component of the cycle, the duty to receive being no less compelled than the duties to give and reciprocate. However, unlike many gift giving relationships described by Mauss and others, the act of applying for employment with an institution is entirely voluntary and, usually deeply desired. An individual may have been terminated from a previous position or, due to changing financial circumstances, have to return to work, but there is no obligation to seek employment with any specific institution. It would be fairly unheard of for a company to seek out an unwilling individual and coerce them into accepting a job offer. There are, of course, headhunting agencies that pursue already employed job candidates to accept a new position, but these recruiters are out to entice, not coerce, these candidates.
Once the applicant has transitioned to employee, to recipient, she is now burdened with the obligation to reciprocate. As has been discussed in the review of the literature on the gift and gift giving, this obligation to reciprocate is heavily mandated by social norms, both formal and informal. The duty to reciprocate as well as its limitations is explored in more detail in the previous section. To touch briefly on those arguments, the obligation to reciprocate is much more easily avoided or ignored depending on the social class, power, and authority of the parties in the gift relationship. Yan’s (2002) research demonstrated that the individuals in the gift relationship that had greater social class or status would frequently fail to reciprocate. To do so carried relatively minimal, if any, negatives social consequences to those of greater social class. This project focuses on the experiences of educators. While those educators and the administrators serving as the agents of the educational institution may be of similar class backgrounds, their respective positions in the structural labor relationship accord an inherent imbalance in power.

It is the unpaid, thus surplus, labor performed by the employee that serves to satisfy the perceived obligation to reciprocate. In return for being “given” the gift of employment, of wages, the worker then in turn gives to the capitalist the “gift” of unpaid labor. The perception of the educators of having received a gift of employment effectively locks them into the socially mandated necessity to reciprocate. This reciprocation frequently, though not necessarily, is manifested in the form of unpaid labor. Interviews with educators from primary, secondary, and university educational institutions yielded data on the various forms of unpaid labor that takes place, and the findings demonstrated that a considerable majority, if not all, educators reported some level of unpaid labor.

In many respects, this unpaid, surplus labor also meets Bourdieu’s (1998) criterion that a gift be misrecognized as well as the obfuscation of calculation, price and value. “To refuse the
logic of the price is a way to refuse calculation and calculability. The fact that the consensus regarding the exchange rate is explicit is what renders calculability and predictability possible: one knows what to expect” (pgs. 96-7). Marx quite ably discussed the lack of consciousness on the part of the worker as to the surplus labor that is being appropriated by the capitalist, often without any awareness that it is being given in the first place. Many educators attribute the necessity of unpaid labor simply as a “cost of doing business” or as just being “part of the job” of working in the educational profession. I maintain that it is rather the misrecognition of acceptance of employment as gift that fundamentally motivates the performance of unpaid labor in such significant quantities and intensity. This misrecognition also addresses Derrida’s statement that the gift is impossible because of the burden of obligation that is inherent in the gift. The unrecognized unconscious giving of unpaid labor on the part of the worker makes it possible to circumvent Derrida’s strict interpretation of the impossibility of the gift.
Chapter 3: The Modalities of Labor

The calculation of wages is a consistently problematic process. To do so raises the questions of the value of labor power and the means by which that value is quantified. In “Wage Labour and Capital” Marx (1849) addresses the issue by analyzing labor performed by factory workers that created a tangible finished product. Before a wage could be properly determined it was necessary to first calculate the value of the commodity produced. Only then could the employer determine the wage they were willing and/or able to pay. This process is increasingly complicated when we consider the valuation of an intangible product of labor. Adam Smith (1991) distinguished between productive and unproductive labor, a distinction examined in greater detail below. Contemporary U.S. society is composed disproportionately of a service economy engaging in predominantly unproductive labor, although some services can be considered productive labor, rather than the manufacturing economy performing productive labor of decades past. Education is a field in which many workers are involved in unproductive labor. Unproductive labor, unlike productive labor, does not produce a vendible product that can be sold for profit. This is not to say that unproductive labor does not create value, for it assuredly does, but produces use value rather than exchange value.

In many service economy occupations, particularly those lower on the wage scale, employers attribute such low wages to employees’ lack of education, training, skill and experience. However there are also relatively low-paid occupations - especially when compared to positions in banking, finance, and healthcare products and administration - such as teaching, which, depending on the level taught, often require higher education, on-going and time consuming lecture or lesson plan preparations, and, in many instances, a requirement to engage
in continuing education programs. A significant majority - nearly 70% - of the teachers I interviewed for this research had, at minimum, a master’s degree. The mean household income for teachers with only a bachelor’s degree was between $30,000 and $40,000 whereas the mean household income for educators with a master’s degree or doctoral degree was between $70,000 and $80,000. Before making comparisons between those salary figures it’s important to note that of the educators I interviewed, all but one of those with only a bachelor’s degree were unmarried while the majority of those respondents with a master’s degree, a doctorate, or professional degree were married and potentially included their spouse’s income in the total household income metric, which will artificially inflate their mean household income in comparison. Some educational occupations are compensated on a per contact hour contract, as in the case of university adjunct instructors, or on a scale based upon employment grade. Adjunct faculty are paid only for their time in the classroom, making all of the other essential work involved in being even a minimally effective university educator: curriculum development, lecture preparation, grading of assignments, and so forth effectively unpaid. For full-time university faculty, the transition from one grade (untenured) to the next (tenured) is often significantly dependent upon a candidate’s research, publication, and service performance records rather than on work done in the classroom. These non-classroom requirements significantly increase the amount of time invested in the occupation overall but are rarely included in the calculation of wages. The primary and secondary school teachers I interviewed unanimously reported working above and beyond their contracted working hours. The majority of respondents reported working between fifty and sixty hours each week. A quarter of the teachers reported working between sixty and seventy hours per week and nearly twenty percent reported working more than seventy hours per
week. This excessively significant amount of unpaid work being performed is more effectively analyzed and explained through the concept of the gift.

I initially began this project with an eye towards exploring an untheorized dimension of the concept of the gift. The relationship between employee and employer shared many similarities between that of giver and receiver and that, as a consequence of the analyses, the inequality observed in labor relations in modern capitalism may be more fully understood. Far from being alien to the capitalist mode of production, the practice of gift giving is an intrinsic, essential aspect of modern capitalism. Gift is any unpaid activity or action that is necessary for the survival or reproduction of a socioeconomic system. Gifts are actions that delineate and strengthen economic relationships, whether at an individual or an institutional/national/international level of analysis. As the section below on the history and theoretical discussion of gift, much of what has been recognized as unproductive and unpaid labor is actually an unrecognized and untheorized component of gift and gift giving. The U.S. free market system is predicated on necessary, organized, individual and institutional gift giving, of which the 2008 economic bailout plan was just the most recent and widely publicized example. That taxpayer bailout of private corporations was little more than an extreme modality of the structural gift giving relationship that is ubiquitously present in modern capitalist societies. Workers in the United States routinely produce more in labor output than for which they are paid in wages, and this ongoing contribution of unpaid labor serves as the functional equivalent of gift.

I reviewed the ways in which work or labor has been conceptualized in analyses of educational labor utilizing a Marxist perspective as well as one of classical and neoclassical economics. In this section I partly describe the historical progression of the concept of both
productive and unproductive labor, demonstrating initial similarities between unpaid and unproductive labor as well as their important differences. In later sections I more narrowly focus on the unpaid labor that is specifically performed by teachers and university faculty to demonstrate its functional equivalency as gift. Analysis of labor is comprised of two distinct dimensions: productive labor and unproductive labor. Several late-Twentieth Century studies also discussed a discretionary dimension of labor (Lipsky 1980, Evans and Harris 2004, etc.). Contemporary economic theory has traditionally treated unproductive labor as of secondary importance to the successful and efficient reproduction of the economic system. Although bearing some similarities to both productive and unproductive labor, neither category sufficiently encompasses the phenomenon of unpaid labor. Unpaid labor is best explained as an untheorized dimension of the gift.

*Productive, Unproductive, Discretionary and Surplus Labor*

Adam Smith was one of the earliest economic theorists to make a distinction between productive and unproductive labor. Smith (1991) writes, “There is one sort of labour which adds to the value of the subject upon which it is bestowed: there is another which has no such effect. The former, as it produces a value, may be called productive; the latter, unproductive” (pg. 270). The U.S. economic system has historically placed a greater emphasis on the preference and importance of productive, rather than unproductive, labor. This primacy of recognition often overlooks entirely the considerable role of unproductive labor to foster and sustain the functioning of productive labor. Such an example contemporary to Smith would be an examination of the domestic labor and child-rearing performed by women that allowed for men
to be able to seek employment for wages outside the home. A brief example of such a system of support relevant to current social expectations of a (non-) gendered division of labor is the work performed by Information Technology professionals in many corporations. While their design and maintenance of computer systems and networks is technically unproductive, its performance allows for and makes more efficient the productive labor it supports.

According to Smith, any labor that is fixed – defined here to mean applied to or upon – in a tangible commodity is considered productive. An example is the labor performed by a carpenter in the transformation of wood as raw material into a commodity to be exchanged for money. Through the effort of the worker, productive labor reproduced the cost of the labor itself, and should have resulted in surplus value as well. It is incorrect to assume that productive labor results in only tangible products and unproductive labor produces only intangible goods or services. Smith offers examples of food service employees serving food and drinks to their customers, of lawyers who create legal documents for their clients, and even the employment of prostitutes selling sexual services as engaging in productive labor. Even though the product is either intangible or is consumed/exhausted upon delivery, it is still considered productive labor because the sale of the products results in the reproduction of the laborers’ costs as well as a potential for profit for the employers of laborers. The potential for exchange for money of the product is the key component of productive labor.

Unpaid labor is akin to productive labor insofar as it leads to the increasing of value in the transformation of raw materials to a vendible commodity. In some respects it is perhaps the ultimate expression of productive labor because it adds value while incurring no cost in wages to the capitalist. Unpaid labor, however, falls outside the scope of traditional economic analysis for exactly that reason; it is not purchased and cannot be analyzed in the same manner as a
traditional commodity. There is no formal exchange taking place because the worker receives no (tangible or vendible) benefit/payment for their efforts. Because labor-power is a commodity with an exchange value, in addition to use-value, any analysis of its appropriation by capital without payment or wages is similarly analogous to the fraudulent acquisition of or theft of any other commodity. It is only the workers’ own complicity in the arrangement mitigates that this conception of unpaid labor as theft as well as the imbalance in power between employer and employees. Lichtenstein (2009) discusses how Wal-Mart is able to, in some situation, compel its employees to work off the clock. Many workers do so because they are economically reliant on the job, are members of a disadvantaged and vulnerable population, or both.

Although Marx never discusses the mechanisms through which capital ensures the workers’ (voluntary) participation in the enterprise, Pierre Bourdieu (1997) discusses ways in which exploitation is sustained by the workers themselves. This serves to further show the inherent, structural inequality between employers and employees. Unpaid labor bears some analytical similarity to the concept of primitive accumulation that Marx (1867) discussed in the first volume of Capital as, “The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement, and entombment in mines of the indigenous population of that continent, the beginnings of the conquest and plunder of India, and the conversion of Africa into a preserve for the commercial hunting of black-skins, are all things through which we characterize the dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief moments of primitive accumulation” (chapter 31). The capitalist, rather than laying out funding for an expedition to a region with potential for a large yield of commodities to be appropriated, either cheaply or by force, funds the hiring and (sometimes) training of employees from whom unpaid labor can be extracted, often in very high quantities. Because productive unpaid labor is, in essence, given
(whether freely or otherwise), it is more appropriately analyzed within the confines of the gift relationship.

Unproductive labor is that category of labor that does not result in a fixing of increased value in the product. Smith (1991) gives domestic servants as an example of unproductive labor, writing:

The labour of the menial servant, on the contrary, adds to the value of nothing. Though the manufacturer has his wages advanced to him by his master, he, in reality, costs him no expense, the value of those wages being generally restored, together with a profit, in the improved value of the subject upon which his labour is bestowed. A man grows rich by employing a multitude of manufacturers; he grows poor by maintaining a multitude of menial servants. The labour of the latter, however, has its value, and deserves its reward as well (pg. 270).

The above passage regarding unproductive labor hints at an initial, somewhat superficial, similarity to the concept of unpaid labor. The capitalist, in extracting unpaid labor, grows richer still by employing those that would contribute unpaid labor. In unproductive labor, the value of the work frequently is consumed upon its completion, and the cost of the labor itself is not reproduced. A servant labors to clean a home and certainly provides a demonstrable and desired service or utility to the employer, but at no point does the servant create a vendible product. Smith also provides examples of soldiers and sailors as unproductive laborers. Their services are essential for the well-being of the society as a whole, but still economically unproductive. The wages paid to soldiers come from taxation and government spending and not from their production of a vendible product. The wages of a servant come from the profit appropriated by the capitalist from the sale of vendible goods produced by his purchasing of productive labor-power. Unproductive labor results in the transfer of income whereas productive labor results in its creation. The labor performed by the servant has value to the capitalist, but it is not productive
labor, i.e. it does not increase the value of the raw materials upon which the labor is worked. The unproductive labor of a servant is valued because it maximizes the exploitation of opportunity cost. It costs a certain amount of money in wages to pay the servant for performing housekeeping duties. The capitalist could perform that housekeeping without employing an outside servant, but to do so would require the capitalist to expend time rather than money in doing the housekeeping. Depending on the value of the capitalist’s time when compared to the servant’s wages, it usually made more economic sense to pay the servant and free the capitalist to perform more valuable work.

There is another modality of labor to be considered as potentially explanatory for unpaid labor. This phenomenon is discretionary labor. Discretionary labor was discussed in Michael Lipsky’s (1980) book *Street-Level Bureaucrats: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services*, and has been used in a number of studies since (Lipsky (1980), Evans and Harris (2004), Moody (19xx), and Mackey (2008). Lipsky discussed the difficult roles held by individuals working in certain (usually governmental) bureaucratic institutions tasked with providing social services and benefits to, usually, low-income families and individuals. The workers in these institutions, the “street-level bureaucrats” were primarily teachers and school administrators, police officers, social workers and other child protective services (CPS) workers, and employees in lower courts, legal services of offices, and other agencies whose mandate is to provide a viable social service. One of the shared characteristics of each of these street-level bureaucrats is that their workloads are, in principle, limitless. Each of these public services organizations are beset with considerably more clients that resources or funding. Social workers and CPS employees have such enormous caseloads that to keep even marginally above water the must impose significant time limitations on each case. Even with implementing time-saving measures there are still...
considerable numbers of cases waiting to be investigated. Administrators at the U.S. Department of Veterans’ Affairs (VA) currently, as of March 2013, have a backlog of 900,000 records of soldiers’ claims to process for benefits disbursement. The average waiting time for a claim is 273 days. Startlingly, this backlog comes after several consecutive years of budgetary increases. Attorneys in public defenders offices are overburdened with clients, which has contributed to increasing numbers of plea bargains and perpetuates a system in which there is greater likelihood for an innocent defendant to be found guilty. Administrators of social welfare programs such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), colloquially known as food stamps, consistently have more applicants than available funds. In such cases, it is not unusual for informal or non-approved practices to be employed to aid those street-level bureaucrats in determining who is “deserving” of public assistance. The administrative practice is often so under- or over-regulated that employees are enticed, even required, to exercise discretion, sometimes inappropriately, in enrolling participants and distributing benefits.

Educators, particularly in publicly-funded schools, are fighting battles on multiple fronts. The numbers of students in classrooms has increased steadily over recent decades. The schools themselves are filled beyond capacity; according to Strizek, et al (2006) reporting in the 2003 Schools and Staffing Survey many teachers - 26.7% in public schools and 15.5% in private schools - do not have their own classrooms in which to safely store books, materials, and students’ assignments. The same survey reports that nearly a third of U.S. public schools, 31.7%, utilized one or more temporary building as classrooms. As school enrollments have increased, very rapidly in some areas, many school districts have been faced with significant spatial shortfalls. One teacher interviewed reported that his English as a Second Language (ESL) class
was assigned to a converted restroom; the fixtures had been removed but the room’s original purpose was unmistakable to both the teacher and the students. Another elementary school in a financially well-off school district in a suburban Midwestern state reported that her class is held in a temporary, modular, pre-fabricated building that was leakage issues, a tenacious group of mice, and a significant variation in temperature depending on where one’s seat is in relation to the windows. Not all schools using pre-fabricated building are suffering from such infrastructural failings, but temporary buildings are supposed to be exactly that - temporary. Modular classrooms are designed for short-term, stop-gap measures, e.g. to house students during brief periods of new construction or renovation. These units were neither designed nor intended for long-term use, and the accounts of leakage and infestation over time clearly illustrate the reason why.

Increasing class sizes also pose curricular challenges to teachers. With more students needing supervision and direction, more assignments, papers, and exams to grade, and state-mandated standardized-exam-focused lesson plans to create, teachers have less and less time to devote to individualized attention to each of their students. Teachers must exercise discretion in how they allocate their time and energy. The making, shaping, and guiding of students could easily be a job without end, and, for many teachers, this is exactly how they undertake their profession - by working longer and longer hours unpaid.

All of the public services sector employees discussed employ some measure of discretionary labor in order to meet all of their professional obligations. However, discretionary labor, particularly as discussed by Lipsky (1980) does not adequately explain the phenomenon of unpaid labor. In Street-Level Bureaucracy Lipsky discusses how the volume of work and very large caseloads incentivize employees to exercise discretion in performing their work.
Fundamentally, what makes Lipsky’s conception of discretionary labor inadequate to explain unpaid labor is that discretionary labor governs how bureaucratic labor is performed and, in some instances, the intensity with which it is performed, but does little to contribute to our understanding of why such unpaid labor, discretionary or otherwise, is performed in the first place.

Lipsky’s bureaucrats, particularly educators, were well aware of the institutional limits on resources and time and would frequently use discretion in directing time and resources towards clients that met the bureaucrats’ particular criteria for valuation. The utilization of formal and, even more insidiously, informal educational tracks was prominently discussed by Lipsky. In students’ first introductions to the educational system, many children would find themselves sorted into specific accelerated, non-accelerated, or even remedial educational groupings, often on the basis of nothing more than language ability, classroom behavior, manner of dress, impressions of the child’s family, marital status of parent(s), or perceived social class. Once locked into a particular track, for most students it served as a self-fulfilling prophecy. Teachers would allocate disproportionate amounts of their limited time to the students that were, often incorrectly and certainly hastily, labeled as being more worthwhile of such temporal investments.

Protection of resources is not a new phenomenon, nor is it even particularly inherently human. Certain bacteria will hold off on producing certain destructive enzymes until, through the exchange of chemical communicative molecules, a certain population density has been reached that will allow the enzyme to significantly affect the host organism. Without such coordination, each bacterium would waste energy and resources producing an enzyme that would be absorbed with no effect by the host. This relationship of cooperation easily parallels that of human societies.
Bureaucrats of social welfare programs exercise discretion to enroll or drop specific applicants, often based not on the official, mandated criteria for acceptance into the program, but, because there are so many applicants who are technically qualified, based on a more arbitrary standard implemented by individual street-level bureaucrats. Evans and Harris (2004) note that Lipsky’s use of discretion tends to describe it either/or with regard to its prevalence among street-level bureaucrats, rather than varying along a continuum of intensity or degree. They also allow for a greater range of potential outcomes resulting from the exercise of discretion, whether positive or negative, intended or unintended.

In Justice Without Trial, Skolnick (1966) described how police officers have significant freedom, even if only freedom from continual surveillance, to exercise discretion in determining which individuals who they detain will be taken in and formally entered into the criminal justice system and which individuals will be let off with a warning. The exercise of discretion by police officers can have very significant impacts upon criminal defendants. One of the most important factors that prosecutors will consider when determining whether to accept a plea bargain and that judges will consider when determining sentencing is whether the defendant has a criminal record. If two offenders are apprehended simultaneously in the act of vandalism and the first has one or two prior offenses while the second, though having been caught several times previously but never, for whatever reason(s), formally charged, then there is a strong likelihood that they will receive differential treatment through various stages of the criminal justice system. The discretion exercised by police officers may prove to be a significantly contributing variable when analyzing the unintended consequences of particular policies and manifestations of authority.

A specific program that grants the police a considerable amount of discretion is the Stop, Question, and Frisk practice in New York City, known colloquially as “stop-and-frisk.” From
2002 through March 2013 the New York Police Department (NYPD) will have performed over five million stop-and-frisk encounters, according to data analysis by the New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU). In the years 2010 to 2012 over 1.8 million people were stopped. Over 1.5 million, or 84.2% of individuals stopped were black or Latino, which is significantly disproportionate compared to the fact that 52.6% of the New York City population is black and Latino. When variables controlling for neighborhood, time of day, and so forth are accounted for there is still a considerable disparity. To take a single New York City neighborhood as an example, in Park Slope in Brooklyn 79% of individuals stopped were black or Latino even though they comprise only 24% of the population. Of the stops performed, 6% (????) resulted in an arrest, 0.12% resulted in the confiscation of a firearm - which was one of the main touted aims of the program - and 1.8% resulted in discovery of a controlled substance, usually marijuana. These firearms and contraband seizure statistics are actually lower than has been found when individuals are stopped and searched at random, i.e. not racially-motivated or directed, profiled stops. Even though two states, to date, have legalized/decriminalized marijuana, NYPD officers have the discretionary power to arrest individuals for possessing marijuana. I don’t argue for the willful overlooking of violations of the law, nor necessarily advocate for a national legalization of marijuana, but rather for recognition of the fact that discretionary enforcement of stop-and-frisk is creating a larger and larger population of individuals, usually black and Latino, that have new or expanded criminal records. Even if more and more states, even the country as a whole, were to legalize marijuana it would not help those individuals swept up by stop-and-frisk. Convicted bootleggers in the early 20th Century didn’t suddenly find themselves released from prison just because prohibition ended, nor will individuals stopped on the street and found with marijuana find themselves with expunged records. Lipsky, Moody, and others have well-
discussed the consequences of having a record to a criminal defendant. However much
discretionary labor may play a significant role in the experiences of clients of street-level
bureaucracies, it does little to explain the phenomenon of unpaid labor. The performance of some
dimensions of discretionary labor presupposes the performance of unpaid labor. If there were not
already a foundation of working unpaid, then the notion of discretionary labor would be less
meaningful.

In *Capital* and *Theories of Surplus Value*, Marx criticized Smith’s, and subsequent social
theorists’, conceptions of productive and unproductive labor. Rather than single universal
definitions of productive and unproductive labor, Marx wrote that they are situationally-
dependent. That which is considered an example of unproductive labor in a feudal mode of
production may not be so considered in a capitalist mode of production. It is necessary to
consider the relations of production in addition to the means of production within societies.
Additionally, there are important class distinctions in the determination and definition of
productive and unproductive labor. From the perspective of the capitalist class, productive labor
is strongly related to surplus labor. Labor is productive if it results in the increased value of
(private) capital or contributes to the accumulation of (private) capital. A key divergence from
Smith is Marx’s assessment that unproductive labor – labor that is only accomplishing a transfer,
rather than an increase, of value – may be *productive* from the capitalist’s perspective. For
example, an accountant in a corporate firm would be considered an unproductive laborer
according to Smith’s definitions, but, because the labor of the accountant contributes to a
reduction of the costs or the facilitation or a securing of capital accumulation, the labor is
productive from the perspective of the employer. This is congruent with Marx’s assertion of the
variability of definitions of productive/unproductive labor. As means and relations of production change and evolve, so do definitions of labor productivity.

It’s necessary to work with a consistent definition and analysis of surplus value, which is the cornerstone of much of Marx’s political economic theory. In *The Grundrisse*, Marx (1839) discussed surplus value and surplus labor:

> The great historic quality of capital is to create this *surplus value*, superfluous labor from the standpoint of mere use value, mere subsistence ...surplus labour above and beyond necessity has itself become a general need arising out of individual needs themselves... when the development of the productive powers of labour, which capital incessantly whips onward with its unlimited mania for wealth, and the sole conditions in which this mania can be realized, have flourished to the stage where the possession and preservation of general wealth require a lesser labour time of society as a whole... Accordingly, capital and labour relate to each other here like money and commodity; the former is the general form of wealth, the other only the substance destined for immediate consumption (pg. 321).

In *Capital*, Marx examined the nature of the desire for and creation of surplus value:

> Our capitalist has two objects in view: in the first place, he wants to produce a *use-value* that has a value in exchange, that is to say, an article destined to be sold, a commodity; and secondly, he desires to produce a commodity whose value shall be greater than the sum of the values of the commodities used in its production, that is, of the means of production and the labour-power, that he purchased with his good money in the open market. His aim is to produce not only a *use-value*, but a commodity also; not only use-value, but value; not only value, but at the same time surplus-value (pgs. 128-9).

The earlier line of theorization on the category of unpaid labor as a possible modality of unproductive labor has shown that such a relationship of similarity is sparse and inadequate. There are pre-capitalist elements that persist in modern capitalism. Instances of gift giving in
modern capitalism are not simply inessential remnants or residual elements from earlier social relationships. Capitalism is dependent upon gift giving. Whether considering the impact of holiday giving to retail and manufacturing industries, the bailing out of private corporations with billions of taxpayer dollars, or the performance of hundreds of millions of hours of unpaid labor, the role of gifts and gift giving in capitalist societies is essential. Unpaid labor is essentially the functional equivalent of the gift, as historically described to only be notably relevant in pre-modern societies. Unpaid labor in modern capitalism fulfills many of the same needs as gift giving in pre-capitalist societies. The seemingly confusing instances of gift giving in contemporary capitalist societies are merely permutations of the misrecognized gift giving system of relations upon which the capitalist mode of production is predicated.

The categories of unpaid and unproductive labor are concepts that have carried over from physiocratic theorists. Physiocracy was a 17th century economic school that asserted a nation’s wealth was most significantly a result of productive work, particularly landed agriculture, and advocated a high price on agricultural commodities. According to Marx (2000), the physiocratic school asserted that only agricultural labor created value in the products of society. The physiocrats differentiated between productive and unproductive labor in an effort to distinguish between some activities that are truly productive from others that were not. Physiocracy immediately preceded and was eventually eclipsed by Adam Smith and the modern school of classical economics. Smith continued using the concepts of productive and unproductive labor but such use led to a considerable amount of circular reasoning in determining which activities are considered productive or unproductive and under which circumstances that may be the case. The circularity of these categories indicates the lack of rationality in their definition. If traditionally unproductive labor has had a pretense of rationality it is because there is consensus
that some economic activities are to be valued and other activities are to remain unvalued. Household and reproductive labor are often conflated with unproductive labor in labor and economic analyses. In addition, many of the occupations traditionally dominated by women – teaching, nursing, administrative assistants, and so forth – tend to have the labor performed in these occupations determined as less valuable than in traditionally male-dominated occupations. This gender-based differentiation holds true even when comparing different occupations that require similar levels of experience and credentialization. Even within the occupations themselves, men’s contributions are valued more highly and men are more often directed into supervisory or management positions. This privileging of men’s labor in such occupations was referred to by Christine Williams (1992) as the “glass escalator” in contrast to the “glass ceiling” frequently experienced by women. It is not rational to accord greater or lesser worth to the labor involved in particular occupations depending on the gender of the laborer. I am using the term rational insofar as the grounds on which the motivating economic reason is exchange. A rational action is one that is both reasoned as it may be evaluated against a coherent logic and one that is optimal for achieving a desired goal or aim. Economically rational actions are ideally value-neutral actions. Labor, as a commodity, should be identical in value regardless of the laborer’s gender. While it may make strong fiscal sense to pay less for a woman’s labor-power than a man’s and fulfills the second criteria of rationality in optimizing a beneficial economic transaction, it fails the first criteria by not being logically consistent. According to Marx (1849), “Labour power, therefore, is a commodity, neither more nor less than sugar. The former is measured by the clock, the latter by the scales” (pg. 8). There is no other metric given as to how labor-power is to be valued. It is rational to assess labor-power as a commodity for exchange by the same standard of valuation. It is not rational to differentially value the labor-power of an
individual or group as having a lesser exchange value even though every laborer may create an identical use-value, however this has been seen time and again in the U.S. when comparing wages paid to non-white or to women compared to white men. It is rational to exchange labor-power for wages; but not to perform significant amounts of unpaid work in exchange for a vague, often informal, and frequently unreliable managerial assessment as a “team player.” It is financially understandable why employers would seek to extract as much unpaid labor as possible, but it is not economically rational for a worker to contribute to participating in their own exploitation. However it is well demonstrated that such participation occurs. In *Pascalian Meditations* Bourdieu (1997) writes that workers create an “investment in labor” by means of which they, in addition to the intrinsic benefit (profit) of labor, i.e. wages, they also find an “extrinsic profit in labor, irreducible to simple monetary income” (pg. 202), which further assures their inevitable exploitation. Within the workplace there is “miscognition of the objective truth of labor as exploitation” (pg. 202). A similar finding was reported in Michael Burawoy’s (1975) *Manufacturing Consent*.

Unproductive labor has no exchange value. In Marx’s (1990) *Capital*, exchange value is defined as the quantity of other commodities for which a particular good could be traded. This is similar to, but not identical to a commodity’s price. This category of unproductive labor’s inability to contribute to surplus value is observed in *Capital* where Marx wrote:

If we now compare the two processes of producing value and of creating surplus-value, we see that the latter is nothing but the continuation of the former beyond a definite point. If on the one hand the process be not carried beyond the point, where the value paid by the capitalist for the labour-power is replaced by an exact equivalent, it is simply a process of producing value; if, on the other hand, it be continued beyond that point, it becomes a process of creating surplus-value… (pg. 134).
The above passage illustrates that one of the key differences between unproductive labor and the concept of unpaid labor is the potential for surplus value. Unproductive labor does not produce a vendible product, i.e. a product from which surplus value may be obtained. Unpaid labor, however, most assuredly has the potential for increasing surplus value. Each unit of work performed and inscribed within its object of labor that is unpaid increases the employer’s potential for profit. Gift, particularly of unpaid labor is, in many cases, exchangeable. It is not appropriate to consider unpaid labor as simply another dimension of unproductive labor. While there some superficial similarities, the differences between the two are significant. Viewing unpaid labor as another modality of unproductive labor is not sufficient to account for all of the facets inherent in unpaid labor. Unpaid labor as gift provides a more cogent understanding. To further highlight this relationship, it is necessary to more closely examine the phenomenon of unpaid labor.

Unpaid Labor

The concept of unpaid labor requires problematization before it can be effectively analyzed. Preliminary interviews with educators indicated a significant prevalence of the notion of unpaid labor, though such labor was manifested in several forms. Even given this initial corroboration I want to not take for granted important aspects of the concept of unpaid labor. First, is unpaid labor being performed by teachers? My hypothesis, supported by my experiences as an educator and the experiences of family, friends, and colleagues, is that unpaid labor is routinely performed. However, in this project I employ a methodology that more rigorously tests that supposition. Second, can the concept of surplus labor and value intrinsically apply to the
unpaid labor performed by educators? For example, most educators have their summers free of teaching obligations. A perspective that is critical of the idea that educators work unpaid may point to these summers “off” and make the claim that educators actually work less than full-time over the course of a year. Another potential critique is that grading, preparing lessons and lectures, and meeting and communicating with students and/or their parents is an essential part of teaching obligations and cannot be considered to be separate from in-classroom obligations. These and other potential critiques are addressed in the following section.

There is very little in the existing literature regarding unpaid labor within a paid occupational role. Most of the literature that does discuss unpaid labor focuses rather on domestic work, as that performed by Filed (1989), Elson (1993), and Keklik (2006). A review of economic analyses of productive and unproductive labor provides the necessary foundation to examine unpaid labor. In many respects, unpaid labor and surplus labor are significantly similar. In *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, Friedrich Engels (1880) wrote:

> It was shown that the appropriation of unpaid labor is the basis of the capitalist mode of production and of the exploitation of the workers that occurs under it; that even if the capitalist buys the labor power of his laborer at its full value as a commodity on the market, he yet extracts more value from it than he paid for; and that in the ultimate analysis this surplus value forms those sums of value from which are heaped up the constantly increasing masses of capital in the hands of the possessing classes (Chapter 3).

Unpaid labor is inextricably linked to the exploitative nature of the capitalist mode of production. Not only does the employer extract more value than initially paid upon acquiring the worker’s labor-power, more *labor* is extracted as well. The power held by employers to compel, or simply collect, unpaid/surplus labor through a system of structural inequality is paramount. One such inequality is the economic power to mandate longer working hours, even if such labor
should be unpaid. Even in strong national economic environments, but especially in weak ones, the millions of unemployed workers in the U.S. is a looming influence serving to deter workers from airing formal or informal grievances about working conditions or policies. These can include such issues as longer working hours or other negative changes in the workplace, e.g. increased mandatory health care or retirement financial contributions. Juliet Schor (1993) wrote in *The Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline of Leisure*, “…employers have a structural advantage in the labor market, because there are typically more candidates ready and willing to endure this work marathon than jobs for them to fill” (pg. 71).

A second example of the systemic inequality between employer and employee is the mechanism through which the structural hierarchy of many workplaces also contributes to employer advantage in the labor relationship. In *Contested Terrain: The Transformation of the Workplace in the Twentieth Century*, Richard Edwards (1979) analyzed the rise of bureaucratic control - an employer/employee dynamic which is characterized by formal rules and procedures and the internalization of norms - to control employees. However, in analyzing the appropriation of unpaid labor I would assert that greater import is placed on the governance of employees through informal rules and norms, many of which are perpetuated by and policed by the employees themselves, having already internalized the norms of teamwork and the paying of metaphorical dues.

Workers’ performance of unpaid labor has long been a significant phenomenon in modern capitalist societies. By unpaid labor I am referring to any labor that is performed by an employee in order to satisfy occupational requirements or obligations, whether implicit or explicit, but for which the employee is not compensated in either wages or other benefits. Unpaid labor can take many forms. For hourly employees any time required by the employer to be on the
premises either for a meeting, to be on-site prepared to work, or to be performing some type of work off the clock is unpaid. For salaried employees the notion of unpaid work is a bit murkier. Traditionally a salary is paid to employees in occupations that generally require a higher degree of education and, often, are more mental rather than physical in terms of job performance. In the United States, a full-time occupation is generally accepted to encompass forty hours. Salaried workers, often due to the nature of the work, have some measure of flexibility in determining how they will allocate their duties over the course of the workday. Frequently salaried employees are required to work greater than the minimum forty hours in order to fulfill all occupational requirements, however this burden was also frequently compensated by the payment of a commensurately high wage. While salaried employees may work above and beyond what is generally considered full-time, they were ordinarily well-compensated for that obligation. There are some occupations where the work requirements far outpace the salary remuneration, but in the U.S. many of those positions are thought of as where one “pays one’s dues” before being promoted into a significantly higher-paying position, often accompanied by shorter working hours. Even should the working hours not decrease, the pay is high enough and the employee herself is sufficiently experienced and/or credentialed that should she opt to work shorter hours for less pay at a different firm or even a different field, there are no significant structural, social, or cultural barriers to impede this option. Examples of this type include physicians in their residencies, associate corporate and district attorneys, public accountants, and entry-level financial occupations. What those occupations all have in common, however, is an eventual graduation into a significantly more lucrative promotion. The teachers and professors discussed in this project will, for the most part, even though salaried have no such commensurate leap in
increased financial reward even after working long hours for years on end, particularly in the early years of their careers.

Just as a gift that one gives or receives need not be a tangible object, but can also be a service, so can the performance of unpaid labor be understood as a gift. This particular gift is one to which there are multiple potential recipients. Unpaid labor can be considered gift to the employing institution. As workers perform labor for which they are not compensated they increase the surplus value to the employer. Some workers may reframe their gift of unpaid labor as a gift to their clients, to students in the case of educators. I examine this perceived shifting of recipients of unpaid labor from institution to student by educators from the perspective of the educators themselves as well as that of the institution that, in addition to (or in spite of) educators’ efforts of reframing, ultimately remain beneficiaries of that gift of unpaid labor, even only if secondarily or indirectly. When teachers labor for the benefit of their students it frequently results in improved educational outcomes. Schools and administrators are also benefitting from increased student performance and, ultimately, teachers’ unpaid labor. When students perform above required minimums on standardized tests then the school system is often financially rewarded (or at least fails to be financially punished). Some teachers whom I interviewed also reported informal benefits, such as decreased administrative oversight of their classrooms and teaching methods, when their classes performed above minimum expectations.

The systemic, taken-for-granted assumption of employees’ participation in contributing unpaid labor has origins across numerous fields and occupations. In the past firms were able to exercise economic power over workers with the threat of termination and unemployment in order to cull as much unpaid labor as possible. While this threat persists, particularly among workers in vulnerable populations, advances in workers’ rights have assisted in curbing many of the most
draconian practices. These earlier practices of worker predation are a separate issue from the form of unpaid labor examined in this project. I investigated a dimension of unpaid labor in which the worker participates in and reproduces a system where unpaid labor is inevitable, is simply a taken-for-granted aspect of what it means to be employed. In addition, this relationship moves in a single direction. As the employer needs labor performed, it is expected that employees will work above and beyond to meet these needs. Should an employee’s needs change, i.e. a new baby or a sick relative, there is no mechanism through which the employee may be granted additional monies or time off, save at the beneficence of the employer for whom there would be no negative consequences were any concessions denied. In this project I examined the means by which educational institutions in modern capitalism foster situations in which unpaid labor is very frequently assumed. In many respects this unpaid labor is an untheorized aspect of the relationship between gift givers and receivers.

In considering the recognition of labor as unpaid, there are two related issues that must be clarified. These issues are whether the worker receives an hourly wage or is paid an annual salary for, usually, working in a full-time capacity. The educators I interview report being both hourly and salaried employees. All of the adjunct instructors with whom I spoke said they were paid an hourly wage for each contact hour, i.e. each hour spent teaching. The primary and secondary teachers and full-time university faculty all reported being paid an annual salary. Because of this, it is necessary to have a clear conception of how unpaid labor is defined for both types of educators.

First, many workers, including educators, have the expectations of the hours that constitute the work day explicitly defined in employment contracts. Hourly wage positions are expected to arrive at their job and "clock in" (defined here as reporting to one’s supervisor when
arriving to begin work or signing into an automated employee time management system) at a specific time, perform their duties, and then "clock out" and leave the premises at a specific time. Due to the formalized beginning and ending work verification it is relatively straightforward to distinguish paid from unpaid work among hourly workers. However, this is not to say that there is no room at all for ambiguity. One respondent related an account of his grandmother’s working at a large discount retail chain. The store had a policy stating employees were not permitted to park “close” to the storefront, so as not to occupy potential customer parking. This respondent’s ninety year old grandmother routinely walked a quarter of a mile to the store’s front door and then a further tenth of a mile from the front of the store to the back to clock-in. Because of her decreased mobility this took her an additional fifteen minutes daily, an additional hour and a half for every six-day workweek. This may technically meet the standard for unpaid labor.

Employees must be paid for any time that they are required to on the premises, regardless of whether they are actively working. Mandatory employee meetings to discuss store policy and so forth are all supposed to be paid. The commute to one’s place of employment is not required to be compensated, but in this elderly woman’s case, it was store’s own parking policy and time clock placement that caused her to spend additional unnecessary unpaid time preparing to work.

Second is the issue of a salaried employee. Salaried employees ordinarily have an expectation of a minimum number of hours that are to be worked weekly, bi-weekly, and so forth. For purposes of calculation a salaried employee is determined to work 2,080 hours per year (52 weeks multiplied by 40 hours per week). This labor obligation may be confirmed through the use of a time clock or other type of active or passive surveillance measures, e.g. office access passcard/keycard logging, records of computer logins and activity, video camera footage of the employee in the workplace, and so on. My focus in this project is the phenomenon
whereby many workers, particularly those who are salaried, are often subjected to direct or indirect, external or internal pressure to perform unpaid labor. Generally, though not always, as is observed in the cases of most educators, salaried employees are earning higher wages than non-salaried. This increased remuneration can and is often considered to mitigate instances in which the employee is occasionally required to work greater than a forty-hour workweek. However, it does little to compensate those employees who are consistently required to work significantly longer hours. I also examine the possibility whereby employees are not explicitly recognizing the means by which such unpaid labor is extracted. This is most significantly exemplified in the employees’ misrecognition of the nature of the worker-capital labor relationship and is another aspect of the way in which workers sustain their own exploitation.

According to traditional Marxist theory, laborers of every type do not sell their labor to their employers, but rather their labor power. Marx (1849) writes, “Labour power, therefore, is a commodity, neither more nor less than sugar. The former is measured by the clock, the latter by the scales” (pg. 8). It has historically been the practice of capital to extract as much labor as possible from the purchased labor power to maximize value. In Contested Terrain, Edwards (1978) describes the means through which capital streamlined the practice of acquiring as much labor as possible from their owed labor power. This practice began with the utilization of overseers, foremen, and managers; shifting to technological enforcement of labor standards, such as moving assembly lines; then transitioning to practices of bureaucratization to further maximize the return of potential labor. There are a variety of informal censures that may be levied against those employees that do not engage in expending this additional unpaid labor. This pressure or censure may be applied horizontally by one's occupational peers or vertically by one's supervisors or other workplace managers. Taking the extraction of labor still further,
capital employed means of obtaining unpaid labor. Although past societies had utilized systems of slavery and indentured servitude to acquire unpaid labor, such extremes were not necessary in modern capitalist societies. This did not manifest itself in any practice or system as despicable as slavery but through the imposition of labor-extending practices that capital was able to implement by virtue of the imbalance of power between worker and capital and through the workers’ own internalization of obligations of reciprocity inherent in gift giving relationships.

In Marxist political economic analyses, unpaid labor is the very linchpin upon which the capitalist mode of production is predicated. Engels (1880) summarizes the concept in *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, writing:

> It was shown that the appropriation of unpaid labour is the basis of the capitalist mode of production and of the exploitation of the worker that occurs under it; that even if the capitalist buys the labour power of his labourer at its full value as a commodity on the market, he yet extracts more value from it than he paid for; and that in the ultimate analysis this surplus value forms those sums of value from which are heaped up the constantly increasing masses of capital in the hand of the possessing class (Chapter 3).

Unpaid labor is economic exploitation, a more radical example of surplus value. The above passage indicates that unpaid labor is not necessary because the practice of buying labor-power to obtain surplus labor is sufficient to create profit. However, because enterprises are encouraged to maximize such profits, mechanism to extract unpaid labor are frequently employed. In the third volume of *Capital*, Marx (1894) discusses the political and economic relations of surplus labor:

> The specific economic form, in which unpaid surplus-labour is pumped out of direct producers, determines the relationship of rulers and ruled... Upon this, however, is founded the entire formation of the economic community which grows up out of the production relations themselves, thereby simultaneously its specific political form. It is
always the direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of production to the direct producers — a relation always naturally corresponding to a definite stage in the development of the methods of labour and thereby its social productivity — which reveals the innermost secret, the hidden basis of the entire social structure and with it the political form of the relation of sovereignty and dependence, in short, the corresponding specific form of the state (pg. 555).

The performance and appropriation of unpaid labor as a commodity in Marxist analysis is governed by rules of exchange. However, a perhaps more informative method through which we can better understand the nature of unpaid labor in political economy, although seemingly more indirect, is to use the concept of the gift. I first examined the social and economic role of unpaid labor, particularly in educational institutions. Second I discussed how traditional political economic thinking has attempted to explain the nature and function of unpaid labor in modern capitalist society. Third I discussed the theoretical progression of the concept of the gift and gift giving. Fourth I discussed the changing roles, professional obligations and responsibilities of educators as well as the changes in the type, degree, and quantity of unpaid labor they perform as a necessary function of their jobs. Fifth I detailed how political economy, the state, and the concept of the gift intersect in order to more fully explain the origination and perpetuation of unpaid labor in modern capitalist society. This project clarifies that a concealed element in the political economic approach to analysis of unpaid educational labor is revealed through the concept of the gift.

*The Extraction of Unpaid Labor*

The changes in the relationship between capital and employee were mainly sporadic and incremental since around the turn of the Twentieth Century. To many workers the possibility of
losing a job was just too great of a risk to take when faced with the choice to air grievances regarding having paid breaks eliminated, meal times shortened, and the like. Imposition, inconvenience, and even outright exploitation were predominantly preferred over the shattering upheaval of job loss. Recently the appropriation of unpaid labor is more especially observed among salaried workers rather than workers being paid an hourly wage. Because hourly workers are traditionally required to clock-in at the start of their working day and clock-out for any breaks and at the end of their working day, this formalized process makes it more difficult for firms to elicit unpaid labor - although it is certainly not an impossibility as there are numerous accounts of workers being forced to clock out yet continue working. Particularly notable examples are discussed by Steven Greenhouse (2004) in his article detailing the various ways in which workers compelled to work off the clock attempted to seek redress. As a salaried worker is not ordinarily required to clock-in and out each workday, it becomes much simpler to entice, convince, or coerce workers into arriving early, staying late, or working through breaks in order to obtain as much labor as possible. This process has come to be seen as the norm among employees in many industries, particularly finance, banking, public accounting, television & film, and it is perhaps nowhere more visible than in the educational profession.

Unpaid labor has also been able to be extracted through the creation of a moral schema in which a perceived sense of hard work, selflessness, and loyalty, particularly to one’s employer, has been adopted in some societies, most especially the United States. This virtue of hard work was famously illustrated in Max Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* and promulgated by the media, pundits, and politicians through the saturation of the collective consciousness of the heroic virtue of “pulling yourself by your bootstraps.” However, while Weber focuses on the role religion played in contributing to the modern capitalist economic
system, I am focusing rather on the practices of gift-giving as a significant factor contributing to unpaid labor; unpaid labor, in fact, as gift. The mechanism of unpaid labor extraction through religious indoctrination and virtue noted above is inefficient and such extraction is better understood in conjunction with the gift ideology as it reinforces the importance of reciprocation as a legitimate obligation. The ascetic work ethic contributed to the persistence in U.S. culture of the virtue of hard work that has served to mask the influence of the gift relationship which I assert has driven the performance and acquisition of unpaid labor. The ascetic work ethic actually serves to camouflage the influence of the gift in motivating employees to work unpaid. If a Protestant ethic fosters a society that prizes and makes virtuous a dedication to labor, then unpaid labor is further evidence of that dedication. While Protestantism values gift-giving, it is by no means a phenomenon unique to that, or any, particular religious denomination. In fact, gift giving is advocated in Roman Catholicism as well, which was the religious tradition used by Weber to serve as the contrast to Protestantism in his analysis.

One of the most insidious mechanisms of the extraction of unpaid work is the imposed culture of teamwork in occupational settings. Teamwork has two distinct facets. The first is the notion of being a good team player with respect to one’s employer, i.e. to the team as a whole. Recent decades have seen a trend in business culture emphasizing the ability to work well with others, at times even over and above an individual’s own job-related talents and abilities. This trend has become sufficiently pronounced that numerous university curricula have emerged or evolved to emphasize the practices of group and team work in course projects. Many college courses devote a significant portion of the total course grade to performance in group projects that require the developed ability to work as a team. Human Resources majors and departments were created in order to produce workers better able manage interpersonal relations between
employees and between employees and management in order to facilitate as smooth and efficient of a workplace as possible. Many colleges and universities offer major and minor programs in management and leadership, a component of which is the training in the management of human capital. Students majoring in management and leadership are routinely offered such courses as: Human Resource Management, Motivation and Work, Labor Relations and Conflict Management, and Human Capital Metrics. Significant time and expense has been devoted to fostering a teamwork-oriented labor environment, often in response to direct corporate requests or through corporate funding of specialized classrooms, seminars, programs, and so forth.

The second facet is that of being a good team player with respect to one’s teammates, i.e. to one’s peers. Many workers experience a compulsion to work above and beyond their contractually scheduled hours. Often this pressure is couched in the notion of being a good team player - everyone else is contributing extra labor and this can be significant impetus to do the same. Nearly every respondent with whom I spoke was aware, to varying degrees, of the work and time investment that their colleagues were putting in. For some respondents this awareness was collegial, for others more adversarial, but virtually no educators lacked a sense whatsoever of their co-workers work habits. In studies on “face time,” defined by Elsbach, et al (2010) as “1) the amount of face-to-face interaction that occurs between employees and relevant others, or 2) the amount of time an employee is merely seen at work or around the office” (pg. 736), there are active and passive components.

The first part of Elsbach’s definition is active, noting the interaction between employee and co-workers, management, and so forth. The second part is passive, in which the employee is merely being observed to be at work. The authors learned that merely being observed at work - not even necessarily being observed actually working, much less being observed working well or
efficiently - was sufficient to contribute to those employees being attributed such traits as “dependability” and “commitment.” While most every employee would be unfamiliar with the findings of this study, each can likely point to an example from their own experiences in which staying late at work brought them positive attention from their supervisors and, more harmfully, when leaving on-time or early, compared to one’s peers, contributed to a negative evaluation of their dedication. An empty chair has no possibility of garnering positive attention or rewards. In many instances of face-time, an employee’s “reward” may be simply the absence of punishment or of negative attention. This importance of impression management illustrates well the Thomas Theorem (1928) stating that, “If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences” (pg. 571-2). Especially in times of high unemployment, many employees would prefer to work longer, unpaid hours than to face the prospect of being defined a poor team player and possibly being replaced. Even among educators, in which there is a greater sense of individuality in that each teacher is the seat of authority within their own classroom, interview subjects reported being aware of which teachers performed more than “their share.” According to many of my respondents, that sense of autonomy has decreased markedly over the last couple of decades in the wake of standardized testing, No Child Left Behind programs, and increasingly arbitrary criteria and methods for teacher evaluations.

Educators expend a considerable amount of unpaid labor. Nearly every teacher has, at some time or another, been required to perform labor unpaid in order to complete all of their expected obligations. This was universally true among the primary and secondary school teachers and the university adjunct instructors with whom I’d spoken. According to one respondent, and echoed by numerous others, “No teacher can do all their work in 40 hours a week... no good teacher anyway.” In addition to the performance of unpaid labor, many
educators report having been required to purchase classroom and educational supplies with their own funds. A secondary school teacher reported always paying for snacks for her school newspaper students. Another primary school teacher stated the $75-100 allowance their school provided for classroom materials was never remotely sufficient to meet their teaching needs, and the teachers routinely purchased material and supplies on their own. This phenomenon is so widely recognized that some bookstores offer teachers an additional discount during the back-to-school shopping season. I’ve found that, based on data obtained from both pre-interview discussions and completed educator interviews, this is an issue that is very nearly universal to all educators, whether teaching in primary, secondary, or collegiate institutions.

In this project I am examining the labor performed by educators. Popular opinion and media accounts of educators, particularly primary and secondary school teachers, are curiously divided in their portrayals. Teachers have recently been described in the media as overpaid, underperforming relics of an over-funded, ineffective governmental bureaucracy. Simultaneously there is a second current of public perception that sees teachers, on the whole, as caring professionals who work long, thankless hours, in difficult setting, for little money. This dual perception of teachers is very intriguing and makes educational professions well-suited for a closer analysis of unpaid labor.

There are many variations of unpaid labor that are performed by educators. Depending upon the type of educational institution, e.g. primary schools, secondary schools, and universities, there will be varying occupational requirements. The types of labor and activities performed that I define as unpaid also depend upon the specific nature of the educators’ employment contracts. Unpaid labor includes all actions and activities that are performed by educators out of a perceived sense of duty or obligation but for which they receive no payment.
Unpaid labor may include the completion of implicit institutional requirements, for example, the decoration of classrooms or making additional time for student-teacher conferences. Unpaid labor may also include labor performed to fulfill explicit institutional requirements, such as lesson plan development, grading and providing detailed evaluative comments of assignments and papers, student organization sponsorship, sports teams coaching, and so forth. While both these implicit and explicit obligations carry specific sanctions for non-performance, an implicit norm of being a “team player” does exist. Most primary and secondary school teachers receive a salary for thirty-five to forty hours of teaching labor per week, from 8am-4pm, for example. During these hours, teachers will fulfill teaching obligations as well as grade assignments, make class preparations, and perform administrative tasks. The majority of those primary and secondary educators spent approximately 75% of their time either actively teaching and/or performing various types of classroom supervision. Every teacher with whom I spoke reported not being able to complete all these required tasks within the usual working hours and must take work home to be completed during their free time. All work necessary for the fulfillment of their teaching obligations must be completed in order to be effective, even just passably competent, in their profession. Teachers may not simply omit some obligations due to time constraints; therefore many teachers are required to perform significant amounts of work either at home or at the school during non-working hours. These obligations seem to be most heavily concentrated upon less experienced teachers. Many of the requirements for curriculum development, once completed, can be repeated from one year to the next, needing only a smaller investment of time for maintenance, updating, and review. The implications of burdening the least experienced educators with the most significant amount of unpaid labor is discussed in Chapter 6, which
examines the reactions to unpaid labor by educators, e.g. feelings of resentment, performing sub-par work, and so forth.

Unpaid labor, like productive labor, does result in fixing increased value in the product, albeit intangibly in the case of the education of students. The performance of unpaid labor increases the value of the education provided to the students. However, unpaid labor does not easily fit into the productive/unproductive labor dichotomy because as unpaid labor is, by definition, uncompensated, it cannot be easily analyzed in a neoclassical economic model as if it were a commodity. Ordinarily, labor is a commodity because it has value and can be exchanged for money. Unpaid labor, again, is by definition unpurchased – yet still appropriated. It is in this context that unpaid labor can be best examined and explained as gift. By understanding the role of the gift in society, we can more accurately both describe and explain the phenomenon of unpaid labor in teaching. Many educators reported a feeling of goodwill or gratitude following being offered an educational position. This sense of gratitude, though neither universal nor uniform, had multiple modalities. Some educators reported feeling grateful to the institution, others to their departments, still others to their colleagues. Other educators spoke of feeling grateful to be able to work in their chosen field, though they did not recognize a specific recipient of/for that gratitude.

Unpaid labor is the manifestation of the fulfillment of a misrecognized obligation to reciprocate after entering into a misperceived gift relationship by “accepting” employment. As I discuss below, the entrance into this gift relationship is facilitated through both individual and social misrecognition and structural reproduction of the employee-employer relationship as a gift relationship. The educator/employee as recipient misrecognizes the “offer” of employment as a gift and then internalizes the obligation to reciprocate, this reciprocation frequently taking the
form of unpaid labor. This unpaid labor can consequently be analyzed and understood similarly
to the surplus labor and surplus value upon which the modern capitalist system is resting.

A neoclassical economic perspective on unpaid labor generally recognizes it as a
phenomenon that would be resolved by the market itself. If workers were unwilling to work the
additional time, explicitly or implicitly, mandated by employers then the workers are free to seek
alternative employment and the employer will be able to hire employees who are willing to
perform the required labor, whether paid or unpaid. Among educators, as discussed in greater
detail in the following chapter, it is this scenario that labor unions have worked, and have
historically succeeded, to prevent. One respondent had discussed after working for 8 years as an
elementary school teacher, she and her family moved to a different school district. When
applying for another teaching position, she found the schools were unable or unwilling to hire a
teacher with her level of experience, i.e. salary history, preferring (or requiring due to budgetary
concerns) to hire a newly graduated teacher with no experience. Another respondent with three
years of elementary school experience discussed how she needed to change jobs to a different
district within a year, or two at the most, in order to not be frozen out of the hiring process due to
too much experience.

Having laid out the theoretical innovation by utilizing the concept of the gift as a
category of analysis and reviewing the literature on the gift, the next chapter discusses the
method used to conduct the empirical research that supports my assertion that unpaid labor is
functionally equivalent to gift and reciprocation and that a gift relationship is embedded in the
employer-employee labor relationship. The empirical research obtained data partly
demonstrating that many educators fail to fully recognize that they are unpaid workers or the
numerous ways that such unpaid labor is both mandated and utilized by the administration and
institution. Educators working unpaid are a concealed part of the capitalist economy that is only revealed through the analytical lens of the gift.
PART II: EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

Chapter 4: Method

This dissertation investigates the unpaid labor performed by educators. I began with the premise that the potential for performance of unpaid labor is universally applicable to every educator in every institution. Interviews and personal experience as an educator at varying institutional levels indicate that the concept of unpaid labor is exceedingly prevalent. It may be that not every educator actually performs unpaid labor, but that the imposed obligation to perform such labor, whether implicit or explicit, exists for every educator by virtue of entering into an employment relationship. It may ultimately prove to be accurate that aspects of the gift relationship affect most, if not all, employer/employee relationships, but this project is focusing first on a case study of educators. The large population of educators in the U.S. and the on-going public discussions about teacher effectiveness, salaries, and student educational outcomes make this an extremely important and relevant subject for critical examination and analysis.

Whether, how, and the extent to which work performed outside of the official school day or setting is considered unpaid is an issue addressed in the theoretical component of this research. This issue of unpaid labor warrants increased exploration for several reasons. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2012) report there are approximately 7.2 million educators currently working in the United States. These educators are working hundreds of unpaid hours of work annually, which, when multiplied by the number of teachers in the U.S., indicates that hundreds of millions of hours of unpaid labor are being performed by educators every year. After comparing my sample data to 2011 American Community Survey (ACS) data on primary, secondary, and post-secondary school educators, it is clear that teachers routinely
underestimate the number of hours, paid and unpaid, they work each week. A second reason to clarify understanding of unpaid labor is that a richer analysis of this phenomenon could potentially affect how educators and unions negotiate future employment contracts and salaries. A third reason is that better understanding the performance of unpaid labor may lead to improved policies to minimize the costs and problems to institutions and students from teacher burnout and attrition.

The turnover rate among primary and secondary teachers is very high. According to Ingersoll (2002) approximately 14% of teachers will quit after their first year. About 46% of teachers will have quit after five years. Hunt and Carroll (2003) in “No Dream Denied” detailed that among urban teachers, the numbers are even higher: around 50% of teachers will have quit within 5 years. This turnover rate is exceedingly costly to educators, the educational institutions, and to the students themselves. This cost can be measured in multiple ways: financial cost to the school system to have to frequently recruit, hire, and train new teachers; reputational cost to the school in having a high teacher turnover; educational cost to both the school and the students in not being able to provide consistency in the curriculum across multiple years. When asked to compare their previous teaching position to their current employment situation, Rogusky (2003) showed that 60.4% of former public school teachers and 63.4% of former private school teachers respond that that the manageability of their workload is more satisfactory in their current non-teaching occupation. 65.2% of former public school teachers and 45.5% of former private school teachers, when asked about the autonomy and agency over their workload, cited that their non-teaching occupation was more satisfactory. The issue of unpaid labor has not been specifically addressed or analyzed in prior research, so there is a significant gap in our understanding of the work performed by educators.
Teacher’s salaries in the United States are significantly less than those in other industrial nations. Low salaries coupled with a considerable amount of unpaid occupational obligations are another reason for high rates of teacher attrition. Rogusky (2003) reported that 45% of all teachers who leave the profession cite low salaries as a reason for job dissatisfaction. Among urban public school in high poverty areas, 46% of former teachers cite salary as a reason for dissatisfaction, while among small private school teachers, 73% cite salary as reason for dissatisfaction. According to data reported in OECD (2009), educators in the U.S. reported an average of 1080 teaching hours worked per year. The average number of teaching hours for 31 other developed nations worldwide was 798 hours for primary education, 709 for lower secondary education, and 653 hours for upper secondary education programs. Toth (2007) reported on a non-scientific study conducted by the Hawai’i State Teachers Association concluding that public school teachers worked an average of 1,780 unpaid hours per year, or 253 work days. Many of the educators interviewed for this project have reported working around 65 hours per week during the school year, which totals to 2,470 working hours over 38 weeks. A 40 hour work week for 50 weeks totals 2000 work hours, a difference of 470 hours or 11.75 weeks of work unpaid. To work an equivalent number of hours as a traditional full-time employee a teacher would have to work 52.6 hours per week over those 38 weeks. This threshold was reached by the majority of the educators in the sample of this project.

According to the OECD “Education at a Glance” (2009) report, U.S. teachers earn on average $43,633 compared to the same developed nation average salary of $39,007. When factoring in a comparison of teachers’ salaries to the nation’s Gross Domestic Product (G.D.P.) per capita, U.S. teachers make a salary that is 96% of the G.D.P. per capita. In comparison, Korean teachers earn a salary that is 221% of the country’s G.D.P per capita. In a comparison of
33 developed nations of teaching salary to G.D.P., the U.S. ranked 26th. For practical purposes, regardless of the starting point of teachers’ hourly salaries, all unpaid labor will cause them to be effectively decreased; the fact that teachers begin from a comparatively low starting point only makes more stark the costs of unpaid labor.

Educators, particularly primary and secondary teachers, have high rates of “burnout.” The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines burnout as, “exhaustion of physical or emotional strength or motivation usually as a result of prolonged stress or frustration.” As an example of the word usage, the dictionary actually states, “Teaching can be very stressful, and many teachers eventually suffer burnout.” There are a variety of reasons for why teachers leave the profession. Pallas and Buckley (2012) considered such factors as the pathway to teaching, i.e. an education major in college or the NYC Teaching Fellows or Teach for America programs, marital and familial status, and length of commute. In an online blog entitled “A Sociological Eye on Education” published by The Hechinger Report, Pallas writes, “teachers are more likely to consider leaving their classrooms if they believe they aren’t getting adequate support from their principals, and if they believe the school doesn’t function well as an organization. Good leadership is not randomly distributed among schools; on average, NYC teachers report less satisfaction with the leadership in schools serving high concentrations of low-achieving, high-need students.” The question of workload was cited by Pallas (2012) as a factor that teachers give when answering why they are changing careers, but Pallas’s study did not focus adequately on that dimension of teachers’ burdens. In order to clarify this issue, it is important to have as much information about educators’ unpaid labor as possible.

This project illuminates an untheorized modality of the gift relationship. This is a unique approach in that gifts and gift giving would outwardly seem unrelated, even antithetical, to an
examination of an employment relationship. However, an analysis of unpaid labor not only clarifies the labor relationship between educators and educational institutions but also addresses gaps in the existing literature on the gift. The analysis of the gift and gift giving spans across a literature from early 20th Century anthropology through contemporary social scientific and economic studies. It is frequently interpreted as a vestige of our collective social past, particularly relevant only in the simplest and least differentiated societies with respect to the division of labor. Past studies have examined gift giving with respect to holiday exchanges of presents and other forms of micro-level exchange, whereas I am suggesting that these micro-level examples, particularly among educators and educational institutions illustrate a larger macro-level phenomenon. An increased understanding of gift theory better fills in the details of many contemporary labor issues, particularly those of surplus labor and value as well as the perpetuation of the antagonistic relationship between capital and labor. This unexplored dimension of gift and gift giving serves as a new and effective tool for thinking about social issues and problems.

Educators’ perceptions of unpaid labor are an important issue to examine. Do the educators themselves recognize that they are working unpaid? If not, why not? Had it simply never occurred to them? Are they lying to themselves? Did such labor just seem like it was a part of the job? Was it something for which their training had prepared them (cadet or student training)? If they did recognize the labor as unpaid, why did they continue to perform it? Did they perceive an obligation to work unpaid? Was it a necessity in order to complete all their occupational requirements? Did it seem like something that needed to be done when one is starting out teaching, but would taper off as they gained in experience? It is necessary to ascertain the educators’ perceptions as to whether and, if so, how unpaid labor is required by
their teaching institutions. Do all (or most) of the teachers at the institution perform a significant amount of unpaid labor? Are those that perform unpaid labor seen as “team players?” What are the consequences of not being considered a team player? Do educators perceive the labor as voluntary or an after-hours occupational requirement?

The empirical component of my project answers two fundamental research questions: (1) because educational labor is such that the work is, in principle, limitless, are traditional methods of measurement of labor adequate? I investigated whether a more qualitative methodology employing semi-structured interviews would yield more valid results; and (2) why do the vast majority of educators routinely perform significant amounts of labor that they consider either unpaid or part of the professional expectations of teachers to go above and beyond formally contracted working hours? Ultimately, I demonstrated that it is a structural systemic relationship between employer and employee that contributes to the performance of unpaid labor. Several other research questions arise from considering the first: If recognized as unpaid, and thus exploitative, what motivates educators to continue to work for no additional wages or remuneration? When not recognized as unpaid, how do educators make sense of the additional hours worked? Do educators feel a sense of gratitude or goodwill to the institution employing them? Who do educators think of as the beneficiaries of their unpaid labor: the institution? their students? the community as a whole? their colleagues? their own sense of professionalism and career aspirations?

I utilized a qualitative research methodology, specifically face-to-face semi-structured interviewing, to gather accounts of subjects’ experiences performing unpaid labor in the course of their educational professional obligations as well as their perceptions and thoughts on how such labor is mandated, either explicitly or implicitly, by the institution. The study also included
a short survey given to respondents at the end of the interview to gather demographic information.

With this in mind, I employed a non-random convenience and snowball sampling methodologies of educators primarily in New York City. The sample of 40 educators includes teachers in primary and secondary institutions, adjunct university faculty, and full-time university faculty. New York City educators were focused upon for several reasons. The first of which is ease of access. Second, as previously discussed, I argue that the phenomenon of unpaid labor is ubiquitous among educators and thus it is of little importance from where the subjects are selected. Educators at private research institutions may well receive larger base salaries than their counterparts at state-funded or liberal arts institutions, but because all educators experience an expectation of working unpaid, the amount of their salaries or wages is incidental. If, as Gamson (1998) reports tenured faculty at private research institutions earn two and one-half times more than liberal arts college faculty that may be a dimension of inequality, but each of those faculty members find themselves equal before the institutional expectation of performing unpaid labor. The high salaries of the private research faculty just help take the sting out a bit. It may be profitable to devote resources to a future study drawing research subjects from numerous settings to confirm my initial assumption, but New York City yielded a useful sample of interview subjects. Third, New York City affords a very large population of educators from which I selected respondents across a wide variety of demographic characteristics. However, in order to give a cursory testing of my hypothesis that unpaid labor is not performed only by New York City educators, or even simply urban educators, I also interviewed educators from a variety of cities and towns in the U.S.
According to Leech (2002), “semi-structured interviews allow respondents the chance to be the experts and to inform the research... can provide detail, depth, and an insider’s perspective, while at the same time allowing hypothesis testing and the quantitative analysis of interview responses.” Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to explore the respondents’ points of view rather than making predetermined conclusions about their behavior. Rather than the closed-ended questions emphasized in structured interviews, semi-structured interviews primarily use open-ended questions. Another strength of the semi-structured interview is the freedom to allow new questions to be generated based on the flow of the conversation. The interviewer has the freedom to let the conversation be the guide in determining when and how to ask specific questions, which may be either predetermined or those that occur to the researcher while conducting the interview. Because of the fluid nature of semi-structured interviewing, the same wordings for all questions were not given to all respondents. In my project this not a significant concern, so long as the primary categories - unpaid labor, perceptions of obligation, questions of gifts, gratitude, and so forth - are addressed, it is less important as to how each category is worded.

Semi-structured interviews have several benefits that make them a very useful research methodology for my project: 1) There is strong potential for the development of feelings of rapport between the interviewer and respondents. A genial conversationalist is able to elicit relevant responses from interviewees more efficiently than through observation alone. My research on unpaid labor would be nearly impossible to perform using observational methods only as it would require many hours of observation for each subject rather than a single hour-long interview. Research on attitudes about and motivations for unpaid labor would be similarly impossible to obtain using only observational methods; 2) they have a high validity. The less-
rigid format allows for respondents to talk about the topics in depth and detail. This can allow the researcher to more easily grasp the meanings behind actions when the interviewees are given the opportunity to speak for themselves; 3) greater ease in examining complex questions and issues. By probing and teasing out respondent’s answers, the interviewer has the opportunity to obtain information about the topic that was previously unknown or erroneously thought to be unimportant; 4) the issue of pre-judgment. Because semi-structured interviews do not solely use pre-set questions, the researcher is not locked into claims as to what is and is not important to the research questions. My project involves uncovering a phenomenon about which the respondents may not be actively, consciously aware. It was important to guard against using pre-set questions that may bias respondents into answering in ways advantageous to the research hypotheses. Allowing respondents significant agency in directing the flow of the interview can guard against bias; 5) ease and convenience. The interviews require very little in the way of equipment and setting. I used a digital recorder to record all interviews for transcription and interviewed respondents at quiet, mutually agreed upon locations or by telephone.

For all the benefits of utilizing semi-structured interviews, they are not without their limitations: 1) success of performing semi-structured interviews is strongly dependent upon the skill of the interviewer and the articulate participation of the respondent. In this project I performed all of the interviews; this eliminated the potential limitations resulting from inconsistent or questionable interview protocols; 2) potential for the interviewer to give unconscious signals or cues that may steer the subjects toward answering questions in a biased manner. I recognized this limitation as a relevant issue and guarded against giving any (un)conscious signals when performing interviews; 3) more costly and time-consuming research methodology than other types of qualitative research protocols. This is a valid limitation, but
semi-structured interviews provided the best and most valid data for the project; 4) as discussed by Gay (1987) regarding semi-structured interviews, a possible concern are their potential challenges with reliability. It is difficult, if not impossible, to recreate a focused interview.

In addition, because of the cost and time investment, sample sizes tend to be small, which significantly limits the possibility of generalization of conclusions to a larger population. My project was not designed to lead to conclusions that are statistically generalizable to any specific larger population. My sample was primarily drawn from New York City educators in publicly-funded institutions. While conclusions are expected to be relevant to all New York City educators, if not all U.S. educators, the smaller sample size of forty-six educators was not a limiting factor in data analysis and statistical computation because I was not attempting to statistically generalize to any larger population. The question of reliability was an important one such that every interview had some pre-set questions that addressed the project’s aims so that the inevitable variations and detours in specific interviews did not significantly negatively impact reliability. This project did not require each interview to be identically conducted, and some variation was expected and preferred.

I selected an approximately equal number of male and female educators from each of the four categories of institution: primary, secondary, adjunct university, and full-time university. The total sample size was forty-six educators encompassing 8 to 16 from each of the institution types.
Table 1: Description of Sample of Educators

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<th>Adjunct University</th>
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<td>46</td>
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I obtained potential respondents from personal contacts and by communicating with department chairs in several New York City universities. This provided an initial pool of potential subjects from which to draw. Of these initial subjects, at the completion of the interview I asked the respondents if they would refer any friends or colleagues that may also be interested in participating in the research study. During the process of compiling the sample, I endeavored to include as diverse a pool of subjects as possible and attempted to maximize variation across such variables as age, race, sexual orientation, academic discipline, religious affiliation, marital status, and number of children. Although I posited the universal perceived obligation for all educators, I sought to maximize variation as much as possible to ensure that perceived obligation is not just experienced by a specific group or groups of educators.

Because I interviewed subjects with whom I was directly or secondarily acquainted, I was not anticipating overly significant entry problems to conduct interviews. Coordinating with the subjects’ work and family schedules to find an amenable interview time was the highest hurdle, rather than any issues that would make the subject population difficult to access. The interviews were recorded with a digital audio recorder and were then transcribed for closer analysis.

The process was semi-structured; I utilized a prepared list of questions and topics to be addressed with each respondent, but also anticipated that the interview would organically drift to tangentially related issues. I first asked a number of descriptive questions, including job title and
place of employment, duration of time at that institution, total number of years as an educator, whether they are a salaried or hourly employee, a full or part-time employee, and their contracted hours of employment. I also asked how many hours they actually worked in a typical week and then asked them to estimate how many of those hours were contact hours spent teaching or in office hours, how many hours were devoted to lesson planning, lecture preparation, curriculum development, and so forth, how many hours were spent grading and assessing student performance, how many hours were spent on administrative duties & committees, how many hours were spent communicating with or advising students or their parents, and how much time they devote to school-related extracurricular activities. After recording those answers I inquired whether their initial assessment of the hours that they spent working, particularly during non-school times, was accurate.

Next, I asked the respondents about their attitudes and perceptions of the work that’s done outside the usual school day or from home. I asked if they considered any of the work that they performed as a part of fulfilling their professional obligations as being unpaid or whether they believed that is included in their salary. I asked about their attitudes toward working unpaid (or outside the contracted hours, for those respondents who did not consider their labor to be unpaid), whether they thought they performed more or less such labor than their colleagues, what it was about the nature of the unpaid work that distinguished it from their contracted labor (i.e. Working from home? The specific duties?), what motivated educators to perform that unpaid labor, whether they saw the necessity of performing that labor as a part of their normal workload or as a discretionary and voluntary performance. I asked them if they were able to fulfill their occupational obligations and responsibilities by working strictly within the bounds of their contracted hours and (if they said no) whether they performed that labor out of a sense of
altruism or charitable giving or a way of benefitting the community, or whether it was out of a sense of professionalism or a part of their vision of being an effective educator. I investigated the respondents’ perceptions of whether their unpaid labor was coerced, overtly or otherwise. I asked if they perceived educators as having a calling to work in that profession, similar to individuals working as clergy, nurses, and in other “helping” occupations, and I asked whether a part of that calling was the responsibility to make one’s self available to the students when necessary, or whether teaching was a nine-to-five type of occupation with no perceived obligation to work outside the school day.

I then asked them about their job-seeking and hiring experiences, and whether they found it difficult or time-consuming to obtain a teaching position. I asked whether they felt fortunate to be offered their current (or a previous) position and, if so, whether that feeling of good fortune may have contributed to a sense of gratitude or goodwill to the institution as a whole, or to the department or to one’s colleagues. I asked if that sense of gratitude may have been a motivating factor in the educator’s performance of unpaid labor. I then asked if that feeling of gratitude or goodwill increased or decreased over time. If it decreased do they then work less unpaid labor or has the beneficiary of that unpaid labor shifted from the institution to the students?

This project was approved by the Hunter College Institutional Review Board (IRB). Given the topics being investigated, there was little to no potential harm to the interview subjects. I anticipated only two possible harms that may have arisen from participation in the study. The first of which were the negative emotions or frustrations that may have arisen from discussing occupational experiences and difficulties. All of the prospective subjects are adults and signed a voluntary consent form during which it was verbally reiterated that their participation is voluntary and may end at any time they choose. Should those emotions or
frustrations or prove too great, the interview would have been immediately ended and, if the participant was amenable, re-scheduled. The second potential for harm was the compromising of research data. The chances of this happening were and continue to be extremely slight as the interview data is kept confidential with only the researcher, faculty committee members, and IRB members having access to any personally identifiable information. Data was safe-guarded on password-protected computer systems or in locked office spaces. Any publication or presentation of the data was done in such a way that none of the information provided would be identifiable or attributable to a specific individual. The names of individuals and institutions were changed or omitted as necessary with pseudonyms to be used instead. The majority of respondents were from New York City institutions, and it is unlikely that the most of the specific data provided would be significantly unique to a single educational institution so as to endanger confidentiality to the average reader.

The following chapters discuss the findings of the interviews. I first present the different ways that educators work unpaid at the various types of educational institution. Next I discuss the quantitative date regarding the educators’ demographic variables and their amounts of unpaid labor. Chapter 6 discusses the themes and patterns found in the respondents’ own words and examines the expectations, motivations, and rationalizations that educators utilize when considering their unpaid work.
Chapter 5: Unpaid Labor by Educators

Many teachers in the United States perform a considerable amount of unpaid labor as a matter of course in the exercise of their educational obligations. This is true at all levels of teaching – from kindergartens and elementary schools through colleges and universities. Details and specifics vary, as discussed, from institution to institution, but the overwhelming majority of educators perform significant amounts of unpaid labor.

Primary School Teachers

Educators in primary or elementary school teach children in kindergarten and grades one through six. Some educational institutions divide students into primary or elementary school, junior high school, and high schools. In these districts primary school consists of kindergarten and grades one through six; junior high is grades seven and eight; and high school is grades nine through twelve. Other educational districts have a system of primary or elementary school, middle school, and high school. For these districts high school is composed of the same grades while middle school includes grades six through eight, and primary school includes kindergarten and grades one through five. When classifying the teachers I interviewed, any middle, junior high, or high school educators were placed in the secondary institution category and educators teaching in a primary or elementary school remained in that institutional category.

A primary school teacher’s main duty is to teach, to be actively teaching their students throughout the course of the school day. Most of the teachers with whom I spoke said that the majority of their day was spent in front of the classroom. This would include either actively
teaching a lesson or could include simply supervising the children as they engaged in an indoor or outdoor recess period or were working quietly on an assignment at their desks. Regardless, the teacher’s attention is on the students and they are unable to perform any other tasks. Primary school teachers are often allotted a short amount of time each day as a “planning” period or grading period, on average between forty minutes and an hour. Teachers are also given about thirty minutes for a lunch break.

A primary school teacher has numerous occupational responsibilities. As listed in the specific requirements of a typical U.S. primary school, these include, but are not limited to:

1. Teaching reading, language arts, social studies, mathematics, science, art, health, physical education, and music to students in a classroom, utilizing course of study adopted by the Board of Education, and other appropriate learning activities.
2. Instruct students in citizenship and basic subject matter.
3. Develops lesson plans and instructional materials and provides individualized and small group instruction in order to adapt the curriculum to the needs of each student.
4. Uses a variety of instructional strategies, such as inquiry, group discussion, lecture, discovery, etc.
5. Translates lesson plans into learning experiences so as to best utilize the available time for instruction.
6. Establishes and maintains standards of student behavior needed to achieve a functional learning atmosphere in the classroom.
7. Evaluates students’ academia and social growth, keeps appropriate records, and prepares progress reports.
8. Communicates with parents through conferences and other means to discuss students’ progress and interpret the school program.

9. Identifies student needs and cooperates with other professional staff members in assessing and helping students solve health, attitude, and learning problems.

10. Creates an effective environment for learning through functional and attractive displays, bulletin boards, and interest centers.

11. Maintains professional competence through in-service education activities provided by professional growth activities.

12. Participates cooperatively with the appropriate administrator to develop the method by which the teacher will be evaluated in conformance with guidelines.

13. Selects and requisitions books and instructional aids; maintains required inventory records.

14. Supervises students in and out-of-classroom activities during the school day.

15. Administers group standardized tests in accordance with state testing program.

16. Participates in curriculum development as required.

17. Participates in faculty committees and the sponsorship of student activities.

Of the above seventeen teaching responsibilities, only five of them (numbers 1, 2, 8, 15, and 15) specifically encompass the actual practice of actively teaching or supervising the students.

Another two duties (numbers 4 and 5) are tangentially related to the practice of teaching, but are more appropriately done at the lesson planning stage rather than in the middle of actually teaching a lesson.

More than half of a primary teacher’s occupational responsibilities are relegated to their preparatory period or to their lunch break. Several teachers interviewed stated that they
attempted to complete all of their grading, lesson plans, communications with parents, record-
keeping, and so forth while on premises at the school rather than having to bring any work
materials home. The majority of the interviewed teachers, however, usually spent anywhere from
one to four hours each evening performing one or more of their teaching duties. Most primary
school teachers interviewed said that they also worked on the weekend, anywhere from two to
eight hours.

Teachers’ labor unions have pursued many different aspects and perquisites in the
collective bargaining process, including salary figures, issues of tenure and seniority, healthcare
and pension benefits, and so forth. A dimension of the teaching profession that unions have made
no real effort to effect change is the amount of time that teachers are required to work actively
teaching or supervising students. If teachers were afforded even an extra hour or two of
preparatory time during school hours, then that would significantly impact their non-working
lives. Fewer teachers would be required to either stay late after school finishing up grading or
paperwork or have to bring home class materials to work on lesson plans in the evening hours
after their own children have gone to bed.

Schleicher (2009) reported that the Organization for Economic Co-operation and
Development (OECD) has collects data on the educational systems of its 34 member nations,
which span the globe from North & South America, Europe, and the Asia-Pacific region. The are
mainly advanced nations but include as well developing countries such as Chile, Mexico, and
Turkey. According to 2009 data, primary school teachers in the U.S. spend approximately 1,332
hours as working time required to be on premises at the school per year. Of those 1,332 hours,
1,080, or 81%, are spent performing classroom instruction. From the data available, only four of
the OECD nations, Ireland, Luxembourg, New Zealand, and Belgium had teachers reporting
higher percentages of classroom instruction time as total working time (and the New Zealand
data may be incomplete). The other reporting nations range from 40.7% to 77.2% with an
average of 62.7% of their working hours spent in instruction.

*Secondary School Teachers*

Secondary school educators teach students in grades nine through twelve. Most
secondary school teachers specialize in a single subject, such as mathematics, biology, English, a
foreign language, and so forth. Many educators teach a variety of courses within their particular
specialization, for example a mathematic teacher may teach classes in algebra, geometry,
trigonometry, and/or calculus. Secondary school teachers frequently teach multiple grade levels
per day. For example, a Spanish teacher will usually teach classes in first-year, second-year,
third-year, and fourth-year Spanish each day. Teachers also frequently teach different classes
depending on students’ abilities. For example, many English teachers will have one or more
general level classes and then an honors level class for more advanced students. This division
across varying educational capabilities often requires that teachers learn and employ different
pedagogical methods in order to most effectively meet the needs of the students.

There are many duties that are part of a secondary school teacher’s occupational
obligations. According to the official website of the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, secondary
school educators typically perform the below:

1. Plan lessons in the subjects they teach, such as biology or history
2. Assess students to evaluate their abilities, strengths, and weaknesses
3. Teach and engage students as an entire class or in small groups
4. Grade students’ assignments to monitor progress
5. Communicate with parents about students’ progress
6. Work with individual students to challenge them, to improve their abilities, and to work on their weaknesses
7. Prepare students for standardized tests required by the state
8. Classroom management duties, including the development and enforcing of classroom rules
9. Supervise students outside of the classroom—for example, at lunchtime or during detention

Other duties of secondary school educators not listed by the Bureau of Labor Statistics but that are listed in job vacancy advertisements include:

10. Collaborating with colleagues
11. Sponsoring extracurricular activities
12. Classroom organization and requisitioning of class materials and appropriate decoration of classroom
13. Contributing to and completing student report cards
14. Completing continuing education, professional development, and performance review as required by state and/or school district regulations
15. Collaborating and communicating effectively with other educators and with administrators
16. Advising and cooperating with the principal and other teachers (or any one or more of them) on the preparation and development of courses of study, teaching materials, teaching programs, methods of teaching and assessment and pastoral arrangements.
17. Participating in meetings at the school that relate to the curriculum for the school or the administration or organization of the school, including pastoral arrangements.

In addition the above job duties, secondary school teachers are increasingly required to utilize synchronous and asynchronous tools in order to be available to students and parents. A synchronous tool enables real-time communication in a “same time-different place” mode. This can include holding virtual office hours or homerooms through the use of audio or video real-time communication programs or the use of chatting or instant messaging programs. An asynchronous tool enables communication and collaboration over a period of time using a “different time-different place” mode. This includes internet forums and discussion boards, blogs, email, databases, and shared calendars and documents. Synchronous and asynchronous tools each have strengths and weaknesses that may influence if and how educators choose to employ them. Synchronous tools allow for real-time collaboration, which fosters and facilitates a sustained dialogue, but it requires more coordination of schedules and availability of time and can be especially difficult to coordinate across time zones. Asynchronous tools allow individuals to participate at any time, but their use often requires an increased need for discipline among the participants in order to maintain an appropriate level of use.

Of the seventeen examples listed of duties for secondary school teachers, only a few of them are able to be performed during the standard school day. Like primary school teachers, secondary school teachers are contractually obligated to be on the school premises anywhere from seven to eight hours per day, totaling 35 to 40 hours per week. Most of those hours are spent in front of the classroom teaching.
Part-Time and Adjunct University Instructors

Adjunct educators are commonly paid by the hour for the number of teaching hours spent in the front of the classroom, whether lecturing, leading discussion groups, or directing laboratory or clinical experiments. Any additional labor required for class preparation – textbook evaluation and selection, syllabus & curriculum construction, reading course materials, creating lectures and lesson plans, developing and grading student assignments and exams, meeting with students during office hours, and communicating with students via email or telephone are all unpaid activities. However, the reality is that each of the aforementioned tasks is absolutely essential to the proper and effective performance of teaching duties. While there are time-saving measures that can be taken to limit the cost to the adjunct instructor of time and effort, they cannot be avoided entirely. It is inconceivable to expect that an educator could lead a successful class if no initial learning objective preparations were completed or if none of the necessary readings were reviewed and prepared.

There has been a considerable increase since the 1960s in universities making greater use of part-time adjunct (inexpensive) faculty rather than hiring new full-time, tenured (expensive) faculty members. Stanley Aronowitz (1998) writes that, “Academic labor, like most labor, is rapidly being decomposed and recomposed. The full professor, like the spotted owl, is becoming an endangered species in private as well as public universities. When professors retire or die, their lines frequently follow them” (pg. 216). According to Vincent Tirelli (1998) colleges and universities nationwide are employing between 40 to 50% of their faculty as part-time employees. In community colleges, part-time instructors make up 64% of the faculty. The justifications most frequently asserted are that economic necessity is making it untenable to hire
new, full-time, tenured faculty. Increased costs of health insurance and pensions in addition to significant losses in state budgetary appropriations or loss in endowment due to the recent financial crisis have led to funding shortfalls and, in many universities, the solution has been to replace or supplement retiring tenured faculty with less-costly part-time adjunct faculty.

These hiring decisions haven’t been without consequence and cost to institutional reputation, but they have allowed many departments and universities to continue to remain solvent. This new academic calculus analyzes the long-term costs of decreased research funding, lower institutional reputation to attract both higher-caliber students and faculty – the loss of the students is most keenly felt as they are sources of income - against the benefit of meeting short-term budget constraints. What has become apparent is that many universities have found it necessary to increasingly base hiring and personnel decisions on budgetary strictures. The more frequent hiring of adjunct instructors has become a requirement for university departments. Sharff and Lessinger (1994) write that “teaching... is increasingly transferred to an underpaid academic class” (pg. 4). However, the lack of financial ability for departments to be able to afford higher salaries has placed a burden of labor on the part-time worker. Leslie and Head (1979) report that because part-time faculty do not usually participate in departmental, college, or university committees, there is an increased labor burden placed on those full-time and tenured faculty subject to those service requirements. However, a number of the responsibilities ordinarily expected of full-time university faculty are just as strongly required, even if the adjunct faculty aren’t (nearly) as highly compensated, assured continuing appointment, or academically protected the same as the full-time faculty. These responsibilities include being subject to student and faculty evaluation as well as the expectation to meet with students outside of classroom hours.
Students enroll for classes with the expectation that their professors will be available to them outside of regular class hours – even if this availability is rarely, if ever, exercised (save for the last week of the semester). Faculty members are, in fact, evaluated on their availability and accessibility by the students themselves. In order to competently teach a course at the college level, it is imperative that the instructor prepare outside of class and make time to meet or communicate with students. Thus, it is necessary, even required, that adjunct instructors perform a significant amount of unpaid labor for each class taught. Adjunct faculty are frequently asked to provide letters of recommendation to students as well as serve as sources of counsel and reassurance to students experiencing academic or personal troubles. The burden of being told by a student that she is thinking about killing herself rests no more lightly on the part-time instructor than the tenured distinguished professor.

As reported for primary and secondary school teachers, there appear to be varying types and intensities of unpaid labor among full and part-time university faculty. There is also some variation by gender, race, and academic rank when comparing full-time faculty members. Faculty members of color have reported being selected specifically by students needing advising initially because of their gender and/or race. Universities also have a number of student organizations for African-American students, Latino students, LGBTQ students, and so forth – most of which are sponsored by a faculty member of the organization’s designation. Less experienced faculty have reported an increased obligation to serve on departmental or college committees and perform other tasks as needed within the department.

The university structure in the capitalist mode of production mandates that some employees will perform unpaid labor. This unpaid labor is essentially a gift. One’s interpretation may vary as to whom the labor is gifted, but it is notably being given and the academic
institutions are clearly the beneficiaries. The part-time laborer is giving the gift of unpaid work, the gift of lost leisure to the university. More importantly, this unpaid labor is essential to the continued operation of the university. Departments would be unable to avoid budgetary shortfalls were it not for the gift of adjunct instructors’, in particular, unpaid work. This is true for educators in primary and secondary schools as well. The hiring of classroom assistants in primary schools has decreased due to financial constraints. Those classrooms that do have assistants are often relying on parent volunteers. Educators across all educational institutions have reported that there is an altruistic component to teaching. They indicate that it is simply understood that there is the necessity to perform some work unpaid. A key investigation in this project is the consequences of this necessity. Misrecognition of employment as a gift from employer to employee directs educators into a gift relationship in which they find themselves to be debtors from the moment of hire. This misrecognition does not originate within some ignorance or error on the teacher’s part, but exists and persists on a social level. Once enmeshed in the gift relationship, the educators are compelled to reciprocate to repay the “gift” of employment. Within educational institutions, this reciprocation is generally manifested as unpaid labor.

There is no commensurate measure for this gap between labor expended and wages received. My assertion is that this labor/wage gap can be explained through a theoretical elaboration of the concept of gift and gift giving. The labor/wage gap is another modality of the gift in contemporary capitalist societies. Gift is any unpaid activity or action that is necessary for the survival or reproduction of a socioeconomic system. Gifts are actions that delineate and strengthen economic relationships, whether at an individual or an institutional/national/international level of analysis. As the section below on the history and
theoretical discussion of gift, much of what has been thought of as either unproductive or unpaid labor is actually an unrecognized and untheorized component of gift and gift giving.

*Full-Time & Tenured University Faculty*

This demographic group amongst the educators sampled performs the least amount of overt unpaid labor. Full-time and tenured faculty usually have occupational responsibilities in three different categories: 1) Teaching; 2) Research and publication; and 3) Service. The teaching dimension includes not only teaching classes, but also advising undergraduate and graduate students, creating course curricula, selecting textbooks and course materials, writing syllabi and lectures, devising assignments and course projects, writing quizzes and exams, grading all of the course assignments and exams, and communicating with, up to, hundreds of students each semester. Teaching obligations varied depending on the type of higher educational institution. Liberal arts colleges expected a greater teaching load per semester while research institutions had significantly fewer teaching obligations.

The second dimension of labor for full-time higher education faculty was research and publication. All faculty members were expected to create, maintain and carry out a cogent research agenda that would lead to presentations, publications, invited talks, and grants. As with teaching, these expectations varied depending on the type of institutions. Liberal arts colleges placed less significance on research, grants, and publishing, however there still persisted the very strong expectation that faculty would perform research and work to see that it was presented and published. In research institutions there was a much greater expectation of a higher volume of publications as well as the acquisition of research grants.
The third dimension of labor in higher education is service. This is a fairly loose category that can include a range of activities from serving on university, college, or departmental committees to founding a service-based service organization that provides some benefit to the community and/or the institution. As with the previous two dimensions of labor, there is variation in expectations for faculty depending on the type of institutions well as the rank of the faculty member. At some institutions, in order to give junior faculty increased time and opportunity to pursue their research agenda, they are often exempt from serving on the same numbers of committees as tenured faculty. Some committees or positions are only open to tenured faculty because of the issues that are governed, for example only tenured faculty members are permitted to serve on the committees that make tenure decisions. Other colleges and universities do not permit junior faculty to serve as department chairs so as not to jeopardize their promotion and tenure by risking alienating senior faculty because of bureaucratic minutiae.

Because they are salaried employees, full-time faculty presented the least overt instances of unpaid labor. The full-time faculty interviewed had no defined work day; they were able to come and go as they pleased so long as they were in class during their designated teaching hours, fulfilled a minimum number of office hours, and attended the requisite committee meetings. Other than that, they were able to set their own schedules. The salaries were based on the expectation of a forty-hour work week and the vast majority, but not all, of faculty interviewed worked over and above those hours. In “The Last Good Job in America,” (1998) Stanley Aronowitz wrote, “I work hard, but it’s mostly self-directed. I don’t experience ‘leisure’ as time out of work because lines are blurred” (pg. 205). This was a common theme amongst the full-time faculty interviewed. The most notable distinction being that while Aronowitz (1998) characterized his career as “over, for all practical purposes” (pg. 206), most faculty members
interviewed were still untenured. Only a quarter of the professors interviewed were tenured. Those that were reported that while they enjoyed the increased security of tenure, they still were researching, publishing, and working towards their next promotion while simultaneously having increased service and committee responsibilities. There was no significant difference in working hours between junior and tenured faculty. The differences were found in the types of work that was done.

Faculty in higher education, even more so than elementary and secondary school teachers, undertook a significant amount of work during their summer “vacations.” For most faculty members the summer is the only available time to conduct their research. The day-to-day responsibilities during the fall and spring semester do not afford them sufficient uninterrupted time to design ad implement their research studies. There is variation in this, of course. Faculty members in the life sciences, especially in research universities, have access to graduate assistants who are able to contribute to and oversee research projects. Some of the research done by social scientists lends itself to this arrangement as well, but many social scientists, especially ethnographers or those researchers performing predominantly qualitative work frequently have to wait until the summer to conduct their interviews, participant observations, and so forth. Research that is international in scope or requires access to overseas libraries and resources is also often done in the summer because of teaching responsibilities during the fall and spring semesters. In addition to performing research in the summer, many full-time professors will also do most of their writing during the summer months and then revise and edit those documents during less busy times throughout the fall and spring.

Some full-time faculty also taught summer classes, for which they were paid. However, for many professors the wage was fairly modest but did help to supplement the modest salaries
afforded educators in the U.S. The financial necessity to teach in the summers posed a significant quandary to several educators interviewed. While full-time and tenured faculty earn more than the U.S. average wage, in most disciplines pays a lower wage than positions requiring comparable levels of education in the medical, legal or financial fields. Research and publication are, in many universities, the most important factors in tenure consideration, but if a professor finds herself financially needing to teach during the summer months, she puts in serious jeopardy her research agenda and potential for tenure and promotion. Like elementary and secondary school teachers, educators in higher education are working diligently and long hours to meet their professional responsibilities and expectations.

The following chapter summarizes the quantitative, demographic information about the sample. I completed forty-six semi-structured interviews with educators. Most interviews were performed by telephone, though there were some performed face-to-face with the participants. Each of the participants was either personally known to me or to one of the other participants. The snowball sampling technique ensured that none of the respondents I spoke with was either a stranger or was not expecting me to contact them. My ultimate aim in collecting my research sample of educators was to correspond as closely as population to the larger population as a whole. Even though the selected methodology does not allow generalization to the entire population of U.S. educators, there is still much that can be understood looking at the data from this predominantly New York City sample of teachers, professors, and adjunct instructors.
Chapter 6: Quantitative Findings

Demographic Portrait of the Research Sample

Much of the demographic information describing my sample was obtained by following a scripted questionnaire that would be either handed out following the semi-structured face-to-face interviews or would be read aloud to respondents participating in telephone interviews. Because the surveys were performed with researcher guidance or presence there is no missing data. If the respondents had any difficulties in determining how to answer a given question I was present to give assistance. This method was very effective in obtaining uniform demographic information about my sample. Some the variables analyzed, particularly those variables describing hours spent grading, preparing lessons, and actually teaching were compiled by obtaining the data from the interview transcriptions.

Of the forty-five total participants, there was a nearly even split along gender lines. Twenty-four respondents were male; twenty respondents were female; and two respondents identified as gender nonconforming. This satisfied my intention to obtain a sample that was approximately half male and half female. Four of the respondents identify as either primarily homosexual or queer, which is about 9.1% of the sample size. This figure is a bit higher than the most recent demographic study (Glionna 2013) performed by Gary J. Gates in conjunction with Gallup on the relative proportions of LGBTQ members of the larger U.S. population. In New York State 3.9% of the sample surveyed said that they identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. According to the same study, the U.S. average was 3.5% of the population. The state with the lowest population of LGBT residents was North Dakota and the highest was...
Washington D.C. with 10%. My sample fits is situated on the high end of the range of national averages.

The participants ranged in age from 25 to 64 with a mean age of 38.7 and a median age of 37.5. Exactly 50% of the educators interviewed were in their thirties. 18.2% of the sample were in their twenties, 20.5% were in their forties, 4.5% in their fifties and 6.8% of the sample were in their sixties. There is a slight positive skew to the age variable with a calculated skewness value of 1.073 and a Standard Error of Skewness of 0.357. This skew should not impact analysis of the data to any significant degree. I am not utilizing any particularly sophisticated statistical analyses that assume a normal distribution, so a slight skew across age is not problematic.

The sample of educators is predominantly white. Two of the respondents identified as Asian and three of the respondents identified as black or African-American. Four of the respondents identified as Hispanic or Latina/o. This is a less racially and ethnically diverse sample than is reflected in the larger population of educators as a whole, but, as previously stated, the issues of unpaid labor and the reasons and motivations for performing it are relevant to all educators, not just those of specific demographic characteristics. Analysis of the numbers of hours reported worked per week do not differ based on racial or ethnic backgrounds. A crosstabulation analysis of race and hours worked per week yields a value of 12.079 with an approximate significance of 0.280; and a crosstabulation analysis of ethnicity and hours worked per week yields a value of 3.506 with an approximate significance of 0.622. These values indicate that any variation in the amount of hours worked per week is not statistically related to the race or the ethnicity of the educator.

Nearly four-fifths, 79.5%, of the sample of educators was born in the United States and nine respondents, 20.5%, were born outside the U.S. I also asked respondents for how long they
have lived in the United States. Almost all of the respondents born in the U.S. reported living here their entire lives. For those individuals who were foreign-born, there was more variation in their responses. Of the nine foreign-born respondents 66.7% have lived in the U.S. from nine to nineteen years, 11.1% from twenty to twenty-nine years, and 22.2% from thirty to thirty-nine years. Lastly, I asked respondents in what size or type of community they were raised. Over two-thirds of the sample, 38.6% reported being raised in a suburban community, 27.3% is an urban community (predominantly New York City amongst this sample), 18.2% in a small city or large town of around twenty to fifty thousand residents, and 15.9% in a very small town or predominantly rural area. I was interested to explore whether there was any significant relationship between the nation and size of community in which an individual was raised and their later tendency to perform unpaid labor. Crosstabulation analysis of U.S. born and foreign born respondents and the number of hours worked per week yielded a chi-square value of 2.188 with an approximate significance of 0.823. Crosstabulating the type of community in which one was raised and number of hours worked per week yielded a chi-square of 16.792 with an approximate significance of 0.331. Neither of these relationships is statistically significant.

I asked my respondents about their marital or relationship status, the number of people that reside in their household, whether they have children, and whether they own or rent their home. In analyzing marital/relationship status I used the standard married, single, widowed, or divorced set of responses, but I also included two other categories to gauge whether the respondents who would be technically single were in a relationship and, if so, whether they were cohabitating. I hypothesized that educators who had a spouse or significant other may be less inclined to work additional hours unpaid. The same hypothesis was also made when inquiring whether the respondents had any children living under sixteen residing in their home. Married
educators were the largest category of respondents, comprising 45.5% of the sample. Currently single, never married made up 20.5% of respondents, 15.9% were in relationships but living apart, 11.4% were in cohabiting relationships, and 6.8% were divorced. I also recoded the data into a new dichotomous variable of respondents who were either married or cohabitating and those respondents who were in the remaining categories. I wanted to determine if it was the fact of living with a spouse or partner that was more likely to contribute to less (or more) unpaid work. After crosstabulating relationship and marital status and number of hours worked per week the chi-square value was 17.748 with an approximate significance of 0.604; crosstabulating the dichotomous marital status variable and number of hours worked per week gave a chi-square of 4.744 with an approximate significance of 0.448. There is no statistically significant between an educator’s relationship or marital status and the number of hours worked per week.

Over two-thirds of the educators had no children less than sixteen years living in their homes. Thirty-one of the forty-six respondents (67.4%) were either childless or their children were already grown. Two educators (4.3%) reported one child; eleven educators (23.9%) reported two children; and two educators (4.3%) reported three children, which was the greatest number of children encountered in the sample. Over one quarter of the educators (26.1%) lived alone and nearly another third of the respondents (32.6%) reported living with one other adult. Households of one or two individuals comprised 58.7% of the sample, which matched the percentage of educators reporting being married or living with a partner. These values corroborate an internal consistency in the ways in which the respondents understood the questions asked. The remaining 41.3% of educators reported having one or more children. Just over half of the educators (52.2%) reported owning their own homes; 45.7% of respondents were renting; and a single educator (2.2%) was living with their parents in a separate, rent-free unit.
To measure the educators’ political orientations I employed a Likert Scale with five gradations: very conservative, conservative, moderate, liberal, very liberal. None of the educators interviewed indicated identifying as very conservative. Four respondents (8.7%) identified as conservative; nine respondents (19.6%) identified as moderate; twelve (26.1%) identified as liberal; and twenty-one (45.7%) identified as very liberal. Over 90% of the educators interviewed identified as ranging from moderate to very liberal, which is quite different from the U.S. population. Related to the findings on political orientation, eighteen respondents (39.1%) reported having either no religious denomination (28.3%) or identified as atheist (8.7%) or agnostic (2.2%). 41.3% of respondents identified as Christian - 15.2% as Roman Catholic and 26.1% as Protestant of varying denominations. Six respondents (13%) identified as Jewish and two (4.3%) as Muslim. There was one respondent (2.2%) that identified as Unitarian. Over a third of the sample (37%) never attended religious services; thirteen of the respondents (28.2%) attend less frequently than once per month. Four (8.7%) attend less than one per year; six (13%) attend a few times per year; and three educators (6.5%) attend services less than one per month. Sixteen educators (34.7) attend religious services more frequently than once per month. One educator (2.2%) attended services more frequently than once per month; six (13%) attended services a few times per month; seven respondents (15.2%) attended services weekly; and two educators (4.3%) attended services a few times per week. The sample of educators interviewed attends religious services less frequently on the whole compared to the greater U.S. population.

The significant majority (84.8%) of the educators I interviewed had earned, at minimum, a master’s degree while 15.2% of the respondents earned a bachelor’s degree. Over half of the sample (54.3%) had earned a master’s degree; thirteen respondents (28.3%) had earned doctoral degrees, and a single educator (2.2%) had earned professional degrees. All of the educators
interviewed had completed at least their bachelor’s degree. This may seem to be an obvious point, but in analyzing employment data from the American Community Survey (ACS) there were a sizable number of respondents who had reported being employed in primary or secondary schools or in higher education but who had not completed a bachelor’s degree. Most of the educators in the sample (82.6%) were employed full-time. Seven respondents (15.2%) reported working part-time, defined in this project as fewer than thirty-five paid hours per week. All of the educators I interviewed who worked part-time were employed as adjunct instructors at institutions of higher learning and were simultaneously working on completing their doctoral degrees. One of the respondents (2.2%) was employed on a temporary contract - this category is frequently used to include long-term substitute teachers, usually in primary or secondary institutions.

The interviewed educators also reported a wide variation in their household income. One of the reasons for this variability in the data is that married respondents or those respondents living with a partner included their partners’ incomes in the calculation whereas an educator living alone had no such additional household monetary contribution. Incomes ranged from less than $10,000 per year to greater than $150,000 per year. The median income reported was in the category of $70,000 to 79,000. Given that nearly 60% of the sample is married or living with a partner, it is those educators who are on the higher end of the income continuum and single educators comprise the incomes less than the median. The median income in the sample is a bit higher than the national average for educational salaries - around $54,000 - but this is likely explained by the high cost of living in New York City, from where most of the sample was drawn, and the inclusion of spousal or partners’ incomes in the household income calculation.
The median range of hours worked per week reported by the sampled educators is 50-59 hours. Over one-third of the respondents (34.8%) answered that in a typical week they work between 50 to 59 hours. More than quarter of the respondents (28.3%) reported working between 40 and 49 hours per week. Five educators (10.9%) worked between 60 and 69 hours per week, and three teachers (6.5%) worked 70 hours per week or more. Nine respondents (19.6%) reported working fewer than 40 hours per week. Three educators (6.5%) reported fewer than 20 hours per week, and six educators (13%) reported working between 20 and 29 hours. These results nearly line up completely with the eight educators who indicated that they were part-time and/or temporary employees. Only a single educator (2.2%) in the sample worked fewer than full-time hours. Teachers spent most of their working hours in the classroom, reporting a range of 20 to 40 hours per week of contact with students. In contrast, educators in higher education reported a range of 3 to 18 hours per week of contact with students. It would initially appear that primary and secondary school educators spend much more time in contact with students, but my sample analysis does not differentiate a full-time university faculty member from a university adjunct instructor, all of whom reported working part-time which complicates the possibility of directly comparing student contact hours between primary/secondary institutions and institutions of higher education. Statements made by the respondents do emphasize an increased amount of student contact, in and out of class, performed by primary and secondary school teachers. There appears to be no significant difference in the amount of time that educators devote to writing and revising lesson plans. The mean number of hours of preparing lesson plans is 10.5 hours and the median value is 9 hours. These values may be impacted by the fact that no distinction in analysis was made due to full/part-time employment status. Primary and secondary school teachers reported a range of 5 to 25 hours per week of lesson planning and curriculum development, and
higher education faculty reported a range of 2 to 20 hours per week. There also appears to be no statistically significant difference amongst the different types of educators with respect to the number of hours per week spent grading. The mean number of hours performed is 6.8 hours and the median is 5.5 hours. Primary and secondary school educators reported a range of 1 to 20 hours per week of grading; university educators reported a range of 2 to 10 hours per week of grading.

From the sample data analyzed there are no statistically significant differences between the educators interviewed that is attributable to the type of educational institution for which they are employed with respect to the performance of occupational duties of teaching classes, writing lesson plans, grading paper, assignments, and exams. University faculty devote more time to research, writing for publication, and university service whereas primary and secondary school teachers spend more time sponsoring student organizations (clubs, school newspapers and yearbooks) and coaching sporting teams. This sample data supports my initial hypothesis that unpaid labor is performed by all educators, not just those in specific types of institutions. While different types of educators may perform varying duties unpaid, all educators are performing some amount of unpaid labor because of the role of the ideology of the gift that persists in contemporary U.S. society that is more completely elaborated in the following section.
Chapter 7: Patterns and Trends in the Interview Data: Educators’ Perceptions of Unpaid Labor

I. Unpaid Labor

The interview data collected from educators at all institutional levels demonstrated the nearly universal prevalence of unpaid labor in some form or another. Labor that is unpaid is any act or activity that is performed in order to fulfill explicit or implicit occupational duties or obligations outside of contractually agreed upon working hours, when appropriate, or greater than forty hours per work week if a defined “school day” is not utilized. Primary and secondary school teachers were the educators most likely to have a defined school day. These educators were then generally divided into two groups: the first for whom the employment contract specifically defines the working hours that the educators are expected to be on the premises, regardless of duties being performed. The second are those educators who are expected, though not necessarily required, to be on the premises prior to the ringing of the first bell and until the last.

The notion of labor that is expected rather than specifically required is a consistent theme in the respondents’ accounts. Tenure-track professors explaining exactly what documents were to be included in their dossiers to be submitted to promotion and tenure committees also discussed this phenomenon of expectation rather than requirement. An assistant professor in the biological sciences discussed how a tenured full professor had introduced a motion to limit the required promotion and tenure documents to just those that would illustrate a candidate’s record of professional development, teaching, and service. Anything else, such as statements of teaching
philosophy and other supporting documents were to be considered optional. The respondent
related that were the motion to pass and be enacted, faculty members up for promotion would be
then faced with the decision to do the bare minimum in terms of satisfying the requirements or to
put in the additional effort and include the “optional” supporting documents. Even though the
requirements may be less time-consuming, the respondent felt there would still be an expectation
to be as thorough and diligent as possible for such an important evaluation.

The first groups of educators discussed their defined school day and the, often, unusual
starting and stopping times. For example, as one female primary school teacher reported, “Our
school hours are from 8:10 AM to 3:07 ½ PM.” When advised that she was the first educator
with whom I’d spoken who had her work day managed to the fraction of a minute she explained
that, “… it’s part of the extended day intervention times, which is 37 ½ minutes – so we teach to
3:07 ½ PM.” More commonly, the school day lasted seven to eight hours in length. Educators
gave a variety of starting and stopping times: “For eight hours, from 7:35-3:35;” “I think it’s
7:00 – oh, that is so early – and I think it’s 7:20 is the time you have to be there until 3:10;” “Per
our contract, we have to be at school at 7:30, and we have to stay until 3:10;” “…you can be
there as long or as little as you want, I think. No, that’s not true – sorry. It doesn’t have any
limitations to how long you can stay, but you’re contractually obligated to be there, I think from
when the students arrive at 8:30 until 4:00.”

The second group of educators reported a more informal expectation that they would be
on-site at the school an appropriate amount of time prior to the first bell and following the last
bell. The teachers discussed varying degrees of oversight regarding what amount of time is
considered appropriate and mechanisms of surveillance that the school employed in order to
observe, whether passively or actively, the educators’ comings and goings. One educator
discussed how in a previous position, “...we had, it was like understood, I don’t think it was in the contract, but it was in the language from the principal that we had to stay for an extra hour after school got out;” “The general time is 8:00 until 4:00, but there’s some flexibility. You can come earlier and leave later. There’s a little flexibility, but the general is 8:00 until 4:00;” another elementary school teacher reported, “…that we’re supposed to be there fifteen minutes before the students and fifteen minutes after.”

The educators at both the elementary and secondary levels reported mixed experiences with various means of institutional monitoring of their arrival and departure times as well as movements within the school itself. Many respondents stated that they either had no institutional surveillance of their comings and goings or were unaware of any such monitoring and that, if it was taking place, was not being brought to their attention either in performance reviews and evaluations or at any other times. Other educators reported using sign-in sheets or time clocks to verify their hours spent on the premises.

There were a number of diverse responses to both the potential for and performance of administrative surveillance. A secondary school teacher said, “We do have a time card and a time clock.” Upon being asked if she had any knowledge of those records being used for evaluation and performance review purposes, she said, “They are. If you are late, you’re supposed to actually punch in, which is not really enforced unless somebody is chronically late. We fine them at the end of the month. But if I’m out for a day, the payroll secretary will make a notation on the card, and there are different reasons why you might be out sick…” Another secondary school teacher, when discussing the time clock being used for evaluation purposes, said, “If you’re ever late you’re supposed to punch in, and they use it in a handful of ways, but it’s usually if you’re late then you’ve got to clock in and be part of a disciplinary thing...so
mostly it’s in terms of lateness, that’s about it.” When discussing administrative monitoring one primary school teacher said, “This is what really pisses me off about this, right? They’ll make you clock-in if you come in two minutes late, but nobody’s keeping track when you stay three or four hours late. That’s the thing that’s really frustrating. It’s like, ‘ok, but you didn’t count the three hours that I stayed yesterday; you didn’t pay me extra for those, but you’re going to deduct me and evaluate my performance based on the three minutes I was late this morning?’ Ugh, nauseating.”

Other methods of surveillance that respondents reported included the use of key cards to access their classrooms, the building, or both. Educators also had to frequently log-on to the institutional server in order to access their computer. Both of these mechanisms maintain logs that administrators could potentially review to determine if and when teachers were accessing the building, their classrooms, or their computers. In discussion with the educators, most were unaware of, unconcerned or unaffected by the surveillance maintained by the institutions. There were, however, several educators who were cognizant of the capability for surveillance. A secondary school teacher said that, “…they can see how much I’m working on the online grade book because I have to log-in and out for that. I don’t know if they do, but I’m sure they have the capability to do that.” Another secondary school teacher discussed the use of video cameras at his institution, saying that “we have video cameras, and there’s been a person or two in the last couple of years who’ve gotten in trouble because when they [the administration] suspected they were not doing things properly, they were able to see when they left, and there have been videos for security reasons.” The use of the various surveillance techniques was a useful tool for the educational administration to quickly and easily determine if, when, and how often paid or unpaid work is being done by each specific educator.
Educators reported a wide array of types of labor that they considered to be unpaid. Elementary and secondary school teachers were more likely to consider a measure of their occupational duties to be unpaid than were educators in higher education, with the notable exception of adjunct or part-time instructors. Some of this variation can be explained by the existence of employment contracts that either do or do not specify the duties that are required in the occupation. As discussed above, many elementary and secondary school educators had clearly defined working hours, and any work that was done outside of those hours was, by that very definition, unpaid – regardless of how necessary it was to be completed. Recognition of this labor as unpaid, however, was less universal. Many educators recognized it as unpaid; a number of others considered that such work was “low-paid,” in that the work itself was a necessary occupational requirement but that once all of those additional hours of labor are factored in, the educators’ extrapolated hourly salary became disappointingly small. It is one thing to receive $56,000 per year for approximately 2,000 hours of work, but it another thing entirely to receive that same $56,000 per year for 2,500 to 3,000 hours of work or more. This characterization of work as low-paid will be discussed in greater detail later in the chapter.

Among elementary and secondary school educators, the unpaid labor reported took many forms. A common theme was that professional development requirements were more likely to be viewed by the educators as unpaid labor than were lesson planning and grading duties, even if the professional development was much less time-consuming. One primary school teacher said:

I think though, the things that I find, that I consider unpaid more often are when we have added things like from professional growth…like a few years ago we adopted a new reading series, for example, and so they wanted to train us in the reading series. But they had us doing the book studies on how to teach reading. Now we all have certification; we all got college degrees – I have a master’s in elementary education. So it felt a little bit like they were expecting us to go back to school and to learn things that we already knew. And the required reading that they were putting on us was a little bit like we’re, you
know, how do you expect, us in the 45 minutes a day, to correct our papers, put in our report cards, communicate with parents, communicate with kids, make our plans for the day, and read two chapters in this book and be ready for discussion? So clearly the expectation was that we were going to go home and be reading it on our own time, and that certainly brought up a lot of contract issues with people feeling, “You’re not paying me to do this – how can you be expecting me to do it?” When they start putting expectations like that, that are not feasible to do within the contracted hours…you know…I’m going to do on my own time obviously, and I don’t feel unpaid for it as much because I can see it’s to my benefit to be planned and ready to do my job. I think it’s when they put exceptions on us that are harder to see the benefits, then I start to feel like “You’re not paying me to do this; I don’t feel the benefits of doing this.”

Another elementary school teacher reported that her school often appropriated teachers’ preparation periods to be used for professional development for which remuneration was inconsistent, saying:

We’re supposed to get paid for them [professional development sessions occurring during preparation periods], but it becomes a kind of hassle. And most people aren’t very knowledgeable about their rights. You’re supposed to be able to give up one prep a month for PD – for professional development – and then there’s two preps for grading; so that’s three preps. Anything above three preps that you lose you’re supposed to get financially compensated for. But most people don’t know that. Otherwise, if they’re not going to pay you, you could refuse to go to the professional development. And although they say there are no ramifications, there are…in the long run.

When asked about the process of submitting requests for remuneration, the same teacher said, “It’s almost discouraged. I remember there was one situation where they wanted us to do grading of tests and they offered after school per session [a supplemental pay for additional work but lower than the educator’s equivalent hourly wage], [but] everyone can’t stay after school. And they said, ‘Sure, you could do it during the day, but during the day they only give you $20 per hour.’ Whether that’s true or not, I don’t know. But that’s what we’ve been informed of.”
Nearly every educator interviewed stipulated that they had to routinely perform labor that was outside of their contracted working hours. The discrepancy lay in how educators would then perceive this labor. Whether they considered it to be unpaid or whether they considered it to be a necessary and reasonable part of the occupation for which they were paid, given that they are salaried employees. While a greater number of working hours per week will functionally lower the educator’s hourly wage, it doesn’t ultimately affect their take-home paycheck. Many educators seemed to prefer to consider the work that they did at home or after school or on the weekends as paid, albeit less so than their school day duties.

For many educators, they’d accepted the expectation and necessity of grading and lesson planning, and so forth on their own time, but mandatory professional development activities were met with less acceptance. Some educators expressed this difference by noting that some professional development activities were, at times, administered in such a way as to call into question the integrity and professionalism of the educators. Even their mandatory nature was off-putting, implying to some teachers that they wouldn’t, on their own initiative, seek to better themselves professionally.

Another common frustration that contributed to educators’ increased likelihood in recognizing some of their job duties as unpaid were bureaucratic requirements and the completion of paperwork. Educators generally proved to be more than willing to go above and beyond when teaching, but work and paperwork requirements about teaching were much less accepted. One educator explained, “I’ve been asked to do things for the district, whether it’s a training program for the district, and that’s part of my job. I train teachers; I train students; I love to do that. But it’s when I’m pulled away from my schools, and I can’t be in the buildings because I’m in a meeting at the district level with a vendor or something, and they’re taking me
away from the school day. So then I’ve got to work even more unpaid later on at night, on the
weekends, to catch up for the things I missed while I was pulled out of my classroom.” Another
teacher discussed the time and effort involved in maintaining an online presence, saying:

During the class day I have time to see students. Usually I work through lunch – I barely
take the time to sit down because the more I can do at school means the less I have to do
at home, and that means more of a life I can actually try to have. And so, I would say a
lot of it, over half of it, I’d consider it unpaid. The lesson planning, the grading, and now
– I don’t know if you’ve heard about this, but many schools are requiring them [teachers]
to put all the grades online and communicate with students and parents and other teachers
and guidance counselors and assistant principals. The whole school is supposed to be
online. So, in addition to the normal everyday grading and lesson planning and meeting
students and all of that, now you have a whole other job which is to be online all the time
putting up your assignments, putting the grades in so students can access them, and
you’re emailing parents, you’re emailing the students – that’s a whole other job that is
unpaid. I needed an administrative assistant just to do that part of the job at this point.
But, people are being punished and put on lists if they’re not doing it, so…it’s bad.

Continuing with this same finding, another teacher said:

It’s just that the job requires [duties] that are outside and beyond…I mean, I have these
little odd random meetings, like a parent comes down at 4:40 on a Friday – that happened
to me recently – and before that, the parent comes down and the expectation is that
they’re here so we should spend time and want to speak with them. And really, can you
think of a worse time in my entire week to spend with any parent, or any person? Usually
it takes a little while to deal with anyone – at least an hour or two – and then the idea that
these meetings [require] different bits of research, paperwork. But curriculum
development takes up most of my time as I teach and research. So, um, is it unpaid? Sure.
This is just stuff that never, it never [ends].

Veteran teachers observed that it is the more junior teachers who are who are most significantly
affected by bureaucratic requirements. A secondary school teacher said, “But I think teachers
today bring home a lot more work and, mainly because, especially new teachers, the demands on
new teachers [are higher] now – and all teachers – but there’s planning and having lessons really
written out formal[ly] for maybe three pages; you know, it’s a different world out there. So, you
know, these teachers are really under the gun to prepare and having to fear their administration. I think it’s a lot; our teachers are bringing home a lot more work now, and they’ve been preparing a lot more.”

Another site of labor most often seen by educators as unpaid is committee work. This was observed across all institutional levels, but most commonly among educators in higher education whose tenure and promotions are dependent on their service. Although full-time professors in higher education are less likely to explicitly consider some of their job duties to be paid versus non-paid, committee work was the type of labor that was most likely to be thought of as a greater time burden. A secondary school teacher, when asked if he had committee work requirements, said:

Yes, I mean, you do some committee work that you’re on, but you do it because you got asked to do it or because the principal really wants you to do it. I’m on the hiring committee right now, and that meets at 4:00 in the afternoon for an hour. And we’re just meeting occasionally, but, you know, if I really wanted to I could have said “No, forget it.” I’ve decided to do this, and when I went to the first meeting I thought “Why did I say yes?” because there were so many teachers in there. I’m going “you don’t need me,” but I’m there, so… And that’s the kind of thing, you know, you do some of that. But other than that I’d say mostly it’s just, you just figure that working extra hours goes with the job.

An assistant professor at a public university after being asked if she had committee obligations replied:

Yes! I have been told to stop doing committee work, and I’m just increasing it. I’m on fourteen different committees. These are committees that don’t meet consistently, so I would say I meet anywhere from five to ten hours a month. It’s a variety of committees. There are curricular development committees, there’s a theory committee that I’m on. I’m on the curricular initiatives committee for [a non-dominant perspective] studies program – I’m the chair of that, the director. I’m also the chair of the [non-dominant perspective] studies conference committee and the [non-dominant perspective] studies development committee. I’m also on the development committee for sociology; I’m on
several school committees, some fellowship committees, residential scholars; I was a reader for the Honors [program] application; I was on the diversity and inclusion committee, university-wide as well as college. I’m on the Black and Latino initiative advisory committee. Oh – there’s the student awards committee, so paper awards that students submit, which means that you have to read all the papers. Again, these meet at various times throughout the year, so one month might be a concentrated effort, spending may five to ten hours a week on that stuff and then I won’t be on that committee for another year; the committee won’t meet for another year, so it just depends on what kind of environment I’m in.

This respondent also discussed a difference in committee and advising duties in part because of her race and gender, saying, “I definitely do more advising and committee work as a person of color…as a black female because there’s so few faculty of color, everybody wants diversity on their committees, so they pull from the ten of us or however many of us there are and so you tend to find that you were selected for all of these committees based on your diversity.” When asked if this held true for advising duties also, she answered:

Oh yeah, absolutely. Absolutely! I mean what was interesting in our department was a white male suggested to a female whose sexual orientation is not his – he’s heterosexual, she is not – and he said that our students were not interested in gay issues or LGBTQ topics or issues, that we shouldn’t be directing any coursework towards that. Which we found surprising; I share an office with this person, and I thought that was interesting because I constantly see a stream of students coming and talking with her about LGBTQ issues, but that’s because they have a comfort level with her and the black students, they’ll come and talk to me because I write about…and I’m a black woman, so you find that people who share some similar characteristics to you, they gravitate to you because there’s a sense of comfort and understanding that is anticipated.

An assistant professor at another urban university experienced a similar situation, but in the other direction. She said:

Well, I’m white, and the majority of the students at [an urban community college] are not white, so I definitely don’t feel sought out by students in terms of race. I do think occasionally there may be white students who feel like they connect with me because – I
think white, especially white American students at [this institution] are the minority. And so, I think some of those students, depending on where they’re from…a lot of times when they’re white American students from [this institution] then they’re from out-of-state and they’ve moved to here to experience the city and then they start going to school once they’re here. Their identification – they’re really different. And sometimes I think they might be wanting to be connected with me a little bit. I’m from the Midwest originally. I don’t really try and foster that because it’s not really, you know… Part of my work is political and so I am more inclined to actually to try to encourage students of color or first generation college students or [students from] disadvantaged backgrounds, but…and I’m not a lesbian, but I do try to connect with my lesbian students there at least at some level. I think it comes up more in writing and that they feel more comfortable coming out in their writing. And then I think, there’s two other things, I sometimes feel like female students might connect with me more equally than men, except that, in addition to Introduction to Sociology, I teach a technology class, and I’m interested in technology issues and that’s often a guy thing so because of that I develop relationships with male students.

In addition to committee work, a dimension of labor that is done by educators, particularly primary and secondary teachers is field trips. Many times a field trip is held within the confines of the school day, and in those instances the educators are only losing out on their prep period(s). Other times the trips were taken to locations that were sufficiently far away so as to require the educators to return home up to several hours after the end of the school day, which impacted not only the educators’ own working time but also caused conflicts with other family or child care obligations. Some educators reported compulsory attendance at overnight or longer field trips. An elementary school teacher said:

Our fifth grade students every year go on a three-day camping trip. The teachers accompany. We don’t get paid extra for that. And the only ones who really get to refuse are the ones who have children. If you don’t have a kid, you are assumed going. So, I’m getting married in a couple of weeks, about six weeks. And this trip had not been planned because we didn’t have the money for it in our budget. At a brief meeting at the beginning of January, we were told, “The trip is on; here are the dates.” I had already scheduled things around the wedding for the week of, but I have to reschedule them now because I’m assumed going. So, I couldn’t say like, “Well, I already had these things.” Last year I
had a dog, I had a puppy. And I said, “I don’t think I can go. I can’t find somebody to watch my dog and all this stuff.” And it was like, “Well, you need to figure it out.”

For most educators a field trip is an infrequent occurrence, but they often require a significant amount of the teachers’ time as well as preclude them from doing any other work while off-site because of their responsibility to monitor the students.

Educators also discussed that the educational profession is one in which a practitioner is “always working.” Unlike many other occupations, such as administrative assistants, factory and service workers, and police or medical personnel, educators are able to perform many of their job duties in any setting, not necessarily being confined to the school or university. One elementary school teacher remarked:

The thing about teaching is that I’m thinking about my job almost constantly. And so, there’s planning and things that I do all the time that aren’t times I’m sitting down and dedicated to work. I mean, teaching is a lifestyle, as opposed to just a job or occupation. It’s so much a part of my day and my, sort of, identity really. But a big thing is that I’m doing a lot of – research is a huge part of my teaching responsibility with history, with American history that I don’t know as well as I would like to or I’ll need to [in order] to teach – so there’s a lot of research that I’m doing, whether it’s movies or reading, or reading a newspaper even that are just part of being on top of information that isn’t necessarily lesson planning.

Unlike other occupations that begin and end with the shift whistle, educational labor often requires the seeking out of outside resources, above and beyond what may be offered by the school.

The extracurricular time investment was often compounded with the notion that the work that the educators were putting in was for the “good of the kids.” As one secondary school teacher discussed:

Yeah, there’s a lot that I do that’s unpaid. Well, I guess I’m paid for the hours I’m supposed to be here; anything I stick around for is unpaid time. So if I stay later to type
up an IIP, or if I stay a little bit later to talk to a parent on the phone about a kid’s progress, or I have to meet with a group of people to discuss progress on a curriculum or scope or sequence, I might do that three times a month for an hour or two. There’s a lot of stuff we do that’s just for the good of the kids, and we’re not getting any compensation for it. I might volunteer some time to look through that [student’s practice exams] so that the kids get feedback quickly, and so they know before they take the test that they’re on the right track or if they need to try again. We do that a couple of times a year. If I’m sticking around to help set-up for a sporting event that’s not my sport, or…there’s just some things that I do because it’s for the good of the kids, but we don’t get any compensation for.

This type of work that educators performed was often difficult to quantify, particularly with regard to remuneration. Another secondary school teacher said, “If on my own kindness of heart I decide to stay late and tutor some kid, I can put in for hours, but good luck them covering it because it hasn’t been approved. So, maybe I’ll get it; probably I wouldn’t.”

For most educators, the unpaid work that they completed was done at home. Some teachers would stay late at the school to complete their outstanding tasks, but most preferred to take it home. For a number of teachers, this flexibility is considered a positive aspect of the profession. By being able to work from home, the educator has a greater amount of agency in their work than does the factory worker or food service employee. However, being able to work from home also contributed to the phenomenon discussed above of educators “always being working.” When asked if the respondent considers any of the work performed to be unpaid, a secondary school teacher said:

Oh definitely! All the time. Most nights when I’m home, and lately, since having kids, the kids go to bed, and I work from, at times, from nine until midnight. I’m up working, catching up on emails, reading the recent curriculum, and doing various things. I’m sitting here working, and I’m doing it unpaid. I’m paid for a seven hour and twenty minute day, and that’s what I’m paid for. So when I’m working outside of that, absolutely. On the weekend, Saturday and Sunday, when I’m doing the same thing – absolutely unpaid. My work would definitely suffer if I didn’t work on the weekend – at
least check emails, do some reading on the weekends – at night if I don’t do the same my work would definitely suffer. I’m expected to do a lot.

A male secondary school teacher also said, “The grading and planning I do is all done after the school day, and it’s either done at my house or at a coffee shop or at school. When I do it at school it’s just because I happen to be there and I work a while at school, but I come home.”

For nearly every educator, the unpaid work didn’t just end after the last day of the school year. As much as the educators’ “perquisite” of having summer’s off is touted, the reality of most educators was vastly different. One elementary school teacher said, “Summer is a different story. I am in there everyday. We started school August 15th this past year, and I was probably in there everyday for at least an hour, if not more. And then, you know, trickling in and out throughout the summer…twenty minutes here, and hour there, just depending on what it was I needed to get done and wanted to do.” Again, there is some flexibility in duration and intensity of the work done by educators in the summer, but what remains unfailingly consistent is that it is unpaid. A secondary school teacher said:

Oh yeah, I consider them [hours working outside the school day] unpaid. Totally. Everything outside of contracted hours is unpaid; everything I do at home is unpaid. But you just have to do that. Of course you would like not to do it. Summer, other holidays, I can go at my own pace, and I can procrastinate if I want – I can work full force if I want. During longer spans of time it seems like it’s more my choice. If I’m doing nightly work during the school year, I’m not very happy. I’d rather not do that. During other breaks it’s not so much that I’m totally, completely resentful. But again, right now the big thing that everyone is working towards is called Common Core, in which everything that we teach is supposed to include writing and math. And so everybody is scrambling because we have a whole new evaluation system and everybody is scrambling to show that they’re incorporating those Common Core [requirements], which takes more time from lessons that you used previously. The incorporation of the Common Core has added many more hours onto everybody’s plate. Many more unpaid hours onto everybody’s plate because this year I am so busy doing paper work stuff to prepare for them [the evaluators] to come in and say, “How are you using the standards to help teach?” and tying everything
that I do to the standard. This year I’m not coming up with new things to do, and I’m not coming up with a whole lot of new labs to do because that’s what I’ll be doing.

Another secondary school teacher added:

Three-day weekends feel like such a luxury because one of the days, at least a day and a half of the weekend, I’m working on school stuff. So it is harder to do that, for example, the last three day weekend – Martin Luther King Junior weekend – I was able to go down to my mother’s house over the weekend with my husband, and we just managed to hang out only because there are no classes this week because it’s Regent’s Week. So, report cards were due on Tuesday, which took half the weekend, but that extra day helps you to get some done. I don’t know anybody who doesn’t work over the holidays. A lot of teachers, in fact, plan a due date or a test on the day before the holiday starts so they can take it home to grade with the extra time. You might assign a test before the last day of winter break so you have as much time to get it done instead of waiting for it to happen in the middle of the week. A lot of catching up happens on the holidays and the weekends.

**II. Educators’ Pre-existing Understanding of the Perceived Necessity of Unpaid Labor**

Perhaps the most interesting finding of educators speaking about their motivations for working unpaid is that a discussion of a pre-existing understanding or expectation of the amount of work required of teachers to justify such unpaid work was only found in interviews with elementary and secondary school teachers. This seemed particularly unexpected given that, for many faculty members in higher education, the journey through graduate school offers and even requires close association with full-time and tenured faculty and provides the opportunity to learn first-hand the various occupational responsibilities and time requirements. Even while many respondents expressed issues or difficulty with the workload, none amongst them spoke of how their earlier relationships with faculty had prepared them, even at least somewhat, for their positions in higher education.
Part of the job

The phrase “part of the job” was one of the most repeated statements by interviewed educators. This firmly demonstrates the entrenchment of the notion that teachers can and should work outside of their contracted school hours in order to both complete their occupational requirements as well as to surpass them. This finding is particularly incongruous, given the significant number of educators who simultaneously discussed how non-teachers had such an incomplete understanding of what teachers do.

A secondary school teacher discussed the importance and necessity of this investment of time in order to meet his standard of professionalism in teaching, saying, “Every job you take, whatever it is in this world requires planning, requires thinking, so maybe a lawyer can charge you for thinking about something and get away with it, but part of the job of a teacher is reformer, actor, psychologist, and it involves a lot of time.” A male secondary school teacher remarked, “I think if I sat down and thought about it, then there are probably a lot of hours that are unpaid, but I knew that when I made the decision to become a teacher – that it was a job that didn’t end when you walked out the door…I kind of feel that this is what I signed on for.” In a similar vein a female elementary school teacher said:

For me it’s something that I just would do automatically and then I didn’t think about getting paid or not getting paid. I just something that I do because I want – I am pretty particular about my classroom, pretty particular about the things that I teach and how I teach it, and I want it done in a certain way. If I need to get a resource then I am going to get it because I want to use it for my kids and because I think it’s best for the kids. I just go ahead and do it; I don’t worry about being paid or not being paid. Of course it would be nice to be paid or, you know, I just kind of think of it as part of the job. And I know I am – like I said, pretty particular, and I want to do things how I think it’s right, and I am not going to let…if the library doesn’t have a book, and I really, really want that book, I am just going to get it.
For many teachers, the most time-consuming dimension of the job was extracurricular activities for which they were sponsors or coaches. Many teachers said that their coaching duties and some sponsoring duties were paid a pre-determined sum based on a calculated number of hours. However the educators interviewed related that the sum paid never reflected even a close approximation to the actual numbers of hours that coaching and sponsorship required. A female secondary school teacher said:

We stayed sometimes voluntarily just because it needed to be done, but it was never demanded of us. I did put in a lot of time in terms of being newspaper advisor. I did a lot of free work for that. We were only given a very limited number of hours, and the newspaper needed a lot more hours so that was basically volunteer work. And I provided snacks for the kids; that was out-of-pocket expense…and I taught a journalism class, but they weren’t paying me per session, and they weren’t doing anything for me…A lot of the newspaper work and grading papers, none of that was [paid]. The newspaper was hour after hour after hour, which most of it wasn’t paid. And grading papers certainly we didn’t get paid for it either. It’s not the same, the kind of paper grading you do as a math teacher isn’t the same as an English teacher or as a gym teacher. But we all take the same salary so I felt a lot of it was unpaid. It came with the territory, but it wasn’t paid or acknowledged by a lot of people.

Many educators discussed how long working hours are “part of the job” but were dismayed at how inconsistently those hours were recognized by school administrators, parents, or the general public. One female elementary school teacher said, “I guess I just do [unpaid labor] because I feel like I should, like it is a part of my job. My job is to be the best teacher and to do everything I’m supposed to do.” Another female elementary school teacher said, “I just think it [working unpaid] is part of the job. This is part of what it is to be a teacher. You’re going to have homework, like your kids have homework.” A male elementary school teacher said:

I think it’s just part of the job, you know? It’s what you have to do to be a good teacher. So if you care about the job at all, then it’s just all part of the territory… It requires a lot
of outside time and work. That’s part of the job. I don’t think you could get it all done in that time frame [the school day]… It definitely takes a special individual – someone who’s patient and someone who enjoys learning and someone who’s able to communicate effectively with kids. It requires a special kind of person.

When discussing the multiple roles that teachers are often required to take on a male secondary school teacher said, “Part of the job of a teacher is reformer, actor, psychologist, and it involves a lot of time, so when you sign on the dotted line to be a teacher you know all these things, so you’re expected that you’ll do that. Better teachers are willing to do more.”

Most educators accepted the necessity to work unpaid without question but were only able or willing to perform that unpaid work to varying degrees. Some teachers were constrained by the competing obligations of family and other commitments. Other teachers were less willing to commit as much time as they had in the past, though all teachers interviewed worked outside of their contracted school day. A female elementary school teacher said, “I just deal with the part of the job that I want to do my best for the kids, and so I just do it… Everyone else, regardless of age, either they’re working early or they’re working late or they’re in on the weekends and trying to better themselves. I considered it [working unpaid] to be part of my job. I’m a teacher; this is what I do, you know? Another female secondary school teacher agreed with the sentiment of working unpaid but did express some frustration that those efforts were not always recognized or appreciated, saying:

I feel that it’s part of the job, and I wish teachers got more respect for doing what is necessary, and we do go above and beyond because there are a lot of us; it is the minority of us who sit back and put their feet up and cruise through. I’m doing it because it needs to be done, and it’s not going to get done unless I do it, so, you know, who else is going to teach writing? They’re not going to learn that. So if I have to put in extra hours to make sure a kid knows better how to write then I will do that. I come from a private school background, private school all the way through college and my idea, in that sense, I do want to give back. I feel like I did come into the public school system so I could
teach kids who are the most underprivileged and, you know, I had such wonderful teachers, and I strongly believe that everybody deserves what I got.

Educators often discussed the impact that some teachers had on their own educations and the influence that had on how they view their dedication to the students. All of the respondents expected that education would be a challenging field and no educator said that they became a teacher for the short work days or summers off. A male secondary school teacher said, “Of course teachers are required to be in uncomfortable situations. That’s part of the job.”

In higher education the respondents also expressed strong statements of dedication to teaching and embracing of unpaid labor as a part of the job. A full-time female professor said, “I feel like it is part of my job description to empower the students so that they can have a fruitful future and to [aid] them in any way that I can so that they can ensure themselves a fruitful future. I feel like that’s part of my job.” Another full-time female faculty member said, “I consider part of my professional obligations to do those kinds of things [work unpaid in some capacity]. I think it just comes with the territory and it comes with what I do for a living. I’m not going to stop researching and publishing just because I’ve already published enough.”

In higher education, the respondents didn’t identify with the notion that teaching is a calling as strongly as did the teachers in primary and secondary schools. The idea of a calling was often likened to such professions as the clergy or medicine or law enforcement. In these professions the common denominator is that of helping others or working for the benefit of others. While this is certainly true of higher education, for many professors, particularly junior, non-tenured faculty, their teaching duties are only a small component of their requirements for promotion and tenure. This also falls under the umbrella of the dimension mentioned earlier regarding competing obligations. Even given these constraints, a female full-time professor
remarked, “I like how you say it – to do the best you can for your students. I don’t know if the extra hours or being underpaid is a part of the calling. I think the calling will be the responsibility that you have as an educator that you have towards people who are your students, and you want to do your best.

_You knew what you signed up for_

I kind of knew when I made the decision to become a teacher that it was a job that didn’t end when you walked out the door. I kind of feel that this is what I signed on for.

A very common theme among elementary and primary school teachers is that they “knew what they signed up for.” None of the teachers interviewed expressed any surprise that they would be performing some measure of unpaid labor. Many of them didn’t anticipate exactly how much work would be required, but that they would be doing some work after school or from home. Several of the teachers interviewed came from families in which one or more parent was also a teacher. In fact, I interviewed one female adjunct instructor and her secondary school teacher father. Because of their observations of how much work their teacher parents put in, many respondents had a very good understanding of what would be expected of them as teachers. A female elementary school teacher jokingly said, “My mum had been a teacher and she worked like a lunatic too, so I grew up around that.” One male secondary school teacher said:

On the one hand, I really don’t feel like I can resent it because it’s work that has to be done, and I kind of knew what I signed up for. I knew that teachers have to do this sort of thing. My mother was a teacher for a while, so I knew about that. But at the same time – what gets me – I think that gets most teachers is not even the low pay, because nobody goes into this to get rich, but that the general attitude towards teachers has shifted in such a negative direction.
Another male elementary school teacher agreed saying, “When I did my student teaching I was kind of just told that it was kind of part of the job; part of the job is just to stay after work on different things. And my Mom’s a teacher too, so she’s told me a lot about how important it is too. She does her lesson plans on Thursday nights; she stays after school. She said you have to have that extra time in there, so I respect it.”

For many teachers the reality and necessity of unpaid labor was apparent very soon after starting their teaching careers. A male secondary school teacher said:

No one’s ever said I wouldn’t be grading on my own time. It’s part of the job that you accept, and if you really get disgruntled about it then you should be in another profession. I went to [a private New York City university] for my master’s and it’s pretty much expected that you’re doing that [working unpaid] to help students. I do remember that there was talk of – for report cards when you have to put in a number of comments about the students’ behavior and that at certain schools that didn’t have that, you have to actually write an entire page on each student. And the problem is, you know, that’s ridiculous. How could you possibly have time to write an entire page if you have five classes of 35 students?

Another male secondary school teacher agreed saying:

Again, you kind of know what you signed up for. So I wasn’t shocked when I realized that I have a lot of work to do in my nonworking hours. Because I started teaching late in life – I already worked in publishing for fifteen years – I had already been to graduate school. So I was like 40 when I started teaching, almost 40. By the time I knew this was going to happen, I kind of accepted that that’s the way it was going to be. So, if you want to be a teacher, this is the way it is. And railing against it, in some ways, is like railing against the sun coming up in the morning – it’s just something that you’ve got to deal with. I think what teachers really don’t like is lack appreciation on the part of the public.

A male elementary school teacher elaborated on the effects of working unpaid on other aspects of his life saying:
It’s just part of the job, you know? I don’t always look forward to it, I guess, but it’s just kind of a necessary component to get those plans together. You know, out in all those details in the lesson so that you’re ready to go on Monday. Otherwise you end up having to play catch-up throughout the whole week. So it’s kind of just one of those things where, yeah, you don’t always look forward to it, but it’s just a necessary part of it… I think it’s just part of the job, you know? It’s what you have to do to be a good teacher… A lot of it was unpaid. It came with the territory, but it wasn’t paid or acknowledged by a lot of people… So, if you are about the job at all, then it’s just all part of the territory.

In a similar vein to educators knowing what they signed up for, some educators also had been prepared for the expectation of working unpaid through their undergraduate or graduate instruction.

**College or training prepared educators for necessity of unpaid labor**

I think it [having to work outside of school hours] was definitely alluded to. The school I went to has a pretty reputable education program. A lot of people who have gone through those programs and taught before… pretty much the main takeaway I got from a lot of those graduates was that you’re going to put in a lot of time, so it was definitely an expectation that I had. The amount of time and the capacity I don’t think I understood when I was in college, but it was definitely alluded to.

For many teachers the expectations of working unpaid were made explicit as a part of their teacher training. This was most commonly realized during their student teacher periods in which they are mentored by an experienced teacher. A female elementary school teacher discussed that practice saying:

I think it’s probably just always been known – you go into teaching knowing you have to work outside the school. And whether or not you realize how much you have to do, I think that’s it’s just a lot that you knew going into it. It’s really expected that you always have to work outside. [This expectation was learned from] teachers and then especially the student teaching in college and friends that were teachers or friends’ parents that were teachers. And, just from being in school I knew that my elementary schoolteacher graded while I was in class.
The responsibility for managing a class and creating lesson plans was no longer a theoretical job requirement but a day-to-day necessity. The first few years of teaching are often the most difficult for new teachers. Not only because they have less experience and a less-developed support system, but also because they have not yet created the framework for their lesson plans going forward. Several teachers mentioned that, while they diligently tweaked and re-worked their lesson plans based on their outcomes and success, it was significantly less time-consuming to plan from an existing lesson than to create it from scratch.

Another time-consuming part of elementary and secondary school teaching is communication with parents. This had traditionally been done during parent-teacher conferences and perhaps a note home every now and then. However, the advent of email and the administration of classroom web pages and blogs have made teachers significantly more accessible, frequently at a significant cost to their non-working hours. Most teachers interviewed also expected this responsibility. A female elementary school teacher said:

I don’t know, I think it was an understanding – there were a number of us in my program that had parents for teachers, so that certainly came up in our discussions about what it was like being at home, in terms of the hours. But I don’t remember specifically having conversations about the expectation that – the time expectations that it would take as a full-time teacher. But we all knew it. Like, it wasn’t like I was surprised by it.

A female secondary school teacher agreed saying:

I kind of assumed it went with the job. I didn’t know when it would actually get done, but I know that that’s part of the job. We have parent-teacher conferences, parents can call anytime they want – they generally don’t – and when they don’t you have to make the outreach to them. So I kind of knew that going in.
A male secondary school teacher discussed the intersection of the requirements of the profession and the specific needs of the children themselves.

You’re told, just as I was told when I was going through my training to be a teacher, that there would be extra hours work, so it’s just something I kind of expected. When I came out of college and was starting to work at my school, it was just something that I walked in on. I don’t think I necessarily comprehended how much work it takes. As I worked more, I realized the population I was working with is just a bunch of disadvantaged kids. I think I developed a need to give them everything I have knowing how much they have going against them.

Another male secondary school teacher elaborated on the ways in which his teaching training did and did not prepare him for the realities and the expectations for unpaid work. He said:

My mum was a teacher and she stayed at her school every night till 7:00, and I had to stay there with her because she was my ride home…I’m just the kind of person that has to do things for myself if I’m smart enough to figure it out. So yes I mean it’s – I don’t feel that the [New York City Teaching] Fellows prepared me at all for what teaching would be like. I loved the professor that we had. He was a former teacher and principal. He had us for four hours a day and somehow made that livable. But at the same time I didn’t get there having any idea what I was doing... I’ve been pretty fortunate that I’ve learnt a lot from my group who had drama classes with me.

Besides the training that educators received as a part of their formal instruction and student teaching, teaching assistant, or adjuncting experiences, many educators have, over time, witnessed and lived through the changing of expectations regarding unpaid labor in their educational institutions.

Changes in the educational system over time

Educators also discussed the ways in which the educational system had changed over time. Not surprisingly, this was a finding that was usually only broached by the teachers with significantly more years of experience. Some of the educators who came from teaching families
offered some of their insights into the changes over time, but observing it secondhand is no substitute for living and working through the institutional and policy changes over the years. A male secondary school teacher explained: “But I don’t think they really prepared you back in the ‘70s for what it was like to be a teacher as it is today, which is much more intensive where you’re in a school a lot more, where you’re preparing lessons, where you have to be working closely with your co-operating teacher.”

In New York City, as well as numerous other metropolitan areas across the United States, there has been a burgeoning increase in charter schools. In New York City according to the New York City Charter School Center non-profit organization charter schools are:

…free public schools open to all New York City children. Though public, they are not run by the NYC Department of Education. Charter schools operate independently, according to the terms of a performance contract or “charter.” Charter schools commit to meeting specific academic goals set by New York State, including raising student achievement, then make their own decisions about how to achieve them.

A male secondary school teacher discusses some of the issues he’d observed among friends and colleagues that were teaching in charter schools, as opposed to New York City schools administered by the New York City Department of Education. He said:

Especially in the newer charter schools, and at that time you know these little schools that have been starting up by the hundreds, the teachers are expected to work past what your six and a half hours, whatever it is, in that six hours and forty minutes and don’t get compensated and that might have annoyed some of the teachers, the newer teachers who put in a lot of extra time in their schools but don’t get compensated for it. I definitely think teachers are looked upon that they work 9:00 till 3:00 and have the summers off and you know they’re very lucky, but most teachers especially today bring home a lot of work. You know, it’s a different world out there.
Related to educators’ observations of the changes in the educational system over time, many teachers discussed how they picked up much of their professional obligations while learning on the job. This was especially true regarding the expectations of unpaid labor. It was rare that institutional expectations for working unpaid would be formalized, but most teachers realized very quickly that there were certain tasks that needed to be completed daily or weekly and since available preparation periods did not give sufficient opportunity for the work to be done during the school day, the only alternative was after school or at home.

*Learning on the job*

You know, I really don’t know. I certainly had no idea how much work was involved in teaching until I started doing it, even though I grew up in a house where my mum was doing it, so I don’t know that I can really speak intelligently about fields I’ve never been in.

For those teachers who came in with unclear or no expectations about the unpaid work required of them, they attributed their justification for working unpaid to “learning on the job.” A female secondary school teacher said:

I think that’s just how it is to have a job. I mean, if you want to be successful and keep your job, there will probably be times that you have to work unpaid. Your first day, first year, is your foundation. Teaching is your life and your everything, and hopefully you don’t have kids because you need to spend your whole life on it. I don’t feel that I was unprepared for the number of hours I would have to spend on it. I think that I knew there would be those types of things that I would need to do.

Another female secondary school teacher added:

I think the reason I did it [work unpaid] was because I didn’t have tenure, and because I didn’t know what I was doing, so I felt like I had to work double-time, at least in the beginning, to really make sure I was prepared every day. You know, they always say better to be over-prepared than underprepared when you’re a teacher, when 15 minutes to
fill can feel like three centuries if you don’t know what you’re doing, so I think I was mostly scared into, like, “Oh, no I have to do all this! I better do it as good as I can.”

For many educators, particularly those with less experience, the challenges of a career in education are particularly daunting. Without a formalized training process and explicit list of professional expectations, many educators were forced to infer from their colleagues activities what was expected. When their already limited planning or preparation periods did not permit them to complete all the required duties then educators quickly realized that their only alternative was to work unpaid. This expectation was rarely formally imparted but the detriments suffered by educators failing to meet the informal standards were no less significant. The next section discusses the degree to which educators’ unpaid labor is recognized by their institutional administration and the effects of that recognition.

III: The Recognition of Unpaid Labor by Educational Administration, Colleagues, Students & Parents

Working unpaid was a phenomenon reported by each educator interviewed. What was significantly less uniform was whether, to the educators’ knowledge, such unpaid labor was being recognized by the educational institutions’ administrators, their colleagues, the students or the students’ parents. The majority of respondents indicated that they felt that their unpaid labor was recognized. However simple recognition is no indication as to the effects that recognition of unpaid labor had. Many respondents said that their efforts were observed and recognized, but that it was not a determining factor in their evaluations and potential for promotion and tenure.
Positive Effects

I’m in a place where I feel like I’m doing a ton of work and busting my butt for all these new lessons and giving all this new, like re-inventing the wheel. I have weekly meetings with my supervisors. Something that comes up a lot is I feel like I’m doing all this stuff and her response is, “You’re doing a good job, and what you’re doing now is fabulous, and next year you have an opportunity to try it again.” So I feel very supported in that at work.

Most educators expressed that they thought their efforts were recognized at least much of the time. For many of those times in which their unpaid work was recognized, whether as unpaid or not, it contributed to positive reinforcement about the school and the administration. One male elementary school teacher said, “I think my principal’s really good about staying positive and telling me that I’m doing a good job. So, I think she notices that I’m doing good work, and I think it’s appreciated.” A female secondary school teacher agreed, saying:

I definitely feel…I know it’s being evaluated by the administration. But I also know that it is valued by the administration that I work with, in my school system, and I think that they feel that they wish they could pay me more, and they wish all those extra hours that I work, I feel like if they could, they would, but there’s just not money there to pay all the teachers for the extra time that we spend on various meetings that we are required to attend after school, the various things teachers are required to do during unpaid time. They just can’t. It’s valued by the administration, but there is no…we haven’t had a raise in four years.

A male secondary school teacher added:

It wasn’t until I had my second Administrator who helped me, you know with techniques and certain classroom management things, so I never really had that with my first one and then by the time, you know in six, seven years I had my act together and the next 18 weeks started being great and to see how you’re doing and probably because I had my own curriculum pretty much. So I never really had interference or, you know, I had some support but not a lot of support from my administrators.

The positive reinforcement experienced by educators in response to their unpaid work was an effective administrative tool in making certain that educators continued to perform similarly in
the future. When educators perceived that their efforts were being recognized and rewarded they expressed a greater likelihood to work to the same level. However, not all educators experienced positive outcomes following their working unpaid. The next section examines educators’ discussions of when their unpaid work was perceived either negatively or in a more neutral but unanticipated manner.

Neutral/Unanticipated Effects

Recognized but with uncertain/variable effects

Often due to the informal, and thus not formalized, nature of unpaid work, the consequences to the educators are not always objectively positive or negative – or unpaid work is subjective depending on the observing audience. One female secondary school teacher said:

I think they’re aware of it, and occasionally they recognize it. It’s not recognized in any sort of financial way. It’s not really compensated, and I don’t think it affects evaluations, necessarily. Both my principal and assistant principal are very aware. Neither one of them is one to stay in their office behind closed doors and not know. They are very aware of what’s going on in the building at all times. They’re constantly up and walking around, and they’ll walk through classrooms on a regular basis, if not more than once a day. So they’re on top of things and definitely have a handle on what’s going on because they know who’s doing what and when. I do think they recognize it; they know I’m doing it and they appreciate it. Sometimes I feel like it’s taken advantage of and becomes an expectation.

A female elementary school teacher added:

Sometimes the administration, or perhaps the other teachers, may wonder how you can do it [complete work obligations without working unpaid or outside of the school day]. I don’t know anybody at that school that doesn’t work outside of school, whether they take it home or do it at school. I think it’s definitely expected that you do something outside of work because I guess the thirty-seven hours isn’t enough time.
A male elementary school teacher said, “Yes, they recognize it [working outside contract hours], but it’s not really compensated by extra pay.” A male secondary school teacher offered a more optimistic characterization of the consequences of working unpaid:

I think it’s being recognized. I happen to teach Honors and a difficult senior class where they’re preparing to pass the Regent’s, and last year my numbers were mostly of students that had failed before passing and were particularly difficult in the sense that they had a rough time passing before. But I think it’s being recognized in different ways. You don’t necessarily need an AP [assistant principal] to tell you, “great job!” Sometimes it’s just giving a certain class just a sign that they appreciate it. In my school they have said to me, “Oh, I really appreciate what you’re doing.” They have actually said that. And I know it, but it’s not always said, so…and also you get credit from students. So I think if you’re relying on someone to tell you that you did a great job, that’s not really what teaching is about, although it’s very nice and it’s much more helpful and it’s much better for morale and it will make a better teacher. Like any job, you deserve congratulations if you do something well, but that’s not the main goal.

Recognized by some but not by others

Some educators felt that while their colleagues recognized their unpaid contributions, school administrators were largely unaware. One tenured male professor said, “I think it [unpaid labor] is [recognized] by my colleagues, including the chair of my department, but I don’t think the administration recognizes how much work we do offsite. I definitely feel they don’t have a handle on…we’re kind of always on the job.” A female full-time professor agreed, saying:

I do believe that in my department, my particular chair, I believe they understand that [that unpaid work is being done]. Again, we all have small children, and we’re all very conscious of time and how to make things work with a small family, or with a young family, I should say. So I believe my department does understand that and take it seriously. I do not necessarily know that the administration does.

Others felt that administrators did recognize certain elements of their unpaid efforts due to the physically observable nature of those particular efforts. A male secondary teacher said, “I definitely put a lot of extra hours into maintaining a classroom environment, trying to update the
classroom and keep it relevant. I think that part of it [unpaid labor] is probably observed. It’s much more visible than some of my other unpaid activities. And then they can see the things I’ve added to it. I think a lot of it, like grading and lesson planning, that doesn’t necessarily get observed. Maybe the kids understand it. I don’t think I did when I was a kid.”

*Educators observed to ensure compliance with expectations*

Many educators felt that they needed to work additional hours outside of their contractual obligations in order to meet the standards of their profession, and thus, have their job performance positively evaluated. A female secondary teacher said, “It’s [working unpaid outside the school day] just something that I feel like I need to do so that I have a good evaluation. I feel as though my administration and my fellow teachers expect it from me. I don’t want a bad evaluation, obviously, and I feel like I need to do this to make sure that they know I’m there supporting them in everything that they do.”

One female secondary teacher noted that she’d heard administrators explicitly refer to colleagues who were not believed to be putting in unpaid hours in negative terms:

I have heard conversations [about teachers who are noticed by administration not putting in unpaid work] – I don’t know how many of them trickle down to the person who’s being talked about. Not, not all the times does it trickle down. But I’ve definitely been privy to conversations about people who aren’t you know, meeting what they should be meeting. And in order to meet that expectation they would, probably should have, put in some extra work, you know.

Teachers feel that the onus is increasingly being placed on them to ensure positive student outcomes. A female elementary teacher said, “I think I put in more time now. One, the curriculum and the evaluations and everything has changed. It’s become more a regular thing – I mean, more accountability is put on the teacher from when I first started… And because now the
accountability is on the teacher, whether these kids are passing or not passing, you know, it was your fault. What could you have done differently, look at the school again differently and then it’s reflecting on you and the principal and the school.”

A female secondary teacher added:

…If their grades are low, you get talked to by your assistant principal; you get “the talk” that says, “Well, so many students are failing – you’re obviously the problem.” … It’s the reason why we’re working so hard. It’s because in my schoolyard dealing with people who nobody else wants to work with, and if they tie teacher evaluations to that, it’s the kids who are going to be punished, because who’s going to want to work with those kids? If they’re going to be punished for not being able to do the impossible?

Many teachers felt that the pressure that they received to continue to produce work outside of contract hours came about because administrators in turn felt compelled to meet parental expectations. A female elementary teacher said, “There is also a pushing from our administration – or administrators – to keep up with that [unpaid labor]. So sometimes what happens is we’re – especially when there are parent events, so there are school events where parents will come into the building – administrators like to not have the same things from the last time they were in the building.”

Teachers stated that they also felt an obligation to meet parental expectations. Another female elementary teacher said, “We have almost two bosses because we have our administration, but we also have to please our students’ parents. Not only do I have to worry about my boss getting upset with me, but I have to worry that twenty-two students’ [parents] will get upset with me.”

IV: The Lack of Recognition of Unpaid Labor by Educational Administration, Colleagues, Students, and Parents

“I think I could be a pretty bad teacher and not have anyone notice.”
Although most educators believed that their unpaid labor was recognized and (usually) appreciated, there were several respondents who felt their efforts were consistently overlooked. These respondents were more likely to be elementary or secondary school teachers or adjunct instructors. This is likely explained by the finding that elementary and secondary school teachers and adjunct instructors were the respondents who reported the highest hours of unpaid labor done each week. While many educators justified their motivation to work unpaid for a variety of reasons, the respondents still also frequently desired to have that work recognized. A female elementary school teacher said:

They are constantly asking us to do more. I feel like if they really understood how much we were already doing then they wouldn’t constantly be asking us to do more. Or one would hope. I think a lot of times they see it as people don’t want to do more because they’re not being compensated for it versus people don’t want to do more because they can’t do more, because they’re overwhelmed. So, I mean, we do start setting limits and saying, “I can’t handle any more?” And then you start getting compared to the teachers who do more, regardless of what it’s costing them.

A female secondary school teacher agreed, saying:

No. Not at all. I think they have no idea. I don’t know if that’s even something that enters their mind. No, no, and I would include administrators in that. I don’t know if they do. You know our principal; I think he only taught for about eight years before he ended in administration. And we have a new assistant principal, and I’m not sure how long he taught. So yes, I’m sure from their teaching days, they were, I’m sure they did outside of class hour time. Now do they think about that with us? I don’t know. No administrator in any of my years of teaching…we’ve had the same principal all thirteen years, never has he in an evaluation or outside evaluation ever said, “Hey, looks like you’ve been spending a lot of time at home, you must have spent a lot of time working on this” or “Wow, you’ve got over 110 Bio 1 students; I’m sure there is no way you can get everything done during the school day…I bet you’re spending a lot of time at home grading.” Nope. Nothing like that.

A female secondary teacher put forth the assertion that the administration was only interested in making certain that no errors were made or, if errors were made, that someone could be
appropriately blamed and steps taken to make sure it doesn’t happen again. She spoke about just staying outside of administration’s notice, which was more easily accomplished by working unpaid and meeting all of their expectations. If you were noticed, it wasn’t because of your good work, but because of your failure to do good work. She explained:

I don’t think they care who puts in what kind of work. They want to make sure that you are not doing anything to majorly screw up because, of course, I think the administrators want to do—you know, they’re working hard in their own way and I think that they don’t want you to create more work for them by screwing up and therefore they have to get on your tail about “why didn’t you do this or you have to do that or this is the new thing that we apparently have to be doing; why aren’t you doing it?” So you have to play the game very politically, and I generally stay below the radar; I do what they need me to do, or I at least put up the appearance that I am and meanwhile I try to do some real teaching when my door is closed. I think that the personality of your immediate supervisor is going to have an effect on that too. My particular supervisor does not recognize the work, the immense amount of work that some people do and what other people are not doing. I think she just does not want to be bothered with any of that.

Other educators in elementary and secondary school corroborated with their own experiences of their efforts going unnoticed. A female elementary school teacher said:

A previous school where I was teaching was a place where the administrators didn’t really know what was happening in the classrooms to begin with. So they didn’t recognize the work that the teachers were doing. Honestly, I don’t think it’s probably observed by my current principal. He probably is unaware. I don’t think it is recognized just because he is busy doing his own thing.

Some educators discussed how the administration pays little heed to the needs of teachers regarding their course preparation. A female secondary teacher reported how the administration didn’t seem to be deliberately making teachers’ job duties more difficult, rather that they just didn’t seem to notice. She said:

I can speak about my school in that the principals don’t necessarily recognize the teacher needing time to plan or calculate grades. So that when a school calendar is set – we are on the trimester system – they don’t leave any planning time for the next trimester…
There’s just not much recognition of what teachers need to do or want to do or why they do what they do.

A male secondary teacher discussed an account of how teachers in his school experienced either a benign neglect or active attention, at best, or harassment, at worst. So long as teachers standardized test scores were at or above the administration’s requirements, educators could expect to be mainly overlooked by administrators, even if they were only teaching to the test and students were not being given an appropriate level or quality of education. A male secondary school teacher discusses his experiences as a teacher of an unpopular subject in some school districts. He said:

I actually am not allowed to stay in the building past 5:00 because the Administration wants to leave early every day. The Assistant Principal leaves at 3:59 and the Principal usually leaves at 3:40. And they don’t want to stay so I can’t stay and do the work that I need to do. If you were to add up all the hours I was putting in, if the test scores are worth a lot then it doesn’t matter how much work you’re doing or even how much your kids might benefit down the road or even how much they grew over the course of the year, none of that matters. It’s really just the test scores that they care about. And that was ultimately what saved me at the last school, you know that my test scores were good and then they got better. And then it went from being harassed every day by the Administration to, you know, the Assistant Principal sitting me down and saying that they couldn’t believe how much I cared about my kids giving the fact that I was of the Caucasian persuasion, and that they wanted me to come back next year. You know the Principal would come in with a checklist, and I remember my second week she started screaming at me in front of my students because my agenda was on the left side of the board instead of the right side of the board.

Among adjunct instructors, where there are no formal time requirements, save for their teaching hours, there was a wide amount of latitude in how much and for how long an adjunct instructor will prepare for a new class. A female adjunct instructor said:

It’s a little more clear that these are the expectations and this is what you're actually getting paid per hour. But I think that would be so depressingly low. And I wonder how they would try to enforce that? You know how would we - would we have to punch a clock? How would we account for that? Because, to be honest, there are days I have
gotten all my prep work done, I have no students coming in for office hours, so I spend that hour, you know, returning personal emails. So I mean, how are they really going to enforce that? Some people don’t prep as much as others. I have a friend who’ll spend hours preparing for one lecture. And I have other friends who maybe glance at their notes they wrote two years ago on the train before teaching. That would be pretty, kind of hard to enforce, um, if not impossible to enforce and to hold people accountable for that.

Adjunct instructors hypothesized that it was not for any pedagogical reason that they were only paid teaching hours, but rather that there was virtually no oversight of the classroom experience. Another female adjunct instructor said, “In terms of support, validation, are people recognizing how much work we are putting in? No. That’s not something that I’ve felt. And if I felt it, it would be memorable. Clearly. I’ll remember to tell you that somebody said, ‘You’re doing a good job.’”

V: The Negative Consequences of Systemic Unpaid Labor

Educators frequently discussed the negative consequences that they had experienced as a result of working unpaid. Perhaps unsurprisingly, at this point in the findings, this was one of the largest categories of responses given by the educators.

Negative Consequences for Educators

There were six dimensions of negative consequences for the educators that were discussed by the respondents. These include: 1) Time away from family and friends; 2) Decrease in quality of teaching; 3) Exploitation of the educators; 4) Perception that educators are “always working”; 5) No time for other pursuits; and 6) Negative public perceptions and media accounts of educators.
Time away from family and friends

In this study only elementary and secondary school educators reported this specific issue regarding their unpaid work. There could be several reasons to explain this disparity between educators. Teacher at both the elementary and secondary level have a very strictly regimented workday. The first bell rings at X time and the final bell rings at Y time, with the intervening hours segmented in an identical, or at least routinized, fashion day after day. Within these hours teachers must complete all of their teaching obligations as well as try to find the time to create lesson plans, grade assignments and exams, and complete institutionally required paperwork, the majority of these tasks being necessarily relegated to being completed either after school or at home in the evenings. Because the teachers must generally remain on the school premises for the entire school day, there is little opportunity to perform other necessary errands, visit with friends, or spend time with family. Assuredly most employees’ workdays don’t allow for such flexibility, but education is fairly unique in that there is a strong expectation that teachers will, as a matter of course, perform a significant amount of the occupational obligations either after hours or from home. Every moment spent grading a spelling quiz is one that is not spent reading to his child or calling her sister for her birthday.

Educators in higher education often have greater flexibility in scheduling their professional obligations. Even faculty in more teaching-oriented institutions are usually only in class for a few hours each day and are then free to hold office hours, write lectures, grade, perform their research, and write according to their preferences. Committee obligations are often outside their ability to control, but that usually does not make up the bulk of many professors’ obligations. Most of the professors interviewed stated that one of the best benefits of their
professions is the significant amount of autonomy that they are afforded. Such autonomy is not available to elementary or primary school teachers. When discussing their unpaid work and work schedules a female secondary school teacher said, “It’s [unpaid labor] a necessary evil… I do not make plans with people on Sundays. That’s really hard, and that can be really tricky. I mean, I think part of the reason why I only do a little bit of work now is because when my partner gets home, I know it has to be done because his work schedule’s kind of crazy too. It was a lot worse before.” A female elementary school teacher said:

> When there’s report card deadlines or some other things that have specific deadlines, then yes. If it doesn’t have a specific deadline then I can try to work it around the family. But parent-teacher conferences, when the district schedules that we have to be there certain nights, whether or not certain things impact whatever my children have happening those nights…When there’s PTA meetings scheduled in the evening and that is scheduled on the same nights as my kids’ baseball games and conflicts that way [then unpaid labor negatively impacts the educator].

Another female elementary school teacher added, “I also feel like I feel taxed. I know teachers who, they’re older and single and their life is school and charity. I sometimes feel like I’m already doing something charitable. Especially at the beginning of the year and being new to the city is just so – my social life took a backseat to my job for the first three months.”

There were other educators who, cognizant of their modest salaries, had to take on second (or even third) jobs and sought out other ways to generate additional revenue streams. There are multiple difficulties with such economic necessity. A male secondary school teacher said:

> I know for the majority of my fellow teachers that it [working unpaid outside of school hours] does create a significant problem. There are a majority of spouses that complain that they work too much, and that they put too much time into their jobs, and that they’re always thinking about it. And I, once again, choose to – I had to create a second income for myself, so I do that. I do that because I don’t want to live off a teacher’s salary.
When educators are forced to seek other paid work, then that is less opportunity that they have to focus solely on the educational attainment of their students. Also, individuals who work longer hours are more likely to be fatigued at both jobs and suffer decreases in performance and energy.

When educators are split between having to work unpaid from home or after school and missing out on spending time with their spouses or children, then that is a significant negative consequence affecting teachers in the current educational system in the U.S. A male elementary school teacher said, “Yes, I think it does somewhat [unpaid work negatively affects time with family and friends]. You put a lot of time and work into making lesson plans and stuff, but my friends and family know beforehand I’m not going to be able to hang out; I’m going to have to do work. So, yeah, it comes at a cost sometimes.” A female secondary teacher offered a similar account, saying:

I can frequently hear my husband’s voice ringing in my ear saying, “Are you ever going to get off that computer?” I remember when I was in the classroom, I’d come home with stacks of paper that needed to be graded or I’d have projects that I needed to get on the computer to grade what my students had submitted online or whatever. Again, that’s taking time away from my family so that I continually develop myself as an educator. I mean there have been times when I have had a lot of work to do and it will usually hit come the weekend and I’ll just say, “Honey, I have got to grade these papers, I have got to do this. And there is no way I’m going to be able to do it once the kids go to bed. I’m going to be exhausted; I have to keep my mind clear. I’ve got too much to do, I’ve just got to do it.” Fortunately he’s very supportive and me being the same way to him and he’ll just say, “Go! Go back in the bedroom. I’ll take care of the kids.” And I have a huge amount of guilt when I have to do that. It just makes me really sad and really mad if I have to do that!

It was not at all uncommon for educators from a wide variety of social, cultural, and geographic backgrounds to experience significantly conflicted emotions regarding the amount of work that they did after school hours or at home in the evenings and time they wanted to spend with their own children. A female secondary school teacher discussed how even small concessions on the
part of the school with respect to the expectations held by the administration that teachers will just do whatever it takes to get it done, regardless of institutional support would make a big difference in quality of life. She said:

It’s really hard to just say, “Nope, that’s enough.” I would definitely do other things if I could. I love my job, but I, like I said, many of us are feeling so demoralized, that you’re not being supported, don’t have the resources, and we’re asked to do a lot with what little we have, including time, so I feel like if I had a more normal teaching time schedule, for example, let’s say I didn’t have to do as much work after school and on weekends I would definitely be open to doing other things. We talk about this all the time at work. Just, what would happen if we had a normal job where, you know, I could say, “Hey, Friend A, I haven’t seen you in a while; why don’t we have dinner Tuesday night?” Everybody was all, “Oh, no, not on a school night!” It’s just this mentality of “not during the week” and “not during the school year” and, you know, a lot of my friends get all confused when I became a teacher because I never saw them after…So yeah, or an evening; just an evening without work almost never happens. Unless it’s like a Friday night, then I can’t work.

Another female secondary school teacher spoke of the anger that many educators started to feel after enough passing time has led to an accumulation of frustration and conflict over the educators’ competing obligations. She said:

After a while you get angry. Some of us get angrier faster than others, but even the best of us get angry after a while… My husband hated it. My kids hated it. But actually one of my sons, he’s a Ph.D. candidate, and he's teaching at the college level. And it was kind of shocking to me in a nice way to that after all the years of complaining that he's doing it too. So yeah, it definitely impacted the family life, and everywhere I would go I would carry around a stack of papers. I got better in the latter years. After a while you just figure you deserve a life too. And eventually I budgeted my time better as I got more experienced… There’s time if you make time, so you’ll stay up later or you’ll miss things, but that’s the way it is. But it definitely impinges on your social life.
Decrease in quality of teaching

Some respondents discussed the ways in which the unpaid working expectations on educators contributed to a decrease in the quality of the students’ experiences and educations. A female elementary school teacher said:

The stress of teaching is a lot more than it used to be. Teachers are stressed out about their kids not passing the test. So, you know, the growth of the student – I mean there is a lot more stress put on the teachers than there used to be and so that can make it hard for the teacher to show their love of teaching. They think it starts to be more robotic: just do this lesson, do this lesson, and we’ve got to move on. It doesn’t matter if you don’t have it; we are moving on; we’ve got to get through the book, you know? You have to learn it for the test. Teachers are under a lot more stress and accountability than they used to be.

A female secondary school teacher corroborated the above account saying:

If I’m doing nightly work during the school year, I’m not very happy, I’d rather not do that… Everybody now is scrambling because of this new evaluation system where everybody is being evaluated every year multiple times each year. You are deemed highly effective, effective, or not effective, and based on that will depend on whether or not retained for the next school year, whether or not you are given any increases in the next school year. It’s not like we were all crappy teachers and now we’re like, oooh, better get better because we’re being evaluated every year so strictly. The administrator comes in, and they see you for a brief period of time and they give you all these new evaluations, hopefully at once, and you get your evaluation back and suddenly there’s a 1[not effective ranking], and you become really defensive! Like “I didn’t realize what a crappy teacher I was until you came in and gave me this 1 because I didn’t have my standards posted or I didn’t have my objectives posted.” And we all teach to that, but now it’s like “really?” so that most definitely in itself, with the new evaluation system, and the incorporation of the Common Core, that has added many more hours onto everybody’s plate.
Exploitation of educators

Teachers in elementary and secondary schools were more likely to discuss the exploitation that occurs of teachers by school systems, particularly younger teachers, but it was also prevalent in higher education as well. Junior faculty were more likely to discuss their workload in terms of exploitation, mainly due to the significant teaching, service, and publication requirements to earn tenure. After being tenured, while many faculty members continued to report significant professional obligations, the perceptions of exploitation decreased. A female full-time professor said about working in academia that:

It’s perceived as something that they do because they love it, and therefore they’re going to do it regardless of the money. And certainly I took a $15,000 pay cut to take my full time teaching position from the job I had before. And that was a really difficult thing to do, and my kids were getting ready to go to college. Um, but I was willing to do it, so I guess I’m part of the problem.

In elementary and secondary schools teachers reported the difficulties that they’d experienced in teaching while also striving to meet the minimum standards for the various standardized tests that the students are required to take and upon which so much is dependent in the school systems. A female elementary school teacher said:

I think that sometimes you can get burned out. I mean, if you are doing what you are supposed to be doing and if you are putting in the time and you are putting in the effort, and I think that it can get overwhelming. I think that it can get too much at times. I think that you can get walked on and administrators thinking you have to do this. And your kids pass, right? Everything is about the test, you know, and when they take a lot away from teaching, from the other way of teaching. [EF]

Other educators spoke of the dangers that arise when administrators and politicians look at the educational system as a business rather than as a social service. A female elementary school teacher said, “And then you start to realize that some people are seeing it [education] as a
business, and they’ll take advantage of the fact that you’re wide-eyed.” A male secondary school teacher added that the perception of exploitation is heightened when there is a fundamental lack of appreciation for all of the work, paid or unpaid, that teachers do. He said:

I think that’s part of it and I don’t think people realize that the teaching profession is a difficult profession whether what level you’re on and, you know, the Union has certain demands, and I think most of the demands that Unions make for teachers or any other workers are legitimate, but in New York City teachers haven’t had another contract for four years now.

Many educators were reluctant to consider themselves to be exploited. The educators interviewed did not identify as an exploited profession, but rather members of a profession of great nobility. To their minds, only the marginalized in society are forced to work unpaid, or are sufficiently powerless as to be able to prevent it, so they spoke of a calling, according to which it’s not important how many hours are worked or competing social functions missed. What is important are the students or, as one respondent said, “It’s for the kid” when she was wondering aloud why not everyone was willing to go above and beyond in their efforts. For her, and numerous others interviewed, an educator is always working, is always preparing or considering possible resources, or is keeping up with professional reading.

*Educators are always working*

Unlike many other occupations, education does not stop at the threshold of the classroom. According to the respondents, the best teachers and professors are those individuals who never stop learning and seeking out new course materials and are continually refining and updating their class lectures. A female elementary school teacher said, “That was a balancing act. My sister-in-law teaches middle school English; she is never not working.” A male secondary school
teacher supported that account saying, “The trouble with it is that there’s no down time. So it’s always fast-paced and there’s always something to do with very few gaps.”

Adjunct instructors were particularly subject to this finding. All of the adjunct instructors interviewed were also current graduate students and were therefore all, depending on their stages in their programs, taking courses, preparing for comprehensive exams, performing research and writing up their findings, serving on committees, and/or writing applications for funding. In addition to these obligations many graduate students were also working as adjunct instructors, not only to gain some necessary teaching experience before entering the job market but also to earn a sufficient income to afford living in New York City. A female adjunct instructor said:

… all of us are working all the time which makes it really hard to do our school work, meanwhile the colleges can hire us for these really ridiculous, really low wages and we will do the work but then that usually often means, I think a lot of us get stuck in this sort of cycle where we can’t make that much progress on our own work because we’re teaching all the time, and I think a lot of our degrees get prolonged because, and the only people that benefit are the folks who are making money, like the board members or whatever at [a large New York City public university].

No time for other pursuits

This finding is one that was again only reported by elementary and secondary school teachers. A female secondary school teacher put it most succinctly saying, “You don’t have a life – especially when you’re a new teacher.” A male elementary school teacher said:

I would say the hours we put in stay the same and there’s never – we never get out of that grace period or that paying dues period. We always have to study – we have to do a specific amount of professional development every year; we have to keep updating our education, and the outside of work day hours always keep up because we have to keep lesson planning and keep grading papers.
A female secondary school teacher agreed saying:

I certainly probably could do more [volunteer and community work] if I wasn’t working on the weekend or at night during the week… It’s super hard to try [to perform volunteer or community work]; I have to be super creative and grab service opportunities where and when I can so that I can put in my thirty hours. It’s definitely kind of hard to put in the schedule, so I have to make time.

A male secondary school teacher concluded, “I’m not treated particularly well, but at least I don’t have to sit and wonder if I’m doing something that I think is important with my time and my life… I would love to have my nights and evenings free…”

Many teachers, for various reasons, are willing, even happy to shoulder these negative consequences that are resultant from the structural deficiencies in the contemporary U.S. educational system. However, to add literal insult to figurative injury, educators – particularly teachers, though professors face their own challenges – have often been subject to a vilification through media narratives surrounding such issues as labor unions, tenure, and standardized testing and evaluation.

*Attacks on teachers*

In the United States elementary and secondary school teachers experience lower occupational prestige compared to other industrialized nations. In Dolton and Marcenaro-Gutierrez’s (2013) survey comparison of twenty-one countries indexed on a relative scale from 1 to 100 the United States scored 38.4 on a measure of teachers’ social status. The index is based on data obtained from four questions: 1) Ranking of primary teachers against other professions; 2) Ranking secondary teachers against other professions; 3) Ranking of teachers according to their relative status based on the most similar comparative profession; and 4) Perceived student respect for teachers. Eight of the twenty-one countries had a higher rating than the United States.
China scored the highest with a result of 100 with Israel the lowest with a result of 2. The Netherlands had the next highest score above the U.S. with the United Kingdom just below the U.S. with a result of 36.7.

Occupational prestige among teachers has been a concern for many years now. Even though teaching requires, at minimum, a bachelor’s degree and often continuing educational coursework toward obtaining a master’s degree, it is often ranked below other professions requiring similar credentials and education. In an international comparative study on educators by Hargreaves et al. (2006), the perceived status of teaching was the least likely positive reason that a respondent might give about the prospect of being a teacher. Supporting my argument that unpaid labor is a significant burden it was the third highest negative response given about the prospect of being a teacher. It was behind low salary and being responsible for controlling a class regarding negative aspects of the teaching profession.

The teaching protests in Wisconsin in 2012 brought intense national media attention to the profession of teaching, very little of it positive. In the more conservative media outlets, teachers were routinely portrayed as lazy, entitled civil servants that only worked nine months out of the year and, if tenured, couldn’t be fired, even in the face of poor job performance. A female secondary school teacher said, “I think teachers right now, at least at my school and my friends, we’re all feeling pretty demoralized because there’s a national attack on teachers. I think that we’re upset about is that people don’t realize how much we actually do.” A male secondary school teacher said:

I think what gets most teachers is not even the low pay, because nobody goes into this to get rich, but that the general attitude towards teachers has shifted in such a negative direction. It sometimes makes you feel like a fool; here I am busting my ass and nobody appreciates it. I don’t think that’s really true; I think a lot of people do appreciate it. But sometimes, you know, you’re only human, and that’s what you think.
A female secondary school teacher elaborated on the increasing responsibilities of teachers saying, “I think it’s become expected of educators in our society to do more and more and more and unfortunately I feel a lot like in our school where we’re not just teaching kids anymore.”

Another female secondary school teacher continued:

The department of education and the mayor want to base approximately 40% of the teachers’ evaluations on standardized test scores. The problem with that is, especially in the high schools, not every teacher teaches a class that ends with a regent’s exam. Some teachers who by the luck of the draw are teaching classes where there’s state exams or regent’s exams are in the hot seat. But what do you do with teachers who don’t have classes that end with these state exams?

The intertwining of student performance on standardized testing with teachers’ evaluations, raises, promotions, and tenure decisions is a complex and problematic issue.

The higher educational institutions are facing similar problems, particularly with respect to lower salaries and an increasing reliance on contingent adjunct labor. A male tenured professor said:

If you are paid so little and you are sort of exploited, then is there any reason to put in any effort? And it’s true that many people do not for that reason – put in any effort. So then it will be correct for the administration to assume they should not be paid anymore. How do you differentiate between them [the administration] and me [a faculty member] in a standardized way?

A male full-time professor also spoke critically of the tenure evaluation perspective, particularly the fact that there was little opportunity for truly prolific work to be recognized by the university.

I mean, basically often the frustration is that a lot of the work that I do sort of passes our official threshold for evaluations. So, if I serve on this committee, than I’m now officially “excellent” in my service evaluation. Ok. But I’m serving on other committees. And that doesn’t actually count towards anything. Right? Or similarly so if I publish one article, then I get an excellent review for my research. But if I publish five articles, it’s the same thing. So there's no - so essentially this is all part of the job, its not that its unpaid. But it’s
that the way that we are assessed for the promotion and for raises and for job performance, uh, the bars are set relatively low and the rewards are relatively low. And so it doesn’t really matter if you get a single or a home run. You are – you’re doing your job either way. So in that sense sometime I do feel my work is uncompensated because I could have not done it, and I would have been compensated the same.

This emphasis on outcomes seems antithetical to the ideals of the educational system itself. For many tenure-track faculty members, contrary to what students have often told about their educational process, it truly is all about the destination rather than the journey.

*Negative Consequences for Students*

My first classroom was a toilet, which had been converted, barely, into a classroom. There’s a whole other little drama right there. So I guess when you look at some of these things, the odd things that you fight for are ludicrous, because getting my kids moved out of this toilet was another major undertaking. And that required more political influence from outside of the school, with me as a new guy and having no clout to do anything at all.

Educators also discussed the negative consequences that are expected and observed as a partial consequence of teachers’ high levels of unpaid labor. The respondents predominantly discussed two dimensions of negative consequences to students: the disadvantage to students with unmotivated or ineffective educators and a desire to go above and beyond for students.

*Students are disadvantaged with ineffective/unmotivated educators*

Each respondent in the study self-identified as a conscientious and dedicated educator who had a deep and abiding interest in his or her students’ educations and future prospects. Nearly all of the respondents discussed accounts, in varying levels of detail and vehemence, of
their small minority of colleagues that did not exhibit such virtues in their own pursuits of their occupational responsibilities. A female elementary school teacher said, “[Some teachers will work their contracted hours] and that’s it, “and when I go home, I’m done. And if it doesn’t get done, it doesn’t get done.” Possibly they’re not the most effective and successful teachers; they’re not the ones that I enjoyed as a child, and they’re not the ones I find my own kids enjoying. It’s not a way that I could work through the job… I think the students know when you are not there for the right reasons, and that you don’t really care about them. Absolutely.” Another female elementary school teacher agreed saying, “They think it starts to be more robotic: just do this lesson, do this lesson, and we’ve got to move on.”

The unpaid work expectations for educators are not optional, but are absolutely vital to teaching effectiveness and success. A female secondary school teacher said, “My third year I wasn’t actually supposed to teach that same group of kids, but the woman that they brought in couldn’t handle them so you know it was just a, pardon my expression but a ‘shit show’ every day. So about mid-year they asked me to switch, and that was the year that I had learned how it works. You know you have to put [time in] in order to get results.” Without investing time in lesson planning and assignment development and grading, a teacher is greatly limiting their potential effectiveness.

In higher education, particularly in courses being taught by adjunct and contingent faculty, there were even more accounts of questionable teaching practices and course outcomes. A female adjunct instructor, when discussing the phenomenon of grade inflation said, “I don’t think it’s a good idea to just give students an A. You know what I mean? Um, I mean I think there is that temptation to kind of do that and not really test them or anything. But I don’t think
in practice that really fulfills – it might fulfill the contractual obligation; I don’t think it fulfills the obligation to the student or the profession.” Another female adjunct instructor said:

I know that lots of my peers have three things that they do: 1) they fill up the classes with library or group work or movie viewings and, therefore, do not teach; or 2) they are absent a lot of the time, and what does it matter? So are students; or 3) they have a bunch of other people teach half the time: just their friends, or whomever they ask. You know, whatever comes up, so I hear. But then, why wouldn’t they? Since they’re also going off of, you know, no one’s validating my labor or paying me for it. Why should I be holding to any sort of [standard]? 

The issues for full-time higher education faculty are different than those for adjunct faculty, but the consequences to the students are no less severe. A female full-time professor said:

Tenure is overwhelmingly – in most cases – it’s overwhelmingly service and publications. I mean that’s the real thing. You know, when you have those 3 components, you know, the one that – the one that’s going to take up the most time is obviously the writing. So something’ll have to suffer, and, like you said, something’s got to give, and a lot of times it’s the students that suffer. And you have these rather ineffective teachers, not because they're disinterested, but they simply don’t have the time. But then you looked at tenured faculty members, and a lot – I think in a lot of cases tenure breeds complacency.

Another female full-time professor agreed saying, “A lot of people have callings to do research and then, you know, the education part is a default.” A male full-time professor perhaps summed it up the best (and saddest) saying, “My chair told me that the president of the college had an attitude that any time when you’re teaching is just going to be wasted, be squandered by faculty.”

Desire to go above and beyond for students

The second dimension most commonly addressed by educators when discussing the negative consequences suffered by students as a result of systemic expectations of unpaid labor
was an idealized desire to go above and beyond for their students. Some educators discussed how their lofty goals for crafting innovative assignments and engaging paper topics were often stymied by the more mundane yet seemingly insurmountable limitations of students’ levels of preparation. A female secondary teacher said, “I’d need to be able to focus on how to write an essay instead of just forcing the students to go through it as quickly as possible. I think it makes a world of difference in terms of doing it like a professional.” But for this teacher, emphasis on the upcoming standardized tests took precedence than teaching how to craft an essay. More and more tools for students’ educational toolboxes are sacrificed each year for the sake of statewide evaluations.

Faculty members in higher education have reported experiencing similar difficulties. One female professor spoke of how little time that professors actually spend with students, saying:

I think we should do more advising than we do. We advise at one registration period per year without pay as a volunteer. We’re not paid for advising time, and it’s seen as more of a volunteer thing you do. But, by the same token, I actually think we should do more of it because the student thinks it’s good enough. It’s not big picture analysis. It’s not well rounded enough. They come and go, but we do it then and again at the end of the semester. There are several weeks where, during your office hours, the faculty chair will direct a student to you. You know, the only time I’m being altruistic actually is when I’m spending a little more time with students than I know is required of me. But I actually view that as part of my job, so I feel like I shouldn’t be paid to do that, and that’s what I’m doing. I feel like professors need to do that, and I know not all professors do that so I feel somewhat altruistic sometimes when I spend a lot of time with students.

These registration advising times are ideal opportunities to forge relationships with students, or at least for faculty to allow students to forge relationships with them, but because many institutions do not reward these interactions, placing much greater emphasis on other criteria that professors need to spend time accomplishing, that the students are given short shrift. As one adjunct instructor said regarding her institution’s administration: “It’s like they already don’t
care about our students.” Because of university requirements for graduation, some types of coursework are overlooked. Another female adjunct instructor said, “I haven’t necessarily accomplished the goal of perhaps making the students really understand it [her discipline], making them feel like it’s relevant to their lives and growing as students.”

Many educators enter into the teaching profession with the ultimate goal of changing the world, or at least changing the world for the students that they teach. Often times, educators reported that the reality is a very different situation. An initial bubbling optimism that is dashed against an indifferent student body, a bureaucratic administration more concerned with test scores and evaluation than actual learning, and a decreasing occupational prestige, makes it increasingly difficult for educators to be able to reciprocate their gift of employment.

**VI. Low Paid (not Unpaid) Labor**

There were many respondents who did not view their labor that was performed outside of contracted working hours as unpaid. These respondents generally characterized such duties as a part of the educational professional obligations and, depending on how much time they spent in completing them, considered them to be low paid labor. Most educators discussed their recognition that the more time it took them to complete that work, the more lowly paid it became. One female primary school teacher discussed her outlook on working outside of the contracted school day by saying, “I’m not one of those people who – it’s 3:10, I’m not doing this meeting because my contract day is over. I’ve just never been one of those people. Now if it came down to it and if our work conditions were just horrible, I would probably start being a little more strict with what my rights are. But everything that I do, whether it’s shopping on the weekends for things for school or going in and planning, I just deal with the part of the job that I
want to do my best for the kids, and so I just do it." Another male elementary school teacher discussed work outside the contract day saying, “I never really feel unpaid. I feel like everything that I do planning-wise is all for a reason, because it’s going to be used directly with students in the classroom. There are times when I do extra, like a lot of extra time doing certain things, and it starts to feel that way, but I don’t really get that feeling too much.”

The educators interviewed frequently seemed to be struggling with the notion that they may be truly working unpaid. The previous respondent said that he never feels unpaid but then immediately turns around to say that such feelings that he may be working unpaid, when they do come, are fleeting. Many of the educators who invoked a definition of low-paid rather than unpaid labor elaborated by giving further details on just how low the pay truly is – low to the point of often being essentially non-existent and certainly not enough to make a meaningful contribution to their economic livelihoods. It is important to consider why many educators cling so tightly to the assertion that their work is not unpaid and why other educators have freely, if somewhat dishearteningly, deemed their labor outside the contracted school day to be unpaid. Perhaps some educators are conflating cost with worth, worrying that if their efforts are not being paid, then they are without value or worth. Whereas even if the work they do is poorly paid, it is at least of some objective and verifiable value.

Some teachers offered accounts of additional work that they would do, particularly when coaching or sponsoring student organizations, that was paid. However, they assessed such pay as nominal rather than a real reflection of and remuneration for their time invested. One female secondary school teacher said, “When I coach I’m usually out the door at 3:15 PM so I can make it to the tennis courts by 3:30 PM. And that’s just a flat fee we get paid for that, so it doesn’t matter if you put more hours in or less hours in, you get the same amount of money. And if you
want your team [to perform well], you should put in more hours, which at the end of the day means all the work you did put into your sport, you probably were essentially paid $0.25 per hour.” This same educator went on to say:

Like I said, the amount of money we get for coaching at the end, when you divide it all – once for football coaches we figured it was $0.25. I think I probably earn a little bit more than a football coach, because I don’t put in quite as many hours as they do. But giving up my summers, my mornings in the summer to get up…and [get] myself down to the court. It’s like a 30 minute drive for me to go from my house, or wherever I’m at in town, to the tennis court. So, I’m definitely giving a lot. In fact, one year my car broke down, and I had to get a new transmission just so I could continue coaching!

Another secondary school teacher spoke of how she would do a significant amount of work outside of school hours but felt that due to the flexible nature of when, where, and how to do that work, it was less onerous than if it was required to be done in school. While teachers had the option as to where and how they’d do this outside work, they still considered it to be an essential obligation.

A different female secondary school teacher spoke of how the financial situation regarding organization sponsorship had changed over time. “I used to sponsor a club, and I was unpaid; and now I am [paid]. Anything that I do – peer helpers, and I’m paid. I do National Honors Society, and I’m paid. I do this program where we do drug and alcohol prevention at the elementary, and I’m paid, which sounds bad in a way, but really for what we’re being paid, none of us can afford to do anything that you’re not paid for. And the same goes for our contracted hours. We’re required to come in for 7:15 AM meetings for our contract, but nobody is signing up for anything that you’re not getting paid for.”

A male secondary school teacher typified the low-paid aspect of the labor requirements in teaching. He said, “If you amortize out all the work I do – at the same time it’s a low rate for
first-time teachers – but if you average it out by the hour with all the hours I put in, it’s a pretty low wage…especially by New York City standards, especially with someone with my level of education. I have an M.A.; some of my colleagues have Ph.D.s, MBAs, so it’s a low wage.”

Another male secondary school teacher said, when asked if he considered any of the work he performed to be unpaid:

[Very long sigh] No, I don’t consider it unpaid. I consider it undervalued or underpaid. I’m certainly aware of the fact that as an English teacher I have more of a workload than really any of the other subjects and that I’m not paid accordingly. And so when 70% of the building leaves at 3:00 PM everyday with no work with them, then it’s pretty obvious that they don’t have any responsibilities that require them to do that work. And yet, they’ve been working longer than me and get paid more, so that’s a bit frustrating. As far as the work goes, I try not to think about it in terms of what I do at home necessarily, more about that if I don’t grade the kids work, then they won’t keep doing the work, and if I don’t give them feedback, the ones who actually do care about learning aren’t going to pick-up as much so it’s just something that I’ve learned has to be done if my kids are going to grow over the course of the year academically in English.

A different male secondary school teacher spoke of how he considered his work to be undervalued and underpaid. He discussed his additional sporting obligations work saying, “…the other thing I do which I get paid extra for is I referee basketball for varsity level in town. I do the Brooklyn JV in ninth grade and junior high. I work those games, and I get paid extra, but the only reason I do it is because it’s just interesting to see the kids. When you have a point of contact with the kids when they get a little older then they see you in a different role. A lot of it is really, you know…when somebody goes and works at the track meet and runs the stopwatch, then they don’t get paid for that. And you know, people do so many different things.”

The notion of work that is performed outside of the contracted school day is overwhelmingly observed in primary and secondary school teachers, rather than amongst educators in higher education, whether full-time professors or adjunct instructors. This seems to
be predominantly due to the fact that in higher education there isn’t a clearly defined school day. Full-time faculty members have their scheduled classes and office hours and then complete their other obligations around those fixed time periods. Adjunct instructors also have fixed class hours, but in their cases it is only those hours for which they are paid. Anything and everything else that they do in the service of their students are outside their contracted requirements. For many adjuncts, they saw their hourly teaching wage as large enough to also include additional planning and grading work, but other such duties were not explicitly delineated in their work contracts. Many adjuncts reported an implicit expectation that they would spend time writing lectures, exams and assignments and grading, but their contracts did not specifically allow for that. Some institutions have calculated the hourly teaching wage allowing for preparation time, but none of the respondents reported having that calculation explained to them while interviewing with the department or during the intake process with human resources. A male adjunct instructor reported:

Well, the way I’ve thought about it for adjuncting, I’ve thought about it as low-paid…last semester, for example, I taught a digital history class with a colleague and friend of mine – he works with me on instructional technology. So we’re teaming up on instructional tech. He’s also an historian, so we co-taught a digital history class. That was two of us, and we were splitting a salary to teach the class. So in some cases we were able to divide and conquer, but it definitely ended up being more than 50% of the work for 50% of the pay. Because we were teaching a new kind of class, there were a lot of new things about it that made it high intensity preparation. We knew that it wasn’t going to be lucrative in terms of paid compensation, but we also knew we’d love doing it and learn a lot from it…Even from start to finish, the way I thought about it in my mind was never quite as unpaid or volunteer…My motivation for doing it definitely was always, when justifying the required lot of extra hours, was – there’s virtually no financial gain from doing extra work on that. It would be easy to justify it in terms of being something that was useful in the future. That’s the closest I’ve come, but I’ve never actually thought of it as purely, as great an extreme as unpaid.
This same adjunct instructor differentiated between the different modalities that his labor took in performing his educational obligations. He said:

When I was doing the most public part of teaching, actually standing in front of the class and holding class session, and we were both [teaching] because we wanted to be there and to be directly involved in everything that we were trying out. In all of those cases I really thought of those hours as getting paid for that part of it, and then I counted that. And then grading and prepping, that somehow counted differently, but it was always counted. I’ve never been able to think of the hours as the same. I tended to just stop thinking about those as paid work...It’s sort of come up again because the history department has asked, ”Are you interested in doing this again in the future?” And we’ve said, “Oh, we’re definitely interested in some kind of arrangement where we continue teaching digital history.” But we both know that it’s not really a sustainable investment of our time for the two of us to keep doing it.

VII. False Consciousness & Misrecognition

Çelik (2007) defines false consciousness as generally referring to, “the claim or hypothesis that the proletariat (and perhaps other classes or social groups as well) unwittingly misperceive their real position in society and systematically misunderstand their genuine interests within the capitalist social relations of production.” Although Lukács (1971) developed the concept from the writings of Marx and Engels, Marx himself never once used the term and Engels made only a single reference to the term but did not make theoretical use of it. It denotes a worker’s inability to recognize their own exploitation within capitalist society because the society itself has accepted and propagated the views that give legitimacy to social stratification and social inequality. False consciousness functions by hiding what Çelik refers to as the real operating mechanism of capitalism: exploitation.

What is at work in educators’ conceptions of unpaid labor as low paid is something akin to false consciousness but is actually Bourdieu’s concept of misrecognition, which is first
discussed in Chapter 2. Misrecognition is quite similar to the Marxist notion of false
consciousness but works at a deeper level. Misrecognition does not explain any intent at the
conscious manipulation of one social group by another. According to Navarro (2006),
misrecognition is a cultural phenomenon as opposed to an ideological one. He writes that
misrecognition, “embodies a set of active social processes that anchor taken-for-granted
assumptions into the realm of social life and, crucially, they are born in the midst of culture. All
forms of power require legitimacy and culture is the battleground where this conformity is
disputed and eventually materializes amongst agents, thus creating social differences and
unequal structures” (pg. 19). The deep-seated, embedded quality of the gift lends itself well to
the use of misrecognition to explain how employees conflate a labor or employer-employee
relationship with a gift relationship using the mechanisms discussed previously.

Based on the data collected from the interviewed educators, unpaid labor is a significant
issue to teachers, adjunct instructors, and full-time professors regardless of whether they
recognize it as such. The labor is still being appropriated, the institutions that appropriate, or at
least impose an expectation of unpaid labor, are benefitting, and educators do experience
negative consequences from working unpaid, no matter the degree to which educators will admit
it to themselves. The exploitation exists, regardless of whether each educator is cognizant or
conscious of it. The following chapter examines the data collected on the respondents’
motivations to work unpaid, in particular, the notion of professionalism. Chapter 8 clarifies the
ways in which professionalism and other motivations and justifications are discussed by the
respondents and considers that to the data discussed in Chapter 1 regarding teacher burnout and
attrition.
Chapter 8: Patterns and Trends in the Interview Data: Professionalism and Educators’ Motivations for Working Unpaid

The theoretical chapters of this project discussed the ways in which educators’ misrecognition of labor relationship as gift relationship fosters a perceived obligation on the part of the employee to reciprocate the “gift” of employment that they had been given by the employers. These systemic misrecognitions are even more firmly embedded in difficult economic times when job are increasingly scarce and when the employee is in a field that has a traditionally difficult labor market, i.e. few vacant positions with a large pool of applicants. Many educators reported having an arduous job search, particularly those professors in higher education. One professor in English reported that any available tenure-track position garners a couple hundred applications or more while a position at the R1 institutions elicits upwards of a thousand applications. This is an extremely challenging market in which to apply for a tenure-track position and successful candidates frequently felt a significant amount of gratitude toward the institution, the department, and/or the faculty members that facilitated their hiring.

Educators also discussed a decrease in the feeling of gratitude experienced. Their explanations for why this may have occurred were varied, but an immediately noticeable trend was that gratitude almost always diminished or shifted over time. Immediately after being hired is when respondents reported the greatest amount of gratitude, which steadily decreased. This seems a reasonable progression, but it could have significant impact in the consideration of why new teachers also steadily leave the profession. According to Hunt and Carroll (2003) about 14% of new teachers leave the profession in the first year and over 50% have left within five years. If gratitude for employment motivates reciprocation in the form of unpaid labor, then as gratitude...
decreases while expectations of unemployment remain the same, then increasing educator burnout and attrition are logical consequences.

Educators often discussed an appeal to a sense of professionalism as rationalization for their performance of unpaid labor. The respondents stated multiple ways in which a propensity toward professionalism can manifest itself, including a dedication to students and to teaching, the notion of teaching as a lifestyle, and a perception that special people are teachers and teachers are special people. This section de-mystifies the concept of professionalism and examines whether professionalism is invoked simply ideologically without having any significant impact on teacher morale, burnout, and attrition or whether educators are able to mitigate the exploitation inherent in the expectation of unpaid labor and perform what Hochschild (1979) called deep acting – in which they are able to self-induce a feeling or emotional response in order to effect transformation of their thinking and perception of their situation such that they are able to better shrug off the effects of exploitation and alienation – rather than just surface acting – which is superficial, never penetrating into the true emotions of the actor. Appeal to professionalism may be a tactic of deep acting used by educators in order to account for the imposed necessity of working unpaid. The decline in gratitude coupled with a multitude of systemic deficiencies and obstacles in the contemporary U.S. educational system make it difficult for educators to reciprocate. The shiny apple of the gift of an educational position turns out to have a poisoned core. This poisoned gift de-motivates educators, leading to eventual burnout and attrition.
I. Unpaid Labor as Reciprocation

A finding that was observed in many educators was that they often justified their unpaid labor as partly in reciprocating the gratitude that they felt towards their educational institutions. Many educators reported difficulty in obtaining their positions. This was especially true among full-time faculty members in higher education. It was not at all uncommon for an educator to describe herself as having felt some measure of elation and relief after having obtained a job in their field. When every vacant position in higher education garners hundreds of applications, the job search process can be difficult and demoralizing. When beleaguered candidates obtain job offers, so often the senses of relief, good fortune, and gratitude are powerful motivators. There were some educators who did not necessarily recognize gratitude as such. However, their subsequent performances of unpaid work demonstrate an internalization of the obligation to reciprocate that which they have been given – a teaching position. This first section demonstrates how gratitude for the “gift” of employment is transformed into the reciprocation of unpaid labor.

A female elementary school teacher discussed her sense of gratitude toward her school because of a specific relationship with some of the staff saying, “I have a different history with the school. I was planning to leave New York City when I interviewed for this job, just on an off chance. But my sister went to my school. The person who was my principal when I was in elementary school started this school. So I felt more indebted to that history and to the community and to the kids than I did than just feeling lucky to get a job. Because I feel like when I was hired it wasn’t that hard to get a job. Also, I was special ed[ucation] and bilingual, so I was in this niche market where I could really get as job anywhere. I didn’t really feel like…I mean I was glad I was here.”
Another female elementary school teacher, when asked if a part of her motivation to work unpaid is due to a sense of gratitude or good will to the educational institution. She replied:

Yeah. I mean, being happy in my job means that when I’m doing my job I’m happy. So if that’s outside my school day, it’s that same sort of feeling. I don’t want to have to be isolated because I’m constantly working. But it’s a positive thing, and it’s an incredible feeling to come into a school everyday and see people that I respect and admire and enjoy working with. And then the kids come, and that all pays off when you give them that worksheet that you spent an hour making, and they have 45 minutes of learning and enjoyment and excitement, then of course it’s worth it. It doesn’t feel like a burden. It feels like work – you’re working, and it’s hard, and you’re thinking, but it’s not a burden.

Another female elementary teacher responded similarly saying, “I am grateful for having this job. I am grateful for [that and working] with the kids, and I think that that in turn goes back to them, but… I am grateful to the kids, but, I mean, I do the best of my ability. And I will no matter what… I mean I know they made a good choice hiring me because, like I said, I do go above and beyond and, not that it’s to show them that they made a good choice, but it goes back to that’s just the type of person I am.”

Some educators made specific mention as to the good relationship that they experienced with their school, administrators, co-workers, students, and parents. A male elementary school teacher said, “If I was part of a district that wasn’t as helpful or that didn’t give us the tools and resources that’s needed, I would be less willing, I think. Or, I guess I would have a sour taste in spending extra time.” Another male elementary school teacher when asked about his sense of gratitude or goodwill towards his school and administration similarly said, “I feel like I want to do well for her because she [was] my biggest fan in the interview, and she was able to, you know, she wanted me and so that made me feel very fortunate to be on the staff. [It] makes me feel motivated, makes me want to work harder to prove that she made the right decision. It was a
very competitive position so I felt very fortunate just to get the job, and I wanted to do well there.

A female secondary school teacher discussed the sense of dual obligation held by her towards the school as well as her perceived obligation of the school towards her. Even in her comments, she seemed to struggle with recognizing a consistent understanding or attitude of obligation and gratitude. She said:

They had no obligation to me. I was just a temporary employee, just filling the spot for someone who couldn’t be in the classroom at the time. They had no obligation to me. They didn’t have to give me the job when it finally came open. But, you know, working in a school community, we’re truly a community and a family. We work together. I’m thankful for the permanent job that they finally gave me, but I kind of feel as though they were obligated to give me that job. They didn’t have to, but they knew how hard I work; they knew my work ethic and all that. To me, it was more of them being obligated to give me that job. They would’ve made a mistake if they would’ve let me walk away. So I really…and it’s really more and more throughout the year, I’ve had a great opportunity, many chances to work with administrators at the union level. I have sat at the bargaining table with administrators and talked about contracting decisions, and why are we not going to do a raise this year, and all of…how long should the teachers’ day be and all these kind of things. I truly feel like in the district where I’m at now, it’s a mutual respect that administrators have for teachers and teachers have for administrators.

Another female secondary education teacher also discussed her conflicted sense of gratitude toward the school saying:

When I first started I felt a great debt of gratitude. Now, I kind of feel like, you know, they owe me the gratitude…I was very fortunate, and I definitely felt that I owed a lot of people because…like I said, my uncle had been at the school a very long time and had the respect of the people who worked there. So one could make the argument that I got the job because of him. And if I did, I did. But I did work very hard to prove that I was capable about getting the job, and that I have done. I have proven myself.

Still another female secondary school teacher explained her good fortune in obtaining her job with regard to the specific subjects she would be tasked with teaching saying, “Yes, definitely,
definitely. I mean, I don’t know how much to tell you, but they had asked if I would teach Spanish and history, and I said ‘No,’ and I sort of thought, ‘Oh that might have been really stupid,’ but then in the end they – the other woman that had interviewed right before me had agreed to do the Spanish teaching so I got the history job and she got the half-Spanish/half-history job. So I felt really fortunate. She continued discussing a sense of gratitude by clarifying that:

I think yes, I’m definitely to be part of this school and I obviously sort of fell on the administration, but I’m very hesitant to leave because as a social studies teacher in any typical high school I’d be prepping students for the Regent’s exam. And this kind of job where you can teach sort of what interests you, I’d need to be able to focus on how to write an essay instead of just forcing the students to go through it as quickly as possible. I think it makes the world of difference in terms of doing it like a professional…I mean part of it is [being] personally invested into what I’m teaching, so right now we’re doing this whole unit on fractions, and it’s fascinating for me and fascinating for students. But also you know when you see students interested in something, you are motivated to find out the resources about that.

Another female secondary teacher discussed her sense of gratitude as it intersected with her perceived understanding of the adversarial relationship between teachers and administration. She explained:

I had a very – up until the last five years or so, I felt very fortunate to be working there and have – I loved working there during the earlier years. It was hard; it was really difficult, but I felt lucky to have been hired. It gives a feeling of, you feel like part of this whole world and you’re working together – it wasn’t adversarial. Which in recent years it’s become very adversarial. There’s so much pressure, starting from the mayor on down that you almost feel sorry for your supervisors. But, at the same time, there was a lot of loyalty, especially for in the school and for the department, but I don’t think that exists anymore. At least not in my school. [To convince teachers to work longer hours] if you could make them feel like they’re a part of a bigger group. Right now the school’s under all sorts of threats from the city. Some of them want to downsize it, and they want to bring in charter schools to be in the same building and all that stuff just destroys any morale that’s left. If you feel like you’re part of a big group where everyone’s working
together, and you don’t have to be afraid of people because you feel like they’re on your side, it’s very different. At the beginning I felt like my supervisor was there to help. We had gotten a new principal somewhere along the way, and I was kind of intimidated. She – because something else happened, she had me do a run-through observation with her, just to prepare for the principal observation, and I was very grateful for that. It was very nice. I felt like she was there to help and not to judge and look for faults and try to give you a low rating or anything. So those were good days, but the work was difficult. I used to spend my whole first year crying after school because it was just so hard to learn how to be an effective teacher in a difficult environment.

A male secondary school teacher discussed similar conflicted perceptions of gratitude to the school or administration for being hired and the negative feelings that arise from working in a school that the respondent considers to be poorly run:

When you’re out of college and you haven’t had a job with a decent salary and benefits there is something you sort of, you know, hope for some security. I can actually afford to pay rent now, but before, I’m not. When I came here I didn’t have any money and the [New York City Teaching] Fellows pay nothing over the summer, and so I was really just scraping by at that time…I don’t [feel a sense of goodwill or gratitude toward the institution]. The school I was at was such a depressing atmosphere, and no one spoke to each other, and it was kind of like the principal preferred to be able to feel like she was intimidating people at all times, and so that doesn’t really lead to gratitude. You know, in a sense I’m grateful to her for giving me the opportunity, and enough time has passed that I will thank her, but I think that’s mostly because I believe that she thinks…she’s got some psychological issues, I think, and I do believe that she cares about the kids, and she’s trying to do what’s best and everything. The conclusion I reached is just that she had absolutely no people skills, she didn’t like kids, and she isn’t particularly educated and not particularly smart. So the real problem is that she was put in charge of the school in the first place…it’s flabbergasting.

Another male secondary school teacher discussed feeling a sense of gratitude toward the school saying, “You know I definitely did [feel grateful] when I was first hired. I felt very lucky. I still feel very lucky that I was hired, especially, like I said, I think I’ve grown a lot, increasing my experience and expertise since I was hired. I don’t necessarily know if I was in their position [back then] if I would hire myself. But now that I see in my school district, how many people
come and go, I don’t necessarily know. I think I’ve thought too much of it at the time. I think they’re trying to hire people so they’ll hire whomever they can.” Another male secondary teacher reported a more high-minded sense of gratitude saying, “I have a lot of gratitude because to be hired to work in front of children is an honorable profession. It’s an honorable thing, and it’s one of the greatest causes; even if it’s not recognized by newspapers, it’s still recognized in my mind.”

A third male secondary school teacher discussed a similarly idealistic sense of gratitude that was coupled with a critique of how certain types of schools are perceived and how that masks real issues of importance. He said:

Primarily because of the school it was, I felt I was absolutely blessed… I think there are a couple of things that are going on. I think if you are talking about charter schools and some of these other schools, people feel almost that they have to prove that they’re worthy of their job by working without being paid. You know, there’s this whole mystique that if you go to all these charter schools, you better be able to work Saturdays and Sundays and fifteen hour days – that kind of stuff. When you work at a school that you care about with students that you know you are touching their lives, it doesn’t even register that you’re working all the time. But that’s not the discussion; the discussion is that you’re doing the work that needs to be done.

There was also a finding in which some educators themselves felt as if their credentials or backgrounds or experience didn’t make them a strong of a candidate as possible for their positions and felt that the administration was, as discussed by a male secondary school teacher, “…taking a chance on me. First place I went to. I was incredibly lucky. I don’t think my story’s typical. I realized even now, knowing a lot about the recession, I realize that this must be unique, that, in general, you don’t get the first job you apply for at any job, and I did. They took a big risk on me. I have no certification, no teaching experience. It was a huge risk. I’m very grateful. If it weren’t for them, I wouldn’t be here.”
Adjunct instructors in higher education also spoke of feeling a sense of gratitude toward their educational institution. As with primary and secondary education teachers, the responses were varied and often seemingly conflicted. One female adjunct perhaps put it most succinctly saying, “Yeah, I do feel gratitude because I do love teaching, and also because even though it’s such shitty wages, I don’t have any other skills; and so I need those shitty wages.” Another female adjunct discussed her willingness to go above and beyond the minimum expectations while simultaneously questioning the necessity of doing so. She said:

I do think that I put in a lot of effort and most of it is because I want to help the students and I think that I’m doing what I need to do to do a good job you know, but it… sometimes evaluation and things I am conscious of, am I doing what they want to see me doing, you know? And there are some things that I do with my course site that are probably above and beyond simply because the school likes to see it and not because it is pedagogically going to help the students.

A female adjunct instructor spoke at length about the reasons for and dimensions of gratitude that she experienced. She said:

I taught there as a teaching fellow in another department. And then they had an opening for someone to teach a very basic core curriculum course. And it was kind of like, “Yeah I’ve already taught this so you know, I’ll just continue teaching it. You know?” Um, but at [this private New York City university] I did find – I did think that was pretty fortunate because, the chair there was very – she was very progressive, was very open to you know, teaching things that hadn’t been taught. And not just repeating what they’ve taught for years and years and years. So you know, when I asked if it would be possible to do a course on sport, she was like, “Oh that’ll be great,” and she signed me up for the next semester. So there I did feel like I was pretty fortunate. And they paid me a significantly larger amount than what [a large New York City public university] pays… I distinctly remember feeling like I really had to do a good job because I wanted to teach there again. And I wanted to show her [the department chair] that her faith in letting me teach something that was my specialty was worth it. I wanted her to, to feel like she made a good decision with me, and that, you know, making another good decision with me was, or making - allowing me to do something else in the same way would be another good decision.
Another female adjunct instructor corroborated these accounts of gratitude and goodwill that intersect with an eventual waning of that gratitude. She said:

I was extremely grateful to the adjunct coordinator that gave me a shot... I realized later that’s because of how desperate they are at times, that it wasn’t me and I wasn’t that great and etc. But still she invited me for an interview and she said, “Do you really want to do this?” And I said, “I've been wanting to do it, like passionately.” And she asked me make a syllabus in 3 days. And I was like, “I've never done it before but I will do it.” And I did... And I feel lucky. Other students, they just don’t get that same sort of thing with teaching. Then I try to think about like you know, I guess there's other options where you just don’t get to do that as much. I’ll tell you, I've never let up in terms of energy or anything like that once I did find out all of the realities. I was the same way then that I am now, probably even more involved in my teaching than I was… But I never thought of impressing them or anything like that. Because there was sort of a screw up at the very beginning, when I showed up so ready with my new syllabus and my new outfit to teach for the 1st time, and no one showed up. And I had this like panic attack, and they said that they just had a typo in registration stating it was for a 9:30 pm class, and no one came to the 9:30 AM. And than I just was like, “are you kidding?” And than, I was like “well let me teach the 9:30 PM class.” And they were like, “no, the section will get filled up as well, but now we have 2 accidently.” And I was like, “no those were my kids that were supposed show up, and I’m supposed to be their professor. So who’s going to teach them tonight?” And they were like, “We don’t know.” And I was like, “I’m going.” And so I ended up teaching the 9:30 AM and the 9:30 PM, which was crazy for your first time. And trying to do courses for the first time. That was just a crazy- but that’s just, that’s what happens. That’s not a solitary sort of thing. Uh and so by that time I just felt more responsibility to the students, than I did to the, to the administration.

Some respondents discussed a feeling of insecurity and inferiority about teaching preparedness. A male adjunct instructor said:

I felt really lucky. I do tend to be a little bit more like, you know, if someone like kind of hires me or whatever, I feel like um, they’re like taking a chance or something. Like I undervalue myself for my skills. And then I want to give them more or stay loyal to them. Um, kind of yea, feel like gratitude towards it. Um, and it really takes my supervisor telling me during evaluations ‘what you did was above or beyond’, or ‘you really deserve something’ to break out of that. The job that I had – even though my supervisor was a
professor who was very forceful about focusing on classes, I still couldn’t like get out of that whole thing of like ‘I’m getting paid so I need to work’. Um, and that’s like my primary. Sometimes my relationship also suffered; I had fights because of it; I had to work on the road; I couldn’t manage balancing all of these things. And so eventually I quit; I quit the job, and I found funding here.

A female adjunct instructor said, “I’ve never done it before [make a syllabus in three days], but I will do it. I took it as a really big deal for me that someone gave me a shot to do something…I though I would get the Ph. D. and go teach then, but they gave me the shot to go do it now, taking advantage of the system that I get to do it now and to confirm to myself that this is what I want to do.”

A full-time higher education faculty member discussed her feeling of gratitude, particularly with regard to living in New York City and the plusses and minuses living and working in a densely populated urban environment. She said:

I think primarily because I was able to stay where I was, which means New York, I know a lot of folks have to move in order to take an academic position, so I was fortunate because I couldn’t really move because my husband has a set job that will always pay three times as much as mine and so…maybe not three times as much, but quite a lot more than mine will ever pay. I really just was not as mobile, and so I was very fortunate that I already lived in Brooklyn and I was able to get a job at Brooklyn… I think if they like their job and they like what they do, then I think there’s gratitude. I feel lucky everyday that I have the job I have only because I really love my department members. We all support each other and, we’ve built some strong friendships within the department, so I feel very grateful that I have the job that I have. Do I think it’s true for everybody? Absolutely not. I think for some people it’s just a paycheck, right? I feel that if you love the place you’re working in and you love the actual job that you do, then you probably feel a sense of gratitude that your life allows you to do what you love doing with people you enjoy.

Many full-time university faculty members had expressed a degree of gratitude toward their department and their colleagues for hiring them, quite a few discussing the difficult market in academia. However, it was also common for the educators to not admit to a feeling of
goodwill or gratitude toward the university administration or even to the university as a whole. A number of full-time faculty members said:

…to the department maybe, because those are the individuals who hired me and you know, anytime you hire somebody you’re taking a chance on them and showing a little faith in them. But let’s be honest, the university is out to make money. So, you know, I don’t owe the university anything for hiring me. I feel like they were lucky to get me too, you know? So – the department is different because that’s a personal relationship that I have with folks, you know. The university I don’t know who that is or what that is, but I’m pretty sure they don’t have my best interest at heart.

Another male full-time professor also described the complex approach that he’d taken toward his pursuit of an academic career, noting that the choices that he’d made with respect to his career outcomes contributed to a strong sense of good fortune and gratitude. He said:

I felt very very lucky. And you know for me, I was on this double track my whole life essentially. I eventually wanted to do this, but I wasn’t really willing to give everything up to do it. So, I wasn’t willing to go wherever I got a job, and I wasn’t willing to, you know, sort of not start a family so I could get my Ph.D. I had all of my own rules. So I kind of assumed that I wouldn’t necessarily ever get it. Because I wasn’t willing to throw everything down in pursuit of it. But when I was prepared for it, like when I completed my MFA and I had, you know, a publication at the time, and was able to pursue it, the doors sort of opened up. I got the school that I really wanted to teach in. Because my background was in adult education, and I really want to work in a community college setting. So I got really, really lucky. I mean honestly, because all my life I’ve been doing work that I really love, I’ve always been really grateful to my employers and feel like lucky to be there. But, that doesn’t preclude knowing when things are not being done fairly. But I definitely have a sense of commitment and gratitude toward the organization.

A female full-time faculty member discussed how her feelings of gratitude inform and influence her day-to-day interactions with her colleagues, saying:

I really feel indebted to… when I first started they were interested in my being intellectually curious; and also the [large New York City public university] system despite all its faults, I personally think, I’ve never seen a place that gives a better value
for the money. Although, like I said, there’s huge problems in the way it’s administered and some of the way it’s run, especially in terms of, especially in terms of student empathy, like registration, financial aid, cost, and so [large New York City public university] has problems but I compare it to other schools in Manhattan or [large New York state public universities] that didn’t do as great a job in providing access to education to the social strata that functions as a social elevator, if you will, but now it’s really the core of a more egalitarian vision of American society, that really began decades earlier… Sometimes I will say to one of my colleagues or my chair, they’ll ask, “How’s it going?” you know, being really nice. Because when they do that I feel like, these people are really nice; I should be doing more to pitch in…I feel like I should be more on the ball, you know? That’s not like not a coercive thing; it does come out of that gratitude like a positive.

The male full-time professor quoted below is an apt illustration of an educator whose thinking regarding gratitude and reciprocation of unpaid labor is inconsistent. He discusses feeling fortunate to have obtained a tenure track position, but disavows any sense of gratitude toward the institution as a whole, feeling grateful, if at all, to his colleagues who supported his candidacy. While the professor may not believe that he is reciprocating unpaid labor as gratitude by working unpaid, the university still benefits from his diligence and work ethic.

I was on the market for two years. I did over a hundred job applications. Uh, from those I got about twelve interviews, and than I had two offers the second year. So, no I wouldn’t say it was easy. Considering the disastrous situation of higher education, yes [I felt fortunate to receive an offer]. Which has only gotten worse since I started in 2008. I got in just before the financial crash…when you look at higher education, over 50% of the courses are taught by disposable labor, so called adjuncts. So yea to be able to get a full time position was – it’s not easy… I distinguish between the trustees who are just, you know, sort of - systematically we have the head of the whole CUNY board as an opponent of public education. So I certainly don’t feel gratitude towards him, with that layer. Towards my colleagues that decided to select me? You know, obviously it was appreciated. Do I feel any kind of obligation because they hired me? No, not anything special because of that.
In contrast to the respondent above, the male professor quoted below embraced his sense of gratitude by discussing how he hit the ground running with respect to his work obligations in his new position. He also questions the outlooks of those individuals who do not seem to appreciate their good fortune, saying:

The day I got here, I was like what do you want me to do? I threw myself into it. Because even without the particularly dire circumstances, the way things work up to you getting a tenure track job, once you get there, you want to do what you were trained to do. And it takes a long time to be able to do that. Being a grad student is a very long apprenticeship that doesn’t have many parallels in other fields. How many other fields do you sort of essentially be a student in waiting for you know, in my case, 9 years? I think it feeds – you know we were talking before of a sense of kind of calling, a mission. And I think its bound up with that too. It’s what I trained for my whole life, and now I get to do it. We have a couple cases where I frankly couldn’t believe that people were sort of essentially, they didn’t seem to value this wonderful opportunity they got.

Another male professor corroborated the above respondent’s statement, discussing how he made a strong effort to immerse himself in work and in the culture of his new institution, sometimes to his own detriment. He said:

Yes. I mean that was certainly true when I got my job at [a Pacific Northwest public university], I was so happy to not be a starting graduate student that I said yes to every committee, to…I was just willing to work my butt off and that unfortunately created a standard by which people knew that I would do all this work, and that if I’d said no a little bit more in the beginning it probably wouldn’t have turned into the snowball of work that it turned into. So yeah, I think that’s true. I think people are sort of excited to have a job so they’re willing to please their new employer. I mean, that’s probably any type of job these days, like when people are in economically tenuous situations, but, even in higher education I think that happens… Yeah, well there is inherent inequality; there’s massive inherent inequality; I could list the number of vice provosts that make six figure salaries. I think the first is sort of like Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs: the first level of gratitude is that you’re grateful that you’re going to be able to feed yourself and house yourself and be able to work in the profession that you’ve dreamed of working in so, I think the gratitude is really rooted on that in the first level. When I got the job I didn’t realize a) how many administrators there were and b) how much money they made and c)
how much power they had to crush me under their thumb if they wanted to. I was excited to have a job.

The above respondent’s thoughts on how gratitude shifts towards an institution over time are elaborated on in the following section.

The respondents interviewed discussed some degree of working unpaid. Although Chapter 7 discussed how some respondents characterized the labor they performed as low-paid, rather than unpaid, really this is a specious differentiation. The consequences to the educators themselves are the same, regardless of how they consider their work performed outside the school day or contracted hours, and the institution and students benefit the same, regardless of how a teacher considers such work. Through everyday language in which words to discuss employment have connotation to gifts and gift giving, and through economic periods and labor markets in which jobs are scarce and applicant pools deep, the labor relationship is misrecognized as gift relationship. The performance of unpaid labor as obliged reciprocation for a misperceived gift of employment is both expected – by administrators, colleagues, and the educators themselves – as well as compelled – through teaching evaluation by peers and students as well as administrative reviews and parental feedback. The following section discusses how an educator’s sense of gratitude may decrease and the consequences when that occurs.

II. Decrease in Educators’ Feelings of Gratitude toward Educational Institutions

Decrease over time

This response by educators was the most common when they reported that although many of them had experienced a degree of gratitude or goodwill toward their educational institution, for many, that feeling of gratitude decreased over time. A female elementary school
teacher stated it the most succinctly: “I see that [decrease in gratitude] in mainly younger teachers.” A male elementary school teacher elaborated on the reasons why gratitude may change over time saying:

Maybe a little bit [did a sense of gratitude decrease over time]. I think once you feel a part of the family, it is what it is, and you feel happy to be there, but it’s not like the initial first year where you’re excited to be a part, and really, maybe, feel honored to be there. Once you get a bit more comfortable, it becomes less of a deal. I think it’s pretty obvious – you get out what you put into it. So, I guess it decreases a little bit, but you just don’t feel all that pressure anymore. But I don’t think it affected me too much.

A female secondary school teacher responded even more pointedly as to how and why feelings of gratitude tend to decrease over time:

Now I kind of feel like they owe me gratitude. I have most certainly paid my dues. Like I said, I was lucky – nepotism just happened to work for me. And I’m not one to take shortcuts. It wasn’t like I was calling my uncle and saying, “You’ve got to get me a job.” It was just one of those moments. I did work very hard to prove I was capable about getting the job, and that I have done. And my uncle hasn’t been there for years, so most people don’t even know that’s how I started out. Maybe in the beginning [gratitude motivates educators to work unpaid], but after working at a place for a while you come into your own, no matter how you got there or in the door. You become who you’re going to become at the job.

Another female secondary school teacher similarly said, “I was there twenty years, so in the beginning I used to hang around and stay longer. As time ran on then I got involved with a carpool I would just rush out. For a lot of years I did hang around, especially with the newspaper meetings.”

Both adjunct and full-time higher education faculty reported their feelings of gratitude or goodwill waned as time passed. A female adjunct instructor even spoke of the sheer impossibility of remaining grateful toward the institution, saying: “I don’t think that feeling [of
gratitude] is sustainable throughout the course of their career.” This sentiment was also shared by a male tenured faculty member who said that gratitude could not be maintained, “I guess while the honeymoon lasts (laughing). I don’t know how long that is, but it [a sense of gratitude] goes away after a while.”

Other full-time faculty members elaborated on the path that gratitude and good will toward institutions of higher education will take over the course of an academic career. A female full-time faculty member said:

I definitely think it [a sense of gratitude] could diminish over time. Again I think that usually happens if your situation changes. So if you’d enjoyed where you were working in the beginning and then over time people got let go or they leave and seek out other employment and then you’re faced with people who you have no rapport with, I could see it changing. Also I think with jobs that are very monotonous type jobs, like, for instance, a factory worker, I could see them [employees] being grateful in the beginning because they have a job and the economic climate is atrocious so to have a job is amazing but that over time if you’re not being challenged in very particular ways or if you’re not afforded the flexibility that maybe you need because your family life has changed or something like that then I do believe that that would diminish over time.

A male full-time faculty member said:

That [sense of gratitude] wears off after a couple of years. You feel fortunate to get the position, but it’s not like they did you a favor; you’re working for them, you know? You’re participating in teaching and doing all the rest. It’s not an economic transaction, but it’s not a favor. Honestly, we’re fortunate because it’s easy not to have a full-time position in academia, Right now we have some openings, and they’re getting two, three hundred applications per opening. So it’s very difficult to get a full-time position.
Competing obligations

Another sentiment that was discussed by some respondents when addressing a decrease in gratitude toward their employing educational institutions was the notion of competing obligations. Nearly all of the teachers interviewed were eager to portray themselves as dedicated educators who wanted to do the best job that they could. In the face of their own visions and expectations of what an effective teacher does and their reports of falling short of those ideals, the concept of competing obligations became clearer. Many of the educators interviewed had other obligations beyond just those related to their professional teaching duties. Many had children or other family, social or community obligations that required significant amounts of their limited free time. One female secondary school teacher said: “Pre-children I would have stayed after school or come in early, but not since I’ve had kids. Pre-children I took some work home and spent hours if I wanted to. After having children, that’s the last thing I’m going to do.” A male secondary school teacher responded similarly, saying: “I’ve gotten to the point where I don’t stay at school quite as much as I used to. I just go home and get changed and then work at nighttime, and so it’s really hard to differentiate [between what work gets done in what location].”

Financial considerations overriding educators’ dedication

In addition to competing family, social or community obligations, many educators reported financial pressures that impeded the professional motivation to go above and beyond their minimum expectations and obligations. A female secondary school teacher said, “The school board is filled with members that don’t like to negotiate with our teachers and give us a
raise and give us a contract and so a lot of time is spent trying to get a contract, which I think makes the environment for teachers maybe not so willing to do things without being paid.” A female elementary teacher also discussed the financial challenges and how they have deteriorated over recent years. She reported that her allocated classroom budget for such items as bulletin board materials, classroom decorations, stickers and treats for the students, and so forth had just been halved from $200 to $100. She said, “I was already spending well over my $200 budget out of my own pocket, and this is going to make it even more difficult to purchase the needed materials.”

Another female secondary teacher discussed how her participation and sponsorship of the school newspaper was made increasingly difficult in the face of falling budgets and increasing responsibilities and duties expected of teachers in their contracts. She said:

The newspaper – I was very very committed to the newspaper... When I first got into it, it was very exciting and new. But after a while the workload was just so big and the pay was so little that, I wasn’t sure. Finally during my last year they gave me back - they had taken away the per session [additional compensation] for a long - I think a year or two during the budget crunches. So I was not only doing it for free, but I was providing snacks for free. But than the last year they gave me per session. So that was – oh, and one year they gave me back the fifth class that was another – I had to do the fifth class and the newspaper, I wasn’t going to – I was going to quit at that rate. I didn’t want to but I couldn’t manage five English classes plus the newspaper… As you get older and more experienced you realize that you care more than the students do, and that’s not necessarily the way it needs to be. They don’t need every single thing graded, and you don’t need to spend 20 minutes on each paper. You may feel like you should, but it doesn’t necessarily make a difference in terms of the quality of what the students get out of it. So you learn; you should learn.
Students deserve the best

The respondents’ sentiment that the “kids deserve the best” is related to the previous finding that financial considerations may override a dedication to teaching. While most educators placed the quality of the education they provide as amongst their highest priorities, the unpaid labor that is necessary to meet those commitments frequently leads to teachers making difficult decisions about the ways that their time outside the school day can be spent. Many educators recognized that they work unpaid but would qualify those findings by specifying that it was done with the betterment of the children in mind. A female elementary school teacher said, “Now I don’t think that it’s so much I feel I owe it to the district at all. It’s more for the kids and the families.”

A female full-time higher education faculty member also said:

I’ve got to say, that [motivation to work unpaid] probably comes from the students more than anything else. People from my old job are kind of astounded at where I am now. A boss of mine said, “Well, she used to teach GED like she was teaching at Harvard.” That was her way of describing it. And what I mean by that is I’ve always been really motivated to go above and beyond by my students, wherever I found them. Not necessarily the organization.

Disillusionment/frustration with the educational institution

The last category of educators’ responses that addressed their sense of a decrease in gratitude was related to their feelings of disillusionment and/or frustration with the educational institution by which they are employed. This frustration was due to multiple factors, including difficulties with administrators, changes in policies, complex bureaucratic requirements, and paperwork. One female secondary school teacher remarked, “Well, I think maybe they have more of a calling when they first started. But the system, at least in New York City, the system
has a way of jading – you get jaded after a while. I think some of that is just that some people
don’t care.” A male secondary school teacher also discussed the feeling of being jaded with
regard to teaching, saying: “If I had been teaching for more years, I would be more jaded.”

Adjunct instructors in higher education were particularly vocal regarding the decrease in
gratitude as related to disillusionment with the institution. Much of this discontent was
attributable to the unreliability and fragility of contingent adjunct appointments and feelings of
marginalization within the departments themselves. A number of adjunct instructors frequently
reported feeling like “second-class citizens within the departments.” One female adjunct
instructor said:

No, because I’m done with the gratitude part now, but I realize this is just…they’ll take
pretty much anybody because of how desperate they are. Because it confirmed for me
that I’m good at and I love it, that if all goes well, it’ll be a significant part of what I get
to do for the next however many decades. I only feel a little bit [of misplaced
confidence]; I’ve never let up in terms of energy or anything like that once I did find out
all the realities. I was the same way than that I am not, probably even more involved in
my teaching than I was.

Another female adjunct similarly said:

I’ve come to resent it more but I think I’ve also come to resent it more because I’ve been
in the program for 7 years and over that time I really changed insofar as internalizing and
identifying, or like internalizing the identity of being a scholar and of being a teacher and
of valuing, I think that I’m worth more now than when I was 24 and had no experience
and no training. Now I sort of compare myself to tenure track folks and think that I’m
worth as much as they are. Umm, so I guess all of those things.

As gratitude erodes and administrations are still expecting educators to work unpaid for
hundreds of hours per year, perhaps this is partial explanation for why so many new teachers
leave the profession within five years – over 50%, according to Hunt and Carroll (2003), in
urban settings. Those educators who remain shift the objects of their unpaid work from the
school or the university to the students themselves. The educational system and its structural deficiencies make it increasingly difficult for teachers to reciprocate, leading to a de-motivation to work unpaid as a result of a poisoned gift. The following section examines the various ways in which educators justify their working unpaid through an appeal to an ideology of professionalism. The next section also clarifies the limits of professionalism. The data collected from respondents coupled with the data on the short life expectancies of teaching careers for over half of new teachers calls into question the efficacy of this notion of professionalism. In this context it appears to be pure ideology with little impact on keeping educators in the teaching profession.

III. Professionalism as Rationale/Rationalization for Unpaid Labor

Educators frequently justified the necessity and performance of unpaid labor by affirming the obligation of a teacher to provide the best possible education to their students. Many teachers and professors discussed the notion of education as a calling, a vocation that one enters for the benefit of the student, rather than for financial gain. Educators primarily discussed seven dimensions of their reporting of unpaid labor motivated from an appeal to professionalism: 1) dedication to students, dedication to quality education for students’ good and future success, and a sentiment that students deserve the best; 2) the importance of teaching as a vocation and a profession; 3) teaching as a lifestyle; 4) special people as teachers and teachers as special people; and 5) being the best educator possible; 6) engaging with students; and 7) the multiple roles filled by teachers. This finding illustrates the use of an appeal to a sense of professionalism by educators to justify their unpaid work and contrasts that appeal with a deeper interpretation that
such attributions to professionalism are rationalizations. Professionalism is itself a barrier to a more egalitarian labor relationship between educators and the institution or administration.

*Dedication to students, to quality education and to students’ deserving best efforts*

The most frequent response given by educators when discussing their motivations for working outside the contracted school day and for no additional remuneration is that they feel a powerful dedication to their students. A female elementary school teacher encapsulated this sentiment saying, “I don’t see teaching as a job to me. I see it, already a job, but I also have kids and it’s kids’ lives – I don’t see it as a job, and so I think that I would do whatever it takes…So I will put in the hours for them.” A second female elementary school teacher also highlighted the dedication to students as motivation to work outside the school day. She said, “I remember when I first started, I remember saying to somebody like, ‘How could you not want to invest this extra work; like, this is for the kid’… I could be done teaching by three o’clock, but if there’s a kid in the office that hasn’t been picked up…I guess I could leave, but I won’t.”

A male secondary school teacher also expressed his dedication to the students, saying: “When you work at a school, you care about with students that you know you are touching their lives, it doesn’t even register that you are working all the time.” Recognition of the amount of time being spent in unpaid work, coaching, and/or club sponsorship was very prevalent among the educators interviewed. A female secondary school teacher said, “There’s a lot of stuff we do that’s just…we do it for the good of the kids, and we’re not getting any compensation for it…but so, it’s nice to see the kids appreciate the sport and have some success out there on the [tennis]
court, so I don’t mind doing it.” Another female secondary school teacher discussed the responsibility of faculty to attend school trips, saying:

And sometimes you do it for the kids. We did trips that were always unpaid, and some of those were really good experiences for the kids, and you feel that there’s an intrinsic reward in that that’s not related to money. Some people feel that kind of a need when they feel somebody reaching for them, they feel the need or who needs them, and they feel the obligation to respond. I guess it’s the obligation they feel very personally; it’s an obligation to the students. I think it’s part of who you are.

Making the time to attend to the students’ educational needs was a very important consideration among educators. Many respondents remarked that such duties were just “part of the job.” A female secondary school teacher said:

I guess I connect with students. And if they need something they need something. And I kind of feel like this is what I signed on for. And if they need me – I mean, I have students that email me after school that need help with something. Or they send me something they’ve written, be it creative or for a class, and they want me to look at it for them and offer them feedback. So, you know, I do it. I feel like it’s my job… One of the reasons I can put up with a lot of the nonsense is because, you know, I still enjoy the students very much. And like I said, if they need something, I just feel like as their teacher, that’s what I’m there for – to help them with what they need. And if it goes beyond 3:09 PM then it goes beyond 3:09 PM. You know? It’s not all about money.

Another educator said, “I always felt that I put my time in and if I needed to stay after school for an hour to talk to the teacher or if a student needed to see me for something, I had no problems staying an hour or so later… I think most teachers would be happy to give a few more hours if it means making a difference.” Another female secondary school teacher answered:

You can do what you think is the right thing to do; you can do what you see that your students need, and you can assess them in a sort of way that you feel is comprehensive as opposed to maybe just basic knowledge and historical facts… You have a very present clientele who you care about. It’s honorable to do that [put in additional hours to benefit
...I take those kids home with me, you know, in my mind, good or bad...I know I’ve never really wanted to be anything else.

Other educators justified their motivation to work unpaid by contrasting the needs of the students, particularly in economically disadvantaged districts, with their ability to help. A male secondary school teacher said:

You know, going in everyday and taking kids who get the worst of everything. In every regard they get the worst school; they get the worst parents; they get the worst and most violent neighborhoods to grow up in, and they get the worst influences from their peers. If none of that affects you enough for you to really push yourself to see if you can help them, then you should quit.

Another male secondary teacher said:

So part of it is the amount of time but also a realization that you have to try to do what works, and it’s more about helping students... and if you go in knowing that things are not always going to be great and smell like roses, and you may have students that shout at you or curse at you, you have to see your place in the world and know that your calling maybe is to help that student. And what if you don’t help them? Ok, you might not, but you always have to have the attitude that you might make a difference... While it’s true you can’t save the world; you can save some people.

Other educators discussed how the maligning of teachers in the media had made them more sensitive to how their efforts were perceived and the actions that they could take in response. A female secondary school teacher said, “I don’t think people really fully realize the extent to which most of us really are very conscientious, hard-working, smart people who are professional, who do the best job we can, and we’re all in this because we care about the teaching and about the kids, and I want people to learn...I want to be the best teacher I can for every student that I have – all 150 of them!”
Only educators in primary or secondary schools justified their unpaid labor through an appeal to a higher loyalty of dedication to their students. The sole exception was an adjunct instructor in higher education that referenced his earlier career as a middle school teacher, saying:

I felt an obligation to help the students as much as possible. I was around a smaller group of students for many more hours when I was teaching in middle school. They were students who were in greater need of academic, and also social, supports. So I felt my obligation was deeper to help them as much as possible… I thought it would be cheating the students if I didn’t put in those extra hours.

Another dimension of educators working unpaid out of a sense of obligation to the students is their belief in and dedication to providing a good and quality education for all students. For several educators there seemed to be some overlap between this dimension of motivation and the previous one of the enjoyment of teaching. As one male secondary school teacher said, “And you know, you don’t do your job for wealth — I don’t do my job for wealth. I mean, I do love my kids; I do love what I do for a lot of it.” Another male secondary school teacher said:

With the kids, I think, when you teach you develop a, you kind of feel responsible to give the kids the best you can give. So it keeps me motivated to do it. Just so they’re getting the feedback they need so they can be successful. As I worked more, I realized that the population I was working with is kids, and I think I developed a need to give them everything I have knowing how much they have going against them. I think it mainly comes from knowing I am an educator and knowing that my teachers gave me a lot. So I give a lot, or I try to give as much as I can to my kids. I think teachers do reap a benefit as far as seeing kids succeed. As far as compensation, no…but as far as seeing the kids do well or seeing the kids happy, I think that’s definitely a benefit I reap. I know the more hours I put in the better I see the kids do, the happier I see the kids are. I definitely realize that as a benefit of my job.

For many teachers, particularly in elementary and primary schools, there seemed to be a strong influence in providing the best possible education, even and often without regard for the
significant time investment required. A number of respondents saw themselves as either the last line of defense in the face of falling educational standards or as leading the charge in providing students the prerequisites for a secure and productive future. A female secondary school teacher said:

Who else is going to teach writing? They’re not going to learn that. So if I have to put in extra hours to make sure a kid knows better how to write then I will do that. I come from a private school background, private school all the way through college and my idea, in that sense, I do want to give back. I feel like I did come into the public school system so I could teach kids who are the most underprivileged and, you know, I had such wonderful teachers, and I strongly believe that everybody deserves what I got.

A male secondary school teacher said, “If you give everything and the rest of your life suffers essentially, then what you bring into that classroom isn’t going to inspire any kids. But, at the same time, if you dedicated every waking hour to teaching English with 75 kids, we could still find more that you’re not getting done.” Another male secondary school teacher discussed the multiple roles that go into being an effective educator. He said:

Part of the job of a teacher is reformer, actor, psychologist, and it involves a lot of time, so when you sign on to be a teacher you know all these things so it’s expected that you’ll do that. When they say there’s teachers who can’t teach, that there’s definitely a collective of teachers who only care about just putting something together like someone would just throw a plate of food together and call it lunch. A teacher could throw a lesson and call it a class, but better teachers are willing to do more… I have a lot of gratitude because to be hired to work in front of children is an honorable profession; it’s an honorable thing, and it’s one of the greatest causes even if it’s not recognized by newspapers. It’s still recognized in my mind.

Another male secondary school teacher speaking about the commitment and time, resources and energy to bettering children’s educational outcomes said, “As a teacher, you know, I’m constantly thinking about – constantly feeling guilty knowing there’s always more – there’s always more parents you can call and more preparation you can do.”
The motivation to work unpaid by maintaining the belief that students are deserving of their teacher’s best efforts was discussed solely by female adjunct instructors. One said:

What used to motivate me was leaving a really good impression that I know what I’m talking about, because I was insecure about that, because I didn’t know what I was talking about. So that motivated me to know everything around the topic, so that if there was a question, it wouldn’t be that I couldn’t answer it. The other thing that motivated me a little bit later um was just a sense of responsibility to the students, especially the populations of students that come to [this urban community college]. I feel like they’re just always given the short end of the stick. I know I’m a part of the system already, but I want to mitigate that as much as possible. So that’s the other motivation that I have.

Another adjunct instructor spent a bit more time clarifying her own position of the use of certain pedagogical practices and techniques. She said:

Here’s that sense of what I was talking about earlier. Many of the students are always short-ended and I want to not be a part of the problem. But that’s not necessarily altruistic; I do think of it as something that’s self-serving also in terms of my own professionalization. I’m learning to be a more and more effective teacher… Just the fact that you have to stand in class for those three hours and say something, and you have to be prepared for that. And I don’t want to just say bullshit. I actually want to teach people.

Importance of teaching and dedication to teaching as a profession

Educators also discussed their view of teaching as an important and honorable profession. Many educators spoke of how “no one goes into teaching for the money” and that, for many, they described teaching as having a calling. Many respondents found it difficult to clearly describe this calling, but they described educators like themselves as individuals who would pursue teaching as a profession not in order to earn a high salary, but often in spite of the salary. Educators recognized the importance of education to young people and to society as a whole and saw themselves as contributing significantly to society’s well being. Because of the importance of teaching, their professional obligations could not be strictly confined to just the hours of the
school day. A female secondary school teacher said, “I think teaching – a nine-to-five kind of job is the kind of thing you really can’t have…You run into a current or former student in the grocery store; I interact with that student. It’s, you know, it is significant as well. It can be pretty significant; it can have an impact on that student’s life as well, and that’s certainly not confined to nine-to-five.” Another female elementary school teacher agreed saying, “I think subconsciously there’s a sense of, like, I’m changing lives and this is part of changing lives.”

Other educators discussed the rewards that come from knowing you are helping others and being able to directly and immediately see the fruits of their labor. A male elementary school teacher said, “You have that instant gratification of helping someone. You’re feeling like you’re making an impact. I think that’s a huge thing, that experience of directly helping a family or a child. And, you know, I think that’s highly motivating for people that get into teaching… I try to get those kids to be responsible and self-motivated as much as possible. And, you know, I think they see that from me and how I’m working to put together the lessons, and they kind of take that responsibility and apply it to their own learning. It’s an important part of teaching.” For some educators, related to being able to see the results of their hard work and efforts, they recognized that many social issues and problems are outside their sphere of influence to solve, or even affect. But a male secondary school teacher described a view of teaching that motivated his going above and beyond minimum expectations:

What motivates me is that we all have these problems, and there are a lot of problems that you can’t fix and have no impact on. There’re problems in the Middle East; there’s nothing I can do. There’re problems in the stock market; there’s nothing I can do. If there are problems where kids are walking around with their pants falling down and just not doing anything; there is something I can do in some respect to… I think it’s a great motivator to try to help that student… I think it’s empowering to empower others, so at certain jobs you can write a good report and you won’t know if it’s good enough a month later; someone might not give you credit. When you’re teaching and you have a student that can’t understand a concept, and they smile and they get it, you can see that in a way
that’s an instant gratification, which is rewarding to know that you’re making a difference, and you can see it right there.

Another male secondary school teacher discussed the importance of making every effort for their students to ensure that they got the most out of their education. He said:

It’s more about having to grade the kids work, keep doing the work, and if I don’t give them feedback the ones who actually care about learning aren’t going to pick up as much, so it’s just something that I’ve learnt has to be done if my kids are going to grow in the course of the year academically in English… Most of these schools aren’t well-run. It’s not like you get treated particularly well or that you are awarded respect, and I’m certainly not paid enough that I get to save anything, so it’s not coming from a sense of importance that it’s not going to get done because there’s definitely no other motivating factors… It comes from the sense that it matters and that it’s…especially with kids who are coming from really bad home environments that there’s the hope that you can help, over the course of a year, maybe one or two kids to have meaningfully different life protection or even help the way that they look at themselves to be more positive.

The importance of education as a profession was a consistent account given by the responding educators. The educators interviewed were all passionate about how important education is to both the individual students and to society as a whole. Many educators also discussed the importance of continually improving upon and tweaking their lectures and lesson plans in order to meet their own expectations of quality work as well as to maintain their interest and enthusiasm for the subjects. A female elementary school teacher said:

I always try to come up with something new because I don’t want to get bored really quick, so if I keep doing the same thing then I get bored. And if I am not excited about something then it’s hard for me to teach it. So even though I have done fourth grade for how many years, I still kind of try out everything and try to implement something different… I would use some of the same lessons again, but there’s always tweaking that could be done, but, you know, the tweaking does take less time.

Other educators spoke of the negative way in which teachers are often portrayed in some media accounts or perceived by other individuals outside of education and expressed the desire
to better demonstrate how much effort, work, and dedication that educators dedicate to their profession. A male secondary school teacher said:

I think that what most people don’t know is how hard teachers work. I think there’s a huge perception that we get three months off a year, we get all these holiday breaks off. I don’t think people really fully realize the extent to which most of us really are very conscientious, hard-working, smart people who are professional, who do the best job we can, and we’re in this because we care about teaching and the kids, and I want people to learn. I think teachers right now, at least at my school and my friends, we’re all feeling pretty demoralized because there’s a national attack on teachers, and it’s spearheaded by a lot of people: by Obama, by Arne Duncan [U.S. Secretary of Education], by [De’Shawn] Wright [New York Deputy Secretary of Education]. You know, Bush started it with No Child Left behind and [former New York City Mayor Michael] Bloomberg, of course, how could we forget our favorite emperor?

A female secondary teacher who has been primarily working as a technology consultant within her school district for the last few years spoke of how little support that teachers have received in recent years, as demonstrated through salary freezes, budget cuts, and parental disinterest. She justified her working unpaid as a way to contribute to the difficulties being faced by teachers saying:

I really feel like I do this unpaid work [as a technology consultant] because I want teachers to know that I’m supporting them, that I’m there to help them. I feel like I need to be there, and I need to be available when the teachers are working. So, I feel like I need to stay at school until about five o’clock every night because that’s when my teachers are at school and that’s when I can collaborate with them and work on lessons with them and I can work with them on what lessons didn’t work, what can we do to fix it, these types of things.

Other secondary school educators focused on taking pride in the quality of work that they perform and ways to keep continually motivated. One said, “There’s a pride thing to where – I’m not competitive with other people in my department. I’m just competitive with my own self about how good a job I want to do. So that helps me keep my edges honed; I want to be the best
teacher I can be for every student that I have – all 150 of them!” She continued by discussing her intellectual interest in the practice of education itself saying:

I also would feel an intellectual draw to pedagogy and how people learn best and when they learn best and who learns doing what and where do teachers learn best and how do we translate how we learn with what we do before the students, and that’s not always what they need, so my interests also…I look at it as a sort of human experiment too and – I’m married to a psychotherapist – and that really interests me, looking at how these students work and what else they’re bringing with them into the classroom that affects how they do and what they want to do. I think it’s a very important human experiment that I’m part of, so I like that part.

Faculty in higher education expressed the same commitment to the craft of teaching as a motivation to work unpaid. A female adjunct instructor said, “I want to be able to identify as a good teacher and there is a certain amount of work that I have to do to feel like I’m doing a good job, and that’s important to me even if it’s unpaid.” This simple statement highlights how easily the impulse to work unpaid can be justified by appealing to a higher calling of professionalism. A male adjunct instructor went so far as to speak about how it can be easy to lose track of how much time is spent working unpaid for courses saying:

I’m probably even underestimating them [unpaid hours of labor] – I say there’s 10 hours a week, and I wouldn’t be surprised, especially during my first couple semesters teaching, if I wasn’t exceeding that. Because I would tend to just show up however much time I had available. I think “oh I could do a little extra, do a little extra work in the course, I could do a little rethinking of the activity for tomorrow.” You know? “That reading that I picked out is never going to work, I’ll find something new.” I think its – from talking to other adjuncts I think that that’s uh, the other adjuncts in my circles have fallen into the trap of underestimating it.

Another female adjunct instructor agreed saying:

I have to stop myself from doing so much sometimes because I think, “No, I shouldn’t be spending so much time, but…” You want to know you are doing a good job and so I don’t really want to let the students down, but it can be very time consuming. I think the
ten hours [of unpaid work per week] is conservative. There are some weeks when it really is a lot more than that.

A tenured female professor spoke of the role that pride can play in contributing to rationalizing unpaid labor through appeal to a sense of professionalism. After saying that she worked between 50 to 60 hours per week she remarked, “I guess it’s just pride and the fact that the place runs well now. The transformation was very dramatic. Their test scores went from some of the lowest in the country when I got there to, you know, amazing. I’m proud of the program I created, so you just want to keep it running well.”

*Teaching as a lifestyle*

Most of the educators, especially the elementary and secondary school teachers, when asked about the amount of time that they spend each week on their professional obligations mentioned that “teaching is a lifestyle.” A female elementary school teacher said, “Teaching is a lifestyle, as opposed to just a job or an occupation… It’s not a September to June job either… You don’t go into teaching for having your summers off… I think there is a level of commitment to others that you have to have to be an effective educator.” Another said:

Like I said, you think about it in the shower; you think about it when you’re lying in bed. I also think – at least elementary school, no, maybe at any age really – I think the good teachers see teaching opportunities in everyday life, at every situation. Maybe I’m being sort of stereotypical, but someone like a contractor’s going to leave the job site when they’re done and their work is over. I don’t know, social workers may be more likely to stop at an organization on their way pick up or drop something off on their way home.

A female secondary school teacher agreed and said, “It’s never, never over. Even on summer vacation you’re still learning, growing, thinking about what am I going to do next school year to
make it better than the previous one. There’s never...teachers don’t get time off. I’m always thinking about the job in one fashion or another. It’s a little bit a part of myself.”

Educators in higher education held similar beliefs about how teaching is a lifestyle. For some professors, they included their research agendas as a major component of that lifestyle. A full-time male professor said, “The summer time I like to do a lot of professional reading, but it’s about teaching, in general, just to keep my hand in and to give me new ideas. I do like books about teaching and education as a profession in general during the summer. And during school hours, absolutely.” Many other adjunct instructors and professors spoke of the importance of education to their students and the various ways that it permeates their entire lives. A male adjunct instructor said, “It’s [education] 24/7. I can care about the students and I care that they are getting the kind of education they need, what they think they are paying for and engaging in. So, I don’t want to let them down. I don’t just want to go through the motions. If you take pride in your work and you care about something, it’s really hard to back off and work on other things.” A female full-time professor said, “I think of my career as not a job, but a lifestyle. My bedtime reading on my nightstand is probably something to do with my job. When I’m traveling it has to do with my job. I don’t really draw a firm distinction between my work and the rest of my life.” Another female full-time professor discussed the ways in which different job responsibilities felt more or less like time-consuming requirements saying, “

I think there’s a way that I sort of bought into that [the idea that some types of work feel more or less unpaid] a little bit myself, which is assuming that the research I get to do is for fun. So, it’s like the teaching is the work, the grading is the work, and the preparation is the work, and the administrative stuff is the work, and the committee work is the work, and then my scholarship is what I do for fun, It’s like my hobby or something.
Many of the respondents highlighted their belief that educators shared a dedication and commitment to teaching. They often discussed the notion that not everyone had the capability or mindset to be an effective educator. A male secondary school teacher said, “I think teachers are always working, always thinking. When I was younger I would go up to the college and use it, but I was also thinking about the lessons I had planned some times. You’re always thinking about something. You’re thinking about your lessons; you’re thinking about the politics. There’s always something going on.” Another teacher agreed saying, “I would say that teachers who really don’t have the heart aren’t going to be the ones that you would see [staying in the profession].” A female secondary school teacher said:

A lot of the new teachers, if they’re dedicated, they just work and work and work…. It [unpaid work] was something that you had to do if you’re going to be a competent, quality teacher. But you didn’t get anything for it other than – if you’re the kind of person who wants to do a quality job, you feel comfortable that you’re doing the best job you can. But you weren’t compensated or necessarily acknowledged. I looked upon it as a way of keeping, feeling comfortable with myself. I taught a lot of classes too, and you feel like it’s an obligation. With me, if I didn’t grade the papers and do a good job with it, I will just feel so uncomfortable. I would feel like I did something wrong. And I couldn’t be comfortable with myself.

A male secondary school teacher corroborated these accounts:

The stakes are very high, the numbers of ways the people run around with it, and the plain fact is I could leave and feel like the job was done. I leave everyday and feel like the job’s not done. It’s just there’s always someone to please. I’ve certainly worked hard in other jobs. I worked in the restaurant industry for God knows how long and you’re constantly on there as well. But then you’re not required that constant level of intellectual rigor. There’s something really different about this job… I think it [dedication] mainly comes from just being an educator and knowing that my teachers gave me a lot. So I try to give back as much as I can to my kids.
Faculty members in higher education held similar beliefs about the strengths that are necessary for an individual to be an effective and successful educator. A female adjunct instructor emphasized the importance of education as a profession by saying, “That’s what an educator should be, someone who – of course I’m biased because I find it an important profession. But someone who needs to prepare the next generation of minds in such a way that they can be more informed about what’s going on, and to plan for a future that is our collective future, you know?” A male full-time professor discussed the importance of educators possessing certain characteristics saying:

You can’t be indifferent. There’s a difference between being a bureaucrat and being an academic or a doctor or a lawyer because you can’t be indifferent to the students… You want to make sure you do your best in class. I would feel guilty if I went to the classroom and did a poor job because I’m not paid well. I would say that’s been the biggest motivation to go in and let the students have a good experience in the classroom.

*Best educator I can be*

Another dimension of rationalization to professionalism that educators reported was an aspiration to be “a good teacher.” A female elementary school teacher said, “I feel it’s [working unpaid from home] is something I have to do in order to be efficient. I don’t know if I could be a good teacher if I didn’t do all of it; I do feel like if I can’t get certain things done then I can’t really focus on the next step.” Respondents commonly discussed the nebulous goal of being the best teacher they could be. A female secondary school teacher said:

I don’t want to be the kind of teacher who passes everybody or makes it so easy that they can…there are teachers who give them an 80 just for showing up and breathing, and I’m not one of those people. I work very hard to make sure they’re learning something, you know… I want to keep improving. I want to make sure – and every class is also different. I can’t necessarily use a batch of lessons from last year if this school isn’t ready for it or
isn’t interested in it. It’s really hard to just say, “Nope, that’s enough”… and then I think as the more competent I became about what I was doing and the visions I would have about where I wanted to go with teaching, the more I actually put substantive work into it. It wasn’t like, “Oh my God, I need a lesson plan for tomorrow!” I know I can write a decent lesson plan, but how can I really fine-tune it so I get them to learn what they need to learn here where we’re at, so – the focus changed behind why I was working so hard.

A female elementary school teacher found that her conception of what it means to be an effective teacher shifted after her own children had started attending school. Her desires for their education allowed her to re-examine her commitment and prioritizations in the classroom. She said, “I think when you have kids the way that you teach changes because you want to teach how you would want your kids to be taught. I teach the way that I would want somebody to teach my own kid.”

Adjunct instructors in higher education were particularly vocal about wanting to be the best teachers that they could be. This seems to be true for several reasons. The first is that as current graduate students and adjunct instructors, the educators do not have any other departmental, college, or university responsibilities apart from student instruction. By not having their workday segmented through committee responsibilities, advising duties, or publication requirements adjunct instructors are able to devote their efforts strictly to teaching. Graduate students certainly had numerous other responsibilities, including coursework, examinations, independent research, and publishing, but this was often discussed as being separate from their teaching duties. In New York City many adjunct instructors do not teach at the same institutions in which they are enrolled as students, so it makes such a division starker. In addition, graduate students are usually only a few years removed from their undergraduate schooling and have clearer ideas about how they would have liked to be taught in their undergraduate courses. One female adjunct instructor said, “I hold my ground because I, I have a standard. I am teaching the
course… I want to do well. You know, I want to do well at work. I want to excel…. I think that’s part of it, to be available to the students – especially in the entry-level courses. The upper level courses are – you know, they’ve already been to a couple upper level humanities courses – but definitely the introductory courses.” Another female adjunct instructor said:

My friends are in education – we take it very seriously. You know? I mean, its not, I’m not doing this just for the pay, or I’m not doing this just until the next gig comes along. I mean this is something that, to be good at you have to really work at it. And failing at it – I mean failing at teaching is not the same as, you know, failing as an administrative assistant at a corporation. You fail there and, you know, they fire you and maybe you brought down the efficiency of the corporate machine. But you're not going to sink the ship. You fail at teaching, and you can really, really mess another person’s - or a lot of other persons’ - lives up. You know? Especially if you’re an elementary school teacher and you fail to teach kids to read. I mean that’s a big deal. At the university level, I mean if we fail to, to get across what it is we’re trying to get across - whatever it is that were teaching - I mean, you can turn off a lot of students to, you know, a whole area of thought or way of thinking that they might have otherwise have been receptive to. And let’s face it, college is fucking expensive. I mean you fail at that, you know, those students have lost. I mean they’ve lost, even economically, on that. I don’t think its something that most educators are taking lightly. The idea that teachers just don’t care and they're ineffectual, they're against seeing, you know, outcomes assessments - I don’t think that’s true. I think it’s just that we take this very seriously and because we do we’re willing to put in the extra.

The uncertainty of contingent adjunct employment was also a powerful motivator to adjunct instructors. Even as more and more departments are increasingly relying on adjunct instruction, there has not been a corresponding increase in job security or occupational prestige. A female adjunct instructor said:

There is a real expectation that the person is meeting with their students constantly and they’re doing all this work, so I should too. You don’t want to be the “bad one” in the department or you don’t want to be a bad collegial citizen. You want to be the good citizen, the good team player. At the end of the day the goal is to make sure that students are getting something out of the course. There are a lot of ways to do that, but one of
them is to make yourself available on your own time. Or to do the extra, to make sure that you read everything thoroughly and you give them comments. Or, you know, over-prepare for a course because you’re not sure what questions they’re going to ask.

Other graduate instructors, particularly those who are currently in graduate school, reported efforts in utilizing the requirements to work unpaid as a “dry run” for eventual employment in a tenure track position. A male adjunct instructor said, “My motivation for doing it [working unpaid] was justifying the – when it required a lot of extra hours, I was like, “Hmmm, this is not, this is virtually not, there’s no financial gain from doing extra work on that.” It would be easy to justify in terms of being something that was useful in the future. That’s the closest I’ve come [in considering motivation].

A female full-time professor also discussed the importance of making sure the students are given her best efforts, saying:

I’ve had anxiety, and I didn’t want to walk in the classroom and I can’t do this, but, you know, if you’re getting paid to work, if there is a day when I’m not feeling up to it I can just put on a movie or something and know that I’ve got to make up for this. You can ease up when you need to. Teachers have to maintain long-term standards, which is why unpaid work, it’s on your terms to some degree, and that helps a lot. And whether I’m underpaid shouldn’t be reflected on the experience that they have in the classroom.

Engaging with students

For many educators one of the most appealing aspects of the job is the opportunity to engage with the students themselves. Some respondents discussed young children and teenagers as having a vitality and energy that they found very motivating. Some educators were teaching in districts with very few financial resources and inconsistent parental support for their children’s education, but they spoke of significantly positive interactions with students, particularly when
the student was able to make an academic breakthrough after considerable effort. Several of the
teachers interviewed spoke of the enjoyment they experienced watching the same cohort of
students advance from year to year in their studies. A male secondary school teacher said:

You know, what ended up happening though is that I got attached to a group of kids. The
kids I started with were sixth graders, and I formed a very close rapport with them. It was
really at heart that I cared about the kids. I didn’t know how to teach; I figured it out
about halfway through the year. And then I moved up with them in seventh grade and
then started coaching them in basketball, and because I had the basketball team, I wanted
to stay and try to build something. I started a student’s basketball game and used it as a
fundraiser. It became the only school community event that we had the entire year. We
didn’t have any other extracurriculars, any other events. And then through the coaching I
was able to get to know the kids better, especially the average boy, and just start
mentoring and, as I said, building something and teaching some things outside the
classroom where they really want to learn. And that was the best part of my job for four
years, was the coaching, and it made it very hard to leave. And it was also, you know, it
was the school downstairs and because I was the basketball coach I had the kids come up
to me and introduce themselves and said that they’d see me next year at tryouts.

A female secondary school teacher related a similar account of watching her students grow over
time, saying:

I think as a teacher we feel committed to our students, and we build these relationships
with our students through the years. I taught at the same school for seven, eight years and
I knew their families; I knew my students from 6th grade through 8th grade. They came
back and saw you when they were high school students. And you build those
relationships with them and they begin to expect…they want help afterschool on
homework and so you stay and help them with homework. They need a student council
sponsor, you step up to volunteer and be a student council sponsor. So then you’re off
doing field trips and activities, and all sorts of things. I don’t want to say I felt obligated
to do these things because I could’ve walked away at any time. I didn’t have to coach; I
didn’t have to be a student council sponsor; I didn’t have to sit on curriculum
committees; I didn’t have to do any of that. It was all a volunteer basis, but I volunteered
to do it because I knew in the end it was going to help my students achieve better in the
classroom, and it helped me build relationships with them.
A female elementary school teacher spoke of how opportunities to interact with students as well as parents greatly improved education outcomes. She said:

I have to have conference with these parents. I feel like you get so much more out of the parents and they get so much more out of you, and then, in turn, their kids do so much better if you have that personal one-on-one. I love the personal aspect of that. I’m a parent and a teacher for that fact…I do feel like you have to put yourself out there. It can’t be a nine-to-five job; you just can’t ever shut the door.

Multiple roles of teachers

A less common justification for working unpaid among educators, and one that was discussed only by female educators, was the idea that teachers are often required to take on multiple roles. A secondary teacher said, “I think it’s become expected of educators in our society to do more and more and more and unfortunately I feel like in a lot of our schools we’re not just teaching kids anymore. We are nurses and social workers and counselors and parents.”

Another secondary teacher discussed the increasing requirements to which teachers have been subjected in recent years. She said:

Teachers are also expected to continually develop ourselves and take more classes and get more training, and that’s a whole other realm of unpaid labor. I’ve gone back to get my master’s; I’ve taken many additional graduate level courses, and right now I’m working on my principal’s license, and that’s all money out of my pocket towards additional coursework that I’m not being reimbursed for in any way from my employer. And, again, that’s taking time away from my family so I can continually develop myself as an educator.

An adjunct instructor also said:

I feel that if you’re just going to talk about labor, or work that it takes to make it happen, it’s significantly more than 10 [hours per course] per week overall. Just in how much of it is hidden because it’s not official to count all the emails and all the conversations and - my students can call me on the phone and they do. And, you know, frequently have -
because of their status, in terms of community students and lots of other things they're doing - they have serious problems that I take and help them with personally as well as a sociologist and an activist. So it just – teaching technically takes over my life by choice.

Despite the various dimensions that individual educators described when discussing an invocation of professionalism, there is little arguing with the data showing that educators are leaving the profession in large numbers and at great cost to themselves, the institutions, and the students. Educators offer this appeal to professionalism to account for working unpaid, but it seems to be, at least to some degree, another aspect of misrecognition. The invocation of a professional ethic appears as little more than pure ideology and plays little significant role in ameliorating teacher burnout and attrition. The data in Chapter 1 describing teacher attrition seem to demonstrate clearly the limits of professionalism. Although many educators interviewed did not discuss recognition of their exploitation, many expressed a growing sense of disenchantment with the profession. At the national level, as the poisoned gift fosters a growing disenchantment, educators’ appeals to professionalism are no longer sufficient to keep them in the profession. The initial gratitude reported by many educators fades as structural obstacles and systemic deficiencies accumulate, eventually leading to over half of all new teachers in urban school to leave the profession within five years. This exodus of educators comes at great cost to the students, the educational institutions, and educators themselves. The next chapter examines respondents’ accounts of strategies to cope with these structural deficiencies and hindrances in the effective performance of their professional obligations.
Chapter 9: Patterns and Trends in the Interview Data: Educators’ Strategies to Cope with Structural Deficiencies in Education

The educational system as a system is increasingly making it difficult for teachers to reciprocate. As various structural deficiencies are experienced by educators, it contributes to higher levels of dissatisfaction and a decrease in educators’ feelings of gratitude toward their institution. As Chapters 7 and 8 demonstrate, it is this sense of gratitude that plays a role in eliciting unpaid labor as reciprocation for the gift of employment. As more and more roadblocks are thrown in educators’ paths, their likelihood of being able and willing to fulfill this obligation to reciprocate is diminished. For many educators the initial desired gift of employment is poisoned just a little bit more with each new indignity and systemic or bureaucratic difficulty. This poisoned gift de-motivates the reciprocation of unpaid labor, at significant cost to educators themselves, institutions, and students.

I. Why People Enter Education

As a means of justifying their working unpaid, many educators discussed their opinions of the current state of the educational system in the United States. There were mixed opinions as to the possibility for the system to continue indefinitely as it is currently structured.

People will always be educators

I don’t know [if the current educational system is a sustainable]. I would imagine as long as the teaching is above minimum wage, there will be people that go into that profession, just like nobody’s going into the clergy to get wealthy.
Educators often expressed the sentiment that there will always be people that choose to be educators, regardless of the salary, occupational prestige, or working hours. A female secondary school teacher said, “I would say yes [people will continue to work as educators regardless of low pay] because there’s not a shortage of them. If people still want to be teachers, and you talk to plenty of high school students and yes, there seems to be a shortage. I don’t know, but people keep doing those jobs. There haven’t been any huge labor movements for any of those professions recently.” Educators in elementary and secondary schools as well as higher education had a cogent understanding of the financial limitations of pursuing teaching as a career. At each institutional level there are options to maximize salary potential, but even the best salaries are generally lower than could be found in private employment.

Some educators related a more cynical analysis of the state of affairs for educators in the current economic and political climate. A male secondary school teacher said, “The more they [the mayor or chancellor] figure out that they have a whole lot of people who love teaching and they’re going to do this regardless for what we do to them…there is no reason for them not to treat us badly.” He asserts that educators are, in many ways, complicit in their own exploitation. They are cognizant of the lower earning potential and increasing bureaucratic complexity but still choose to enter the profession. That dedication is turned around on them and wielded as a weapon by administrations during hiring and salary freezes, contract negotiations, and when ever more evaluations and standardized testing sessions are implemented. The unpaid labor of educators is entirely expected and counted on by education administrators. As one female adjunct instructor said, “The system would fall apart if we only did what we were paid to do.”
Barriers to improving the educational system

Respondents made reference to the multiple barriers that impeded meaningful improvements being implemented to the educational system. Some educators discussed the high turnover rates of teachers. Teachers in urban school systems have a fifty percent likelihood of leaving the profession within five years. A female elementary school teacher said:

The classrooms will just get bigger when you have fewer teachers. Honestly, when people talk to me about teaching I’m like, “Don’t do it.” It’s so hard to get a job, and once you do get a job it becomes such miserable work. At this point all you’re doing is worrying about scores. I think what people used to call teaching – at least my understanding of it from my social circle – there’s this sense of creating this world for kids and getting through to students and teaching somebody in different ways. Maybe we do have enough teachers, but just then it would become the nine-to-five people who will only put in the bare minimum. I don’t think it’s sustainable the way people envision public school or education should be… It’s going to be high turnover rates, right? A lot of young people doing it? I think it’s just going to be like a Peace Corp thing. People go into it for three or four years, then just go on to do something else.

A male secondary school teacher discussed in great depth the multiple factors that contribute to how and why teachers often come from similar class backgrounds. He said:

Well that’s a tough one, let me think, let me try to define this. I think if you’re going into public work, police, nursing, teaching, it’s a personal choice. I think it might also be a family thing, you know your parents are teachers, your parents are fire fighters, and your parents are police… it could be something that’s running in your family. As far as going into corporate America that can be said as “labeled.” It’s probably related to how far you can, what kind of college course and what kind of direction you took in college if you went into business or law, you’re going to work a lot harder to get into those entry level jobs I think, I’m not sure. It depends on your social economic position; it depends on the colleges you went to. If you are in a higher class of income or your parents were you’re probably going to be prepared in your lower level schools or to enter into better colleges that give you entrée into corporate jobs, whereas if you’re coming from a more middle class, more often middle class life that you might not have the opportunity to reach those same levels. I think it’s an economic thing but not always, I mean, but I think a lot of the
corporate jobs that exist are [paying] a hundred thousand dollars plus, because of where you graduated and where you went to college.

A female adjunct instructor discussed the poor market for tenure-track positions with respect to the number of new doctoral graduates. She elaborated:

I think a lot of it comes down to the graduate education – the traditional departments have educated way more people than they could place in jobs and that has just been amplified in the last few years when the market got even worse. And I think that now they are starting to catch up with that but they never really take action, which is what the situation calls for. If my department, and I’m just speculating, let’s say hypothetically it was placing two-thirds of its graduates in job, full time and tenure track, people that were actually going on the market. But we’ve always educated more people than we needed and I think a lot of people who have finished academia, when they finish they are introduced to the concept that there are more Ph.D.s than there are full time tenure track jobs. I think a lot of us have always been over-achievers and so we sort of think hey well you know, if two-thirds of people get jobs I’ll be one of those two-thirds – that’s not you know, thinking to yourself special but that kind of I know I have to do it. I’ll just work very hard and I’ll do it.

Financial barriers to education

It’s more attractive for schools to hire new teachers because you can get two new teachers for the price of one old teacher.

Respondents had much to say about the financial barriers to seeking a career in education and how they think that such barriers often lead highly qualified and motivated people to enter into other professions. An earlier passage discussed how many teachers pursue a career in education regardless of salary concerns, but that many of those potential teachers may experience personal situations that require them to eventually earn a higher wage. A female elementary school teacher said:
And I think probably a little bit it’s the teacher’s own fault. Because if we continue to be willing to be in it for the kids at the price they’re paying us, then why would they pay us any more? That’s a big piece of it, really. When you feel called to be a teacher, and the district is not paying us what we think is fair compensation for what we’re doing, we also don’t feel like we can not go to work and leave those kids without an education, without a place to be. So we do show up for work. And teachers have had that, several of my co-workers, we’ve had that conversation when there’s been budget cuts or they’ve cut salaries or they’ve cut our raises. We try to tell them that we can’t work under these conditions and we can’t work without these resources. But the reality is that kids come to school on the first day of school, and even if we don’t have those resources, we’ll still find a way to teach them. And so the following year we say, “No, you can’t cut even more because last year was hard.” And they’re like, “Yeah, it was hard, but you did it, so now we can cut back even more because you did it.”

A male secondary school teacher agreed saying:

I think, generally, people who are good with children have that calling from early on, but some don’t do it because they think it won’t make…they won’t make enough money or they think that it’s not glamorous enough… They’re definitely going to have to figure out ways to make teaching something that’s attractive to young people, such young people who care and love students or who have a different radical frame of reference. They have to do something to bring teachers into the fold. I can tell my high school students that those programs out there is the best way – that can give people a little more money; it’s the best way of getting people to join this profession.

Similar sentiments were discussed by faculty in higher education as well. A male full-time professor said:

I think if the conditions and the pay were better, I think it would attract more people that maybe have a interest in doing it, but that are kept away because of the – I don’t mean that they’re greedy and want money. But you know, maybe they have a family or you know, they – they have other considerations to think of. And, I’m sure a lot of people are kept away from these kinds of professions because the prospect of - the financial prospect is bad… at least the people that feel that it could be an interesting field but than are kept away because of the money and the conditions… I think the lower you go down the column, the more unpaid labor there is and lower salaries there to begin with, which makes it very unsustainable.
Lastly a female secondary school teacher said:

It’s really disappointing to see what happens at that level. First, they’re under a lot of pressure. They have no budget, but the hiring decisions are made because someone cheaper and possibly less experienced is, I think, the problem. Not every experienced person is an excellent teacher, and not every new teacher is a great method teacher, but this administration is making decisions based on money, and that’s becoming problematic.

_Sense of altruism or higher purpose or calling_

Maybe because you feel called to be a teacher or called to be a physician because it is that calling. You are not there for the salary, and you’re not there for the financial return. You’re there for other reasons.

Many teachers, adjunct instructors, and professors reported that they had a calling. Many of these same respondents simultaneously qualified such statements by saying that, in their experiences, not all teachers or professors must have felt such callings – some were only there for the paycheck, such as it is. When speaking of people in the educational field, a female elementary school teacher said, “You know, that’s their true calling and that’s what they want to do, then yes. They’re obviously not doing it for the money, so…” A male secondary school teacher was speculating on the structural nature of the educational system. He said, “I’ve been wondering if that’s [the notion that the virtue of teaching is its own reward] kind of built into the system itself to help people keep doing the work they do. You know, the kind of rhetoric about teaching and the forms of it, and if people understand that then they won’t be as upset when they do the work they do and there’s no monetary compensation for it.” This teacher was critically examining the expectation of unpaid labor by educators and recognizing such expectations for what they are, a mechanism to reproduce the current system in which teachers are paid a modest
salary even while performing significant hours of unpaid work each week. Another male secondary school teacher said, “They get into teaching because they want to help and then probably just be able to stay in teaching because they’re able to get enough out of it that it balances out.”

Educators in higher education also demonstrated a penetrating insight into the role played in altruism and unpaid labor. A male full-time professor said:

I do think that there’s kind of this expectation that educators are altruistic or we wouldn’t be doing it at all. And you know especially maybe in the United States, I’m trying to think…I know there are countries where teachers are paid much better wages; maybe I don’t know, in London. Right. But I think that there’s an expectation or assumption…I mean, it’s an ideology. I think ideologically there’s a thing going on where educators are expected to be altruistic. I think we’re going to sustain it a long time. We’ve been sustaining it a long time. I am not all that hopeful of that changing in this country. I think it would be a really revolutionary change for educators to be suddenly paid much better than they are. I mean some educators are paid fairly well like teachers on Long Island, public school, high school teachers on Long Island. At one point when I was doing my Ph.D. I looked into quitting and teaching high school with the number of graduate hours I had. At least on paper it looked like I could make quite a bit of money.

A female full-time professor shared the same line of thinking saying, “It makes those of us who are in those occupations feel guilty about asking for more money or feel guilty about wanting to make money. Right? So that’s another byproduct of it, right?” The questions these educators are asking interrogate a deeper issue that is addressed in this chapter: whether or not the contemporary U.S. educational system can be sustained as it is. Will the institutional reliance on educators’ gift of unpaid labor be sufficient to reproduce the current educational system? Or will the gift that educators are reciprocating continue to become so poisoned that it actually demotivates educators to reciprocate? Moreover, the poisoned gift may be contributing to the high numbers of teacher burnout and attrition, especially amongst new teachers.
II. Sustainability of the Current Educational System

Ineffective/unmotivated/uncaring educators

In opposition to teachers motivated by altruistic impulses or fulfilling their calling, respondents also gave accounts of educators who are ineffective, unmotivated, uncaring, lazy, disdainful of children, or just incompetent. While respondents generally lauded most educators as conscientious and dedicated teaching professionals, this was not always true for each and every educator. A female elementary school teacher said:

I think you have good teachers out there who move or, you know, when they take a few years off to raise their family and go back and definitely talented people out there don’t get that chance, and then you have some people who are not so great in what they are doing, but they are there and – I mean it’s pretty frustrating that I was the same on the outside this year whenever I was trying to get in. And I would say that some of the people that I didn’t think worked as hard were there and, you know, it’s frustrating. Because you know that you could be doing a good job and you want that job and, you know, there is this kind of person sitting there, coasting by and not doing what they should be doing when there are so many other people that would die to have their job.

A female secondary school teacher continued saying:

The job is so overwhelming that there’s really no way you can get it done during work time. And that’s probably one of the reasons so many people don’t stay in the profession… Unfortunately we’ve had a string of assistant principals since then. The newer teachers really didn’t have the benefit of having a supervisor who really understands that her biggest role is to train young teachers who really don’t know what they’re doing and have to be taught.

It seems as though respondents are offering two different accounts for the persistence of ineffective or unmotivated educators. In the first, there are educators who are unsuited for the work. They either have the wrong temperaments or are not dedicated to teaching as a profession.
The others are those who have allowed themselves to become burnt out and “jaded” but are unwilling to seek other employment so close to their retirement. A male secondary school teacher concluded:

I think it depends on what is the overall goal. If the goal is to have the best school possible, you just need to have people who are willing to do it; and can you sustain it? I’m not sure. I think in the school I’m at a majority of the teachers have a commitment; it’s not 100%. And so I don’t know. I know there are other schools that might not. When I was student teaching, there were schools where half the teachers were just waiting for retirement and you could see the difference there. So as far as whether it’s [the current educational system] sustainable, I think you have to try your best. I don’t know what other answer there is.

Burnout and loss of desire to teach

Most respondents gave accounts of witnessing or knowing less effective or unmotivated teachers, but few offered any detailed speculation about why those educators were so uncaring. There was little discussion as to whether they were once truly dedicated educators who had become de-motivated over time, or if they are apparently just ineffective educators. What most respondents agreed about was that education is a demanding field and that without some degree of a sense of higher purpose then these unmotivated teachers will burnout and eventually leave the profession. Echoing such sentiments a female secondary teacher said:

Yeah, if you don’t like teaching, then there’s not a lot of incentive, salary wise, hour wise, demand wise, yeah. There would not be motivation to stay. And honestly, at times, I have thought, “you know, I would miss teaching, the kids, and I would miss what I would do. But you know, if I could work the same school hours, the same calendar as a teacher, and be able to have that holiday time, summer time, be on the same schedule as my kids’ time... hmmm, would I do that?” and some days I most definitely would!
Another female secondary teacher broached the possibility that the routinization of teaching that occurs in some (other) school districts contributes to de-motivated teachers, saying:

I don’t know why people who teach in sort of the district schools do that. That feels a lot more like a clock in, clock out teaching the same thing all the time. You know, the bell rings…we don’t have bells…the bell rings in 45 minutes and you get a new group of 34 kids and you say the same thing to them. Before they take a quiz you add up the numbers and I think, for me that feels like a very different job than that one that I have.

Some educators brought up the bureaucratic obstacles and other negative aspects and deficiencies of the educational system as a social structure. The deficiencies and difficulties poison the gift and de-motivate educators to continue to reciprocate. As Yan’s (1996) study in rural China demonstrated, people will persist for quite a while in a gift relationship where the giver is failing to meet his or her obligations. What Yan’s study didn’t address, primarily due to the marked differences in the potential for mobility comparing contemporary U.S. educators and rural Chinese peasant farmers, is that when alternatives are presented that allow educators to extricate themselves from these toxic gift relationships, many will do so, leading to the high numbers of educators leaving the profession. This chapter concludes with an examination of educators’ thoughts on the sustainability of the contemporary U.S. educational system.

*Lack of sustainability*

So there’s always going to be that population that will look for that, you know, as a benefit, as money, as the equivalent of money. I think the serious pursuit of excellence is really on the agenda; it’s not sustainable. Because every school system we compare ourselves to internationally pays teachers better and takes them more seriously as professionals.
The last dimension that educators discussed concerning why people become educators is the lack of sustainability that they foresee for the future of the U.S. educational system. Much of this pessimism is partly due to the educators’ observations on how systems of education are implemented in other nations. The female full-time professor in the above quote makes the point clearly that the U.S. values and treats its educators more poorly than many other industrialized nations. A female adjunct instructor spoke about the questionable sustainability of current systems of higher education saying:

You know, you look at tuitions that are just rising rising rising rising, and putting a real burden on the students. Than you look at how little, you know, the people who are really driving the school in a lot of cases where there are a huge number of adjuncts...And you really have to wonder…you're not going to be able to sustain this. Or if you are able to sustain it by simply putting bodies in classrooms, are you going to have the same outcomes? I mean, are we going to have the same quality of education when you have – I mean no offense to graduate students, I am a graduate student that teaches. I’m not saying I can’t do a good job of it, but don’t you think that someone who has a degree would do a better job? Or you know, at least has the potential for doing a better job? Or something to point to that’s been peer reviewed and that’s said, “you’ve done a good job” on something? I mean I think that’s a serious problem. I really don’t think the university the way it currently is, is sustainable in the long term. I don’t know what that system would look like, but this - what they have going now – seems like it’s either going to become increasingly more expensive, or it's going to crumble.

The educators interviewed in this study were not overly optimistic about the current state of the educational system. The structural deficiencies that are pervading education in the U.S. are poisoning the gift that educators are working such long unpaid hours to reciprocate. This poisoned gift contributes to de-motivating educators from going above and beyond in their teaching and classroom preparations. In the face of increasing professional obligations within a decreasing amount of time to perform them, many educators are struggling to reconcile their exploitation as anything other than what it is.
Conclusions

Gift and gift giving is an original and effective category of analysis through which aspects of social issues and topics that had remained hidden utilizing existing analytical lenses can be uncovered. The educational field proved to be a very valuable case study to demonstrate the efficacy of the gift and the individual’s role in a gift relationship as an analytical tool. Educators at all institutional levels from elementary and secondary schools to higher education nearly universally demonstrated the presence of a gift relationship embedded in the employer-employee labor relationship. This gift relationship is manifested in the expectation and performance of unpaid labor. The forms of unpaid labor and its degrees of intensity varied across numerous factors, including the type of educational institution, level of dedication, presence of competing obligations, and specific occupational requirements, but what was constant was that all educators interviewed reported some measure of unpaid work done to fulfill professional responsibilities.

For elementary school teachers their unpaid labor most often consisted of writing lesson plans, grading assignments and tests, communicating with parents via email and telephone, and creating classroom decorations and resources. This was similar for secondary school teachers but with the frequent addition of team sport coaching or club or activity sponsorship, which was, in some cases, partially paid but never compensating for all of the time invested. Junior and tenured faculty in higher education also work significant unpaid hours. For junior faculty these hours were generally spent pursuing their research agendas and writing for publication, which, while an important component of promotion and tenure, usually has little determination on salary. Tenured faculty members are also pursuing research and publication but because they’ve been
granted tenure, at many institutions there is an expectation of increased committee work or service as departmental chair. Many committee and department chair positions are only available to tenured faculty, often to protect junior faculty from potential negative repercussions while being reviewed for tenure because of personality or bureaucratic conflict in the course of their service. Adjunct instructors in higher education perform the most amount of unpaid labor when compared to their contracted working hours. All of the adjunct instructors in New York City interviewed reported that they were paid only for their time spent teaching and that any other professional responsibilities, such as grading, writing lectures, creating the curriculum, and communicating with students, are effectively unpaid.

Although many educators did not explicitly recognize their unpaid labor as a gift, in the popular, everyday sense, the nature of their reported unpaid labor met the criteria for gift as discussed by Marcel Mauss (1924), which, while he never defined the gift, he left certain hallmarks for which acts of giving, receiving, and exchange can be examined. A gift relationship is constituted by three obligations: 1) The obligation to give; 2) The obligation to receive; and 3) The obligation to reciprocate. Every respondent interviewed fulfilled the obligation to give by working unpaid outside the school day or by working greater than full-time hours to complete his or her occupational requirements. The obligation was derived by the educators’ perceived expectations that they will work any and all hours required in order to meet their professional duties. Even though many educators did not explicitly consider their employment to be a gift, nearly each and every one of them, by working unpaid to considerable degrees, were in accordance with the expectation of reciprocation in a gift relationship. This gift relationship uncovers a greater understanding of unpaid labor by educational professionals than traditional Marxist, classical, or neoclassical examinations of labor relationships.
In another sense of the gift relationship there is the perception that the educational institution, or its administrative agents, are “giving” jobs to educators. In fact, it is only through being given employment that an individual is even an educator at all. Although some educators did not believe that their job was a gift, and that that they earned their positions – which is not a point of contestation in this study – their consequent actions after accepting the job usually demonstrated otherwise. Employees in many other fields never work unpaid for any reason, while others do so with great frequency. This phenomenon of working unpaid has most commonly been found in salaried employees that earn very large salaries, such as investment bankers and corporate attorneys, and in employees from vulnerable populations or in lower wage or lower status occupations, such as recent or undocumented immigrants working in non-skilled service positions. The teachers interviewed were neither, all of whom possessed a bachelor’s degree, at minimum, and were all either U.S. citizens or documented immigrants. Yet even with these advantages most educators discussed the necessity to work unpaid. While some educators disavowed the notion that their employment offer was a gift, most respondents reported feeling a sense of gratitude or goodwill towards the educational institution – at least for a while. Important to stipulate is that an employment offer is not a gift in the sense of a present that is offered to an individual either with or without a reason for doing so. What is happening is that following taking the job offer educators are working unpaid such that this labor meets the criteria for reciprocation, even if the educators aren’t recognizing the initial “gift.” This gives strong evidence of the gift relationship being embedded and misrecognized as a labor relationship. It is this gift relationship that gives a broader, deeper explanation and understanding of the phenomenon of unpaid labor among educators.
The obligation to receive is fulfilled by the educational institution and/or its administration. At the administrative level educators reported both an implicit and explicit expectation that an effective teacher will work as long and as hard as necessary in order to complete their work. The institutional administration receives this unpaid labor with greater or non-existent degrees of recognition or appreciation.

The obligation to receive is also then performed, knowingly or otherwise, by the educators in accepting the offers of employment. Everyday vernacular in the U.S. demonstrates this notion of receiving. “I got three job offers while I was on the market.” “I gave my brother-in-law a job in the shipping department.” “I waited ten days to finally accept my initial job offer.” The English language clearly illustrates the aspect of the gift in labor relationships, even if that seemingly contradicts the perceived American virtue of self-sufficiency.

The final obligation of reciprocation then is manifested in the unpaid labor done by educators to fulfill their perceived expectations of what it means to be a “good” teacher and to give back in response to the educators’ reported feelings of gratitude and goodwill. If they spoke of unpaid labor as a dimension of gift at all, many of the educators interviewed initially conflated working unpaid as giving rather than as reciprocating. Some educators spoke of working unpaid because they wanted to be the kind of teacher that they’d had in their own lives, or that they’d wished they’d had. They spoke of how deserving most of the kids were of their very best efforts, even if that means they were working into the evening and on the weekends. They spoke of how there was just so much to get done and working unpaid was the only way to complete their obligations, which they did feel obliged to do in order to identify as a professional and effective educator.
But educators also spoke of gratitude and goodwill that they felt towards the school or department or university that hired them. Many talked about the difficulty they experienced on the job market and how fortunate they felt to have received a job offer. Every educator interviewed believed that they had earned their position and that the offer itself was not a gift, or, if it was, not an unwarranted one. Fewer respondents explicitly recognized or discussed the multitude of factors that influenced their being hired. For most, the academic job market is arduous with vacant positions each receiving hundreds of applications from an individuals who meet the minimum qualifications for the job. From speaking with the respondents it was reasonable to conclude that regardless of their specific and appropriate credentials, there were other less tangible factors that contributed to their eventual hiring, whether it was a positive interview or campus visit, a well-received job talk or sample lecture, or just the fleeting ephemerion of giving a good “vibe” to the search committee or administration, many educators perceived another variable or factor in play that may have contributed to their hiring. None of this is to dismiss each and every educator’s suitability and qualifications for the position, but in the face of such competition, it is impossible to perfectly describe how and why an applicant was selected. Given this uncertainty, the fact that most educators felt some sense of gratitude or goodwill toward their hiring institutions is unsurprising. It is perhaps even less surprising that as a result of such goodwill, educators are inclined to reciprocate a measure of that gratitude – at least for a while. Most did so by working unpaid, which satisfied both the obligation to reciprocate the job offer which they had been “given” as well as to fulfill all of the expectations and responsibilities, explicit or implicit, that allow the respondents to consider themselves dedicated and professional educators.
The empirical findings provided important data on the relatively unexamined phenomenon of unpaid labor within a paid educational occupation. While unpaid labor has been extensively researched in domestic settings, there is comparatively little in wage labor settings. Although it is well-known anecdotally that teachers work long hours during the school year, there was little public or media attention regarding just how much unpaid work occurs during their summer “vacation” months as well. Educators were often split into three groups in their perception and recognition of unpaid labor. One group was very much aware of the hours that they were putting in with no financial remuneration. For some respondents this came across as cynicism and a weary resignation about the poor possibility of the system changing for the better anytime soon. The other group often did not outwardly recognize that the work they performed outside of the school day or over and above forty hours weekly was unpaid at all. These individuals simply considered it part of the job and, while not generally pleased to be working so many additional hours, did the work in order to fulfill their perceptions of their professional obligations. Many of these respondents said that they thought most of their peers were working similar hours and those that were not they usually deemed less dedicated or allowed for the pervasiveness of competing obligations of family and children. The third group was the most numerous, composed of those educators who recognized they were working unpaid, often up to thirty or more additional hours each week, but did so earnestly out of an avowed dedication to their students and to their profession. For these educators, even though they outwardly claimed that they’d prefer to have to work fewer hours, they wanted to give back to the students. Many educators in this group spoke of having dedicated teachers during their own schooling and wanted to be that person for their own students.
If educational labor, especially unpaid labor, were examined through more traditional lenses of Marxist, classical or neoclassical economics, then a great breadth of nuance would be lost. Looking at educators’ unpaid work only as a labor relationship of inherent inequality between employer and employee would explain some measure of the unpaid labor done by educators. The difficult job market, particularly in higher education, would also clarify a part of why educators are willing to go so far above and beyond their contracted workdays in order to meet their professional obligations. It is the use of gift as an analytical lens that has uncovered a much richer and more nuanced explanation of unpaid labor by educators.

Many of the educators interviewed, rather than consider the work they perform outside the school day or in excess of their contracted hours as unpaid, preferred to instead classify it as low-paid. There may be multiple explanations for this. One interpretation is that when one’s labor is appropriated with no payment whatsoever, the depictions of exploitation are fairly explicit and difficult to deny even for the most starry-eyed new educator. To most people’s minds, the workers who are forced to labor without pay are those from vulnerable populations or who work in lower-status occupations. The more common media accounts of labor exploitation ordinarily concern immigrant or minority populations with disadvantaged backgrounds such that they are powerless to protect themselves from predation. In addition, the occupations most vulnerable to forced unpaid work are usually in the food service or retail industry, especially for those positions that require little education or professional credentials. On the contrary, educators are highly educated professionals working in a field with significantly higher occupational prestige. To admit that one’s labor is being appropriated unpaid requires that educators more closely identify with lower paid and status labor than they find comfortable. As educators have
experienced a general decline in benefits and status and stagnation in their pay, to also accept that they are being coerced to work for free is a step too far.

Many educators chose instead to consider their labor to be low-paid – not unpaid. Educators also invoked an appeal to a professional ethic when discussing the expectations they experienced to work unpaid. They were not members of an exploited proletariat that had been on the losing end of labor negotiations over the most recent years and decades – labor relations so imbalanced that such a fundamental labor dimension as length of working day was not even on the table – but rather they were practitioners of a noble profession that had as its goal the education of young people and the betterment of society. If it required, and institutions and parents expected, five or ten or twenty or more weekly hours of unpaid labor to fulfill their professional obligations, then that is simply what it means to be an educator, and they knew what they were signing up for. Educators used the notion that it was good for the students to rationalize an ever-increasing unpaid labor expectation. However, rather than simply unreflexively accept these labor requirements as intrinsic to education, the fact that educators do more work unpaid partly because of a professional ethic is problematic.

Within the teaching profession in the U.S. there are a number of factors that obscure the recognition and acceptance of being exploited. The good fortune and gratitude that many educators discussed after having been hired is one such factor. As just discussed above, the especially difficult recent and current economic climates coupled with fierce competition for vacant positions – particularly in higher education – lead to educators experiencing a sense of gratitude for the “gift” of their employment, for obtaining a job in their field, for being able to utilize their educational and employment backgrounds, and for the opportunity to mold young people and to make the world a better place. All of these factors led to situations in which
educators generally experienced senses of good fortune and gratitude. Even for those few educators who specifically denied feeling a dimension of gratitude directed toward their employing institution, the educators interviewed were still pleased to be working in their field. The perceived obligation to reciprocate that which they’d been given is a deeply embedded social structure. Those educators claiming no gratitude toward the institution were obliged all the same to reciprocate, preferring instead to consider themselves going above and beyond for their students. In so doing they ignore the fact that to work unpaid to benefit the students is to benefit the institution as well. Any unpaid labor done to create a better learning environment for the students and to positively contribute to their educational outcomes is ultimately to the best interests of the institution.

Gratitude was observed to generally decrease over time. Upon their initial hiring, educators experienced their greatest senses of gratitude and, consequently, the strongest impetuses to reciprocate through unpaid labor. However, over the course of their employment, educators would fall increasingly victim to a series of structural inadequacies and deficiencies and experience a series of degradations that make it difficult for the educator to reciprocate. The obligation and expectation to reciprocate still persists, but the day-to-day frustrations and inequities begin to take their tolls.

In an effort to maintain a positive educational outlook, educators invoke an appeal to a sense of professionalism. Educators hold tightly to their increasingly problematized professional ethic that emphasizes the importance of providing a high quality education to each and every student, regardless of the inherent difficulty. This professional ethic holds up education as a noble profession, for which many, if not most, educators are endeavoring to better the world through educating the future generations. However, as Hunt and Carroll (2003) have shown,
professionalism has its limits. Within five years, over half of all new educators in urban schools will have left the profession. Even more will be suffering from burnout and decreased energy and excitement. The gift as the lens through which unpaid labor is studied also offers insights into demystifying professionalism.

Through the educational system’s structural deficiencies and educators’ increasing degradations, the gift becomes essentially poisoned. Even when some educators are unable or unwilling to consider themselves to be exploited, they do get disenchanted. What amounts to a poisoned gift makes it difficult for educators to reciprocate unpaid labor. As gratitude wanes, predominantly because of the poisoned gift and its systemic hindrances and obstacles coupled with degradations experienced by educators, they are less and less likely to reciprocate unpaid labor. An ethic of professionalism is often invoked as an emergency measure to try to stem the tide of increased frustration and discontent, but with the gift poisoned and educational professionalism weakened as a result of the deficiencies in the educational system itself, teachers – especially new teachers – are burning out and leaving the profession in high numbers.

The implications of this research regarding potential educational institutional policy influence as well as influence in educational collective bargaining are promising. The burnout and attrition of teachers in urban schools within five years comes at considerable cost to both the students, when they have an ever-changing crop of new, inexperienced, and over-burdened teachers, and to the educational institutions, having to expend additional resources and administrative oversight in hiring new teachers.

In higher education the use of adjunct labor has exploded in recent years. At the public universities in New York City, over half of students (Aronowitz 1998) are routinely taught by contingent and adjunct instructors; at the city’s community colleges the figure is closer to 60%.
While most adjunct instructors are dedicated and knowledgeable instructors, there is more to the professor-student relationship than just classroom instruction. Students often seek out professors for help in course advising, in navigating the bureaucracy of the college or university, and in writing letters of recommendation for future graduate work or employment. These non-classroom tasks are much better suited to, often only able to be performed by, full-time faculty members. As these full-time professors are declining in numbers, so are students’ educational advantages.

For those academics who are able to obtain a tenure-track position at a college or university the job satisfaction is usually fairly high. Some more senior faculty members have discussed how the positions have decreased in benefits and increased in research and publication requirements in the last couple of decades. One newly-minted tenured associate professor, in addition to discussing her pleasure at getting tenure, lamented that her publication record and grant awards far outstripped nearly all of the most senior faculty in the department and that some of them were still critical of her productivity. The extreme necessity for publication has significantly intensified over time, which has required a commensurate increase in labor spent pursuing those tenure and promotion requirements with no corresponding increase in salary, save for periodic cost-of-living increases. For a great number of faculty members, they have lived through a period of decreasing financial benefits coupled with an increase in occupational expectations and requirements.

This project has provided a firm foundation upon which I envision other additional research agendas to be supported. The ethic of professionalism coupled with many educators’ aversion to identifying as exploited would benefit from a more focused analysis into that relationship in order to more completely deconstruct the notion of professionalism. The need that
many educators seemed to discuss regarding to aspiring to a calling or a higher purpose also merits increased attention. Many educators offered the statement that they went into education to save or change the world, but always unsaid was saving the world from what or changing the world to what. Educators offer the hint that their goal is to stave off barbarism or incivility, and it would be interesting to contrast educators’ purported efforts in that vein with many of the other functions of education in so far as it contributes to the reproduction of the capitalist status quo.

In order to more thoroughly interrogate the concepts of gift, gratitude and professionalism it would also be useful to interview former teachers in addition to current teachers. It seems that the spaces between former and current teachers is where the notion of gratitude and reciprocation of unpaid labor may be the most explicit. It may also prove useful to interview educators in other geographic locations as well in order to ascertain that my data and conclusions are not only generalizeable to educators in the New York City area. My sample included several educators located outside of New York City, with no significant differences in the data collected between them, but a larger sample size would only contribute to a clearer picture.

Nearly all of the educators and their experiences fit the model of misrecognition of labor relationship as gift relationship, with all of the consequent obligations to give, receive and reciprocate. However, the full-time faculty in higher education generally experienced fewer negative consequences resulting from the structural deficiencies and systemic inequities that served to poison the gift for elementary and secondary school teachers as well as for adjunct instructors. The increased freedom to allocate their occupational duties as they preferred over the course of the workweek often mitigated the performance of unpaid labor. As professors were able to work around other obligations and appointments, their perceptions of unpaid labor were
less realized. In addition, full-time professors were even more likely than elementary and secondary teachers and adjunct instructors to not consider themselves to be unpaid. This was not the case for all full-time faculty, and one might make the interesting argument that it was exactly this ease of concealment of unpaid labor that makes it all the more insidious among professors in higher education. In any project going forward, it may prove fruitful to investigate educators in elementary and primary schools separately from faculty members in higher education. In addition, future studies may be improved by distinguishing between educators teaching in institutions with smaller numbers of students versus those educators teaching in significantly larger institutions, e.g. high school teachers in a school with a few hundred students likely experience different issues than a high school teacher in a school with several thousand students. This potential for variation should be clarified.

Employees working unpaid is a common enough phenomenon in U.S. society, but the unpaid work done by educators is particularly significant both in its intensity – with several respondents working over seventy hours per week and all working more than forty – and its potentially detrimental consequences to the educators themselves, the students, and the educational institutions. The inherent inequality between employers and employees can explain a small measure of unpaid labor, but it doesn’t explain how so many unpaid hours can be elicited, nor does it explain the multiple motivations and rationalizations that are offered up by educators when asked about why they work as much and as hard as they do. The gift and its embeddedness in contemporary labor relationships unearths a significantly more complex understanding of the phenomenon.

This elaboration on the untheorized dimension of the gift relationship that yields profitable data and insight in examining unpaid labor should also prove to be useful in analyzing
other fields besides that of education. The gift and the gift relationship is a total social phenomenon; it informs and influences all aspects of every type of society. This research supports my assertion that the gift is a significant presence still in capitalist and post-industrial societies. In further research I will build on this foundation to demonstrate a misrecognized facet of the gift relationship is inherent in modern capitalism rather than relegated to being only of interest in more primitive societies. While investigation of gift and the ethic of professionalism in higher education could easily constitute a research agenda spanning the next several years, I would also argue that use of the gift as a category of analysis would continue to uncover greater depth of data that had previously remained hidden across a variety of research sites. As an integral component across societies, the gift has much to show us about all aspects of human interaction.
Appendix I: Face-to-Face/Telephone Interview Questions

Question: Do you have an employment contract that stipulates the hours at which you are to be at the school/university working?

Question: Do you have an employment contract that stipulates a certain number of required hours of work per week (or other pay period)?

Question: Are you a salaried or an hourly employee?

Question: Is your position exempt or non-exempt with regard to paid overtime?

Question: How many hours per week are contact hours, i.e. hours that are spent actively teaching?

Question: How many hours are spent at the school/university where you are available to meet with students?

Question: How many hours do you spend each week developing curricula and writing lesson plans/assignments/quizzes/exams?

Question: How many hours do you spend each week grading assignments/quizzes/exams?

Question: Where do you do most of your grading? At school? At school during off/non-work hours? At home?

Question: Do you think that any of the work you perform in a professional capacity is unpaid?

Question: If so, what is it about that work that is different than other work you perform that is paid? The type of work? The setting in which it is done?

Question: How much and what type work (if any) do you perform during the summer and other school holidays?

Question: What is your opinion regarding the work that you perform from home? during non-work hours?

Question: Would you say you perform less, as much, or more work from home that your colleagues?

Question: What motivates you to perform unpaid work from home? Necessity to get everything finished? Perception that other educators are putting in hours working from home?
Question: If you perform unpaid work, do you consider that a type of altruism, of charitable giving? Do you consider it a form of giving back to the community? Is it simply part of what it means to be an educator?

Question: Do you think workers in non-education fields perform a comparable amount of unpaid labor? Please explain the reasons why you hold that opinion.

Question: Do you consider teaching a “9-5” type of job?

Question: Do you think that one has a “calling” to be a teacher? If so, is it part of that Calling, much like for the clergy, to be significantly available and/or working during non-work hours?

Question: If you didn’t perform unpaid work during your off hours, would you be able to meet all of your occupational requirements and obligations?

Question: Do you feel that the amount of unpaid work you perform - the effort you make - is being observed, recognized, and/or evaluated by the institutional administration?

Question: Is performing some unpaid labor simply part of what it means to be an employee?

Question: Was the necessity of working unpaid/from home/when parents are available discussed as a part of your curriculum in College/Graduate School? If yes, how so? To what extent?

Question: Has your attitude toward unpaid labor changed over time? Have you grown to resent that time required more? Or has it seemed less of an imposition as time has passed?

Question: If you perform unpaid labor, do you think that doing so prevents you from wanting/being able to do volunteer work in your community?

Question: Does performing unpaid labor ever negatively impact your non-working life? Does time with family or friends suffer or come in second to outstanding unpaid work? Every now and then? Sometimes? Frequently? All the time?

Question: Was it difficult for you to obtain your current position?

Question: After receiving an offer of employment did you feel a sense of gratitude or good fortune? To the institution? To your department? To the individual responsible for hiring you?

Question: Do you think that sense of gratitude or good fortune may have contributed to motivating you to work unpaid?
Question: Why do you think it is that many occupations that are often described as “callings,” e.g. nurses, clergy, police officers, fire fighters, are often lesser-paid compared to occupations in more corporate or financial fields?

Question: If you worked in another occupation besides education, do you recall ever performing unpaid work? Working through a lunch/meal break? Working late off the clock? Coming in to work on a day off without clocking in?
Appendix II: Respondent Questionnaire

1. What is your gender?
   - □ Female
   - □ Male
   - □ In Transition
   - □ Self Identify ___________________
   - □ Other: ________________________

2. Please specify your ethnicity
   - □ Hispanic or Latino
   - □ Not Hispanic or Latino

3. Please specify your race
   - □ American Indian or Alaska Native
   - □ Asian
   - □ Black or African American
   - □ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
   - □ White

4. What was your age at your last birthday? __________________

5. What is your sexual orientation?
   - □ Primarily Heterosexual
   - □ Primarily Bisexual
   - □ Primarily Homosexual
   - □ Other:
6. **What is your marital status?**
   - [ ] In Relationship but living apart
   - [ ] Living Together
   - [ ] Married
   - [ ] Divorced
   - [ ] Separated
   - [ ] Widowed
   - [ ] Single, Never Married

7. **What is your Religious affiliation?**
   - [ ] None
   - [ ] Agnostic
   - [ ] Atheist
   - [ ] Christian/Catholic
   - [ ] Christian/Non-Catholic
   - [ ] Jewish
   - [ ] Muslim
   - [ ] Other: ________________________________________

8. **How often do you attend religious services?**
   - [ ] Never
   - [ ] Less than once per year
   - [ ] A few time per year
   - [ ] Less than once per month
   - [ ] Once per month
   - [ ] A few times per month
   - [ ] Once per week
   - [ ] A few times per week
   - [ ] Daily
9. **What is your political orientation?**
   - □ Very Conservative
   - □ Conservative
   - □ Moderate
   - □ Liberal
   - □ Very Liberal

10. **Where were you born?**
    - □ United States
    - □ Outside the United States, please specify country:
      ______________________________

11. **How long have you been living in the United States?**
    - □ Less than 9 years
    - □ 9-19 years
    - □ 20-29 years
    - □ 30-39 years
    - □ More than 40 years
    - □ All my life

12. **What kind of area where you raised in?**
    - □ Rural
    - □ Small Town, Rural
    - □ Small Town or City
    - □ Suburban
    - □ Urban

13. **Do you own or rent your home?**
    - □ Own
    - □ Rent
    - □ Other: □
14. **How many people, including yourself, are there in your household?**
   - □ 1
   - □ 2
   - □ 3
   - □ 4
   - □ 5
   - □ 6
   - □ 7
   - □ 8 or more

15. **How many children under 16 live in your household?**
   - □ 0
   - □ 1
   - □ 2
   - □ 3
   - □ 4
   - □ 5 or more

16. **What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? If currently enrolled, mark the previous grade or highest degree received.**
   - □ 1 or more years of college, no degree
   - □ Associate degree (for example: AA, AS)
   - □ Bachelor's degree (for example: BA, AB, BS)
   - □ Master's degree (for example: MA, MS, MEng, MEd, MSW, MBA)
   - □ Doctorate degree (for example: PhD, EdD)
   - □ Professional degree (for example: MD, DDS, DVM, LLB, JD)
17. What is your total household income?
- [ ] Less than $10,000
- [ ] $10,000 to $19,999
- [ ] $20,000 to $29,999
- [ ] $30,000 to $39,999
- [ ] $40,000 to $49,999
- [ ] $50,000 to $59,999
- [ ] $60,000 to $69,999
- [ ] $70,000 to $79,999
- [ ] $80,000 to $89,999
- [ ] $90,000 to $99,999
- [ ] $100,000 to $149,999
- [ ] $150,000 or more

18. What is your employment status?
Are you currently...?
- [ ] Employed for wages Part-Time
- [ ] Employed for wages Full-Time
- [ ] Self-employed
- [ ] Out of work and looking for work
- [ ] Out of work but not currently looking for work
- [ ] On a paid family leave
- [ ] On an unpaid family leave

19. Which of the following best describes your main job?
- [ ] Full-time, all year round [Note: Full-time teachers & professors should check this response]
- [ ] Part-time, all year round
- [ ] Temporary
- [ ] Seasonal or part year
- [ ] Contract or on call
- [ ] Do not know
20. **For what type of educational institution are you currently employed?**
- [ ] Public Primary School
- [ ] Parochial Primary School
- [ ] Private Primary School
- [ ] Public Secondary School
- [ ] Parochial Secondary School
- [ ] Private Secondary School
- [ ] Public 2-Year College or University
- [ ] Parochial 2-Year College or University
- [ ] Private 2-Year College or University
- [ ] Public 4-Year College or University
- [ ] Parochial 4-Year College or University
- [ ] Private 4-Year College or University

21. **How many weeks did you work in the past 12 months?**
   Please include paid vacation in the total weeks worked.
- [ ] None
- [ ] 1-9
- [ ] 10-19
- [ ] 20-29
- [ ] 30-39
- [ ] 40-49
- [ ] 50 or more

22. **Are you an hourly or a salaried employee?**
- [ ] Hourly
- [ ] Salary
- [ ] Not employed
23. **How many hours do you work per week?**
   - [ ] None
   - [ ] 1-9
   - [ ] 10-19
   - [ ] 20-29
   - [ ] 30-39
   - [ ] 40
   - [ ] 41-49
   - [ ] 50-59
   - [ ] 60-69
   - [ ] More than 70

24. **If you work more than 40 hours per week, are you paid overtime?**
   - [ ] Yes
   - [ ] No

25. **Do you clock-in when arriving to work and clock-out when leaving?**
   - [ ] Yes
   - [ ] No

26. **Are there specified hours of the day in which you are expected to be at work?**
   - Example: From 8AM to 4PM, regardless of specific teaching times
   - [ ] Yes, Please indicate hours: ____________ AM / PM to ____________ AM / PM
   - [ ] No
Bibliography


