Abstract

This ethnography is a story of perceived marginalization and silencing due to self-identification on a liberal arts campus. Ironically, it is a social group that many often place in the position of “oppressors,” but these people can also imagine themselves at the blunt end of some sort of power relationship. In this ethnography I examine the lived experience of conservatives on a small liberal arts college campus. I intentionally expand on the traditionally leftist notion of “Cultural Hegemony” to make sense of a conservative experience. Throughout the ethnography I dig deeper into what my informants believe to be the mechanisms of power on campus; Common Hour (a weekly speech given on campus), in class interactions, out of class interactions, the protest tree, and the 2016 election. Each gets at a part of the conservative experience on campus, one where they believe themselves to be at the blunt end of an encompassing liberal power apparatus. This ethnography, I hope, will shed light on the somewhat unheard experience of conservatives on college campuses as well as bring to light the extent of the victimhood culture in colleges today.
Right or Wrong: The Marginalization of Conservative Thought on a Liberal Arts Campus

-Zack Bradley
**Introduction**

The 2016 Presidential election has arguably been one of the most polarizing political events in the modern political era. Ideology is increasingly making its way into our daily social interactions. Increased polarization of Washington has begun to trickle down through society, leaving little to no chance for healthy and open dialogue. Naturally, as the anthropologist, I wanted to find a way into this clash of ideologies to better understand it in a humanistic manner. The research question I wanted to understand was... “Given the national context and polarization, what is the lived experience of conservatives on Franklin and Marshall’s campus?” In conducting this research, I set out to follow an ethnographic method that harkens back to the traditions of Weber and Geertz, one that tries to get into the minds of my informants by allowing their experiences to produce an anthropological result of thick description. This is a study of perception, one rooted in restoring legitimacy to the claims of my informants in a way that breaks the stereotypes that we often assign to them. The upshot of this thesis is not to test the views of my informants in order to judge them empirically right or wrong, but rather to ask about their lived experience.

I decided to narrow the scope of my research to the Franklin and Marshall “culture” made up of its institutions, students, faculty, and staff. As Nicole Hoover, formerly a faculty liaison of F&M Votes puts it, “There are clearly a lot fewer Republicans than Democrats on our campus.” That being said, it must be pointed out that a liberal arts college like Franklin and Marshall does not necessarily reflect the make up of our nation culturally or ideologically. However, this is precisely what makes this an interesting social dynamic worth looking into. My informants believe the majority
ideology silencing them is comprised of liberals and that they, the conservatives, make up the silenced minority ideology. At the same time, liberal groups tend to imagine a dynamic where the same socially constructed categories exist but where the roles are reversed.

It is important to note that when looking at liberals versus conservatives neither is a part of some homogenous group, but rather represented by numerous nuances. In this study, I am interested in listening to the experiences of all people who self-identified as conservative to see whether certain perceptions of the political environment on campus transcended these nuances. This led me to interviewing religious conservatives, pro-Trump conservatives, anybody but Trump conservatives, social conservatives, and fiscal conservatives. They are in fact conservative in different ways and don’t agree on everything, but nonetheless self-identify as conservatives. Many of my informants seemed still to be in the process of self-definition. For this reason, I believe it would be detrimental to my study if I narrowed in on a particular cohort of conservatives, especially when many of my informants were unable to assign themselves to a specific sect of conservatism. The issue is that we typically do not preserve the nuances of political groups. This is one of the distinct problems that my informants have on campus, one where these distinctions are not maintained and when one slice of conservatism is inappropriately lumped with others. In this ethnography I will attempt to describe the experience of conservative students on campus. Therefore, I will focus on breaking apart the stereotypes of their ideology and the grouping of them by outgroups. If I were doing a study on a similar situation about a liberal group of
students, I would focus on uncovering the nuances in liberalism, but that is not the objective of this study. Throughout the ethnography, many of my informants do exactly what they get so aggravated about. That is, they generalize a nuanced group of people in how they talk about liberals. I completely understand that liberals on campus are not homogenous, but it is still important to describe them in this light throughout this study because that is how my informants do.

To better understand the relationship between the liberal and conservative ideologies on liberal arts campuses, it is important to understand my informants’ perceived notion of cultural hegemony. It is also important to acknowledge that I will use theory of both Gramsci and Williams whose conceptions of hegemony are tied to class in the Marxian sense. For this reason, I intend on using a more expansive conception of hegemony with the use of ideology but not necessarily bound in class, that still fits into the definitions laid out by these Marxist theorists. There is ideological hegemony in other abstractions like the ideological groups of “liberals” and “conservatives” on our campus. Gramsci’s is a particularly Marxist version of hegemony; that doesn’t mean that that’s the only instance of it. This left me to use the definitions laid out by these Marxist theorist nonetheless, because I believe they are still valuable and theoretically useful when they are applied to different scopes not bound in class. As long as we acknowledge that the ideological majority and minority on Franklin and Marshall’s campus are not bound in class, the descriptions of Gramsci and Williams are extremely helpful in creating a starting point in describing what a cultural hegemony is, in which I will then expand to better fit the experiences of my informants.
Throughout this ethnography, I will refer to the ideological hegemony on campus. This hegemony is not a thing of nature, but rather bound in my informants’ realities. In trying to make sense of their experiences on campus, I am talking about something that is felt by the informants, not something that would necessarily be felt by those who would not constitute my informants. In this way, it is their reality and important in that they actually believe it to be true. At the end of the day, I am interested in understanding the way that hegemony is felt by my informants.

In this ethnography, I explore the social matrix of a perceived cultural hegemony, through the experience of conservative students who live out their college years in an environment that they believe has assumed a collective ideology contradicting their own. This acceptance of being the “minority” ideology has many lasting implications on conservatives’ ability to participate in the institutions of the college. In this paper, I will try to paint the picture of how my informants perceive the system of Franklin and Marshall College to be set up against conservative students, where they are put at a disadvantage in their ability to interact with others in many different social and political realms. I will unpack the effects of these power dynamics throughout this ethnography.

This dynamic between liberal and conservative students on Franklin and Marshall’s campus creates a problematic social environment for those in the minority social group just as any minority group in relation to a dominant and more energized majority group. As one of my informants, “John,” stated “what would the point be of us trying to stand up for our political beliefs if most of the campus disagrees with us.” Through this perspective it becomes easier to understand the complaints of conservative students on campus. The campus where they live and learn, to them, is driven by a single-
track liberal mindset. Therefore, the perceived hegemonic majority ideology on campus often times shapes the experiences of conservative students. The ways in which the liberal hegemony is visible and active on campus force many conservative students to adapt as not to be at the judged by those who are on the left of the political spectrum. I want to point out that the “liberal hegemony” is not in itself something, but rather an abstract concept I employ to better synthetically group and make sense of liberal processes acting out on campus whether that be in institutional or social forms. My notion of “liberal hegemony” is best understood as a Weberian “ideal type.” In other words, liberal hegemony is not from nature itself, but rather a model or lens for understanding and making sense of complex phenomena, a complex phenomenon that is felt and negotiated by my informants. It is then the responsibility of the reader to use this “ideal type” as a tool for understanding self-identified conservative students’ conceptualization of Franklin and Marshall’s campus, and also not to reify it as some concrete measurable thing.

Hegemony, as Gramsci points out, is “the spontaneous consent given by the masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group” (Lears, 1985). In other words, to understand Gramsci’s notion of hegemony, one must acknowledge the dominance associated with it. To achieve a dominant culture in a given society, Gramsci argues that the people must “monopolize the instruments of coercion” (Lears, 1985). Similarly, Raymond Williams argues that the concept of hegemony, “has a crucial role: that of explaining the dominance of particular class interests” (Higgins, 1983). As with Gramsci, Williams acknowledges that dominance of class, or group, interests defines hegemony. As I pointed out earlier, the
ideological hegemony felt by my informants is not one bound in ideology in relation to class, but rather bound in ideology in relation to politics. Through the perspective of conservative students, the liberal ideology on campus has much more social power and status than they do. One of my informants, “Bill” stated “the liberal ideology is given the platform to speak out more often than we are.” If we look at the previous quote by Raymond Williams, we can see how for my informants, a more expansive definition of cultural hegemony that focuses on the relationship between ideologies on campus instead of class based relationships, still shows it has a “crucial role: that of explaining the dominance of particular ideological, not necessarily class, interests” (Higgins, 1983). In common hour, in the classroom, and on campus, my informants truly believe that the ideological hegemony has assumed control over these spheres of life to the point where preferential treatment exists for one political group and not the other. I argue that the liberal ideology is a social group not bound in hierarchies of wealth or material disparities, but one essential to ideology in relation to politics and party in the Weberian sense. We can see the liberal ideology on campus interacting with the conservative one in parallel ways to how the wealthier and more powerful classes work in relation to the poorer and less powerful. In both circumstances those who are on top of the hierarchy carry out their lives in ways that implicitly and explicitly silence or marginalize those in the lower echelons of the hierarchy. For this reason, I believe that it is appropriate to use the concept of hegemony to understand and make sense of the perceived liberal ideological hegemony on Franklin and Marshall’s campus. Conservatives believe to be conducting their daily lives within the context of this hegemony. Williams describes that, “hegemony is the central, effective, and dominant system of meaning and values, which
are not merely abstracted but are organized and lived” (Higgins, 1983). In other words, the hegemonic force is not an entity in itself but a process of ongoing interactions and experiences constructed from the viewpoint of the conservatives through their interactions on campus.

In this study, I aim at understanding the lived experiences of my informants, which leads me to adopting a Weberian theoretical framework. The Marxist tradition, which of course includes Gramsci and Williams, tends to describe power relations as a one way causal arrow, or something imposed by the powerful. The Weberian tradition looks at the way power is exercised, and is very interested in how power is felt by the powerless (Gerth and Mills, 1958). My study relies more on the Weberian tradition because I aim to privilege the experience of those who feel as though they are the objects of power. The Weberian tradition pushes to understand the flip side of power, which it ultimately argues is legitimacy. (Gerth and Mills, 1958). In doing this, it argues that all power is not based in class but also other things like status and party (Weber, 1958). In short, I was drawn to the Weberian tradition because it recognizes the importance of studying how people feel power executed on them (Gerth and Mills, 1958). This is in a sense the essence of this ethnography, to study and make sense of the relationship between my informants and the set of perceived power apparatus they believe to conduct their lives on campus within.

While Gramsci’s definitions give us a good starting point at understanding the processes of hegemony, another aspect other than the definition’s reliance on class as the engine of power relations that fell short was his inability to acknowledge subaltern agency within a hegemonic context. In the instance of Conservatives at Franklin and
Marshall College, a lot of the time that Hegemony is not about false consciousness. Instead, those who are the objects of Hegemonic forces may be very conscious and even confront the hegemony in small unnoticed ways. Scholars like James Scott argue that people at the blunt end of power are not as mystified and oblivious as earlier Marxist scholars may have thought, and that they have some degree of agency. I believe that James Scott is really an addition to Gramsci in a more ethnographic and Weberian manner. In other words, Scott comes from a tradition that is both Marxian and Weberian where he writes a lot about power, but he also writes a lot about those who are the objects of power.

Scott was very driven to understand how people within circumscribed circumstances act. His term, “weapons of the weak,” very much describes subtle and active resistance strategies of marginalized groups in response to hegemonic forces. He points out that while “Everyday forms of resistance make no headlines, Just as millions of anthozoan polyps create, willy-nilly, a coral reef, so do thousands upon thousands of individual acts of insubordination and evasion create a political or economic barrier reef of their own” (Scott 1985). Scott explains how, “There is rarely any dramatic confrontation, any moment that is particularly newsworthy” (Scott 1985). For him, “The nature of the acts themselves and the self-interested muteness of the antagonists thus conspire to create a kind of complicit silence that all but expunges everyday forms of resistance from the historical record” (Scott 1985). As we can see, while Scott is directing his attention to the “Weapons of the Weak,” he never forgets that they are indeed the weak. In other words, while they do confront their suppressors, they don’t have the capacity to really make any drastic changes.
I believe that the cultural hegemony on campus is one that acts in all of the same ways that Gramsci points out, by using the instruments of coercion to create dominance and drive social and political forces in a particular way within a given society. As I stated before, the engine for these processes are not class-based relations but ideological relations in regards to this differences in understandings of value and moral structures that students have. In every cultural hegemony, there are still those who make up the minority group, or the group that doesn’t necessarily fit into the social or demographic make-up of the majority. This ideological hegemony is not unnoticed by those who are constrained by it but are very much acknowledge and negotiated.

It is easy to see those who make up the Liberal Hegemony as intentionally trying to push conservative students into the shadows. Instead it is important to dig deeper than that and understand these individuals’ reactions as constantly constrained by the perceived power of the liberal hegemony. This means that many liberals are non-intentionally generating the silencing of Conservative students. There is much more than just political difference going on here, and I hope to lay out some of the threads of these relationships in the rest of this study.

This is exactly the reason why I decided to look deeper into the experience of conservatives on our campus. I have heard many conversations surrounding the issue, and never realized how widespread the feeling of marginalization and silencing on college campuses is for so many students. I narrowed my scope to Franklin and Marshall’s campus so I could gain insight of the broader problem on a very local scale. I strive not to make “high rock” claims on all of college campuses but rather display what it means to be a conservative on Franklin and Marshall’s campus.
Methodology

In order to do an ethnography on political material, I had to maintain as close of an objective state of relativity to my informants as I possibly could, while also not crossing the line into advocacy. Several times throughout my research, administrators and Franklin and Marshall staff members have insisted I speak up about this issue so as to advocate for my informants. In order to be the best ethnographer I could, I resisted their many requests. Throughout the ethnographic study I interviewed 15 different informants. The interviews varied in their length with some going on for an hour and a half, and others going for just 5 to 10 minutes. Most of my interviews would end with my informants telling me about other people they knew who would have a lot to say about certain issues or the project in general. This drove my research in many different directions. While my focus was on the conservative student experience, my goal in this study is not to study solely the student but his/her negotiation of political processes in the face of a perceived hegemony, which led me to interviewing the colleges leaders of student social and political life. My informants were diverse in gender, class, and age, which aided me in seeing a trend that transcended the surface level differences among them. While most of my quotes came from interviews, there was definitely participant observation in the fact that I would try to pay attention to certain comments from conservatives in class, out of class, and when with friends, to see both who to interview, and also spheres of life on campus were hot button issues.
After conducting and analyzing my field research, I realized that all of my informants honed in on what I thought to be five similar themes … in class, out of class, the protest tree, common hour, and the 2016 election. Each of these spaces are a reasonable division of the mechanisms of power as my informants see it. In other words, these are the ways that I was guided by my informants to view their perceived power structures on campus. These power relations create and co-construct the marginalization and silencing felt by conservatives on campus. Each mechanism of power will make up a part of this study due to the relevance each has to my informant experiences as conservatives on Franklin and Marshall’s campus. No one section or theme is completely mutually exclusive from the other but rather constantly work in tandem with each other to create the conservative’s world on campus.

First, I will discuss some of the experiences my informants have had in the classroom and how the ideology of certain teachers and students has suppressed their ability to speak up. I will then move on to out-of-class experiences where I will dive into how the Franklin and Marshall political and social climate has affected the ability of conservative students to interact in the public eye of the campus. I will then shift gears toward the protest tree, (a space for students to share their political opinions or bring awareness to certain issues) and what it means through the perspective of conservative students, and how they make sense of the messages posted on it. Then I will discuss Common Hour and how the events and speakers convey the liberal leaning ideology of the school and how that constitutes the suppression of conservative views. Lastly, I will touch on the 2016 election of Donald Trump and how that has affected the ability for
conservative students’ ability to be taken seriously and engage in productive dialogue on campus.

**Mechanisms of Power in the Classroom**

“it’s the assumption that anyone can partake in a conversation, when in reality it’s so one sided.”

I decided to begin by sharing the experience of Franklin and Marshall conservative students in the classroom because it is the space where most of the political conversations are being held, and where the actions of professors and classmates leave a lasting impact on the agency of conservative students to share their political views in an equally accepted manner. Each of my informants has his/her own stories about the impact of the hegemonic nature of liberal thought in the classroom, and each is equally informative to my overall research question.

In an interview, Margaret Hazlett, the Dean of the College, explained that Franklin and Marshall should be a place where everyone can share their opinions in a safe and controlled environment. She explained that one of the initiatives of Franklin and Marshall College is “Controversy with Civility.” In other words, to create respectful dialogue between opposing viewpoints in the hope that in the end, it can benefit both parties involved. In doing this we must recognize that we have differences of opinion and acknowledge that the way we conceptualize the world is not the objective truth. Similar to Hazlett’s points, the college website explains that “interactions among classmates with diverse ideas and worldviews requires students to contend with other perspectives.” She believes that we enhance our learning capacity when we challenge our ideas. So if the college initiative in part is to create controversy with civility and to expose students to a
variety of worldviews, why do conservative students argue that the classroom setting is devoid of contending worldviews? Why are conservative students feeling ostracized on our campus? Where is Franklin and Marshall failing to meet expectations of a diversity of thought that it has adopted as an initiative for the college? Why does the majority not acknowledge minority opinions when Dean Hazlett herself stated, “we are hindered when people feel silenced.” These are all questions I attempted to make sense of through the ethnographic method.

Charles Camosy, a journalist for the Washington Post stated, “Higher Education in the United States, after all, is woefully monolithic in its range of worldviews” (Camosy 2017). Of every five liberal college professors there is merely one conservative. (Camosy 2017). This contrasts with the national voting population and creates an isolated culture of left leaning individuals on college campuses, that being the students, professors, and administrators. One of my informants I interviewed “Grace” is currently a senior at Franklin and Marshall. Students like Grace do not agree that Franklin and Marshall is meeting its initiative to expose students to a wide array of worldviews. She stated, “it’s the assumption that anyone can partake in a conversation, when in reality it’s so one sided.” In my view, Grace was able to articulate what my other informants said in a much more eloquent manner. Due to this, she ended up being a key informant for me in conducting my research. I decided to use most of what Grace said in our very long interview in this ethnography. I will end up using more quotes from her than any other informant, not because her answers better fit some sort of predetermined finding, but because she says the same key ideas in more sophisticated terms.
The power dynamic between students and professors is the engine for the silencing of conservative thought in the classrooms. Professors who expose their ideology to their students run the risk of unintentionally alienating conservative perspectives from their classrooms. The problem is that of the professors who do, most are unaware of the effect their political tirades have on the psyches of conservative students. With the end goal of a decent grade in mind, conservatives realize that if they don’t share their opinions in class the professor cannot hold those opinions against them. Grace explained that one of her professors is “blatantly liberal,” and that she would “not feel comfortable sharing her views or sort of arguing against blatant bias.” Another informant “Katie” explained that she feels that there was mainly one opinion that the entire class felt (including the professor)… and that her opinion was different in many ways.” Having strong ties to Christianity, Katie felt as though she couldn’t participate in the class as much as she would like to, in fear of classmates or the professor challenging her beliefs and saying she was wrong. The issue isn’t that her viewpoint would be challenged, but more that she believes a response would not be taken seriously.

Similarly, “John,” a junior at Franklin and Marshall, stated “sometimes when they (other students) say something political and the professor agrees with them, for a conservative it makes you feel standoffish.” Both students acknowledged the power differential between themselves, the students who receive the grades, and their professors, the ones who administers the grades. Grace stated, “We can’t have any challenges to a professor’s perspective.” She made it seem as if attempting to start a dialogue in the classroom for her is a lost cause. Even if it doesn’t emotionally disturb the student, it still marginalizes thoughts, because others don’t want to try to involve
themselves in an uphill battle, leaving conservatives, like Grace, to prioritize keeping their thoughts to themselves over engaging in political debate and risking the professor using it against them.

Camosy also touches directly on the issue at hand for conservatives in many college classrooms in stating, “If anyone disagrees with liberal ideas they risk being marginalized as ignorant, bigoted, fanatical, or some other dismissive label” (Camosy 2017). Labels are one of the most prevalent fears of conservative students and one of the underlying reasons why they feel they cannot share their opinions in class. The list of labels provided by Camosy are sometimes used by liberals on our campus to generalize or group all conservatives. John said that, “the last thing I want to be known as is a racist, and that’s the first thing they would think I am if they found out that I am a conservative.” John explained that he would love to be able to have a healthy dialogue with liberal students so that they could both understand why each other thinks a certain way about certain issues, but he is also doubtful that any encounter would end in a productive result for either side. The very nature of his explanation for not engaging in conversations on campus speaks to how the liberal hegemonic processes on campus silence the conservative world-views from having equal channels of expression.

While they may feel silenced, conservative students still maintain their autonomy by constantly interacting and resisting the liberal hegemony in different ways in the classroom. The silent resistance in the classroom can sometimes involve conservatives exchanging looks. These looks are very much used as “weapons of the weak” in that they are everyday forms of resistance that are subtle and not boisterous enough for non-conservative students to understand but still effective in confronting and resisting the
perceived ideological hegemony. Grace explained that she had a class with two other students who she knew were conservative and that they “would look at each other all the time and be like “this is bullshit” when the professor would say something clearly biased in class.” This way, they can exchange looks of solidarity semi-secretively to display a shared acknowledgment of the teacher’s bias, and the perceived ridiculousness of it. Grace explained that often when they would look at each other they would chuckle. This laughing and making light of the power dynamic, in a way acknowledges and switches power roles for those involved. In other words, they resituate the social dynamic by putting themselves in a more powerful position than the professor who in reality holds the power in the room. It is a repositioning where they become the ones making judgments based on ideology at the expense of the professor who before was the very one they were worried about judging them.

**Mechanisms of Power Tied to Outside of the Class**

“The biggest problem is that we feel that we are the minority here and if you speak up you’re just going be torn to pieces easily”

The conservative interaction with liberal hegemonic processes is not unique to the classroom but also work its way into social events on the campus. This also means that it continues effectively to restrict conservative students from expressing themselves publicly. Grace explained that she was a part of the Republican Club on campus, which has the mission of getting “Republican voices out on campus, and to debate current social issues.” When I asked her why the club is, in a way, unable to achieve its mission she said, “How are we supposed to have any foundation or visibility on campus if people feel they can’t talk about it or express themselves because they would be scrutinized.” She
went on to explain, “The biggest problem is that we feel that we are the minority here and if you speak up you’re just going be torn to pieces easily… They just get aggressive and in your face and don’t want to have a conversation.” This depiction of the dialogue on campus contrasts with the essence of a liberal arts education, which seeks to expose its students to a wide array of viewpoints. A feeling of being shut down in an aggressive manner is counter productive to “controversy with civility” brought up by Dean Hazlett. In talking about interactions outside of class, Grace explained, “It’s not a dialogue it’s a one-way conversation” and also that Franklin and Marshall’s campus is “not an environment conducive to sharing.” Much of this has to do with her understanding that her ideas and perspectives won’t be given the time of day on our campus, because of what she calls, “the aggressive nature of their responses.”

Another more prominent example of how some liberals respond to conservatives on campus can be seen through a story told by another one of my informants, “Jerry.” At an event on campus (the event is not disclosed because it could help to reveal the identity of this individual) Jerry was asked by the faculty member in charge what his thoughts were on a complaint made by a student’s parent about the cheerleaders kneeling during the national anthem. He responded that while he recognizes their right to protest, he also doesn’t agree with the protests taking place during the national anthem, something that holds special value to him.

Another student who was also a part of the conversation began to scream and yell at Jerry. She quickly left the topic of the national anthem and attacked Jerry for being a white heterosexual male. She proclaimed that these characteristics meant he had privilege which in turn makes him silence the protests of African Americans. Jerry explained how
he was also confronted about his political ideology and how his ideology is at fault for suppressing the protests of African Americans because according to this student, “he pushes it on his liberal teammates.” She also quickly drew connecting line from the race of Jerry (Caucasian) to his supposed wealth. She stated, that as a wealthy white male he has to acknowledge his privilege. This especially bothered him since he comes from a middle class family in the middle of Pennsylvania where he attended public school for his entire life. He said this troubled him because to the other student, “just because he was white meant that his parents automatically made more money than her parents.” He continued to say, “that is quite literally profiling someone based off the color of their skin.”

This links with the irony of the liberal hegemony brought up by many of the other informants I interviewed. Jerry explained the root of his argument to be that he came to Franklin and Marshall to get a quality education, and play football, and that if he doesn’t want to fight for social justice as a part of his education it is completely his right not to do that. In other words, she condemned him for not sharing the same world-view and values that she has. The response, for Jerry, was not an attempt to have a civil conversation but rather to try and spite him for not pushing and buying into the liberal orthodoxy. If we take seriously the goals of Franklin and Marshall College laid out by administrators like Dean Hazlett, then interactions like this are particularly dangerous on a Liberal Arts campus. It seems easy to connect the way that this particular student reacted to the perceptions of the liberal ideology on campus in how it may predispose her to see the dominant, or in this case liberal, views as obviously right and that only a bigot could question or think differently about them. In theory, a liberal arts education should have
conditioned this student to try and understand Jerry’s point of view instead of confronting him as if her value-laden morals are the objective truth.

I describe this interaction not to question and challenge the world-view of the student who confronted my informant, Jerry. I rather want to critique the way that this student and many others on campus engage in political and moral discussions on campus with those who think differently. I want to highlight how the effects of the perceived hegemony in most cases, doesn’t allow for civil and mutually benefitting conversations but rather fails to open up the opportunity for acknowledging the subjectivity of their own worldviews.

Just as in the classroom, conservative students feel overshadowed by the liberal orthodoxy on campus. John stated that conservatives feel alienated on campus because, “liberals continue to verbally push their narrative on everyone else.” Grace similarly explained that because of liberals being larger in number and much more vocal on campus, “people would feel that they are going to be judged or not heard when they are explaining why they have taken a conservative perspective.” Grace used an analogy to explain how the boisterous attitude of liberals on our campus silences conservative thought. She said, “Imagine if everyone on campus always wore black hoodies, would you just go wear a red one?” She went on to explain, “When all we see is a one-track mind, you start to feel intimidated about sharing a different perspective.” In other words, the opinions of liberals on campus overshadow conservative opinions to the point where it makes it uncomfortable for conservatives to participate and engage in political conversations.
Many of my informants explained what they thought to be the irony with both the liberal agenda and a Liberal Arts education. Grace stated, “It’s so hypocritical… they want to have an open dialogue… the second anyone else has a voice different than theirs they flip out and don’t want any part of it and they say you’re a horrible person, and that’s the end of the conversation.” Similarly, another informant “Bill,” explained, “Franklin and Marshall talks so much about diversity, and how it wants to foster diversity, but they too often forget and leave behind the diversity of thought.” He continued… “It bugs me because diversity doesn’t only apply to race and ethnicity, it stretches farther than that.” What my informants stressed is, that if you are going to use the notion of being “accepting to all people” as a staple of your college and your ideology, then don’t turn around and ostracize the voice of someone just because they don’t perceive the world the same way you do. Katie explained that “although we are told to speak freely, in reality, on a campus like F&M, people tend to only want to hear the liberal perspective and if you differ from that, you are wrong.”

One of the recurring themes behind my informants’ marginalization on campus is because they have seen high-ranking figures in our college, like the President and the Don of a certain college house, publically state politically biased claims. This institutionalized and legitimized the claims made by conservatives that our institution is biased, and that it isn’t meeting its liberal arts agenda. Dean Hazlett explained that as an institution Franklin and Marshall College cannot be biased. She continued… “If we aren’t meeting that standard as an institution of learning then we are failing short.” Some of the stories shared by my informants would suggest then that Franklin and Marshall to a point is failing at remaining unbiased. This is not to say that administrators like Margaret
Hazlett are at fault in this social dynamic, because of the reclusiveness of many conservative students there is little chance for them to even know that this problem persists.

Grace shared a story about a sorority event that President Porterfield attended and gave a speech at. She stated, “He had the guts to say, “I feel sorry for all of you women; it’s been a very sad and traumatic last four months for all of you and my daughters.” The problem with this statement for Grace was the generalization that all women must have voted for Hillary. She also was bothered that the thought didn’t even cross his mind that there may be a conservative woman in the audience. She said that in this instance she looked around and “even her liberal friends were saying “this is inappropriate.” The main point was, “this is sorority stuff, it has nothing to do with politics… even worse, he’s the president, he is quite literally the face of our institution.” An institution that prides itself in the diversity of thought becomes problematic when the leader is generalizing that there is not diversity of thought among women sorority sisters. Having the man with the most power on campus make political statements legitimizes the hegemonic processes that suppresses conservative thought on the college’s campus. It also undermines the principle that the college will remain an unbiased institution. President Porterfield’s speech at the sorority event isn’t an isolated event. Grace also explained how the Don of her college house sent out an email saying, “come and have a good laugh at Trump making a fool out of himself.” As in the example with President Porterfield, having a person who represents the college in a position of power send a mass email with a slanted bias was troubling for conservative students. It made Grace feel very uncomfortable, and for her, this is supposed to be her living quarters on campus… and he is supposed to “be in a position
where he is there for the moral support of all of his students.” The actions Grace took next support the claim that conservatives aren’t passive in combating their circumstance on campus but that they are constantly finding active ways to resist the ideological hegemony.

Grace sent a message to President Porterfield, explaining her problems with the email and how it was inappropriate for the Don to send that message in a mass email. Dr. Porterfield wrote back, “He didn’t mean anything by it, and that the Don is such a sweet man.” During the interview, Grace argued, “you know damn well if it was the other way around there would be a lot bigger reaction from the administration, but because he matched the common narrative it was ok.” This is Grace’s attempt to show how she believes that if it were a conservative faculty member the circumstances would be different. This may be untrue but speaks to the nature of how informants like Grace see the institution as fundamentally constructed to support liberals and to the detriment of conservatives.

I argue that Dr. Porterfield is not intentionally trying to make students who share a different world-view feel uncomfortable on campus, but rather that he also falls victim to the processes of Groupthink. As Clark McCauley points out in, *Group Dynamics in Janis’s Theory of Groupthink: Backward and Forward*, “the leader of a group suffering from Groupthink is as much a victim as anyone else in the group” (McCauley 1998). In other words, this experience laid out by Grace displays not a directly motivated attack on the ideology of conservatives but possibly a side-effect of Groupthink.

Nicole Hoover, formerly a faculty liaison of F&M Votes, stated that she has a “hard time getting the conservative group to join her in a way the Democrats do.” She
continued to explain that they are “harder to track down, and hold fewer events.” This speaks to the side-effects of the silencing that conservatives believe they face on campus. They are less willing to engage with a political institution on campus because they assume they are biased due to their role as the minority ideology. In feeling as if they have less representation, they are less prone to get involved in a political institution of the college. It speaks to the very nature of their perceived exposure to the campus Ideological Hegemony. Overall, the atmosphere outside of the classroom has many of the same resonating themes as in the classroom, but they are negotiated and made sense of in different ways.

**Mechanisms of Power Tied to the Protest Tree**

“Here’s the thing, it’s not a two sided tree it’s a one sided thing.”

The protest tree is a place on Franklin and Marshall’s campus where students can anonymously put up posters to bring awareness to certain issues. While the protest tree is aimed at providing a platform for the freedom of speech, the essence of it may, for conservatives, act contradictorily to its purpose. Dean Hazlett acknowledges that in light of the 2016 election the protest tree has become “a lightning rod for anti-Trump messages.” This coincides with how Grace explained the protest tree. She stated, “Here’s the thing, it’s not a two sided tree, it’s a one sided thing.” Having predominately liberal messages on it only reinforces my informants’ assumption that the campus has one collective ideology that contradicts the conservatives’. She went on to say, “Honestly, its all so one-sided, and I think the protest tree is just a symbol of the biases on this campus.” In a way, the protest tree institutionalizes the marginalization felt by conservative students. The traditional response from the left I would receive goes along the lines of
“well they can post things up there if they want to.” When asked why conservatives don’t post political messages on the tree, Bill responded, “That’s a liberal thing to do.” This means that for Bill, and John who stated, “you’re not going to see a conservative posting their problems on a tree,” the protest tree is not a medium friendly to conservatives but instead it better fits into the liberal ideological framework. John explained this difference in dealing with problems by stating, “I hate the idea of the protest tree. I just think it is a preposterous way of getting out how you feel.” In other words, he doesn’t understand the quintessential meaning of it as a Liberal on campus would. To him, it just “sounds like a bunch of people whining.” My informants do not see the posts on the tree as effectively helping the causes they talk about, but they rather see it as way for people to be able to complain in a way that they aren’t held responsible for. To many conservatives, it seems like a weaker and ineffective way of dealing with your problems. John stated, “liberals always want to be in your face and push their agenda on you.” I think this speaks directly to the reason why they see it as a liberal space, in how every time they pass by the tree all of the liberal topics are right in their face in the form of big poster boards.

One focus of the protest tree was the language used on it. Grace said that the language was “incredibly aggressive and also ironic.” She honed in on one sign in particular that she said “generalized all white guys in frats as rapists.” To her this was unbelievable. She said, “Half of their platform is about not being generalized yet this tree is one big piece of generalization… If anyone were to post something generalizing Latina women, the school would be up in arms, but because it’s white men it’s ok.” Often times my informants would draw upon these comparisons to make sense of their experience on campus. Most times it escalated the conversation emotionally, which showed how
important these issues were to my informants, and therefore how important it was to understanding them the best I could.

In the end, conservative students are still finding ways to resist these hegemonic processes with silent ideological resistance strategies or “weapons of the weak.” During the writing process of my ethnography, the Republican students covered the protest tree in posters and signs, telling people to come to their meetings, and also arguing conservative political points. Seeing this tree had me reconsidering the use of the protest tree from the conservative perspective. Professor Smith, a professor of Archeology in the Anthropology department stated, “I saw it as a reaction.” After talking with Professor Smith, understanding the republican posts on the tree to be a “response,” led me to understanding it as a way of the conservatives on campus to confront hegemonic processes in a very “liberal space.” I argue that the Republican students are attempting to take a space that they see as quintessentially liberal, and use it to their advantage to confront the Hegemonic processes of the left on Franklin and Marshall’s campus. John stated, “At least someone had the courage to show people that there are actually other students on campus who don’t fit into the collective liberal mindset.” For John and my other informants the Republican posts on the tree were directed at liberals to show them that there actually is a diversity of thought on campus.

After reconsidering how I made sense of the protest tree within the framework of my research, not surprisingly, the Republican Club’s posts on the tree were bombarded with responses from the left. Every sign that the republicans posted had two or three agressive responses from liberal students, saying that they “don’t feel safe in the republican space.” If I had more time to conduct research on this issue, I would love to
know what constituted republican groups on campus as being dangerous? Is it because they don’t think the same way as the person who responded did? Is it because the person who responded is generalizing a group of people she doesn’t agree with based on opinion and not fact based issues? The response speaks to many of the complaints my informants have about their experience confronting hegemonic processes on campus, ones focused on the ironic intolerance of those on the left and how they use their number and institutional advantages to silence conservative thought. The posts by the Republican club were not offensive and did not target any population on campus, they rather attempted to get people to come to their organization’s meeting. Every week there are liberal posts made on the protest tree with no response from their conservative counterpoints, but the minute there is a conservative post, the tree comes alive with comments from those who are “offended” by those who don’t match their narrative. The aggressive responses from the left only further supports the claim that the hegemony on campus is active in silencing thought that doesn’t match their own, which in this case is the conservative thought. The fact that when conservatives attempt to mobilize on campus they are silenced by liberals, speaks to the way in which the perceived liberal hegemony negates the ability for conservatives to participate. While the students who responded to the posts made by the Republican club are for sure the minority among liberal students on campus, it constructs a tangible image of what the liberal hegemony looks like for many of my informants.

**Mechanisms of Power Tied to Common Hour**
“I don’t think that’s constructive dialogue and that’s the antithesis of what we’re trying to do, at least what they say they’re trying to do.”

An institutional aspect of Franklin and Marshall College that serves as a staple of the ideological hegemony on campus is Common Hour. Putting her understanding of Common Hour in her own words, Grace stated, “It is our school’s one form of open dialogue and it’s clearly biased.” This statement left me, the ethnographer, trying to better understand how this institution of inclusion, feels exclusive to her and other conservatives on campus. Grace stated, “from my perspective it’s pretty frustrating because it’s the assumption that everyone can partake in the conversation when in reality if I asked a follow up question that was maybe more conservatively based I would get some nasty looks, and it wouldn’t be accepted.” She and other informants of mine see Common Hour as a congregation of like-minded people who feed off their like-mindedness, and are exposed to no critiques or responses from people who think differently. It is far too intimidating for a conservative student to stand up and ask a conservative question in front of a left leaning audience who hold the social power in the room. John stated, “It’s not a dialogue I would feel comfortable sharing my perspective in.” He continued to state, “I don’t think that’s constructive dialogue and that’s the antithesis of what we’re trying to do, at least what they say they’re trying to do.” In saying, “at least that’s what they say they want to do,” John is acknowledging his disbelief in the fundamental purpose of Common Hour, and also his disbelief that the school legitimately intends on holding constructive dialogue.

Bill explained that the worst part of Common Hour is when “I am forced to go by my classes and every time it’s a topic contradicting my political platform… I sit there
while everyone around me and the speaker are basically talking to each other.” For the conservatives, it is not a space open to challenging ideas, nor is it a space where a conservative speaker would be welcomed. Bill stated, “This school would be up in arms if the Republican Club on campus sponsored an event for a conservative speaker to come… They would find a way to label him/her as a racist, a demagogue, a sexist, or what have you.” From my discussions with conservative students and administrators, they cannot recall a Common Hour event that was sponsored by the Republican Club. While these claims are not facts, but merely speculation, they are real in the sense that it is his reality, and it displays the way conservatives like Bill make sense of the hegemonic ideology on campus. They also are important in understanding the conservative experience, one where there is a distrust in Franklin and Marshall institutions due to a perceived bias.

Liberal and conservative students in one of my first classes of the fall semester were disappointed in the common hour given by President Porterfield. Some of the material that he touched on was very political and biased. Some students did not disagree with what was said but rather believed that it was inappropriate for the President to politicize his speech since it alienated those who hold different viewpoints. Dr. Porterfield chose to act in a hegemonic way by going to common hour and making a political statement that offended some liberals and most of the conservatives. Again, I do not want to assume that Dr. Porterfield has the intention of silencing conservative students’ views in making his speech, but I would speculate that he is well aware that political statements like this are divisive in nature. However, I still argue that he, like the professors, falls victim to the processes of the liberal hegemony and its side effects. This
in turn has lasting impacts on the ability of conservatives to comfortably participate in political conversations on campus when to many conservatives the campus itself has taken a stance contradicting their own.

A response frequently given by liberal students and administrators is along the lines of “if they want a conservative speaker they can sponsor one.” The problem doesn’t lie in their ability to sponsor a speaker, but rather the perceived receptiveness of the Franklin and Marshall hegemonic ideology. Bill stated, “they act like they are willing to have a conservative speaker, when we all know there would be protests and students complaining to the administration about any conservative speaker coming.” This harkens back to this notion of the left being intolerant of the right’s views, and using labels to push them into the shadows of the Franklin and Marshall Campus. So while there may be equal opportunities for every student or group to sponsor an event, the conservatives on campus acknowledge that the receptiveness and respectfulness directed toward their speaker would be much different than the current ones. Some other conservatives on campus have conducted pseudo-experiments where they have sent in conservative speakers for common hour to prove their pre-determined theory right. “Brandon” explained how he sent in two candidates his freshman year. He stated that, “they basically said at this time we are not going to do that” and that “they didn’t give a reason.” When I first heard Brandon say this, I was very intrigued since it may have been a testament to active silencing of conservative thought on campus, but when I dug deeper it got a little bit muddier. Both of the speakers he provided were Christian speakers. This sheds a little more light on why perhaps the committee did not decide to invite these speakers to come to campus. Not because they are anti-Christian but because common hour is a time for
speakers to come and talk about their engagement with intellectual phenomena, something I think becomes hard to substantiate when talking about religious beliefs. However, the attempt to bring a conservative speaker to campus, Christian or not, was still Brandon’s way of affirming what to him felt like a liberal bias on campus; one that doesn’t care for the views of Christians.

**Mechanisms of Power Tied to The 2016 Election**

“People are all about the freedom of religion and speech until someone says something they don’t want to hear, then opinions get stifled.”

The concept of labeling and assigning characteristics to those who are members of a specific party plays a huge role in how Conservatives on Franklin and Marshall’s Campus have had to deal with the 2016 election. After the results, even though the conservative candidate won, it exacerbated political tensions on campus, and energized the ideological hegemony making the environment worse for right leaning students. Emotions have risen since Donald Trump was elected the forty-fifth president of the United States, which has made it even harder for conservatives to have their voices heard on campus. This is due to an increase in politicized talk, in all of the social spheres I have discussed in previous sections. The increase in politicized talk on campus is not equal on both sides of the political spectrum but mostly the left who are energized and unhappy with the outcome of the election. Nicole Hoover remembered a forum conducted by a government professor on campus. She explained how he proclaimed that he was a liberal and how he was unhappy with the results of the election. After informing her of the research I was conducting, she reflected on her experience and said “I could only imagine how it would feel if you were a conservative in the audience, especially if you had him as
your professor.” This is just another example of faculty members, and those who make up the liberal hegemony, not being consciously aware of the position conservatives are put in on our campus. This speaks directly to how much of the silencing is generated in non-intentional ways. Therefore, I think that if it is the goal of professors to foster an environment open to competing world views, it is in their best interest to keep their ideology hidden and to remain as unbiased as possible in how they conduct their classes. Professors, liberal or conservative, should find ways to provide the alternative viewpoint in class, which allows conservative students to feel more comfortable with participating. If a conservative knows the political party of a professor it makes him/her question actually arguing conservative points, or bringing up contradicting points to his/her worldview.

Another instance brought up by Grace had to do with the sororities on campus. Her sorority decided to take the stance where they wanted to reach out to “sisters” and hold a meeting on the election, because a lot of them were heartbroken by the results. Grace proceeded to raise her hand and say, “I don’t feel comfortable with ‘Kappa Kappa Gamma’ saying that we have a stance either way, this is a sorority not a political club.” After her short remarks a Hispanic girl turned around and said “fu** you” to her in front of the entire sorority. Grace proceeded to keep her mouth shut because she believes she was “classier than that” and because she didn’t plan on “stooping to such a low level.” She then went on to make a hypothetical comparison by stating, “If Hillary won we would have never hosted a meeting on the “traumatic” nature of the victory, and if I would have said fu** you to that Hispanic girl the response would have been a lot different.” Again, Grace is pointing to the notion that the institutions of Franklin and
Marshall College are run in a way that props up liberal thought, and shuts down conservative thought.

A large problem on campus and in the nation as a whole since the 2016 election has been the generalizing of the Republican party based on the characteristics of Donald Trump. An example of this unfolded itself in one of my night classes where the professor, who is a federal judge, asked the class to keep him updated on who Donald Trump’s selection was for the United States Supreme Court. Around eight o’clock, a girl in the back of the class raised her hand to inform the Judge that Neil Gorsuch was nominated by the president. After Judge Stengel asked the student what she thought about it, she instantly blurted out, “it’s bullshit.” The Judge then responded that the Gorsuch is a very well renowned judge with a good track record and how he is highly regarded by others in the judicial system. From my informants’ perspective, the problem with the student’s response is not that she disagreed with the candidate but that she had no idea who Neil Gorsuch was let alone his track record as a judge; she just used his association to Trump to automatically denounce him as a supreme court nominee. This is the same judgments being made of conservatives on Franklin and Marshall’s campus, some of whom didn’t vote for Trump and some of whom did. They are often generalized to the same characteristics that the media and left wing actors call Trump solely due to their association with the same party.

Sadly, these negative attributes are often assigned to conservative students on campus who didn’t vote for or support Donald Trump. My informants possessed a shared fear of being labeled as racists and bigots because of some of the questionable statements made by Trump. Bill stated, “The worst part is when they assume that everyone that
identifies as a conservative has a collective mindset, we as humans naturally have a diversity of thought, and it is ok to disagree with someone in your own party.” As Bill acknowledges, many conservatives denounced the many offensive statements made by Trump during the election cycle, but they remain scared of being labeled as a bigot or a racist. The conservatives I spoke to told stories of them consistently overhearing other students labeling Republican ideas as negative adjectives traditionally assigned to Trump. These processes of generalization act as instruments of coercion, that further marginalize conservative thought on campus, because it makes it that much more difficult for a student to challenge a liberal statement in all of the social spheres they are involved in. I do acknowledge that many times conservatives generalize all liberals to be of a certain collective mindset, but making sense of and understanding the nuances of the liberal mindset is not what I set out to do, since I am looking at the experience of conservatives on campus. The generalizations also work in a particularly interesting way in this instance due to there being a perceived disparity in power between the liberals and conservatives on campus. Here we see the liberals generalizing as a way to silence or dismiss the views of conservative in comparing them to Trump’s negative attributes.

All in all, the irony of the 2016 election is that while the conservative candidate won, in many ways it was a loss for college conservatives. Some of my informants who did vote for Trump believed that liberal students didn’t ever take the time to actually listen to or take seriously the concerns of Trump voters. Katie stated, “the majority of campus didn’t even want to hear the opinions of Trump supporters because they didn’t hold the same opinions as those who supported Hillary.” She continued to say, “People are all about the freedom of religion and speech until someone says something they don’t
want to hear, then opinions get stifled.” While in the other sections of my study I have highlighted ways in which conservative students resist the hegemonic ideology on campus, when it comes to the 2016 election my informants saw it as a no-win situation due to how emotionally charged the liberal base on campus was.

**Theory Revisited**

After having a strong sense of the experiences of conservatives have on Franklin and Marshall’s campus, you also begin to understand how my informants experience highlights processes of the Ideological Hegemony, and Groupthink. When we look at perceived liberal ideological dominance on our campus, we must not understand it to be an entity in itself but rather an ongoing process of interactions between those who make it up and those who don’t. Both ideologies play a role in the construction of the perceived liberal hegemony. I have laid out the argument that while it may not be intense and rambunctious, behind the scenes and in very subtle ways, conservatives on our campus are resisting the liberal power structures they believe they are submersed in.

T. J. Jackson Lears, explains that ruling groups never engineer consent with complete success (Lears, 1985). We saw this in most of the five sections of the paper with exchanged looks in class, confrontations on the protest tree, and emails sent to administrators. This means that the boundaries between those holding perceived power and the perceived powerless do not have a clear concrete division where power is solely exerted from those in the majority on to the minority, but rather that the minority, or the conservative students, are also pushing back against that power. It would be naive however to suggest that this exertion of power is happening in equal ways, at least that it is being perceived that way.
To achieve this dominant position on campus the perceived liberal hegemony would have to, as Gramsci put it, “monopolize the instruments of coercion” (Lears 1985). In the case of my informants understanding of power structures on Franklin and Marshall’s campus, we see that the instruments of coercion have tangible effects. That is to say that professors teaching and their authority in the classroom is an example of one of those instruments of coercion. The policies of the college and the ability to of the majority to generalize the minority are other examples of the instruments of coercion. Even the mere number advantage of liberals on campus acts as an instrument of coercion that maintains the dominance of the majority group. “As Gramsci points out, “power is exerted by the dominant class through the medium of ideology” (Daldal 2014). Again, while the ideological hegemony on campus is not defined by a particular class, defining it as a “ideological political group” still fits into the perspective of Gramsci’s notion of hegemony and gives us a framework in which to analyze and make sense of Liberal processes on Franklin and Marshall’s campus in relation to how conservative students perceive and make sense of them. This means that in the view of a conservative student on a small liberal arts campus like Franklin and Marshall College, the liberal students, staff, and faculty use their ideology as a way to create social cohesion, therefore exerting their power and dominance over the smaller group of conservatives. This is not to say that these forces are consciously acted out by the liberals, but that these processes also act in unconscious and non-intentional ways. Gramsci goes on to explain that “to be conscious of the hegemonic forces and the complex social network within which an individual realizes himself already generates power” (Daldal 2014). He goes on to say that, “once a social group is able to modify the ensemble of those relations and make it
common sense it is creating hegemonic order” (Daldal 2014). In other words, once a group is able to establish its way of conceptualizing the world as “common sense” or overriding supported by the rest in a given community, it creates a hegemonic order where those constrained by it may not agree with it but are constantly exposed to its forces. The submissive groups “affirm this conception verbally and believe themselves to be following it, because this conception is the conception which follows in normal times” (Daldal 2014). This results in the conduct of these groups not being “independent and autonomous but submissive, and subordinate” (Daldal 2014). We could see this throughout the ethnography in how my informants saw institutions of the college to have assumed a liberal ideology. For them, their relationships with professors, student clubs, and social gatherings, are restricted and constrained by a liberal ideology.

Gramsci’s notion of submissive groups also parallels the experience of a conservative on Franklin and Marshall’s campus because in the classroom, in the dorms, when passing the protest tree, and when attending to Common Hour, they have accepted the imbalance of social power between themselves and liberals. Much of this can be understood through a Gramscian lens of “common sense.” In Gramsci’s terms, common sense is an “ideological construct which is accepted by all even contradictory segments because it is the discourse that follows in normal times” (Patnaik 1988). The “common sense” for conservatives on a liberal arts campus is very much affected by the overwhelmingly liberal institution they believe they attend. This common sense displays the perceived hegemonic power of the left on liberal arts campuses in its ability to restrict and constrain the actions of the “out groups” such as conservative students. It changes the preferences of conservative students in how they act and participate on campus. As many
of my informants have said, they don’t believe that it is worth engaging with others within a “institution that is set up against them” from a ideologically political standpoint.

Gramsci’s attempt to understand the subaltern consciousness of hegemonic processes directly relates to this ethnography as long as we understand it in relation to James Scott’s conception of subaltern agency. He proposes two theoretical consciousnesses that subaltern groups possess. The first is implicit in one’s activity, and the second is superficially explicit or verbal. I argue that much of the experiences my informants have told me about, activities done in the public eye of the campus, have to do with the latter of the two theoretical consciousnesses. On the other hand, they seem to be much more actively explicit while in their houses or surrounded by other conservatives. Raymond Williams addressed this very predicament by stating, “The social consciousness, in the end, is to protect the private consciousness” (Higgins 1983). In other words, many conservatives have constructed a façade that doesn’t coincide with their private consciousness, due to the threat of marginalization of other students and professors on campus.

In the end, we see that the conservative students’ perception of this liberal hegemony meets the criteria set up by Gramsci and Williams even though it isn’t class based. The story of the liberal ideological hegemony on campus is one bound in dominance to the point where those in the minority ideology change their actions in response to it. Conservatives are pushed into the shadows by this ideology because it is what follows in normal times on campus. Through the perspective of my informants, the liberal ideology on campus has control over most of the social interactions to the point where they don’t feel comfortable sharing their views. Having the agency to consciously
alter their own actions supports the claims made by James Scott in his notions of Weapons of the Weak. My informants are not unaware of the circumstances they are in. They are very aware, and constantly negotiating the liberal hegemony that they perceive, and sometimes confronting it in subtle ways. This means that the perceived ideological hegemony on campus, does not exercise coercion with complete consent by the minority groups. An easy solution to the perceived problems faced by conservative students would be for them to transfer schools or leave the environment causing such problems. It can be confusing to some why my informants continue to consent to the power relations they are exposed to. The consent to processes of coercion are not necessarily constructed by the hegemony itself, but also constructed by priorities outside the realm of political relations. Conservative students, for the most part, believe that dealing with the perceived hegemony is worth it if they can graduate with a degree from Franklin and Marshall. In other words the elite education provided by Franklin and Marshall is worth the marginalizing and silencing that comes with it.

The social construct of Hegemony, and in specific the liberal hegemony on Franklin and Marshall’s campus, are understood by my informants to be bound in processes of Groupthink. Having social and institutional power on campus, the perceived liberal hegemony becomes dangerous because it displays symptoms of groupthink in that they “all contributed to forming and maintaining a consensus that the group and its premature decision against an external threat from people who are unreasonable, wrong, and likely to fail” (McCauley 1998, 143). We can imagine the external threat to be made up by many of my informants who believe that they are marginalized because they have viewpoints that contradict those of the liberal hegemony.
I believe that understanding the social construct of Groupthink, as defined by Clark McCauley, allows us to see how and why conservative students are having difficulties feeling included on campus. As McCauley stated, Groupthink is a “homeostatic model in which communication and persuasion are aimed at controlling disagreements that can undermine both group goals and the confidence of conscious” (McCauley 1998, 145). Through the perspective of hegemony and the power it exerts, it seems likely that when using “instruments of coercion” brought up by Gramsci the liberal orthodoxy’s power on campus links the hegemony with a Groupthink mentality where differing opinions are easily dismissed and silenced.

The inability to assign validity to the worldviews of submissive groups on the part of those consumed by Groupthink creates dangerously an “illusion of invulnerability, belief in the superior morality of the group, collective rationalization, and stereotypes of out groups” (McCauley 1998, 146). The experiences of conservative students are constrained by the perceived processes of Groupthink, because they are the ones who hold views contradicting the liberal hegemony. They often feel dismissed and labeled as unreasonable as we saw in the 2016 election section, because they believe that the Liberals on campus understand their worldview to be morally superior to the perspectives of those in the out groups. It is important to understand that discussions of Groupthink and its processes are in general terms, meaning that of course not all liberal students and professors exert its symptoms in this exact way, but that from the perspective of my informants many, if not most, do. Groups are powerful and can shape the behaviors and mentalities of those who make them up. Due to that, “groupthink is an explanation that indicts group processes rather than individuals” (McCauley 1998, 158). In other words,
Groupthink is a group phenomena where “no one person is responsible for groupthink anymore than one person is responsible for a plague” (McCauley 1998, 158). As we saw this theme resonated in all of the different sections that explained the lived experiences of conservative students. In the classrooms and outside of the classrooms, processes of Groupthink were expressed in the opinions of my informants in ways where they believe the left leaning ideology is unable to understand viewpoints that contradict liberalism.

**National Context**

The social unrest of conservatives on college campuses is not unique to Franklin and Marshall College, but also exists in higher education institutions across the country. At Vassar College in New York, students tell very similar stories to the informants I interviewed. One student explained that in class, students would snicker at different conservative leaders names like Mitt Romney and Jeb Bush. (Struyk 2014). While this may seem innocent to those with a collective mindset, it left a lasting mark on the participatory behavior of this particular student. He explained how sometimes he “questioned his beliefs because so many fellow students believed something different” (Struyk 2014). Instead of allowing a diversity of opinions to foster a healthy debate, this student’s world view is not taken at face value, but instead thought of as not legitimate. This connects to the lived experience of my informants in how they truly believe that their views would be stifled in the context of a classroom.

Similarly at Orange Coast College in California, a professor was caught on camera calling Trump supporters terrorists. Olga Perez Stable Cox, the professor in a recent human sexuality class, asked Trump supporters to stand up in a room and preceded to bash those who supported the president. One student explained, “Nobody felt they
could stand up… Me in fear of my grade” (Struyk 2014). The professor continued to state, “I bet none of you will stand up because you’re embarrassed for yourselves” and that “the rest of the class should look out for them and know who to protect themselves from” (Struyk 2014). Some of the students, being conservatives and having voted for Trump, were put in a very troublesome situation. In talking about their experiences, the students acknowledged the power difference between them and their professor. One stated, “nobody wants to stand up and be publically humiliated by a teacher who holds power in the classroom like that” (Struyk 2014). The acknowledgement of the power dynamic in itself affirms the power of the liberal hegemony and silences the voices of conservatives. This harkens back to my informant’s perceptions of professor biases in the “In Class” section of this ethnography. Working within an environment that they themselves believe to be working against their interests, conservative students are constrained by these wider liberal forces where their ability to participate within that system is limited.

The way power plays out in social hierarchies and social norms on their campus and Franklin and Marshall’s campus are similar for conservative students. As famous scholar, Foucault, stated, “power is Omni-present” (Daldal 2014). Foucault also explains that power always has a particular end in mind, and in this situation, the liberal professor is using her directed end to dehumanize and humiliate those who think differently than herself. While she may not have noticed it at the time, using her ideological agenda in class impaired the agency of conservatives to have an equal voice of opinion, or at least that’s what they told the reporter of the article. Stories like this, for my informants, confirm their pre-conceived notions of what would happen if they did decide to speak up.
It doesn’t seem that a conservative in her classroom would feel comfortable sharing his/her opinion in the class. This parallels what many informants stated in the “In Class” section of this ethnography where many feel there is nothing to gain from critiquing something from a different worldview when the person who holds the most power in the class. In the Orange Coast College circumstance the professor is open about her inability to listen and legitimize the thoughts of those who voted for Donald Trump. After conducting my research on Franklin and Marshall’s campus, I would argue that her actions would have conservatives making a strong case that she would be unable to remain unbiased if she discovered their political ideology or who they voted for. Since I haven’t conducted my research on their campuses, I cannot make this statement with total certainty.

At a group of Ivy league schools’ (Harvard, Princeton, Yale) professors joined together and wrote a letter to incoming freshman where they said their thoughts were “distilled into three words, ‘think for yourself’” (James Madison Program in American Ideals and Institutions 2017). They open the letter by stating, “you may have discovered already in high school that thinking for yourself can be a challenge and that it can take a lot of courage to do so” (James Madison Program in American Ideals and Institutions 2017). The professors also explained how in today’s climate it’s “all too-easy to allow your views and outlook to be shaped by dominant opinion on your campus or in the broader academic culture” and that “the dangers faced by students and faculty members today is falling into the vice of conformism yielding to Groupthink” (James Madison Program in American Ideals and Institutions 2017). These professors use of the phenomena of groupthink in their letter led me to investigating its symptoms and in
general its effects on my research and how it fits into the way the perceived liberal hegemony acts. As with what I discussed earlier on the impacts of Groupthink, the professors stated that the “tyranny of public opinion does more than merely discourage students from dissenting from prevailing views on moral, political, and other types of questions… It leads them to suppose dominant views are so obviously correct and that only a bigot or crank could question them” (James Madison Program in American Ideals and Institutions 2017).

The letter itself speaks to the concerns of conservative students on Franklin and Marshall’s campus. It discusses the nature of the perceived liberal hegemony and the dangers of it. While many of these professors would make up what my informants define to be the liberal hegemony, they acknowledge the problem that is occurring on college campuses. This problem is one of limited intellectual debate where schools are falling short of challenging the viewpoints of the majority ideology on campus, due to collective thought and groupthink.

Problems of Groupthink and the marginalization of conservative thought on college campuses have even reached some of the nation’s largest news outlets. The front page of the Sunday Review in the New York Times on March 19th 2017 had an article titled, “What College Teaches Conservatives.” The article begins by discussing Stephen Miller, who currently is president Trump’s policy advisor. It tells the story of a kid who grew up a conservative in a very liberal environment, who constantly challenged his liberal educators, and was quoted saying his schools were “institutions not of learning, but of indoctrination” (Cogan 2017). They also talk about President Trump’s Supreme Court nominee, Neil Gorsuch, and how he made sense of his experience as a conservative
at Columbia. The two conservative leaders both attribute their positions in very liberal communities to their success down the road because to them, “it strengthened their critical thinking skills” (Cogan 2017).

The most important part of the New York Times article is toward the end when they interview the presidents’ of the Republican clubs at Harvard and Cornell. The author explains how in her interviews every college republican felt as if, “the more typical conservative leaning student still feels inhibited about expressing political views on campus” (Cogan 2017). Kent Haeffner, the president of the Republican club at Harvard stated, “There’s a good chunk of closeted conservatives that feel very suppressed.” (Cogan 2017). While this statement is a broad generalization, when it comes to the experience of conservatives at Franklin and Marshall we can see that it still stands up. Haeffner also acknowledges that many times there are not “tangible advantages to being a conservative at a top university” (Cogan 2017). In other words, for many republicans on campuses like Harvard and Franklin and Marshall there is a belief that it is better to keep their political views to themselves than to try and win uphill battles.

The president of the Republican club at Cornell explains a more violent example of the intolerance of conservative thoughts on college campuses. After the election of Donald Trump, Olivia Corn explained how she was pushed to the ground by a fellow student and called a racist (Cogan 2017). The worst part for Olivia was that she “didn’t even support Donald Trump” (Cogan 2017). As we saw in the “2016 Election” section, fear of being labeled a racist is not unique to these colleges but all relevant at Franklin and Marshall. Later in the article the author interviews a man by the name of Samuel Abrams who was a student at Stanford 20 years ago. He stated that, being a conservative
on a liberal campus is “very lonely and isolating.” His experience displayed that this problem of marginalization is not unique to our generation, but rather has been a part of our higher education institutions for decades. William Buckley was a graduate student famous for confronting the liberal ideology at Yale. He is most known for his piece titled *God and Man at Yale*. He pointed out that, “Though liberals do a great deal of talking about hearing other points of view, it sometimes shocks them to learn that there are other points of view” (Buckley 1959). In my ethnography we saw how at face value Franklin and Marshall has a persona of an inclusive and understanding campus, but when we dig deeper we find many students who attend F&M see this as merely a façade. Buckley was famous for creating and energizing the Conservative movement in the United States. His work began on college campuses where he attempted to confront the ideological hegemony. Much of his research has to do with the religious sector of conservatism and many of his arguments are grounded in these worldviews. For this reason, I decided not to pay as much attention to his work, but it is still worth bringing his thoughts into the theoretical framework of conservatives in higher education.

The marginalization and silencing of Conservative thought on college campuses also found its way into some of the nation’s top TV networks like FOX. The Bill O’Reilly show on 3/6/17 had a segment dedicated to an incident that occurred at Middlebury College where students and activists shouted down Charles Murray, a speaker invited to the school. One professor was physically injured and sent to the hospital by protesters grabbing her hair due to her association with the speaker. Not only did these protesters inhibit the ability for a speaker to provide an alternative viewpoint to their own, but they also used violence to silence views contrary to their narrative. One of
the speakers on the show stated, “these students need to understand that your free speech does not trump someone else’s.” (O’Reilly 2017). The response of liberal students on Middlebury’s campus exacerbate the fears that conservative students have in sharing their different and equally important views on campus. The speaker went on to say that, “this doesn’t happen to liberal speakers; it only happens to conservative speakers” (O’Reilly 2017). The reaction to a conservative speaker by mass protests and a trip to the hospital effectively marginalizes and pushes conservative thought into the shadows out of fear of retaliation. This parallels the thoughts that many of my informants had when it came to common hour and the biases they believed were associated with it. To my informants, shows on Fox and other conservative media outlets only further validate their concerns with higher education. I believe that these shows make conservative students more aware and prone to pick up on liberal biases and processes of the perceived liberal hegemony.

Fox also recently began a segment they named “Campus Craziness,” where the anchor, Tucker Carlson, provides different examples of what he perceives to be the “ridiculousness” of liberal higher education. Some of the topics they have discussed during this segment have to do with safe spaces, “censorship” of dissenting viewpoints, protests and responses to conservative speakers, and events that take place in classrooms run by liberal professors. “Campus Craziness” started after I ended my ethnography in Spring 2016 which shows how many of the phenomena I touched on in this study aren’t just being brought up by major news outlets, but also that shows like Tucker Carlson’s are devoting entire segments to it.

It must not be ignored that conservative media sources like Fox News have an impact on the perception of biases by conservative students on campus. Watching
segments like “Campus Craziness,” gives conservative students a heightened awareness towards what they believe to be bias. Hearing stories from news sources of liberal biases in higher education has the ability to leave conservative students actively looking for liberal “craziness” on their own campus. This would, in turn, make students believe they see more frequent examples of liberal biases than they would have if they didn’t have a heightened awareness.

Students actively looking for biases, I speculate, has a generational aspect to it. Since my informants were completely made up of millennials, there may be ways of thinking that are generationally constructed and shared with other groups that seem distinctly different or even in opposition to those who I interviewed. It is often said that millennials are a generation of victims, where those who are apart of it can imagine themselves at the blunt end of some sort of power relations. This study would support these general claims on millennials, especially since it tells the experience of white middle to upper class college students who are still able to construct a social dynamic where they believe they are a part of a silenced and marginalized group. We can imagine different studies done on different groups on campus like minority, and LGBT groups, where they would also explain stories of marginalization and silencing, but in relation to a different perceived “hegemony.” For these reasons, I believe that the perceptions of many of my informants are generationally constructed. I would speculate that other groups on campus would tell very similar stories and experiences of marginalization and silencing on campus as my informants did, some of which would have my informants in the hegemonic group.
As I stated before, there have been many protests on college campuses in response to conservative speakers being invited to campus, many of which have become violent and resulted in the police getting involved. One that gained a lot of media attention was the demonstrations at UC Berkeley. The university invited conservative speaker Ann Coulter to give a speech on campus. The invitation was accompanied shortly after with massive student protests. Out of fear of possible violence, Ann Coulter’s speech was cancelled. Afterward, Ann Coulter and many other conservatives and even liberals, accused the institution of stifling conservative viewpoints. One student, Harmanjit Sodhi, told CNN that “she was liberal growing up in Tacy, California… But that Berkley’s leftism pushed her to the center” (McLaughlin 2017). She explained how “many of her classmates are quick to label someone a bigot or shitty person if they divert even slightly from core left-wing values” (McLaughlin 2017). One student stated, “these are ideas, but we are humans” and that he thinks people “attack human beings when they need to attack ideas” (McLaughlin 2017). Protests broadcasted on the national level have implications for conservative students everywhere not because they are scared of those particular instances, but because it highlights the possibility of certain reactions that fellow classmates may have to conservative thought.

Similar to U.C. Berkley, Evergreen College in Olympia, Washington had several student protests over perceived racial grievances (Allen 2017). These protests resulted in “invading a professor's class to taunt him with charges of racism; occupying the library and the college president's office while the campus police, ordered to stand down, barricaded themselves in their headquarters; delivering F-bombs, derision, and assorted demands—firing the police chief, confiscating the guns of the rest of the police, setting
up mandatory race-oriented "cultural competency" training for the faculty, excusing the
protesters from their end-of-term assignments, and providing free gumbo for a radical
potluck—to the cornered president, George Bridges; and creating such a threatening
atmosphere for the professor in question, evolutionary biologist Bret Weinstein (another
target of the firing demands), that he had to hold his class on May 25 in a public park in
downtown Olympia.” (Allen 2017). While the example at Evergreen was not at face
value a response to conservative thought, it was energized from the left of the ideological
spectrum and therefore has implications for those who are on the right. These
demonstrations show conservatives the lengths that the liberal students will go to if they
become offended by dissenting opinion.

On campuses where protests break out, or where the liberal orthodoxy hold the
most power, conservative students have a tough time sharing their opinions, which leaves
them looking toward other outlets that are more inclusive to conservative thought. One
medium that many college conservatives use to express their opinions of their liberal
campuses is social media, and in specific, Twitter. Twitter works as a space where
conservative students can respond to the marginalization and silencing they experience in
the classroom in a safe way. While their peers may see their tweets, it’s usually only their
close friends, and, most importantly, their professor cannot view or use their tweets
against them. It allows the students to reclaim the autonomy that they feel they’ve lost in
the classroom. Two twitter accounts that I found useful in my research were “College
Republicans” and the hash tag “My Liberal Campus.” These accounts give me insight
into how conservative students are making sense of the liberal hegemonic processes.
My College Republicans is an account that retweets and post tweets about different student’s experiences in relation to liberal institutions of higher education. Students can tweet at the account by tagging @CRNC at the end of their tweets. The tweets are then sifted through by the account holder and the ones that they find the most important are retweeted for all of those who follow the account to see. It acts as a realm where conservative students can find solidarity in the sharing of stories with one another. While in the classroom they may feel ostracized, here they can express their opinions, and see opinions of other conservative students going through the same experience of marginalization and silencing.

The tweets on the account very much reflect the same themes that my informants shared with me. One student tweeted, “There is no room for conservative thought here.” This quote reflects the silencing felt by Franklin and Marshall conservatives in the classroom, which results in a lack of diversity of thought and opinion. Another student tweeted, “I know I have- or my friends have- spoken up about their views in political science classes and we get beaten down and laughed at.” If we take this quote seriously and at face value, the learning environment is thus compromised, because no one is engaging in healthy debated advertised by liberal arts colleges.

The second important social media space I saw conservative students using to express their experiences in class is the hash tag #MyLiberalCampus. This medium works a little differently than the College Republican’s page. Any student can use the hashtag “My Liberal Campus” and tweet an experience for all to see. In other words, if a student searched for the hash tag “My Liberal Campus” they would be able to find all of the tweets other students have used the hashtag with. One example is from a student who
tweeted, “My professor called Republicans ‘brain-dead’ on #MyLiberalCampus.” While this may be an extreme example of the conservative experience in class, it highlights how these students feel as if they are held to a different standard from the rest of the class, thus limiting their ability to engage comfortably and productively in class. Another tweet stated, “You’re dealing with an administration who are all of one opinion and that becomes the norm.” This tweet harkens back to Gramsci’s discussion of hegemony and how those who make it up have the ability to use their ideology to establish norms that groups who may not agree with them follow. Tweets like this one were especially interesting to me because I wanted to understand why these students make blanket statements like this about an entire institution. Just like with many of my informants, even though this student may have no idea about the ideology of those who run his/her college, it says something about his/her experience on campus in how they assume anyone tied into the college are all of the same collective ideology. True or not, there are real life implications for thinking and making sense of this phenomena in this light.

**Conclusion**

This study was aimed at understanding self-identified conservative students’ experiences on Franklin and Marshall’s campus on a personal and informant based level. I believed, and continue to believe, that ethnography is the most effective method to understand people’s political worlds as our nation becomes more and more polarized. As we learned in the election process, statistical data and polling fell short, mostly due to people’s hesitancy to publically show their support for such a controversial candidate. Perhaps had political scientists used more of an ethnographic approach in their polling, they may have better predicted the outcome of the election.
The experience of a conservative student on Franklin and Marshall’s campus is very much shaped by the perception of a left leaning hegemonic ideology. It’s an experience of marginalization where social interactions on campus, in class, and in other events are curbed by a fear of being the minority and suffering loses in grades or being morally dismissed by those who make up the majority and think differently than they do. Even though they find themselves in opposition to the hegemonic forces on campus, as Gramsci points out, they still consent to the general direction imposed by the dominant social group (Lears 1985). This does not mean that they agree with these processes, but that they passively submit to them through continuing to stay connected to and maintain the Franklin and Marshall culture. As I pointed out throughout this study, the perceived hegemony on our campus is one bound in political ideology, which is why I continued to refer to it as the ideological hegemony. Gramsci explained that the dominant social group exerts its power through ideology. The hegemonic ideology in Franklin and Marshall College is bound in politics, leaving a dichotomy with the dominant hegemonic liberal social group making up a majority of the students and the subordinate conservative group making up the minority of students. Raymond Williams explained how social consciousness seeks to protect the private consciousness (Higgins 1983). My ethnographic research supported his claims due to the fact that many conservatives display a made-up façade when interacting with the Franklin and Marshall community in order to conceal their conservativeness as not to experience the perceived negative effects of doing so. This displays, for the most part, their submissiveness, and also their passive consent to the hegemonic processes of the left leaning ideology they believe exists on
campus. I say “for the most part,” because as I have discussed before, the conservative students still do find ways to confront the ideological hegemony.

After conducting my research I believe that it is not enough to say that conservative students are marginalized because of the left acting like a sort of “bully” on campus. This doesn’t paint the whole picture of the political dichotomy. After reading this study it may seem that the conservatives are complainers who would rather sit back and allow others to walk all over them than stand up for who and what they believe in. I argue that there is an essence to being a conservative on Franklin and Marshall’s campus. I believe there is what I call a “conservative character” which is composed of certain fundamental characteristics. I use this term as a Weberian “ideal type” to interpret educated conservatives at a general level. In doing this, I am attempting to put together what I learned from them. I understand that another researcher may have put this together differently, but this is an interpretation on my part. The conservative character in a general sense is reserved, to the point where many of the informants I interviewed would rather not take the time to confront the liberal hegemony on campus, not because they are scared but because it’s not important to them or because they have priorities in social spheres outside the realm of politics. They want to be left alone, which is a major reason why they are bothered with the liberal hegemony on campus. Not only because their voices are being silenced, but because as they say, they don’t want the liberal agenda “shoved down their throat 24/7.”

Liberals are often defined as “progressives,” which speaks to the nature of their actions on campus. Some, not all, are very boisterous due to their quest for social change. The conservatives, on the other hand, are less worried about changing the world, and
more worried about their personal lives, which I argue, leads to inaction from their social group. A lot of the social unrest for conservative students has to do with the fact that posting on the protest tree and bringing up political things in class doesn’t fit into their social logic. This is not to say that all conservative’s actions fit into the same box of “conservative character,” but I argue that for many it is the reason why they are bothered by the liberal ideological hegemony on campus. I am in no way reifying this term because it is not in itself a thing of nature, but rather an abstract model of what many conservatives are like. Understanding the “conservative character” helps us think about and understand their experience more as long as we don’t reify it. Understanding the concept of a “conservative character” also restores some legitimacy to my informants’ claims of social unrest on Franklin and Marshall’s campus. They may not always feel suppressed, but they may be annoyed with the perceived aggression liberal students and faculty members have with their political platform. This is not the fault of the Liberal students, because they too have a worldview that brings a different way of understanding their actions to the table. The “conservative character” also has a way of conceptualizing the world, a way that I believe exacerbates the symptoms and side-effects of the liberal hegemony. This is because the reclusive nature of the conservative character leaves them more vulnerable to being pushed into the shadows on college campuses. The understanding of the “other” political party is very much bound in perspective. The frustration and confusion on both sides stems from a disconnect in world-views.

Some may believe that I set out in the ethnography to condemn the liberal ideology, or the way liberals conduct themselves on campus. One could imagine, however, a situation where the positions of the liberal ideology and conservative ideology
were flipped. In this circumstance I would expect the majority to still conduct itself the same regardless of which ideology has adopted the title. One can find this very dynamic on the Franklin and Marshall football team which is overwhelmingly conservative. In a random poll I conducted of more than 40 players on the team a little more than 80 percent said they were conservative while 10 percent said they were liberal and the other 10 percent said they were moderate. Having played on the team for 4 years, I can attest to the claim that this team is just another example of what happens when majorities silence minorities. Processes of the hegemony and Groupthink are still byproducts of the ideological majority, or in this specific case the conservatives.

I often wonder what would actually happen if a conservative speaker would come to campus. My informants have no doubt that they know what would happen. However, one must ask why my informants stop at the hypothesis without actually putting it to the test. I think that this speaks to the “conservative character,” where there may be an intrinsic quality of non-action and passiveness. This makes it less likely for a conservative students to engage in activist like activities where they are actively fighting for their values, because it is against what can be considered a conservative characteristic. As for what I think would happen if a conservative speaker came to campus based on my research, I believe in much of the same theories as my informants. The students as a collective would surely not be as receptive to a conservative speaker as they would a liberal one. I do understand that the response would be much different for different types of speakers, e.g. Neil Gorsuch or Ben Shapiro, but I do believe the support for these events would be different nonetheless. That doesn't have to do with the liberals on campus being intolerant, but possibly with obvious fact that liberals are the majority
social group. I also disagree with my informants in much of what they said, because a lot of the time it seemed like their hypotheses were based on worst case scenarios. I do believe that the school would allow the Republican club to sponsor an event, but it would be naive to think that there wouldn't be some backlash from different students on campus, especially in light of the instances that are occurring at other schools with similar student bodies to Franklin and Marshall. To me, there are issues that Franklin and Marshall should address in regards to the equality of voice between different people with different viewpoints on campus. All in all, I believe that my informants have legitimate complaints about how a conservative speaker would be treated, but I also don’t think that the speakers would be treated as horribly as they insist they would.

It seems to me that the school is starting to open up the doors for conservative speakers with guests like one speaker invited by the Government department, Ken Mehlman, who was at one time the chair of the Republican party, and a speaker from the ACLU. The ACLU speaker was invited to campus shortly after a riot broke out at William and Mary University due to another ACLU speaker talking about a similar topic. The school invited this speaker regardless of the perceived outrage and response from the students on campus. The school hired police officers to maintain civility between the students and the speaker. One police officer explained to me that they were posted in different parts of the room and outside of the room because the school was scared of a possible “riot of sorts.”

As we can see the college is taking some steps toward creating a ideologically diverse environment on campus. I am however still wary of buying that this will be the final fix for the problems that my informants have had within the perceived liberal
hegemony on campus. While there is a movement on campus to invite speakers from the right of the political spectrum, the talks are not publicized like other liberal ones on campus. The conservative speakers are also not invited to give their talks in larger venues like common hour, but perhaps inviting conservative speakers to smaller talks are the first steps needed for that to happen in the future.

While the marginalization is real in the sense that it is felt by these students, they are also finding ways to confront and articulate the hegemonic forces on campus. If it is in subtle ways by using Scott’s concept of “weapons of the weak,” like exchanging looks in class with other conservative students, or more explicit ways like writing an email to the president of the college, or posting on the protest tree, conservative students are finding ways to respond to the marginalization they face at Franklin and Marshall college. I do not believe that it is the implicit goal of the college to silence the views of these students, but I do believe that in bringing some of these issues to light it will make staff members, and administration reflect on how they may impact the social, and academic experiences of students who think differently than they do. Some problems I believe are not intentional, but rather concealed by the very nature of the “conservative character.” In other words, I think that once these issues are brought to the attention of those who make up the ideological hegemony it will force them to reflect on their own actions which will lead to a more inclusive environment for a diversity of thought. I have had several of my informants who hold positions of authority on campus tell me that they never realized that this was happening. Usually upon reflecting on past experiences many would admit that they could see how different events would make conservative students uncomfortable. I do not attempt to come to the conclusion that liberals are consciously
creating this “hegemonic” force on campus with the end goal of silencing conservatives. I rather push to bring to light how their position of power on campus in institutional and social forms non-intentionally creates a system that limits the participatory behavior of conservative students.

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