Social Class Culture Cycles: How Three Gateway Contexts Shape Selves and Fuel Inequality

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Keywords

Abstract

America's unprecedented levels of inequality have far-reaching negative consequences for society as a whole. Although differential access to resources contributes to inequality, the current review illuminates how ongoing participation in different social class contexts also gives rise to culture-specific selves and patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting. We integrate a growing body of interdisciplinary research to reveal how social class culture cycles operate over the course of the lifespan and through critical gateway contexts, including homes, schools, and workplaces. We first document how each of these contexts socializes social class cultural differences. Then, we demonstrate how these gateway institutions, which could provide access to upward social mobility, are structured according to middle-class ways of being a self and thus can fuel and perpetuate inequality. We conclude with a discussion of intervention opportunities that can reduce inequality by taking into account the contextual responsiveness of the self.

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INTRODUCTION

A growing social class divide characterizes the contemporary American experience (Murray 2013, Pickety & Saez 2003). In the past 50 years, economic gains in American society have been heavily concentrated at the very top of the income distribution. For example, in 2008 the top 1% of Americans held 21% of the total income compared to 9% in the 1970s, a twofold increase from three decades earlier (Saez 2010). As a result, people at the bottom of the social class hierarchy are increasingly disconnected from the material resources, skills, and life experiences needed to thrive (Duncan & Murnane 2011, Stephens et al. 2012a). This staggering social class divide predicts a wide range of important life outcomes. For example, 74% of students at the 146 top-ranked colleges come from families with earnings in the top income quartile whereas only 3% come from the bottom quartile (Carnevale & Rose 2004).

To explain why social class so powerfully shapes important life outcomes (e.g., attaining a college degree), social scientists often point to resources as the answer. A common approach is to consider how differential access to resources (e.g., money, power, status) creates opportunity gaps that constrain what people are able to do and, in turn, produces inequality (e.g., Bertrand et al. 2004, Kraus et al. 2011, Shah et al. 2012). Material resources, power, and status have a powerful influence on behavior, but they are only the beginning of the story. Life in different social class contexts also affords people different selves. These selves provide culture-specific answers to foundational questions such as "Who am I?" and "How should someone like me act?" Social class experience shapes the type of self that one is likely to become and defines the behaviors that are likely to be experienced as normative.

We use the term self to refer to the continually developing sense of agency or "me" at the center of one's experience (Markus & Conner 2013, Markus & Kitayama 2010, Oyserman & Markus 1993). Selves are interpretive frameworks or schemas that lend meaning to people's experiences and thus provide the mechanism through which contexts shape behavior. Selves are not fixed characteristics of individuals but are instead highly malleable psychological states—ways of being. They emerge in response to the requirements of the multiple and intersecting contexts with which people interact in the course of a given day or over a lifetime. Although people tend to have some continuity in how they think about themselves across time and place, everyone has multiple selves that can arise or be activated in different situations. For example, depending on the situation,

most people can behave both independently (focusing on themselves and their preferences) and interdependently (focusing on others and adjusting to the requirements of relationships). One powerful way in which sociocultural contexts—including nation, gender, religion, race/ethnicity, and social class—influence behavior is by fostering the elaboration of one self more than other selves.

The current review integrates a growing body of research from psychology, sociology, organizational behavior, anthropology, and education to illuminate the social class culture cycles, in which selves are both shaped by and shapers of the cultures—i.e., the ideas, interactions, and institutions—of their social class contexts. To accomplish this goal, the review contains two sections. The first provides an overview of research that characterizes the culture-specific behavioral patterns and psychological tendencies that selves in different American social class contexts are likely to afford.

The second section provides an in-depth review of research illuminating how social class culture cycles operate over the lifespan and through three critical contexts—the home, school, and workplace. Following Ridgeway & Fisk (2012), we call these gateway contexts because they are both psychologically formative (i.e., afford particular selves) and function as key access points to future opportunities and valued life outcomes. To reveal how these cycles operate, we first highlight how each gateway context can foster social class cultural differences. Second, we illuminate how mainstream institutions are structured to reflect and reinforce mostly middle-class ways of being a self. Through these dual processes of differential socialization and the institutionalization of middle-class norms, these gateway contexts can fuel and perpetuate inequality.

Earlier accounts of social class cultural differences left the impression that working-class cultures consisted of a constellation of individual attitudes, values, and behaviors that were largely fixed and therefore passed on from one generation to the next (e.g., Moynihan 1965).[1] The past few decades of social psychological research on selves, identities, and cultures, however, reveals that selves are far more dynamic and malleable than was previously theorized (Chen et al. 2001, Hong et al. 2000, Lee & Tiedens 2001, Markus & Hamedani 2007, Markus & Kitayama 2010). For example, since selves are highly contingent on their supporting sociocultural contexts, they change quickly in response to different contextual conditions. Moreover, because individuals actively contribute to their culture cycles, people can change their cultures over time by challenging the ideas, practices, and institutions that constitute them. Taking into account the contextual responsiveness of the self, we conclude this review with a discussion of potential interventions that could reduce the production of inequality.

Throughout this review, we focus on variation in selves that emerge in different social class contexts. To cover a large interdisciplinary literature on social class and behavior, we use the terms middle class and working class as relative terms to organize a broad literature across disciplines in which social class is defined differently (e.g., in terms of educational attainment, household income, or occupational status). Specifically, we use the term working class to refer to individuals in contexts on the bottom half of the social class divide, including people who have attained less

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[1]The argument was that people in poverty were so socially and economically isolated that they became disorganized, developed low aspirations, and turned away from middle-class values. Once this culture of poverty was in place, the argument went, it was transmitted to the next generation even if the social conditions changed. In the ensuing debates, people cast culture as an internal force that was located within individuals (e.g., in attributes and values), whereas structure (e.g., resources and institutions) was cast as an external force located outside of individuals and their actions. Much research in the past half century, however, has questioned this distinction and now regards culture and structure as interdependent forces that interact to influence each other in a bidirectional, ongoing cycle termed mutual constitution (see Stephens et al. 2012c).
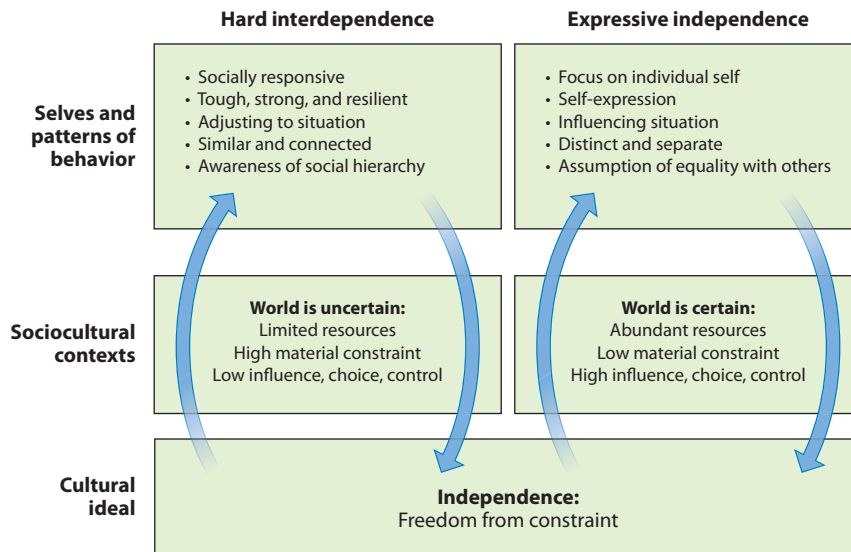
Figure 1

US American social class culture cycles.

than a four-year college degree[2] or who have relatively lower incomes or lower-status occupations. We use the term middle class to refer to individuals in contexts on the top half of the social class divide, including people who have attained at least a four-year college degree or who have relatively higher incomes or higher-status occupations.

DIFFERENT SELVES: EXPRESSIVE INDEPENDENCE VERSUS HARD INTERDEPENDENCE

Understanding how social class shapes selves requires attention to both the material resources (e.g., income, access to high-quality education) and the social resources (e.g., relationships with family and friends) that organize people's experiences in different social class contexts. It also requires considering how the availability of these resources shapes behavior over time as well as the resulting cultural norms. For example, how much and what type of influence do people have over their experience in a given situation? Does the situation encourage or allow for the expression of personal preferences, ideas, and opinions? Over time and across situations that afford certain behavior patterns, how people are able to act in turn shapes how people understand what it means to act as a normatively appropriate person (Bourdieu 1977, Correll 2004).

How, then, do repeated experiences in different social class contexts shape what behaviors are possible and the type of self that one is likely to become? To answer this question, it is first necessary to recognize that people's local social class contexts are embedded in a larger national context. As shown in **Figure 1**, in American contexts, all people are exposed to the foundational cultural ideal of independence (e.g., the American Dream, the Protestant Work Ethic). In an

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[2]We use the term middle class to refer to individuals with a four-year degree or more and the term working class to refer to individuals with less than a four-year degree because these are the modal self-descriptions among individuals with these levels of educational attainment (Lareau & Conley 2008).

effort to achieve this shared cultural ideal, most Americans strive to be free from constraint (see Bellah et al. 1985, Hochschild 1996). This shared independent ideal is not only a metaphor for how one ought to live one's life, but it is also built into and promoted by the social machinery—law, politics, employment, education, media, and healthcare—of mainstream American society (cf. Wilson 2009). Despite the shared aspiration of independence, social class contexts provide unequal opportunities to realize this cultural ideal.

Middle-class American contexts promote and scaffold the American cultural ideal of independence. They provide greater access to economic capital, higher power and status, more geographic mobility, and greater opportunities for choice, influence, and control than do working-class contexts (Day & Newburger 2002, Kohn 1969, Pascarella & Terenzini 1991, Pattillo-McCoy 1999). In response to contexts that can be characterized as relatively stable, predictable, and safe (e.g., higher job security, safer neighborhoods; Bernstein 1974, Kohn 1969), people need to worry far less about making ends meet or overcoming persistent threats than in working-class contexts. Instead, middle-class contexts enable people to act in ways that reflect and further reinforce the independent cultural ideal—expressing their personal preferences, influencing their social contexts, standing out from others, and developing and exploring their own interests.

Life in middle-class contexts tends to afford an understanding of the self and behavior as independent from others and the social context. As shown in **Figure 1**, the broader cultural mandate to be free from constraint, coupled with the wealth of opportunities to act according to this ideal in middle-class contexts, promotes selves and patterns of behavior that are both individual focused and self-expressive. As an example, when a parent asked a middle-class child why he changed his mind, he asserted, "This is America. It's my prerogative to change my mind if I want to" (Lareau 2003, p. 130). We call this way of being expressive independence to distinguish it from the self-protective form of strength and toughness that working-class contexts are more likely to afford.

Although working-class contexts also tend to promote the American cultural ideal of independence, they less often scaffold and institutionalize it. Working-class American contexts are characterized by less access to economic capital, lower power and status, more geographic mobility constraints, and fewer opportunities for choice, control, and influence than middle-class contexts (Lachman & Weaver 1998, Pattillo-McCoy 1999). In response to contexts that can be characterized as relatively chaotic, unpredictable, and risky, people have less freedom to chart their own course and to express themselves than in middle-class contexts. Instead, responding effectively to the conditions of working-class contexts requires a different set of behaviors—adjusting to the social context, being aware of one's position in social hierarchy, and relying on others for material assistance and support (Kohn 1969, Lareau 2003). Notably, however, in working-class contexts, adjusting, responding, and overcoming challenges is often coupled with a sense of toughness, strength, and resilience.

With higher levels of material constraints and fewer opportunities for influence, choice, and control, working-class contexts tend to afford an understanding of the self and behavior as interdependent with others and the social context. As shown in **Figure 1**, the broader cultural ideal of freedom from constraint, coupled with the requirement to adjust to the needs of others and the demands of the social context, promotes selves and patterns of behavior that are both socially responsive and self-protective. We call this way of being hard interdependence[3] because it affords

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[3]The interdependence that develops in relatively low-resourced, working-class American contexts is different from the style of interdependence common in many East Asian or South Asian contexts. Interdependence in East or South Asian contexts is part of the dominant discourse and is fostered by the mainstream practices and institutions of the larger society (e.g., Tsai et al. 2007), whereas interdependence in American working-class contexts is afforded primarily by holding a relatively low

not only an awareness of the influence of social contexts (Kraus et al. 2009, 2012; Stephens et al. 2007, 2011) but also a focus on strength and toughness (Chen & Miller 2012, Kusserow 2004, Stephens et al. 2009). For example, a college student from a working-class background described how confronting and overcoming adversity had fostered a sense of resilience: "I've been through a lot in my life and that defines who I am now. It gave me a perspective that made college a lot easier to tackle. Midterms and papers are hard, but at the same time they seem like another drop in the bucket" (N.M. Stephens, M.G. Hamedani, & M. Destin, manuscript under review).

In sum, the conditions of different social class contexts give rise to culture-specific selves and corresponding patterns of behavior. The selves that emerge through ongoing participation in middle-class contexts tend to reflect and promote cultural norms of expressive independence, whereas selves in working-class contexts tend to reflect and promote norms of hard interdependence. Each of these ways of being enables people to adapt to their local social class contexts. Furthermore, both expressive independence and hard interdependence can be highly functional even beyond the local social class contexts in which they emerge. However, as we illuminate in the next section, gateway American institutions often translate these social class differences into inequality. They do so by institutionalizing middle-class cultural norms as the cultural ideal and by devaluing the hard interdependence that is prevalent in many working-class contexts.

THE SOCIAL CLASS CULTURE CYCLE: THREE GATEWAY CONTEXTS

In this section, we describe how three gateway contexts—home, school, and workplace—contribute to social class culture cycles. In doing so, we specify two key processes through which the cycle operates: (*a*) socializing social class cultural differences and (*b*) institutionalizing middle-class norms.

The Role of Families

Families are an important gateway context that often provides access to critical resources such as financial and social support, education, and health care (Chen 2004, Evans 2004). For example, early childhood family environments have long-term impacts on children's physical health outcomes (Repetti et al. 2002) and academic achievement (Reardon 2011). Families have such a formative influence, in part, because they provide the initial platform through which children learn how to act as culturally appropriate people in the world (e.g., Lareau 2003). Below we describe the initiation of the social class culture cycle as it emerges in middle-class and working-class families.

Socializing different selves. Local family contexts tend to socialize culture-specific selves and patterns of behavior that will enable individuals to effectively respond to the conditions of those contexts. For example, parents often encourage children to engage in activities and to develop the types of specialized skills that will prepare them to be successful in the different types of worlds that they anticipate their children are likely to encounter in the future.

Middle-class families often prepare their children for a world that is relatively materially unconstrained and thus more stable, predictable, and safe (e.g., higher job security, safer neighborhoods; Bernstein 1974, Kohn 1969). To thrive in contexts with these conditions, children need to develop selves that orient their behavior toward expressive independence. For example, in a series of

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status within the larger social hierarchy and needing to protect the self against environmental threats and adjust to and attend to others. The style of interdependence common in working-class contexts reflects the foundational American ideal to be free from constraint (e.g., including some expressions of independence through its normative emphasis on strength and toughness) but is tempered by the ongoing requirement to be socially responsive.

interviews, Kusserow (2004) found that parents in middle-class families assume that their children possess soft selves that are like "delicate flowers" and that need to be cultivated to grow and reach their potential. Likewise, parents use words like "bloom" to describe the careful and gentle process of child development (e.g., Kusserow 2012, Lareau 2003). Guided by these assumptions about the nature of the self, parents often encourage their children to prioritize their individual needs, to express themselves, and to influence the world.

In contrast, working-class families often prepare their children for a world that is relatively materially constrained and thus more unstable, unpredictable, and risky (e.g., lack of access to healthcare, lack of an economic safety net). To thrive in contexts with these conditions, children need to develop selves that orient their behavior toward hard interdependence. Kusserow (2004) found that working-class families assume that their children possess hard fortress-like selves that need to be self-protective, tough, strong, and resilient so that children are not easily beaten down and are able to persist in the face of adversity. Parents use words like "keeping your pride" to describe the fortifying process of child development (Kusserow 2012). Guided by these assumptions about the nature of the self, parents often encourage their children to prioritize others' needs over their own, to be attentive to the requirements of the context, and to be strong by standing up for themselves.

Communication styles. These efforts to craft different selves can be seen in how parents interact with their children. Parents may implicitly or explicitly develop these ways of being, for example, through their styles of communication. Middle-class contexts afford and even require the expression of personal desires, beliefs, and opinions, as well as a consideration of how rules can be changed. Parents in middle-class contexts foster norms of expressive independence by immersing their children in what Lareau (2003) calls "a steady stream of speech" or constant conversation in which they encourage their children to share what they are thinking, feeling, and learning (Hart & Risley 1995, Lareau & Calarco 2012, Phillips 2011). Moreover, in the classic book *Class, Codes, and Control* (1974), Basil Bernstein finds that speech patterns in middle-class contexts are characterized by complex grammatical constructions that are often abstract and involve frequent counterfactuals or conditional statements. For example, if a child does or says something inappropriate, parents may ask an indirect question: "Do you really think you should be saying that right now?" or "What do you think will happen if you continue to do that?" (Bernstein 1974, Kusserow 2004). This style of indirect questioning promotes expressive independence by encouraging children to explore their own thoughts and beliefs and to reach their own conclusions.

In contrast, working-class contexts often have less of a safety net than do middle-class contexts, and breaking the rules or stepping out of line can have more severe consequences. Parents in working-class contexts therefore display far less tolerance for breaking the rules and leave little room for error in communicating with their children. Bernstein (1974) finds that speech patterns in working-class contexts are characterized by simple grammatical constructions that are concrete and involve few counterfactuals or conditional statements. For example, when a child does something inappropriate, working-class parents often issue direct commands, such as "Do not say that" or "Never do that again." Such direct commands promote hard interdependence by communicating the importance of being tough and strong and adjusting to the rules.

Storytelling. Parents' efforts to cultivate different selves are also evident in the cultural practice of storytelling. Storytelling is an important medium through which parents can model the "right" way to think, feel, and act as a person in the world. Middle-class contexts, with their built-in safety net, afford ample opportunities for exploration, optimism, and self-expression. When telling stories, parents in middle-class contexts tend to highlight the positive elements of the story while

encouraging their children to ask questions and consider alternative realities. For example, if a child tries to rewrite a story by insisting that Santa Claus comes at Easter, a parent may ask: "Really, does he? Tell me about it? How does that work?" This style of storytelling can foster expressive independence by encouraging children to prioritize their own views, to see the world as their oyster, and to challenge the status quo.

In contrast, working-class contexts, with a stronger imperative to avoid errors given the lack of safety net, often require consideration of facts and a close attention to the potential costs of breaking the rules. As a result, parents in working-class contexts tend to dramatize the negative aspects of the story while emphasizing the facts to ensure that their children get the right answers (Miller & Sperry 1987, 2012; Miller et al. 2005). For example, if a child in a working-class context were to insist that Santa Claus visits at Easter, a parent might challenge the child's statement by saying "No, he doesn't, don't be crazy." This style of storytelling can foster hard interdependence by conveying to children that you can't always get what you want and that the world is not theirs for the making.

Activities and play. How children spend their time also fosters different selves. In middle-class contexts, which often require and reward individuality, parents frequently engage in what Lareau (2003) calls concerted cultivation. They provide a range of enrichment activities (e.g., play dates, creative classes) that will help their children develop and explore their personal interests (Vincent & Ball 2007). For example, parents are likely to ask questions and give their children choices: "Would you prefer to try art or sports camp this summer?" In the course of answering such questions, parents tend to encourage their children to elaborate their preferences as well as to consider what those preferences signal about who they are. Parents then further scaffold their children's interactions with their instructors in these activities, helping to ensure good experiences while also teaching their children to voice their likes and dislikes to authority figures (see Lareau & Weininger 2003). For example, a parent might say, "If you don't like the way Mr. Thompson is arranging the teams, you should tell him." Engaging in structured and individually tailored activities can promote expressive independence by showing children the importance of pursuing their own passions, expressing themselves through their actions, and influencing the world to reflect their preferences.

In working-class contexts, which are more likely to require an awareness of the importance of others' needs and preferences, parents more often adhere to what Lareau (2003) calls a natural growth model. In other words, parents are less likely to create structured activity schedules to meet their children's personal interests. Instead, they more often trust that their children will develop naturally—through frequent social interactions with others and with limited parental intervention. For example, a parent might tell a child to go outside to play with siblings and neighborhood friends and would expect the child to figure out how to entertain herself. Parents are less likely to scaffold these interactions with peers. For example, if neighborhood children were to have a dispute, a parent might emphasize the importance of resolving the problem on their own. Encouraging children to engage in unstructured activities without parental intervention can foster hard interdependence by instilling the value of getting along with others and teaching children how to stand their ground and negotiate their social interactions for themselves.

The Role of Schools

Schools are a critical gateway context that can provide access to valuable financial assets, social networks, and future educational and job opportunities (Lareau & Weininger 2003). For example, in the US economy today most jobs that provide a living wage and basic benefits require at least

a four-year college degree, and college graduates can expect to earn 84% more money than high school graduates earn (Carnevale et al. 2011).

Although education is an increasingly important arbiter of who has access to valued life opportunities, schools are not neutral spaces. Instead, the ideas, practices, and standards of evaluation prevalent in educational settings both reflect and promote culture-specific norms for how to be a good student. Schools can promote these norms by providing students with educational experiences that encourage the development of specialized skills and patterns of behavior, which will help them to effectively navigate their future occupations (Bowles & Gintis 1976, Oakes 1982). In doing so, schools can either continue to foster the selves that children develop in the home or they can provide a pathway to becoming bicultural and thereby interrupt the social class culture cycles that are often initiated in the home.

Schools in working-class, low-income communities often reflect and promote the norms of hard interdependence that are common in many working-class families. Given the low rates of social mobility in American society compared to other industrialized nations (OECD 2010), many educators in working-class schools assume that most working-class students will not migrate to the middle class but rather that they need to be prepared for the conditions of the low-wage, blue-collar jobs they are likely to hold in the future. If students from working-class families attend schools in their local working-class communities, they are often socialized by the schools and their teachers in a way that will continue to develop patterns of behavior that reflect hard interdependence. At the same time, they rarely get the opportunity to develop the norms of expressive independence that are institutionalized in many mainstream American settings.

On the other hand, schools in middle-class or mixed-social-class communities often represent a potential access point to opportunities to attain higher education and thus upward social mobility in American society. These schools tend to offer greater resources (e.g., new textbooks, Internet access) and higher-quality teachers (Darling-Hammond 2006, Phillips & Chin 2004). They also tend to foster the norms of expressive independence that are institutionalized and taken for granted in many university settings and in high-status, professional occupations (Stephens et al. 2012a). Many educators in these schools assume that students need to be prepared to excel in university classrooms and to navigate the high-wage professional or managerial jobs that they will likely hold in the future.

Middle-class students who attend these schools have an opportunity, then, to strengthen the norms of expressive independence that are often cultivated in family contexts. In contrast, working-class students who attend middle-class schools (or who defy the odds and make it to universities) have an opportunity to develop additional selves that orient behavior toward expressive independence. However, if educators do not provide the additional time and resources that many working-class students need during this challenging transition, then the exclusive focus on expressive independence in middle-class schools can create barriers to working-class students' success. For example, even before students have the opportunity to learn how to enact expressive independence, many educators rely on these norms as the cultural standard through which they interpret and evaluate students' behavior (Fryberg & Markus 2007, Greenfield 1997, Kim 2002, Li 2003). Moreover, the exclusion of norms of hard interdependence can inadvertently signal to working-class students that school is not a place for students like them and, as a result, lead them to struggle both socially and academically.

Schools in working-class contexts socialize hard interdependence. Schools in working-class communities often continue to foster the norms of hard interdependence that many working-class families begin to cultivate in the home. Schools promote these ways of being because they tend to assume that their mostly working-class students will go straight from high school to the workforce

to obtain a low-wage, blue-collar job.[4] Blue-collar jobs present relatively few opportunities for choice and control, little substantive complexity, and a high degree of routinization and supervision (Kohn & Schooler 1969, 1973). To effectively navigate jobs with these expectations, workers need to be familiar with and know how to enact hard interdependence, including being tough and strong and cooperating with and adjusting to others.

To cultivate the skills and values that many students will need in working-class occupations, working-class schools often present a classroom experience that resembles the military (Anyon 1980, MacLeod 2009). For instance, the classroom experience is characterized by relatively limited individual freedom, restricted access to class materials and supplies, more routine and structured activities throughout the day, and stricter rules. To convey the importance of deference to authority and following the rules, teachers often evaluate students' homework based on whether they followed the instructions rather than whether they get the right answer. These conditions tend to foster hard interdependence by emphasizing the importance of solidarity, knowing one's place in the hierarchy, and recognizing that "it's not all about you."

Schools in middle-class contexts socialize expressive independence. Schools in middle-class or mixed-social-class communities often continue to foster the norms of expressive independence that many middle-class families cultivate in the home. Teachers in middle-class schools tend to assume that their students will go from high school to college and afterward obtain a high-wage professional or managerial job. Both colleges and managerial or professional occupations require relatively high levels of autonomy, substantively complex work, and a nonroutinized flow of tasks (Kohn & Schooler 1969, 1973). To effectively navigate contexts with these expectations, students need to develop expressive independence—to be confident in their abilities, promote their interests, and express their ideas and opinions.

To cultivate the skills and values that many students will need in high-wage, professional occupations, middle-class schools provide an academic experience closer to that of a university setting. For instance, the classroom experience is characterized by ample individual freedom, open access to class materials (e.g., art supplies), complex and varied tasks, and freedom of movement and activities (e.g., a choice among tasks; Anyon 1980). To instill independent thinking when solving problems, teachers focus not on following the rules but rather on the importance of understanding the logic behind the process of answering a question (Anyon 1980, Heath 1982). They also emphasize the value of independent work, encourage students to ask questions, and place greater emphasis on creativity and challenging assumptions. These conditions tend to foster expressive independence by promoting a sense of ownership, an awareness of opportunities for choice and self-expression, and a desire to promote individual accomplishments.

Producing disadvantage: working-class students in middle-class schools. As described in the section above, working-class students who attend low-income, working-class schools are often further socialized with hard interdependence, whereas middle-class students in middle-class schools often gain additional expertise with expressive independence. These differences are not inherently problematic, as both of these ways of being are responsive to the conditions of the contexts in which they emerge. The reality, however, is that important gateway institutions in American society, which serve as key access points to valued resources and upward mobility, institutionalize expressive independence as the norm and therefore evaluate and treat people on the

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[4]Given income-based residential segregation, middle-class students rarely live in working-class neighborhoods. If they do, they often attend private schools instead of local working-class public schools (cf. Reardon 2011).

basis of these middle-class expectations. As a result, the continued socialization of hard interde-
pendence can limit working-class students' access to subsequent opportunities (e.g., college or
professional jobs).

Many working-class students, however, do have the opportunity to attend middle-class schools
and to gain access to higher education. These students have a chance to become bicultural, devel-
oping norms of expressive independence that are often required to excel in middle-class university
settings and beyond. Yet, as we document in the sections that follow, these students are still dis-
advantaged because middle-class schools tend to take it for granted that expressive independence
is the only "right" way to be a student. Additionally, teachers rarely harness the norms of hard
independence—a sense of strength and resilience, an awareness of others' needs, and an ability to
adjust oneself to the social context—that many students from working-class contexts bring with
them to school settings. As a result, the school culture can inadvertently signal to working-class
students that they do not belong and are unlikely to be successful there. These experiences can
disadvantage working-class students and prevent them from fully realizing their potential.

Institutional interactions. Middle-class American schools and university settings tend to reflect
and promote expressive independence as the standard against which students' and parents' behavior
is interpreted and evaluated. This focus on expressive independence guides administrators' and
educators' assumptions about how students should learn, be motivated, and interact with peers
and professors. For example, in a survey of administrators at research universities and liberal arts
colleges, we found that the vast majority reported that their institutions expect students to enact
norms of expressive independence—to pave their own paths, to challenge norms and rules, to
express their personal preferences, and to work independently (Stephens et al. 2012b).

For students from middle-class backgrounds, expressive independence is likely experienced as a
seamless continuation of their previous experiences at home. As a result, they are not only equipped
with the "rules of the game" needed to excel, but they are also likely to take it for granted that
they belong and know how to fully realize their academic potential. Yet, for many working-class
students, who are more often guided by norms of hard interdependence, expressive independence
is often disconnected from their previous experiences at home, and thus they are less likely to feel
comfortable in these settings and to have the skills needed to enact the expected behaviors. For
example, college students from working-class backgrounds, who are more accustomed to schools
with highly structured curricula and clear rules, report difficulty choosing a major or planning
out their schedules to manage multiple and often competing demands on their time (e.g., papers
and exams). As a result of such difficulties, working-class students are often disadvantaged. They
experience more stress and perform worse academically than do their middle-class peers (Stephens
et al. 2012b,d).

Student-teacher interactions. Teachers in mainstream schools often assume that good students
are those who exemplify norms of expressive independence. For example, Calarco (2011) finds
that teachers expect students to be proactive learners—to go out of their way to ask questions, take
charge of their educational experience, and express their needs to the teacher. If students demand
the help that they require, teachers often view this behavior as indicating a motivated, thoughtful,
and intellectually curious student. Yet, if students sit quietly, try to figure things out on their own,
and do not speak up when they need help, teachers may assume either that students do not need
help or that they do not have the drive, talent, or imagination necessary to excel.

Middle-class students, guided by norms of expressive independence, often learn how to
prioritize their own needs and tend to assume they are on equal footing with the teacher. As a
result, they have more comfort and familiarity expressing these needs and are thus more likely

than working-class students to approach the teacher, raise their hand to ask questions, and even interrupt the teacher in the middle of class. On the other hand, working-class students, guided by norms of hard interdependence, more often learn the importance of "hanging in there" and of showing respect and deference to authority figures. As a result, students from working-class contexts often seek to avoid burdening the teacher and thus are less likely to proactively ask questions of the teacher or request assistance when they need it (Calarco 2011; see also Kim & Sax 2009).

Because norms of expressive independence guide teachers' responses to students, middle-class students who enact these norms are given an educational leg-up on their working-class peers. Not only do teachers more often help their middle-class students, but they also respond more positively to them, given that they are likely to fit their assumptions about what it means to be a good student. Teachers offer middle-class students more attention, more frequent praise, and higher levels of responsiveness (Calarco 2011, Rist 1970). However, working-class students, who more often enact norms of hard interdependence, are less likely to fit with teachers' normative views of a good student. They therefore receive less ongoing support than their middle-class peers, which places them at a distinct academic disadvantage.

Parent-teacher interactions. Just as teachers assume that students should be proactive learners, they assume that good parents are those who are highly involved, informed, assertive, and advocate for their children. Teachers and administrators (who are often middle class themselves) expect parents to take charge of and influence their children's educational experience—that is, they expect parents to act as partners with the teacher. If parents act according to these expectations, then teachers tend to assume that these parents are highly committed to their children's education and are therefore more attentive to the parents' demands. If parents are less involved, however, teachers tend to assume that parents are either satisfied with their children's academic experience and progress or that they simply do not care about their children's education.

Middle-class parents, guided by norms of expressive independence, often take on the role of educational expert, as they tend to assume that they are equals with the teacher and know what is best for their child academically (Reay 1998). As a result, middle-class parents are more likely than working-class parents to challenge the rules, question the judgments of school officials, and take charge of their children's educational experience in a way that promotes learning and growth (Horvat et al. 2003). For example, if a teacher gives a child negative feedback that threatens the child's sense of self-esteem, a parent might set up a meeting with the teacher to discuss how the teacher can provide more sensitive feedback in the future (see Lareau & Weininger 2003). In contrast, many working-class parents, guided by norms of hard interdependence, often assume that the teacher is the expert who should be primarily responsible for their child's education. Because they are aware of their lower rank in the social hierarchy in relation to the teacher as well as their own limited experience navigating the educational system, they may feel uncomfortable interacting with the teacher and be less equipped to initiate discussions with the teacher about their children's progress.

Norms of expressive independence guide teachers' responses to parents, and thus middle-class parents are more often successful advocates for their children, securing them additional help, academic opportunities, and individually tailored learning experiences. Middle-class students reap the benefits of their parents' advocacy and efforts to promote their academic interests. For example, students from affluent families are more likely to receive accommodations for learning disabilities on college entrance exams such as the SAT and ACT than are students from low-income families (Calif. State Audit. 2000). Additionally, when the result of a test does not produce the desired

outcome (e.g., admission into the gifted program), middle-class parents are more likely to have their children retested and to ask school officials to make an exception to the rule (Lareau & Weininger 2003).

On the other hand, although working-class parents are often equally committed to fighting for their children, they are less likely to have the resources or knowledge required to effectively advocate on their children's behalf. As a result, working-class students are often disadvantaged because they less often receive the intervening parental support that would produce more positive academic outcomes and greater access to opportunities. Additionally, if teachers assume that middle-class parents' greater involvement indicates that they are more committed to their children's educational success than are working-class parents, then teachers are likely to respond more positively to their interactions with both the middle-class parents and their children (Lareau 1987).

The Role of the Workplace

Workplaces provide access to income, health insurance, and other valuable resources that help employees provide for their families, send children to college, and save for retirement. Thus, the workplace is yet another important gateway context that can either continue to foster the selves that are initiated in the home and often perpetuated in schools or that can interrupt and change the course of these social class culture cycles. Like the institution of education, however, workplaces are not neutral spaces but instead reflect culture-specific norms and assumptions about how to be a good employee or coworker. Just as teachers prepare students for different anticipated life trajectories, so too do employers socialize workers to be effective in different types of occupations (Acker 2006). The occupations typically held in middle-class contexts are those that require a college degree, are managerial or professional in nature, and involve nonmanual labor (often called white-collar jobs). In contrast, the occupations typically held in working-class contexts often require a high school diploma or less, provide hourly wages, and involve manual labor or low-skill service work (called blue- or pink-collar jobs).

Working-class occupations often reflect and promote the norms of hard interdependence that are common in many working-class families and schools. If students go straight from high school to work rather than attending college, then their managers and coworkers will often assume these individuals will remain in these working-class jobs and need to be prepared for work that is generally routinized, monotonous, and team-oriented. Thus, these workers tend to be socialized by their managers and coworkers in a way that will continue to develop patterns of behavior that reflect hard interdependence. On the other hand, middle-class occupations often represent a potential access point to increasingly high-status positions and secure, higher incomes. Many managers in middle-class workplaces reasonably assume that their employees will remain in the middle class and need to be prepared to eventually work as independent managers, innovators, and even power brokers. Thus, they tend to foster the norms of expressive independence that are taken for granted in many middle-class homes and schools.

Those employees from working-class backgrounds who defy the odds to attend college and then gain access to middle-class jobs likely will have accumulated some experience and comfort with norms of expressive independence. In university settings, they will have been exposed to these norms and may have attained some level of fluency in expressive independence (as well as hard interdependence) and therefore have become bicultural. Nevertheless, these students still have far less experience with and knowledge about how to enact the particular norms of expressive independence required in elite, high-status professions (e.g., consulting or investment banking) compared to their peers, who have inhabited middle-class worlds for their entire lives. Thus,

on the path to career success, the exclusive focus on expressive independence is likely to create obstacles for employees from working-class backgrounds.

Working-class occupations socialize hard interdependence. Working-class occupations (e.g., machine technicians) continue to foster the norms of hard interdependence that employees are often previously exposed to both in the home and at school. These occupations promote these ways of being because they often require interdependence with others (e.g., working together to fight a fire), involve close monitoring by one's superiors, and have a relatively routinized set of tasks and procedures (Kohn & Schooler 1969, 1973). Work settings characterized by these conditions also tend to offer employees relatively few opportunities to influence the type of work that they do, decide how they spend their time, or express themselves.

To navigate working-class jobs effectively, workers need to follow the rules, cooperate with others, show discipline, and be deferential to their superiors (Berg et al. 2010, Wrzesniewski & Dutton 2001). These behavioral requirements reflect and foster norms of hard interdependence. For instance, workers are often socialized through workplace interactions to value social relations, coworkers, and security (Cooke & Rousseau 1998, Friedlander 1965, Lamont 2000, Salzinger 2003, Urtasun & Núñez 2012). For example, Barker (1993) finds that both supervisors and coworkers in a working-class manufacturing company emphasize that job success relies on cooperating with fellow workers and being responsive to social norms. Work teams in this setting are organized to stick together over time, and these ongoing relationships are meant to enhance group solidarity, enforce rules, and increase productivity. Additionally, because working-class jobs are often physically strenuous and produce tangible, concrete outputs (e.g., building a house or fixing a sink; Torlina 2011, Williams 2012), employees are often socialized to view work as means to an end or as a functional activity necessary to support one's family (Lamont 2000).

Middle-class occupations socialize expressive independence. Middle-class occupations (e.g., managers) continue to foster the norms of expressive independence that their workers are often previously exposed to both in the home and in schools. Middle-class occupations focus on these ways of being because they often require independence from others (e.g., writing a memo on one's computer), are relatively cognitively demanding, and involve a specific outcome goal coupled with the personal freedom to decide how and in what manner one wants to pursue that goal. Such work often focuses on personal freedom and choice and offers employees the opportunity to job craft or to have the ability to influence their job to meet their needs (Berg et al. 2010). For example, software engineers at Google are offered the option of using 20% of their day to work on a task of their choosing (Wojcicki 2011).

To navigate middle-class jobs effectively, workers need to be creative, express themselves, and experiment with different strategies. These behavioral requirements further reflect and foster norms of expressive independence. For instance, workers are often socialized through workplace interactions to value independence and freedom (Bacon & Storey 1996, Cooke & Rousseau 1998, Friedlander 1965, Hyman 1994, Lamont 2000, Urtasun & Núñez 2012). For example, Sutton & Hargadon (1996) found that IDEO (a professional product-design firm) emphasizes to employees that job success relies on challenging and breaking rules, expressing personal views, and being independent thinkers. To ensure that people remain independent and creative in their thinking, project work teams are regularly reorganized so as to disrupt the emergence of strong group norms. Furthermore, because the products of labor in middle-class jobs are often based on ideas (e.g., a presentation), employees are socialized to view work not as a means to an end (e.g., to pay the bills) but instead as a valuable end in and of itself (e.g., a source of self-expression or personal fulfillment; Williams 2012).

Producing disadvantage: working-class employees in middle-class workplaces. As described in the section above, working-class employees in working-class occupations are often further socialized with hard interdependence whereas middle-class employees in middle-class occupations continue to accumulate additional expertise with expressive independence. Again, these cultural differences can be beneficial in their respective contexts, as they can help people to respond to the expectations and requirements of different types of occupations. At the same time, however, given that expressive independence is the American cultural ideal and standard against which gateway institutions evaluate employees' competence or success, the continued development of hard interdependence in working-class occupations can also function as an obstacle to upward mobility. For example, working-class employees who enact hard interdependence may seem less qualified for a promotion or for additional opportunities in the future than comparably qualified employees who enact expressive independence.

Some employees from working-class backgrounds manage to defy the odds to earn college degrees and gain entry to middle-class workplaces. These employees have an opportunity to continue on the path to becoming bicultural (and achieving upward mobility) by further developing the norms of expressive independence to which they are often exposed in educational settings. Yet, as we document in the sections that follow, working-class employees are often still disadvantaged in middle-class workplaces because expressive independence is left unmarked as the only "right" way to be an employee and is taken for granted as the norm. Managers often judge potential employees according to these middle-class norms and, at the same time, fail to leverage the norms of hard interdependence that many working-class employees bring with them to occupational settings. As a result, the workplace culture can signal to working-class employees that that they do not belong and prevent them from fully realizing their potential.

Hiring interactions. Managers and employers in mainstream American workplaces (who are themselves mostly middle class) expect and prioritize the norms of expressive independence that pervade many middle-class contexts. For instance, they expect job applicants to ask questions, to express their preferences, and to take risks. These expectations can guide decisions about hiring or promotion (Cooke & Rousseau 1998, England 1967, Mills 2002, Urtasun & Núñez 2012). For example, Rivera (2012) finds that during important decisions about hiring, these expectations for potential employees can manifest themselves in managers' desire to feel a connection or sense of fit with the applicants. Perceptions of fit can, in turn, shape how managers assess applicants' qualifications for a position at an organization (e.g., the merit of their previous experience) as well as their judgment of whether that person is likely to get along with coworkers and bosses.

Throughout the hiring process for these middle-class jobs, many applicants from middle-class backgrounds communicate norms of expressive independence, emphasizing control, choice, and nonconformity. Middle-class applicants also tend to call attention to the numerous, and often expensive, activities and hobbies they enjoy. Managers' familiarity and comfort with applicants who demonstrate cultural fit—through shared norms and extracurricular interests—enables them to view these applicants as successful employees at their organization. For instance, in evaluating one applicant's résumé, a manager noted the importance of identifying hires who would fit in with other employees at the organization: "With his lacrosse and her squash, they'd really get along . . . on the trading floor" (Rivera 2012, p. 1009). As a result, applicants from middle-class backgrounds are advantaged because they are more likely to fit with managers' assumptions about what it means to be an ideal employee and coworker (Ridgeway & Fisk 2012, Rivera 2012).

In contrast, when applicants from working-class backgrounds participate in the hiring process for middle-class occupations, they have had fewer of the life experiences that foster and promote

the cultural ideal of expressive independence. Instead, they are more likely to enact norms of hard interdependence, emphasizing social responsivity and toughness in their interactions with potential managers or employers. To make matters worse, working-class applicants also have a more difficult time signaling their cultural fit with the organization by discussing ski weekends or tennis lessons (Ridgeway & Fisk 2012). As a result, hiring managers often view applicants from working-class backgrounds as less well equipped to be successful or to fit in with the company culture of expressive independence (Ridgeway & Fisk 2012, Rivera 2012). Similar to the case in schools, applicants from working-class backgrounds are disadvantaged compared to their middle-class counterparts: Managers assume that working-class applicants do not fit their expectations about what it means to be an ideal employee or coworker.

Workplace interactions. Little empirical research has directly examined how workers from different social class backgrounds respond to a predominantly middle-class workplace culture of expressive independence. We expect, however, that workers' experiences and responses would be quite comparable to those of students. For example, workers from middle-class backgrounds, who have been socialized with expressive independence at home and in schools, would likely be more familiar and comfortable with a workplace culture of expressive independence and thus have a relative advantage.

Yet, for many workers from working-class backgrounds who have likely been socialized with hard interdependence at home and in schools, a focus on expressive independence could reduce their sense of belonging and additionally render it more difficult for them to fit in with and adapt to workplace expectations (cf. Stephens et al. 2012b,d). This mismatch between working-class employees and their middle-class colleagues and institutions could also reduce employees' job security and satisfaction, continuing the cycle of disadvantage for working-class employees.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The current review synthesizes a growing interdisciplinary literature on social class and behavior to reveal how three gateway contexts—home, school, and workplace—contribute to social class culture cycles. We reveal how these cycles operate through the two key processes of socialization and institutional disadvantage. First, social class contexts characterized by different conditions foster different ways of being a person, student, and worker. Second, middle-class schools and workplaces, which serve as gateway institutions to valued resources and upward social mobility, can create barriers to success for many Americans from working-class backgrounds. They do so by institutionalizing expressive independence as the cultural standard for measuring success. These processes often work in tandem to create, maintain, and reproduce a growing social class divide in access to valued resources, life experiences, and outcomes.

If left unchecked, this social class divide in American society will continue to grow. This divide threatens foundational American ideals, including the American Dream, or the belief that with hard work and effort people can improve their social standing in society. An emerging body of research further suggests that this divide has far-reaching negative consequences for society as a whole. For example, nations with higher levels of inequality are less economically competitive than those with lower levels of inequality (Barro 2001). More unequal nations can also expect to have higher levels of a wide range of social ills, including crime, drug use, school dropouts, depression, anxiety, and early deaths (Kawachi & Kennedy 2002). In the face of higher levels of income inequality, all members of society can expect to live shorter lives, to suffer from higher

rates of chronic illnesses, and to be less happy and less trusting of one another than when income inequality is lower (Oishi et al. 2011, Wilkinson 2002).

Sites of Change: Reducing Social Class Inequality

Given the negative individual and societal consequences of this social class divide, a pressing issue for researchers and practitioners alike is understanding its sources and developing the tools to reduce its pernicious effects. As we have illuminated in the current review, the dual processes of socialization and institutional disadvantage are indeed strong forces of social reproduction. The continued growth of social class inequality is, however, not inevitable. In fact, the first step toward halting or even reducing inequality is making visible the largely unseen processes through which social class cycles operate to produce inequality. Although the social class culture cycles operate through both individuals and institutions, interventions need not target all elements of the cycles simultaneously. Rather, the current review suggests that interventions can productively target the constituent elements of culture cycles (e.g., individuals, institutions) in a way that will influence other elements of the cycle and thus become self-sustaining.

Diversifying institutional norms. Institutional norms are one important site of change. Institutions are not neutral but instead promote particular middle-class understandings of how to be an effective person, student, or worker. Institutional norms reflect middle-class perspectives, in part, because the people (e.g., university administrators or managers) who hold the power to create these institutions and define institutional rules and standards of success are typically from middle-class backgrounds. Thus, even in the absence of discriminatory intentions, people in these positions of power often build institutions to reflect their own cultural norms and assumptions about the right way to be a person. And, as we have shown, students and employees from different social class backgrounds not only have differential access to these institutionalized middle-class norms but they also experience these norms quite differently. This is a process that can generate and perpetuate inequality.

Although most gateway contexts reflect middle-class cultural norms, emerging research from social psychology suggests that broadening institutional norms can promote a more inclusive environment and reduce inequality in the process (Davies et al. 2005, Markus et al. 2000, Oyserman et al. 2007, Purdie-Vaughns et al. 2008). For example, our own research with working-class college students demonstrates that even small changes to the norms communicated in cultural products can make a difference. Specifically, reframing welcome letters to make them more inclusive of interdependent selves improved working-class students' college experience (i.e., reduced stress; Stephens et al. 2012d) and their performance on academic tasks (Stephens et al. 2012b). If institutions were to make their cultures more inclusive, then people from diverse social class backgrounds may be able to leverage different aspects of their selves on the pathway to success. For instance, working-class individuals could capitalize on the strength and social responsiveness associated with hard interdependence. At the same time, middle-class individuals could continue to leverage the rule challenging and self-expression associated with expressive independence. In other words, multiple paths to success could be made available to people from different backgrounds.

Another way to diversify institutional norms might be to increase awareness of social class cultural differences and how they are likely to matter for people's experiences in schools or workplaces. Raising awareness in this way might enable power brokers to see the advantages of both hard interdependence and expressive independence and thereby encourage them to be more accepting of different ways of being a student or employee. Awareness of the potential for bias can sometimes diminish the bias itself (see Apfelbaum et al. 2010, Castilla & Benard 2010, Devine et al.

2012). For example, in a typical gateway interaction, a student from a working-class background may be interviewing for a management job with a middle-class supervisor. To the extent managers are unaware of social class differences, they are likely to implicitly value and prioritize expressive independence over the hard interdependence that the potential hire is likely to demonstrate. But to the extent that managers are aware of such social class differences, as well as the potential advantages of hard interdependence, they may be able to work to overcome some of their normative preferences for expressive independence. In turn, these efforts may serve to reduce some of the disadvantage faced by applicants from working-class backgrounds.

Empowering selves. A second site of change is to empower selves in gateway institutions and thereby afford some of the ways of being that are prioritized in important gateway contexts. Supporting the potential effectiveness of such an approach, a growing literature on power, resources, and status indicates that even a single situational experience of having or lacking resources can shift the self and behavior immediately and quite dramatically (e.g., Shah et al. 2012, Vohs et al. 2006). For example, individuals assigned to a high-power role or asked to imagine having power in a single situation view themselves as more independent from others and also display behaviors that are often aligned with norms of expressive independence (Lee & Tiedens 2001). Specifically, they show greater confidence, attend less to others and the social context, are more emotionally expressive, and focus more on pursuing their own goals (Anderson & Berdahl 2002, Gruenfeld et al. 2008, Guinote 2008).

Given the central roles of power, resources, and status in changing selves and behavior in the immediate situation, interventions might seek to provide people with a more enduring sense of psychological empowerment. One route to such empowerment might be to provide individuals with additional knowledge, understanding, or cultural capital. For example, in our own intervention, by exposing students to the stories of successful college students from different social class backgrounds, we empowered working-class students with an understanding of how their backgrounds can make a difference for the college experience—in terms of obstacles, strengths, and strategies for success. Through this experience, students learned that their struggles were an expected part of being a working-class college student with a different background, rather than an indication that they did not belong or could not do well in college. Equipped with this understanding, working-class students also learned and were empowered to enact the behavioral strategies (e.g., asking for help from professors) that students "like them" needed to improve their academic performance (N.M. Stephens, M.G. Hamedani, & M. Destin, manuscript under review; see also Gurin et al. 2013).

Another approach to empowering selves is to educate students directly about the expectations of the dominant culture and the "rules of the game" needed to operate within that culture. For example, an intervention might teach students about the assumptions embedded in the university culture: How do teachers expect students to behave both inside and outside of the classroom? And what is the logic underlying these assumptions? For example, if students from working-class backgrounds understand that professors expect them to voice their ideas and opinions and take the initiative to ask for help, then they may be better equipped to adjust themselves to these expectations of the college culture. Another possibility is that students could be provided "cultural training" sessions in which they would be taught and given a chance to practice the rules for how to interact with professors or peers.

Future Directions

Future research is needed to disentangle the immediate situational effects of power, status, or resources from the more enduring or chronic experiences of social class (see Stephens & Townsend

2013). For example, how might the cultural norms that emerge from repeated or chronic experiences of social class—e.g., interacting with particular ideas, practices, and institutions over time—diverge from those produced by situational manipulations of power? And how do previous experiences in different social class contexts shape how people respond to the presence or absence of resources? For example, Shah and colleagues (2012) reveal that stripping the rich of resources in a single situation can cause them to display behavioral tendencies (e.g., overborrowing) common among the poor. If provided resources, however, would the poor have access to the appropriate cultural scripts or rules for how to display the behavioral tendencies common among the rich? Findings from studies on the manipulation of power and control suggest that the poor will immediately shift in some behaviors but that people's social class backgrounds will also moderate their responses to the acquisition of resources, power, or status.

Future work is also needed to examine the psychological consequences of repeatedly navigating within and across social class boundaries.[5] For example, how do working-class individuals who ascend the social class hierarchy manage the competing and often contradictory demands of school and family life? And how do their selves and behaviors change in responses to these experiences? Moreover, as students adjust to the predominantly middle-class culture of education and work, to what extent do they shed their working-class ways of being versus become bicultural, or fluent in both cultures? Research that illuminates the dynamic nature of self and identity suggests that students from working-class backgrounds are shaped by their ongoing interactions in middle-class schools and workplaces. Yet to what extent and how they are shaped are open questions. Further, research on biculturalism suggests that people who learn middle-class ways of being and also retain working-class ways will have higher levels of psychological well-being and be better prepared to thrive in diverse settings than those who do not (cf. LaFromboise et al. 1993). For example, in middle-class workplaces, elements of hard interdependence may help students from working-class backgrounds to overcome adversity or to adjust to their roles in the organizational hierarchy.

CONCLUSION

Everyday life in American society—from what people watch on television to how they interact with and educate their children—is more stratified along social class lines than ever before. These social class divides not only shape the nature and content of people's everyday lives but also inform the types of experiences to which people have access, as well as the selves and patterns of behavior that people have an opportunity to develop. As America becomes more experientially and culturally divided by social class, individuals who have spent their lives in working-class communities will have an even harder time gaining access to the skills, knowledge, and resources needed to successfully navigate opportunities in a middle-class world. In turn, they will have a harder time accessing the educational credentials and job opportunities that are increasingly necessary to earn a living wage.

Despite the magnitude of these social class divides and their myriad negative consequences for the nation as a whole, American society has been slow to recognize their significance. This blindness to class inequality has been difficult to overcome because social class itself—especially the idea that social class shapes one's life chances and outcomes—runs counter to the idea of America as the land of equal opportunity. Recognizing the influence of these divides further threatens the middle-class belief that success is the result of individual effort or merit alone. For people with middle-class standing, these social class culture cycles afford access to the accumulation of

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[5]Future work should consider in greater depth how the contextual experiences, as well as the culture-specific selves and patterns of behavior they afford, vary within the working and middle classes.

the experiences, skills, and resources required for success. Moreover, the criteria used to define merit are actively constructed by the people who have the power to define institutional rules and therefore reflect middle-class perspectives. In other words, these cycles and the selves and patterns of behavior that they afford are produced and malleable rather than natural and fixed. With these insights in mind, researchers and practitioners alike will be better equipped to intervene in and change the course of the social class culture cycles and, in doing so, create a more educated, healthy, and productive citizenry.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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Errata

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