

**THE POWER OF THE PAST: CLASS, MARRIAGE, AND INTIMATE EXPERIENCES WITH  
INEQUALITY**

by

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## PREFACE

The idea for this project began in 2007, when, over coffee, another graduate student asked me about my parents' class backgrounds. While this is probably a strange, if not taboo, question in many circles, his awareness that I was interested in studying class made the question seem normal. It turned out that both of us were raised by mothers and fathers who did not share their class roots. We talked a bit about how this likely shaped us, and noted that even though our parents grew up in different countries, mine in America and his in Japan, that our parents' class positions seemed to be expressed in similar ways. After musing over the topic for a few minutes, he off-handedly remarked, "You should write your dissertation about that."

His comment resonated with me as I realized that the study of marriages between those with different class origins would allow me to answer questions I had developed a deep interest in due to my own life experiences. My interest in class and relationships that straddle class lines had begun ten years earlier when my family moved from Shaker Heights, Ohio to Ada, Ohio. Both communities were in northern Ohio, but at the time it seemed to me that their similarities ended there. Shaker Heights was suburban with a veneer of wealth; Ada was rural and working-class. I was aware of these differences before we moved, but not aware of what it would mean for my life.

Leaving behind the canopied streets and colonial homes of Shaker Heights, we drove past Ada's trailer parks and four stop lights before arriving at our new home. The physical differences between the two towns were stark; from hills to flatlands, from small businesses to farms, from

neighborhoods lined with mansions to the town's only mansion included as a stop on my first tour of the town. The two places did not seem as though they belonged in the same state.

The social differences, however, turned out to be even starker than the physical differences. We moved in next to a boy who would join me in my seventh grade class. He spoke in an accent I hadn't heard before and spoke of interests I didn't share – trains, tractors, and football. Going to school, I observed even more differences. Ideas of what constituted a rigorous academic class were far apart, as were ideas about what to bring for lunch, where to shop, what television shows to watch, and what to do on the weekends. The first weekend I moved to Ada there was a tractor pull and greased pig contest – leisure activities with which I had no experience. Three hours away, the world was very different.

By the time I left for college, Ada felt like home. Over the six years I lived there, I had adapted to some of the cultural ways of the town while also keeping some of the culture of my family. I enjoyed creamy potatoes and jello salads with my friends and they ate mussels at my house; I stopped thinking it was weird that many of my classmates had never left the state while my family took vacations around the country; I teased them about saying “it don't matter” and they teased me for not saying it; I supported their decisions to go to local colleges while I limited my college search to institutions outside of the state. By the time I left, I felt like the country song with the refrain “you don't need an invitation, kick off your shoes come on in” was an apt characterization of the town, provided, importantly, that you were white, straight, and did not pose too big of a threat to Christianity.

Upon heading to college, I changed geographic and class locations again, this time moving to Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut. This move proved to be an even harder transition. I had read that students at Trinity were preppy, but I had no idea that preppy meant



something very different in wealthy New England circles than it did in working-class Midwestern ones. The college “uniform” of pearls and popped collars for women and popped collars and Nantucket red pants for men, sometimes with a sweater tied around their necks, was an image I had only before seen in movies. Many students in these “uniforms” had attended boarding schools – places I thought only existed for troubled students sent away to be reformed. My freshman year, a school newspaper article told of a thousand dollars worth of jeans being stolen from a dormitory dryer; I was more shocked by the amount the student had spent on jeans than that they were taken. And, most of all, the norm of “you don’t need an invitation, kick off your shoes come on in” was replaced by unreturned “hi’s” on the campus quad and fraternity men serving as gatekeepers at party doors. In one place, forming relationships across class lines was relatively easy and at the other it was not a possibility. I wasn’t sure if this was due to each community’s internal culture or my place within each community’s class hierarchy.

Studying marriages between those from different classes seemed like one way that I could start to understand how crossing class lines worked. So much of the literature on class and culture made my experiences at Trinity – a college that the Princeton Review consistently ranked in the top three for offering the least amount of cross-class interactions – seem normal. People from different classes could not understand each other, this literature said, and feelings of resentment and alienation often were sparked when two classes met. Yet my experience moving to Ada taught me that class divides did not have to produce complete social divides; while relationships were still affected by class they did not need to be extinguished by it. But how anomalous were my experiences in Ada? And what conditions could make class a crossable social line? Studying those who had made lifelong commitments to those from different classes seemed like one way to find out.

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**SECTION 1**  
**INTRODUCTION**

## CHAPTER 1 INEQUALITY, CLASS, AND MARRIAGE

The first time that Lori drove up to her future husband's childhood home, she thought, "Oh my God, what am I doing?" She made herself park her car, but she continued to wonder if she was, metaphorically, in the right place. Her boyfriend's father looked up from tinkering with a car in the garage, and greeted her in casual clothes that struck her as underwear. She then entered the three-bedroom house where her future husband, Jason, grew up with his four brothers.

Maneuvering around a maze of cribs that was set up for the daycare Jason's mother ran out of the house, she cautiously entered, careful not to knock over the stacks of clothes piled high on the couches while struggling to be heard over the TV that was on in another room. Soon Jason's brothers came home, and "kept asking me things like, 'Is it true you're a millionaire?' Which I was like, 'No! I'm not a millionaire!' 'Is it true that your family has three houses?' 'Yes, they do have three houses.'" Lori stayed for a week, and although Jason's family stopped peppering her with questions about her family's wealth, she never felt at home. She did not like the tacky furniture, the cramped space, the processed food, or the way Jason's brother mocked her formal dinner-table etiquette. She did not like that Jason's family did not venture outside of their home, that their mannerisms were rough, or that Jason's parents argued about sex in front of her. Her family was so different.

When Jason, accompanied by Lori, first drove up to his future wife's home, the family's yardman greeted them at the gate: "Oh Miss Lori! Is this your beau?" They drove up the winding driveway, and the family's live-in nurse and cook let them inside. Jason exclaimed, as he did

repeatedly that weekend, “This isn’t normal!” as he was introduced to the lifestyle that was normal to his wife. He was awed by the size of their multiple homes, intimidated by the norm of putting his napkin in his lap, and felt that he “didn’t really know how to eat.” He made a social gaffe when his soon-to-be father-in-law asked if he would like to go on a night sail: “And I thought, ‘Well is it like we’re going to go to Walmart or something for a special discount late at night?’” After returning from their sojourn to the sea, Jason’s father-in-law asked him to tie up the boat. Not wanting to admit that he did not know what knots were used to dock a boat, Jason gave it his best try and then stayed awake all night worrying that his fiancé’s family’s boat had drifted out to sea. During the entire weekend Jason felt anxious and on guard. He too wondered if he was in the right place.

Sociologists rarely consider marriages like Jason and Lori’s – marriages between those with different class backgrounds. I call these marriages “different-origin marriages,” and while there are a variety of compositions of different-origin marriages, I focus on those that, like the marriage between Lori and Jason, are composed of spouses with similar middle-class destinations (i.e., current class position) but dissimilar class origins (i.e., childhood class position).<sup>1</sup> These are then *not* marriages between a yacht owner and yacht cleaner or even between a successful business person and her secretary. They *are*, however, the marriages between the grown child of the yacht owner and the grown child of the yacht cleaner or the grown child of the business person and the grown child of the secretary. Each husband and wife pair started their lives in different spheres, though they came to share the same one. The stories of 64 college-educated individuals in different-origin marriages are the basis of this book, and their lives are compared to those of 20 individuals in “same-origin” marriages – marriages between two children of college-educated fathers who are college-educated themselves.

## DIFFERENT-ORIGIN MARRIAGES AND INEQUALITY

Different-origin marriages – again, those between college-educated couples who are united by their class destinations but divided by their class origins – are not unusual. Americans are increasingly marrying partners whose level of educational attainment and occupational prestige match their own, but are much less often choosing a partner whose father worked in the same type of job as their father (Kalmijn 1998; Mare 1991; Schwartz and Mare 2005). Some scholars describe father’s occupation as losing some its “already modest importance” in directing who marries whom (Kalmijn 1991), and others assert that its modest importance has dropped to nearly no importance at all (Blossfeld and Timm 2003). Today, a full 19% of men whose parents have less than \$1,000 dollars of wealth marry women whose parents have over \$100,000 of wealth (Charles, Hurst, and Killewald 2012). While father’s occupation was once an important predictor of who marries whom, it is less so today.

Different-origin marriages then exist at notable rates. This, however, is not the only reason they are worth considering. Equally important is that marriage patterns affect the societal distribution of resources. Though debated,<sup>2</sup> some scholars estimate that between 25 to 50% of inequality between couples is due to the trend of college graduates marrying other college graduates and high-school graduates partnering with other high-school graduates (Fernández and Rogerson 2001; Reed and Cancian 2009 in Breen and Salazar 2011; Schwartz 2010). These numbers, however, do not account for the class background of each spouse. They therefore do not alert us to if there is inequality between college-educated couples who share their class origin and college-educated couples who do not. Yet, as couples cross the threshold carrying the financial, social, and cultural resources they collected in the past, there is a distinct possibility



that each partner's classed history shapes the amount of resources the couple will possess in the future.

Financially, even couples who share an education may have unequal opportunities based on each partner's classed past. This is partly due to that parents in different classes give their adult children different amounts of financial support. Between the time when they are 18 and 34 years old, the children of parents in the lowest two income quartiles receive an average of \$25,000 of financial support from their parents, while the children of parents in the highest income quartile receive an average of nearly \$71,000 over the same period (Schoeni and Ross 2005). Thus, the consolidation of resources (or lack thereof) occasioned by marriages between individuals who share their class background potentially creates substantial disparities between couples. If parents give at the same rate no matter who their child marries, then couples composed of two adults from the highest income quartile will receive about \$92,000 more than couples in which each partner is from the lowest quartile. Couples that cross class quartiles would receive an amount in the middle. Their marriage disperses parents' financial support rather than concentrating it.

Financial disparities are likely even wider than these numbers suggest. The above figures do not include all forms of financial inequality between same-origin and different-origin couples. Privileged parents may continue to offer financial assistance to their children after they are 34 years old. They may contribute to their grandchildren's college funds, relieving the financial burden on the couple. They may also underwrite their grandchildren's preschool education, pay for family vacations, act as a safety net to the couple, and bequeath inherited wealth. Again, if both spouses have privileged parents they may benefit from financial contributions from both sets of parents. Marrying across lines of class origin disperses some of this wealth.

Even all of these factors together do not paint a full picture of how class origins may shape couples' financial bottom lines. Parents' financial assistance to their children in early adulthood may compound. Couples may use their parents' monetary support to increase their future earnings by investing in graduate school (Carnevale, Rose, and Cheah 2010), or through buying a home – a path that has historically led to wealth accumulation (Krivo and Kaufman 2004). Conversely couples who have two sets of low-income parents may find themselves offering money to their parents rather than receiving it; instead of accumulating wealth they may distribute it.

Spouses' class origins also shape their access to social capital. When two individuals marry they combine their childhood, neighborhood, and family networks – networks which potentially have access to information and resources that may help them maintain their class position. Marriages between two individuals from privileged backgrounds likely expand the number of people they know who are in positions to help them advance their careers. Marriages between two upwardly mobile individuals, on the other hand, are less likely to be able to combine networks of people who can help them navigate graduate school, land a job, or negotiate a promotion. If neither set of parents has graduated from college themselves, they may be unable to offer the advice or contacts that can be crucial for continued success. Different-origin marriages have the potential to distribute these resources more widely, as those from privileged backgrounds can share their social resources with a partner who has access to fewer resources.

Culture also plays a role in social class outcomes (Bourdieu 1984; Khan 2011; Lacy 2007; Lareau 2003; Neckerman and Kirschenman 1991; Pattillo 2007; Rivera 2012; Sennett and Cobb 1972; Willis 1977; Young 2004), and how culture operates through different-origin

marriages is the focus of this book. High rates of same-origin marriages have the potential to perpetuate social class inequality, as schools, white-collar workplaces, and white-collar social organizations favor middle-class culture (Graham 1999; Kendall 2002; Neckerman and Kirschenman 1991; Rivera 2012; Wingfield 2010). Same-origin couples consolidate their knowledge (or lack of knowledge) of how to successfully navigate these institutions. Different-origin marriages, however, offer the possibility of diffusing such knowledge. Partners who have spent their entire lives interacting with middle-class people and middle-class institutions can share their experiences with their upwardly mobile partner, for whom middle-class culture may at times feel foreign or intimidating. Spending countless hours of intimate time together might also allow upwardly mobile partners to internalize middle-class culture, which might assist them in building new social networks and performing according to middle-class standards at work. Moreover, as couples narrate their pasts and visit each other's families, couples may piece together how class works. With more intimate experience with inequality, they might understand how class shapes each partner's and family's opportunities and they might demand a more equitable class system.

Marriages like Lori's and Jason's – different-origin marriages – therefore have the potential to counteract inequality. Through analyzing the lives of couples like Lori and Jason, couples in which one partner is from a white-collar background and the other is from a blue-collar background, I examine the relationship between different-origin marriages and class inequality. I bracket the ways in which different-origin marriages shape the distribution of financial and social resources, and instead attend to how they shape and are shaped by cultural factors.

In the chapters that follow, I draw upon interviews with those in different-origin and same-origin marriages to document four sets of findings about marriage, culture, and inequality. First, I explain how individuals' own experiences with inequality encouraged them to marry across class lines. Contrary to past research which posits that class differences are divisive at worst and obstacles to overcome at best, I find that individuals' class differences operated as magnets pulling those from different social locations together. Under specific conditions, individuals' own classed experiences led them to prefer a partner who happened to be from another class.

Second, I examine the ways that class shaped the lives of those in different-origin marriages. I illustrate that classed tastes led individuals to love a partner from another class, but not to love their partner's package of classed dispositions, orientations, and worldviews. Shared bank accounts, residencies, children, and degrees did not erase the ways that their pre-marital experiences taught them to understand the world. When it came to ideas of spending and saving, working and playing, dividing housework and scheduling time, expressing emotions and raising children, individuals shared more in common with other respondents – strangers – who shared their class origins than their partners with whom they shared their lives. Loving a partner from another class did not equate to loving the class sensibilities of that partner, and spending, on average, over a decade living together did not lead them to have identical tastes or worldviews.

Third, not only did merging their lives not merge their ideas, but spouses' ideas about how to go about their daily lives were also systematically organized by class. Those from white-collar backgrounds professed a preference for *management*. They managed each of their resources: their money, time, home, career, leisure, emotions, and children. Blue-collar-origin spouses routinely questioned the wisdom of this approach. Why budget your money when you

could spend without thinking? Why manage time when you could be spontaneous and go with the flow? Why regulate emotions when you could express them? Why manage your children when you could let them grow? In each domain, they preferred not to regulate their own resources; they preferred a *laissez-faire* approach. Different-origin marriages therefore merged individuals' resources but not their ideas about how to use them.

Finally, I show that class had a profound impact on different-origin marriages but most couples had a profound belief that class did not matter. They often understood that they and their partner began their lives in differently classed neighborhoods, lived in homes of varied sizes, and even were raised by parents who possessed different tastes. Yet that was in the past, many believed, and only shaped what they had and not who they became. As class was only about resources and their resources were shared, there was no way that class could now shape their marriage. Class then shaped many marriages without being detected.

Each of these findings – that class inequalities shape how marriage are formed, that sharing years together did not yield shared ideas, that sensibilities were systematically organized around class origin, and that living in a marriage marked by class did not produce minds that thought of class – has implications for inequality. That opposing classed tastes helped individuals cross class lines shapes how resources are distributed and limited social closure. That upwardly mobile partners were guided by the lens they developed in their past may shape their possibilities for the future. That classed tastes were organized around management and *laissez-faire* binaries has implications for how rewards and sanctions are allocated. The low visibility of class to those who encounter such differences so intimately cautions us against assuming that close relationships can lead to greater class awareness and understanding. These findings fit into larger theoretical debate about culture, class, and families.

## THEORETICAL DEBATES AND CONTRIBUTIONS

In examining how different-origin marriages alleviate or extenuate class inequality, I draw upon theories about how class and culture work. Specifically, I am guided by theories that show that, despite what many respondents believed, class is more than an agglomeration of income, education, and occupation. Class includes an internalized set of tastes and dispositions, and this shapes *who* we like and *what* we like. Some suggest that we are forever guided by the class sensibilities we developed in childhood; others say that as we grow into adults we might also grow into a new sense of who we are and who and what we like. Still others ask: if you have a close relationship with a person from another class, can you learn about how class works? Each of these areas of research can be furthered by examining the unique experiences of different-origin couples.

As I review this literature, I foreshadow that the experiences of those in different-origin marriages must make us reconsider some of these theories. We need to expand our understanding of how class guides who we like and we need to rethink what our class origins lead us to want. We must also acknowledge that even those in situations who are most likely to assimilate into the middle-class do not, and the entrenchment of class sensibilities means that no amount of preaching to others will convince them to change. Finally, classed ideologies may trump classed experiences. Wanting to believe that class does not matter may not make it so, but it does make it possible to be blind to how it matters when it exists in front of you.

### *Class, Identity, and Inequality*

Not only do many Americans ignore class, but they also tend to think of themselves as having unique tastes, dispositions, and worldviews. French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu (1980, 1984), however, forcibly challenged this view. He described that each person's childhood class location heavily influences who they become. Individuals go through the "internalization of externality" (Bourdieu 1980:55), and internalize a set of class tastes and dispositions. They often learn to prefer what their classed resources can provide and what their classed experiences suggest is normal and desirable. This occurs unconsciously through childhood socialization. Everything from how to hold a fork, what to eat, how to speak, what sports to play, what music to listen to, what television shows to watch, what to wear, how to furnish a home, how to approach a teacher, and what to expect of the future are rooted in each person's childhood class location (Alters 2003; Bourdieu 1984; Calarco 2011; Calnan and Cant 1990; Crane 2000; Hart and Risley 1995; Savage 2006; Stempel 2005). Thus, Lori, who grew up in a wealthy family, learned that sailing was a normal part of life, European vacations could be taken for granted, and salads were part of every meal. Jason grew up amongst the working-poor, and to him eating processed food, watching television, and spending vacations sleeping on his grandmother's floor were experiences his family could afford and that he considered normal and enjoyable. Each partner learned to prefer things that their class resources allowed them to enjoy. Each also learned to navigate their own social world relatively seamlessly, but to feel like a "fish out of water" in the other's class (Bourdieu 1984).

Taken together, Bourdieu (1980) called the idea of internalized social conditions that exist in the forms of stable preferences and dispositions the "habitus." There are several relevant features of the habitus. First, individuals are usually not aware of the classed nature of their

sensibilities. The habitus can, and often does, operate without any conscious intention or reflection. It is experienced as an intuitive sense, “an external world of cultural assumptions and social institutions that ordinary people inhabit without thinking very much about them, and an internalized version of that world that becomes part of people’s identities, generating dispositions to feel/think/judge/act in certain ways” (Ortner 2003:12). Second, and importantly, the habitus works to reproduce the social world. This works, in part, because those who share a class often share a set of tastes, worldviews, and dispositions. People prefer to associate with people like them and exclude people not like them (Lamont 1992; Bourdieu 1984). Bourdieu (1984:56) put it this way:

Like every sort of taste, [the habitus] unites and separates. Being the product of the conditions of existences, it unites all those who are the product of similar conditions while distinguishing them from all others. And it distinguishes in an essential way, since taste is the basis of all that one has—people and things—and all that one is for others, whereby one classifies oneself and is classified by others.

Tastes thus “unite and separates” and in doing so tastes can influence the distribution of social rewards. As those in the higher classes share tastes with others in their class, they form relationships with each other and exchange their resources among themselves. At the same time, partly because they possess different class-based tastes, those in lower classes are excluded from these social networks and the resources that often go with them. In other words, “the socially innocent language of likes and dislikes” (Bourdieu 1984:243) that are rooted in childhood class conditions is a key factor in keeping groups and their resources separate.

For the remainder of the book, I refer to the habitus as “class sensibilities.” I do this to avoid jargon, and I intend the terms to be synonymous. Everyone – those who married a partner from another class and those who did not – not only has individual sensibilities but also class



sensibilities. Each person's set of class sensibilities shapes who they like, and as such, can shape whom they choose to marry.

### *Class Sensibilities and Marriage Partners*

"Taste is a match-maker" Bourdieu (1984:243) wrote. "It marries colours and also people." What Bourdieu meant by this was that people's tastes are developed according to their childhood class position, and these class tastes guide them to select a spouse who shares their class sensibilities. Many scholars (DiMaggio and Mohr 1985; Illouz 1997; Johnson and Lawler 2005; Kalmijn 1994; Van Leeuwen and Maas 2010) agree with Bourdieu, and often note that differences in class sensibilities can lead potential couples to feel misaligned. Inequality scholar Dalton Conley (2005:225) wrote, "Never does [how class matters] become as explicit as when we are bringing a new romantic interest home to dinner: suddenly small class differences may seem like enormously unbridgeable chasms." Non-scholars also intuitively understand that class background might matter in shaping who marries whom. A male upwardly mobile college student interviewed by Jenny Stuber in her study of undergraduates' understandings of class explained:

When it comes to dating, it's hard for me to be like, "Hey, let's go see a movie," or "Hey, let's go out to dinner," 'cause I can't always do that. Not only that, but when you get closer in relationships you always feel uncomfortable, you know, telling them about your past. You wonder if they're going to think less of you. Or if you were to meet their parents, are they going to accept you? (Stuber 2006:303).

Scholars and lay people tend to agree: class differences can act as "unbridgeable chasms."

People are more likely to fall in love with those on their side of the class divide.

Scholars' theories also suggest reasons why those from different classes are unlikely to marry. They note that it is more difficult to meet someone from a different class than from your own (Bourdieu 1998; Bottero 2005), and, as discussed above, even if individuals from different classes meet they are unlikely to consider each other viable "husband material" or "wife material" (Bourdieu 1980, 1984, 1998, 2008; DiMaggio and Mohr 1985; Illouz 1997). If one partner has already assimilated to the other's class sensibilities they might be able to find common ground on which to build a relationship (DiMaggio 1982), but if the upwardly mobile partners have not assimilated then such relationships are unlikely to take off.

Some theories do explain why different-origin couples wed, but they do so without considering that those from different classes enjoy each other for who they are. Structural theories consider that when there is an asymmetry in the number of heterosexual men and women from the same class looking to marry, then by default some who want to marry will be forced to cross class lines. Here marrying across class lines is viewed as an unwanted outcome of structural forces, not a union between those who feel they found their ideal life partner (Blau, Blum, and Schwartz 1982).

Exchange theory (Davis 1941; Merton 1941) also explains different-origin marriages, but not in a way that suggests that two individuals love each other for all of who they are. The theory posits that partners trade their different resources. It is usually assumed that the higher origin partner offers the lower origin partner the resources that stem from their higher status, while the lower origin partner offers the higher origin partner a resource divorced from their class origin – something like their beauty, youth, or intellect (Elder 1969; South 1991; Taylor and Glenn 1976). The assumption, in short, is that those from lower social origins must compensate for their class background, as those with higher origins would see it as undesirable. Those from higher

classes would find those from lower classes appealing *despite* their class background, not *because* of it.

These theories focus on why different-origin couples are unlikely and undesired. Yet, as noted above, different-origin marriages are becoming increasingly common and now represent a substantial fraction of all marriages. Chapter 2 suggests that the theories we have are inadequate for explaining why people who grew up on the opposite side of the tracks fall in love. I show that partners loved each other *because*, not *despite*, each acquired different dispositions in their different class locations. Their partners' different dispositions offered the potential to quell their own cultural malaise, and their differences were then viewed as helpful and attractive. Yet, while class differences may lead individuals to prefer a partner from another class, they did not lead them to prefer the packages of class sensibilities that their partners possessed.

### ***The Content of Class Sensibilities***

As noted above, class sensibilities are rooted in one's childhood class position (Bourdieu 1984). Bourdieu found that class conditions produce patterns of tastes, and that these patterns of tastes systematically correspond with binary oppositions. He discerned that the lower classes tend to possess what he called "low," "vulgar," and "practical" tastes, while the higher classes tend to harbor what he called "high" "refined," and "aesthetic" tastes. He noted that the former tastes are often ones that make a virtue out of necessity, while the latter highlight distance from necessity. For example, we could think of a person in the working-class enjoying fast food. This preference makes a virtue out of necessity, as fast food is relatively cheap and easy to find. Those in the higher classes may have a taste for lobster, a food that distances them from necessity. Lobster is

expensive and not particularly filling; eating it shows that one can eat for pleasure more than for subsistence. Fast food is then considered “low” and “vulgar” by those in the higher classes, while lobster is considered “high” and “refined.” The lower classes may also make a virtue out of necessity by saying that fast food makes them normal people, while eating lobster is a mark of pretention.

Bourdieu’s theory of binary tastes has empirical support. Douglas Holt (1997), for example, discovered that in a small city in Pennsylvania, Bourdieu’s theory of high/low, refined/vulgar, aesthetic/practical, and virtue of necessity/distant from necessity captured adults’ preferences for types of furniture, restaurants, music, movies, books, and vacation spots. Using an American marketing survey, Lewis and his colleagues (2007) also found tempered support for Bourdieu’s classification of class tastes. They highlighted that American tastes generally follow the binaries of refinement/coarseness, moderation/excess, nurturance/aggressiveness, and communal orientation/individual orientation. Exploring the issue less systematically, others have also found that Bourdieu’s theory holds. Higher class college students find study abroad and extra-curricular activities that distance themselves from the explicit purpose of school to be enjoyable, while working-class and poor college students make a virtue out of necessity by claiming that working at a paid job while keeping up with their classes is honorable (Stuber 2009). Higher class parents also expose their children to high culture and work to develop their tastes for exquisite things, while parents in the lower classes may find more “vulgar” activities such as watching television to be satisfactory methods of entertaining their children (Lacy 2007; Lareau 2003).

However, Bourdieu’s theory of binary classed tastes also has its critics. Some have argued (Lamont and Lareau 1988) that the concepts of “high” and “low” culture better captures French

tastes than American tastes. Americans may be less attuned to theater, opera, and classical music than the French; their tastes may be better characterized by other criteria. Another group of scholars have claimed that the top of the American class hierarchy is not distinguished by their taste for high culture alone, but by their consumption of a wide variety of culture (Bryson 1996; Khan 2011; Peterson and Kern 1996). Unlike the upper classes who consume a variety of culture and are referred to as “cultural omnivores,” those in the lower classes tend to be “cultural univores,” enjoying a narrower array of culture (Peterson and Kern 1996). Class tastes are then distinguished by the range of culture that each class enjoys (Erickson 1996).

In addition to the aforementioned critiques of Bourdieu’s theory of binary classed tastes, I add my own. I suggest that neither high/low, vulgar/refined, virtue of necessity/distance from necessity, nor omnivore/univore theories apply to all types of tastes or capture the tastes of the upwardly mobile and the stable-middle-class. Bourdieu’s theory of high and low tastes, for example, is useful for capturing tastes for objectified culture (i.e., art, theater, literature), but tastes for objectified culture are just one element of class sensibilities. Less objectified tastes, such as a taste for a certain type of emotional display or a taste for spontaneity (two tastes that are discussed in the following chapters) are less readily captured by the binaries of high/low, refined/vulgar, aesthetic/practical, and distant from necessity/virtue of necessity. The omnivore/univore theory is not more helpful here, as it also cannot capture less objectified tastes.

Bourdieu’s theory is also problematic as what counts as distancing oneself from necessity or making a virtue of necessity is not always obvious. We might think of a preference for saving money as making a virtue of necessity if we think that being frugal and spending wisely is a necessity of one’s class condition, but we might also think that saving distances oneself from

necessity as saving can be a sign that one does not have to spend every penny in order to survive. The binaries are not clearly demarcated, making the theory difficult to apply.

In what follows, I show that class sensibilities – at least for upwardly mobile and class-stable college-educated whites – can be better captured by a different social organization scheme. Like previous theorist, I find that a binary of high/low, distance from necessity/virtue of necessity, omnivore/univore characterize *some* of respondents' tastes. However, I find that a different binary offers a more comprehensive account of their sensibilities: that of a managerial style for those with white-collar-origins and a laissez-faire style<sup>3</sup> for those with blue-collar-origins. This binary resembles Annette Lareau's (2003) conception of concerted cultivation and the accomplishment of natural growth, but extends it to sensibilities beyond parenting. Those who preferred a management style, like those who prefer concerted cultivation, view many aspects of their lives as requiring monitoring, planning, and work. They preferred to budget their money, delegate the housework, plan their time, develop their career trajectory, accumulate cultural capital through leisure, cultivate their children's skills, and regulate their emotions. Those with white-collar-origins, in short, preferred to manage their own lives. Those who favored a laissez-faire style, like those who favor the accomplishment of natural growth, think that things are best when they are left to be. They preferred assuming things will work out without a great deal of intervention. They favored going with the flow and living in the present. More than a high/low divide, this management/laissez-faire binary captured how respondents from different classes wanted to go about their daily lives. These differences existed despite the many opportunities spouses had to adopt their partners' sensibilities.

***Taking the Class Out of the Person after Taking the Person Out of the Class***

Sociologists debate how much taking a person out of their class takes the class out of the person (Bourdieu 1984; DiMaggio 1982; Erickson 1996; Granfield 1991; Lacy 2007; Lubrano 2004; Sayer 2005). In other words, there is a debate about how much one's childhood class conditions contribute to adults' sensibilities, especially if one leaves their childhood class position behind and enters a new class. This is a key question for inequality scholars, as class sensibilities shape individuals' chances of success and also may shape the structure of the class system. The enduring influence of class sensibilities is not important because one set is inherently superior to another, but because white-collar class sensibilities are systematically rewarded by white-collar institutions while blue-collar class sensibilities are not (Bettie 2003; Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Calarco 2011; Khan 2011; Lareau 1989, 2003; MacLeod 1995; Streib 2011). Therefore, those who adopt white-collar sensibilities have advantages in middle-class institutions – places such as schools, workplaces, businesses, and banks – and these advantages may translate into secured or advanced mobility. Those whose sensibilities do not match those that middle-class institutions expect may suffer from harsher judgments, fewer rewards, and have more difficulty maintaining a middle-class position. Furthermore, class sensibilities may be passed down to children, influencing their ability to succeed in white-collar institutions such as school, college, and the workplace. In other words, if upwardly mobile people do not assimilate, it may be more difficult for them and their children to hold onto their middle-class position.

There is another way that the stickiness of class sensibilities shapes inequality. According to a 2008 Brookings Institute Report, 17% of children born into the bottom income quintile make it into one of the top two income quintiles as adults, and 28% of children born into the second lowest income quintile do the same. If these upwardly mobile individuals do not assimilate then

they bring a diversity of ideas and practices to more privileged spaces. Doing this may temper the extent to which blue-collar sensibilities are devalued, as those born into more privilege may interact with them as equals as colleagues and partners. The non-assimilation of upwardly mobile individuals may infuse new sensibilities into a professional and managerial milieu, which may minimize cultural closure, or the extent to which those in middle-class jobs have a cohesive culture. Minimizing cultural closure might, in turn, minimize the extent to which those with the “wrong” class sensibilities are excluded from middle-class occupational and social positions. Finally, their own positions at the top end of the class hierarchy may allow these upwardly mobile individuals to make decisions about whom to hire, promote, or admit into prestigious social organizations. If upwardly mobile people prefer people like them, they might be instrumental in aiding others’ upward mobility. On the other hand, if class sensibilities are highly malleable and individuals assimilate into their new class, then, while individuals’ own mobility might be advanced, cultural closure may be furthered. There is then a paradox: what is best for the mobility of the individual may not be best for the mobility of others with blue-collar roots, and what is best for those with blue-collar roots, as a group, may not be best for an individual upwardly mobile person.

Different-origin marriages offer a unique window into understanding into how this paradox plays out. Though the data cannot document how respondents’ sensibilities changed over time, the case of different-origin marriages offers the next best way of testing the durability of class sensibilities. Blue-collar-origin partners in this study were upwardly mobile, having attended college and secured professional or managerial employment. They married a partner from a white-collar background who is currently also in a white-collar position. They mostly lived in white-collar neighborhoods, and socialized with colleagues and friends in white-collar



milieus. In short, they are completely immersed in a class that is not the one of their past. If people shed their former class sensibilities and adopt the dominant ones of their new class, this would likely occur for this group. If it does not occur, it provides strong evidence that one cannot fully take the class out of the person after taking the person out of the class.

Additionally, we might also expect white-collar-origin partners to adjust their own sensibilities. They are exposed to their spouses' family, a group who lives in a different class than their own. If their partner's sensibilities are durable, then they spend years of intimate time with a person whose sensibilities are unlike their own. If despite years of marriage, white-collar-origin respondents' sensibilities resemble those of strangers who married other white-collar-origin spouses rather than the sensibilities of the person with whom they share their life, this again provides strong evidence that the class individuals are born into has a lasting influence on their lives.

### *Theoretical Views on the Durability of Class Sensibilities*

Class sensibilities may be sticky – that is, relatively unchanging – or they may be alterable over time and through exposure to new people, experiences, and institutions. Bourdieu (1980, 1984) took the position that class sensibilities are highly resistant to change. As noted above, he posited that class sensibilities are inculcated in children at an early age, as children internalize beliefs, tastes, and dispositions that serve them well in their class milieu. He regularly insisted that internalized class sensibilities stay with individuals throughout their life course and even through mobility. New experiences are filtered through the class lens individuals gained early in their lives, making it so that ideas are slow to change. If Bourdieu is correct, then, despite their years

together, white- and blue-collar-origin spouses would have distinct ways of interacting in the world.

Others argue that early class conditions do not carry the weight that Bourdieu described. Cultural mobility theorists (DiMaggio 1982) do not deny that one's childhood class culture influences one's sensibilities, but they believe that class sensibilities are more malleable than Bourdieu suggested. They propose that schools offer individuals the opportunity to learn and internalize new sensibilities. Schools teach and reward white-collar culture, and students may pick up the necessary worldviews and practices needed for them to succeed in that environment (Aschaffenburg and Maas 1997; DiMaggio 1982). Colleges, in particular, may enable cultural shifting, as individuals are immersed in a white-collar institution, enabling them to unconsciously or consciously learn a new culture. Strong ties, such as spouses, may also transport cultural information, which may change the sensibilities of each spouse (McFarland and Pals 2005). This theory maintains that class sensibilities are adaptable more than intractable, and that immersion in a new culture is likely to lead to the internalization of new sensibilities. Given that upwardly-mobile partners in this study have attended college, are immersed in a white-collar milieu, and can receive cultural information from their spouse, then, if cultural mobility theory is correct, respondents from blue-collar and white-collar backgrounds would share similar tastes.

Swidler's (1986) theory of culture and change would predict the same. She theorized that culture is less a set of permanent dispositions, worldviews, and tastes, as Bourdieu claimed, but rather a "toolkit" that people can use to form "strategies of action." She theorized that individuals are exposed to a great deal of culture (they have large toolkits) but that they tend to use a relatively small subset of the culture that they know (they have favored tools). The cultural tools

that individuals employ are the tools that they are good at using, and they are skilled at using them because they began using them at a young age and use them often. This suggests that early experiences shape later experiences, as individuals get “good at” using the cultural tools that they learned early in their lives. However, Swidler’s idea of culture does not preclude learning new cultures later on in life, especially when individuals are continually exposed to new cultural tools and can repeatedly observe how others use those tools. Indeed, Swidler’s toolkit theory implies that individuals may be able to learn a new repertoire of skills in a new environment, and suggests that culture is not deeply embedded in individuals:

[Swidler’s] toolkit theory presumes that actors are only relatively “lightly” touched by their socialization history, being provided only with a loosely structured set of skills, heuristics, routines and shallow habits that allow them to best navigate (and select) which strategies of actions go best with which externalized institutional structure at a given moment (Lizardo and Strand 2010:208).

Under this theory, individuals’ culture is much more flexible and adaptable than in Bourdieu’s approach. Upwardly mobile individuals and those regularly exposed to their spouses’ class sensibilities may develop a new cultural repertoire that fits their new class; they may expand the pieces of culture they feel comfortable using. According to this theory, those who spend their lives together are likely to feel comfortable using similar cultural tools.

Finally, even Bourdieu left room for class sensibilities to adjust, or even change rather dramatically. He wrote that class sensibilities are “durable but not eternal” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:133) and that they can be “destabilized... torn by contradiction and internal division” (Bourdieu 2000a:160). So while he believed that class sensibilities are unlikely to change, he did not rule out the possibility of change.

In short, how much one can take the class out of the person after taking the person out of the class is a debated theoretical issue. Much, but not all, of Bourdieu’s work suggests that class

sensibilities are relatively intractable, and these theories would suggest that marriage to a partner from another class is unlikely to change each person's classed sensibility. Cultural mobility and toolkit theorists, on the other hand, are more apt to believe that class sensibilities are relatively malleable and that spouses would learn cultural tools and strategies of action from each other. Given that there is a theoretical debate, we should examine what the empirical literature has uncovered.

*Empirical Takes on Taking the Class Out of the Person after Taking the Person Out of the Class*

The empirical literature is again divided as to how much you can “take the class out of the person” after “taking the person out of the class.” Many of these studies examine the class sensibilities of college students from blue-collar backgrounds. This research repeatedly finds that blue-collar students' class backgrounds accompanies them to college, leaving them without the dispositions and worldviews necessary to fit into a white-collar world (Aires and Seider 2005; Armstrong and Hamilton unpublished manuscript; Granfield 1991; Lehmann 2007; Ostrove 2003; Stuber 2006). At the same time, their mobility exposes them to new experiences, and their class sensibilities slightly adjust. They become different from those with whom they grew up, but not different enough to feel comfortable in their new class environment (Dews and Law 1995; Lubrano 2004). They routinely feel trapped between two worlds. Class sensibilities change, this literature suggests, but not a lot.

Other research more forcefully doubts the durability of class sensibilities. Individuals may consciously try to change their class sensibilities to fit into their new class milieu and they may experience some success at doing so (Hurst 2007; Kaufman 2003). The media offers

templates for class sensibilities (Ortner 2003), and because class sensibilities are not neutral, but moralized, those with stigmatized sensibilities have reason to try to mimic those of the middle-class (Kaufman 2003). Exposure to new networks may also lead individuals to change their sensibilities (Erickson 1996; Young 2004), and individuals may purposefully adapt new scripts to fit into new milieus (Lacy 2007). In addition, sensibilities may have never been perfectly aligned with class conditions, meaning that class origin may be only loosely connected to sensibilities (Sayer 2005).

The previous studies are then inconclusive about the durability of class sensibilities. They also have other limitations. First, many studies are vague about what they mean by the durability of class sensibilities. Discomfort in a new class milieu is often taken as evidence of the longevity of class sensibilities, but other factors could also contribute to upwardly mobile individuals' discomfort in a new class. Additionally, though specific worldviews and dispositions may be mentioned – Stuber (2006), for instance, cites upwardly mobile students' distaste for their more affluent peers' consumption practices and perceived attitudes toward education – class sensibilities are more often taken as a whole. There is no reason, however, to assume that all aspects of classed sensibility change or resist change at the same rate. We could imagine, for instance, that the upwardly mobile college students may learn to feel comfortable dressing in the attire of white-collar professionals, as they practice doing so during interviews, internships, presentations, and ceremonies and as they have regular exposure to faculty and staff who model this attire. At the same time, upwardly mobile students may never learn to appreciate the opera, to which they have less exposure.

Additionally, with the bulk of studies focusing on college students, it is difficult to determine if class sensibilities adapt over a more extended period of time. We may not expect

dispositions and worldviews to change in individuals' first years out of their original class environment, but may expect them to adapt over a number of years of continued living in a new class milieu. Autobiographical sketches (i.e., Dews and Law [1995]; Ryan and Sackrey [1984]; Tokarczyk and Fay [1993]) often written by middle-aged adults, suggest that upwardly mobile individuals do not assimilate, but we might expect those who feel permanently ill at-ease to write about their experiences more so than those who easily adapt. Lubrano's (2004) journalistic account also maintained that class sensibilities have a lasting influence, but again selection is an issue as he interviewed those who felt most uncomfortable in their new class environment. Sociological studies of adults are again mixed: Lacy's (2007) and Erikson's (1996) studies cast doubt on the enduring influence of sensibilities developed in children's social class, while Stuber (2005) finds it continues to affect adults. In short, we have little idea of how class sensibilities change over a sustained period of time.

Chapters 4 - 7 examine seven aspects of class sensibilities: ideas about money, housework, planning, paid work, play, parenting, and feeling rules. These seven items were chosen based on a combination of domains that are important to inequality, documented by previous research, and brought up by respondents. The findings demonstrate that assimilation did not occur; those from blue- and white-collar backgrounds held dissimilar sensibilities. That spending an average of over 4,000 days together, and, for the upwardly mobile individuals, more years in their current class position than their former one, did not lead those from different backgrounds to share their sensibilities provides strong evidence that they are deeply entrenched. Inequality from the past then carried over into the present, as their different sensibilities were likely to be differentially rewarded by middle-class institutions.

### *Increasing Class Awareness*

Cultural theories do not only center on how tastes produce inequalities; they also investigate people's views of inequality. Different-origin marriages are of interest to this subset of scholars, as they are thought to prompt awareness of how class works (Blossfeld and Timm 2003; Hazelrigg and Loperato 1972). Couples can compare each other's childhoods, swapping stories about the ways money constrained them or provided access to certain experiences, the activities they did for fun, the ways they interacted with their parents, the places they vacationed, the ideas they learned about work, or the way they expressed emotions. When visiting their in-laws, they can compare their expectations and practices to those of their own family. They might notice how resources and family cultures were linked, and gain a greater appreciation for how class works.

Though class is often invisible, it may become visible to those who are intimately connected to a partner who grew up in a different social sphere. An increased understanding of class is important, as it could destabilize the myth of a classless society and disperse the idea that class creates inequities in life chances and a diversity of life styles. Unfortunately, the influence of class largely went unnoticed by those whose lives were so affected by it. Chapter 3 demonstrates that living with a different-origin partner does not typically lead to a different understanding of class.

## **CLASS AND THE EXPERIENCE OF MARRIAGE**

One way of reading this book is to focus on how the study of different-origin marriages can offer insights into the above theoretical debates. Another way to read the book is to focus on the experiences of those in different-origin marriages. This is also something we know little about, as most studies have focused on how marriages and families differ according to couples' class destinations (for example, Gerstel 2011; Hansen 2005; Rubin 1976, 1994), but have not examined if they also differ according to their class origin (see Komarovsky 1962 for a dated but classical exception).

Marriages between two working-class adults vary considerably from the marriages between two middle-class adults. To fully comprehend the differences, consider a few statistics. Within just five years of marriage, 34% of marriages between high school educated partners will end in divorce, while only 13% of marriages in which women have a college degree will terminate within the same time span (Cherlin 2009). The likelihood of couples bearing children before they marry is also deeply divided by class. In 2001, 53% of women with a high school degree had a child before marrying, while that number was only 7% for women with a college degree (Smock and Greenland 2010). Other differences are large as well: those with bachelor's degrees are more likely than those without them to wed at all, wed at a later age, feel satisfied with their marriages, and have biological children only with their spouse (Carlson and England 2011; Cherlin 2010; Conger, Conger, and Martin 2010; Smock and Greenland 2010). And not only have the transitions into and out of marriage and parenthood been increasingly marked by class, but so too have daily experiences. Inequality has risen over the last forty years, offering the top twenty percent of the income distribution larger paychecks, safer neighborhoods, and better schools. At the same time, working-class families have been shaken by deindustrialization, declining unionization, stagnating wages, and the increasing difficulty of getting their children



into college (Duncan and Murnane 2011; Morris and Western 1999). These demographic patterns and social conditions mean that class has divided marital experiences and produced different types of challenges to different classes of couples.

Couples' adulthood class positions are therefore inextricably linked to their marital experiences, and research demonstrates these connections are both produced by class inequality and reproduce it (McLanahan and Percheski 2008; McLanahan 2011). It is likely, however, that the current focus on couples' adulthood class position masks variation within these groups.

Adults enter into their marriage, just as they enter into their occupations, with decades of classed experiences. They were raised by parents who had their own classed marriage or classed non-marital relationships; here they developed their first taste of what it means to be a husband, wife, and overall person. Their own peer dating culture was also influenced by the classed dynamics of their communities; their first loves and first heartbreaks were set in a classed milieu. Exposure to ideas and dispositions that matter in marriages – images of the future, expressions of love and anger, strategies of money management, visions of parenthood – all also occur long before individuals meet the person they will marry and even long before they finish their education, establish themselves in a career, or receive their first paycheck. If we consider only spouses' class destinations, then we pretend like none of these experiences matter. Yet it is not hard to imagine that the years before individuals meet their mate influences how they experience their marriage. Indeed, one study that touches upon contemporary different-origin marriages found that couples felt that their different class origins mattered more in their relationships than did their different races, religions, or nationalities (Bystydzienski 2011).

Dissimilar childhoods can then create dissimilar expectations that can shape the experiences of marriage. But class is not the only source of dissimilarity that matters for

marriage. Indeed, girls and boys also learn that different ideas and behaviors are expected of them, and the sensibilities that husbands and wives develop are then often patterned by gender (Hochschild 2003). Women, for example, are more likely to see housework and parenting as their responsibility, while men are more likely to see breadwinning as their main contribution to the marriage (Hochschild 2003; Townsend 2002). Times, however, are also changing. While gender equality has not been achieved, considerable progress has been made in de-gendering some sensibilities and opportunities (Coontz 2011). However, at the same time as gender parity has been increasing, class equality has been decreasing (Autor, Katz, and Kearney 2008). Thus, on some criteria, the boys and girls who share their class may be more similar than two children who share their gender but grow up in different social classes.

The growing class gap and narrowing gender gap mean that at least as much attention should be paid to class as to gender. For this reason, and because gender inequality in marriage has received far more attention, the book foregrounds class origin more than gender. There is, however, an even more important reason why there is not as much gender analysis as some readers may expect: many men and women of the same class held similar views. This is not to dismiss the relevance of gender in shaping ideas;<sup>4</sup> there were times when men and women held different views, times when class and gender intersected, and times when how gender mattered was shaped by if respondents were in different- or same-origin marriages. Overall, however, on the dimensions discussed in the following chapters, class origin was more strongly related to beliefs than was gender. As such, the following chapters reveal more about how marriage is shaped by each partner's class origin than by each partner's gender.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Marriages may be personal, but they offer insights into questions about public policies. One policy issue is that the classes are, according to social critic Charles Murray (2012), “coming apart.” Geographically, the wealthy are isolating themselves from the poor (Murray 2012; Reardon and Bischoff 2011). Economically, income and wealth gaps are growing (Autor, Katz, and Kearney 2008). Socially, the classes are coming apart in terms of their likelihood to marry, go to prison, and go to church (Cherlin 2009; Murray 2012; Wacquant 2009). The lives of those in different classes are increasingly different and unequal.

Different-origin marriages are one place where the classes come together. But the experiences of those in this book belie the idea that physically coming together leads to culturally coming together. Cultural osmosis – the idea that individuals will soak up a new culture through immersion – did not occur and strong ties did not equalize cultural knowledge. This means that sociologists need to recognize that adults with college degrees still have unequal abilities to navigate middle-class institutions – a point that is too often forgotten when adults share their class destination, gender, and race. It also means that policy makers should not plan on closing the class divide through increasing opportunities for cross-class socialization. Enticing rich and poor young adults to live together, as *New York Times* columnist David Brooks recommended, would likely have no effect on reducing economic or cultural gaps between the classes. Similarly, Murray’s (2012) call to close the cultural class divide by having the elite preach what they practice would likely be a waste of breath. Sensibilities did not change through

years of exposure to a loved spouse; it is unlikely to change through listening to a stranger preach about the righteousness of their beliefs.

## THE STUDY

To capture the experiences of those in different-origin marriages and how their experiences inform us about theoretical debates, I drew upon data from interviews. I interviewed 32 different-origin couples – 15 couples in which the woman married “up” and 17 in which the man “married up.” I interviewed husbands and wives separately, for a total of sixty-four interviews with those in a different-origin marriage. Marriages are defined as different-origin if one partner had a father who worked in a blue-collar job and had, at most, a high school degree while the other partner’s father had at least a bachelor’s degree and worked in a white-collar professional or managerial position. In all but a few cases, respondents’ mothers’ level of educational attainment was very close to their fathers’. I refer to these respondents by their class origin: blue-collar-origin or white-collar-origin.

I also interviewed ten couples – 20 individuals – in what I refer to as “same-origin” marriages. These are marriages between college-educated individuals with college-educated professional fathers.<sup>i</sup> *I refer to this group of respondents as “same-origin” in order to differentiate them from white-collar-origin respondents who were raised in the same class but married blue-collar-origin partners.* This group of same-origin respondents – those born into white-collar families and married those in white-collar families – provide a useful comparison group for two reasons. First, they allow for an analysis of whether those with white-collar backgrounds in different-origin marriages adapted their partners’ sensibilities. If white-collar-

origin and same-origin respondents share their sensibilities, this suggests that the former were not changed by their marriage to an upwardly mobile partner. Second, a comparison group of same-origin partners allows for an analysis of how husbands' and wives' interactions are dependent upon the class each partner came from. Similar sensibilities may play out differently depending upon if individuals' partners share their sensibilities or have different ones.

Though the 84 respondents in this study came from different class backgrounds, they were similar on a number of other dimensions. They were highly educated, mostly having completed college or graduate school. They shared a race; they were all white. They shared a nationality; they were all United States citizens. They were also all in heterosexual relationships, and all but two had completed their bachelor's degree (the two who had not had attended college for at least two years). All but two couples had children who were ages 4 – 18; one couple did not have children and one had older children. Most respondents were middle-aged; their average age was 41. Their marriages had all also passed the newlywed stage; on average, they had been married for thirteen years. These similarities were purposefully created to understand how class background matters to a group that is too often viewed as untouched by social forces – married, college-educated, white Americans.

The findings do *not* extend to other groups. The findings do not extend to relationships in which one partner was downwardly mobile, as which way one moves through the class system may have different implications. The findings also do not extend to those without college degrees. Respondents' college, and often, graduate degrees provided years of socialization into a white-collar milieu. At the same time, their education may have given them an especially articulate way to define themselves and argue against their spouses' requests for change. The findings also do not extend to couples in which neither spouse is in a professional managerial

occupation, as the self-direction that many of these jobs require may spill over into having a strong sense of self at home (Kohn 1969). Those of different races and sexualities may also have different experiences, as whites and heterosexuals tend to have less cross-class interaction than other groups (Chauncey 1995; Kennedy and Davis 1993; Pattillo 2005; Seidman 2011), have different sensibilities that stem from different strategies for proving “respectability” (Moore 2011), and be influenced by different marriage markets (Banks 2011; Schwartz and Graf 2009).

That respondents were all white, highly-educated Americans in different-sex marriages, however, does not mean that the sample was entirely homogeneous. Respondents were evangelic Christians, Methodists, Catholics, Mormons, Jews, and atheists. Seventeen respondents were stay-at-home parents, eight worked as teachers, four as lawyers, four as engineers, four as doctors, four in internet technology fields, three as professors, and others as managers, scientists, financial analysts, social workers, and business officials. They lived in small cities, small towns, and in the countryside. Some grew up as hippies, some spent their youth singing in Kling-on choirs, some joined punk-rock bands, and others hunted. Some watched their parents deal with alcoholism, others with divorce. Their lives were filled with differences, though, as the coming pages will show, they were, similarly influenced by class.

These interviewees who were similar in some ways and dissimilar in others, all agreed to make their private lives public. They answered fliers recruiting couples with “different economic backgrounds” that they saw in their children’s schools, at the meetings of their social clubs, and through the listservs to which they subscribed. They then sat down with me, apart from their partner, and answered questions about their marriage, their children, and their lives.

The questions they answered were open-ended. They began by recounting the story of how they met their partner, and, upon prompting, included their first impressions, their parents’

first impressions, and the reasons why they felt that their partner was the one they wanted to marry. I then presented them with a list of topics such as money, housework, paid work, and leisure, and asked them to tell me how they thought about these items in comparison to their spouse. They could have said they were similar or different on these items; if they were different, their difference could have had be based upon any criteria. In addition, I asked about their childhoods and their children. I finished by asking direct questions about their ideas of social class. In all, I spoke to each respondent for an average of 105 minutes. The findings in the following chapters are the result of the patterned responses that interviewees gave to these open-ended questions.

### **OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK**

In the following chapters, I address the questions of how class and culture operate in different-origin marriages in ways that may impact inequality. The first next two chapters examine how different-origin couples enter into and think about being in a different-origin marriage. Chapter 2 explains that existing theories are unable to grapple with why different-origin couples wed, and presents a new explanation of why individuals want to cross lines of class origin. Chapter 3 investigates how individuals realized that their relationship spanned class lines and how their marriage related to their ideas of social class.

Chapters 4 - 7 asks if merged lives lead to merged sensibilities, and argues that the patterned ways that respondents think about interacting in the world suggests that the class individuals are born into has a lasting way of shaping their thoughts. Chapter 4 introduces this point by illustrating the ways that those from white- and blue-collar backgrounds think about

their household resources and labor. Specifically, it examines how those from each class tended to think about money, the division of labor, and time. Chapter 5 then investigates how blue- and white-collar-origin partners think about work and play, and Chapter 6 looks at how parenting practices differ according to class background. Chapter 7 turns to the part of respondents' lives that they felt changed the most: how they expressed their feelings. As well as documenting how upwardly mobile partners did not fully assimilate and how white-collar-origin respondents' sensibilities did not depart from those who married within their class, I also show how each sensibility has its own implications for inequality. Even seemingly personal topics can shape the ease in which one stays within their class. Finally, Chapter 8 concludes the book. It summarizes the findings and lays out the implications of what was learned from studying what happens to people like Lori and Jason – those who say “I do” to someone raised in another class.



**SECTION 2**  
**ENTERING INTO AND THINKING ABOUT DIFFERENT-ORIGIN MARRIAGES**

## CHAPTER 2 HOW COUPLES CROSS THE CLASS DIVIDE

Vicki, a woman who wore leggings, an oversized t-shirt, and a messy pony-tail to our interview at her mid-sized colonial home, felt that her mother raised her to be classist. Her college-educated mother had grown up surrounded by luxuries – a mansion for daily life, an island home for vacations, maids to serve her, and the finest clothes to wear. For a period, Vicki’s mother maintained her lifestyle, partly through her marriage to Vicki’s successful father. However, after Vicki’s parents divorced and before Vicki’s mother regained her class position, Vicki, her brother, and her mother moved away from luxury and into a working-class community. During this period, Vicki’s mother continually reminded her children that while they lived in a working-class neighborhood, they were not working-class people. Vicki remembered: “It didn’t matter that she was a single mom and we lived in an ugly, small house. We were still somehow better than somebody that lived in a mobile home.” Her mother tried to convince Vicki to think of herself as a class above her neighbors by emphasizing “the luxuries that she had growing up and that were sometimes a part of our life because we had access to them. She figured that it helped us not be white trash, I guess. Because we had exposure. I think she depended a lot on that.”

Vicki consciously rejected her mother’s classism, but when she became involved with her future husband, John, she felt she could not suppress it. She remembered: “When I first met John’s parents I had a complete reaction that was like my mom would have. How she trained us to be. Like, ‘Oh yeah, that’s blue-collar.’ Or ‘They’re blue-collar. They’re not well educated. They don’t speak well.’” She continued: “The way they talk and dress, the way they decorate

their house, the kind of things they were interested in – all really kind of stereotypically blue-collar.” Specifically, Vicki remembered that John’s parents’ home was decorated with hundreds of porcelain figurines, that his family was deeply religious, and that John’s father worshipped his motorcycle. These were all things that Vicki’s mother taught her to disdain, as well as to disdain the people who liked them. Nevertheless, Vicki decided to marry John, a short, bearded man who talked in clichés and inherited many of his parents’ tastes.

Ian and Isabelle also grew up with differences in their exposure to luxury. Ian’s mother did not believe in the superiority of her class; rather, she believed that “underneath it all we’re all the same.” This led her to repeatedly avow that Isabelle’s upbringing in a rural community must have been “so idyllic and wonderful.” That was not, however, how Isabelle experienced her childhood. She felt that being raised by parents who had their first child as teenagers was a struggle. She remembered the guilt she felt every time she asked for lunch money and the exclamation her mom made when handing it to her: “That school, it’s taking all of our money!” She recalled sinking away from classmates so they would not inhale the smell of cows that had sunk into her clothes, ones that her mom had made. And she remembered that “all of [my mother’s co-workers’] kids who were around my age were all kind of fuck-ups. You know, they were dropping out of high school, getting pregnant.”

Ian, a confident, youthful looking man in his late 30s, also grew up around “fuck-ups” – those who snorted cocaine in mansions on the coast. They were people who made Isabelle wonder, upon first meeting them, “Who are these people? I don’t even understand this.” There were other parts of Ian’s life that she did not understand. Ian hailed from a lineage of academics; a building on a small college campus was named after his great-grandfather and nearly everyone in his family had a Ph.D., M.D., or J.D. after their name. When Isabelle met Ian, on the other

hand, she did not have a sense of what graduate school was, and her parents still do not understand the different types of colleges or degrees. Isabelle also did not know the everyday etiquette of Ian's world; when they first met she used to ask him how to load his father's dishwasher and where to place the forks on the table.

Cultural matching theory would predict that when Isabelle and Ian met at a selective liberal arts college, or when Vicki and John met at the restaurant where they each worked while attending college, they would not have found each other of interest. According to cultural matching theory – a theory that suggests that people like each other when they have internalized similar tastes, dispositions, and worldviews (Bourdieu 1984; Lizardo 2006; McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001) – Vicki's disdain for John's language style, leisure habits, and tastes would have led her to avoid him. When Isabelle's father picked her up from college with dead chickens in the bed of his pickup truck, Ian would have felt that the places that they came from were too different to make a relationship work. Similarly, John would have wanted to pair with someone who appreciated his family's motorcycles rather than disdained them, and Isabelle would have preferred a partner who understood how to take care of chickens. Each would have felt that they were too different from their partner and that their ideas of the future were too divergent. Unless one partner had already traded their class sensibilities for a new set – if one partner was “culturally mobile” – the relationships would be unlikely to form or work (DiMaggio 1982).

Another theory, exchange theory, suggests that differences might be more appealing. This theory predicts that individuals match with partners who have a resource that they lack but want (Davis 1941; Merton 1941). Usually researchers make assumptions about what resources are exchanged. When it comes to different-origin marriages, they often assume that the more

privileged partner trades their economic resources for the less privileged partner's physical resources – their good looks – or their human resources, such as their educational attainment (Arum, Roksa, and Budig 2008; Schoen and Wooldredge 1989; Skopek, Schulz, and Blossfeld 2009; South 1991). The assumption is, in short, that a higher class background is worth exchanging, while a lower class background must be compensated for by providing resources that are divorced from it. Yet, it is not clear what resources John could offer Vicki or what resources Isabelle could offer Ian. Both married partners who they felt were better at school than they were, and neither was significantly better looking their partner. Typical applications of exchange theory then cannot explain their mutual attraction as they do not offer insight into what resources were exchanged.

This chapter shows that combining aspects of cultural matching theory with aspects of exchange theory reveals why couples like Vicki and John and Ian and Isabelle found each other appealing. Just as cultural matching theory predicts, internalized dispositions were relevant in who appealed to whom. And just like exchange theory predicts, each partner saw the other as having a resource they wanted but lacked. The resources they exchanged, however, were not the ones that are usually considered. Rather, they were dispositions that each internalized in their childhood class position, dispositions that they thought could help them meet elusive, changing, or contradictory cultural ideals.

### **EXPLAINING DIFFERENT-ORIGIN MARRIAGES**

Respondents typically exchanged a particular type of cultural resource, one that I call a “cultural complement.” I define a cultural complement as the obverse of the disposition or identity that

respondents felt they lacked. Upwardly-mobile blue-collar-origin respondents often felt they lacked a sense of stability and an achiever identity; they found partners who had these traits. White-collar-origin respondents felt they lacked the ability to express their emotions and to disconnect from work; they were drawn to partners who exhibited these qualities. That these specific cultural complements resonated with respondents was not coincidental. Class and cultural trends positioned some dispositions as particularly elusive and as likely to be found in a partner who was raised in another class.

***Cultural Complements Blue-Collar-Origin Respondents Found in their White-Collar-Origin Partners: A Sense of Stability***

Isabelle (blue-collar-origin), a blond, feminist, therapist dressed in a sweater, jeans, and plain black pumps, described why Ian (white-collar-origin), who was an angry punk-rocker when they met, appealed to her: “I found him to be very stable and solid, which was very nice.” She continued, articulating what she meant by a sense of stability: “He didn’t worry about life or the future... He seemed sort of together and like he had a good sense of that things were okay in the world.” The sense of stability that she felt Ian had was not one that she shared. Isabelle’s farm upbringing meant that her life was characterized by unpredictable crop yields and cash flows. Her life was not like Ian’s, one that, despite the instability caused by his parents’ divorce, provided him with the certainty that his needs would be met and his future would be secure. Isabelle’s background made a sense of stability seem elusive; she enjoyed that her partner, Ian, was able to project a sense of stability.

Such feelings of instability and stability are related to class upbringings. Since the 1970s, the wages of blue-collar workers stagnated, many farming and factory jobs disappeared,

numerous unions disbanded, and much of the social safety net eroded (Duncan and Murnane 2011; Morris and Western 1999). These changes made stability a precarious state for many blue-collar workers, and children growing up in blue-collar families may have internalized the sense of stability associated with their class conditions. Isabelle, for example, internalized a sense that the world was an unpredictable place.

Those from white-collar-families had more reason to internalize and project a sense of stability. Over the same time period, the wages of college-educated workers rose and greater job security existed for white-collar workers (Morris and Western 1999). White-collar families then had financial stability, and they were often able to pass this down to their children. Children in white-collar families were able to grow up assuming that their lives would resemble their parents' – that they too would receive a college degree and work in stable jobs (Bozick et al. 2010; Goyette 2008). Thus, while blue-collar-origin respondents were likely to find a sense of stability elusive, those with white-collar-origins were not.

Madison (blue-collar-origin), a petite, pensive woman, also experienced the insecurity that her class conditions engendered, and felt attracted to a partner who experienced conditions that allowed him to display a sense of stability. Madison met Evan (white-collar-origin), an introverted, thin, thoughtful man, on a high school hiking trip (see Appendix C for a table on how couples met). As she got to know her future husband, she noticed that her family and Evan's family were from a different class. She grew up with a father who was "very much a blue-collar" man. She recalled that: "My dad would do the whole guy thing, nachos and Sunday football." She compared her father to Evan's father: "Evan's dad, he would always have his shirt tucked in to his jeans or his slacks with a belt whereas my dad would [have his] shirt out." Their mothers differed too. Evan's mother, according to Madison, "always sits with a straight back... very

controlled and restrained.” She described her own mother as more casual and extroverted, enjoying gossip, pointing out others’ tacky shoes, and dreaming of the future. One of the things she and her mother dreamed of was a life like the one Evan’s family already possessed: “[His family was] already where I had wanted to be... His parents are the people who go to the local theater and try local restaurants and... travel.”

What struck Madison the most about Evan and his family, however, was not their clothes or pastimes, but their sense of stability. She brought up this factor when responding to a question about why she was initially drawn to Evan.

Madison (blue-collar-origin): I had a less stable childhood. My parents were trying to build a house and we had for many years no electricity and no running water and we would go to my grandmother’s house for that. And then they divorced and he appealed to me in some ways because he was very stable and I wanted somebody who seemed very stable.

Jessi: What did you mean by “stable?”

Madison: It wasn’t exactly that he had two parents. That wasn’t key. It was his family is to some degree predictable and reliable. And very competent. They have it together.

Madison, in short, felt attracted to Evan because of his cultural complement. He projected the sense of stability that she wanted but found elusive.

Christie (blue-collar-origin), a cheerful curly-haired woman with a warm smile, agreed with Madison that partners who exuded a sense of stability were appealing. She grew up in a family that was always scraping by, and one that had an unpredictable supply of money due to the combination of her father’s small income as a maintenance worker and his penchant for alcohol. She met Mike when they were both in junior high school, and found him attractive partly because he provided her with a sense of stability: “My house was chaotic... Mike provided some stability for me.” Despite that Mike’s parents were unhappy together, Mike did



have a stable life compared to Christie's. His parents tucked away money for him in a trust fund; he knew his future would be secure.

Because of their divergent economic conditions, those with blue-collar-origins were then more likely to find a sense of stability to be elusive, while those from white-collar-backgrounds were more likely to project a sense of stability. This pattern, however, was also gendered. It was white-collar-origin men who provided this cultural complement to blue-collar-origin women, likely because cultural norms position men as stable and as financial providers (Kimmel 2006). Blue-collar-origin women then tended to feel attracted to white-collar-origin men because they projected a specific cultural complement – a sense of stability.

### ***Cultural Complements Blue-Collar-Origin Respondents Found in their White-Collar-Origin Partners: An Achiever Identity***

About forty percent of blue-collar respondents – an approximately even number of men and women – were drawn to an additional or different cultural complement: the appearance of an achiever identity. Yet, just as a sense of stability was desired by blue-collar-origin respondents but more easily accessible to white-collar-origin respondents, so too was an achiever identity. Since the 1980s, most students from all backgrounds aspired to attend college and enter prestigious occupations (Goyette 2008). Whites, in particular, are likely to see college and a variety of careers as open to them, as people of their race have had these opportunities for generations (Beasley 2011).

Yet, while aspirations of a college-degree trickled through the class structure, the children of college-educated parents are often given more opportunities to achieve and experience more ease in doing so. Teachers are more likely to single them out as achievers, allowing them to internalize this identity (Rist 1970). If schools have tracks for high achievers, they are more

likely to be on them (Oakes 1985). Their parents, who attended college themselves, are usually better able to instruct their children how to use high school to prepare for college and then how to use college to prepare for a career (Lareau 2011; Mullen 2010). The children of college-educated parents then often find themselves on an escalator that lands them at the gates of college and then ushers them onto a prestigious career. The children of non-college educated parents are less likely to have these experiences, and as such upwardly mobile students are more likely to feel that they stumble to the doors of higher education and continue to stumble once there. Thus, even though the blue-collar-origin respondents in this sample made it to college, they still found an achiever identity to be elusive. They were attracted to their white-collar-origin partners in part because their greater opportunities allowed them to project the achiever identity that they wanted but found elusive.

Aaron (blue-collar-origin), a tall son of a mill worker, was one such respondent who felt drawn to his wife, Alexa (white-collar-origin), because of her cultural complement of an achiever identity. Aaron was a teacher, and he loved teaching. That is, he loved teaching seniors who were college-bound and were already marked as achievers. When his school gave him the option of teaching a science class to “the general population” or retiring, he chose the latter as he did not want to teach non-achieving students. He also disliked his colleagues, whom he felt were not achievers. He vented: “People who get hired for this stuff are not the brightest lights in the chandelier.” He continued: “I don’t like teachers very much. I was never a teacher. I’m a scientist who happened to learn to educate and enjoy educating kids. Most of the teachers I know are very nice people but they’re not very smart and they’re not real well educated.” Aaron had grown up feeling he was “the resident genius in the neighborhood;” as a child he had repeatedly

earned accolades for his academic achievements. Being around non-achievers was not how he imagined himself.

If Aaron could not secure an achiever identity at work, he could be around women with achiever identities. He was attracted to women with a cultural complement – women who had succeeded occupationally the way that he had wanted to but felt he had not. When asked if there was something he had been looking for in a person to date, he said: “Women who are going places. Or at least were making things happen as opposed to just going with the flow.” He succeeded in dating this type of woman: “Most of the women that I went out with over the years were people who now have careers, fairly significant ones. Now they’re doctors, lawyers and dentists, professors, researchers. You name it.” His wife, a petite, plain, practical woman with hair that reached halfway down her back, was one of these women. They met when he was her high school teacher, though they did not begin dating until his wife was in a doctoral program. He identified her as “sharp” and with “intellectual stature.” He made contributions to her dissertation research that still seemed to make him proud. Marrying white-collar-origin Alexa – who had a Ph.D., one that he helped her obtain – provided Aaron with a cultural complement. She had the achievement identity that he wanted for himself but was unable to attain.

Katie (blue-collar-origin), a short woman with kind eyes who wore a baggy black sweater and jeans, also appreciated her partner’s achiever identity – an identity she felt she did not have. She met her future husband, Ryan (white-collar-origin), a brown-haired class-clown who played in a rock band, when they were in high school. She remembered: “I always had the sense that we were not from the same world.” Her father worked the night shift at a steel mill when she was young, then transferred to a daytime union position. She remembered that he “definitely worked hard for anything he ever had.” They always had enough food and clothes – they were not near

poverty – but they also did not have nearly as much as Ryan’s family. Ryan’s father was the president of a college, and they live in an “immaculate” house with table settings that looked like they were “out of a Martha Stewart magazine.” Ryan also remembered that Katie’s father made him feel that their different worlds made Ryan unsuitable for his daughter: “[Her father] was very different from me and I was definitely not what he pictured for his daughter... He was kind of a guy’s guy and could fix things. I am not.”

Yet, despite their different social worlds, they remained friends throughout high school and began dating halfway through their college careers. Katie wanted to start dating Ryan partly because he was on an achievement path – a path she felt she was not on.

Katie (blue-collar-origin): He was a lot different from the other people I had dated... He was a lot more down to earth and seemed to be kind of on a path...

Jessi: Okay. How was he more down to earth?

Katie: I guess what I mean by that was—it may be a euphemism for “studious” and he really cared about school... Just more studious and more committed... He was the kind of person who was going to continue with his education and at the time he wanted to teach. He wanted to be a religion professor. So he wanted to get his Ph.D. in Buddhist studies and that part didn’t work out but he had clear academic goals.

Though Katie was attracted to white-collar-origin Ryan because he was on a “path” with “clear academic goals,” she did not share his sense of being on a path. She entered college after she “tagged along” with her best friend on her tour of colleges. She then chose her college because her best friend was going, not because she was on a path to get there. Her father did not help her feel that she was on the right path; he tried to dissuade her from attending. She ignored his wishes, but being in college did not make her feel that she had more direction. When asked how she chose her major, she replied: “To be honest, I flipped through the course catalog in college and I was just looking for something I could do.” Her career goals were also less certain: “I

never really had anything concrete... There was nothing I really wanted to pursue; I just wanted to do something important.” Blue-collar-origin Katie was thus attracted to her white-collar-origin husband partly because she felt he had what she lacked – clear academic and occupational direction and a clear achiever identity.

William (blue-collar-origin), son of an intermittently employed repairman, also was drawn to a partner who had the achiever identity that he desired but lacked. William grew up in a trailer in a poverty-stricken rural neighborhood. He remembered: “We were really poor. I mean there were months that we had to go and borrow money just to pay the electricity bill.” He made a few attempts at mobility, entering college and dropping out, joining the Marines and then not working. He recalled that his first years out of the Marines were characterized by “playing,” partying, and not achieving:

I didn't have a job. I didn't have an education. I didn't really have a good direction, I guess you could say. There wasn't really much going on there I would say that was good. It's not that I am selling myself short on any of these, it was what it was. And so at some point you have to get a job so I went and got a job in construction and I worked a couple of years of construction and decided that I wanted to play again and played for a good many years. But now I am an older guy who plays and so people expect you to play when you're in college a little bit but once you get beyond that, they don't really expect you to come back and play again. So I had an image.

Without much direction and with the image as an immature partier, William rejoined the military. His commander placed him in a language program, and he decided that he would, for the first time, strive to be an achiever.

It was in the military language program that he met Anneka, the athletic daughter of an engineer and a teacher. She was the top student in the class. She was studious, disciplined, hard working, and, William thought, “terribly brilliant” and “beautiful.” He was not sure that Anneka would like him; he felt that they were different enough that “it was one of these things to where

you wanted to know if there was something to talk about.” He also knew that she viewed him as a “redneck from Louisiana.” Despite these obstacles, he pursued her, even inviting her out twice because she did not realize that their first evening out together was meant to be a date. William enjoyed that Anneka had a cultural complement – her position as the top student in the class and her studious habits signaled that she had an achiever identity that he was now trying to attain. Those with blue-collar-origins often felt that their partners’ achiever identities and senses of stability provided them with access to dispositions that they found to be elusive.

***Cultural Complements White-Collar-Origin Respondents Found in their Blue-Collar-Origin Partners: Emotional Expressivity***

White-collar-origin respondents also felt drawn to their blue-collar-origin partners due to cultural complements, and the cultural complements that they appreciated also happened to be readily available in a partner who grew up in a different class. These respondents felt that they had internalized a disposition – emotional restraint – that had been useful in their parents’ time but was no longer useful in their own. Respondents were raised in the 1960s to 1980s, a time when white-collar workers were expected to exercise emotional restraint at work. Parents working in these jobs often instilled their children with the same sensibilities, thus preparing them for a white-collar job (Kohn 1969; Hochschild 1983; Illouz 2008; Walkerdine, Lucey, and Melody 2001). By the 1990s, however, when respondents were adults, the emotional restraint that they were inculcated with became less valued. This was partly true at work, but it was especially the case in another arena: marriage. Unhealthy marriages were now defined as possessing too much emotional restraint; emotional expressivity marked marriages as healthy, intimate, and successful (Cherlin 2004; Illouz 2008). Many white-collar-origin respondents wanted to meet the new norms of emotional expressivity, but felt that the dispositions they internalized in the past

constrained their ability to do so. The children of blue-collar-origin workers were less often taught to restrain their emotions, and more often allowed to express them (Kohn 1969; Walkerdine, Lucey, and Melody 2001). As such, they were positioned to provide their partners with a cultural complement.

Ryan (white-collar-origin), mentioned above as providing his wife, Katie, with a cultural complement, also felt drawn to Katie because of the cultural complement she possessed. He enjoyed that her family exercised less emotional restraint: “My family is difficult to read. My family is kind of a passive-aggressive family. ‘Uptight’ might be the word. And Katie’s family is not.” He continued: “With her family people let their hair down a little bit more and are themselves a little bit more than my family. There’s less falseness with her family.” However, though Ryan appreciated Katie’s style of emotional expression, he had trouble fully imitating it. He conveyed: “She’s certainly taught me a lot about what it means to be a loving, caring person... She does it in a way that is so un-showy and natural and genuine. That that’s something I try to learn from but I don’t know how well I do.” Marriages are now defined as healthy when each partner is able to read the other’s emotion and express their own. Ryan felt that he lacked these important skills. Katie had more access to them, and supplied Ryan with a cultural complement.

Lori, a tall, serious woman who grew up with private schools and private cooks, also felt drawn to her partner’s cultural complement. She met Jason (blue-collar-origin) at a summer academic program, where the two found much in common despite also feeling “exotic” to each other. Lori remembered that one difference in particular attracted her to Jason: “I attributed his ability to be such an intimate partner to the fact that he comes from this household where there

was so much intimacy. So that was something I obviously wanted and was looking for.” She expounded:

There’s an emotional honesty to him that I don’t think you find with people from my class background. So I’ve always really appreciated that. That’s the thing I most like about him... And I was really struck by this idea that they were so intimate... The five boys, they really loved each other. They’re really intimate with each other in a way that’s completely unlike my family’s experience... I sort of liked that. I was surprised by it. I kept saying, “You love each other!” To me it just seemed so—it’s not that we don’t love each other, but they *obviously* loved and enjoyed each other.

Jason provided what Lori wanted but lacked: emotional honesty. Jason had more experience expressing his emotions and therefore had the skills to help her meet new and widespread marital standards.

Mike (white-collar-origin), a friendly, lanky man who owned his own real-estate business, made the same point. His father was a professor, and wanted to help Mike meet his academic and career goals. Mike, however, met Christie (blue-collar-origin) in junior high school and felt drawn to her and her family because they had skills that he felt his family lacked.

Mike (white-collar-origin): My dad was like, “We’ve gotta get you somewhere. Let’s look at what you are wanting to do and what you are interested in.” But I was really drawn and impressed by Christie’s family which was in so many ways closer than our family. I mean, they were more fun to be around. And definitely closer and more communicative and everything else... I was like “Wow, they have their issues too but just the way they communicate.” It showed me that you can be closer, that you can do things and talk about stuff that we really didn’t so much in my family.

Mike felt drawn to a style of emotional expressivity that he had not been taught by his family, and, as we will see later, he was never able to produce. His wife, Christie, internalized the more expressive style of her family and was able to provide Mike with a cultural complement.

Other white-collar-origin participants also wanted to distance themselves from their family’s lack of emotional expressivity. Brandon’s white-collar father decided to stop hugging



him when he was two because he believed “showing emotion is a sin.” Brandon found a “nurturing” wife. Leslie (white-collar-origin) found that “norms of propriety” dominated her family life, silencing discussions about “how we really felt about stuff” and distorting her personality: “I really am naturally an extrovert but I had been trained to not be, shall we say, by my early life.” She married a man from a blue-collar background who cared less about propriety and allowed her greater emotional expression. Colton (white-collar-origin), when talking of his father, stated: “We don’t really talk very deeply with each other.” Norah, from a white-collar-origin family, added: “My dad is just pretty much not there in the emotional department.” Alexa (white-collar-origin) revealed: “I learned more about my parents since my dad died and we’ve gone through the stuff in the house than I really knew before.” Each of these white-collar-origin respondents disliked their family’s lack of emotional expressivity, but felt that they had internalized it as well. They found blue-collar-origin partners, who, due to changing and period-specific norms, had more experience displaying their emotions.

***Cultural Complements White-Collar-Origin Respondents Found in their Blue-Collar-Origin Partners: Disconnection from Work***

Another set of classed experiences prompted white-collar-origin respondents to turn to blue-collar-origin partners. Since the 1960s, white-collar individuals have been caught between contradictory demands: they were supposed to both spend more time at work and do more work at home while also meeting the considerable time demands required by marital intimacy and intensive parenting (Hays 1996). Several white-collar-origin respondents felt their parents’ work overly detracted from or spilled over into family life. As adults, some strived to resolve the contradiction by not letting work interfere with their family life. However, their internalized need to constantly work made this difficult to do. Those from blue-collar families were less likely to

experience this contradiction as, on average, blue-collar workers spend fewer hours at work and experience less work-to-home spillover (Jacobs and Gerson 2004; Schieman, Whitestone, and Van Gundy 2006). They were also more likely to identify with family than with work (Lamont 2000; Williams 2010). The children of blue-collar fathers internalized these orientations toward work. They presented their partners with a cultural complement.

Vicki (white-collar-origin), mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, met her husband John at work. One reason that she did not follow her mother's training and distance herself from John was that he provided her with a cultural complement. She observed that he disconnected his identity from work: "For him, he's just like, 'Whatever. Went to work.' And either it was a good day or a bad day and maybe he'll say something about something happening but basically it's just what he does to earn money." John's work ethic was refreshing to Vicki, as she resented that her single-mother was part of the white-collar trend to spend more time at work and to have work dominate her identity. Vicki complained:

My mom worked and we went to childcare and to school. We were like latchkey kids... I don't think [my mother] has a strong family value. She doesn't value the celebrations in families like for the holidays or birthdays. She acknowledges career things or academic, like if you do well in school or if you got a promotion. Those types of things she'll recognize. But the other things that are more traditional, she doesn't really care.

Vicki contrasted her mother's ideas of work and family to John's ideas of the same. She admired about John "the importance of family to him and how he structures his life around family." Yet, as we will see in Chapter 5, Vicki could not stifle her urge to work. As she struggled against the disposition that she felt she internalized and the one that prevented her from also meeting the time-intensive demands of family life, she found a partner with a cultural skill unlike her own – the ability to disconnect from work.

Ian, also mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, felt the same way. His father was also part of the white-collar trend of spending more time at work, a trend that Ian did not appreciate (Jacobs and Gerson 2004; Robinson and Godby 1997).

Ian (white-collar-origin): My dad always worked really hard. He would work 16 hour days as a lawyer, and get incredibly stressed out before he would go to trial. He told me one time that he had to wear three undershirts to keep himself from sweating... And so I saw that as not at all appealing. So one of the reasons that I was attracted to anything I perceived as being countercultural had a lot to do with what I saw my parents were mixed up in and that was what I wanted to avoid.

One of the things that Ian was attracted to in the countercultural movement was his wife. Asked why he initially wanted to be with her, he said: “I liked that she was clearly non-mainstream and kind of countercultural.” Isabelle also had a work ethic that differed from his father’s – one that was not about sixteen hour days and little family time. She wanted, in contrast, to minimize the time she spent at work: “I don’t want work to interfere with other parts of my life,” she explained. White-collar norms of increasing work hours made it hard for Ian’s family to spend time together; Isabelle offered a model of how to not let work interfere with family life.

Norah (white-collar-origin), a woman with short brown hair and thick glasses, found George (blue-collar-origin), a red haired man who shared her cheesy sense of humor, to be a suitable marriage partner partly because he helped her resolve what she experienced as contradicting ideas of work and family. Norah grew up in what she referred to as the upper-class. Her family had access to “the rounds of fundraising, balls and social opportunities” but did not attend them. Partly, this was because her father, a medical researcher, was so much of a workaholic that not only did he not have time for social events but she was also sure that one day someone would “walk into the office and find him dead at the computer.” Norah met George – a man with a different connection to work – at church. They dated for a few months, until Norah ended the relationship so that she could fully devote herself to her academic work. Yet, the

couple stayed in touch, and as Norah came closer to completing her degree she began to question if she wanted a work-life balance that resembled her father's. George, she saw, provided a model of how she could continue to be invested in work but still have time for family.

Norah (white-collar-origin): I have always had a tortured relationship between work and identity. I mean there's something about graduate school that encourages you to make work your entire life. And one of the things that George... liked about his job was he did it and then he came home and it wasn't there... And then the second thing was of course my torture over whether this academic thing was sufficiently a central part of my identity that I should submerge the rest of my life to it. In other words, should I do, you know, the tenure track, go wherever the job goes, do whatever it takes to be successful in the field, including not having children, the successful single person model of females in academics? Or was it something that was right for me in a particular stage of my life but not right for me in another stage?

Jessi: Do you think George has helped with that transition?

Norah: Absolutely. Just because he's always had that other model of "Here's your work, you do it, you come home, you know, you leave it behind." That you can be intellectually invested in what you're doing but not merged with it.

Norah partly found George to be, in her words, "husband material," because his ideas of work were different than her own. Like many from his class background, George was "invested" in his job without being "merged" with it. George's father's job allowed him to model these ideas to George; his father's position on a factory line meant that he could not bring work home nor could he fully immerse himself in it. George then modeled these ideas to Norah, showing her how work and family could contradict less. In doing so, he provided her with a cultural complement.

#### **SAME-ORIGIN SIMILARITIES**

Same-origin couples, who also had white-collar origins and destinations, did not feel drawn to partners with cultural complements. In the following section I hypothesize about why respondents who grew up in similar class conditions and were exposed to the same changing and contradictory ideals did not find them to be as out of reach. First, in this section, I show that without finding an element of their past to reject, same-origin respondents married a partner who had a cultural match rather than a cultural complement.

Few respondents who married a partner who shared their class origin recalled growing up in unexpressive families or with parents whose dedication to work detracted from family time. Same-origin Amy and Shawn met while working long hours in the financial industry, shortly after each graduated from separate elite colleges. Each felt that they came from close families. Amy, the confident and energetic daughter of a university president and a teacher, had moved several times with her family and had also traveled on solo-trips to eastern Europe and southern Africa. She pointed to these experiences as she described the closeness of her family: “We had really close families that, like I said, the family unit was strong enough that they could uproot and go somewhere.” Her husband, Shawn, a tall, formerly rowdy man who resembled the comedian Dennis Leary, also came from a privileged background. He remembered growing up spending time at his grandparents’ “great house on a hill with vineyards and a little winery and a swimming pool” and being “keenly aware that this was not something that everybody had.” Also like Amy, he felt that he came from an emotionally expressive family. He said of his childhood: “The love of the family was absolutely number one. That’s something that I always just knew and felt in my bones.” Furthermore, both admired their parents’ dedication to work. Shawn said:

You work hard. You have to figure out what you like to work at so that you can find a way to enjoy working at it. I think that’s something I learned that from my parents, watching them; I consider them to be hard workers... I think Amy would say the same of her parents.

Both felt that they had intimate families and both enjoyed their parents' work ethics. They then did not feel that their emotional dispositions did not prepare them to meet contemporary cultural ideals and did not grow up feeling that dedication to work conflicted with dedication to family. They then did not feel drawn to their partner because of cultural complements, but because of cultural similarities. When asked why she wanted to marry Shawn, Amy said: "We found that we had this common background." Shawn concurred: "I remember thinking, 'Wow, she had a very similar upbringing and family experience as I did.'" Specifically, they both enjoyed that they had experience with extensive international travel – a commonality that their privileged backgrounds made possible and that was salient as they had no need for cultural complements.

Carlie and Clint (same-origin) met when Clint checked Carlie into her dorm room during her freshman year of college. They got to know each other as they shared a dormitory floor, and they discovered that they were both the children of engineers and on track to become engineers themselves. They both grew up traveling as well. Carlie had pictures from her international travels that looked like those out of a *National Geographic* magazine, while Clint's travels provided him with a wide range of portraits of the United States. As well as enjoying their similar interest in travel and their similar backgrounds, they also enjoyed the emotional closeness of each of their families. When asked why she wanted to marry Clint, Carlie spoke of Clint's close-knit family:

A strong sense of family. We had met each other's families by then and his family is very similar to mine. You know, a strong relationship with his parents and with his siblings and the same with me.

Clint also named a close family as a reason he was attracted to Carlie: "She came from a good family, similar values... [Her family] had somewhat similar beliefs, you know, family-oriented."

Furthermore, Carlie and Clint appreciated each other's matching work ethics. Carlie explained that she married Clint partly because he had a "good work ethic. He's not one to take a sick day or skip a class or something like that – just a good work ethic." When asked what he had looked for in a spouse, a similar work ethic was among the characteristics Clint had sought: "Just someone who had similar thoughts in general about life and work attitudes... You get a job, you work, you raise a family, you're not a bum. You don't take advantage of society and you have to pull your own weight." Neither Clint nor Carlie felt that they needed a cultural complement to help them meet contemporary cultural ideals. They then found each other appealing because of their cultural similarities rather than their cultural complements.

Phil (same-origin), son of a doctor and a professor and himself an architect, also did not feel that his parents' emotional expressivity or orientation toward work left him ill-equipped to meet cultural ideals. He described his father as someone who "threw himself completely into his work" but also "loved to laugh with his family" and was, in his wife's words, "his best friend." He described his mother in a similar way, presenting her connection to work and her emotional expressivity together and without contradiction: "My mother is hard driving, interested in accolades, never met a woman who worked harder. Academic. Loves her family intensely." He married his wife Rose, then, partly because she had traits that were similar to his mother's, not different than them. He fondly said: "Rose and my mother are cut from the same cloth." Rose, meanwhile, chose Phil partly because he recognized how important work was to her and did not mind that her work conflicted with family life. She said: "I liked the fact that he was so supportive of what was important to me... I was a year ahead of him and so I graduated and went [across the country for work] and he stayed back [at college] and he didn't have a problem with me leaving." Those who married respondents who shared their class origin had no reason to

appreciate cultural complements as they rarely felt that the dispositions they were exposed to as children left them unable to meet cultural ideals. They then felt drawn to partners with cultural similarities, sometimes ones like experience with travel that were likely to be found with those who shared their class origin.

### **WHY SOME WITH MIDDLE-CLASS ORIGINS MARRIED WITHIN THEIR CLASS AND OTHERS DID NOT**

A cultural complement is only appealing if individuals feel that they internalized dispositions that would not allow them to meet cultural ideals. How individuals interpret their own dispositions and cultural ideals is subjective; even those who experience the same broad socio-cultural environment can come away with different understandings. In this section, I hypothesize about why those in different-origin marriages viewed their own dispositions as falling short of their ideals, therefore making cultural complements more appealing, while those in same-origin marriages did not.

White-collar-origin respondents in different-origin marriages tended to have two experiences that those in same-origin marriages did not. These experiences may have prompted them to question if they were fully meeting cultural ideals and wonder if those from blue-collar origins were better able to meet them. First, several respondents who married partners with blue-collar-origins had upwardly mobile parents whom they observed having difficulty finding intimacy in their adulthood class milieu:

Lori (white-collar-origin): I was my mom's kid in that my mom was also intimidated [by upper-class culture]. She felt like she didn't belong in that world. And that really rubbed off on me. So I felt like I didn't belong in that world.

Norah (white-collar-origin): My parents were upper-class but not comfortable with it... It's like [my mother] couldn't quite read all of the signals or would miss some of the signals or just had that look of trying too hard. Or being too



desperate... She was wanting to be like the neighbors or wanting to have everything be proper and then always feeling like she was coming up short.

Upwardly mobile individuals sometimes experience a mismatch between aspects of the culture of their class origin and destination. As they are more familiar with the unspoken norms of their class origin, they often find it to be warmer and more intimate as well as to offer a more secure sense of belonging (Bourdieu 1984; Dews and Law 1995). This sense may have, in Lori's words, "rubbed off" on them; they may have learned from their parents to see their own families as lacking intimacy and to believe that people in other classes offer more intimacy. No same-origin partner reported similar feelings, though some of their parents were also upwardly mobile.

Second, several respondents who were attracted to cultural complements and married working-class-origin partners grew up within a social network that was heterogeneous by social class. They drew upon these experiences to frame working-class families as more intimate and better able to balance work and family. This framing aligns with broader cultural discourses that position working-class people as warm and more family-oriented while identifying middle- and upper-class people as colder and more career-oriented (Kendall 2011; Lamont 1992, 2000). Vicki (white-collar-origin), for example, had one set of wealthy grandparents and another set of poor grandparents. She associated the latter with a greater balance between work and family and less emotional restraint.

I think class matters, like I said before, more to the people that have money. Not to the people who don't. They really seem to have a better balance in their life. It's just what I've noticed, especially going in between the different classes... When I go back to [my mother's parents] and their beautiful house and all their stuff, they're just kind of cold. Not very warm people. And very snobby. I mean very snobby! You couldn't go anywhere without putting on airs. My grandma literally would not let us go out with her unless we dressed a certain way... And then we'd go across town to my dad's mom and she'd just be like: "Happy to see you and hang out with you!"

Just as Vicki concluded that the working-class people she knew were warmer and “have a better balance,” so too did Dan (white-collar-origin). He recalled that during his childhood “most of the families around us were blue-collar families.” They were families that, he thought, offered more intimacy and balance:

Some of the jobs that my friends’ fathers had were not easy jobs. And yet they were able to spend more time... The other dads playing with their children, their sons. Our next-door neighbors, who one son was my brother’s age and one was my age, they were out playing basketball constantly as a family. And if we were visiting them, the dad was right in there. My dad never. So that was a big difference, being more active with my friends’ parents than with my own.

These respondents positioned those in the working-class as providing more intimacy, warmth, balance, and emotional expression. Though they could have found a cultural complement with middle-class-origin individuals who perceived their family to be more intimate and expressive, their own juxtapositions may have prompted them to more easily recognize a cultural complement in an upwardly mobile partner with working-class roots.

Those who married laterally, however, rarely reported engaging in sustained interactions with those outside of their class. Only one same-origin respondent who had poor or working-class grandparents reported seeing them often, and only two reported having friends from the working-class. Most instead made statements like Ted’s: “I think I grew up in a pretty homogenous suburb. Obviously there were different classes there. But I did not hang out a lot with people who were very different than where we were.” Their limited experience with those outside of their class meant that they did not compare their own family’s styles of emotional expression and work/family balance to those in other classes, and cultural references that identify the working-class as warmer and more family-centered would be less likely to resonate with them. Thus, while societal changes in norms of emotional expressivity and contradictions between the demands work and family were widespread, those who married “down” were more

likely to have had experiences that prompted them to question the adequacy of their own dispositions and to appreciate those with cultural complements.<sup>ii</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Vicki married John despite that she felt he came from an uneducated family with vulgar tastes. Isabelle married Ian despite that he could not identify with her rural upbringing and would need to instruct her on things that were obvious to him – how to load a dishwasher and distinguish between a liberal arts college and research university. They also married despite that John was no more physically attractive or educated than Vicki, nor was Isabelle more good looking or educated than Ian. Their cultural differences then did not divide them, and they were not able to exchange the typical resources. The usual theories could not explain why they appealed to each other. Rather, they appealed to each other because each could offer the other a cultural complement – a disposition that they felt they lacked, but one that they thought could help them meet an elusive, changing, or contradictory cultural ideal.

Love crossed class lines for reasons that previous theories would not predict. Cultural differences were not insurmountable obstacles, as cultural matching theory would predict. Rather, cultural differences that were complementary operated as magnets, drawing those who grew up in different classes together. And, unlike the predictions stemming from common uses of exchange theory, those with blue-collar-origins did not need to compensate for their background by providing their partner with an abundance of another resource. Rather, each partner had dispositions they developed in their childhood class position, ones that the other found appealing and potentially useful. Thus, the melding of the two theories provide the best

explanation of why those like Ian and Isabelle loved each other – dispositions mattered, as cultural matching theory asserts, and these were traded, as exchange theorists would expect.

Cultural complements were the particularly salient in drawing together individuals across class lines. This salience, however, does not rule out that other factors also played a role in who appealed to whom. Couples matched on their race, and many matched on their level of educational attainment and their religion. They shared senses of humor and tastes in movies or music. These cultural matches likely made each other seem like viable mates and also helped draw each partner to the other. Those with dissimilar levels of education, races, or religions may not have even considered each other as husband or wife material.

Cultural complements, then, were influential in encouraging cross-class appeal. The next chapter turns to how couples thought of class in their marriage, and the following chapters turn to the married lives of those who were united by cultural complements. We will see that although class-specific trends helped bring the couples together, few actively considered the role class played in their relationship. Furthermore, after getting together, cultural complements went from differences to appreciate to differences to manage. In these times, Madison learned “we weren’t quite as similar as we thought we were” and Isabelle observed “the things that you are drawn to sometimes become the things that drive you crazy.”<sup>5</sup>

### CHAPTER 3 UNDERSTANDINGS OF CLASS

It makes intuitive sense, and it has been suggested by others, that marrying across lines of class origin would create the conditions for a more equitable class system (Blossfeld 2009; Hazelrigg and Lopreato 1972; Kalmijn 1991, 1998; Leiulfsrud and Woodward 1989). The thinking goes that spouses from different classes exchange stories of their unequal pasts and interact with each other's families and childhood friends. Through these experiences, they piece together how class shapes life chances and lifestyles. They learn, in short, of tilted playing fields and socially-shaped sensibilities. In addition, as they enjoy their spouse's sensibilities and integrate into their spouse's network, they cross class lines in more relationships. Social distance then diminishes as love and friendship continue to cross class lines. In short, different-origin marriages, according to this line of thinking, have the potential to decrease class disparities as they make class visible, comprehensible, palatable, and personal.

This potential was not reached for William (blue-collar-origin), a muscular man with a short haircut who wore a sweater and stylish jeans. Rather, at the end of the interview, when I asked him if there was anything else I should know, he tearfully told me that I should know that class did not matter. He relayed: "I don't pay attention to any differences as to where we came from, Anneka and me. I really don't. Because I really don't think that anybody in my family loved me any less than hers or would have given me anything less than hers would have given her. We just didn't have the opportunity."

William's emotional answer surprised me. His tears surprised me not just because his military background and large build did not prepare me to see him cry, but because he had been cheerful for the first hour-and-a-half of the interview, before my questions about class began. His statement also surprised me because I did not know why he felt that class was associated with love or moral worth. My questions asked about similarities and differences, but not about a hierarchy of experiences and definitely not about whose family loved who more. It was clear to me that his family did love him, regardless of what class he was from.

On top of his passionate reaction, his denial that class mattered also surprised me. The class differences between him and Anneka were large enough that I thought he would have considered them. He felt that he grew up in "the lowest" class. He grew up in a trailer park, and his mother regularly borrowed money from relatives in order to pay their bills. Even though he grew up in a rural, Southern town where everyone was poor, he felt that others always had more. His wife, Anneka, did not share his childhood way of life. She grew up in a townhouse in a Northern city. Her father held a Ph.D. and was around enough other Ivy League graduates to know that he found them intolerable. She did not worry about how the bills would be paid or worry if they would have electricity the next month. Unlike William, she also grew up knowing she would go to college and become a professional.

I expected that these differences – which were shared in the stories they told each other and lived when they visited each other's families – would have led them to understand that class was not an empty category or a meaningless word. Class was something that was lived; it shaped who they were and how each wanted to live their lives. It shaped, as the coming chapters will show, how thought about money, work, and play. But, contrary to my expectations, William did

not “pay attention” to their class differences. As such, he did not think it was a difference that made a difference.

This chapter shows that William’s experiences were representative. The chapter begins by revealing the ways in which respondents recalled realizing that their spouse grew up in a different class. This section argues that the way they initially framed their partner minimized their ability to learn about what Paul Fussell (1992) called America’s “dirty little secret.” The chapter then proceeds to discuss the role respondents thought class played in their marriages. This section reveals that most were not aware of how class touched their lives, making it impossible for them to use their marital experiences to draw broader conclusions about how class works. The chapter ends by illustrating that even those who did recognize that class shaped the person they loved did not necessarily extend this love to others of their partner’s class. Love sparked between those from different classes, but did not spark understandings or further relationships that would bridge class divides.

#### **AWARENESS OF BEING IN A DIFFERENT-ORIGIN MARRIAGE**

If different-origin marriages are to act as experiential learning sites for how class works, spouses must first be aware that they are in a different-origin relationship. Though sociologists may depict these marriages as different-origin, this characterization may not resonate with those in them. In this section, I show that the idea that different-origin marriages provide insight into how class works breaks down for a sizeable subset of those in different-origin marriages, as they did not recognize the classed nature of their union. Additionally, most of those who did recognize that they were entering into a different-origin union framed their class differences in ways that

decreased the likelihood that they would use their marriage to uncover the subtle ways that class shaped their lives.

### *Denying, Downplaying, or Disregarding Their Different Origins*

George, a talkative and energetic man with red hair and rectangular glasses, grew up with a father who worked in a factory and a mother who worked at home. He spent his childhood in a cookie-cutter house in a blue-collar town that was populated by families who were connected to the auto-industry. His family's income was stable but did not provide enough to cover vacations or leave his family free from financial worries. George married Norah, a gregarious woman who was raised by a father who presided over laboratories at a large hospital and a mother who spent her time trying to keep up with the upper-class fashions in their neighborhood. Unlike George, Norah grew up with access to balls and galas, music lessons and museums, as well as far-away vacations. By many measures, Norah and George grew up in different classes.

George, however, did not register their class differences. When I asked him when he first realized he and Norah were from different classes – a leading question, given that it did not occur to me that he would fail to notice the differences that I found so apparent – he replied that he had thought about it only when I asked the question. He laughed as he replied: “I guess we’re from different class backgrounds!” In eight years of marriage, the idea that and Norah grew up on different rungs of the class ladder had not occurred to him.

Similarly, Adam, a reserved man whose parents emigrated from Southern Europe, had not considered that he and his wife, Andrea, began their lives in different classes. Adam's father's earnings as an electrician were spread thin as they provided for his family of ten. Adam



was the first in his family to step foot on a campus as a college student; his mother had a high-school degree and his father earned a GED. Andrea's parents, by contrast, were both college-educated. Her father had a position as an engineer, and his income provided her and her siblings with more as there were fewer of them. Adam, however, never considered these differences.

When I asked him when he first realized that he and Andrea were from different classes, he said: "When I saw your email. I never really thought of it. I thought we were just middle-class, suburban people from the Midwest. It never struck me that [my in-laws] went to college... I never really thought about it."

Other respondents not only did not think about their class differences, but denied them. Eric, a handsome and outgoing former fraternity member, grew up in a neighborhood that was well-off enough that he distinctly remembered the first time that he encountered a peer who could not afford to buy a school lunch. Jill, an attractive woman from an Italian family, was raised by a father who socialized with plumbers in order to remind himself that he earned a little more than others. Even though Jill was well aware of their class differences, Eric's first reaction was to deny them: "I still don't consider us from different class backgrounds today. It's funny, because when Jill told me about this research I was like, 'What? Why? How do we fit that?' And she was like, 'Well your dad was a doctor; mine wasn't.' And I was like, 'What? Well, okay.'" Even though Eric conceded to being in different classes when his wife explained her position, at the time of the interview, he again denied their difference.

Mary also denied that she and her husband, Ben, came from different classes. Mary's father had a Ph.D. and worked as a professor at a small university. Her mother received a Masters Degree and worked as a teacher. Her husband, Ben, in contrast, was raised by two parents with high school degrees. His father worked as an electrician and his did not work for

pay. Mary did not think that these differences meant that she and her husband were raised in different classes. Neither she nor Ben grew up lacking anything, so she assumed both were raised in the middle-class. Their backgrounds, she thought, were not different.

These respondents who did not think about or denied their class differences made up twenty percent of the sample. This group included relatively equal numbers of men and women, and those from blue- and white-collar backgrounds. Those whose class differences from their partner were big and small were also included, as were those who had a partner who observed their class differences. For this group, their marriages did not provide them with insight into how class shaped their lives. As they overlooked or denied their differences, they did not end up thinking about class much at all.

Given that they stepped into each other's class worlds as they visited their in-laws and imagined their partners' pasts, their lack of class awareness requires some explanation. The first reason why they did not see their class differences may simply be that class is difficult to see. Race may be read off of skin color, and gender from anatomy, but class is more difficult to identify as it is less associated with the body. Clothes can also be changed, and jewelry can be bought with loaned money, making personal adornments also difficult to interpret. Additionally, Americans tend to conflate whiteness with the middle-class (Ortner 2003), which may lead whites to overlook class differences between themselves and other whites.

Moreover, while social movements have positioned race and gender as differences that matter, no such social movement has revealed the ways that the class individuals are born into can shape their life chances and their lifestyles. Instead, the prevailing idea is that class matters little in the land of opportunity and the home of the American Dream as anyone born in the United States can grow up to become the next millionaire. This discourse obscures the fact that

childhood class position does shape life chances (Corcoran 1995), and it does not even consider the idea that dispositions and worldviews are shaped by the class of one's youth. Americans are then not readily prompted to recognize class differences, or even to think that class can be easily identified. They are certainly not asked to think about how class shapes the people they love.

Class differences were also denied because of the flexible and contested nature of class boundaries. Though the average person may feel fairly confident that they can differentiate women from men or blacks from whites, it is less clear where the line is that differentiates the middle-class from the working-class or the working-class from the poor. This confusion allows class boundaries to be drawn strategically, including and excluding individuals as they wish. People tend to see the middle-class as normal (DeMott 1992), and the lack of fixed class lines allows people to draw class boundaries that are wide enough to situate their own and their partner's class origin in the middle-class. Mary, for example, could decide that she and her husband were both middle-class because they were not lacking any necessities. Another respondent, John, denied that he and his wife grew up in different classes because they both had parents who worked hard. The difficulty of seeing class and the ease of drawing one's own boundaries meant that twenty percent of those in different-origin marriages did not think their partner grew up in a class they did not share. Given their lack of awareness of their class backgrounds, their marriages would not provide them with the experiences to learn more about how class shaped opportunities and sensibilities.

***Acknowledging Class Differences Without Acknowledging that Each Partner is Classed***

The remaining eighty percent of respondents believed that they were in a marriage that spanned one class divide, that of their class origin. However, the way most learned of their partner's different class background is telling for how they would later think about class in their relationship. Only four respondents did not pick up on their partner's class background from the stories they told, the obstacles they faced, the tastes they held, or their ideas of what was to come. Rather, they ascertained their partner's background through their partner's *parents'* tastes, homes, and occupations. Effectively, they saw their partners' parents as being shaped by class, but not their partners' themselves.

Rachel, a plain and stocky woman with a large gap in her front teeth, grew up in a different class than her husband, Gordon. Rachel was raised by a mother who earned her GED and spent time fixing fences, riding horses, and tending to their farm. Rachel's father, like her mother, was casual in appearance and demeanor, while also being rather gruff. He worked as a cop. He swore and he was tough. His aspiration for Rachel was that she not end up in jail, a fate she once tempted when she sold drugs out of their family home. Her own aspirations shifted from being a wife to a stewardess, or even a nun. She thought college was not for her, and dropped out of high school before returning to get her GED and then, years later, her college degree. Rachel's husband, Gordon, grew up geographically close to her but in a family that was socially distant. Gordon, a tall, shy man, was raised by an MBA-holding father who wore cardigans and corduroys and a mother with an English literature degree who was still offended by the word "shit." Though he was a newly-employed recovering alcoholic when Rachel met him, he still carried with him his class tastes. His art classes gave him drawing skills, his English reflected the proper grammar that his mother cared so much about, and when he walked into the rough bar where he met Rachel, he carried a tray of sushi.

Rachel did not recognize the class signals that her partner transmitted. Instead, she first noticed their different class backgrounds when she met Gordon's parents. She explained how their class differences dawned upon her: "The day I met his parents, they were taking us to a play. They took us to the play *Elephant Man*. And I don't think I have ever been to the theater with my parents. My family had been to county fairs and rodeos and Gordon's family goes to concerts or plays." Rachel was able to read the class signs that Gordon's parents conveyed. She knew that the theater was associated with a class that she did not share. She had not, however, been able to read the class signals that were associated with Gordon's demeanor and tastes. Class was made visible by Gordon's parents, not Gordon himself.

Dan, similarly, did not realize that he and Gabriella grew up in different classes until, after a year of dating, he visited her mother. Dan, the son of an engineer and an artist, walked into Gabriella's mother's home and gazed upon a sea of crystal figurines that stood atop the furniture. He remembered his reaction: "Oh my God! I don't know what to do with this!" Dan found the figurines to be tacky and distasteful, a signal of low culture and a lower class. Yet, despite that he had visited Gabriella's apartment several times and found it artistically uninspiring, he did not associate her own tastes with her background. It took being bowled over by his mother-in-law's figurines for him to understand that their class backgrounds were not the same. Dan, Rachel, and other respondents like them recognized that they grew up in a different class than their partner only after meeting their partners' parents. They were able to interpret class signals that came from their in-laws but not their partners themselves.

Others discerned their partners' class upbringing by asking about their parents' occupations and educations. Norah (white-collar-origin, currently a stay-at-home mother) said she first figured out their class differences "pretty much as quickly as we went over the family

history.” Matt (white-collar-origin, currently a manager) explained: “It was just the kind of thing, like second date, ‘So what’s your dad do?’ So you kind of know that going in.” Joe (blue-collar-origin, currently an accountant) agreed: “You pretty much know after you talk to somebody for a while. You know, ‘What do your parents do?’ ‘What do my parents do?’ It comes out soon enough.” They first realized their partners’ class background because they asked; that they learned through asking suggests that they did not think class was readable from other cues.

Only four respondents first discerned their partners’ class origin from something associated with their spouse, not their spouses’ parents. Amelia (white-collar-origin, currently a school social worker) met Isaac (blue-collar-origin, currently a teacher) when they began working together as colleagues. She identified that their similar positions belied their different pasts when she first heard Isaac say “ain’t.” Danielle (blue-collar-origin, currently a preschool teacher) realized that Jim (white-collar-origin, currently an office worker) was raised with more privilege when he said that he attended a prestigious college and then moved back home. Those things, she knew, “didn’t happen in my world.” Jason observed that he and Lori grew up in different social spheres when she recounted her vacations to Europe. To him, vacations meant rolling out the sleeping bags on his grandmother’s floor. He knew Lori’s idea of a vacation signaled that her family could afford leisure activities that his could not.

That Amelia, Danielle, and Jason were able to connect their partners’ experiences and sensibilities to their class origin demonstrates that it was possible for respondents to use the present to understand their partners’ class past. Most respondents, however, likely had similar conversations and were exposed to similar cues but did not interpret them as conveying class signals. They saw their in-laws as transmitting class cues but not their partners themselves. Without seeing their partners’ as people who had class-inflected tastes, dispositions, or

worldviews, they were then unable to gain an understanding of how class mattered in their marriage.

### **RESPONDENTS' UNDERSTANDING OF THE ROLE CLASS PLAYS IN THEIR MARRIAGE**

Four-fifths of respondents who married a partner whose father had a different type of occupation and education thought they were in a different-class marriage. But knowing that their fathers worked in different types of jobs and had different amounts of formal education is very different than believing that these differences matter. This section explores the meaning respondents attributed to their different-origin marriage. Identifying how those in different-origin marriages think about class is important for understanding individuals' ability to grasp class more generally. If they do not understand how class shapes sensibilities after years of living with a loved one who was shaped by the conditions of their past, they are unlikely to recognize how class matters in more dynamic and less intimate relationships.

Even though class-engendered cultural complements helped unite the couples and even though several respondents learned to associate one class with more intimacy than another, few saw their own marriages as influenced by class. In fact, many felt strongly that class did not and could not shape their identity or their marriage. Asked if they thought class mattered in their relationship, respondents often forcefully denied the relevance of their different backgrounds.

Kevin (blue-collar-origin, currently a graduate student): I don't see how it makes any difference. I think it's just an artificial distinction.

Leslie (white-collar-origin, currently an office worker): It's really not an issue to us, not that I know of anyway. Tom might say differently, but I'm not aware of it.

Colton (white-collar-origin, currently a stay-at-home father): No, it's not really important to us... It's really a non-issue.

Others just said “no” when asked if they ever think about their class differences. Most respondents indicated that their class differences were insignificant in their lives and in their marriages. They did not think about class, because, in the words of Kevin (blue-collar-origin) and Colton (white-collar-origin), it was an artificial and unimportant distinction.

Respondents’ denial of the influence of class recurred as they responded to questions about what advice they had to others in different-origin marriages. As they thought class was inconsequential, the advice they offered was to ignore each other’s class background. Tom, Rachel, Nick, and Norah offered a representative sample of this modal reply.

Tom (blue-collar-origin, currently a computer programmer): Advice. I think the best thing I could say is just don’t pay much attention to it. It’s really not important.

Rachel (blue-collar-origin, currently a lab assistant): I would say it doesn’t matter. I’d say marry for love.

Nick (white-collar-origin, currently a stay-at-home father): I don’t know if I would because to be honest I never really, until I saw that study that you are doing, I can’t say I ever really thought about it. I mean if you ask me, sure, yeah, we’re from different economic backgrounds but beyond that I don’t think I would have spent a second thinking about it. I don’t know if it changes you at all.

Norah (white-collar-origin, currently a stay-at-home mother): I would basically say, “Look at the person and not their family.”

Most often, those in different-origin marriages were not aware of how class impacted their marriage. They denied that class had any sway on their relationship or that it was worth thinking about at all. Nick noted that class does not shape people, Norah implied that their in-laws’ class position is unrelated to their spouses’ identity, and others instructed potential couples to simply ignore class differences. These respondents maintained that their class origin was irrelevant to their own identity, their partner’s identity, and their marriage. Their marriages did not increase



their understanding of class, as they were confident that class was a category that they already understood – they understood that it was irrelevant.

A small subset – about twenty percent of those in different-origin marriages – did believe that coming from different class backgrounds *could* have an impact on marriage. However, most did not see how class made a difference in their own. Isaac was the fifth of ten children born to a father who worked in a factory and had a fourth grade education and a mother who rarely left their home after receiving her high school diploma. Isaac grew up with his large family in a de-industrializing city that was rough and poor. As a teenager he thought he would end up in the military or jail. His wife, Amelia, grew up in safe suburbs with a father who worked as a university president and a mother who earned a Masters Degree and worked as a stay-at-home mother. Isaac thought that coming from different class backgrounds *could* make a difference, but thought that it did not matter for his own marriage as he and Amelia married relatively late: “We were older [when we met]. We both had Masters Degrees. We were both solid in what we were doing. Very confident. And we didn’t have to change a lot. So that’s clearly a different ballgame than if you’re eighteen and you’re marrying somebody from a different class.” In other words, Isaac thought that class differences might matter for couples who married young, but that the impact of class was erased for those like him who married once they have stable jobs and graduate degrees.

Bob similarly thought that class could matter for other couples whose class pasts were discrepant, but that class did not matter for his own. Bob, a short man dressed in a windbreaker and jeans, grew up with a father who told him that the key to not becoming like him – a truck driver who worked 16 hour days – was to go to college. His wife, Bethany, grew up in what she knew others thought of as a mansion and with the certainty that she would go to college. Bob’s

advice to other couples in different-origin marriages was to talk about each spouse's background: "Their experience will be different than your experiences... Just don't be afraid to talk about the differences." Yet, when asked if he talked about these differences with Bethany, he said that he rarely did. Their class differences, he said, were not wide enough to occasion discussion. He could see how class might matter for other people's marriages, but, he maintained, it did not matter for his own. Their marriages then did not lead to greater class understandings, as they thought class differences affected other people but not themselves.

The following chapters reveal that class did, in fact, shape their marriages, and did so quite profoundly. Respondents recounted differences in how they and their partner thought about money, housework, time, paid work, leisure, parenting, and emotions. The data in the following chapters came from the stories they told about their lives, but they still did not think that class mattered in their marriage. More strikingly, some were able to talk fluently about class in other aspects of their lives. Some knew that their class background posed obstacles for them in college; others understood that their class privilege afforded them a safety net. Yet, they saw class as divorced from marriage. How could many respondents be aware of class in some aspects of their lives, while maintaining that their relationship was a sacred site that class did not touch? Why, in other words, were they not able to use their marriage to learn more about how class works?

The answers lie in how respondents understood class more generally. They did not understand childhood class conditions as producing long-lasting cultural ways of being; rather, they saw class as a contained social force and themselves as unique individuals. Some saw class as primarily material, while others insisted that even thinking about how many resources one has was classist and immoral. For others, class shaped their marriages without their knowledge because class was an unthinkable concept, because seeing patterns was difficult, and because

American culture upholds the belief that individuals marry unique soul mates – not socially influenced individuals – who have cherished idiosyncrasies. Also, as noted above, few respondents considered that the cultural items that marked their in-laws as classed also shaped their partners. Class molded their marriages, but other ideas molded their thoughts, averting their ability to see themselves, their partner, and their relationship as classed entities. I consider each of respondents’ non-mutually-exclusive ways of thinking – or not thinking – about class below.

### *Class as Primarily Material*

One reason that couples denied that class played a role in their marriage, despite recounting many ways in which class did indeed matter, was that respondents tended to view class primarily in material terms. Many acknowledged that their parents and in-laws had different amounts of money, held different degrees, and worked in jobs with more or less prestige. But they thought that the influence of class was negated by their shared bank accounts and assets. This logic makes sense if class is only characterized by resources and not also by the cultural practices produced by those resources. By viewing class as only about the things money could buy, they thought that their current equality erased the effects of their past experiences with inequality.

### *Class as Primarily Moral*

Others did not consider class a relevant consideration for their marriage because they contended that thinking about class was limited to thinking about individuals’ moral worth – who was superior to whom. In their thinking, they did not consider class because they did not judge

others. Caroline (white-collar-origin, currently a researcher) said: “I don’t think [about our class differences] because I don’t think my parents raised me to be snotty.” Aaron (blue-collar-origin, currently a retired teacher) agreed, noting that his mother taught him “don’t judge.” Jim (white-collar-origin, currently an office worker) angrily explained, “It would only be if you were looking in black and white, things were different. But we don’t have a great sense that one person is better than the other person, more privileged or anything like that... Class doesn’t make a damned difference.” Ben (blue-collar-origin, currently a manager) was one of several blue-collar-origin men who had a similar strong feeling:

Ultimately it comes down to I don’t want to put myself in a class. I don’t think I’m better than anybody else. I don’t think I’m worse than anybody else. So to me, that’s what the classes do is: “The reason you’re in this class is because you fit this criteria.” Well, I don’t give a shit about your criteria.

Respondents’ association of class with morality makes sense given the language that is often associated with class. Those who try hard and are morally righteous, according to the tenets of the American Dream, get ahead. Those who are poor must then be lazy and morally suspect. Furthermore, the language used to talk about class is often morally coded. People move “up” and “down” the class ladder, rather than just into different positions. A “classy” event is a good one, and a “good family” is often one that is at least middle-class. People at the top of the class ladder are at least partially celebrated while those at the bottom are called leaches, parasites, and welfare queens (Kendall 2011).

Respondents had picked up upon the morally-coded language that is often infused in discussions of class, and learned to associate thinking about class with thinking about others’ moral worth. Such a conflation is problematic for the same reasons that the colorblind ideology is problematic for race relations: it masks the structural nature of class and assumes that not talking about class will make class differences matter less (see Bonilla-Silva 2003 for a

discussion of colorblind racism). In this case, the moralized nature of class positioned it as a taboo topic, as admitting to thinking about class would be admitting to being classist. This discourse then allowed some to acknowledge that they grew up in a different class than their spouse while simultaneously preventing them from further exploring the topic. The conflation of class and morality inhibited respondents' ability to use their marriage as a launching pad to learn more about how class works.

### *Class as Unthinkable*

Additionally, individuals did not consider how class shaped their marriage simply because class was unthinkable. When asked, some could identify that they were raised with more or less class privilege than their spouse, but the lack of a broad class discourse meant that outside of the interview they simply did not think about class. When asked if she thinks about the class dissimilarities in her marriage, Evelyn (blue-collar-origin, currently a project manager) replied: "That never occurs to me." Anneka (white-collar-origin, currently a graduate student), whose parents were "anti-status seekers," even regularly forgot that she and (blue-collar-origin) William did not share a class background:

I forget about it. I'm almost surprised occasionally when he'll mention something like, "Growing up we never had X." And I'm like, "Really? Oh, well of course you didn't." I haven't internalized it I guess.

Anneka realized that she and William were from different class backgrounds, but even with her personalized window into his classed past, she could not remember to even think that they had class differences, let alone that they might matter. Americans tend not to dwell on class (DeMott 1992), and even with her husband's reminders of their difference she did not consider the

implications of their class backgrounds. Individuals may be blind to how class shapes their marriages simply because class is unthinkable.

### ***Hidden Patterns***

White-collar-origin spouses may be able to acknowledge class dissimilarities while not believing they impact their relationship because of their limited contact with those from blue-collar backgrounds. Without a known network of people who were raised in their partners' class they may find it difficult to see any patterns in classed ways of being. Blue-collar-origin partners, on the other hand, had networks from their childhood class position and their adulthood class position. While they knew enough people to see patterns, many still did not. They may have been wary of interrogating these patterns, as white-collar culture is granted more esteem than blue-collar culture (Bettie 200; Bourdieu 1984), and not seeing patterns may buttress their own esteem. Yet if one cannot see classed patterns, one cannot but assume that their partner is unique and has idiosyncratic tastes, worldviews, and dispositions. Such an interpretation, however, prevents those in different-origin marriages from using their relationship to learn more about how class works.

### ***Class as an Individual Property and Marriage as the Union between Two Unique People***

Another reason why individuals may not have understood how class shapes their marriage is that Americans prefer to think about individuals rather than groups (Ortner 2003). If class is thought about at all in America, it is commonly portrayed as about individual struggles (climbing from

rag to riches), not about group struggles, and definitely not about group identities (DeMott 1992; Ortner 2003). In the contemporary era, love and marriage are also viewed as between two unique individuals – soul mates who are so individual (and not classed) – that they are meant only for each other (Swilder 2001). With Americans so primed to see class, love, and marriage as about individuals only, it is no wonder they never consider the idea that they, their partners, and their marriages may be structured by systematic social forces.

In sum, even though many respondents were cognizant that they were in one kind of different-origin marriage, could identify class cues from their in-laws, and could talk about class in abstract ways, few routinely thought about how their different class backgrounds influenced their own identities or their marriage. Importantly, not only did most not grasp how class molded their marriage, but their marriages did not often prompt them to think more about class or to understand the links between class and culture. Instead, most respondents continued to think about class as divorced from culture, immoral to consider, or unthinkable. Despite their personalized window into their partner's background, they seldom saw a partner who was shaped by class or developed an appreciation of how class works.

#### **THE EXCEPTIONS: WHEN DIFFERENT-ORIGIN MARRIAGE ENABLED GREATER CLASS UNDERSTANDING**

Different-origin marriages rarely were associated with gaining a better understanding of how class works, but that did not mean that such insight could not be gained. Ten of sixty-four respondents did think their marriage was shaped by class, and used their marital experiences to draw broader conclusions about how class shapes opportunities and sensibilities. Eight of the ten who did so either had backgrounds in the social sciences or related disciplines or were married to

a partner who did. This suggests that class may be easier to see if individuals are exposed to a curriculum that is likely to demoralize class and relate macro class conditions to daily life circumstances. However, even when marriages served as incubators for class understandings, they rarely generated the desire to engage in more cross-class relationships.

Ian, for example, married Isabelle, a women's studies major who works as a therapist. Before meeting Isabelle, Ian had barely considered the concept of class. The first thing he learned about class from Isabelle was "that it exists." But he also learned more. He learned that class was not just something that Marx and Engels wrote about, but that it was also about people's real lives. He saw the hardships that his wife's family faced as they fended off debt collectors and learned that his family was comparably well-off. He learned that his entire wife's family lived in the same small town, and put together that moving often and far away was more emblematic of the lifestyle of his class than hers. He observed the way that he felt more comfortable in elegant restaurants and in graduate school, and discerned that his background gave him a sense of ease in these settings that his wife's background did not provide her. His wife, Isabelle, whose awareness of class preceded his, helped Ian interpret these differences and attribute them to class. With Isabelle as his guide, Ian was able to use their experiences to learn more about class.

Lori and Jason, who both worked in social-science-related fields, also learned about how class worked through their marriage. Jason spent months telling Lori: "Well look, I'm sorry. You can go on about how you really don't have any money but it's not ordinary to go to prep school, it's not ordinary to have a family that has three homes. I don't care if two of them belong to your grandmother. It's not normal to have these servants." After Lori ended her months of resistance and realized that she grew up amongst the elite, she joined Jason in interpreting their experiences



through a class lens. For the first time, she admitted that her legacy status and grandmother's donations made it easier for her to get into a selective college than for Jason to do the same. She admitted that not having the latest fashion styles did not immediately drop her from wealthy to middle-class. Through her marriage, she learned to more correctly identify her position on the class ladder.

Together, she and Jason also learned to connect class to culture. When Jason's brother asked Lori if her arm was not long enough to reach across the table to grab the paper towels, they realized that ideas of etiquette differed across classes. When Lori demanded that Jason throw out his polyester pants, they knew their fashion differences were associated with the class they came from. And when Lori was horrified by Jason's suggestion that they eat at Kentucky Fried Chicken – even, in a fit of disgust, calling Jason a “plebe” – they realized that the food they enjoyed was associated with the class from which they came. They realized that class was about more than money, but was associated with the opportunities it provided and the sensibilities it cultivated.

A minority of spouses then used their marriage to gain an understanding of their place in the class system and the connections between class and culture. However, the understandings that this small subset of respondents obtained should not be romanticized or assumed to be useful for broader class action. Jason's love for Lori did not extend to an appreciation for the upper-class. He described his workplace – one that included several colleagues with upper-class backgrounds – as “enemy territory,” a place where he actively tried to hide his lower class roots. He could not imagine marrying anyone else in the upper-class, and found himself loathing some of the elite members of his wife's social circles. He could not accept his in-laws' genteel

mannerisms, and he hated the way they avoided talking about emotional issues. Jason's love for his wife did not extend to loving the ways of the upper-class.

Similarly, Chelsey, a thin, stoic, social sciences high school teacher, gained an understanding of class through her marriage to Nathan, a rugby-playing son of a millwright. Her ideas, however, did not lead her to gain a greater appreciation for class differences. She thought that Nathan's class background provided him with some admirable characteristics – he had a lot of integrity, he was generous, and he was amazing during crises. But she also found living in a different-origin marriage to be a struggle as their differences made it difficult for him to get along with her parents and because he regularly reminded her of their past inequities. Chelsey explained: “[Class] has been the motif in our lives forever... I had a good life growing up so he feels like he deserves it now more than I do.” She did not recommend living in a different-origin marriage, and envied her sister who married a man who shared her class background. Thus, even when the experiences associated with different-origin marriages engendered an understanding of how class shaped themselves and their marriages, it did not necessarily lead to the ability to break down larger class divides. Love for a partner from another class did not extend to loving the experience of crossing a class divide or loving the things about their partners that made them classed.

## **CONCLUSION**

Married people today are meant to know each other intimately. In many ways, the respondents in this study did. They knew that their partner grew up in a mansion or in a small ranch house. They knew their partner grew up with parents who scraped up enough money for a homemade ping

pong table or that they saved enough to spend a week a year sightseeing in another state. They knew that their partner grew up with a father whose late hours left them constantly waiting impatiently for them to come home for dinner or that their partner's father was regularly out of work at five o'clock sharp. They knew the details of each other's lives. But most did not know that these experiences in the past were shaped by their class or that these experiences continued to shape who each person was. Their shared stories and visits to each other's childhood homes did not lead them connect their partner's experiences to the class of their past.

Most respondents were like William. Though twenty percent of respondents had never considered that they grew up in a different class than their spouse, eighty percent, William included, knew that they were born into families with unequal resources. Yet, knowing this did not lead them to pay attention to it. In fact, most saw little reason to give it any thought. Most initially saw their partners as people who came from classed parents but who were not shaped by class themselves. Once married, most thought they kept love and class separate. They opened joint bank accounts and shared educational degrees, nullifying, they thought, the influence of their former discrepancies. They did not discuss class because they were not snobs and refused to put people in categories. They did not internalize that they came from different classes; they thought they were two unique people who fell in love. Most did not think about class, as class was not a difference that made a difference.

As class never became etched on their minds, they missed the ways that class mattered in who they were and who they loved. Their marriages were not experiential learning sites, ones where they compared their partner's upbringing to their own and drew conclusions about how class influenced their lives. Rather, most different-origin marriages offered little hope that

intimate exposure to a partner from another class could raise class awareness or tear down class divides.

However, just because different-origin marriages did not often lead to new class insights did not mean they never did. A small group of respondents felt that their marriage provided them with a new perspective on the extent of privilege they were born into and the opportunities and costs of growing up in the class they did. They learned too to associate tastes and sensibilities with the resources their class background provided. Their marriage offered them an education about class.

Yet, it was not the case that more knowledge of class led to breaking down class divides or dissolving class antagonisms. Some who gained an understanding of class learned that they loved their partner but not all of their classed tastes or ideas. Some learned that they felt comfortable with their partner, but uncomfortable with others from their class. What they learned about class did not typically encourage them to build more relationships that spanned across class lines.

**SECTION 3**  
**CLASS AND THE DOMAINS OF MARRIED LIFE**

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **MANAGING RESOURCES AND DIVIDING DUTIES**

When couples marry they must decide how to manage a household together. In addition to deciding if and how to combine their bank accounts and furniture, they must also determine how to merge their ideas about money, divide housework duties, and allocate their time. Each of these domains shapes inequality: how much couples spend and save shapes the contours of class inequality for their own generation and the next, ideas of housework are associated with gender inequality, and notions of time use may be related to how individuals perform at work or teach their children to perform in school.

Though spouses shared a class destination, they did not share ideas of how to consider money, housework, and time. Spouses identified differences between how they thought about saving and spending. White-collar-origin spouses often harbored a “live for tomorrow” approach, preferring to save and manage their money carefully. Blue-collar-origin spouses more often favored a “live for the day” philosophy that emphasized spending over saving and using money to feel free from constraints. Class differences also emerged around housework, with white-collar-origin women preferring to manage the division of labor and blue-collar-origin women preferring to take a more *laissez-faire* approach to the gendered division labor. Finally, white-collar-origin partners preferred managing their time through careful planning while blue-collar-origin partners preferred not to manage their time but to be spontaneous and go with the flow. Differences therefore revolved around a self-management/*laissez-faire* axis, with white-collar-origin partners choosing the former and blue-collar-origin spouses choosing the latter.

Before turning to the details of housework and time management, I first examine one of the most controversial of resources: money.

## **MONEY**

“Money should be spent, in my opinion,” Aaron (blue-collar-origin), a tall, straight-talking, well-read man said. At 63 years old, Aaron was the oldest respondent. He had graduated from college forty years ago and spent two-thirds of his life living in the middle-class as he worked as a high school teacher. Yet, despite his four decades in the middle-class, his philosophy on money was still related to the class he came from. He grew up as the son of two factory workers, and remembered that his parents “didn’t have money.” He explained that they “tried real hard to get me stuff that I really wanted, a bicycle and that kind of thing. But you didn’t just go out and buy the latest fancy gadget because everybody else had it. It didn’t work that way.”

Now that Aaron is in the middle-class, he uses money to prove he is no longer bound by the constraints of his past. He relished that he could spend what he wanted, and he purposefully did not keep track of his expenditures. He explained: “I go out and spend \$25 or \$30, \$50. I don’t care. It’s my walk around money. But then I need to account for it [to my wife] and I just I can’t do that. This is sort of like quality of life. You want this, you need this. It’s important. Well, I’ll get it.” He continued: “If I decide I need something and it’s important, then I don’t care what it costs. It’s irrelevant. Cost is irrelevant.”

Alexa (white-collar-origin), a petite, shy, purposefully plain systems administrator, had been married to Aaron for seventeen years, and had been close to him for the nine years before their wedding. The quarter-century she spent with Aaron did not lead her to share or appreciate his views of money. She described Aaron’s ideas of money: “His goal has always been to have

enough money that he didn't have to worry about it, because he was raised worrying about it... [Now] he's finally got enough he doesn't have to worry about it, and he is damned if he's going to worry about it." This was not her view of money: "I treat it carefully. I don't want to waste it." Aaron was aware of this difference as well: "She thinks that spending money on yourself is largely unnecessary and it should be kept to a minimum or done efficiently." Alexa did not want to use money to "live for the day" and did not think it was appropriate to take a laissez-faire approach toward money.

Danielle (blue-collar-origin, currently an artist and preschool teacher), was a former hippie with a sense of humor about the hardships of her past. The daughter of a mechanic and stay-at-home-mother, she grew up in a stable but modest working-class family before hitting more severe hardships. She dropped out of high school after kissing a black student in a play put her in danger at her recently integrated school. She married a "lunatic" husband and bore her first daughter. When poverty hit her as she divorced her first husband, she resorted to stealing toilet paper rolls from public bathrooms and waiting in welfare lines. After twenty-seven years of marriage to her calm, stoic, second-husband, Jim (white-collar-origin), however, her ideas of money were still shaped by the experiences in her past. Thinking about money was not helpful when there was too little to meet her needs, and she continued to avoid thinking about it: "I just pretended like it didn't exist and I would just spend what I needed to and never think about it." She expanded: "I was afraid to face the realities of it, which is that it's limited. You only have so much. And you have to budget and you have to think about it and you have to plan ahead and you have to save. I just thought, 'I don't want to do all that.' I'd rather just not, you know." As Danielle's past tense reveals, she did try to change her financial habits. However, even with her attempts, she still preferred to not think too carefully about money and to use money to live for



the day. Jim told: “Her philosophy always is you only get one chance at something so regardless of whether or not something might be frivolous you do it anyway because there’s only going to be one opportunity.” These “one-time” events were defined narrowly. Their son, for instance, may have many birthdays, but he would only have one birthday in which he turned ten.

Jim, a tall, thin, muscular man with a long, low ponytail, grew up in a mansion in an upper-class neighborhood. He did not share his wife’s ideas of money. He did not spend without thinking, but researched purchases until Danielle would exclaim: “I can’t stand it! We’re just going to buy this! Stop researching it!” He also did not spend frivolously, nor did he stand by his wife as she did. Jim returned Danielle’s purchases so often that she falsely told him that there were rules against returning cologne; she also asked their son to spill soda on their new couch so that Jim could not take it back to the store. Jim did not spend much on himself. He drove cars that strangers called “death traps” and wore shoes that prompted his wife to joke: “I think a homeless guy gave them back to us.” He spent hours trying, in Danielle’s words, to “save eleven cents.” Danielle’s preferences were then to spend, not over-think purchases, and live for the day. Even after nearly three decades of marriage, Jim took the opposite approach.

Aaron and Danielle’s ideas of spending were then more similar to each other’s than they were to the partners with whom they spent their lives. They both thought money should be spent, and preferred to take a laissez-faire approach to their purchases – they preferred to spend without thought. Their partners, Alexa and Jim, however, preferred to more actively manage their money. They researched potential purchases before spending, thought about their budgets, and leaned toward saving over spending. Though blue-collar-origin respondents left their class origin and their parents’ financial situations behind, their ideas of money were still influenced by their past.

Their financial sensibilities both replicated the strategies they learned in the past and distanced themselves from their past constraints.

### *Blue-Collar-Origin Ideas of Money*

I asked respondents to tell me how they thought about money, and how their thoughts were similar or different than their spouse's ideas. There was a wide range of things they could have said, from naming disagreements over specific purchases to saying that they had no differences at all. Based upon my own experiences working with blue-collar-origin students who were not yet full members of the middle-class, I expected blue-collar-origin respondents to tell me that they prided themselves on their responsible spending and that they thought middle-class luxuries were frivolous. In fact, most said the opposite. They were like Aaron and Danielle – they thought money should be spent to “live for the day,” and that it should be spent without much thinking. Such strategies both replicated those that were useful in their pasts while also, sometimes, distancing themselves from them.

### *Replicating Strategies that Were Used in the Past*

Blue-collar-origin interviewees named different ways that their parents responded to having limited means, but, despite these differences, they tended to develop the same ideas of money: that money should not be carefully managed or saved, but spent and spent without too much thinking. Some, like Jill (blue-collar-origin), a local politician who resembled the soap opera actress Susan Lucci, grew up with parents who “were in debt up to their eyeballs” and, Jill felt, used their money to buy new RVs, houses, and diamond rings that would allow them to pretend

to be in a class that they were not. Jill felt she learned her financial sensibilities from her parents: “I’m very comfortable spending money. That’s what we did.” Her current monetary goals were to “indulge and live in the time.” She tried to convince her husband, Eric (white-collar-origin), to do the same: “I’ve got to make him spend a little more. Live life a little more.” Jill’s parents borrowed money to live the life they wanted, and, while Jill felt she was more restrained than her parents, she still wanted to use her family’s finances to improve her present, not future, life.

Isabelle (blue-collar-origin), a blond, introspective therapist, also grew up learning financial strategies from watching her parents manage their debt. Her parents, however, unlike Jill’s, did not attempt to pass as middle-class, but simply to survive. She learned that taking a laissez-faire approach to money made sense, as thinking about money and trying to manage it would not improve their financial situation. She also learned that spending money was wise, as, if it was not spent, someone might take it. She explained: “Coming from the family that I came from, it’s sort of like, ‘If you have money, spend it, because someone’s going to want it [like a debt collector].’ And so I think historically I have been very unconscious about money and nervous about it but not really knowing what to do, how to make it different... Like for my family, it’s, ‘You can buy groceries, you can pay this bill, you can pay this bill. You can’t do it all so why bother trying to do it all?’” Isabelle’s family situation taught her that money should be spent when it was available and that worrying about finances was pointless. She learned to use money in a laissez-faire style – to spend without too much thought, and to live for the day.

Other blue-collar-origin respondents learned from their parents’ more precarious financial situations that a small amount in their savings account was normal and not a reason to start thinking carefully about their spending. They learned that things worked out despite limited savings. As such, they again wanted to spend what they had and did not see the point in worrying

about money. Jenny (blue-collar-origin), a petite, soft-spoken stay-at-home mother, grew up with parents who were financially stable but never had a lot. Unlike her husband, she did not mind having a near-empty savings account, as her parents' accounts were never well stocked: "I just have faith things will work out... Financial certainty. [My husband] frets about retirement and college costs. And I tend to think, 'We'll get there. It will be okay.'... And just the week to week stuff. I'm okay if we only have \$40 in the checking account, but he worries more about that kind of stuff than I do." Jenny's background positioned a small checking account as normal and not a reason for worry.

Christie (blue-collar-origin), a warm, open, social worker, also grew up learning that a small savings account was normal and not a cause for concern. She was raised by a father who worked on a maintenance crew, a mother who worked at home, and a family whose income was both limited by the small wages maintenance men receive and her father's alcoholism. Though her family's financial situation meant that they sometimes rationed food, she learned that worrying about money did not help: "[My husband] Mike worries about finances so much more than I do which is so weird. Money is so important to Mike. And he had it growing, and I didn't have it growing up. And I just always assumed things are going to be okay. I don't know if it's because my family made it through... I've just always assumed the money would be there." As such, she said that she regularly tells her husband, (white-collar-origin) Mike, "Live for the day!"

Blue-collar-origin respondents' idea that money should be used to live for the day was then derived from their observations of their parents' response to having limited means. If financial situations would never be fully resolved and there was never enough to stock a savings account, then not worrying and living for the day made sense. Moreover, spending made sense if there was no way to pay all of the bills and still save. Respondents may have *had* to "live for the

day” as there was little money left over to pay the bills and also “live for tomorrow.” Even though respondents left their class origin and parents’ financial situations behind, some still used the financial strategies that they learned in the past. Simultaneously, some also used their new money to distance themselves from the constraints of having more limited means. This again meant taking a laissez-faire approach – spending money freely, as if there were few constraints.

### *Distancing Themselves from the Past*

Spending and spending without great thought were also strategies that respondents used to distance themselves from the past. Madison (blue-collar-origin, currently a stay-at-home mother), a soft-spoken, thoughtful, academically-inclined woman, grew up dreaming of making it. She described her mother as a social climber, and together they envisioned what it would be like to leave their half-built house, sporadic electricity, and outhouse. With her college degree and college-educated husband, Madison now had the financial ability to live the dream she and her mother imagined. This meant buying things that were not strictly necessary – purchasing decorative items, gourmet foods, and items that would make her life a little bit easier. In short, it meant spending. She told: “I am a spender. I tend to go over the budget by a couple hundred dollars each month... For me, it’s important to indulge and live more in the time.” Madison dreamed of the things that money could buy. Now that she had money, she wanted to use it to distance herself from the poverty of her past. This required spending, not saving.

Simply spending money could also allow respondents to feel unbound by their pasts. Madison received a thrill from spending money and buying extra things – practices that distanced herself from the past as she often grew up wishing she had more money to spend, especially on things that were considered “extra.” Christie (blue-collar-origin) similarly

remembered that her parents could only occasionally afford Pop-Tarts, and even then she had to split them in half and share them with her sister. She now enjoyed buying Pop-Tarts and chiding her husband for buying generic food. Elliott (blue-collar-origin), a cheerful stay-at-home father in his late 30s, grew up eating government-provided cheese and swearing he would never work in a factory like his father. He now got a thrill out of being able to spend large sums of money: “I still think a hundred dollars is a lot of money. I mean, growing up that was a ton of money. But I still think, in my own head and my own mentality, a hundred dollars is a lot of money, and it’s cool that I can go out and spend a hundred dollars and not necessarily think twice about it.” Now that respondents had money, they enjoyed being able to spend it. Doing so proved that the constraints of their childhoods were not the constraints of their adulthoods.

Several respondents had an item that they received a particular thrill from spending money on: a large home. Such homes could “prove” their position in the middle-class, symbolize their success at achieving the American Dream, and distance themselves from the stigma of the small homes of their past. Chelsey (white-collar-origin), a serious teacher dressed in a fleece and sneakers, wanted to downgrade from what her husband, Nathan (blue-collar-origin, a recently laid off salesman), called their “McMansion light.” Chelsey knew that convincing Nathan to move out of their large home would be a challenge, as the house was symbolic to him:

Another reason that Nathan is so attached to the house is that for him, a big house is a sign of success – that he’s overcome his background, class, etc. So it’s much more important to him as a status symbol than it is to me. And it doesn’t even matter to him what the inside looks like as long as people seeing it from the outside are impressed with its size. I definitely don’t need that outer display.

In their new position, blue-collar-origin respondents could spend to show they made it; they bought homes to show the world that they had arrived.

Thus, for upwardly mobile blue-collar-origin respondents, living for the day and spending without careful thought were both responses to their past and to their mobility. From their past, they learned that they needed to spend – partly because saving was infeasible, but also because not spending might mean that someone else would take their money. They did not fear a small stockpile of savings, as this was normal to them. They also learned that worrying about money did not allow them to change their financial situation, and as such there was little need to think carefully about their budgets. They also spent in ways that responded to their mobility. As youths, they imagined how they would *spend*, not save, money once they had it, and now that they had it they spent to fulfill their dreams. They also spent to get a thrill – to show themselves they had made it – and spent on large homes to show others they had made it. Though their financial situations were very different than that of their parents, the laissez-faire spending strategies they used both resulted from and responded to the class of their past.

### ***White-Collar-Origin Savers And their Relationships with Blue-Collar-Origin Spenders***

Just as Alexa's marriage to Aaron and Jim's marriage to Danielle led them to merge bank accounts without merging their financial sensibilities, so too was this the case for many white-collar-origin respondents. They grew up in families that were able to meet their basic needs while also saving, and they were used to having a larger safety net. Their childhood financial security also meant that they did not spend their youths imagining what they would do with more money, nor did they feel the need to use money to distance themselves from un-stigmatized pasts. They instead wanted to save – to use money to “live for tomorrow” – and to meticulously

manage their money so that they felt secure that they and their children would stay in the class in which they had always lived, the middle (and sometimes upper) class.

Evan (white-collar-origin), a thin, introverted, software engineer grew up knowing that his family's financial situation was stable and that his parents would underwrite his college tuition. He had no need to distance himself from the past, and instead wanted to save for his own future and his children's future. Unlike his wife, Madison (blue-collar-origin), who regularly went over their budget, spent to get a thrill, and used money to realize her dreams, Evan focused on saving for the future. He said: "My philosophy on money is very much to save... Personally I tend not to spend 'cause generally there's just not a lot of things that I want... I get concerned about not really having enough for retirement. We are saving some for kids' college... I have no idea what the future will bring and I am afraid that we will not have enough."

Vicki (white-collar-origin) also felt the need to save. She wanted to manage her money to prepare for her own future and that of her children. Her husband, John (blue-collar-origin), did not grow up assuming he would always be in the middle-class, and he was fine with taking a riskier approach. Vicki explained:

Like retirement and savings, saving for college. Just all those things that I know are so important. For him that's just not important. He doesn't think twice about it. He thought even less about it when we first met. Now he'll think a little bit about it, like planning for college. But at the same time he just goes, "They could get student loans. We had student loans." I go, "No! No! They can't get student loans!" He just has an answer for everything. Like: "You don't have to plan for retirement because everyone's going to have to work until they die. That's just how the economy is." And it's like, "Okay, but you can't count on that."

Vicki did not share her husband's idea that it was okay to risk their children's college tuition or their own retirement. Though John never had a large family safety net, Vicki had grown up in an environment where there was always a safety net – her mother's wealthy parents, and later her mother's own large income – and not having one was not something she wanted to consider. She



wanted to manage her money – to think carefully about how to use it – so that she and her children could stay in their class.

Leslie (white-collar-origin, currently an office worker), a self-described science-fiction nerd who also ran marathons and hosted a cooking blog, felt the need to save as well. She explained: “I’m the saver and he’s the spender.” Leslie tried to convince Tom (blue-collar-origin) to save more, but felt that her efforts were fruitless: “I’m trying to plan and budget, not that I’m doing a very good job by myself right now. I try not to spend more money than we need to, try to actually determine what the needs are. If the kids say they want something or need something, it used to be he’d just do it no matter what it was. Now he checks with me, except it’s still me having to decide.” She called herself the “superego” – the one who makes the meta decisions about what to buy and what to forego. Leslie’s call was usually to carefully consider their budget and to save; Tom’s was to not think about budgeting and spend. Leslie thought about retirement, their children’s college funds, and a family safety-net more than her husband did; she took steps to make sure they remained in the class in which she had spent her life.

White-collar-origin and blue-collar-origin spouses then tended to disagree about how to use their incomes. White-collar-origin partners wanted to save and budget, while blue-collar-origin partners were more likely to want to spend while ignoring a budget. The former, in other words, wanted to take a managerial approach to money, while the latter favored a more laissez-faire approach. Shared lives did not lead to shared ideas of money.

***Exceptions: White-Collar Spouses Who Outspend their Blue-Collar Partners***

Deviating from the primary pattern, a few white-collar-origin partners were more inclined to spend money than their blue-collar-origin spouses. Each of the white-collar-origin respondents who outspent their partners lived a current lifestyle that was less privileged than the one in which they were raised. While their education levels and occupations closely resembled their parents', their financial situation was not as advantaged as that of their parents. They spent more to try to reproduce the lifestyle they had grown accustomed to living. However, it should be noted that this was not a sufficient condition for wanting to spend more – many white-collar-origin savers also had less in their bank accounts than their parents had in theirs.

Anita (white-collar-origin, currently a marketer), for example, a frumpily-dressed, cheerful woman in her early 40s, regularly outspent her blue-collar-origin husband. Her father was a dentist and her step-father was a professor. Their incomes, combined with her mother's income from working as a nurse, meant that Anita grew up living in a privileged environment. Her husband, Todd (blue-collar-origin, currently in retail), described: "Her mom and step dad's house would probably be a two or three million dollar house. Everything was state of the art. It had a Viking range and subzero fridge, swimming pool in the backyard." Anita and Todd themselves lived in a much smaller home, one that did not have the newest appliances or a pool.

Anita spent more than Todd as she tried to make her home emulate her parents' home and as she tried to offer her children the same advantages that she received. She explained: "I expect, hope, to get to the same point that my parents are at. Whether it's home comfort level and that kind of thing... I'm trying to create a similar feel or quality to our home." In addition, she spent more on their children's education than Todd thought was wise. She sent their children to private preschools and then, without telling Todd, enrolled them in a public school outside of their district – one that they would have to pay for. She admitted that this meant "not compromising

on things when compromising might be a better idea.” Todd, who grew up in a trailer and received a rural public-school education, was not as convinced that not compromising was a good idea: “When we were talking about where to put them [in school], I was like, ‘Honey, there’s got to be cheaper places.’ She’s like, ‘No, these places aren’t accredited. They’re not licensed.’ I’m like, ‘This is our situation. We can’t do that.’ But what are we doing? We’re spending money we don’t have.” Anita wanted to use their money to pass on the advantages that she had, advantages that Todd never had, did not feel entitled to, and did not feel were necessary to pass on at all costs.

Like Anita, Parker (white-collar-origin), a tall, confident graphic designer with an earring, goatee, and vest, grew up having more than he currently had. Parker grew up attending a private boarding school, riding in his father’s expensive cars, and admiring his father’s \$25,000 watch. He grew up assuming: “I’m going to be a corporate attorney and work in mergers and acquisitions and I’ll have a Ferrari by the time I’m thirty.” His life veered away from the one he had imagined; he is now past thirty and does not own a Ferrari nor does he earn as much as he had hoped. He reported that he now spends much more than blue-collar-origin his wife and had a different understanding of what is necessary. He offered an example:

A couple weeks before [our son] was born I had cleaned out my car and went to put his car seat behind my seat. So [our daughter’s] car seat was behind Lillian’s seat. And I couldn’t fit it. I moved the seat up and I couldn’t fit it. I moved the seat up and it finally fit. And I couldn’t get in the car... My solution was not a smaller car seat but a bigger car. But I’m big! And so I bought an SUV. Lillian was kinda miffed about it.

Parker’s wife, Lillian (blue-collar-origin, currently a stay-at-home mother), did not see purchases like a new car (especially when the problem was a large car seat) as necessary. Coming from her background, she also did not imagine that there was an endless supply of money – that certainly was not true for her family. But Parker grew up with every reason to believe that money was not

a limited resource. If one can afford a \$25,000 watch, the message is that there is no need to worry about money. His parents also regularly bought new cars, and Parker learned to see no problem with going out and spending tens of thousands of dollars on a new – his wife emphasized, not used – car. While his own financial situation was more limited than his parents', he acted as though it is not. His ideas of spending were derived from his childhood class position, even if they did not make sense for his current financial position.

### ***Those Whose Ideas of Money Changed***

Most couples were largely at an impasse or were forced to compromise as their ideas of money were far apart. As they could not change their partners' views, Aaron, Danielle, Jill, and Madison (all blue-collar-origin) spent despite their partners' wishes, while Vicki (white-collar-origin) opened up her own savings account for their children, Jenny (blue-collar-origin) saved more than she would have on her own, and Gina (blue-collar-origin) always remembered to “think about him before I buy anything because he’s very frugal.”

A few respondents had success at changing their partners' ideas when the information they had was incorrect. Though Leslie (white-collar-origin) could not convince Tom (blue-collar-origin) to become a careful saver, she did eventually persuade him that a budget determined the *maximum*, and not the minimum, amount they were supposed to spend. Colton (white-collar-origin) similarly taught Evelyn (blue-collar-origin) about the perils of carrying a credit card balance, and then successfully convinced her that “you don’t pay interests on credit cards or buy what you can’t afford.” Yet, at the same time, providing new information did not always lead to changed habits. Mary (white-collar-origin) was still trying to convince her

husband, Ben (blue-collar-origin) that bills should be paid on time. She said that he regularly rhetorically asks: “What’s the worst that could happen? It’s late. Oh well, we’ll pay a late fee. Oh well.” She found herself repeating: “Oh, no. Think credit report.”

Most of the differences that couples had, however, were not small differences about the definition of a budget or the dangers of a bad credit report, but more philosophical differences about how much was necessary to save and if there were joys of spending without thinking. Only three respondents reported changing their financial philosophies in major ways. One was William, a man whose accent still suggested that he was raised in the South. He portrayed his change in ideas of money as he went from growing up in a trailer with a hard-working mother and less-often working alcoholic father to a graduate-school-educated man married to a studious wife from a graduate-school educated family:

That is something that’s changed tremendously. Not her, but me. So I used to spend money, a lot, and had no concept of saving period. And, this didn’t come strictly from her. Her family never thought like that. So over the years that has been a major difference in me, the way that I approach our finances and the way that I put back money, the way that I spend money, the way that I budget things, all of that has changed a lot.

William (currently a contractor) now saves for retirement and vacations. He said this shift was not hard: “She pretty much takes care of that. I put aside the money in certain places but all of it’s pretty much automatic and if it’s not there you don’t really depend on it so it. It just goes somewhere... It moves in different directions and so it’s not necessarily difficult.” Yet while the change may not have been difficult for William, no other blue-collar-origin respondent made such a large shift in how they spend their money. This suggests that the change is often hard, or, more likely due to the evidence above, unwanted.

William’s change may be explained by two factors. First, William spent a majority of his income on entertaining: “It wasn’t a problem for me to go out and spend \$300 on a meal for

friends because I worked 80 hours a week. It was nice to have somebody to actually hang out with that didn't swing a hammer." Having a family now means that William entertains less and therefore spends less. Second, William was intent on socializing with people who "didn't swing a hammer." After marrying his white-collar-origin college-educated wife and then graduating from college himself, William could socialize with white-collar people without needing to pay for them. The way he used to spend money was no longer necessary given his mobility.

Only two white-collar-origin respondents changed their financial practices due to their partners' influence. One was Ian, the son of a lawyer and currently a professor himself. He spent his early 20s believing in his wife's view of money: "When I first started dating Isabelle, the idea that you could just buy stuff on credit cards and you could just be in debt and not really worry about it was really a novelty. And so I was like, 'Well, this is really cool.'" Ian felt that his parents divorced, in part, because his father was miserly and obsessed with money while his mother was a spendthrift. Given his attributions for their divorce, he concluded that thinking about money was unappetizing and that making a budget would lead him down a slippery slope that ended in misery. Ian was then susceptible to adopting Isabelle's view that one could not think about money, as it would resolve the problem of being in a relationship in which people had different spending habits. He now regretted that this approach put them in debt, but also continued to follow it: "Both of us are extremely uninterested in making and maintaining a budget... We definitely come together on the fact that we'd like to be totally unconscious about money and not think about it." Adopting their partners' financial sensibilities was then possible, if uncommon. Most respondents used strategies that derived from their class background, and, if they were mobile, responded to their new experiences. For most respondents, financial

sensibilities did not solely replicate their partners' sensibilities nor were they solely reactions to their current incomes.

### ***Same-Origin Couples and Ideas of Money***

Same-origin couples reported similar orientations to money as did white-collar-origin respondents in different-origin marriages. They wanted to save their money and felt that they were frugal. Leah (same-origin), a deeply religious homemaker with a 1980s fashion sense, who married Luke, a blonde, Christian, IT professional said: "Neither of us are really big spenders on ourselves. We're not really into buying a lot of clothes or expensive stuff or jewelry or any of the big ticket items." Clint (same-origin), a tall, athletic, funny, engineer married to Carlie, a more serious engineer, also presented himself as frugal: "We both believe in saving for a 401(K). I mean you save for retirement, you save for big purchases, save for vacation. You try and live within your means." Ted (same-origin), a bearded educator married to Diana, a short, energetic educator, also maintained that they were not inclined to spend: "We don't have real extravagant tastes. We don't need to spend huge amounts of money to enjoy ourselves or have fun. So that works out pretty well." Same-origin respondents like Leah, Clint, and Ted preferred not to spend a lot or spend without thinking. Their preferences, like most in same-origin marriages, were similar to those of white-collar-origin spouses who married those from another class.

Even among same-origin couples, however, there could be differences in the circumstances in which they grew up, and therefore differences in how they thought about money. Adrienne (same-origin), a short-haired, feminist, computer-scientist turned law-student, grew up with a college-educated father who was frequently without work. When she was

sixteen-years-old, her family's financial situation worsened as her parents divorced and her father left the country to, she thought, avoid paying child support. Adrienne's husband, Paul, a middle-aged, curly haired, computer-scientist turned journalist, grew up in a much more financially secure environment. While he did go through a short financial hard spell as a child after his father, an attorney, died, his mother had her own job as a scientist and she remarried a professor. He did not experience the many income fluctuations that his wife had experienced.

Both Adrienne and Paul described themselves as frugal. Adrienne told: "We never really spent anything, we bought a house, but other than that, we really just didn't spend money." However, while their ideas about money were similar when their finances were stable, they relied on strategies that they learned in their past when money was tight. Paul once lost his job, and they responded to this crisis very differently. Adrienne explained Paul's position: "Paul grew up in a family where there was always enough. His family is much better off than mine is. And he just can't imagine not having enough, even when there is no income coming in... I'd say, 'Maybe you should pack a lunch instead of going out to lunch everyday' and he just wouldn't. He couldn't fathom that that was something that most people do when money is tight... He just thinks there will always be more." Adrienne, however, was used to income fluctuations for her father's unemployment and then desertion, and took an approach that she learned when she was younger: "It's natural to me at the first sign of trouble to say, 'Okay, we are going to bat down the hatches, we are going to stop buying this, this, and this and we are just going to make do.'" Though they both wanted to be frugal when times were stable, their ideas did not coalesce when times were tough. Adrienne bemoaned: "It's difficult in a relationship when one person is sacrificing a lot and making do and the other person just goes right on. And I just haven't been able to reconcile that. I don't really know what to do about that... It's just a difference that I



don't think that we will ever be able to overcome." Respondents learned different financial strategies in response to their childhood class conditions, and even couples with more minor class differences – those who both had college-educated parents who worked in professional white-collar jobs – rarely merged their financial ideas after, usually, over a decade of marriage.

## **HOUSEWORK**

Another form of household management is dividing housework duties. Sociologists have devoted many studies to uncovering who does what around the house, looking especially at the interplay between earnings, gender, and the division of labor. While scholars agree that most women do more housework than men, debates center around the relative importance of husbands' and wives' relative earnings, absolute earnings, gender performances, and gender ideology in determining the scope of the inequality (Becker 1981; Brines 1994; Gupta 2006, 2007; Hochschild 2003; Killewald and Gough 2010; Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard 2010; Tichenor 2005). Without going into the details of these studies, we can learn from them that class destination – in the form of absolute earnings or earnings relative to one's spouse – as well as gender influence how housework decisions are made. But how does class background intersect with gender to shape who does what around the house? Are ideas of this form of household management part of class sensibilities, and, if so, how do they manifest? In what follows, I show that class origin is related both to how much women wanted to manage the division of labor and how interviewees felt about the appearance of their home.

### ***Class Origin and Feelings about the Division of Labor***

Women do more housework than men (Brines 1994; Tichenor 2005). Yet, not all women do the same amount of housework. Low-income women tend to spend more time on housework than high-income women (Gupta, Sayer, and Cohen 2009). Assuming that this was true during respondents' childhoods, blue- and white-collar-origin women would have been exposed to mothers who performed different amounts of housework. They may also have been exposed to different gender norms about who does chores. Those in blue-collar families tend to believe in a more gendered division of labor while those in white-collar families tend to profess a belief in a more egalitarian split (Deutsch and Saxon 1998; Hochschild 2003; Pyke 1996).<sup>6</sup> As gendered ideas of housework formed in childhood can follow individuals to adulthood (Cunningham 2001), those from different classes may have different orientations toward housework.

For the couples in this study, class origin mattered little in who was in charge of the housework. Gender, unsurprisingly, mattered much more. Two-thirds of couples agreed that the woman did more housework; only in one case did a couple agree that the man did more. But, while class origin did not matter in respondents' attributions for who did how much around the house, it did matter in how they felt about the inequality. Women with white-collar-origins were likely to be upset about the uneven division of labor and try to manage it, while women with blue-collar-origins were less disturbed about the unequal division of labor and took a more laissez-faire approach to who did what chores at home.

Many white-collar-origin women, such as Vicki (white-collar, currently a teacher), started their marriages prepared to manage the division of labor. Vicki remembered that when she married John (blue-collar-origin, currently a restaurant manager) she studied the book, *Halving it All*, to learn how to create an equal division of labor. She remembered: "I was

adamant that if we both work then we both do half of everything.” Yet, the book alone did not suffice as Vicki spent the next decade trying to arrive at a more equitable division of labor: “It took us seven years to get it right. Or maybe ten years. It takes a long time. A lot of negotiating and fighting.” Vicki cared enough about the division of labor to read about it and spend the first ten years of their marriage searching for a split that would feel equal.

An equal division of household labor also bothered Mia (white-collar-origin), a lively brunette who began her career as a banker and then became a stay-at-home mother. She remembered feeling bothered from the beginning of her marriage: “When we first bought the house, I was doing all of the cleaning and Kevin was watching a lot of football. And I was like, ‘This is a bunch of B.S.’” Kevin would not do more household work, and instead recommended that they hire a woman to clean their home. This worked until their finances changed and they could no longer afford to pay others to clean their house. Ten years later, Mia again tried to prompt Kevin to do what she considered his fair share of cleaning, but found herself failing: “Just last week we had a discussion and I said, ‘Since we’re both home [Kevin is currently a full-time Masters student], I don’t think I should be doing all of the cleaning and you could clean the master bathroom.’ I am still waiting for him to clean the master bathroom so we don’t agree on that.” Mia tried to manage the division of labor, though she did so unsuccessfully.

White-collar-origin women were regularly conscious of the division of labor and were cognizant of perceived or real inequalities, regardless of which spouse worked more in the paid labor force. Stay-at-home-mother Mary (white-collar-origin) also tried to negotiate an equal division of labor: “My impression [of his idea] is that he goes to work and does 9:00 to 5:00 there and then I do kids and house. But those hours tend to be in my mind a lot more than his job. So that’s something we’re still negotiating.” Caroline (white-collar-origin) had a similar

problem. Her husband worked full-time while she worked part-time, but she did not feel that meant the housework was all her responsibility. After years of negotiating, she decided that she could not convince her husband to change and so she hired help. She felt it was necessary as “a cleaning lady is definitely cheaper than a marriage counselor.”

Even in couples in which the woman worked for pay and the husband was home, the unequal division of labor was a source of stress for the white-collar-origin woman. Alexa (white-collar-origin, currently a systems administrator) worked full time; her husband, Aaron, had recently retired. Alexa did not hide her anger when speaking of housework:

There's so much sitting and staring at me every time I walk into that house I can't sit for two hours. He considers that to be a failing on my part. I consider it to be a failing on his part that he doesn't see the stuff. I went down the stairs with the broom today and I got this God awful pile of dust just going down the stairs. And I said, “Does nobody besides me see these piles of hair inside the stairs?” He says, “You know, I do clean that but probably not as often as I should. Builds up awfully fast, you know.” And all I hear is, “No, you don't see it. Builds up real fast my eye, builds up 'til I sweep it.”

White-collar-origin women wanted to manage their household division of labor so that it would be equal. As their blue-collar-origin husbands did not go along with their plans to the extent that they wished, they spent years researching, negotiating, and complaining about the unequal division of labor.

White-collar-origin women in same-origin marriages did the same. Diana, a feisty, energetic teacher, spent longer than she wished trying to create a more equitable division of labor. One day, sick of being the one to clean, she did something she came to regret. She narrated: “He had this pile of laundry sitting on the floor, sitting on the floor, sitting on the floor. So he'd left his long underwear on the floor and I kept saying, ‘Could you just pick it up?’ So he came home finally and he goes, ‘Where's my underwear?’ And I said, ‘I threw it away. I'm done. Tired of looking at it.’” Adrienne (same-origin) also felt that her differences with her

same-origin husband, Paul, made her take steps that she felt were drastic. When they “were financially in the worst possible shape” she hired a woman “because otherwise it would’ve been on me.” She explained: “I was tired of being angry about that. He just doesn’t think about it and I think about it all the time.” That both white-collar-origin women who married blue- and white-collar-origin men spent years and tears trying to manage an equitable division of labor suggests that the perceived inequalities are not based upon the class origin of their husbands, as neither blue- nor white-collar-origin men met their standards. Rather, they believed that gender inequalities existed, and they felt compelled to try to change them.

However, while the distribution of labor may be unequal regardless of the class origin of the men, not all women were angry about it or tried to manage it. Women with blue-collar roots tended to take a much more *laissez-faire* approach to housework. They tended to believe in going with the flow to get housework done, and were not as upset if this meant they did more than half. Unlike white-collar-origin women, Gina (blue-collar-origin, currently a stay-at-home mother) did not read about housework or try to manage their division of labor. Concerning housework she said, “I don’t think we really discussed it. We just fell into roles.” Gabriella (blue-collar-origin, currently a librarian) also did not enter her marriage with ideas about how to manage the housework. Instead she said: “We didn’t really talk about... It’s naturally divided itself.”

Taking a *laissez-faire* approach to housework – falling into roles or letting them naturally divide themselves – meant falling into gender roles. Not only was this the case, but, their non-managerial style also meant that they did not try to reassign roles later. They did not see the need to, as they did not expect their husbands to take an equal role. Sidney (blue-collar-origin, currently a stay-at-home mother) credited her husband not with doing an equal amount of the housework, but with being cleaner than imagined others: “He never leaves clothes on the floor. I

have to hand him that, he's really clean compared to some guys." Lillian (blue-collar-origin, currently a stay-at-home mother) not only did not try to convince her husband to do more, but actively told him that it was okay to do less: "[He's learned] that he doesn't have to clean up the house. That it's safe. I'm not going to come down on him if his clothes aren't picked up even though it's sometimes an irritant." Jill (blue-collar-origin, currently a local politician) also told her husband not to worry about the housework: "I'll say to him, 'Let that go. Hang out with the kids today instead.'" These blue-collar-origin women did not manage the division of labor but took a more *laissez-faire* approach, one that meant that they did the majority of the housework without complaint.

Women with white-collar and blue-collar roots then both said they did more housework than their husbands. Women raised in white-collar families, however, were more perturbed by this inequality. They entered their marriages prepared to manage the division of labor so that they would not do more than fifty percent. They found, however, that their husbands would not do what they deemed to be their fair share, and, as such they spent years – sometimes over a decade – unsuccessfully negotiating with their husbands or hiring help so that their debates would stop. Women from blue-collar backgrounds tended to describe taking a much more *laissez-faire* approach to housework. They did not try to manage their division of labor, but “fell into” a division of labor and then told their husbands not to worry about doing an equal share. As lower-income women do more housework than higher-income women and are less likely to prize egalitarianism (Gupta, Sayer, and Cohen 2009; Hochschild 2003), these women's expectations may have derived from watching their parents and may be related to their class background. Just as white-collar spouses enjoyed managing their money, white-collar women also wished to manage their household division of labor. And, just as blue-collar spouse preferred not to take a

laissez-faire approach to finances, blue-collar women also exhibited a laissez-faire disposition toward allocating the housework.

### *Housework and Class Sensibilities*

Feelings about the division of labor were divided along of class origin. These feelings, however, were not the only ones that were related to respondents' class origins. Some respondents had strong feelings about their homes that responded to their childhood class position. Beverly Skeggs (1997:90), who studied white working-class women in England, observed the importance of the appearance of one's house to one's classed identity:

When a visitor enters the house they see their most intimate environments through the eyes of the other and they apologize. They continually doubt their own judgments...They care about how they are seen in the eyes of the other. They feel they have to prove themselves through every object, every aesthetic display, every appearance. Their taste in furniture and aesthetic organization becomes along with their clothes, body, caring practices and every other aspect of their lives a site of doubt. A site where they are never sure if they are getting it right. They assume that certainty exists elsewhere, that others have it... The working class are never free from the judgments of imaginary and real others that position them, not just as different, but as inferior, as inadequate... Class is lived out as the most omnipresent form, engendering surveillance and constant assessment of themselves.

Homes are then sites where people – especially women, who are viewed as responsible for the domestic sphere – can feel judged for their class position, and where they try to prove that their lower class position does not cast doubt on their respectability. Upwardly mobile women had the financial resources to use their home to show that they were respectable and part of the middle-class. However, having the financial resources did not always give them a sense of security that their house – and, by extension, themselves – would not be judged.

Madison (blue-collar-origin), a petite, soft-spoken, woman who wore a fashionable red top with her jeans rolled up around her shins, worried about how her home reflected her class position. She grew up in a home that was constantly under construction and in disrepair. She spent afternoons with her mother dreaming about how to improve their home when more money came in. But the money did not arrive fast enough to avoid social stigma, and some of Madison's peers knew the state of her home and ostracized her because they thought she was poor. As a child, Madison learned that the state of her home was related to the state of her social network.

As an adult with more resources, Madison wanted to create a home that would prevent stigma. Her goal was to create an upper-middle-class home, a home which distanced her from her past. But like the working-class women whom Skeggs interviewed, she could not seem to get it right. She made tables and charts of where each dish would go, only to decide that the system was wrong and to start again. She organized and re-organized the linen closets so that their home looked respectable and neat. She read home decorating magazines and watched home improvement television shows so that she could pick out the right decorative items. She felt that she tended to obsess about the appearance of her home. Her obsession had a goal: "For me it's about creating this atmosphere that I thought, 'This is what a nice, comfortable kind of middle-class home looks like, or upper-middle-class' ... And it's not so much for me keeping up with the Joneses. It's just creating this image that's in my head."

Yet, Madison's research into creating an upper-middle-class home did not make her feel that she was getting it right. She tried to gain the approval of her white-collar in-laws – those who had the type of home she always wanted – but she appeared to them be trying too hard, doing too much. She felt judged and as if she was getting it wrong when they would say to her: "Why would you do that? Why is that necessary?" Her in-laws were less emotionally invested in



their home – they proved their class position through their inherited wealth, prestigious jobs, and educations. To Madison, however, her home was a site where she felt particularly vulnerable for being judged for her class background. If her home did not look “classy,” then Madison may be exposed as coming from a lower class. Madison understood the consequences of that – she remembered feeling rejected because her home represented her poverty and some of her classmates did not play with the poor. As an adult, Madison obsessed over housework, as she tried to create the “upper-middle-class image” in her head, but did so without the background to feel confident in her choices. She tried to do too much, at least according to her white-collar in-laws, and still felt that she could never get her house to be “right.”

Isabelle (blue-collar-origin, currently a therapist) also worried that her home could be harshly judged, and, by extension, so could she. Her husband, Ian (white-collar-origin, currently a professor) described how deeply she cared about the state of her home, a feeling that he did not share: “She can’t be happy if the house isn’t nicely decorated, all put together. It was actually a source of conflict when we first moved because she wasn’t working and she was spending all of her time and a lot of money that we didn’t have on furnishing the house. And I would have preferred to do that more slowly and have her focus on getting a job. But she sort of felt like she couldn’t even go out and do that until she felt like her house was a home... I don’t particularly like the house to be messy and grimy but it doesn’t make me crazy. And with her it’s incapacitating.”

To Isabelle, unlike to her husband, the upkeep of their home was urgent because it was not only about aesthetics but about judgments of her class past. She explained: “I like things to be clean and orderly. I think that comes from wanting to be different than my background. I get really paranoid people are going to think we’re really trashy.” Isabelle worried that people

would conflate having trash with being trashy. Though no one in her adult life had ever accused her of this, her childhood class position meant that accusations of being white trash may have been ones that she wanted to preemptively fend off.

Jason (blue-collar-origin, currently a professor) also felt a connection between housework and his class sensibilities. But, unlike the women whose class origin led them to do more housework, Jason's interpretation of his class origin and his gendered responsibilities led him to do less. He grew up in a small home that was in not well maintained. For five years, his parents' kitchen cabinets lacked doors as they waited to replace them. For fifteen years, his family walked on concrete floors as they ripped out their linoleum without replacing it. To Jason, this became normal, and less a source of embarrassment than it might have been to Madison and Isabelle as his gender shielded him from the notion that it was his responsibility to care for the house.

Jason and his wife, Lori (white-collar-origin, currently a professor), currently live in a beautiful home that they purchased with the help of Lori's inheritance. The house is situated in a neighborhood where long driveways lead past well-maintained front lawns and children safely ride their bikes to the racquet club down the street. Jason, however, had trouble appreciating his home and neighborhood as the distance between them and those of his past made him feel alienated from his current residence. Lori explained: "He would say, 'I haven't done anything to deserve this house!' He doesn't even in his deep psychology see the house as being his."

Not feeling like the house was his partially meant that he felt unable to care for it. Men are not often the ones who take the lead in housework, and his childhood experiences did not prepare him to learn how to maintain a luxurious home. Lori revealed: "There is an idea about how you keep up the yard, how you maintain things, that he feels is foreign to him. It intimidates him. He doesn't want to make decisions in these areas." He also felt like he might do simple

things regarding the house wrong, like calling the wrong snow-plow company or selecting the wrong mailbox. Yet, unlike Madison and Isabelle, who also worried about getting household maintenance projects wrong, his gender relieved him the feeling that he was responsible for the house or that the house was as much of a reflection of him. He then opted out of tasks that he felt he might get wrong, rather than obsessing over them. Feelings of housework then are related to the class respondents grew up in, but are acted upon in gendered ways. As with ideas of housework, ideas of time management also related to experiences with gender and class origin.

### **TIME MANAGEMENT**

Gabriella (blue-collar-origin, currently a librarian), an affable, easy-going librarian and Dan (white-collar-origin, currently a financial analyst), a short financial analyst with long grey hair and an artistic flair, were married in a small ceremony at a church not far from where they lived. Despite the careful planning that a wedding entails, a theme arose that they had not planned: their differences in their ideas of time. Dan remembered that during the wedding the minister “pointed out that I tended to plan a lot and Gabriella tended to wing it.” Gabriella recounted the story that the best man told: “Dan loves to make jack-o-lanterns for Halloween... He plans out the face and then he carves and everything. I’m not a big jack-o-lantern [person], but ‘Oh I love you, honey. Let’s make jack-o-lanterns together.’ But I didn’t want to plan it out so I just started cutting, and ended up with this pumpkin with this big hole. That kind of exemplifies. Dan’s like, ‘Plan it out’ and I’m like, ‘Just start cutting!’”

On the day they married, Dan then was one who wanted to plan and manage time while Gabriella preferred to “wing it” – to not manage time but to take a more laissez-faire approach.

These differences, after eight years of marriage, had not disappeared. Dan revealed that he is now more willing to “allow things to happen” but does this to please his wife rather than because his preferences have changed. Generally, the difference remained as he still planned their time while Danielle continued to think: ‘Whatever, we’ll deal with it when it comes up.’”

Differences in ideas of time management are often attributed to gender. Women are seen as responsible for planning children’s doctor’s appointments, play dates, the couples’ social time, family’s meals, shopping trips, and extracurricular activities (DeVault 1999; Tichenor 2005). But, as some have noted (Burton and Tucker 2009; England, McClintock, and Shafer 2011; Silva and Corse unpublished manuscript), planning may also be related to class destination. In this section I argue that ideas of planning and time management are neither entirely attributable to gender or adult class position. As Dan and Gabriella’s case begins to suggest, planning could also be related to class origin. White-collar-origin respondents tended to want to manage their time, while blue-collar-origin respondents typically preferred to take a more laissez-faire approach to time by going with the flow.

### ***Time Management and Class Origin***

Blue- and white-collar-origin respondents felt that their parents had very different ideas of time. Ian (white-collar, currently a professor), for example, described that his mother planned carefully when he and his wife, Isabelle, visited: “My mom, she’s very planned out. So she’ll start talking to us three weeks before we’re going to go visit and telling us about the menus that she’s picked out and exactly who’s going to sleep where and ‘Well, I’ve got this air mattress. I think it’s going to be okay. If that doesn’t work out, I’ve got this back up plan.’” Ian’s wife, Isabelle, did not

have parents who planned: “Whenever we visit Isabelle’s mom, it’s like we never know when we’re supposed to go where, and there are many times when it’s not clear if we need to go get dinner ourselves or if she’s going to make it... Her father can’t even tell us where he’s going to be the next day. He can’t make plans and say, ‘I’ll meet you at someplace for lunch the next day.’... Her mom and step-father will tell us on very short notice that they’re coming to visit us. And they won’t tell us how long they’re going to stay.”

Ian and Isabelle then were raised by parents with different ideas about if they should plan time in advance or take a more laissez-faire approach to their time use. Ian’s mother was a social worker and her first- and second-husbands were both well-off. Their financial stability allowed them to plan, as it was unlikely that an unforeseen event would disrupt their ideas of what was to come. Isabelle’s parents were farmers, and as such may not have been able to make plans, as their work depended more on the whims of the weather. Their income also depended on the yield of their crops, meaning that it was neither constant nor predictable. With income and work fluctuations, going with the flow, rather than planning, was a useful skill.

In addition, planning differences may stem from childhood socialization patterns. Other research finds that blue-collar children tend to grow up without many planned activities; they become skilled at spontaneously filling their time. White-collar children, on the other hand, often grow up attending a series of planned activities, and do not develop the skills to entertain themselves in unplanned time (Lareau 2003). Each of these factors may have contributed to the pattern that white-collar participants typically wanted to actively manage their time while blue-collar respondents more often wanted to avoid managing time.

Such patterns continued to the present. Matt (white-collar-origin, currently a manager), a thin, introverted man and Jenny (blue-collar-origin, currently a stay-at-home mother), a busy

woman who was constantly involved in at least a half-dozen volunteer groups, were married for 20 years but still had differences in how they thought about time.

Matt (white-collar-origin): I tend to be a little bit more of a planning kind of person. Jenny tends to be a little bit more opportunistic. So if we need to buy an old used pickup truck or something, I'll more tend to say, "Well, think, too, what do we need? And what year should we look at and what features do we want?" And she would be more of, "Let's just keep our eyes open. If we see one that looks good, let's go buy that. And don't do all of this planning."

Jenny (blue-collar-origin): His need to figure out everything before you get there took me some learning. I got irritated with that. But I finally just understood his need and now I'm better with it. [It could be] small things like where are we going to park, directions, how are we going to get there. I tend to be like, "We'll read the signs." He has to know ahead of time. That kind of thing. Being hugely prepared. He doesn't like to do things on the fly.

Alexa (white-collar-origin, currently a computer scientist) and Aaron (blue-collar-origin, a recently retired teacher) had similar differences. Alexa felt she planned much more than Aaron: "Sometimes we like to plan things together but it's gotta be something that I'm already fired up about. I don't think he ever comes to me and says, 'I want to do this. How about we do that?'" Aaron did not believe in actively managing his time: "I remember people having planned ahead for the future. And it's like, 'Well, no, if you live properly right now, each minute to minute, the future's going to take care of itself.'" Thus, blue-collar-origin respondents such as Aaron, Gabriella, and Jenny preferred to take a laissez-faire approach to time – they enjoyed spontaneity and going with the flow. Their white-collar-origin partners, however, favored managing their time through careful planning. They wanted to feel prepared for what was coming.

Differences in planning ethics were experienced in different ways by blue- and white-collar-origin respondents. Blue-collar-origin respondents found their white-collar-origin partners' planning ethic to be simultaneously annoying and helpful. Jack (blue-collar-origin, currently an engineer) told his wife, Caroline (white-collar-origin, currently a researcher), that he

no longer wanted to know her plans for their menus next week or for their lives in six months. At the same time, he attributed her planning ethic to their ability to go on vacations, finish household projects, and find their relatives appropriate gifts. Similarly, while Jenny found her husband Matt's need to plan small details in advance to be frustrating, she also found his skill useful and admirable. When she was in charge of a preschool's relocation, she turned to Matt for help with the move because of his planning proclivities: "He's good at thinking through the logical order of things. If a problem occurs, what are your options and what would be the best step. He's real good about all that." She could also see how her husband's planning ethic helped their daughter in school: "My daughter, she's 14... She's got a project to do in a week and she knows how to divide it into pieces so it will get done. She's way better at that than I am." Jack and Jenny, as well as other blue-collar-origin respondents, then found their partners' planning ethic to be both irritating and useful. Such an ethic was implicitly a rejection of their own more laissez-faire attitude, but also was sometimes useful for the white-collar world of work and school.

White-collar-origin respondents, especially women, did not see their partners' planning ethics as simultaneously annoying and helpful, but as a problem to try to fix. Leslie (white-collar-origin, currently an office worker) viewed planning as a necessary part of housework and a form of labor. As such, she was offended that her husband did not do it: "I can't think of an area in our lives where he takes the lead in planning. I plan the vacation. I plan the budget, such as we do, which is not very well at this point... If it's a goal that needs both of us it's like having a weight sometimes. He doesn't mean to be a weight but... I'm a planner and he's just not. He's a reactive person." Though Leslie disliked that she did all of the planning, she could not get her husband to change: "If you plan, if you're a planner, you do that mental projecting all the time..."

You're thinking ahead, saying, 'What's going to happen if I do this?' I really don't think he does that. I don't know if it's because he doesn't want to, it's too hard, he doesn't have the capacity, I don't know. But he just doesn't do that." To Leslie, her husband's laissez-faire approach to time was a problem that she could not change.

Vicki (white-collar-origin, currently a teacher), felt the same way. She wanted to manage time, while her husband, John (blue-collar-origin), wanted to take a more laissez-faire approach. Vicki described her own sensibilities as: "We need to plan! We need to schedule! We need to be neurotic!" Her husband, however, took the opposite approach: "For him, it's 'It will always work out. It will always get done. Don't worry.'" Vicki saw John's approach as deficient, and as such tried to change it: "At the beginning of the marriage I thought, 'This is something we'll work on and I can change him. I can turn him into a neurotic person, whatever, type A person.'" Like Leslie, however, she learned that her efforts would not change her husband's approach to time: "I understand that that's who he is and he's not changing... Having to accept that was a big thing."

White-collar-origin respondents, especially women, may have been more likely to view their partners' approach to time to be particularly problematic because they were not confident that going with the flow would allow them to get things done. Women were contending with the second shift, and, as they saw planning as necessary, they felt that their husband's lack of planning added more to their shift. Men found their wives' lack of planning more problematic as it left them feeling unprepared and unable to get as much done. Dan, for example, tried to relinquish his planning in order to do what Gabriella wanted – to go with the flow – but then would find himself thinking: "Ggrr. I haven't been able to do what I wanted to do." Thus, while blue- and white-collar-origin respondents tended to have different ideas of time, it was the latter



who tended to find their differences to be most problematic. Planning ethics were often divided by class origin, but such divisions did not produce uniform conflicts.

### *Same-Origin Couples and Planning*

For same-origin couples, planning was a gendered endeavor, as respondents claimed that women did the majority of the planning. However, men did not feel that being spontaneous was best. Rather, they believed that managing time through planning was necessary, but thought their wives were better at doing it than they were. Phil (same-origin, currently an architect) thought that his wife, Rose, “has such a handle on what she is doing on any given day at any given hour” and was happy that she taught him, to some extent, how to do the same. Paul (same-origin, currently a journalist) admired his wife’s ability to organize and plan: “She is much better at organizing and planning than I will ever be... Not that I am bad at it, I end up getting a lot of things done, but I am much more likely to follow a tangent than go down a straight line.” Men and women from white-collar backgrounds then tended to think managing time through planning was best, but that their wives were better at it than they were.

## CONCLUSION

The ways that couples preferred to manage resources and divide duties was related to each partner’s class background. Those with white-collar-origins tended to want to carefully manage their money and their time, and white-collar-origin women tended to want to manage the division of labor. Those with blue-collar-origins, by contrast, typically wanted to take a more

laissez-faire approach. They enjoyed the freedom to spend without thinking and to use their money to live for the day; they also preferred to go with the flow rather than plan their time. Women with blue-collar roots were also less interested in managing the division of labor, but fell into roles in which they did the majority of the housework without much complaint. Years of marriage to a partner from another class then did not lead couples to share their sensibilities. In fact, they often shared their sensibilities more with respondents who shared their class origin than with their spouse with whom they shared their life.

The class divide in couples' ideas of managing resources and dividing duties has implications for gender and class reproduction. In terms of gender, women with blue- and white-collar origins did the bulk of housework, but how they felt about differences corresponded with their class origin. White-collar-origin women most often tried to get their husbands to do more around the house, including more planning, but their attempts may have added to the second shift as it required research, negotiations, and fights. Blue-collar-origin women did not feel the burden of equalizing the household division of labor, but may have put themselves in danger of a more unequal relationship as they fell into gender roles that they felt little need to challenge. Neither strategy – working to equalize the gendered division of labor or letting it go – was likely to change the fact that women did most of the household labor.

Individuals' sensibilities about managing resources and dividing duties may also have implications for class reproduction. The ability to plan is not part of many schools' or workplaces' explicit curriculum, but, as Jenny (blue-collar-origin) noted, is useful for succeeding in them. Planning helped Jenny find a way to properly relocate the preschool where she volunteered and helped her daughter complete a project that was due in a week. A preference for not managing time may be viewed by teachers and employers as being inefficient or

disorganized. White-collar-origin parents may be better able to help their children plan than upwardly mobile parents.

Monetary differences may have even more critical implications for class reproduction. Those from white-collar backgrounds tended to want to save and carefully budget. These tactics are likely to help them maintain their class position in retirement and in the case of a job loss. They are also likely to help their children attend college, as the amount parents have in savings is a predictor of whether their children attend and complete college (Conley 2001). Same-origin couples from white-collar backgrounds are then not only more likely to have two sets of parents who can provide a safety net, but they are also more likely to create a large safety net themselves. Different-origin couples are more likely to have one partner who prefers to spend money to live for the day, an approach that may be fruitful for enjoying one's current class position but less so for reproducing it. Regardless of the class they are currently part of, the class that individuals were raised in may then have implications for the class position they are able to maintain and pass on to their children. This was also the case, as we will see in the next chapter, concerning ideas of work and play.

## CHAPTER 5 WORK AND PLAY

In the last chapter, I demonstrated that individuals' class backgrounds were related to how they thought about finances, unpaid labor, and time. In this chapter, I show that class origin is also associated with ideas about how individuals earn their money – work. Here, the main division between how white-collar-origin and blue-collar-origin spouses thought about work was that the former viewed work as a primary component of their identity while the latter viewed their jobs as unrelated to their identity. Those from more privileged backgrounds also tended to manage their career trajectories, while those from less privileged backgrounds took a more *laissez-faire* approach. These differences had consequences for the couple as it created inequalities within the couples' relationships, inequality that was difficult to eradicate even by those who tried. Same-origin couples faced a different dynamic around work: men and women both thought that work should be validating and part of their identity. Yet, ironically, several same-origin women felt that they needed to leave the full-time paid labor force in order to find more rewarding work.

This chapter also examines how respondents prefer to spend their time when they are neither working nor attending to household duties – how they prefer to play. I show that partners maintained discrepant ideas of leisure. White-collar-origin spouses tended to see their weekends and vacations as time to be involved in cultural events, while blue-collar-origin spouses more often viewed the same as a time to relax. The self-manager/*laissez-faire* binary then also mapped onto couples ideas of work and play, as white-collar-origin spouses managed their cultural capital accumulation through their leisure while blue-collar-origin spouses took a purposefully

laissez-faire stance towards their leisure. In ideas of work and play, overlapping lives did not lead to overlapping ideas of how to live them. Class assimilation did not occur.

## **WORK**

Vicki (white-collar-origin) felt that she could not shake her mother's ideas of work. She explained: "[My mother was] always working, that's all she does. That's where she validates herself and gets her self-esteem and self-concept from. So it definitely wears off on you as a child that you have to be the same way." Though it was decades since she had lived with her mother, Vicki found herself also seeking self-esteem and validation through work and putting in long hours to reap those rewards. She found herself automatically taking on leadership positions at the school where she worked as a teacher, committing to being on new committees without thinking twice about it, and feeling compelled to apply for more prestigious jobs. She liked the idea of working from when she woke up to when she went to bed. She derived a lot of satisfaction from her job and felt that her work provided her with self-esteem and purpose.

Vicki, however, had admired her husband, John's (blue-collar-origin) ideas of work since the time they met, seventeen years ago. John called his work as a restaurant manager "just a job," and not part of who he felt he really was. He had little interest in advancing his career or even thinking about work while he was at home. Vicki admired that John so easily put his family ahead of his career, a priority that she intellectually believed in but found difficult to internalize or practice. Even though John asked her to focus more on family, she found her time and identity more tied up in work. Though she preferred her husband's ideas of work to her own and to her mother's, seventeen years of being with John were not enough for her to learn to replicate them.

Vicki's and John's work ethics were likely rooted in their backgrounds. Vicki's mother received her MBA and then worked her way up to being the vice president of a chain of hospitals (her father was a successful lawyer, but he moved away when she was a toddler). Vicki's mother's job offered her a sense of accomplishment, status, and the idea that her opinions mattered. Those who grew up with parents in white-collar professional positions observed that dedication to work could lead to climbing the company ladder and that self-esteem, status, and power were connected to paid work. It is no wonder that as adults, white-collar-origin respondents then felt that driving to succeed would bring validation and rewards. Women felt this as well as men; by the time respondents were coming of age, women were graduating from college at higher rates than men and the feminist movement promised that identifying with work would also provide them with internal rewards (Buchman and DiPrete 2006; Gerson 2010).

Of course, work is not rewarding for everyone. John grew up with two parents who worked in factory jobs. Such work offers little chance of promotion, and, as such, ambition and drive went unrewarded. The work itself is often less internally satisfying as well as while blue-collar workers may feel pride in a job well done, they have little say in what jobs are selected or how they are completed. The work itself is often repetitive, and there is little room for creativity, personal touches, or a feeling that the product that they created was different than the product someone else would have made. There was then little reason for those who grew up in blue-collar communities to think that motivation would be rewarded or that paid work offered self-esteem, validation, or personal recognition. Those who grow up in blue-collar communities are more likely to learn that validation is more tightly connected to family than work (Williams 2010).

At the time of the interviews, most respondents from white- and blue-collar backgrounds worked in professional or managerial positions – those that were likely to offer opportunities for validation and status. White-collar-origin respondents tended to enjoy these aspects of their job, saying that their work provided them with a sense of accomplishment and identity. Blue-collar-origin respondents, however, usually did not. They discursively distanced themselves from their careers and were more interested in creating physical and emotional boundaries from their work. They also felt less driven and less interested in managing their career paths. Rather, they would keep their eyes open and see if new opportunities arose. These differences in how white- and blue-collar origin partners' thought of work created inequalities in their relationships, ones that were different than the inequalities that same-origin couples experienced. These inequalities for different-origin couples existed in part because, again, loving a partner from another class did not mean loving or sharing all of their beliefs.

### ***Blue-Collar-Origin and White-Collar-Origin Beliefs about the Purpose of Work***

Those who grew up with white-collar parents tended to see work as part of their identity. Eric (white-collar-origin), a business developer, revealed that his identity was deeply connected to his work: “I’ve worked so much for so long that it’s tough to really get asked: ‘What are your activities? Who are you out of work? What’s your identity outside of work?’” To Eric, his identity was inside of his work; he did not know how to answer questions about his identity outside of his job. Mary (white-collar-origin) felt the same way. In high school she was a straight-A student and voted most likely to succeed. She sailed through law school, landed a job as a lawyer, and assumed she would become a CEO. Her identity was tied to her academic and

workplace success, so, when she temporarily stopped working for pay after having her first child, she felt she lost her identity. She wondered: “Who am I? I’m not really me. I’m a mom or I’m a wife. I’m not really me.” She planned to return to work so that she could “find herself” again. She knew who she was when she was working.

Many white-collar-origin respondents identified with work in part because it gave them a sense of accomplishment. Alice (white-collar-origin), a private-practice lawyer, felt that her sense of self was tied to work and enjoyed it because she accomplished things: “I’m a working person at heart... I like going to work everyday. I really like doing something for somebody else and being accountable for it.” Leslie (white-collar-origin) dropped out of her Ph.D. program after having her first child and then became an office worker at her children’s school. Despite that her job was not as prestigious as she imagined, she still enjoyed that she felt accomplished at work. She said, “I like working, a lot.” She liked it because, “It’s [easy] to say, ‘I’ve checked this task off.’” Alexa (white-collar-origin), a systems administrator, enjoyed the same feeling, despite that her husband, Aaron (blue-collar-origin) had different ideas: “I’d like to say he’s taught me how to play, but I don’t think he’s succeeded. I actually have more play doing work than I do doing things that are play. Because the things I enjoy the most have end results. They’re for a purpose. They achieve things. They accomplish something. I don’t think he’s been really able to change that.”

Not surprisingly, given that white-collar-origin respondents tended to feel that their identity was tied to work and that they enjoyed getting things done, they also tended to feel very driven – more driven than their partners. Nathan (blue-collar-origin, currently laid off from a sales job during the recession) prided himself on his own work ethic, but still felt that his white-collar-origin wife, Chelsey, a teacher, was more driven: “My set point is surviving. Whereas hers



is excelling... She's really driven. She's more driven." Ian (white-collar-origin, currently a professor) also felt that he was more drawn to work than his wife, Isabelle (blue-collar-origin, currently a therapist). He described: "I think that our ambition plays out very differently. I am really driven... I will stay up for four days straight to meet a deadline, and I am constantly driven to try to achieve the next thing... And she's just not really driven in the same way." White-collar-origin men and women then felt that work was a part of their identity, and a place where they felt accomplished. They felt highly driven, more so than their partners. Work offered their parents the opportunity for validation, autonomy, and a sense of accomplishment, and they felt the same about their own jobs. This was despite that many, like Vicki, were initially attracted to their partners because they were better able to dis-identify from work.

Blue-collar-origin respondents' ideas of work were different than those of their partners. To them, work was something they did, and even something they enjoyed, but it was not part of who they thought they were. Kevin (blue-collar-origin, currently a graduate student) emphasized that unlike many white-collar respondents, work was not integral to his identity: "I'm not one of the people who's necessarily defined by what I do. I've never defined myself that way." Sue (blue-collar-origin), currently a physician's assistant and the breadwinner for her family, also felt strongly that her identity was not in her work: "I am not a career woman. Even though I work in a career I struggle at it at times. There are days that depending on where I'm at with everything going on there are days I just want to go through the motions and get my paycheck."

Not identifying with their job, blue-collar-origin respondents also drew firmer boundaries between work and home. Some, like Joe (blue-collar-origin), limited their hours so they could be home with their families: "You have to make a living. But I don't think you need to be totally driven and spend your life at a job, you know, get there at 6 and home at 9 and totally ignore

everything else that's going on. Life has to be a balance... And I've never wanted a job where I had to work late. I always wanted to leave at 5 o'clock so I could be home and be with the family." Others, like William (blue-collar-origin), limited their hours and also created emotional cut-offs from their jobs: "My ideas of work are you go and you do your thing and you come home. It's a way to earn a living and outside of that, I don't put much more into it. I enjoy what I do, but I don't want to bring it home. It belongs there when I'm here." Vicki (white-collar-origin) explained that John (blue-collar-origin) also made these emotional cut-offs: "I think even if he had a job that would technically be consuming, it wouldn't be for him. I think [that because of] the things he says to me about 'just leave it at work' or that kind of thing. That you don't let work get in the way of your family and your time at home, which I do all the time." Blue-collar-origin respondents were then more likely to find work to be "just a job." They distanced their identity from it, and created clearer boundaries between their work and home lives.

White-collar-origin and blue-collar-origin respondents then, on average, held different ideas about how much work meant to them and how large of a role it should play in their lives. Given these differences, it is then not surprising that white-collar-origin respondents tended to want to manage their career trajectory, while blue-collar-origin respondents did not. Leslie (white-collar-origin), for example, described that she strategized about her career advancement while her husband, Tom (blue-collar-origin), took a more laissez-faire approach, changing careers only when he needed to do so: "He's been at the same job for quite awhile and only moves when forced to, which has happened a couple of times since we've been married. Whereas I want to get somewhere." Anita (white-collar-origin) also felt that she managed her career trajectory in ways that her husband, Todd (blue-collar-origin) did not: "I think [I am] more driven in actively reaching for what I want. Whereas I feel Todd is a little more, 'Let's see what

comes.’ And the right thing will come.” Leslie and Anita (both white-collar-origin) planned how to move their careers forward, while their husbands, Tom and Todd, responded to opportunities that arose but did not actively seek them out. They took more laissez-faire approaches.

### ***Inequality and Different Ideas of Work***

“He’s definitely changed jobs and career paths a couple times because of me,” Anneka (white-collar-origin) said about her husband, William (blue-collar-origin). After they married, William followed Anneka across the country, from California to Washington DC, and then again onto the Midwest when Anneka found new work. He left the military because she asked him to, and he did not return to the oil rigs where he previously worked because it would mean being away from the family for long periods of time. He once left a job that he had started only six months ago in order to follow Anneka for her new job. He gave up promotions and work that he enjoyed for the sake of her career.

It is generally thought that women move for their husband’s careers (for example, Bielby and Bielby 1992; Shauman and Noonan 2007). However, in different-origin couples, gender was not the main factor in who moved for whom. In total, 15 respondents moved for their partner’s career. There was gender parity in how many men and women moved for their partners: eight women and seven men said they moved because of their partner’s job opportunities. But there was not parity in who moved for whom in terms of class origin. Thirteen blue-collar-origin respondents moved for their partners’ career, while only two white-collar-origin respondents – one man and one woman – moved for their spouse’s job. If moving is a sign of prioritizing one partner’s career over the other – a reasonable assumption, as moving requires the other partner to

leave their current job and possibly endure a period of unemployment and foregone promotions – then it was white-collar-origin respondents’ careers who were most often prioritized. Class origin, more than gender, was associated with who moved for whom.

Such inequality may result from respondents’ ideas of work. Blue-collar-origin respondents were most likely to think of a job as being just a job – a route to a paycheck but little more. If this is the case, then absent losing a job, it makes little sense to leave a community and uproot a family for another job that will be just a job. It makes much more sense if work is a main component of one’s identity and a route to personal fulfillment.

White-collar-origin respondents’ more managerial approach to their career may also have made it more likely that their partners would move for them. They were more likely to actively seek out new opportunities – opportunities that may be farther away. Those who kept their eyes open for new positions would be less likely to be aware of job openings in other cities, as their eyes could only see what was in their local area.

Moreover, white-collar-origin respondents were more likely to hold the idea that moving for their job was something that people like them did. College-educated people are more likely to move for their jobs than high-school educated people (Finch 1989); the former are then more likely to grow up with the idea that moving is a route to career advancement. Thus, Ian (white-collar-origin) had the idea that it was normal to move to California for graduate school and then to Michigan for a career. His wife, Isabelle (blue-collar-origin), had less knowledge of what graduate school was and how to choose between different universities, and also “didn’t have the wherewithal that somebody would go somewhere with me or that I could be making such lofty decisions.” To Isabelle, such decisions were lofty in part because and it was unusual to think that men might move for their wives’ careers, and in part because her entire family lived in the same

town. Her parents still called her to ask when she was moving home. Moving away from home was not what people like her did.

Blue-collar-origin respondents also moved for their white-collar-origin partners simply because it seemed like the rational thing to do. Those from blue-collar backgrounds are more likely to move through college in non-linear ways, taking more time to earn their degree (Goldrick-Rab 2006). As such, their careers in the white-collar professional sphere can be less advanced than those of their similar aged white-collar-origin respondents. This is what happened with Rebecca (white-collar-origin) and Joe (blue-collar-origin). The couple met at a bar when Rebecca was visiting old friends. Though Rebecca was four years younger than Joe, she already had a job as a teacher in another state, while Joe had recently graduated from college and was looking for work. As she had a job and he did not, they decided that it only made sense that he moved for her. If she left her job then neither would be employed.

It was also a rational decision for blue-collar-origin respondents to follow their white-collar-origin partners because the latter's greater knowledge of white-collar work helped them find more secure careers. Bob (blue-collar-origin), for example, had grown up determined to be the first in his family to complete college. But with completing college as the goal, Bob did not think about how to use college to prepare for a career. A paper engineering company offered to pay his tuition should he enter the field, and he agreed as he thought the scholarship would help him graduate. He had not thought about how such specific training or the decline of the industry could limit his career options. His wife, Bethany (white-collar-origin) became a doctor. As her career paid more and as he worried about his future in the paper industry, it made sense to him to prioritize Bethany's career. Thus, because Bob did not think about the connection between college and work and did not have the same opportunities, he did not have the same career

options that his wife did. Blue-collar-origin respondents then often moved for their white-collar-origin spouses' career as the latter's tendency to manage their career trajectory, think of moving as an option, graduate from college earlier, and navigate work meant that making rational decisions often meant prioritizing the white-collar-origin partner's career.

### ***Trying to Pay it Back: White-Collar-Origin Respondents as their Partners' Job Coach***

While couples prioritized white-collar-origin partners' careers, white-collar-origin partners, especially women, also tried to help their spouses with their own careers. Having the knowledge of how to help their partners succeed, however, was often not enough to persuade their partners to act upon it. When white-collar-origin spouses' advice conflicted with their partners' ideas of work, their efforts often failed.

White-collar-origin women whose husbands had not yet completed college tried to convince their husbands to finish their degrees. To white-collar-origin women, having a college degree was simply what people did and how they showed that they valued education. They had not considered, however, that their husbands may view college degrees differently – as ways to improve their earnings. As their families were financially stable, their husbands saw no reason to enter or re-enter higher education. It was then difficult for white-collar-origin women to persuade their blue-collar-origin husbands that college was necessary.

Alice (white-collar-origin) was part of a family in which graduate degrees and high-powered careers were normal. One of her siblings was the vice president of a marketing company, another was a plastic surgeon, and another was a radiologist. She grew up dreaming of becoming a successful career woman, originally one who would be so devoted to her career that

she planned on spending only fifteen minutes a day with her children – time that would, however, be of the highest quality. Alice became a lawyer and opened her own practice. She married Elliott (blue-collar-origin), a man she met when she was in college and dated for nearly a decade before they married. Elliott was a waiter at a chain restaurant when they met, and, after moving to be closer to Alice, became a car salesman before they married. Alice tried to convince Elliott to do what had worked for her and her siblings – attend college and obtain a more prestigious career. But Elliott simply did not see the point, as to him, education and jobs were avenues to make money and he was already making enough: “I didn’t want to [go to college] initially. We had talked about why do I need to go to school when I’m making, you know, eighteen, nineteen, twenty dollars an hour? Why go to school?” Elliott did eventually attend college to appease Alice, but he dropped out after realizing that his future wages as a teacher would not differ dramatically from his current wages as a car salesman. Alice’s encouragement could not override Elliott’s sense that education and jobs were to make money, and, as such, he did not need a college degree.

Vicki (white-collar-origin) also tried to convince her husband, John (blue-collar-origin) to finish his degree, but, like Alice, failed. John stopped attending college when he found a well-paying job in internet technology, and, for years, remained a semester shy of finishing his bachelor’s degree. Vicki spent years telling him that she was “dead set” that “you have to finish your degree.” Being college-educated was part of Vicki’s identity, and a part that she wanted to pass on to her children. As such, she pleaded with John to obtain his bachelor’s degree – a symbol, to her, of valuing education. But, to John, a degree was not necessary if their family finances were stable, and not having a degree may have been a way of taking pride in his past. He refused to finish his last semester of college because, he said: “My dad didn’t go to college

and he was able to support his family.” Given that their finances were secure, and that John believed a job is just a job, Vicki was unable to convince him to finish his degree and find a different job that would just a job, one that would not drastically change their family’s financial position.

Lori (white-collar-origin) also struggled to help her husband, Jason (blue-collar-origin) advance his careers. They both had advanced degrees, so Lori did not need to convince Jason to enroll in higher education. She did, however, model a style of work that he admired but felt he could not replicate. Both were professors, but he felt that she managed her career by creating new possibilities, while he still approached his job as if he were in a blue-collar position and needed to complete tasks that others created. He explained: “[Lori] just had a sense of possibility that she could go out in the world and do things. And she would. She’d go out and start programs.” He admired Lori’s ability to manage her own career, but felt he was unable to follow her lead: “I still don’t have this... People like me think that the world is out there and is structured already and I’ve got to adapt myself to it. It’s still to this day it’s very hard for me to think of the university as a place where I can just play, [where] I can go start a program. I’m usually given something to do and I try to do it well.”

Lori’s modeling of how to manage a career path was not one that Jason felt he could follow. Nor did he follow Lori’s advice to network in order to advance his career. Lori wanted to help Jason in a traditionally gendered way – to entertain his colleagues. But Jason refused. He refused not because he was uninterested in advancement, as some blue-collar-origin respondents were, but because he worried that his class origin would be exposed. Dinner parties with colleagues are a middle-class ritual (Rubin 1976) and he worried that he would make a faux-pas



that would reveal his class roots. Though Lori felt it was important to socialize with colleagues, Jason's anxiety about his past meant that he would not take Lori's advice.

White-collar-origin respondents only were successful in helping their partners' career when their partner was in crisis. Crises are times when Bourdieu (2000b) predicted that changes in class sensibilities are most likely to occur, and when Swidler (2001) suggested that new ideas may be more closely followed. Todd (blue-collar-origin) was in such a crisis when Anita (white-collar-origin) successfully persuaded him to finish his college degree. He had been working in retail for nearly three decades, and was fed up with the industry. When Anita responded to his despair with: "You're unhappy. Quit! We'll figure it out. Go back to school full time," it seemed like a solution to end his malaise. He further followed Anita's advice, majoring in film production because it fulfilled his interests. But, after his crisis passed, Todd questioned if Anita's advice was best: "I might have gone [to college] part time, but I wouldn't have just upped and quit." To Todd, but not to Anita, staying in an unsatisfying job was what people do, as jobs are primary ways to earn money.

Anneka (white-collar-origin) also had success persuading William (blue-collar-origin) to return to college. William had started college before he met Anneka, and found it a great place to party but not a place where he received high grades. When he and Anneka married, he had a job in the military, one that paid well without requiring a college degree. His class ideas of work as well as his gendered ideas of breadwinning suggested to him that he should work rather than attend college. He remembered: "I was very much brought up in, 'You need to go out there and earn a living and you need to take care of your family.' My initial thoughts were, '[Going to college] isn't taking care of your family.' And there were opportunities for me there to earn a good living, even without a degree." His family called regularly to tell him not to go to college,

and asked loaded questions such as: “How could you go back to school when your wife’s pregnant and you’re not going to work?” Sensing that she was losing her fight, Anneka created a crisis. She protested his decision loudly and repeatedly. She argued with him and enlisted her family to call and tell him the benefits of a college degree. She was clear that their marriage would be much, much happier, if he attended college. In a state of crisis, William left his breadwinning and family ideas behind and attended and graduated from college.

Ian (white-collar-origin) also helped Isabelle (blue-collar-origin) with her career in a time of crisis. After the couple had moved across the country for Ian’s job, Isabelle applied to have the State of Michigan approve her license to practice therapy. Seven months after submitting her paper work, she had not heard about her application and therefore could not work. Isabelle remembered that Ian tried to give her “entitlement lessons” as he firmly pushed her to call the licensing agency. Being delayed in earning money for months, she eventually worked up the courage to call, all the while thinking: “Oh, God. I’m such a pain. I can’t.” Her call worked, as the president of the board apologized for the delay and approved her license. But, even so, when asked about Ian’s entitlement lessons, she said she still did not easily act on them: “I definitely haven’t internalized that. I think it’s something that I am aware of. Sometimes. But it’s never a comfortable thing.”

Thus, when white-collar-origin respondents tried to help their blue-collar-origin spouse advance at work their advice was usually only taken in crisis situations, and, even then was not regularly internalized. White-collar-origin respondents’ advice rubbed against decades of acting in different ways and believing in different strategies. This suggests that actively transferring cultural capital from one adult to another is difficult at best. Even advice from a respected and

loved partner was not often trusted, acted upon, or internalized if it conflicted with already internalized ways of thinking.

### ***Same-Origin Couples and Ideas of Work***

Same-origin marriages were often characterized by a different dynamic. Unlike in different-origin marriages, both partners often expected to find work validating and fulfilling. Women in same-origin marriages, however, had such a high expectation of finding validating work that they left the full-time paid-work force when they could not find fulfilling work. Thus, in order to meet their expectations about work, women in same-origin marriages, decided, paradoxically, to leave full-time jobs. All but two same-origin women spent some time as a part-time worker or full-time stay-at-home parent.

Amy (same-origin), a bouncy 39-year-old woman, always thought that fulfilling work was in her future. In fact, she remembered telling her family that would one day have a powerful and exciting job: “I wanted to be the President. My grandfather was actually involved in politics and he was a State Senator and I remember telling him that I was going to be President and he said, ‘Oh, you could be the President’s wife.’ And I said, ‘No, I’m going to be the President.’”

Amy never made it to the White House, and, in fact, struggled to find a fulfilling career at all. She spent her first years out of college working at an investment bank, but quit after thinking: “This isn’t what I want to be when I grow up. And you should certainly not spend this many hours doing something you don’t really like.” She then turned to a career she thought she would enjoy more – photojournalism. But her ideas of photojournalism were very romantic – traveling the world to snap pictures of far-away places. She again felt unfulfilled as she instead found

herself at the public library taking pictures of children's story-times. The idea that she would leave the paid work force was one that she would not have believed when she was younger, but after being unable to find a validating career it went from unimaginable to preferable: "We had decided to have a child when I was not happy with where I was professionally. It made sense in a way to not go back to work because I didn't have any work that I wanted to go back to." Amy did not view work as "just a job" or as a financial necessity. Work was supposed to be something she "wanted" to do and something that would bring her prestige, adventure, and fulfillment. Lacking these options, she left the labor force to become a stay-at-home mother and to search for a more fulfilling career.

Jen (same-origin), a short, curly-haired, spritely woman, similarly recalled, "When I was growing up I never thought I wanted to be a mom." She wanted to be an art professor, and after obtaining a Master's degree she landed a job as an adjunct. The job did not go as she expected, as she found that it was not adding to her self-esteem. She remembered: "I just thought, "You see the time that I am putting into this job and the effort that I am putting into this and if you don't think it's worth it to advocate for me, then you know what? I'm okay. You really just pay me gas money to get here." Given that her career was not validating, and also that her son was having trouble in elementary school, she decided it made sense to remove herself from the paid labor force.

Perhaps ironically, dropping out of the paid labor force allowed seven of the ten same-origin women to find more fulfilling work. Not burdened by needing to earn money, they could pursue their interests regardless of the pay. After Jen quit her job as an adjunct art professor, she created and sold her own art from home. Leah, a drama major in college, left the labor force after disliking the politics at her workplace. She took up freelance writing and videography, both of

which she found more fulfilling. Rose, who had planned on becoming a lawyer, started her own small business that she ran from her home. Hannah worked as a stay-at-home mother as she always dreamed, but also found fulfilling part-time work as a grant writer and dance teacher. These women assumed that their jobs would be validating and enjoyable, and found part-time work that made this possible. Like white-collar-origin women in different-origin marriages, not only did they expect to find work that could be part of their identity, but they also felt that they had the agency to find a way to do so.

Same-origin men were constrained by their breadwinning role, and therefore did not feel that they had the option of leaving the labor force when their careers were unrewarding. Brad (same-origin) went to law school because, according to his wife, “His parents wanted him to follow in the family footsteps and there was a lot of pressure.” He is now a lawyer with his own private practice, but does not enjoy what he does: “If he had it to do again, he would have done another pathway. I think he’s good at what he’s does because he’s smart but I think if he had it to do again, he’d be captaining a charter boat or fishing or a nature guide or an engineer.” While women may have had the option to pursue such careers, Brad stayed in his job as a lawyer, a job that supported his family even if it was divorced from his passions. Thus, while same-origin women risked more financial stability should the divorce, they had the option to look for fulfilling work in more part-time and untraditional venues. White-collar-origin women whose husbands were less invested in career advancement sometimes also lacked this option, as their own income was also needed to make ends meet. Thus, similar ideas played out in different ways depending upon the class origin of each of the partners.

## **PLAY**

Blue- and white-collar-origin respondents not only had different opinions about work, but also harbored discrepant ideas about how to spend their time outside of work. Scott (white-collar-origin) was a short, curly-haired, man who seemed comfortable in khakis and a dress shirt. As well as working at a business he founded, he wanted to travel the world, snowboard down mountains, camp in national parks, and taste the foods of Italy. When not traveling, or at least reading about international events, he wanted to get out of the house. He wanted to go to local parks, walk downtown, sample new restaurants, explore museums, and attend sporting events. His wife, Gina (blue-collar-origin), had no interest in these things – she enjoyed her local neighborhood, familiar white bread, and spending vacations relaxing at resorts. Scott could not imagine a future with a person who preferred staying home to being out and who was more interested in her corner of the state than in countries far away. So, before they married, Scott dumped Gina.

Scott then pursued a woman who lived a cultured life in New York City. He realized, however, that she would not leave her career to follow his, so he returned to Michigan and to Gina. He figured that he could persuade Gina that backpacking across Europe, cooking new and exotic foods, and hiking through national parks were fun activities that they could do together. After nearly a decade of marriage, however, Scott realized that Gina was not going to change. He reduced the amount of pressure he put on her to enjoy what he enjoys, and tried to admire her for being able to be happy without needing to get out of the country or even the house.

Scott and Gina's different ideas of leisure were emblematic of the differences described by many different-origin couples. Many white-collar-origin respondents, like Scott, used leisure to manage their cultural capital accumulation. They were also cultural omnivores (Peterson and

Kern 1996), meaning that they sampled and enjoyed both highbrow and middle-brow activities, things like international travel as well as football games. Blue-collar-origin respondents, however, tended to be more like Gina. They took a laissez-faire approach to their leisure, not wanting to use their free time to expand their cultural repertoire but to instead relax and see what came. They were also more likely to be cultural univores – they enjoyed a smaller range of things, things that tended not to include highbrow activities. They were happier staying home and relaxing rather than attending the theater or visiting a museum.

These differences likely stemmed from their childhoods, as white- and blue-collar children grow up doing different things for fun and using leisure time in different ways. White-collar children tend to grow up packing their free time with cultural activities (Lareau 2003; Vincent and Ball 2007), which gives them the sense that leisure time should be busy time and should occur, at least in part, outside of the home. The activities they participate in also tend to be a mix of middle-brow activities that are accessible to many as well as high-brow activities that are accessible primarily to those who share their class. They then learn to be busy cultural omnivores who find satisfaction in middle- and high-brow leisure activities.

Children raised in blue-collar families are less likely to be involved in many activities, especially those associated with high culture (Lareau 2003). Their parents tend to have tighter budgets that prevent their children from being involved in a plethora of organized activities, and they also have less incentive to do so. Knowledge of poetry or the ability to play the violin may help children succeed in middle-class settings, but do not typically help people get their foot in the door at the local factory or help them make connections with the local foreman. In blue-collar settings, being normal and fitting in are often prized, not showing off unique skills or being active in a large range of sophisticated activities (Stephens, Markus, and Townsend 2007). More

time is also spent relaxing with family (Rubin 1976) – family that are more likely to work in physically demanding jobs and who may prefer relaxation to leaving the house. These differences carried over into respondents’ adult lives, as white-collar-origin spouses often preferred to spend their leisure time busily managing their cultural capital accumulation through participating in highbrow and middle-brow events that were inside and outside of the home, while blue-collar-origin respondents favored taking a laissez-faire approach that prized relaxing at home over accumulating cultural capital.

White-collar-origin respondents then spent their time trying to convince their partners not to take a relaxed laissez-faire approach to leisure but to leave their home more and become more involved in cultural events. Lori (white-collar-origin) learned that she would need to do this the first time she visited her husband, Jason (blue-collar-origin), at his childhood home. After spending the week sitting in a room that she described as a cave – a wood-paneled room with dark curtains that were kept closed – she realized that her husband and his family had no need to get out of the house or to be involved with cultural activities. She tried to persuade them to do something else – explore the nearby city, go to the beach, or even just take a walk. She failed in convincing them to leave the relaxation of their house behind, and, a quarter-century later she still usually failed to persuade Jason to leave the house with her. She called getting him out of the house her “lifetime ordeal.” He usually still preferred to spend his leisure time doing little at home, while she still preferred to be involved in more cultural events outside of their home.

Mia (white-collar-origin) also was interested in being involved in more cultural events than was her husband, Kevin (blue-collar-origin). She grew up traveling on the weekends, and wanted to do the same as an adult. She also wanted to go to the local theater, spend time ice skating, and play sports. She was a cultural omnivore – one who enjoyed highbrow events like



theater and travel, as well as middle-brow events like softball. Her husband, however, was more of a cultural univore. He enjoyed sports, but refusing to attend the highbrow (and feminized) theater and had little interest in taking weekend trips. He preferred to stay home and watch football on TV – to spend more time relaxing than accumulating cultural capital.

Even when they were at home, white-collar-origin respondents spent more time in cultural capital accumulating activities than did their blue-collar-origin spouses. Ryan (white-collar-origin) grew up spending weekend afternoons going out to lunch, to a bookstore, and then settling in on the couch to read with his family. As an adult, he still spent his time reading as well as listening to new music. Katie (blue-collar-origin) grew up playing in her backyard and watching TV. Ryan tried to share his interests with Katie, but, after twelve years of marriage, she still did not appreciate his high-brow tastes: “She likes Shell Silverstein [a poet who writes for children] a lot. That’s where she draws the line.”

Dan (white-collar-origin) also preferred to spend his weekends involved in a variety of activities. He wanted to spend part of his weekends exploring parks and hiking outside. When he was home, he preferred to spend time “doing something creative, something I can lose myself in.” He tried to involve his wife, Gabriella (blue-collar-origin) in some of his artistic endeavors, but found that had trouble accessing some of the cultural and artistic skills he already had. She also simply did not want to spend her weekends creating new things, but instead wanted to relax: “I’d rather sleep late in bed, read a book. That’s my downtime. I don’t want to be moving around.”

Vacations followed the same patterns for different-origin couples. White-collar-origin respondents wanted to use their time to expand their cultural capital. As such, they wanted to manage their time in order to pack in as many sight-seeing events, monuments, and museums as

possible. They wanted to explore cities, travel across the country or out of the country, and learn about new places. They also enjoyed beaches and lake houses, but often not for long periods of time, as the slower pace left them bored more quickly. Blue-collar-origin respondents, however, often preferred traveling to a beach and spending their entire vacation relaxing by the water. They had no need to engage in a wide range of cultural activities, as years of marriage had not turned them into cultural omnivores.

Couples resolved their differences in a variety of ways. Some white-collar-origin women took their children to plays and musicals while their blue-collar-origin husbands stayed home. White-collar-origin men sometimes took their children to sporting events while their blue-collar wives relaxed at home. On vacation, couples spent one day relaxing and the next sight-seeing, or went on vacations that one would enjoy more than the other. They also found movies they could agree upon and friends and family they both liked to visit. Much of their time was also spent at their children's events, which they both said they enjoyed.

One activity, however, regularly led to passionate disputes. White-collar-origin women tended to deeply dislike how much their blue-collar-origin husbands watched television, a leisure activity that was both part of "low" culture and contradicted their ideas of using leisure to accumulate an array of cultural capital. Chelsey (white-collar-origin) found her husband's love of television to be incomprehensible and distasteful: "I just can't stand how much TV he watches. It drives me crazy... And he watches the same movie over and over again. There are about five movies that he likes and they are on all the time and he watches them every single time they're on. And I don't get that at all." George (blue-collar-origin) said that his wife, Norah (white-collar-origin), had such disdain for TV that he reduced the amount he watches: "I was willing to watch TV but she pointed out that TV is a lot of mindless entertainment that really

doesn't enrich us very much. So we cut back on that." Watching television may be the antithesis, to white-collar-origin women, of using leisure time for cultural capital accumulation and the symbol of low culture. Several women hated that their husbands engaged in it, and convinced them to stop when they could.

It was only white-collar-origin *women* who cared about their partners' television habits, however. These women's statements suggest that it was not only their ideas about what types of leisure was appropriate, but also how much leisure they partook in that lead them to be upset. Alexa (white-collar-origin) explained this: "I don't like sitting in front of the television. I don't like sitting in front of a movie... There's so much sitting and staring at me every time I walk into that house I can't sit for two hours." That her husband did regularly sit for two hours in front of a movie was a reminder that he was taking leisure time and she was not.

Same-origin couples had few disagreements or differences about their leisure activities. Most spoke of how busy they were with their children's activities, household improvements, and vacations that balanced relaxing beaches with national parks and hurried sight-seeing. None talked of highbrow interests that left their partners disinterested or felt that they had hours to relax. In general, they did not take a *laissez-faire* approach to leisure, but managed their free time through busy schedules and many events.

## CONCLUSION

After years of marriage, respondents from different class backgrounds did not share their beliefs about work or play. Those with white-collar-origins, like Vicki, tended to be driven to advance at their workplaces and see work as part of their identity and a source of validation. Those with

blue-collar-origins, like John, were more likely to understand their jobs to be routes to paychecks rather than validation, and, as such, made clearer cut-offs between work and home. They also took a more laissez-faire approach to advancement, while those with white-collar-origins were more likely to manage their career trajectories. These differences meant that couples tended to prioritize the white-collar-origin partner's career.

Couples also had differences that fell along class lines in terms of what they wanted to do with their time outside of work. Those with white-collar-roots were more likely to favor using their leisure time to participate in a wide variety of highbrow and middle-brow activities both inside and outside of the house. Their partners had less interest in highbrow activities and in leaving the house; they saw their leisure time not as a time to manage their cultural capital accumulation but to simply relax.

That these differences persisted after years of marriage, similar types of jobs, and the availability of shared resources suggests the improbability of taking the class out of the person after taking the person out of the class. The differences also remained even as spouses actively tried to get their partners to change – to drag them out of the house and into the theater or into a college classroom. Even respected and loved partners were then unable to transmit their cultural capital to the person with whom they spent the most time, suggesting that cultural capital may not be easily transferred even through the strongest of ties. Years together, in short, did not lead to the eradication of class differences.

These differences have potential consequences. As blue-collar-origin partners were more likely to put their spouse's career first, they may be in more precarious positions should their relationships dissolve. This disparity may be compounded as blue-collar-origin respondents were more likely to keep their eyes open for career opportunities rather than searching them out,

making it more difficult for them to advance or find new work. Their greater disinterest in using leisure time to get out of the house and into a range of activities may also have economic consequences, as such practices are linked to knowing fewer people who can help them with career advancement (Lizardo 2013). Those from blue-collar-origins may then end up behind their white-collar-origin partners in their ability to find and maintain high paying jobs.

Gender inequality also played out in different ways depending upon the class composition of the couple. Gender was less associated with who moved for whom than was class-origin. As gender inequality decreases – as women see themselves as career-oriented and have increasing opportunities to advance at work – gender inequality in different-origin relationships may fade and be combined or replaced by inequality associated with class origin.

Same-origin couples tended to have more traditional gender dynamics, with men staying in the paid labor force and women leaving it, though it is not straightforward how these dynamics mattered. Men and women in same-origin relationships tended to assume that work was not “just a job” but a fulfilling endeavor. Women had the freedom to leave the paid labor force when they could not find validating work; men’s role as breadwinners made them more likely to work even if their work was less fulfilling. Thus, women in same-origin marriages had greater flexibility in finding enjoyable work. However, should the couple divorce, men’s greater labor force participation may help them maintain financial stability in a way that their wife’s experiences would not.

These findings indicate that studying the intersection of gender, family, and work necessitates a consideration of class origin. The influence of gender depends upon the class origin of each spouse, as individuals respond to their partners’ classed preferences and also consider their own. White-collar-origin men may feel the need to work regardless of whom they

marry, but white-collar-origin women's career paths may differ depending upon their husband's classed ideas of their jobs.

Finally, though the non-assimilation of upwardly mobile respondents may have negative consequences for their own career advancement, it may benefit a younger generation of potentially upwardly mobile individuals. Hiring decisions are often influenced by the sharing of cultural dispositions and leisure activities (Rivera 2012). To the extent that upwardly mobile individuals are on hiring committees, they may be better able to appreciate the leisure preferences and ideas of work of those who share their class origin. Their non-assimilation may then help upwardly mobile individuals who come after them.

## CHAPTER 6 PARENTING

Leslie, the daughter of a mid-level manager and a homemaker, cried as she told me about what happened that morning. She came downstairs after getting ready for work and found her husband, Tom (blue-collar-origin), on his hands and knees, wiping up the milk that their seven-year-old daughter spilled. “Shouldn’t you be supervising her doing that? Instead of you doing it and her watching?” Leslie questioned. She explained her reasoning: “If you do this, where you just tell the kid to get out of the way, you’re telling them they’re not competent. You’re telling them they can’t handle this. You’re telling them that they won’t be able to handle this, that only an adult can handle this. So you’re both pushing down their self-esteem and their ability to handle things. You’re also not lifting them up in showing them how to do it and giving them the tools to be able to handle it in the future.” I asked Leslie why she thought that Tom had not asked their daughter to clean up the spill. She told me that it was because he did not like to manage their children: “If he’s in charge he just feels better doing it than delegating. He feels less comfortable supervising someone.”

For eleven years, Leslie tried to convince Tom to change his parenting style. Just as she asked Tom to manage the clean-up of a spill, she also asked him to manage their daughters’ use of time. She asked him to initiate family-reading times rather than allowing their seven- and eleven-year-old daughters to spend their evenings as they pleased. She asked him to implement routine bedtimes and structured bedtime rituals, rather than going with the flow each night. She tried to show Tom how to become the managerial parent that she thought was best, but she felt

she had failed. Speaking of her efforts, she said: “The implementation is just not always there. He just doesn’t know how. It doesn’t fit with his natural style, or his natural inclination.” I asked Leslie what she thought Tom’s natural parenting style was. Her reply: “Laissez-faire!”

The example of Leslie and Tom – a couple who shared a love of their children, but not an agreement on how to parent – demonstrates both the intractability of parenting styles and the deep meaning of them. Leslie’s intensive instruction was ineffective at goading Tom to shift from his more laissez-faire parenting style to her more managerial parenting style. Her inability to change Tom’s parenting habits was perhaps unsurprising, considering that Tom not only took a laissez-faire approach to parenting, but also took a laissez-faire approach to his own time, money, work, and leisure. Yet, as Leslie’s tears indicated, their disagreements were intense as they were not only about how to live their own lives but how to raise their children as well.

Their disagreements, of course, were not unique. Some may see Leslie and Tom’s differences as those that typically fall along gender lines. It is, after all, not unusual for women to think more about the hidden curriculum of mundane family events and to have more thoughts about family rituals (Lareau 2000; Walzer 1998). However, if gender alone shapes parenting styles then Leslie’s parenting style would be emblematic of all women in this sample. In fact, her parenting philosophy represented only that of women who shared her class origin; women raised in another class tended to possess different parenting beliefs. In this sample, women with blue-collar roots were also in charge of parenting, but they rejected the idea of so actively cultivating their children’s academic skills or managing their time. Though they also loved their children, they had other ideas of what was best for them. They were more likely to favor a laissez-faire approach.



Of course, that women from different classes preferred different parenting styles is not to say that gender did not matter. For women, their gender positioned them as being in charge of parenting, while their class-origin was associated with their ideas of how to best parent – in a more managerial or laissez-faire manner. For men, despite the recent uptick in father’s involvement with their children, their gender positioned them as their wives’ helpers in parenting (Coltrane 2004; Townsend 2002). Thus, even though their class origin was associated with whether they preferred to manage or take a laissez-faire approach in their own lives, they were also expected, regardless of their class origin, to not disrupt their wives’ parenting practices and to not take primary responsibility for parenting. As a result, white-collar-origin men typically took a more laissez-faire approach to raising their children than to navigating their own lives. Blue-collar-origin men, like Joe, took a laissez-faire approach in much of their own lives, and approached parenting in the same way.

This chapter then demonstrates the continuing influence of class origin, as those with blue- and white-collar-origins continued to harbor dissimilar parenting beliefs even after co-parenting together for many years. However, gender was particularly important in ideas of parenting, and it moved the lines of who was likely to take a managerial or laissez-faire approach. When it came to parenting, white-collar-origin women were largely alone in their preference for managerial parenting. White-collar-origin men tended to join blue-collar-origin men and women in harboring more laissez-faire beliefs about how to raise their children. This chapter reveals these patterns by examining parents’ expectations of parenthood, ideas of organizing children’s time, notions of strictness, and ideas of children’s futures. It also brings in the perspective of same-origin couples in order to show that the parenting beliefs of respondents who married down were no different than those who married laterally, suggesting the coherence

of beliefs around class origin and gender regardless of who one marries. The chapter first, however, shows how these new findings augment past scholarship on parenting.

### **PAST SCHOLARSHIP ON PARENTING**

College-educated white-collar professionals tend to have a parenting style that is referred to as “concerted cultivation” (Lareau 2003). These parents believe that children can be shaped by adults’ efforts, and that it is adults’ responsibility to see to it that they become successful – often defined as academically successful – children and then adults. In this effort, they fill their children’s time with enriching activities that they believe will develop their character and build their skills (Hoff, Laursen, and Tardif 2003; Lareau 2003; Vincent and Ball 2007). And, although they tend to believe in fostering their children’s independence, they regularly undermine this belief by micromanaging their children’s daily life (Weininger and Lareau 2009). They are hands-on parents who dedicate countless hours to their children’s careful development (Hays 1996; Lareau 2003).

High-school educated parents who work in blue-collar jobs tend to love their children just as much as college-educated parents, but typically have different beliefs about what children need and what it means to be a good parent. They are more likely to believe that their children have the capacity to develop on their own. As such, adults provide their children with love and necessities, but do not see the need to organize their children’s time or micromanage their lives. Children, they believe, should be allowed to grow without a great deal of adult intervention (Lareau 2003).

This analysis is useful in depicting broad differences in classed parenting styles, but it ignores two key characteristics of parents. First, the prevailing wisdom overlooks that parents who are currently in the middle-class may hold beliefs that correspond with the dominant beliefs of the class *in which they were raised*. Parents may intentionally and unintentionally parent how they were parented, and these styles are likely to be different depending on whether respondents were raised in white-collar or blue-collar families. Parents raised in different classes may also wish that their children develop different skills based upon the skills that were useful to them; a laissez-faire style may be associated with the absence of cultivating *middle-class skills*, not skills more generally. Likewise, parents raised in different classes may have different goals for who they want their children become, and may use different strategies depending upon whether they want their children to become white-collar professionals or whether they are open to them also taking blue-collar paths. In other words, if taking the person out of the class does not take the class out of the person, then adults raised in different classes may have different ideas about what constitutes the most important skills, career trajectories, and overall parenting styles.

Second, this analysis of classed parenting styles ignores that men and women are not usually equal contributors to parenting (Townsend 2002). Some men may be highly involved as parents and maintain independent ideas about how to parent, but, in general, men are expected to follow their wives' lead rather than developing their own parenting plans (Walzer 1998). As such, men who take a self-management approach in most aspects of their lives may not take a management approach to all aspects of parenting.

This chapter demonstrates that ignoring class origin and gender means misunderstanding the ways that parenting beliefs play out. Parents' college educations did not provide them with a homogeneous set of parenting beliefs, nor did spending years together co-parenting. Instead,

respondents' recollections of their initial expectations of parenthood reveal that a divide along lines of class origin and gender may have appeared even before their children were born.

### **EXPECTATIONS OF PARENTHOOD**

White-collar-origin women, unlike all groups except same-origin women, remembered their plans to be parent-managers. They remembered that before their children were born, they had visions of who their children would become and what parenting strategies they would use to effectively shape them. Some were going to give birth to doctors, others to musicians, and most to academic achievers. They were going to have structured reading times, routine bedtimes, and cook only healthy food. Their children would not watch television, scream in a restaurant, or need to be bribed. They spent countless hours reading parenting books and scrutinizing their peers' parenting practices. They had a vision and a plan. They expected, in some of their words, to be a "perfect parent."

It had not occurred to white-collar-origin and same-origin women that being a perfect parent did not only depend upon their own managerial strategies, but upon their children's agency as well. They remembered that their first surprise of parenthood was that their managerial strategies were not as effective as they had imagined as their children had other ideas of who they wanted to be. Aneka (white-collar-origin, currently a graduate student) reflected: "I realized that a lot of it is dependent on the child and not the parent. And so, as much as a parent can will something to happen with children, they're their own people too." Vicki (white-collar-origin, currently a teacher) similarly remembered: "Before you have kids you really do think that you can control so many variables. Then you realize there are things that you can control, but not

a lot. And of those things that you do control, there's still a lot of compromise." Bethany (white-collar-origin, currently a doctor) concurred: "You have all of these expectations of what they're going to do and you realize they have other ideas of what they want to do... You can't control everything she does or everything she thinks." Same-origin women also tended to plan their managerial styles without consideration of their children's agency. Carlie (same-origin, currently an engineer) said: "You always have these great ideals... You learn that you have to adapt your ideals around the personalities of your kids."

With the exception of a small number of white-collar-origin and same-origin men, women with white-collar roots were alone in their plans of becoming all-powerful parents with specific ideas of how they would shape their children. Despite their similar class destinations, no other group of respondents consistently expected to be parent-managers. Most, in fact, entered parenthood with few ideas at all. Lillian (blue-collar-origin, currently a stay-at-home mother) recalled that before her children were born, she only knew that she wanted to have children. She had few visions of who they would be or how she would raise them:

I had an idea that I would have a lot of children. The reality after having the first one – I realized it takes a lot more than just the desire to have a lot of children. It's hard. I saw it in just a general dreamy kind of way. Oh yes, a farm full of children.

Gina's (blue-collar-origin, currently a stay-at-home mother) vision of parenthood was much more aligned with Lillian's than with women from white-collar backgrounds. The daughter of a metal worker, Gina imagined taking a laissez-faire approach to parenting. She did not imagine who her children would be or how she would shape them:

How have my ideas changed since before I had kids? I think getting on the floor and playing with them more than just providing for them and making sure you know what's going on in their lives. Involved parenting. . . . I just never realized how much really goes into it. All you picture is the baby. You don't picture them growing into kids.

Other blue-collar-origin parents and white-collar-origin men also did not plan who their children would be or what managerial strategies they would use. John (blue-collar-origin, currently a part-time stay-at-home father), for instance, said: “I didn’t have any [expectations] before they were born. You just have no idea before your kids are born. And then once they’re born you figure it out.” Madison (blue-collar-origin, currently a stay-at-home mother) concurred: “I don’t think when we had them I had a lot of expectations.” Nick (white-collar-origin, currently a stay-at-home father) similarly recalled: “I don’t know that I had any ideas about parenting when we first had [our first child].” Paul (same-origin, currently a journalist) reiterated this point: “I don’t think I really had any strongly formed opinions about what it would be like to be a parent... It’s been eye-opening to figure out how much time you spend and how small things you do have a big impact on how they behave.”

Thus, it was primarily white-collar-origin women and same-origin women entered parenthood with the idea that carefully considered parenting strategies would shape their highly malleable children. Such women were raised by parents whose jobs entailed managing others, and, as the previous chapters have shown, they managed most aspects of their own lives. As women, they were expected to take charge of parenting and they did so in a manner that made sense to them: they envisioned who they wanted their children to be and strategized about how to create the child they imagined. No other group had both a general predilection toward management and the idea that their children’s development was primarily their responsibility. As such, blue-collar-origin women and men, as well as white-collar-origin and same-origin men, did not remember preparing their managerial strategies before their children were born. Once their children were born, in terms of structuring their children’s time, similar divides held.

## CURRENT IDEAS OF PARENTING

### *Structuring Time*

A hallmark of contemporary middle-class parenting is organizing children's time (Lareau 2003; Hoff et al. 2003; Vincent and Ball 2007). But the idea that middle-class parents structure their children's time neither takes into account the class origin or the gender of parents who currently reside in the middle-class. Not all parents were raised in a milieu that put a premium on structured time, and not all currently organized their own time (see Chapter 4). Moreover, in any given family, both parents are not expected to be equally in charge of organizing their children's time – if this duty is thought to be needed, it is often considered to be the responsibility of women and not men (Lareau and Weininger 2008). Again, it was the group who was raised by parents who worked as managers, who managed their own time, and who were expected to take charge of parenting who most fervently believed in organizing their children's time: women who grew up in white-collar households.

White-collar-origin women typically believed that structured activities were necessary for their children's development. Zoey (currently a stay-at-home mother) enrolled her four-year-old daughter in swimming lessons, creative movement classes, story time, sign language classes, and music lessons, all with the idea that they supplemented her child's preschool curriculum. Zoey's goal was to identify and cultivate her daughter's skills: "I think it's important to expose your kid to a lot of different things and see where they fit and what they like without investing too much. You know, is your kid a natural athlete? Is your kid a natural brain?" Mary's (white-collar-origin, currently a stay-at-home mother) ideas of parenthood were the same. Her four- and six-

year-old daughters were enrolled in gymnastics, swimming, foreign language classes, and sports so that they could learn teamwork and to “set goals and win things.” To white-collar-origin women, organized activities outside of the home helped them identify and build their children’s skills.

White-collar-origin women also typically believed that time in the home should be organized. Alexa insisted that her children have a set routine: wake up, make the bed, pack their own lunch for school, walk to school, do well in school, come home and complete homework, attend music and religious lessons, and go to bed at a set time. Most white-collar-origin mothers insisted on at least some of these: set bedtimes, structured reading and homework times, and routine mealtimes. They thought that children succeeded when they were disciplined and responsible, when they knew what was coming next, and when they would have daily time to focus on their academic endeavors – both completing homework and doing extra reading.

Even time that was seemingly unstructured could be used by white-collar-origin women to shape their children’s character and build their skills. Norah (white-collar-origin, currently a stay-at-home mother) had filing cabinets that overflowed with newspaper clippings, cartoons, and research reports on parenting. She adapted a school curriculum that was “not mainstream yet” but that had “a carefully thought out rationale” and “good research to back it up” to implement at home. This style, according to Norah, “involves ways to teach self-regulation through children’s natural activities” and teaches “how to set goals and follow through with them.” Thus, even time that appeared to be unstructured and reserved for play could be used by white-collar-origin mothers to teach skills, especially the skills that replicated their own – the skill of being a self-manager.



Same-origin women preferred to parent in much the same way; they preferred to structure their children's time in order to build their skills. Leah (same-origin, currently a stay-at-home mother) said that her children's time outside of school was so filled with soccer games, church, piano lessons, foreign language classes, and trips to the zoo that it required a lot of effort to "just let the kids stay in pajamas for half the day and play and not be structured." Alisha (same-origin, currently a stay-at-home-mother) also mentioned that her children's schedules were both filled and structured: "Our kids are so busy and they're doing so many things and we have a very structured home life." Rose (same-origin, currently a stay-at-home mother) entered parenthood planning on implementing "a structured learning time and a structured play time and a structured time to read," and while she gave up on some of this structure, she still made sure that her children were involved in music lessons, sports teams, and a series of enrichment activities. These women also wanted to use this structured time to build their children's skills. Leah, for example, explained her children's involvement in sports by saying: "[The coach] is really teaching the kids life lessons as much as he is teaching them to play soccer."

While organizing children's time is often viewed as the dominant practice of college-educated women, blue-collar-origin women did not share the idea that structured time should be used to build academic or life skills. Only a few blue-collar-origin respondents involved their children in many activities, and these mothers did so not to conscientiously cultivate their children's skills but to provide them with opportunities that they lacked in the past. Isabelle (blue-collar-origin, currently a therapist), for example, disliked that she was raised by *laissez-faire* parents. She was often alone as her father farmed and her mother bartended; she gravitated toward school as it provided her the structure she wished she had. Now, as a mother, she saw it as her responsibility to make sure her three- and five-year-old sons did not feel the same way.

She enrolled her children in gymnastic lessons and soccer teams, and tried to find the perfect balance of “being out in nature, letting them bake things with me, pulling out art supplies, having some magical combination of spontaneity and planned activities.” She did this not to cultivate their skills but engaged in structured activities because, “I don’t want them to be deprived. I want them to have the best possible thing that they could have.”

Sidney (blue-collar-origin, currently a stay-at-home mother) felt the same way. She remembered that her childhood felt lonely as she was an only-child, her parents did not have the idea that they should play with her, and she did not have the opportunity to participate in as many activities as she wished. Her five- and six-year-old children are now in a wide array of organized activities, and at home she throws dance parties, plays board games, and bakes with them. Her goal is not to have her children learn to set goals or become chefs, but to make sure that they do not feel as lonely as she did. For Sidney and Isabelle, loving their children meant relieving them from the burdens of their pasts rather than seeking to cultivate their skills.

Other blue-collar-origin women were more ambivalent about structuring their children’s time, both in the home and outside of it. They tended to enroll their children in at least one organized activity while simultaneously questioning their necessity. Lillian (blue-collar-origin, currently a stay-at-home mother), for example, said about her six-year-old daughter: “We have done dance. She’s enjoyed dance... I want to support her in doing the best that she can and that doesn’t necessarily mean jamming her full of activities.” Madison’s (blue-collar-origin, currently a stay-at-home mother) philosophy was similar: “We just try to let them be free range and let them play and have fun. We try to give them stimulating experiences but we don’t want them to be overscheduled.” Gina (blue-collar-origin, currently a stay-at-home mother) was married to a white-collar-origin man, Scott, who strongly wanted to enroll their three- and six-year-old

children in organized activities, but she ignored his pleas as she thought structured events were unnecessary: “He thinks they should get out of the house more and I think they’re happy being home a lot of the time. If you’re playing with them, they’re happy.” Blue-collar-origin women were more likely to question the necessity of organized activities and to not mind when their children played in unstructured time. This finding may be surprising given prevailing ideas about college-educated women’s parenting style, but was consistent with blue-collar-origin women’s tendency to take a laissez-faire approach when using their own free time.

Blue-collar-origin men, despite their college education and white-collar jobs, also did not want to structure their children’s time to the extent that their white-collar-origin wives did. No blue-collar-origin man said that he implemented his own system of organized time, and many did not agree with the systematic use of time that their white-collar-origin wives imposed. Some simply did not see the point of extensive structure. Tom (blue-collar-origin, currently a computer programmer) revealed: “Though I know the kids need structure, I think Leslie thinks they need more structure than they really do.” Adam (blue-collar-origin, currently a manager) agreed: “With signing up the kids for a lot of sports things, it seems like there’s always something for them. I guess I don’t think they need to do so much.”

Others more actively resisted the idea that their children needed so much structure. Ben (blue-collar-origin, currently a sales director) begged his white-collar-origin wife, Mary, to not have their four- and six-year-old daughters involved in an organized activity every night, and questioned the need to organize their children’s time at home: “[Mary] feels like if the kids are left to do something of their own imagination, she’s failing. She has to keep ’em busy all the time. That’s where we’re very different... I tell ’em, ‘Go find something to do. You can draw, you can play, you can watch a cartoon. You can do whatever.’” He also questioned the need to

cultivate their children's skills, calling German lessons a "waste of time" and believing that violin lessons were unnecessary as "You're not trying to raise someone to play in the symphony."

John (blue-collar-origin, currently a stay-at-home father and restaurant manager) also resisted his wife, Vicki's (white-collar-origin, currently a teacher), wishes to structure their children's time. He did not ask his four-year-old son and ten-year-old daughter to read rather than play video games, to have a routine bed time, or to learn new academic skills. He led his own life in what Vicki called a "Type Z" fashion, which opposed what she called her own "Type A" style of "We need to plan! We need to schedule! We need to be neurotic!" His approach was that "the kids will do whatever," a style that mirrored the "Type Z" style he used in many aspects of his own life.

Blue-collar-origin women and men then did not share white-collar-origin women's belief in organizing their children's time to build their skills. What did white-collar-origin and same-origin men believe? Only four white-collar-origin men and three same-origin men had strong opinions. One – Scott (white-collar-origin) – wished his children were enrolled in Chinese lessons, pottery classes, and sports teams so that they could build skills and become worldly people. Another respondent, Dan (white-collar-origin), spoke as if he had read Lareau's work (he had not), claiming that his desire was "to actively mold as opposed to just let grow," and part of his efforts to actively mold were through using structured time. Clint (same-origin, currently an engineer) discussed structured time at home: "I think kids need a certain structure and order in their life, you know, routine... They have a routine and they follow a schedule." He also thought that structured activities outside of the house were beneficial to his kids: "I think you learn social interactive skills, teamwork, leadership skills, how to get along with others."

These white-collar-origin and same-origin men, however, were unusual. Most men in these groups had little to say about the organization of their children's time. Here, their gender likely trumped their class origin in thinking about parenting, as less than a third of men with white-collar roots – including those who married “down” and those who married laterally – emphasized the desire to structure their children's time. Most simply said they supported their wives. Thus, while they were more likely to have grown up in a managerial environment, their gender exempted them from the expectation that they were meant to manage the children's time.

In sum, the idea that middle-class parenting is characterized by constantly structuring children's time in order to cultivate their academic and extra-curricular skills is an idea that many *women who were raised in white-collar families* held. It was not a belief shared by blue-collar-origin women or men, those who, as previous chapters showed, also did not take a managerial approach in many other areas of their lives. Nor was it an idea held by most white-collar-origin men, as they had few ideas of parenting at all. Though they took a managerial approach in many aspects of their own lives, their gender relieved them from also actively managing their children's lives.

### *Ideas of Strictness*

The patterns above situate white-collar-origin and same-origin women as managers and everyone else as more laissez-faire parents. However, when it came to strictness, white-collar-origin men sometimes joined white-collar-origin women in preferring to more strictly manage their children's behavior. Enforcing behavioral standards was a managerial action that white-collar-origin men could do while they were with their children while still leaving the decisions about

how to structure their children's time to their wives. Blue-collar-origin respondents tended to not be as strict, and blue-collar-origin *women* called upon their white-collar-origin husbands to cut back on their managerial approach to discipline.

White-collar-women continued to believe in strict standards. Rebecca (white-collar-origin, currently a teacher), for example, did not let things slide because boys will be boys, as her husband did. Her husband, Joe (blue-collar-origin, currently an accountant), explained: "She may be more strict than I am. When you have two boys and as a father I remember the days of being a teenager so I'm a little more understanding when they do something stupid. It's like, well you know, they're just boys." Vicki (white-collar-origin, currently a teacher) also felt more strongly than her husband that their ten-year-old daughter and four-year-old son should abide by stricter standards. She said: "I'm more strict and would be even more so if he would agree more. I'm more strict. But I can't get him to be strict so I have to compromise." She described more quickly punishing bad behavior and having a broader definition of what constituted unacceptable behavior.

White-collar-origin men also thought of themselves as strict or were identified as strict by their blue-collar-origin wives. Scott (white-collar-origin, currently a businessman) named himself as the stricter parent: "I have a hard line on things. I think she's more inclined to lower the bar more quickly whether it's eating healthy food or cleaning up something or asking for something nicely. I'm probably more likely to be patient and wait for them to do it the right way, just sort of like not giving in." Gabriella (blue-collar-origin) also named Dan (white-collar-origin) as the stricter partner: "Dan's a little more 'You need to do it the right way' and I'm a little more casual about things. I think that's as far as behavior goes. I think I have a higher tolerance for misbehavior than Dan does." Katie (blue-collar-origin, currently a social scientist in

the private sector) similarly identified her husband, Ryan (white-collar-origin, currently a lawyer), as the stricter parent: “Ryan sometimes feels like I am too permissive with them sometimes. Sometimes he feels like we need to be a little bit more strict.”

Blue-collar-origin women generally tolerated their white-collar-origin husband’s strictness until it was shrouded in authoritarian tones. Direct orders contradicted their desire to let their children grow in a laissez-faire manner, and, as such, they pushed back. Gabriella (blue-collar-origin) said that her only recurring fight with Dan (white-collar-origin) occurred upon occasions when he would exclaim to their seven-year-old son: “This is what we need you to do. We need you to do it.” Madison (blue-collar-origin) generally thought her husband, Evan (white-collar-origin) was an admirable father, but objected when he did not ask their four-year-old daughter if she had a minute and instead ordered her to “stop now and do what I say.” Lillian (blue-collar-origin) felt that her husband, Parker (white-collar-origin) was raised by a mother who said: “This is how you do things. Here’s the list.” She disliked that Parker had followed his mother’s authoritarian lead and would instruct their six-year-old daughter: “No, you need to do what I say because I say you do it. You don’t talk back to me like that.”

Blue-collar-origin men also had wives who managed their own time and were generally managerial parents. They, however, were less likely to complain that their partners made strict demands of their children. Partly, this may be because men feel less able to criticize their wives’ parenting styles than vice versa, and partly it may be because women’s communication styles and greater involvement in parenting communities teaches them to couch orders in less authoritarian language. Andrea (white-collar-origin, currently a stay-at-home parent) explained how she convinces her children to do as she wishes: “I’ll ask if they want to take their bath now or in 15 minutes, instead of making them take the bath at that exact time.” Offering their children

a choice – even within highly constrained options – may deter their partners’ criticisms that they are overly strict with their children. Regardless of who criticizes who, in general, it was white-collar-origin respondents who positioned themselves as stricter than their blue-collar-origin husbands and wives. Same-origin respondents were evenly divided about whether the mother or father was stricter, with several parents suggesting that they used strict standards to help their children succeed. Kent (same-origin, currently an engineer), for example, said: “Sometimes I’m a little too hard on my kids. I’m too critical. I just want them to do the right thing.”

### **EXPLANATIONS FOR MANAGERIAL AND LAISSEZ-FAIRE PARENTING**

Though they all currently resided in the middle-class and wanted what was best for their children, class origin and gender were nevertheless associated with how respondents wanted to raise their sons and daughters. White-collar-origin and same-origin women were self-managers in many elements of their lives, and, as the parent in charge of childrearing, they believed in implementing management strategies when raising children. White-collar-origin and same-origin men sometimes used managerial tactics when they were with their children, but mostly with respect to discipline. Blue-collar-origin men and women generally rejected the idea of such management. They did not manage other parts of their own lives, and did not think they needed to manage their children.

To some degree, these differences parallel respondents’ general dispositions, but they may also be due to their ideas of what types of experiences their children should have, what type of skills were important to develop, and who their children should become. Some blue-collar-origin men and women, but no white-collar-origin or same-origin men or women, said that they



believed that their children needed the opportunity to learn from mistakes and persevere through struggle. A managerial approach might prevent their children from making their own mistakes; a laissez-faire approach was much more suited toward this goal. Taking a hands-off approach therefore did cultivate skills, skills that were associated with their own classed upbringings.

Jason, (blue-collar-origin, currently a professor), wanted his fourteen-year-old daughter to attend college but not to do so without learning to overcome struggles, something that he felt was an important part of his background.

I think most people in my position feel this. We had to struggle for things. And when I look at my daughter I see she is not struggling for anything. And part of me is happy about that because she still is a smart kid and does better in school than I did at her age. But there's no uphill battle in her life. And that to me is such an important part of my self narrative. It might be false consciousness. But the fact that she doesn't have that kinda disturbs me. And it makes me think that when she does encounter a real hardship, if she ever encounters that in her life, she's not going to be ready for it. She's not going to understand it.

Upwardly mobile blue-collar-origin individuals often face “uphill battles” as they overcome obstacles associated with growing up with fewer resources. Their children's ability to take on uphill battles may help them identify with them and diminish any ambivalence they feel about their children growing up in privileged settings. Blue-collar-origin individuals also may be especially likely to see struggles as simply part of life, as their fewer childhood resources meant that they were likely to struggle more. A managerial parenting approach would not prepare their children to take on their own uphill battles and learn to struggle without giving up. A laissez-faire approach could engender these skills – the skills of independence and resilience, skills that blue-collar-origin respondents were more likely to consider important.

Other blue-collar-origin respondents also took a hands-off approach with the intent of teaching resiliency and the ability to learn from inevitable hardships. Lillian (blue-collar-origin,

currently a stay-at-home mother), believed in giving her children the freedom to grow because she wanted them to practice learning from their own mistakes. She revealed:

Part of me wants them to fail miserably. And to cover my eyes and say, “Ok, I know this is good for you.” I do think it’s important for them to fail because you learn so much from that. But to fail safely. Not to crash a car into a tree or whatever. Or not to take some psychedelic drug where their minds are out of it for the rest of their lives. But to do something they could learn from, like if they went for a job and it didn’t work out for them... because you can learn so much from what didn’t work in that situation.

Ben (blue-collar-origin, currently a sales manager) agreed: “I use the phrase ‘encourage failure.’ People say, ‘Why do you encourage failure?’ ‘Because I want them to know it’s part of life and it’s okay. You learn from it and maybe the next time you do better or you don’t.’” Blue-collar-origin respondents may have made a virtue of necessity as they equated struggle with worthwhile characteristics, but they nonetheless wanted to develop their children’s ability to learn from mistakes. This approach meant letting mistakes happen, which meant taking a more laissez-faire parenting approach.

Some blue-collar-origin parents may have also preferred a laissez-faire approach because they questioned whether academic achievement and prestigious occupations should be their primary goals for their children. Their own parents had not attended college or worked in exalted careers, and they had grown up around many admirable blue-collar people. The idea that their children would also become blue-collar people was not to be dismissed, as it was for some white-collar-origin parents, but to be at least ambivalently accepted.

Christie (blue-collar-origin, currently a part-time stay-at-home mother and part-time social worker), for example, said that parenting “Just came naturally. It wasn’t difficult.” She did not think deeply about her own parenting strategies, and she limited her children’s involvement in organized activities. Her parenting style aligned with her future goals: she did not use

organized activities and structured time at home to cultivate her children's skills because she was not trying to shape her children into academic achievers with prestigious jobs. Rather, she questioned whether a heavy focus on academic achievement was healthy: "My kids are self-motivated to make sure they have an A. Getting a B is not acceptable for them. That makes them almost too competitive." She also would be happy if her children learned a blue- or pink-collar trade: "I think that if they wanted to go vocational... if the economy goes too bad, I think that's a gift. Somebody that can cut hair. Somebody that can weld. I'm almost sad that none of them have taken an interest in automotive or something hands-on." Christie's goal was not to have her children become white-collar-professionals. As such, a managerial parenting style was out of place.

Others also did not rule out the possibility that they might be pleased if their children became blue-collar workers. Isabelle (blue-collar-origin, currently a therapist) explained: "If either one of them decided not to go to college, I might feel a little sad. But then I'm like, 'Oh, but if they wanted to be a farmer then that'd be pretty cool, or a carpenter.' And, so maybe not." Madison (blue-collar-origin), the mother of two young children, concurred: "If they chose to go to a community college, that's okay with me... They actually give you something you can hold in your hand and say, 'I know how to do this.'" For these blue-collar-origin respondents, strictly monitoring their children's behavior and using organized time to cultivate skills was less necessary, as they were not convinced that their children needed to become highly-educated professionals.

White-collar-origin parents, however, were less likely to equivocate about their children's educational future. Thus, Mia (white-collar-origin) firmly stated: "They will go to college. They will go to college," and Joel (white-collar-origin) called college "non-negotiable." Mary (white-

collar-origin) had thought of a bachelor's degree as a minimum: "I would like for them to go to college at least. I'd love for them to get an advanced degree." Nick (white-collar-origin), like others, had already tried to instill in his young sons the inevitability of college: "They already know it's expected that they'll go to college, get degrees." Same-origin respondents agreed. Abby (currently a doctor) said: "College is not an option. The option is what grad school. I want them all to be successful." When asked whether he cared if his children went to college, Brad (same-origin, currently a lawyer) also said that he thought college was necessary: "Yeah, I think they should... I would pay for it because I wouldn't want 'em to not go just because they didn't want to pay."

White-collar-origin and same-origin respondents then were firm about their educational aspirations and expectations for their children. They, however, often said that they had few career goals for their children – that whatever they wanted to do was fine. But getting a college-degree would likely lead them toward a white-collar professional track and away from a blue-collar track. Thus, many made statements like Alice's: "I don't have career goals for them, not at all really. I think they have to find their own way. I hope they'll go to college, but I don't have specific goals for them." Yet, there was no reason to hope for college if they equally hoped their children entered blue-collar careers. White-collar-origin respondents were raised in families and neighborhoods where college degrees were the norm. They did not hope that their children would then become unlike the people they knew. As such, a managerial parenting style made sense, as preventing mistakes and cultivating an appreciation for organized activities could help their children gain admission into college and become people like them.

#### **PARENTING WITH A PARTNER WITH DIFFERENT BELIEFS**

Husbands and wives from different classes then often had different ideas about parenting. How they navigated their differences was based upon the intersection of class origin, gender, and gender ideology.

Couples who had the most heated differences about parenting were those composed of white-collar-origin women and blue-collar-origin men. However, not all of these couples found their differences problematic; only in those couples where the woman believed that men and women should be equal parents did intense disputes arise around childrearing. These women did not recognize a laissez-faire style of parenting as active parenting, and therefore did not find their husbands to be equal parents. They then, like Leslie, spent years trying to change their husband's parenting style. This repeatedly failed, as their husbands did not change and felt insulted that their laissez-faire but involved parenting style was not appreciated.

White-collar-origin women and blue-collar-origin men fought less when the woman was less concerned with equal parenting, and therefore did not mind if her partner was less managerial or less involved. These women could then make the parenting choices independently, while their husbands were not asked to change their childrearing approach. Zoey (white-collar-origin) and Austin (blue-collar-origin), for example, did not report arguing about parenting. Because Zoey did not expect Austin to be an equal parent, there was little for them to argue about. Zoey took their daughter to a half dozen organized activities, talked to her about becoming a pediatrician, and helped her cultivate a love of learning. Austin completely deferred to Zoey on these issues, believing that because Zoey was more immersed in the parenting community she was better able to make childrearing decisions. When men deferred to women

and women did not expect men to be equal parents, differences in parenting beliefs were unlikely to be experienced as problematic as neither partner accused the other of being a bad parent.

Blue-collar-origin women and white-collar-origin men also tended to resolve their differences with relative ease. Their differences were not as great, as white-collar-origin men were less likely than white-collar-origin women to enter parenthood with a toolkit of managerial strategies or the desire to carefully structure their children's time. In addition to their smaller differences, when white-collar-origin men did want to implement a managerial style, they generally did not force it on their wives. Thus, even though Dan (white-collar-origin) preferred to actively cultivate their son's talents and be stricter about their son's behavior, he did not try to impose his views on his wife: "We respect each other's views. So we allow the other to approach it the way they want to. But when it's our turn we do it differently." In terms of parenting strategies, white-collar-origin men then tended to be more similar to their partners than white-collar-origin women were to theirs, and also less likely to feel that their position as a father, and not a mother, allowed them to impose their views. With only one exception, white-collar-origin men did not report initiating disagreements over parenting with their blue-collar-origin wives.

Blue-collar-origin women, for the most part, also respected their husbands' parenting styles. While they disliked it when their husbands became too authoritarian, they enjoyed that their husbands were involved. They may have been more likely to grow up in homes where men denounced childrearing (though they were still as likely as men in white-collar families to be involved [Pyke 1996; Shows and Gerstel 2009]), and were then pleased when their husbands were involved with their children. Thus, though Gina (blue-collar-origin) and her husband, Scott (white-collar-origin) had strong disagreements about several aspects of parenting, Gina still named Scott's fatherhood skills as the thing she most admired about him. She explained that he

was a good father because: “He comes home from work after a long day and he immediately plays on the floor with the kids. He doesn’t say, ‘I need a half an hour to watch the news’ like a lot of people.” Jill similarly named Eric as an admirable father because “he wants to be part of their lives.” Likewise, Isabelle (blue-collar-origin) appreciated Ian (white-collar-origin) because he regularly interacted with their children: “Even though he’s very busy, he comes home and is present for the two-and-a-half hours between when he gets home and bedtime.” They did not define good fatherhood as equal parenting or managerial parenting. With their husbands also deferring to them, they tended to resolve most of the differences they had with ease.

Finally, same-origin couples reported having only minor disagreements, often about exactly how much management should take place. Some couples agreed that they needed to set times for their children to do homework, but disagreed about if it was okay for them to take breaks. Some agreed that they wanted to strictly limit their children’s television time, but disagreed about exactly what the limit should be. Other couples shared a commitment to communicating with their children’s teachers, but disagreed about if a particular issue warranted a meeting. Overall, however, they got along well, partly because men still tended to defer to their wives, and partly because their general managerial habits were well aligned. Arguments about large philosophical issues regarding what children need were reserved for couples in which white-collar-origin women expected their husbands to be involved in equal parenting, and when they defined equal parenting as managerial parenting.

## CONCLUSION

Leslie's and Tom's parenting differences may have appeared to be personal to them, but they were, in fact, experienced by many different-origin couples. For the most part, those who shared Leslie's gender and class origin shared her parenting beliefs. They wanted to act as parent-managers. They entered parenthood imagining who their children would be and assumed they would have the ability to shape their children as they pleased. After their children were born, they continued to try to shape them through organizing their time and setting strict standards. Their goal was to get their children into college.

Leslie and other white-collar-origin mothers' ideas of parenting are often viewed as emblematic of college-educated parenting styles, but, in practice, they were only preferred by women who grew up in white-collar professional households. These beliefs were not shared by many men with white-collar-origins – those who were managerial concerning strictness but not in asking their children to organize their time. A managerial parenting philosophy also cannot be conflated with a college-educated woman's style, as college-educated women from blue-collar backgrounds were more likely to actively reject this approach. Men from blue-collar-origin backgrounds, even though they raised children with white-collar-origin women, also did not share their beliefs. White-collar-origin women were then largely alone in the extent that they wanted to manage their children's lives.

Such differences reflect their different goals for their children. Blue-collar-origin respondents were more likely to feel ambivalence about contributing to their children's class reproduction. Rejecting the idea that they needed to carefully cultivate their children's academic and extra-curricular skills may have been a way to reject the idea that their children needed to enter a class that they were not always a part of. Moreover, a more *laissez-faire* approach could encourage their children to identify with and learn from some of the struggles of their class past,



a past that they did not want to reject. Their laissez-faire style, therefore, should not be viewed as fully discarding the idea that they needed to cultivate their children's skills, but as encouraging them to develop skills that are associated with their own past.

These differences had consequences for some couples' satisfaction, which may be associated with the likelihood of later divorce. In general, husbands' and wives' discrepant parenting styles can raise their risk of divorce (Block, Block, and Morrison 1981), and in this study, two of the women who were the least satisfied with their husband's parenting styles did consider terminating their marriages due, in part, to their parenting differences. Divorce has consequences for children as well as couples; children of divorce have lower odds of class reproduction than those in two-parent families (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994).

Class reproduction could also be furthered because schools reward managerial parenting. Parents' management of their children's time is associated with their children's greater academic achievement (Bodovski and Farkas 2008; Cheadle and Amato 2010; Roksa and Potter 2011). However, it is not clear if having two parent-managers is necessary for reaping the benefits of this association, or if one parent, especially if the parent is the mother, will suffice. What is clear, however, is that taking the person out of the class did not take the class out of the person, and years of married life did not lead to the assimilation of parenting beliefs.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **FEELING RULES**

Lori (white-collar-origin) remembered what shocked her the most about the first week she spent with Jason's (blue-collar-origin) family. Shortly after meeting his parents, they began to loudly argue in front of her. She wasn't sure what the fight was about, but she knew that neither of Jason's parents was backing down, and soon Jason's mother was threatening to forgo sex with his father. Lori cowered in the corner as Jason's parents yelled, feeling like her family dog who now cowered as she and her husband fought. She had not seen such publicly displayed emotions before, especially not a display of such unpleasant emotions that were expressed so intensely. Jason, however, felt that his parents' emotional exchange was quite normal. He said that his family commonly expressed what he called "raw emotions" – those that had not yet been mulled over and that were not couched in polite language or soft tones. Emotions were simply expressed as they were felt, and not always in a nice or calm way. In Jason's family, emotions appeared to be relatively unmanaged.

Jason, in turn, found Lori's family's way of dealing with emotions to be surprising. Jason observed that Lori's family had a ritual he named the "stomp off." The stomp off occurred in a sequenced manner: after they had considered their feelings, one family member would quickly express their dissatisfaction with the perceived offender, the offender would reply, and then the accuser would stomp out of the room. The stomp off ensured that powerful and unpleasant emotions would be kept mostly out of the public sphere; displaying raw emotions was viewed as crass and unseemly in Lori's patrician family. In Lori's family, emotions were to appear to be

carefully managed. They were to be processed before displayed and strong emotions were to be mostly hidden.

The ritualized family interactions that Jason and Lori's families practiced – the expression of “raw emotions” and the “stomp off” – taught each partner different “feeling rules.” Feeling rules, according to Hochschild (1983), are social guidelines about what individuals should feel and how they should express their feelings in a given situation. Individuals often try to align their own feelings with what their feeling rules indicate they *should* be feeling, therefore teaching themselves to actually feel different things. Thus, Jason watched his parents and learned that powerful feelings should be felt and expressed. Lori, on the other hand, observed her family rituals and learned that intense emotions should be hidden and not felt. They learned not only to display their feelings in different ways but also to have different feelings.

I refer to Jason's feeling rules as *laissez-faire* and Lori's as *managed*. This is not to imply that a *laissez-faire* set of feeling rules is less socially regulated or that only Lori had to manage her emotions to align with feeling rules. Rather, I call Jason's feeling rules *laissez-faire* because, while they are learned, they emphasize the *appearance* of freedom from regulation. Emotions appear more unregulated as they are expressed immediately after being felt and as a broader and more intense set of emotions are felt and displayed. The style, in short, appears to be unmanaged because it calls for the display of “raw emotions” – those not carefully sifted through, sanitized, or intellectualized. Likewise, I call Lori's emotional style “*managed*” not because it requires more work to align her emotions with her feeling rules, but because it gives the appearance of being more controlled. *Managed* feeling rules call for a delay in emotional reactions, the sanitization of intense and disagreeable feelings, and the intellectualization of emotions. These feeling rules give the *appearance* of being more managed.

This chapter shows that Lori and Jason did not follow unique feeling rules, but ones that reflected the feeling rules of their class. It shows that blue-collar-origin respondents like Jason felt they grew up with feeling rules that emphasized a laissez-faire emotional style, while white-collar-origin respondents like Lori felt they internalized managed feeling rules. The chapter also evinces that, compared to ideas about money, housework, time, paid work, play, and parenting, respondents felt their emotional sensibilities were somewhat malleable. However, though respondents tried to change, many still stayed the same. It was difficult to completely take the class out of the person after taking the person out of the class.

Before proceeding, a note about the methodology is important to consider. Unlike most of the arguments in earlier chapters, the arguments in this chapter did not stem from answers to questions about the topic at hand. In other words, the interview protocol did not include any direct questions about emotions. Rather, feeling rules came up in response to questions about how the respondents were different from their spouse and how their parents were different from their in-laws. That patterns were as strong as those in other chapters despite no direct questions on the topic suggests the salience of emotional differences to different-origin couples and the importance of them in their relationships. Same-origin couples, on the other hand, rarely brought up emotions in their interviews. As such, their experiences are not documented in this chapter.

#### **HOW BLUE-COLLAR AND WHITE-COLLAR PARTNERS REMEMBER THE FEELING RULES OF THEIR CHILDHOOD CLASS**

Feelings are often experienced as personal and individual, but are, in fact, socially patterned (Kemper 1978). On the occasions when feelings are thought to be socially organized, it is popularly assumed that gender divides people into relatively emotional and unemotional camps

(Cancian 1987). However, research that examines self-reports of feelings largely finds that the popular conception is mistaken as gender is not strongly associated with different feeling rules (Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin 1999; Simon and Nath 2004). Rather, feelings are often aligned with more generic power differences, one of which is a difference in social class (Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin 1999).

Those from different classes often learn different feeling rules. White-collar parents tend to repeatedly ask their children to align their feelings with those of a managed emotional style (Kohn 1969; Walkerdine, Lucey, and Melody 2001). Rather than punishing their children because of their deviant actions, they punish their children for their deviant emotions. This teaches children that they need to internally and externally regulate their feelings to appear thoughtful and kind (Kohn 1969; Walkerdine, Lucey, and Melody 2001). They also ask their children to turn their emotional reactions into rational arguments, thereby appearing calm and even-tempered (Walkerdine, Lucey, and Melody 2001). Such strategies are important for white-collar parents, as they prepare children for white-collar jobs. Professional white-collar jobs tend to require a restricted range of emotional displays and the ability to remain calm on the job (Wingfield 2010). Learning early on to regulate their emotions in this style can help children born into white-collar families succeed in professional white-collar careers.

Blue-collar parents, on the other hand, tend to teach their children to use a more *laissez-faire* style when expressing their emotions. In traditional blue-collar jobs, a managed emotional style is less important as workers are less likely to need to turn a feeling into a logical argument in order to get ahead at work. Traditionally, they also worked in jobs in which their performance was not judged upon the basis of their interaction with customers or superiors (Kohn 1969). A more restrictive emotional style was then unnecessary for their career success. Furthermore,

blue-collar communities tend to find direct and unmediated emotional displays to be a sign of authenticity and a signal of integrity (Williams 2010). An emotional style that focuses on slow and processed emotional reactions might lead others to question their motives and find them suspect. Fitting into blue-collar communities and reaping the social capital they provide may then mean learning to follow more laissez-faire feeling rules.

Aligned with this literature, blue- and white-collar-origin respondents in this study described their parents as abiding by different feeling rules. Those from blue-collar backgrounds tended to describe their parents as expressing emotions as they felt them and expressing a broad range of emotions, while those from white-collar backgrounds tended to describe their parents as expressing a narrower range of emotions and processing them before publicizing them. In other words, those from blue-collar backgrounds remembered that their parents expressed their emotions in a laissez-faire manner, while those from white-collar backgrounds recalled that their parents used a managed emotional style.

Such differences were repeatedly raised when respondents answered open-ended questions about the difference between their parents and their in-laws. Differences fell along lines of class origin and did not intersect with gender. In other words, respondents tended not to identify differences between their mothers' and fathers' feeling rules, but instead pinpointed large differences between their mother and mother-in-laws' and father and father-in-laws' feeling rules. In terms of differences between his mother and mother-in-law, Mike (white-collar-origin), for example, identified his mother as abiding by a managed emotional style and his mother-in-law as following a more laissez-faire style: "My mom is more reserved. Again, less outward emotion. Her mom is the opposite. Her mom is insanely running around, hugging people. Just kind of crazy. Very different there." Andrea (white-collar-origin) believed that her

blue-collar mother-in-law expressed a broader range of emotions than her own mother: “Mine is a little more unemotional, a little more even, and his is very up and down.” Tom (blue-collar-origin) noticed the same pattern: “My mom was always much more open with her feelings than my mother-in-law is. My mother-in-law is more guarded.”

Fathers and father-in-laws were also not described in a uniform way that cohered around gender, but were instead portrayed in ways that cohered around class. Again, white-collar fathers were typically described as managing their emotions while blue-collar father were depicted as expressing them in a more laissez-faire style. Brandon (white-collar-origin) described the difference he noticed in how his father and father-in-law displayed their feelings:

Her dad is wide open emotionally. A wonderful person who just wants you to like him. Very considerate of other people... He’s just a really nice guy. Very emotional, cries at various things. Cried at my mom’s funeral. Cries if he talks about his daughters and his grandson. He’ll start to get teary. My father believes showing emotion is a sin. He’s just a very closed person.

Isaac (blue-collar-origin) put this difference simply: “Her father was more into the intellectual component. My father was more into the emotional.” Chelsey (white-collar-origin) also noticed that one father was more emotionally expressive than the other. She focused on just one emotion, anger, and noticed the difference in their fathers’ likelihood of expressing it: “His dad had a bad temper and [my husband] got into a physical fight with his dad at one point. I mean [my father and father-in-law] are completely different in every way. My dad is calm, quiet, patient, never raises his voice, never loses his temper.”

There was not only a divide in the emotions that were expressed, but in the likelihood that respondents discussed personal and emotional topics with their families. Blue-collar-origin respondents were more likely to describe growing up with feeling rules that allowed them to discuss emotional topics with their parents. Madison (blue-collar-origin), for example, said that

she grew up discussing everything with her parents, but that her in-laws put restrictions on emotional topics: “They don’t talk about love or money or relationships and sex, and that is a big problem for me now.” She emphasized her point by recalling two incidents when her husband was a teenager. Her father- and mother-in-law, a doctor and a nurse, left a pamphlet about HIV on her husband’s bed rather than discussing the emotional topic of sex with him. Additionally, when their teenage daughter ran away from home with her boyfriend, Madison asked her in-laws if their daughter loved her boyfriend. Their response was that they did not know, and would not dare ask their daughter such an intimate and emotional question. For many respondents, this norm extended into less severe circumstances. When asked about their parents’ first impressions of their spouses, few white-collar-origin respondents were able to answer the question as they did not discuss personal matters with their parents. Most blue-collar-origin respondents, in comparison, relayed their parents’ reactions.

The taboo put on emotional and personal topics by respondents’ white-collar families was present in more humorous topics as well. Joel (white-collar-origin), a former fraternity member in his mid-thirties, also depicted his white-collar-origin family as less likely to talk about personal and emotional topics: “My parents don’t talk about anything personal, and [my in-laws] love to get together and gossip. Her dad would tell her brother ‘I can’t get it up anymore, I gotta get Viagra.’ those things that would make you blush that you couldn’t believe people were talking about, let alone your parents or in-laws.” Joel was shocked by his in-laws’ conversation. In white-collar families at the time when Joel was growing up, emotional parent-child conversations were more off-limits.

Those from white-collar and blue-collar backgrounds then remembered growing up with different feeling rules. White-collar-origin spouses felt their parents’ feeling rules called for a



managed emotional style, while blue-collar-origin spouses felt their parents' feeling rules called for a laissez-faire emotional style. The next section shows that, to a certain degree, respondents' mirrored the emotional styles of their parents. After countless emotional exchanges in years of marriage, a class divide still existed in respondents' default reactions in how to express their emotions.

### **BRINGING THEIR EMOTIONAL CULTURES WITH THEM: THE DURABILITY OF CHILDHOOD FEELING RULES AND HOW THEY PLAY OUT IN MARRIAGE**

The divide respondents observed between their parents and in-laws was the same one that felt they experienced in their marriages. Blue-collar-origin respondents commonly depicted themselves as more likely to display their emotions and to do so before mulling over them, while white-collar-origin respondents were more likely to say that they were less emotional and more rational. This class divide was not moderated by gender; though no questions asked about emotional displays, nine white-collar-origin women and ten white-collar-origin men were named as less likely than their partner to feel and display strong emotions. In contrast, only two blue-collar-origin partners, both men, were named as the more logical spouse. These differences existed despite that those white white-collar-origins initially felt attracted to their partners because of their more laissez-faire emotional style.

Respondents tended to feel that their own emotional reactions mirrored their parents' reactions more than their spouses' reactions. Elliott, the son of a tool and die worker and currently a stay-at-home father, noted that he tends to react emotionally to events, while his wife, Alice (white-collar-origin, currently a lawyer), responds to events analytically:

If we have an argument, I'm very much emotional. And she has a very analytical mind and she always wins the argument because she can analyze the situation and

bring it down to bare bones, where I'm purely emotional... It's hard for me to zone in on the analytical side. "Well, this is what I feel." "Well, why do you feel that way?" "I don't know; I just feel this way."

Elliott described himself as "purely emotional" and his wife as "analytical" and less emotional. Elliott observed that this pattern paralleled the way they grew up: "Her mom can be emotional, too, but not to the same degree as my family. I mean there's some analytical there, too... Alice gets very frustrated with my mom because you can't have a disagreement with my mom because she's emotional – the analytical side never works." Elliott then mirrored the more laissez-faire feeling rules of his mother, while Alice mirrored the more managed feeling rules of her mother.

Mike (white-collar-origin, currently a small business owner) grew up with parents who were more likely to restrain their emotions than display them, an emotional style that he deeply disliked. Yet even though he wanted to be able to express more emotions, after twenty-five years of marriage he still found it difficult. His wife, Christie (blue-collar-origin), called their emotional styles the biggest difference between them: "How are we most different? Probably in the way that we express feelings and deal with feelings. And that's probably rooted in our families... He's still learning, still trying." Mike felt he internalized a more managed emotional style, one that he was unable to escape despite spending more than half of his life married to a woman with a more laissez-faire emotional style.

Gordon, son of an accountant and currently a teacher, also grew up with different feeling rules than those of his wife, Rachel, and her family. He recounted his early impressions of his in-laws: "Her whole family is like her in that they all wear their emotions on their sleeve and they're all pretty fiery people." Gordon recounted a particular instance that surprised him:

Her family's really intense, too, and I am not sure if she sees it. I remember one of the first Christmases over there, her sister and she got into a huge shouting match with their grandmother... And people were leaving the house. It was like a TV movie, you know?

Rachel's family's feeling rules were foreign enough to Gordon that he could not relate them to any of his real life circumstances, and instead needed to pull up a media image to make sense of the event.

Despite that Rachel and Gordon lived with each other for one and a half times as long as they lived with their parents, these differences in feeling rules still mirrored those of their parents rather than those of each other. Gordon explained that Rachel "wears her emotions on her sleeve" and that he could "walk in the house and know exactly the second I step in if there's something wrong." He felt that the reverse was not true, however. Rachel could not easily read his emotions because he did not display them as obviously. Gordon indicated that "growing up with a stoic father who never showed emotion" meant that it remained difficult for him to feel emotions intensely or express them outwardly.

Like many others, Anneka (white-collar-origin, currently a graduate student) also described the biggest difference between her and her husband, William (blue-collar-origin, currently a contractor), as their emotional styles. She explained: "When something upsets him, he reacts very emotionally... My knee jerk reaction to things is that I shut up. I go underground, you know, back off, think about the situation and then I'll come back and react to it." In other words, Anneka felt she usually used a managerial emotional style while her husband, William, often took a more laissez-faire approach. These differences were not unique to a couple, but were representative of broader differences that cohered around class origin despite countless emotional encounters with their spouse.

### ***Anger, Conflict, and Affection***

Some of respondents' broad emotional differences played out in terms of specific emotional expressions. Though no questions were asked about emotions, about a third of couples mentioned a specific emotional difference that they had: blue-collar-origin respondents were more comfortable expressing anger and engaging in conflict, while white-collar-origin respondents were more likely to shy away from anger and conflict. This pattern was not moderated by gender, as blue-collar-origin men *and* women were perceived to have shorter tempers, while white-collar-origin men and women were thought to be more even tempered. This pattern suggests that others' findings that lower status individuals are more likely than higher status individuals to feel anger may be extended (Conway, DiFazio, and Mayman 1999; Ross and Van Willigen 1996; Stets and Tsushima 2001): children who grow up in lower class positions may be more likely than those who grew up in higher class positions to express anger even after they leave their childhood class position behind and join a higher class.

For example, Sidney (blue-collar-origin), a bubbly and outgoing stay-at-home mother, reflected that her husband, Joel (white-collar-origin) was less likely to show anger: "He's so level headed, he barely gets upset. It's mostly me." She continued, illustrating their difference:

I just get real quick to anger; I don't have a lot of patience. Like today I couldn't find the remote control and I knew my [six-year-old] son was the last person to have it, so I got furious. I was so angry because I'd made lunch and wanted to sit down and just eat and watch a show and to me it was a huge deal. Joel came downstairs and asked, "What's the big deal?" I was just like, "He never should have had it though!"

Others described similar differences. Chelsey (white-collar-origin) felt her husband, Nathan (blue-collar-origin), was much more likely to show his anger and to do so before processing it: "He has a very bad temper. He's very different than my family. My dad never raises his voice. Ever. Nathan gets very angry... He'll yell and swear. I mean that's a big difference too."

Bethany (white-collar-origin) mentioned the same difference, though it did not bother her as

much: “I am very, very calm and easygoing. And he definitely has more of a temper. Not in a bad way, but he has more ups and downs and I am definitely very stable.”

While they were more likely to rise to anger quickly – a disposition aligned with *laissez-faire* feeling rules that allow for stronger emotions that are more immediately expressed – blue-collar-origin partners also tended to be the spouse who initiated conflict resolution. Their more emotional childhood culture may have prepared them for more heated disagreements as well as for finding resolutions to these disagreements. White-collar-origin individuals were also not as privy to watching others argue, and did not feel as comfortable with conflict or conflict resolution. White-collar-origin partners were more likely to avoid conflict. Zoey (white-collar, currently a stay-at-home mother) put it plainly, “I’m an avoider, a conflict avoider.” Jason (blue-collar, currently a professor) stated, “She avoids conflict a bit more than I do.” Gordon (white-collar, currently a teacher) concurred, “I want to really avoid confrontation” but then added:

It just wasn’t acceptable to her, and understandably, that I didn’t want to deal with anything. And I learned that you have to get things worked out. It’s almost like I didn’t have to learn that because she demanded that. We used to laugh that people used to say, “Never let the sun go down on your arguments.” Pft, there wasn’t—it was like it’s got to be done now. I mean they never festered. They never go on. We have a problem, a conflict, it’s dealt with until it’s no longer a problem. It’s not, “We’ll talk about it later” and it comes up again later kind of thing. So it’s not like I had to learn that. It was forced upon me.

Gordon’s wife Rachel was more comfortable with conflict resolution, and therefore took it upon herself to initiate conflict resolution and to mandate that Gordon participated. Isabelle (blue-collar-origin) also had to teach Ian (white-collar-origin) that conflict did not need to be avoided at all costs; they could disagree without the relationship falling apart:

He would be very afraid of disappointing me or having opinions. If he’s fairly neutral about something like, “Oh, why would I have an opinion?” And I’m like, “I want you to have an opinion!” So learning to maybe express his feelings more. To just to be able to say, “I don’t like that,” or, “I’m upset about this,” or, “I’m

nervous” without it feeling like he was going to ruin me or something would be bad.

In addition to initiating conflict and conflict resolution, blue-collar-origin respondents were also more likely to work on adding public displays of affection to their relationships. Blue-collar-origin respondents were more acclimated to expressing emotions in public, and wanted to express their love publicly as well. This took effort on their part, as their partners’ feeling rules suggested that affection should be expressed in private more than in public. George (blue-collar-origin, currently a scientist), for example, repeatedly tried to initiate more public displays of affection. He recounted that it took several years for his wife, Norah, to feel comfortable with such displays: “We didn’t have public displays of affection and things like that. And that was something that I was fond of... Again, we talked about it often enough and are affectionate enough in private but it was nice when we could hug and kiss and hold hands [in public].” Anneka (white-collar-origin) also said that it was her blue-collar-origin husband, William, a man with a body shaped by years in the military, who initiated public displays of affection: “I am a lot more probably openly affectionate than I would have been otherwise, because William is really openly affectionate and he’s just not embarrassed at all about just saying ‘I love you’ or holding hands or dancing. He’s not funny about any of that.” Jenny, a quiet daughter of an electrician, confessed that she also wanted more public romance: “Sometimes I wish we could be more openly affectionate.”

Blue-collar-origin partners then often took charge of some of the emotional aspects of their marriage, often both initiating conflict and conflict resolution, as well as working to institute a norm of public displays of affection. The feeling rules of their past were often ones that normalized the display of anger, conflict, love, and the discussion of emotional topics; such feelings and discussions of feelings were then not threatening or uncomfortable to them but

normal parts of relationships. Their feeling rules, in other words, prepared them to be the emotional leader in these aspects of the relationship, as they expressed emotions more freely and asked that their partner do the same. Those from white-collar backgrounds were less comfortable with the expression of emotions, and were more likely to avoid highly charged emotional situations.

### CHANGE

Marriage tends to be a site where feelings are confessed, processed, and mulled over. Respondents from different class backgrounds tended to want emotionally intimate relationships, but carried different ways of expressing their feelings with them to their marriage. Yet, unlike other sensibilities, respondents felt open to considering their partners' ways of expression. More than any other sensibility, their perceptions of their emotional sensibilities changed while they also stayed the same.

Such change may reflect societal changes in emotional norms. Since the turn of the century, expressing emotions loudly, quickly, and intensely has been viewed as a signal of low culture. Expressing emotions in a calmer, more managed way, by contrast, has been viewed as a marker of being part of high culture. It meant being refined, civilized, and intelligent (Pavletich 1998).

Such a dichotomy remains, but its boundaries have become more blurred. The rise of the vocation of therapy has meant that a "therapeutic ethos" has pervaded society, so that even those who have never attended a therapy session are guided by the norms of this practice (Illouz 2008). In other words, in the last five decades, ordinary people have learned that they should be in touch

with their emotions, think about them, and express them. Nowhere has this change been more evident than in marriage (Cherlin 2004; Illouz 2008). When respondents were growing up, middle-class husbands' and wives' were expected to be companions, but not necessarily to be the spouses' emotional confidant. Today, marriage has become the site par excellence for emotional exchanges. Spouses are expected to express their feelings to each other. The expectation is so strong that failing to do so marks marriages as unhealthy and in danger of dissolution (Cherlin 2004).

As noted in Chapter 2, white-collar-origin partners were then in the unusual position of growing up with sensibilities that lost some of their value. They grew up with, and, to some degree, internalized feeling rules that prioritized a managerial emotional style. This style did not allow them to adequately meet the norms of emotional expression, and some then wanted to change. At the same time, the connection between emotional calm and being civilized did not disappear, and may have even intensified for those joining the middle-class. Thus, respondents from both classes were in positions that encouraged them to reflect upon their emotional expressions and consider changing them.

The above responses hinted at change. George's wife eventually became more willing to engage in public displays of affection, and Aneka learned to say "I love you" in public. Gordon learned to engage in more emotional conflict, and Ian figured out how to express dissatisfaction without fear. Three more widely cited changes also occurred. First, some tried to learn from their partners to change the amount they drew upon their emotions in making decisions. Second, white-collar-origin respondents, especially women, learned to express more disagreeable feelings. And third, respondents experienced general shifts in their emotional style.



Emotions can be used to inform decisions, or they can be bracketed as irrelevant. When differences in the use of emotions were raised, it was blue-collar-origin partners who wanted to consider them in making decisions while white-collar-origin respondents tended to ignore them. Some white-collar-origin respondents learned, however, to consider their emotions in making decisions. Ben, the outgoing son of an electrical line man and currently a manager, had some success in convincing his wife, Mary, that emotions were useful in making decisions. He repeatedly mentioned that Mary had a 4.0 GPA and graduated at the top of her law school class, but that the skills that led her to do well in school led her astray in making daily decisions. Book learning and endless research did not prepare her to make decisions; his gut served as a more able compass. Several times he remarked that Mary believed he lived a “charmed life.” He explained what living a charmed life meant:

Good things happen. For instance we were going to buy a new car and I looked online and I did my diligence and I found a car that I thought, “Wow, that’s a good deal for that price. It seems like it’s got a good background.” And we went. She’s not like that. She would have to study a bazillion [different cars] and then after she’s got all of this paper, she’ll say, “How do we make the decision?” There’s not a book that gives you an answer to that. You’ve just got to go with your gut. So she says, “You have a really good gut!”

Ben used his “gut,” or his learned emotional reactions, as a source of knowledge. Mary, the daughter of a professor, had not been taught that emotions can be a source of information or a way to help her make decisions. Her family culture and class culture told her that she needed to make decisions through endless research and objective decisions. Though she did not adapt this style herself, Mary gained a new respect for using her gut to make decisions – she learned that it could lead to a “charmed life.” Like Mary, Ian, son of a lawyer and currently a professor, learned to consider emotions as providing useful information: “I think she has helped me in one way by modeling somebody who very extremely makes most of her decisions from her gut, from her

intuition. Well, not very extremely, but somewhat extremely compared to what I am used to.”

Some white-collar-origin respondents then developed a new respect for integrating emotions into decision making.

Some blue-collar-origin respondents also learned to respect the idea of using less emotion in decision making. Jill (blue-collar-origin, currently a politician) explained what her white-collar-origin husband, Eric, taught her:

[He’s taught me] how to look at things from a different perspective and sit back and not react so quickly. He’ll pull me back before I want to make a rash decision on something, an emotional decision. He’ll say, “Let’s look at this for a minute first.” I don’t always like to hear his ideas but he offers them and I hear them. He does help me sit back and analyze the situation a little better.

Danielle, who grew up in a blue-collar-family, also felt she learned to make decisions more slowly and without as much emotion. She relayed what she learned from her husband: “To be more patient. Have a little slower burner, not as a high of a flame; the idea of you can turn the burner on really high, you can cook it really fast, but you can singe. If you have a lower burner it can take longer but you probably do a better job. So I think I’ve learned not to jump in as quickly.” Blue-collar-origin respondents may have been particularly open to hearing that they should remove some of their emotions from their decision making as white-collar milieus tend to reward calm and reasoned arguments over emotional ones (Lareau and Calarco 2012; Wingfield 2010). When it came to using emotions in decision making, spouses were willing to consider that their partners’ sensibilities should be appreciated.

Another change in emotional styles occurred – that of learning to express more disagreeable feelings. This was a change that about half of white-collar-origin women, compared to two white-collar-origin men, one blue-collar-origin woman, and no blue-collar-origin man said that they made. White-collar-origin women often grow up learning that they are not

supposed to express disagreeable feelings, but to instead appear easy-going and deferential in public (Brown 2003; Walkerdine, Lucey, and Melody 2001). Men of all classes are not as often taught that disagreeable feelings should not be expressed. In fact, their anger and displeasure can be viewed as a sign of confidence and competence (Miller 1983). Men with blue-collar-origins are particularly unlikely to keep their disagreeable feelings quiet, as expressing feelings, even negative feelings, is more aligned with blue-collar feeling rules (Williams 2010). These differences in feeling rules position blue-collar-origin men as likely to encourage their white-collar-origin wives to relinquish their idea that they must always be agreeable.

White-collar-origin women tended to be grateful to their husbands for helping them learn to express disagreeable feelings. They often found such an ability empowering, as their former focus on expressing only agreeable feelings led them to feel disempowered. Mia (white-collar-origin, currently a stay-at-home mother), for example, was pleased that she learned from her husband, Kevin (blue-collar-origin, currently a graduate student) to express disagreeable feelings. She explained: “Kevin doesn’t mind other people being uncomfortable. That’s not a problem for him. He’ll tell it like it is and I get that from Kevin now.” Mia offered an example of how she no longer restrains her emotions when they are not pleasant. She said that when they ask if her son can spend the night with one of his friends whom she dislikes, she now says firmly: “Nope, that’s just not something we’re going to do at this time.” If pushed, she directly explains, “I don’t like the way that you run your household.” She attributes her new expression of disagreeable feelings to her husband, Kevin: “I would have never done that before Kevin. No, I would have been like, ‘Oh, we’re busy every week for the rest of our lives.’ Now I would just lay it on the line.” Mia used to express only agreeable feelings, but feels that she learned from her husband to also express disagreeable ones.

Alice (white-collar-origin) felt she also learned from her husband that she did not need to manage and repress her disagreeable emotions to the extent that she had in the past. She explained that her ability to express not-nice feelings came not from her training as a lawyer, but from her blue-collar-origin husband, Elliott: "I've learned a lot about standing up for myself a little bit more... I'm just used to letting things slide by me and not make waves. And I'm not saying to randomly make waves. I think I'm still kind of a peacekeeper at heart; I don't really love the conflict or anything. But he's allowed me to know that you can stand up for something without being obnoxious." Similarly, Andrea (white-collar-origin) also felt that she defaults to an agreeable position, but that her husband, Adam (blue-collar-origin) helped her learn to also express disagreeable opinions and emotions: "I'm still pretty relaxed about things. I used to want everyone else to get along and now I'm not afraid to have a discussion with a friend. When I was younger I would have just clammed up and not said anything." Thus, though white-collar-origin women still preferred to express agreeable feelings, they learned from their blue-collar-origin husbands that they did not need to restrain them as much.

Finally, respondents from both classes changed their more general emotional styles – using a more or less managed emotional style. Men and women from each class were equally likely to say that they changed their emotional dispositions. William, son of a sawmill repairman and currently a contractor, made a rather large change in his emotional reactions. He admired his wife's emotional style – a less emotional style – and wanted to emulate it:

She doesn't run fully on emotion. And that's commendable. It's changed the way that I think about things and the way that I react to statements... I'm an emotional person. I could get angry. But not so much anymore. I used to wear my, you know, I used to let my emotions get me. And couldn't control them very well... Now I want to make sure before I run my mouth off about it that I've thought it through long enough to say, "1) Is it worth saying? And 2) Am I even making a good argument here?" So usually if I think about it for longer than ten minutes, I

come to the realization that I should just really go on about my business because I shouldn't have been upset about it to begin with.

William felt he used to have a laissez-faire emotional style – he felt emotions deeply and expressed them immediately. He felt that he adapted to more managed feeling rules, however, as he learned to think about his emotions before verbalizing them. He attributed this change to living with his white-collar-origin wife, Anneka: “It’s very hard being married to someone who studies and reads as much as she does. Because if you don’t go into something with facts, then you’re usually going to end up wrong. So I have tended over the years to listen a little bit more or to maybe hesitate a little bit longer before I go to mouthing off.” William, in other words, began to abide by more managed feeling rules. He mulled over his emotions before expressing them.

Just as William observed and strived to follow his wife’s feeling rules, so too did Elliott. He explained: “I’m not nearly as emotional with stuff. I have gotten a little bit more analytical, like when I go back and say, “Okay, step back, take a breath and try to figure it out.” He still felt more emotional than his wife, Alice, and still had trouble articulating *why* he feels the way he does, but he felt also has developed the ability to take a more removed stance.

Lori (white-collar-origin) also thoroughly adapted to her husband’s feeling rules. She explained that her new emotional style was difficult to internalize but the change has been empowering and worthwhile. She said: “We’re not necessarily emotionally honest where I’m from. So I had to learn to, instead of just being angry and resentful, I needed to learn to just ask for the things I need and to make it explicit. And so I did. It just took me a long time to get there.” She attributed these changes to her husband, Jason, who did not stomp-off, as her family did, but expressed his raw emotions as they argued: “I was always shocked that we would have these arguments where I thought he was clearly in the wrong and he would defend himself. He

would make me fight. And it was really hard for me to learn how to argue like that. But I did... I'm much more emotionally honest... I fight. I really will argue and get down in the mud." Lori also attributed the ability to talk about more emotional topics to her marriage to Jason, a new norm that she greatly enjoyed: "We just talk all the time. We talk constantly. And there's nothing we don't talk about. So to me that's just wonderful. I was not raised in a house where people did that."

Thus, unlike ideas of money, housework, time, paid work, leisure, or parenting, many respondents felt that they appreciated their partners' emotional style and learned from it. Such appreciation and change likely resulted from societal changes in emotional norms that simultaneously position emotional expressivity as valued while also propping up rationality as a sign of being civilized and refined (Illouz 2008; Pavletich 1998). These dual norms allowed spouses to appreciate their partners' emotional style and try to change their own.

However, while respondents felt their emotional styles changed, they still often felt they had default positions that their attempts to change did not reset. Alice and Andrea, for example, learned to express disagreeable feelings but still preferred to be agreeable. William learned to think about his emotions before reacting, but his wife, Anneka, still called this difference the biggest one between them. Elliott became more analytical, but was still not as analytical as his wife. Additionally, implied in that William, Elliott, and Lori changed their emotional styles to be more in line with their partners' styles was that their partners' emotional styles adjusted less. Change then coincided with stability, and the change that did take place did not result in spouses' emotional dispositions being indistinguishable.

## CONCLUSION

Emotions seem personal and marital conflicts seem unique. However, the sum of respondents' answers indicated that their emotions were not shaped only by individual factors. Rather, respondents who grew up with blue-collar parents felt they internalized feeling rules that called for feeling and expressing emotions intensely and quickly. Those with white-collar parents, in contrast, felt that the internalized feeling rules that called for feeling and expressing emotions calmly and slowly. More than any other sensibility, respondents learned to appreciate their partner's different feeling rules and to even try to emulate them. Most, however, defaulted to their own styles while still appreciating the other's.

Feeling rules are important to couples not only because discrepant feeling rules may lead to miscommunications, but because feeling rules matter for class reproduction. Schools and professional workplaces often reward those who follow managed feeling rules. Students and workers are expected to discuss their differences calmly, to process their emotions before expressing them, and to use rational arguments more than emotions (Lareau and Calarco 2012; Wingfield 2010). These standards favor those who have managed feeling rules – those that are often from white-collar backgrounds.

That respondents are white may have made such rules less obvious to them. Blacks, especially black men, are often aware that a laissez-faire emotional style will lead them to be judged. In workplaces, they tend to temper their anger in order to not be stereotyped as an angry or scary black man (Wingfield 2010). Whites from blue-collar backgrounds may be less aware of these norms as they may be sanctioned less for breaking them. However, enough displays of “raw emotion” may have less obvious but still real consequences for upwardly mobile whites as they engage in the workplace or try to advocate for their child in school. Thus, even though those

from white-collar backgrounds may have found the norms of emotional expression hard to achieve in the places where they are valued most – in marriage – their emotional style, if it extends to other spheres, may help them reap more rewards. Though respondents from each class valued their partners' emotional styles, these styles are not equally rewarded in institutions that matter for class reproduction.



## CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSION

Soon after they met, Mike and Christie discerned that their families lived in different classes.

Christie recalled: “I knew we didn’t have money. I mean, that was obvious. We lived in a two-bedroom house, so my sister and I always shared. We had one bathroom. And it was little.”

Christie recognized that Mike’s family was from a higher class, as Mike’s father would pick him up from Christie’s house in “this little sports car. And here’s my family that buys a used car.”

Mike’s family also had cable television, and Mike had a trust fund – two more things that

Christie knew marked them as from different classes. Mike noticed the differences as well. He knew that Christie’s father worked on the paint crew at their school while his father worked as a

professor at a prestigious research university, and he observed that Christie’s home was much smaller than his own. They also recognized that their aspirations were different. Mike always

knew he would attend college, while Christie told Mike’s mother: “I wanna be a grocery store clerk, checkout.” Accordingly, Christie thought of Mike as more driven than her, and he earned

significantly better grades. Their class differences marked their lives in many ways, so that even when they began dating at age thirteen their class differences were apparent.

Given that sociological theories stress that class and cultural differences are social repellents (Bourdieu 1998, 2008; DiMaggio and Mohr 1985; Gorman 2000; Illouz 1997; Johnson and Lawler 2005; Lamont 1992, 2000), many scholars would predict that Christie and Mike’s relationship would end long before they considered marriage. They would see that they were too different to stay together, and each would find a partner who was more like them. Or, if they did

marry, it would be because Christie was far more attractive than Mike or that she would gain more education than him. These traditional explanations did not suffice. Christie and Mike did marry, and not because Christie compensated for her background by offering Mike a resource that was divorced from it.

Sociologists would also debate what would happen to their sensibilities once they married. Cultural mobility theorists (Aschaffenburg and Mass 1997; DiMaggio 1982) would guess that Christie would assimilate. After all, since she was thirteen years old she began to spend considerable time with Mike. She immersed herself in middle-class culture when she went to college, and then again when she went onto graduate school. As an adult, she lived in a middle-class neighborhood, and Mike's income as a small business owner gave her access to the things that his stable income could buy. She spent far more of her life in the class she entered as an adult than the class she lived in as a child. Her sensibilities, according to cultural mobility theories, would be nearly indistinguishable from those of people born into the middle-class.

Ann Swidler's (1986) toolkit theory would predict the same. Christie's life with Mike and her constant exposure to middle-class people gave her access to the tools that those born into the middle-class use. When thinking of her money, she would reach for the tool that told her to save. When thinking of time, she would reach for the tool that suggested she plan. She would use the tools that her husband and his community used.

Of course, neither cultural mobility nor toolkit theory did explain how Christie went about her daily life. Departing from her husband's ideas, she said about money: "Live for the day!" Unlike her husband's approach, she told her children not to plan but to "be present in the moment." Referring to work, she compared her ideas to her husband's: "He has a much stronger work ethic than I do. In terms of getting him to sleep, it's insane. I put in my 40 hours; once in a

while I get 50. But you're not really gonna get a lot more out of me than that unless you are going to pay me more." They preferred different vacations – Christie enjoyed resorts while Mike preferred outdoor adventures. Their emotional styles differed too. While Christie was expressive, Mike, she said, "would rather slice up his car than talk about feelings." Thus, as was true for the majority of respondents, the upwardly mobile person was not also culturally mobile, nor did she prefer her husband's cultural tools. Rather, even though Christie and Mike were together for three quarters of their lives, their sensibilities were still associated with the class in which they were born.

Given their different class sensibilities, their swapped stories of their upbringings, and their visits with each other's families-of-origin, cultural sociologists might also predict that Christie and Mike became more aware of how class works (Leiulfsrud and Woodward 1989; Nenga 2011; Young 2004). Yet, even though they were both keenly aware of their different class roots, neither associated their class differences with differences in their marriage. Christie noted that she saw their identities as disconnected from their class origins: "I don't think that it was the actual economic part that made the tension for Mike and I. It was personality style more than class or money." Mike also did not see a connection: "I don't think that [class] should be the primary consideration... I don't know if it matters at all really." Like Christie and Mike, most other respondents acknowledged that class existed and that they were in a different-origin marriage but denied that class played any role in shaping their identities or their marriages. For most couples, different-origin marriages did little to spark individuals' understanding of how class works or to act as a conduit to voluntarily forming more relationships that would cross class lines.

In this chapter, I summarize the findings that Christie and Mike's marriage illuminate. I focus on why respondents fell in love with a respondent from another class, and what happened to their ideas of class and their sensibilities after years of marriage. In doing so, I show how previous theories need to be reconsidered or extended. Finally, I relate these findings to inequality, discussing their implications for how class is reproduced and what policies may be effective in diminishing the class divide.

### **THE POWER OF CULTURAL COMPLEMENTS**

Though the classes are "coming apart" (Murray 2012), cultural complements were able to bring those with different class origins together. Blue- and white-collar-origin respondents appealed to each other partly because of their cultural complements. Blue-collar-origin interviewees were drawn to their white-collar-origin partners because of their sense of stability and achiever identity. White-collar-origin respondents felt their blue-collar-origin partners were appealing because of their emotional expressivity and ability to disconnect from work. These particular dispositions were appealing to those of each class because elusive, changing, or contradicting circumstances made them difficult to attain given their own class conditions.

The initial binding power of cultural complements suggests that other theories may be incomplete. Cultural differences were not initially divisive, but uniting. Those from white-collar backgrounds appreciated their partners because of the dispositions they developed in their class background, not despite of them. And cross-class appreciation did not happen as an exception to class processes but because of them. The social conditions that offered upwardly mobile individuals the dispositions that white-collar-origin individuals wanted but lacked (and vice

versa) encouraged love to systematically cross class lines. However, while respondents initially admired their partner's differences, they rarely adopted them. Nor did they regularly see them as signs of their partner's class.

### **CLASS EXPOSURE AND CLASS AWARENESS**

It would have been reasonable to predict that as participants married someone from a different class, they would develop a greater sense of how class works. As they shared stories about their childhoods and families-of-origin, they may have noticed how differently they grew up. They could have imagined how their resource discrepancies led them to different worldviews, dispositions, and tastes. A few did put this all together, but most did not.

Other studies have also documented how difficult it is for individuals to see and understand class (DeMott 1992; Ortnner 2003). This study adds to their conclusions; having an intimate partner from another class did not often lead to a greater understanding of class. Individuals often acknowledged that they were in a different-origin relationship, but they did not regularly believe their class differences had any bearing on their own identity, their partners' identity, or their marriage. Perceptions that class is only material or mostly moral contributed to individuals not seeing the influence class had on their marriage. Others were not structurally situated to see patterns, found class unthinkable, or were swayed by the marital ideology of two unique – not class-influenced – individuals. Moreover, even those who learned to see the way that class shaped their lives did not use their knowledge to tear down class barriers. They may have bridged a class divide when they married their partner, but they did not usually want to continue to do so with others from their partner's class. Different-origin marriages were then

rarely a site that produced the knowledge or emotions necessary to raise the visibility of class or to replace class antagonism with broader class appreciation.

### **THE NEW SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF SENSIBILITIES AND ITS IMPLICATIONS**

Though respondents did (at least initially) appreciate one person raised in another class, this did not lead them to appreciate or adopt their partners' sensibilities. Rather, blue- and white-collar-origin spouses tended to maintain separate sensibilities. While these sensibilities occasionally revolved around previously depicted axes – those of high/low, distant from necessity/virtue of necessity, omnivore/univore – they often cohered another axis. For white, highly educated, heterosexual blue- and white-collar-origin respondents, sensibilities tended to be organized around managerial and laissez-faire approaches. White-collar-origin respondents typically preferred to manage their resources – they favored budgeting their money, dividing their chores, planning their time, organizing their careers, using their leisure time to accumulate cultural capital, structure their children's daily lives, and restrain their emotions. Their preference was for deliberation, planning, and regulation. Blue-collar-origin respondents' sensibilities, on the other hand, were regularly marked by a purposeful laissez-faire approach. When it came to the same factors, they preferred to feel free from regulation, to take things as they came, live in the moment, and relax. They preferred a life that allowed them to live in the moment rather than to continually deliberate, plan, or supervise. Table 8.1 displays the organization of their sensibilities.

Table 8.1: The Content of Spouses' Sensibilities

	Blue-Collar-Origin <i>Laissez-Faire</i>	White-Collar-Origin <i>Management</i>
Money	Preferred to spend without thinking	Preferred to research purchases and budget
	Preferred spending to live for the day	Preferred spending to live for tomorrow
Housework	Women preferred to allow the division of labor to unfold	Women preferred to organize the division of labor
Time	Preferred spontaneity or going with the flow	Preferred organizing and planning time
Paid Work	Preferred to keep their eyes open for new opportunities	Preferred to manage their career search and advancement
Play	Preferred to let weekends unfold at home	Preferred to manage cultural capital accumulation
Parenting	Preferred to let children organize their own time and take a permissive approach to their behaviors	Preferred to manage their children's time use and behaviors
Emotions	Preferred to express a wide range of emotions as they felt them	Preferred to express a restricted range of emotions and process them before discussing them

This new binary has new implications. Organizational schemes such as high and low or vulgar and refined characterize a set of tastes and dispositions that possess more overt classed connotations, are deeply moralized, and are observable in both casual and sustained relationships. High culture is widely viewed not as just different than low culture but as “classy” and superior. Tastes for the refined and vulgar also can quickly slip from characterizing the things one enjoys to characterizing the type of person one is; those with a taste for “classy” things are “classy” people, those with a taste for “vulgar” things are “vulgar” people. Tastes for

high or low culture may also be revealed in small talk; deeper relations are not needed to sense if a person has a taste for items culturally deemed high or low.

A taste for being a managerial or laissez-faire approach is less overtly classed, less moralized, and sometimes only visible after an extended period of time. Cultural scripts support both self-managed and laissez-faire styles. Arguments for managing children's time and activities receive a great deal of cultural support, as do arguments against helicopter parenting. Similarly, arguments for being invested in a career are well received, but so is Joe's (blue-collar-origin) favorite saying: "Nobody ever puts on their tombstone that they wish they could have spent more time at the office." Likewise, gender equality in the allocation of chores is culturally valued in some spheres, but so is the quip that a clean and managed house is a sign of a wasted life. A clear hierarchy in self-management or laissez-faire styles is not widely in place or widely uncontested. Furthermore, unlike a taste for high or low culture, a taste for a managerial or a laissez-faire approach is less likely to slide from characterizing one's tastes to characterizing one's inner being and moral worth.

Furthermore, it may not be apparent if an individual is a self-manager or takes a laissez-faire approach until a relationship is already well established. While individuals may make small talk about their involvement in the roller derby or appreciation of soap operas (low culture), and couples going on their first dates might discuss the types of restaurants, movies, or music they enjoy (indicating their taste for the vulgar or refined), those just meeting may be less likely to strike up a conversation that touches on the axes of self-management and laissez-faire approaches. It is likely not until a relationship has existed for an extended period of time that people know if the other prefers to use their money to "live for the day" or "live for tomorrow," if they manage their emotions or express them quickly, or if they view weekends as a time to



relax or a time to improve their cultural skills. Once relationships are established, given the relatively un-moralized nature of these topics, individuals may not decide to dissolve their relationship because of them. In some ways, then, differences based on self-management and laissez-faire approaches may allow more social openness than differences based on high or low culture.

Though this study cannot provide evidence for how the management/laissez-faire divide plays out in non-marital contexts, it is plausible that this divide has unique implications in other arenas. Public schools, for instance, may be more understanding if children have not visited the art museum (high culture) than if children do not behave as self-managers. Teachers often expect students to be able to manage their time (knowing how long each assignment might take, being ready for the next activity in the allotted time), achievement trajectory (selecting their classes and track, making post-graduate plans), and emotions (expressing discontent rationally). Colleges favor applicants who performed cultural capital accumulating leisure activities and assume that parents are savvy-enough financial planners. Those who do not have these skills may struggle to manage their time, leisure, work, and money. The inability or preference not to manage one's time, academic trajectory, and emotions likely yields several disadvantages, and these disadvantages may curtail some individuals' mobility efforts.

That said, a laissez-faire approach may be rewarded at times. Spontaneity may be viewed as fun and emotionally expressive individuals may garner some attention. Workplace hiring committees may be unable to judge if one takes a managerial or laissez-faire approach on the basis of a short interview, and may enjoy an applicants' go-with-the-flow or expressive approach. Those who are not self-managers may also be more easily managed, and as there are many middle-class jobs that also required ease at being managed some employers might

appreciate this skill. Usually, however, middle-class institutions likely reward self-managers more often than they reward a taste for living a laissez-faire life. More research, however, should ascertain how this classed divide operates in practice.

### **YOU CAN TAKE THE PERSON OUT OF THE CLASS BUT YOU CAN'T TAKE THE CLASS OUT OF THE PERSON**

For the individuals in my sample, class background was associated with whether sensibilities were better aligned with a managerial or laissez-faire style. Though upwardly mobile respondents' sensibilities may have altered as they traveled through the class structure, it was likely that they were, nevertheless, continually influenced by the sensibilities that they gained in the past. Taking the class out of the person did not undue the influence of the class.

These findings offer support for Bourdieu's theory that class sensibilities are continually tied to the past despite mobility or exposure to new ideas. Why might this be the case? One answer is that the culture that respondents used seemed to work for them. As such, there was no reason to adjust their class sensibilities. By many measures, blue-collar-origin respondents were successful, so they might conclude that their class sensibilities must not have been problematic. White-collar-origin respondents could also consider themselves to be successful (even if they had more structural help). With their culture working for each group, they had little reason to adjust their class sensibilities.

A second reason why class sensibilities were sticky rather than malleable may have to do with the context of their exposure to partners of another class. Other studies have examined the durability of class sensibilities in the context of education and work, but the "rules of the game" of marriage and the "rules of the game" in education and the workplace are very different

(Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). In education and at work the “rules of the game” are seemingly set by authority figures. Getting ahead implies playing their game; individuals expect to change as they play the game as best they can. Students may, for example, learn to write in a different way if they believe it will provide them with better grades, or act more deferentially than they feel. Employees may learn to play golf to schmooze with their boss, or they may adjust their idea of what makes a good worker to suit the needs of the company. Students and workers change because in school and workplaces culture is exchangeable for valuable rewards. Individuals may adjust their culture to receive better grades, keep their jobs, or earn a promotion.

In marriage, on the other hand, culture is less obviously exchangeable. Marriages are, at least symbolically and in the present time, marriages between equals (Thorton and Young-DeMarco 2001). In marriage, unlike at school and work, there is no authority figure that can incentivize personal change, and it is unclear what gains changes would bring. Arguments may be avoided, but changing takes a lot of effort for the reward of avoiding a few spats.

Marriages also differ from schools and workplaces in that the latter are public while the former is private. Schools and workplaces judge identities fairly publically – entire classrooms or offices notice if a student or employee has poor oral communication skills or becomes “irrationally” angry (given the norms of what situations provoke anger in that class setting). In marriage, however, spouses may be the only ones to know if their partner has trouble talking about their feelings or if they prefer not to follow a family budget. Having only one person judge aspects of identity may lower individuals’ incentive to change.

Moreover, participants may have felt little need to change as their spouses selected them to be partners until “death do us part.” This long term commitment could provide some an incentive not to change, as they would be together with or without their changes. Spouses also

often began their marriages enjoying each other's cultural complements, and only later in the marriage did cultural differences become problematic. Partners may then have perceived their partners' preferences as dynamic, and not wanted to change in case their partners' preferences changed. Finally, while there is a cultural ethos that one must do what it takes to do well in school or at work, one ethos about marriage that spouses need to accept their partners for who he or she is. This discourse makes it safe to assume that one need not change. Marriage (though not the entire field of relationships) may be a context in which there is little reason for class sensibilities to change and some reasons for them not to change. In the private sphere of marriage, assimilation did not occur.

#### **WHY THE CONTINUAL INFLUENCE OF CLASS MATTERS**

The stickiness of class sensibilities suggests five points: that strong ties do not always lead to cultural changes, that the middle-class has more cultural heterogeneity than is commonly assumed, that the study of culture should focus more on class origin everyday sensibilities, that cultural osmosis is a problematic policy strategy, and that those who cross the class divide may benefit from being aware of the stickiness of their own and their partner's sensibilities. I discuss each of these points below.

#### ***Sticky Class Sensibilities and the Limits of Strong Ties***

That sensibilities were organized around class origin has implications for how we think about strong ties. As culture can be learned from networks of friends, colleagues, and more distant

others (Erikson 1996; McFarland and Pals 2005; Young 2004), some would predict that respondents also assimilate to the culture of their strongest voluntary tie – their spouse. This did not often happen. This suggests that while cultural capital is learned in the family (Bourdieu 1980, 1984; Lareau 2003), it is not regularly passed from husband to wife or wife to husband, at least not if the pairs have different class origins and if the cultural element is linked to classed sensibilities. This may be because class sensibilities were set and relatively inflexible by the time individuals married. Spouses' advice routinely clashed with partners' worldviews, or clashed with their sense of themselves and what they are capable of doing. When there was a clash of ideas, change rarely occurred. For example, Vicki (white-collar-origin) pressured John (blue-collar-origin) to finish college – after all, he was only a semester shy of earning a bachelor's degree – but John refused because to him a job was just a way to earn a living and they were already earning enough to get by. Given his idea of work, there was no reason for him to go back to school. We could also think here of Isabelle (blue-collar-origin), who could not internalize Ian's (white-collar-origin) entitlement lessons partly because they always made her uncomfortable to enact. Advice that conflicted with an already established worldview or disposition was unlikely to be accepted or internalized. In general, then, when class sensibilities are set they may be relatively immune to the influence of even the strongest of ties. Thus, we should not assume that culture can be transported through strong ties.

### ***The Culturally Heterogeneous Middle-Class***

That class sensibilities are organized and sticky also implies a more culturally heterogeneous middle-class than is commonly assumed. Upwardly mobile individuals added their classed

worldviews and dispositions to the middle-class, infusing it with different ideas about resource management, work, play, emotions, and parenting. This is significant for several reasons. First, cultural closure – that everyone in one class shares a culture – is prevented when upwardly mobile individuals do not assimilate. If cultural closure were to occur, it would be easier to exclude those not from the middle-class, as the cultures of the middle- and non-middle class would be more obviously marked. Cultural diversity in the middle-class, however, allows the class system to remain slightly more open. Middle-class gatekeepers may come from blue-collar backgrounds and possess blue-collar sensibilities, and white-collar individuals may know and respect others who have blue-collar sensibilities. Familiarity with, and perhaps respect for, individuals with white-collar destinations but blue-collar sensibilities may increase the likelihood that gatekeepers do not discriminate against those with blue-collar sensibilities. A heterogeneous middle-class may then be helpful for minimizing class inequality.

At the same time, while cultural heterogeneity may facilitate the next generation's mobility, it may make this generation's mobility more difficult to secure. Class sensibilities are often thought of as important for securing a middle-class position both because they guide how individuals navigate institutions and because they are convertible for financial resources (Bourdieu 1984). Less ability to navigate institutions – to approach changing jobs or expressing emotions in the “right” ways – could depress individuals' earnings. Similarly, managing time effectively and talking about the “right” leisure activities could help workers climb up career hierarchies. In these ways, we would expect upwardly mobile workers to have fewer career opportunities than those who have spent their entire lives in the middle-class.

Yet, the consequences for cultural heterogeneity outside of marriage are currently only speculations and not fact. What is clear is that class origins shape the sensibilities college

graduates carry with them throughout their lives. This means that scholars should not assume that college-educated individuals share the same cultural resources. In fact, they should not even assume that all family members share their cultural resources. Husbands and wives maintained different sensibilities, ones that could lead to unequal pathways to opportunities.

### ***The Need to Expand Studies of Culture***

This study also calls our attention to the need to revise assumptions embedded in empirical studies of class and culture. Much work considers individuals' class destination, without considering how each person came to be a member of that class (for example, Illouz 1997; Lamont 1992, 2000; Lareau 2003; Peterson and Kern 1996; Schwartz 2010). This study cautions against overlooking class origins, as they shape tastes, worldviews, and dispositions. Even studies not specifically about class, but that enter a measure of class into their analysis, should consider also examining class origins. This is particularly true for studies of work, housework, parenting, and emotions. This study suggests that neglecting the study of class origins means inappropriately attributing homogeneity to class destinations.

Many studies of class and culture also focus on high culture (Aschaffenburg and Maas 1997; DiMaggio 1982; DiMaggio and Mohr 1985; Dumais 2002; Dumais and Ward 2010; Roscigno and Ainsworth-Darnell 1999). Yet while the respondents in this study occasionally mentioned their appreciation for art or poetry, they spoke more about their partners' capacity for intimacy, ideas of work, and strategies of spending. Highlighting high culture can mean missing the ways in which culture is most relevant to individuals. Correspondingly, the distinction between high and low culture may not always be the most salient distinction for either

structuring tastes or leading to exclusion. As the worldviews and dispositions that were relevant to respondents have implications for social reproduction, they should be of interest to sociologists as well.

Paying more attention to the management/laissez-faire divide might yield further cultural insights. Comparing the management/laissez-faire schema to the high/low culture schema might tell us how different types of axes operate in different settings and confer different rewards. Inequality is likely not driven by just one type of cultural binary but by several. The study of different-origin marriages has produced many new insights, which future research can expand upon.

### *The Limits of Cultural Osmosis*

Some work on social class assumes that cultural osmosis can occur, or that individuals will pick up the cultural of others around them. Moving to Opportunity (MTO), for example, offered vouchers to a randomly selected group of low-income people to move to higher-income neighborhoods. Part of the rationale behind MTO was that low-income families would benefit from being around higher-income neighbors “who may act as role models for adults and youth and enforce social norms” (Popkin, Harris, and Cunningham 2002:57). Prominent scholar William Julius Wilson (1996) likewise predicted that the loss of the black middle-class from the inner city would mean that low-income residents would not be able to pick up middle-class culture – the culture that workplaces are more likely to value. Similarly, conservative writer Charles Murray (2012) insists that the elite need to “preach what they practice” to the working-



class, and columnist David Brooks adds that “we need a program that would force members of the upper [class] tribe and the lower [class] tribe to live together, if only for a few years.”

Each of the above programs and authors – who represent a range of opinions on the political spectrum – assume that cultural osmosis would work. In other words, they write that if lower-income individuals were surrounded by higher-income individuals, they would absorb their culture. Bracketing concerns about some of these authors’ assumption that low-income individuals have inferior values, this study suggests that this strategy may be ineffective if implemented for adults. Cultural osmosis did not often occur in different-origin marriages, when respondents had years to soak up their partners’ classed tastes and dispositions. It is therefore unlikely to work when individuals are less deeply steeped in another class environment. Theories and programs predicated on the ideas of cultural osmosis may need to be re-thought.

### ***The Benefits of Raising Awareness of Class Sensibilities***

This study showed that crossing class lines is not easy, as it means living with a partner whose sensibilities are different than one’s own. Those in different-origin relationships may benefit from a deeper understanding of how they and their partner were shaped by class. Differences may be more palatable if individuals understand that they are neither unique nor easy to change. Couples may benefit from understanding why one partner wants to use money to live for the day and the other needs more money in their savings account; they may make different decisions if they understand why their partner demands that their children’s time be more or less structured. Focusing on understanding and recognizing the value in each partner’s sensibilities, rather than trying to change them, may help couples deal with their differences.

It is, however, not only couples who should be aware of the social organization of sensibilities. Schools and workplaces may benefit from making class visible. This means not only recognizing material differences, but also recognizing that not all of their students or workers enter their institution with the same ideas. Schools should not reward or punish students for how well they manage their time and emotions; if these skills are valued by the school they should be taught while recognizing that some students will have a head start. Similarly, employers should not assume that the ability to be spontaneous or deal with little structure is evenly distributed. If these sensibilities are valued, they again need to be taught.

Finally, policy makers need to be aware of the stickiness of class sensibilities. Class gaps cannot be closed through offering adults role models or hoping that cultural osmosis results in shared sensibilities. There is a possibility that greater integration earlier in life, when children are still developing their sensibilities, may lead to more shared sensibilities (although, this strategy also has problems, see Streib 2011). The best way, however, to create fewer cultural divides between the classes is to equalize the resources with which children are raised. The class individuals are born into provides them with enduring sensibilities that later policies may be unable to change.

## **APPENDIX A DATA AND METHODS**

Sociology professors sometimes tell their American students that their marriages will be arranged. This can produce shock amongst students, as Americans think of themselves as free to choose their spouses; arranged marriages seem like the province of far-away countries. Yet, while Americans' marriage partners may not be hand-picked by their parents, they are chosen from a highly constrained segment of the population. Even though potential suitors and their parents may no longer consciously weigh their in-laws' assets before accepting a proposal, given who individuals meet and who they are likely to like, many people marry the same type of people that their parents might have picked. Social forces do the arranging rather than parents.

With this in mind, I had doubts about if I could find enough individuals in different-origin marriages to recruit for this study. A few professors deterred me from the study, telling me it would be impossible to find enough couples to interview. A family demographer cautioned me against even delving into the quantitative data to find out how many different-origin marriages existed nationwide. She advised that perhaps only two percent of all married couples would be different-origin, and not only would that undermine the importance of my study but it would make the study recruitment an insurmountable obstacle.

With her worries and others' in mind, I chose to define the sample more broadly than would be ideal. I originally hoped to select respondents in cross-class marriages by class origin and destination, but decided instead to examine the easier to find same-destination different-origin couples (and therefore to do a slightly different study). For the different-origin couples, I

only used class origins to recruit respondents. I also widened the criteria concerning the age of respondents' children; instead of a narrow range, I included anyone who had school aged children, those between ages 4 and 18. I also did not make any restrictions about the number of years that couples needed to be married; they simply had to have a child together who was at least four years old.

Additionally, I made choices to limit the internal variation within the sample. I restricted the sample to whites. Due to local segregation patterns, most people around me were white. I worried that having a few non-white respondents would introduce variation into the sample that I could not explain based on only a few respondents. I also worried that interracial couples would have their own dynamics which would mask the class dynamics of the relationships. For the same reasons, I limited the study to United States citizens and to those in different-sex marriages. Married couples also qualified for the study but cohabiting and dating couples did not. I made this decision because married couples make a lifelong legal bond to each other – a stronger commitment than cohabitation or dating – and because the class dynamics in each type of relationship might vary. Though these criteria meant that I did not have my ideal sample and would not be able to address as much variation as I preferred, ideal situations must sometimes be sacrificed for practical concerns. I thus ended up recruiting a sample of white, heterosexual, United States citizens who are married to a partner who was raised in another class.

Of course, these decisions about who to include in the sample still left a sociological elephant in the room; I had not decided how to define or operationalize class. Class is a notoriously nebulous concept, one that escapes easy definitions. Sociologists wage heated debates about if class is categorical or continuous, how many classes there are, where the line is between one class and another, and if culture is a product or cause of class conditions or both

(Bourdieu 1985; Lareau and Conley 2008; Marx in Tucker 1978; Weber in Grusky 1994; Wright 1985; Zweig 2000). Trying to resolve these debates or please all stripes of class scholars is impossible; I settled on a definition that has wide, but not universal, agreement. I think of classes as large groups of people who share similar amounts of occupational prestige, educational attainment, income, wealth, and debt. I view culture as often stemming from one's class (economic) position, but also creating a loop to reproduce economic differences. I think of culture therefore as separate from class but closely related to it. People's class is not defined by their culture, but their culture is often an indicator of their class.

In this study, I use the categories of white- and blue-collar to define individuals' class origins. White-collar-origin respondents are those that had fathers with bachelors or advanced degrees and who worked in professional or managerial jobs. Blue-collar-origin respondents are those that had fathers with at most a high school diploma and who tended to work with their hands (though, of course, their jobs also often required mental work). White-collar occupations included doctors, lawyers, engineers, accountants, professors, and teachers, while blue-collar occupations included factory workers, truck drivers, electricians, mechanics, police officers, farmers, and repairmen. I divide the classes into white- and blue-collar for practical rather than theoretical purposes. Recruiting was facilitated by simple class categories, as potential respondents were aware of their fathers' educational attainment and work history. White- and blue-collar categories were also useful for analyzing the data: in a small sample it was practical to divide respondents into a small number of groups.

There are two main disadvantages of the white-collar/blue-collar categories. The first is that it reproduces patriarchal ideas of class as it defines participants' class origin by their fathers' but not their mothers' class position. I made the decision to define class by fathers' occupation

and education before recruiting participants as I knew that at the time when respondents were growing up fathers were more likely to be primary breadwinners (Fischer and Hout 2006) and because housewives are difficult to classify. As it turned out, in terms of educational attainment, most respondents' parents had matching levels of educational attainment: 29 of the 32 blue-collar-origin respondents' mothers did not have bachelor's degrees, while 26 of the 32 mothers of white-collar-origin respondents had bachelor's degrees and all but one had attended at least some college. Fathers' class position therefore was usually an adequate proxy for both parents' class position.

The other potential problem with the white-collar/blue-collar classification scheme is that these are broad class categories and each contains considerable variation. White-collar-origin respondents included, for example, the son of a teacher, the daughter of a university president, and the granddaughter of a wealthy Fortune 500 company founder. Blue-collar-origin respondents included those whose breadwinning fathers struggled to feed ten children to those whose fathers earned a middle-class income in a unionized factory. I examined the individuals on the margins on their class categorization to see if they would better fit into the other class; this was rarely the case. Despite the broad economic variation, the categories of blue- and white-collar did capture many of the differences between individuals.

Even with these broad categories, there were still analytical decisions to be made. I needed to decide what to do with the two respondents who had not graduated from college. I decided to keep them in the sample. I did this because each had undergone a substantial amount of college – one was a semester shy of a bachelor's degree while the other completed two years of college. This allowed for some socialization through higher education to occur. Furthermore, this enabled me to peer across another class line – educational attainment – and to see if the

patterns still held. Some “messiness” in the sample seemed acceptable as it reflects the messiness of the real world.

In addition to the different-origin marriages, I also recruited a sample of same-origin couples. These were couples in which each partner and their father had graduated from a four-year college and worked in a white-collar job or as a stay-at-home parent. This group allowed me to understand if the reasons why white-collar partners married down were really different than those that married laterally. It also permitted me to understand if the white-collar-origin partners adapted their upwardly mobile partners’ dispositions. In a world that had endless resources, I would have also interviewed several other comparison groups: couples in which each partner was from and is now in a blue-collar milieu, different-origin couples in which one partner was downwardly mobile, couples that were different-origin but disbanded, different-origin couples by their destination as well as their origin, and couples that had mismatching class destinations but shared class origins. These groups would all give me analytical purchase on other types of arguments. Unfortunately, those arguments will need to be made at another time. In the end, I came away with a sample that included 32 different-origin couples and 10 same-origin couples. I conducted 84 interviews – 15 with women with blue-collar roots and 15 with their husbands with white-collar roots, 17 with women with white-collar origins and 17 with their husbands with blue-collar origins, and 10 with women with white-collar origins and destinations and 10 with their husbands who shared their origins and destinations. All but two respondents graduated from college by the time of our interview, and all but five worked in a professional or managerial job or as a stay-at-home parent at the time of the interview. In other words, nearly all respondents ended up in white-collar positions or stay-at-home parents, but half of those in different-origin marriages did not begin there.

Respondents were also middle-aged (a median age of 41) and most had been married over a decade (the median years of marriage was 13 for different-origin couples). All but one participant had all of their children after marrying, and only two respondents had been previously married. Again, all were white, heterosexually married, and United States citizens.

Table A.1: Respondents' Demographic Characteristics

Respondents' Demographic Characteristics	Respondents with Blue-Collar Origins in Different-Origin Marriages	Respondents with White-Collar Origins in Different-Origin Marriages	Respondents in Same-Origin Marriages
<i>Highest Level of Education</i>			
High School	0	0	0
Some College	2	0	0
Bachelor's Degree	16	12	10
Advanced Degree	14	20	10
<i>Current Occupation</i>			
Professional Managerial	15	22	14
Middle-Class	3	0	0
Blue- or Lower-White-Collar	3	2	0
Graduate Student	1	1	3
Stay-at-Home-Parent	8	6	3
Unemployed	2	1	0
Age	42	41	40
Median Years Married	13	13	14
Number Previously Married	2	0	0
Modal Number of Children	2	2	2
Median Age of Oldest Child	8	8	12.5

*Notes:* Professional managerial occupations included those positions that offer authority and autonomy. These occupations included lawyers, doctors, engineers, teachers, scientists, managers, computer programmers, and elected politicians. Middle-class positions were operationalized as having less authority or autonomy. This included a physicians' assistant and a project manager for others' research projects. Blue-collar and lower-white-collar positions included one secretary and bus driver, a filing clerk, a lab assistant, and a stock attendant at a store. One



unemployed respondent was recently encouraged to retire from a teaching job while the other was laid off from a sales job during the recession.

### **RECRUITING THE SAMPLE**

Even with these somewhat “messy” and broad sampling criteria, my first efforts at recruitment were met with failure. I posted fliers in buildings and on listservs, only to be met with an empty in-box. Finally, one woman called me. She told me that she would do the study if she was paid, but otherwise her life as a hockey mom made her too busy to be altruistic. I got the hint, and reallocated some of my transcription funds to pay participants.

Now, offering \$50 per couple, I found my in-box flooded with interest. I sent fliers that announced a study about marriage, family, and “economic backgrounds” to every parenting listserv, school, parent-teacher organization, Meet-Up group, and activity-based club I could find in a small Midwestern city and its surrounding rural areas. The kindness of strangers also facilitated the recruitment portion of the study; without my knowledge someone posted a flier about the study in a high school newsletter and church bulletin. Parenting listservs, parent-teacher organizations, and fliers posted on preschool bulletin boards proved to have the highest pay-offs, though some respondents heard about the study through their church dispatches and social clubs.

After a flood of interest and then a gap, I asked faculty on the first-generation mentorship listserv if they knew anyone who might want to participate, and also asked acquaintances if they knew of possible participants. These methods yielded some interest in the study but no participants. Other recruitment efforts also failed. The motorcycle clubs never responded to my emails, the accountants group felt it was too off-topic to send out, the local indoor children’s playground did not have a bulletin board, and some social justice groups did not see the

connection between the study and their mission. The Friday night astronomers club meeting was also a failure; after being told that I needed to wait until the end of their two-hour Friday-night meeting to make my two-minute pitch, they laughed at me for assuming that any of them were married. The Rotary Club welcomed me but produced no new respondents. Attempts at snowball sampling also did not produce any new respondents. Though some interviewees volunteered to contact their friends on my behalf, most said that they did not know their friends' class backgrounds and therefore did not know who to ask.

Recruiting same-origin couples turned out to be more difficult than recruiting different-origin couples. This came as a surprise, as I assumed that same-origin couples were more common. I recruited them only after I had interviewed all but a few of the different-origin couples, and turned to the listservs and groups that had yielded the different-origin participants to find the same-origin couples. By this time, I felt that I had worn out my welcome – these listservs had sometimes posted three announcements recruiting different-origin couples – and I was more reluctant to ask them to send my same-origin announcement multiple times. If it was because of my hesitancy in posting repeatedly, same-origin couples' belief that they represent the norm and have little of interest to say, or same-origin couples' possibly better financial position, it was more difficult to recruit these couples. For the same-origin group, I turned to interviewing one couple who were friends of a friend and one couple who attended synagogue with my mother's friends. While the interviews with my friend's friends went well, the interviews with my mother's friends' friends did not. They clearly had signed up for the study out of a favor to their friend, and had little interest in answering my questions with more than a quick sentence reply.

After the emails were sent out, I began the screening process with the potential respondents. For each potential respondent, I either informed them of the eligibility requirements and asked if they met them, or asked them for all of the information so that I could judge if they met the study criteria. I felt very nervous about patronizing potential respondents by asking them to confirm information that was clearly on the flyer, and sometimes felt too shy to ask them if they were white or had children. I should have done so, however, as I ended up meeting one couple who did not have children and another couple in which both partners were black. I went ahead with the interviews in both of these cases – they hinted that they needed the money and I figured their interviews would still be informative. I ended up including the childless couple as there was no reason to exclude them other than from the parenting section. I did not include the black couple in the study, though their interviews were strikingly similar to the others' with the exception that they were both especially class-aware. After the screening process, I began the interviews.

## **THE INTERVIEWS**

I designed the interview questionnaire based on my ideas of how class might matter in the couples' lives. A robust literature documents the ways that tastes and worldviews are classed; I asked about as many of these topics as I could. Thus, I asked about how they thought about money, vacations, food, housework, politics, and parenting. I also asked a number of questions to capture the ways that class mattered that I could not predict. These ranged from asking about the stories of how couples met, their first impressions of their spouse, why they thought their spouse was someone they should marry, how they are similar to their spouse, how they are different,

what they have learned from their spouse, and how they have changed because of their spouse. These questions allowed me to see where class mattered in ways that I had not forecasted; ideas of time management and emotional management came up with surprising frequency as ways each partner was different than their spouse. The end of the interview asked open-ended questions about class. These questions were saved until the end in case they were contentious; for some respondents, as discussed below, they were.

In nearly every case, I interviewed the husband and wife separately. I did this so that I would not get couples' stories but individuals' stories. I thought that each partner might have different understandings of the same events, and indeed this was sometimes the case. Rarely did spouses' answers conflict with their partners', but they emphasized different details and provided information their spouse did not. I also interviewed wives and husbands separately in case they were in unhappy marriages or would not reveal some information in front of their partners. I promised each partner that I would not report anything to their spouse. During the course of the interviews I also tried to assure them of their confidentiality. The second partner to be interviewed inevitably would ask something along the lines of: "Have you already heard this story?" I would tell them that I could not answer what I had or had not heard, and in any case I was interested in their interpretation of the story.

Due to the couples' time constraints, I did conduct the husband's and wife's parenting section together for two couples. This produced a different set of data than the data from individual interviews; each partner seemed deeply interested in what the other would say and seemed to be performing partly for the other. They seemed to also want to help each other come to an agreement on answers, as if there was one "true" answer that they were working together to produce. While no data is "pure" and no one is ever not performing, the data produced here was

qualitatively different than the data from individual interviews. Here I had the opportunity to see how the couple interacted together, but I lost the individual accounts of their lives. Data from these dual interviews do not appear in the parenting chapter.

It is also worth noting that while I conducted at least part of every interview with just one partner at a time, there were several times when the other partner would briefly overhear part of the other's interview. I asked the respondent to choose where we met, and a few respondents asked me if it was acceptable to conduct the interview at home when their partner was also home and watching their children. Knowing that the only way for some of them to be able to participate was if I could accommodate their schedules, I agreed to this. I requested that we conduct the interview in a room where their partner was out of hearing distance; I also alerted them that I planned on promising them confidentiality, but it was theirs to waive. Most of the time they found a private space for us to chat, though there were several times when a partner would briefly walk through the interview room. This posed some challenges, as I was afraid that a respondent would be less honest if their partner was in the room or in hearing distance. While I am sure that some respondents concealed some of their thoughts when their partner could listen in, at other times I was surprised by what respondents would say in front of their partners. A few partners said fairly negative things about their spouses even though it was possible that their partners could overhear our conversation. Only once did a partner interrupt the flow of the interview. In this case she wanted to make sure that I understood that her husband's comments were a subtle jab at her. Having a partner in hearing distance thus helped me acquire some data while probably preventing me from acquiring other data.

For most of the couples, eavesdropping was not an issue as their partner was not in the same building. Many interviews also took place at respondents' offices, my office, or coffee

shops. Coffee shops posed their own challenge; many tables are close together, and I worried that respondents would be tight-lipped as those sitting near us could overhear the conversation. While it is impossible to know what someone would say in a different circumstance, most respondents were still talkative and open during these interviews.

Overall, most respondents were surprisingly open. Interviews lasted a median of one hour and forty-five minutes, and even the above conditions, signed consent forms, and an audio-recorder seemed not to deter many from telling the details of their lives. I was often surprised at the end of the interviews when respondents profusely thanked me for the opportunity to talk about their marriages and families. Many equated the interview to a therapy session, including the one respondent who worked as a therapist. For many this seemed to be a positive thing – they said they were happy I made them think about their marriages and family decisions in ways they had not before or they were happy to have a chance to reflect upon such a routine but important part of their lives. Others seemed less thrilled that their interviews resembled therapy sessions. They said that they had revealed more than they intended, and seemed worried about the potential consequences of this. Of course, not all interviews resembled therapy sessions. Some respondents stuck to short answers about the facts of their lives. In most of these cases, their partners' gregariousness partly made up for this and I was still able to get some sense of each partner's sensibilities.

Respondents' relative openness may have resulted from their own agendas. Some had clearly come prepared to tell me the story of a happy marriage in times of high divorce rates. Others seemed to come for "girl talk." I distinctly remember one woman plopping down on her couch in a way that made me think that she was approaching the interview as a teen girl might approach a sleepover with an intimate friend. Still others said they signed up for the \$50, out of a

sense of obligation to help the university, or because they saw themselves in the flyer and felt compelled to join. A small subset also seemed to have been dragged into the study by their partners who felt more desire to participate than they did.

## ANALYSIS

I analyzed the interviews using a combination the extended case method (Burawoy 1998) and strategies derived from grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin 1998). The first, the extended case study, is an approach that acknowledges that researchers are immersed in a sea of theories. Rather than asking them to temporarily disregard these theories, it asks the researcher to consider them and expand upon them. I used this approach when thinking about how couples married and the durability of their class sensibilities. I knew, for example, that theories of cultural matching suggest that cultural similarities produce affinities and cultural dissimilarities beget apathy or antipathies. I purposefully chose a sample whose marriages could not be explained by this theory in order to revise it. Similarly, one goal of the study was to determine if class sensibilities are so entrenched that even years spent with a different-origin partner could not deeply alter them. Here I looked to apply old theories to new circumstances rather than to create new theories. Some of the questions I asked in the parenting section of the interview were also based on Annette Lareau's (2003) findings of class-based parenting styles. When it came to parenting, I sought to find out if it was not just parents' class destinations that guided their beliefs, but their class origins as well. I looked to extend Lareau's work, rather than create an entirely new theory.

Qualitative research is also useful not only to revise theories, but to discover them. I did not enter the study with the intent of interrogating the organizing principles of tastes. Instead, in

these instances I used grounded theory to create new theories. I also did not begin the study with the plan to investigate each topic that appears in the book; I did not ask about time management or emotions, but analyzed these themes as respondents regularly brought them up.

Both grounded theory and the extended case method ask the researcher to use inductive coding. I did this for each section of the interview, regardless of whether I was looking to revise theories or not. In these cases, I wrote multiple memos documenting possible emerging patterns. I then used open coding to capture these themes, and also coded other themes that emerged from multiple readings of the transcripts. After this was complete, I used selective coding to refine the open codes. For the portions of the study in which I was looking to expand existing theories, I used deductive coding in addition to inductive coding. Here, I examined if existing theories captured the data and coded these instances. For each type of coding, I went back to look for disconfirming data and to ensure that each piece of data fit in each code.

After each type of coding was complete, I constructed tables to understand how often each type of data was associated with each type of person. In doing so, I created tables with columns of respondents by class origin and gender (blue-collar-origin women, blue-collar-origin men, etc.) and rows that delineated each belief. I then filled in each cell with the appropriate respondents' identifiers (e.g., R15F for Respondent in Couple 15, female). These filled in tables allowed me to visualize the classed and gendered patterns for each theme, as some cells were quite full while others were empty.

Even with the tables, it was difficult to interpret the trends between different-origin and same-origin couples. That the questions were open-ended meant that those in different-origin and same-origin did not always talk about the same themes. Partners were asked to compare themselves to their spouses on a variety of broad domains; that each interviewee's reference was



a person with a particular classed history meant that those with different partners sometimes brought up different categories of answers. For example, I asked the question: “How are you and your spouse different?” Respondents in different-origin marriages often brought up their varied ways of expressing feelings; respondents in same-origin marriages rarely did the same. This means that I have little data on how those in same-origin marriages express their feelings. It is possible that the lack of data is in some ways data in itself – it may indicate that same-origin couples had more similar ways of expressing their emotions. However, I cannot say for sure that this is the case. In these cases, I include information of different-origin, but not same-origin, couples.

Finally, the analysis cannot be extended to other groups. I also did not interview any couples that were divorced, biasing the sample towards those who made their marriages work or were at least committed to not divorcing. The analysis does not include anyone who was considerably downwardly mobile, leaving it an open question of whether sensibilities are differentially likely to change for upwardly and downwardly mobile individuals. The analysis also cannot be extended to different racial groups, those in interracial marriages, or those not in heterosexual marriages, as different marriage markets produce different understandings of who is a suitable partner and as those in other demographic groups may have different understandings of class (Banks 2011; Hochschild 1995). The analysis, in short, is only applicable for whites whose marriage consists of one upwardly mobile partner and one partner who has spent their entire life in the middle-class.

## **REFLEXIVITY**

The contours of the interviews were not just influenced by who the respondents are but who I am as well. Before the project began, I considered how my class, gender, and age might influence the interviews.

### *Class Sensibilities*

I worried about how respondents would see my class position and how this might influence my ability to quickly build rapport. Even though I had spent my adolescence in a working-class community, I knew that my parents' terminal degrees and professional managerial jobs defined me as upper-middle-class. I also knew that even if respondents did not ask about my class background, they might be able to sense it.

I thought about if and how I should perform my class during the interviews. I felt that part of my sensibilities was so inscribed that there was little I could do to change it. I had internalized the “niceness” and soft-spoken disposition that often defines white middle-class women (see more about this in Chapter 7), the natural use of “proper” grammar that is typical of the upper-middle-class, and the body type associated with women from my class. I thought about what to wear – something I could change – but thought it best to wear similar clothes to all of the interviews. I thought about trying to slip back into the slight accent and speech patterns that I developed in my working-class community but found that when I tried I was no longer able to pull it off. Like my respondents, my class origin ended up overriding my ability to change.

Deciding that the combination of my disposition, appearance, and status as a graduate student would not allow me to alter the performance of my class sensibilities, I instead tried to be aware of how reactions to me were classed. The primary way that I noticed class mattering in the

interviews was that several of the blue-collar-origin men seemed to have false beliefs about the purpose of the study. At the end of the interview, some asked me what the study was *really* about after I had told them a vague but true premise of the study. They seemed to think I was tricking them. I'm not sure if this was distrust of me as a classed person or because some studies – perhaps especially psychology studies – do tell subjects that the study has one premise when it really has another. Other blue-collar-origin men seemed to think the study was designed to help me in my own relationships. They would offer general advice about marriage, telling me things to do and things to avoid. One blue-collar-origin man also noted that he was thinking of going back to school in sociology to become a therapist like me. He did not realize that a sociology degree would not lead into a career as a therapist, either for me or for him.

The combination of my class upbringing with blue-collar-origin respondent's class upbringing also occasionally clashed during the final stages of the interview. Here I asked about if they ever thought about class, if they think class matters for their marriage, if they had advice for others in different-origin marriages, what class they grew up in and what class they are in now. Sometimes interviews that had been going perfectly well took an emotional turn during these questions. Several blue-collar men became angry, and some who had not previously cursed in the interview started swearing. One became teary. Some angrily told me that they knew that the purpose of my study was to show that class mattered. As it does not matter, they said, the study was inherently flawed.

My reaction to their reactions was to listen and to try to be reassuring. If they were upset that the study was looking for class differences, I assured them that differences were not necessarily problematic and that I had no reason to think that different-origin marriages were especially likely to end in divorce. I sometimes went further, saying that sociology studies

assumed that these marriages are rare, and so I just wanted to understand how couples got together and how they worked out. I tried to present it as I was on their side – together we would show that different-origin marriages could work. I doubt that any of these reassurances were effective; by this point these respondents seemed distrustful of me and angered by the fact that I had brought up class at all.

The anger and sadness that some respondents expressed when discussing social class reveals that “hidden injuries of class” (Sennett and Cobb 1972) can occur during the interview process. Simply talking about class seemed to be upsetting for some. This might be because they desperately wanted class to not matter but my questions suggested that it might. It might also occur because of the language they used when talking about class. William, for example, described his wife as coming from a “pretty good background” and noted that her great-grandparents “did really good for themselves.” The ways that people avoid explicitly talking about class is often by using morally loaded terms. He noted that his background was different than his wife’s “pretty good” background. By implication, then, his would have been “pretty bad.” This type of language, used commonly throughout our society, leaves blue-collar people in a defensive position. If respondents perceived me as from an upper-middle-class family, they may have felt especially defensive around me.

Additionally, hidden injuries of class sometimes occurred during the interview when I asked respondents about the first time they remembered finding out about their class position. This often caused some discomfort for white-collar-origin respondents who remembered being singled out for being perceived as rich and therefore as different. Blue-collar-origin respondents more often told stories of lacking items that they wanted or lacking a sense of belonging. For

different reasons, many respondents from both classes looked sad while they answered this question.

This process raises the question about if and how it would be possible to construct an interview about class that does not risk invoking hidden injuries of class. Given the way that American society thinks about class – the myths of the lazy and undeserving poor and the hard-working and morally superior rich – I’m not sure that this is possible. If that is right, then a debate might be needed as to when it is appropriate to interview people about class and when it is not.

All of this said, it is also worth considering that my class upbringing might have led me to misread if hidden injuries of class occurred. As Chapter 7 showed, those raised in white-collar families tend to show less emotion than those raised in blue-collar families. Perhaps my own class position led me to read too much into what to me were sudden and expressive displays of emotions. After William’s interview, for example, I felt sure that his wife would cancel her interview. But, to my great surprise, she showed up and seemed happy to be there. It is also worth keeping in mind that the majority of blue-collar-origin men did not seem disturbed by my line of questioning, and that no blue-collar-origin women seemed equally upset. I do not know why some reacted more strongly than others. Also, while I can make educated hypotheses about class, gender, and individuals’ relationship to work, I also do not know why men seemed more likely to become upset while talking about class than women.

Finally, my class background had some advantages for conducting the study. It likely put some respondents at ease as white-collar-origin interviewees may have imagined that I shared a background with them. My past was also helpful in that my experience living in three different class milieus made me feel that I could fairly accurately know a person’s class background by

spending a few minutes with them. As an informal test of the durability of class sensibilities, I arrived at the interview without looking at my notes of which respondent was from which class (although sometimes, of course, I remembered without checking my notes), and then I would guess the class background of the respondent before the interview began. I used cues from the way they talked, their general mannerisms, and their bodily disposition. In all but a few cases (all blue-collar-origin women), I felt that I could easily and accurately identify respondents' class backgrounds. While this information is not "scientific" and this study examines tastes, worldviews, and dispositions rather than speech styles or the way individuals hold themselves, it still added to my impressions that it is difficult to take the class out of the person after taking the person out of the class.

### *Age and Gender*

I also thought about how my age and gender might shape the interviews. I worried that as I look much younger than I am and given my gender as a woman, respondents might perceive me as unprofessional. If this did matter, it was only apparent to me a few times when respondents interrupted the flow of the interview to ask how old I was. They seemed to usually guess that I was much younger than I was, and the information about my age seemed to set them at ease. Others asked what the project was for, and when I replied that it was part of my dissertation research they also seemed to think that my status as a graduate student justified my presence and probing questions.

Gender also mattered in instances in which I felt unsafe. In these cases, being alone with respondents in their homes under what first seemed to me to be suspicious circumstances made

me uncomfortable and caused me to try to rush through parts of the interviews. Those two interviewees, however, were both very talkative, so my efforts to rush through parts of the interviews failed. It also turned out that they were unnecessary as I was safe throughout the time I spent with them.

Though I would have felt more comfortable going to strangers' homes if I was a man, my gender may have been an asset in other ways. Cultural norms suggest that it is women, rather than men, who often ask personal questions and who are available to listen to personal confessions. White and short woman particularly fit the image of individuals others open up to, and these characteristics might have also facilitated many respondents' comfort with me. I did not notice any differences about whether men or women were more likely to be talkative or reveal particularly personal details. Overall, those who agreed to interviews were likely to be those who felt comfortable talking about marriage and family, and most respondents were, indeed, quite talkative.

**APPENDIX B**  
**THE POLITICS OF STUDYING CLASS AND CULTURE**

A focus on taking the class out of the person after you take the person out of the class, the content of individuals' sensibilities, and how different-origin relationships spark class awareness are perhaps not the obvious focus of a study of marriages and inequality. These questions all revolve around the cultural aspects of class and marriage and not the economic aspects. This may seem like a counterintuitive choice, since, after all, class is primarily an economic category. Yet, many scholars argue that class inequality is buttressed by both economic and cultural forces. Class sensibilities stem from economic conditions, and class sensibilities can contribute to maintaining economic differences. Economic and cultural aspects of class are interrelated rather than divorced (Bourdieu 1980, 1984).

The study of culture and class may also seem like an odd choice because of the politics and historical legacy of studying the two together. A half century ago, Oscar Lewis (1961, 1966) notoriously coined the term "culture of poverty." By this he meant that some individuals living in poverty develop a culture that is passed down from generation to generation and that precludes escaping from poverty. Lewis' view has been strongly criticized as blaming the poor for their poverty, and as claiming that the poor could arise from poverty if only they had the right values. Daniel Moynihan (1965), the Assistant Secretary of Labor under Lyndon Johnson, also picked up on these themes in his report *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*. Using ideas derived from the cultural of poverty thesis, Moynihan blamed the matriarchal family structure prevalent in black families as causing black poverty. Recently, Charles Murray (2012) wrote that



some men at the lower ends of the economic ladder are “economically ineffectual” (227) due, in part, to their “decay in industriousness” (181). Reiterating the culture of poverty theme, Murray blamed the poor for their poverty.

After the backlash against Lewis’ work and the Moynihan Report, sociologists distanced themselves from victim blaming. Even into the present, many mentions of culture and class are responses to the culture of poverty thesis, the Moynihan report, and those who sympathize with Charles Murray. Arguing against these texts, sociologists repeatedly report that the poor share middle-class values but lack the resources to enact their values (i.e., Liebow 1967; Duneier 1992; Newman 1999). The main message has been that despite different resources, individuals from all classes share the same desires and ways of understanding the world.

More recently, and perhaps guided by Bourdieu’s work, other scholars have begun to make a different argument – that there are real cultural differences in how those from different classes engage in and think about the world. Structural conditions create differences in ages of marrying (Smock and Greenland 2010), ideas about if it is best to have a baby before or after marriage (Edin and Kefalas 2005; Geronimus 2003), parenting styles (Kohn 1969; Lareau 2003; Rubin 1976, 1994), ways of communicating (Bernstein 1971; Hart and Risley 1995; Heath 1983; Illouz 1997; Shinn and O’Brien 2008), tastes for consumer goods (Holt 1997), and ways of interacting with educational institutions (Lareau 1989, 2003; Calarco 2011). This strand of scholarship emphasizes that structural conditions create distinctly different worldviews, tastes, dispositions, and practices. They also emphasize that cultural differences may be passed down from one generation to the next, and that cultural differences may play a role in shaping children’s chances of ending up in a different class than the one in which they started.

These two camps – those that emphasize the cultural similarities of those from different classes and those who emphasize the differences – may have more in common than is apparent at first glance. Those who distance themselves from the culture of poverty thesis emphasize that those from different classes share similar *values*. Everyone, for example, wants their children to do well in school (Goyette 2008). Those who see cultural differences between the classes, however, suggest that those from different classes have different ideas about exactly what those broad values mean and how to realize them. What it means to do well in school, for example, varies by class (Young 1999). Similarities and differences exist, allowing some scholars to argue that we all want the same things and others to suggest that classes have fundamentally different cultures. Neither, however, blames the poor for their poverty, as both recognize that when culture matters, it is not that individuals are part of deficient cultures, but that the culture of institutions favors middle-class cultures over those of the poor (for example, Lareau 2003). There may be nothing “wrong” with the individual’s class culture other than it is not recognized and legitimized by the middle-class institutions that dominate society.

I include this synopsis of the history of studying culture and class because I am aware that there is still, sometimes, a strong backlash against studying culture and class together. This may be particularly true in studies such as mine, in which the differences between the classes receive greater attention than the similarities. However, the findings of this study should be of comfort to those who reject the culture of poverty thesis. Upwardly mobile individuals did not share their sensibilities with those born into the middle-class, but their sensibilities cannot be read as being too problematic. Despite the mismatch between their ideas and those that may be more expected by middle-class institutions, they nevertheless achieved a version of the American Dream.

**APPENDIX C**  
**RESPONDENTS' DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS AND MEETING PLACES**

Table C.1  
*Respondents' Class Characteristics (N = 84)*

Pseudonym	BC/ WC <sup>a</sup>	Respondent's Occupation	Respondent's Education	Father's Occupation	Father's Education	Mother's Occupation	Mother's Education
<i>Different-Origin Couples</i>							
Jill	BC	politician	MA	stenographer	HS	financial planner	HS
Eric	WC	businessman	MA	doctor	MD	office manager	BA
Rebecca	WC	teacher	BA	engineer	BA	secretary	SC
Joe	BC	accountant	BA	factory	8th grade	farm, factory	HS
Christie	BC	social worker	BA	paint crew	GED	SAHM <sup>b</sup> then secretary	HS
Mike	WC	real estate	BA	professor	Ph.D.	SAHM	MA
Rachel	BC	lab assistant	BA	police officer	HS	SAHM	GED
Gordon	WC	teacher	BA	accountant	MBA	SAHM	BA
Sue	BC	physicians assistant	MA	farmer	8th grade	nurse	SC <sup>d</sup>
Nick	WC	SAHF <sup>c</sup>	BA	engineer	BA	SAHM	BA
Jenny	BC	SAHM	BA	electrician	HS	SAHM	HS
Matt	WC	product manager	MBA	teacher	MA	SAHM	BA
Chelsey	WC	teacher	MA	vice president of a company	Ph.D.	SAHM	BA
Nathan	BC	unemployed, formerly in sales	BA	millwright	8th grade	SAHM then secretary	HS
Amelia	WC	social worker	MSW	university	Ph.D.	SAHM	MA

Isaac	BC	teacher	BA	president factory worker	4th grade	SAHM	HS
Danielle	BC	preschool teacher	MSW	mechanic	11th grade	SAHM then clerk	HS
Jim	WC	office worker	BA	scientist	Ph.D.	SAHM	BA
Alice	WC	lawyer	JD	doctor	MD	SAHM	SC
Elliott	BC	SAHF	SC	tool and die	HS	SAHM	HS
Caroline	WC	scientist	Ph.D.	engineer	Ph.D.	bookkeeper	BA
Jack	BC	engineer	MA	factory worker	HS	SAHM then secretary	HS
Evelyn	BC	project manager	BA	factory worker	HS	factory worker	HS
Colton	WC	SAHF	BA	civil engineer	BA	worked in art gallery	BA
Anneka	WC	Ph.D. student	MA	engineer	Ph.D.	math teacher	MA
William	BC	contractor	BA	sawmill repairman	HS	salesperson	< HS
Vicki	WC	teacher	MA	upper level manager	BA	vice president of hospitals	MBA
John	BC	SAHF, part time restaurant manager	SC	heating and cooling	GED	factory	HS
Lori	WC	professor	Ph.D.	preacher	Ph.D.	SAHM	BA
Jason	BC	professor	Ph.D.	bus driver and preacher	HS	day care worker	HS
Zoey	WC	SAHM	BA	engineer	MS	seamstress	6th grade
Austin	BC	lawyer	JD	police officer and waiter	HS	SAHM then cleaner	HS
Alexa	WC	computer scientist	Ph.D.	engineer	BA	accountant	BA
Aaron	BC	retired teacher	BA	mill worker	10th grade	SAHM	10th grade
Lillian	BC	SAHM	BA	machinist	GED	SAHM	HS
Parker	WC	graphic designer manager	BFA	lawyer	JD	nurse	HS
Mia	WC	SAHM	MA	vice president of a university	MA	retail worker	BA

Kevin	BC	graduate student	MA	auto worker	HS	HR at retail store	HS
Gabriella	BC	librarian	MA	military, warehouse worker	GED	secretary	Associates
Dan	WC	financial analyst	MBA	engineer	BA	art gallery attendant	MFA
Katie	BC	social scientist	MA	steel worker	HS	several pink collar jobs	HS
Ryan	WC	lawyer	JD	college president	Ph.D.	nurse	RN
Leslie	WC	office worker	BA	manager	MBA	SAHM	BA
Tom	BC	programmer	BA	security guard	HS	nurse	Associates
Andrea	WC	SAHM	BS	engineer	BS	SAHM	BA
Adam	BC	manager	MBA, MA	electrician	GED	SAHM	HS
Gina	BC	SAHM	MA	metal worker	HS	SAHM	BA
Scott	WC	director of business	BA	Scientist	Ph.D.	principal	MA
Sidney	BC	SAHM	BA	steel worker	HS	secretary then SAHM	HS
Joel	WC	sales manager	MBA	engineer	BS	teacher then SAHM	BA
Mary	WC	SAHM	JD	professor	Ph.D.	teacher	MA
Ben	BC	director of sales	MBA	electrician	HS	SAHM then nurse	RN
Ann	BC	school cook	MA	farmer	HS	SAHM	MA
Brandon	WC	unemployed	BA	accountant	BA	SAHM	BA
Isabelle	BC	therapist	MA	farmer	HS	bartender	< HS
Ian	WC	professor	Ph.D.	lawyer	JD	therapist	MSW
Bethany	WC	doctor	MD	bank manager	BA	secretary	SC
Bob	BC	SAHF	BS	truck driver	HS	SAHM then librarian	HS
Norah	WC	SAHM	Ph.D.	scientist	MD	SAHM then teacher	BA
George	BC	scientist	BS	factory worker	HS	SAHM and nurse	Associates

Madison	BC	SAHM	BA	security guard	HS	engineer, sales	Associates
Evan	WC	software engineer	BA	doctor	MD	SAHM then nurse	BA
Anita	WC	marketing	MA	dentist	MA	nurse, teacher	MA
Todd	BC	retail	BA	navy	HS	accountant	HS

*Same-Origin Couples*

Hannah	WC	SAHM/grant writer	BA	dentist	MA	SAHM	BA
Bryce	WC	medical resident	MD	professor	Ph.D., JD	SAHM	MA
Leah	WC	SAHM/writer	BA	media producer	BA	SAHM	Associates
Luke	WC	IT worker	MA	engineer	BA	medical clerk	BA
Adrienne	WC	graduate student	BA	agent	BA	teacher, banker	MA, MBA
Paul	WC	journalist	BA	professor	JD	scientist	MS
Abby	WC	doctor	MD	doctor	MD	nurse	MA
Sam	WC	doctor	MD	doctor	MD	teacher	BA
Amy	WC	graduate student	MA	university president	Ph.D.	teacher	MA
Shawn	WC	investor/manager	BA	business owner	MA	teacher, business owner	MA
Rose	WC	SAHM	BA	lawyer	JD	human relations	JD
Phil	WC	architect	MA	doctor	MD	professor	Ph.D.
Alisha	WC	educational therapist	MA	minister	JD	social worker	MSW
Brad	WC	lawyer	JD	lawyer	JD	SAHM	BA
Carlie	WC	engineer	BA	engineer	BA	SAHM	BA
Clint	WC	engineer	BA	engineer	BA	SAHM	BA
Diana	WC	preschool teacher	BA	engineer	BA	teacher	BA
Ted	WC	educator	MA	professor	Ph.D.	teacher	MA
Jen	WC	SAHM, artist	MA	business owner,	BA	teacher, farmer	MA



Table C.2

*Respondents' Family Characteristics (N = 84)*

Pseudonym	<sup>a</sup> BC/WC	<sup>b</sup> Age	Years Married	Number of Children	Age 1 <sup>st</sup> Child	Gender 1 <sup>st</sup> Child	Age 2 <sup>nd</sup> Child	Gender 2 <sup>nd</sup> Child	Age 3 <sup>rd</sup> Child	Gender 3 <sup>rd</sup> Child	Age 4 <sup>th</sup> Child	Gender 4 <sup>th</sup> Child
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*Different-Origin Couples*

Jill	BC	42	17	2	14	<sup>c</sup> G	12	B				
Eric	WC	43	17	2	14	G	12	B				
Rebecca	WC	44	21	2	18	B	16	B				
Joe	BC	48	21	2	18	B	16	B				
Christie	BC	45	25	3	21	B	20	B	17	G		
Mike	WC	46	25	3	21	B	20	B	17	G		
Rachel	BC	55	27	2	23	G	21	G				
Gordon	WC	52	27	2	23	G	21	B				
Sue	BC	46	11	3	10	B	8	B	4	B		
Nick	WC	41	11	3	10	B	8	B	4	B		
Jenny	BC	42	20	3	14	G	10	B	10	B		
Matt	WC	46	20	3	14	G	10	B	10	B		
Chelsey	WC	46	23	2	19	G	17	G				
Nathan	BC	55	23	2	19	G	17	G				
Amelia	WC	57	19	1	17	G						
Isaac	BC	58	19	1	17	G						
Danielle	BC	56	27	4	36	G	26	B	24	G	12	B
Jim	WC	53	27	3	26	B	24	G	12	B		
Alice	WC	39	10	2	8	G	6	G				
Elliott	BC	39	10	2	8	G	6	G				
Caroline	WC	37	18	3	11	B	8	B	6	B		
Jack	BC	37	18	3	11	B	8	B	6	B		
Evelyn	BC	40	19	2	17	B	14	B				
Colton	WC	40	19	2	17	B	14	B				



Anneka	WC	31	8	2	6	G	4	G		
William	BC	37	8	2	6	G	4	G		
Vicki	WC	42	13	2	10	G	4	B		
John	BC	42	13	2	10	G	4	B		
Lori	WC	47	25	1	14	G				
Jason	BC	48	25	1	14	G				
Zoey	WC	43	13	2	4	G	1	B		
Austin	BC	44	13	2	4	G	1	B		
Alexa	WC	44	17	3	13	B	10	B	8	B
Aaron	BC	63	17	3	13	B	10	B	8	B
Lillian	BC	45	14	2	6	G	1	B		
Parker	WC	39	14	2	6	G	1	B		
Mia	WC	40	10	2	6	B	3	G		
Kevin	BC	40	10	2	6	B	3	G		
Gabriella	BC	--	8	1	7	B				
Dan	WC	--	8	1	7	B				
Katie	BC	36	12	2	5	G	2	G		
Ryan	WC	36	12	2	5	G	2	G		
Leslie	WC	40	20	2	11	G	7	G		
Tom	BC	48	20	2	11	G	7	G		
Andrea	WC	--	12	3	9	B	7	G	5	G
Adam	BC	--	12	3	9	B	7	G	5	G
Gina	BC	--	9	2	6	B	3	G		
Scott	WC	--	9	2	6	B	3	G		
Sidney	BC	29	11	3	6	B	5	G	1	G
Joel	WC	32	11	3	6	B	5	G	1	G
Mary	WC	39	13	2	6	G	4	G		
Ben	BC	39	13	2	6	G	4	G		
Ann	BC	39	10	0						
Brandon	WC	43	10	0						
Isabelle	BC	39	10	2	5	B	3	B		
Ian	WC	39	10	2	5	B	3	B		

Bethany	WC	38	10	2	7	G	0.3	B		
Bob	BC	38	10	2	7	G	0.3	B		
Norah	WC	38	8	1	4	G				
George	BC	38	8	1	4	G				
Madison	BC	33	12	2	6	B	4	G		
Evan	WC	33	12	2	6	B	4	G		
Anita	WC	41	6	2	5	B	3	B		
Todd	BC	45	6	2	5	B	3	B		

*Same-Origin Couples*

Hannah	WC	31	8	2	6	G	3	G		
Bryce	WC	29	8	2	6	G	3	G		
Leah	WC	38	13	3	9	B	6	B	1	G
Luke	WC	33	13	3	9	B	6	B	1	G
Adrienne	WC	45	3	2	9	B	5	B		
Paul	WC		3	2	9	B	5	B		
Abby	WC	48	23	6	20	G	18	G	15	G
Sam	WC	48	23	6	20					
Amy	WC	39	14	2	11	B	9	G		
Shawn	WC	40	14	2	11	B	9	G		
Rose	WC	37	13	3	13	B	6	B	2	G
Phil	WC	37	13	3	13	B	6	B	2	G
Alisha	WC	38	14	2	12	B	10	B		
Brad	WC	42	14	2	12	B	10	B		
Carlie	WC	36	18	2	13	G	9	B		
Clint	WC	37	18	2	13	G	9	B		
Diana	WC	50	23	2	19	G	14	B		
Ted	WC	50	23	2	19	G	14	B		
Jen	WC	41	17	2	14	B	11	G		
Kent	WC	46	17	2	14	B	11	G		

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*Notes:* Women are listed first in each couple. The respondent listed below each woman is her husband. <sup>a</sup>BC = blue-collar, WC = white-collar. <sup>b</sup>Age: Age was not asked about but could often be inferred through information in the interview (i.e., knowledge of age at marriage and years married). When age could be inferred plus or minus two years it was included. <sup>c</sup>G = girl. <sup>d</sup>B = boy. <sup>e</sup>3 = This couple has only been married for three years, but were together for 22 years prior to marrying.

Table C.3: Meeting Places

Meeting Place	Total Number of Respondents in Different-Origin Marriages Meeting in this Place	Total Number of Respondents in Same-Origin Marriages Meeting in this Place
Junior High or High School	7*	1
College**	11	10
Graduate School	1	2
Work during College	2	0
Work after College	15	3
Religious Institution	4	0
Through Friends or Family	10	2
Bar	4	2
Leisure Activity	6	0
Online	2	0
Other	2	0

*Notes:*

\* Odd numbers exist because half of a couple (one person) was in one category, while the other partner was in another. For instance, one couple met when she was in high school and he was at work as her teacher.

\*\*The category of “college” includes all meetings that happened in college, including those which happened at a bar or through friends.

**APPENDIX D**  
**INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE**

**Matching Mechanisms**

- Will you tell me the story of how you met your partner?
  - First impressions? Reason for first attraction?
- Before you met your spouse, what characteristics were you looking for in a partner?
  - Was there anything in someone you dated in the past that you were trying to get away from?
- What made you think this was someone you wanted to marry?
- What did your friends and family first think about your partner? What do they think now?

**Engagement and Wedding**

- Tell me about the wedding planning.
- Tell me about the wedding.
- Tell me about some of the decisions you and your partner first made as a married couple (place to live, bank accounts, housework, etc)

**Life Together**

- How are you and your partner most alike? Most different?
- How do you think being in this relationship has changed you?
- How do you think being in this relationship has changed your partner?
- What compromises do you feel like you've had to make in your relationship?
- Do you think you and your partner are mostly alike or mostly differently when it comes to your ideas about the following? Please explain your answer.
  - Gift giving?
  - Holiday rituals?
  - How to spend money on yourself? On your kids? On your family as a whole?
  - The types of food you like to eat?
  - How your home should look?
  - Your politics?
  - Ideas about work?
  - Things to do on the weekend?
  - How to spend vacations?
  - Other people to spend time with?
- What do you admire about your partner?
- All couples disagree about some things. What types of things do you and your partner disagree about?

- How do you resolve these disputes?
- What types of things have you learned from your partner?
- What types of things do you think your partner has learned from you?
- Who do you think has changed more?
- On a scale of 1-10, how satisfied are you with your marriage?
- If you could change one thing about your marriage, what would it be?

### **In-Laws**

- Tell me about your in-laws.
  - What were your first impressions?
  - Do they have any customs that you aren't (or weren't initially) used to?
  - How are your moms alike? Different? Your dads?
  - How has your relationship with them evolved over time?

### **Parenting**

- Tell me about your children.
- What personality traits do you appreciate in your children?
- What personality traits do you think your children get from you?
  - From your spouse?
- What kind of activities does your child do?
  - How did you decide on these?
  - Are there any activities your child has ever wanted to do that you've not allowed?
- What type of elementary and high school do you want your child to go to?
  - How did you decide on this?
- Do you have a career goal for your child?
  - How would you feel about them doing your father's job?
  - Your partner's father's job?
- What are some life lessons you hope your child learns?
- How do your ideas of how to parent compare to your partners' ideas?
  - Can you tell me about a time when you and your partner disagreed about what or how to teach your child?
  - How did you work out the differences?
- What is the most important thing you can do as a parent to make sure your child turns into the adult you would like them to be?
- Has your child ever befriended someone you disapprove of?
  - What did you not like about this person?
  - What did you do when your child was hanging out with that person?
- Has your child ever dated someone you disapproved of?
  - What did you not like about this person?
  - Can you tell me about someone your child has dated that you've really liked?
- What could be the biggest thing your child could do to rebel?
- Since your child was born, how have your ideas about parenting changed?

## **Life Before Your Relationship**

- Tell me about the family you were born into.
- Is there anything about your childhood that stands out to you as being particularly formative?
- Describe the neighborhood(s) you grew up in.
- How was your family similar to other families in the neighborhood?
  - Different?
- What were some of the activities you did outside of school while growing up?
- What did you want to be when you grew up?
- Tell me about what school was like for you.
  - What type of elementary school did you go to? High school?
- Did you go to college? What was it like?
  - How did you pick your major?
- What values did your parents instill in you?
- Do you disagree with any of your parents' values?
  - If so, which ones?
- Do you feel more similar or different than your parents?
- Looking back on it, is there a time when you remember learning of your family's class status?
  - How did you find out/figure it out?

## **Direct Questions (mostly for different-origin couples)**

- When did you first realize that you and your partner were from different class backgrounds? What made you think so?
- Before agreeing to this interview, did you think much about being from a different class background than your partner?
- Before you met your partner, did you have many friends from a different class background?
- Before you met your partner, did you date people mostly from your partner's class background?
  - Did you also date people from your own class background?
- What did your grandparents do?
- What class would you say you grew up in? Why?
- What class would you say you're in now? Why?
- Is there any advice you'd give to those who marry someone from a different class background?
- Many people who are upwardly or downwardly mobile say they never fully feel comfortable in their new position. They sometimes describe this as experiencing permanent culture shock, or that they're straddling two worlds. Did you feel this way at one time?
  - Do you still feel this way?

## Demographic Questions

- What was your father's job when you were growing up?
- What was your mother's job when you were growing up?
- What was your parents' marital status?
  - If they were divorced, how old were you when the divorce took place?
  - Which parent did you live with?
  - Did the other parent provide financially for you and the other parent?
- What was your father's highest level of education?
- What was your mother's high level of education?
- Did your parents own a home?
- What is your own occupation?
- What are some of your previous occupations?
- What is your highest level of education?
  - [If respondent went to college] Where did you go to college?
- What is your religion?
- How long have you been married?
- Were you married to anyone before this person?
  - What was his/her occupation?
  - What was his/her highest educational level?
  - What did his/her father do?
  - What was his/her father's highest educational level?
  - Why did you get divorced?
- Where is the last vacation you went on?
  - Did you take vacations when growing up?
    - What are some of the places you went to?
  - Where is your favorite place you've ever been on vacation?

## Reflections

- Is there anything else you think I should know about your background or your marriage?
- How do you feel about the interview?
- Do you have any questions for me?



## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I use “class origin” and “class background” interchangeably.

<sup>2</sup> Breen and Salazar (2011) suggested that others have overstated the increase in inequality due to educational assortative mating.

<sup>3</sup> I credit Rick Rodems with applying the word “laissez-faire” to the respondents’ belief system.

<sup>4</sup> The emphasis on ideas is important, as it is likely that the behaviors of husbands and wives differed more than their stated ideas.

<sup>5</sup> It is not just class differences that can seem at first attractive and later unappealing. Felmler (1998) finds that this phenomena occurs more broadly.

<sup>6</sup> There are often discontinuities between their beliefs and what they do. Some authors have found that blue-collar families tend to have a more equitable division of labor even while preferring a gendered division of labor, while white-collar families profess their belief in equality but have a gendered labor split (Hochschild 2003; Pyke 1996; Shows and Gerstel 2009).

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