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How social class shapes thoughts and actions in organizations

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Abstract

This chapter presents the premise that social class is a potent, robust, and distinct predictor of how people think and act in organizations. Drawing on theories of social cognition, I define social class as a dimension of the self that is rooted in objective material resources (via income, education, and occupational prestige) and corresponding subjective perceptions of rank vis-à-vis others. Informed by demonstrations of the psychological effects of social class, I describe how social class may shape behavior in three illustrative domains of organizational life: social relationships, morality, and judgment and decision-making. I document objective and subjective measures of social class to guide research on its effects. I conclude by discussing the risks and benefits of investigating the social class of organization members, and the potential costs for organizations and researchers who ignore social class.

Keywords: Social class; Socioeconomic status; SES; Organizational behavior

Contents

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There are considerable differences in the amount of material resources that individuals possess in most countries (Davis & Cobb, 2010; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). The average income of the top 1% richest people in the U.S. is approximately 20 times larger than the average income of the bottom 90% (The Economist, 2011). Such inequality in income, indexed by the Gini coefficient, is rising in several countries, including the U.S. and China (Pappas, Queen, Hadden, & Fisher, 1993; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). To characterize these differences in income and other material resources, individuals use social class as a mental category to label and describe themselves and others. For instance, social commentators distinguish between the ''Haves'' and the ''Have-nots'' (Paul, 2010). Terms such as ''old money,'' ''new money,'' ''mucky mucks,'' and ''blue bloods'' are used to refer to individuals with abundant material resources.

In addition, individuals perceive that the ''Haves'' and the ''Have-nots'' act differently in their social environments. In a *New York Times* column, Krugman (2011) critiqued the perspective that the financial crisis is ''mostly the public's fault . . . voters wanted something for nothing, and weak-minded politicians catered to the electorate's foolishness,'' arguing instead that ''the policies that got us into this mess . . . were, with few exceptions, policies championed by a small group of influential people.'' Other social commentators blamed ''parasitic bankers and other elites rigging the game for their own benefit,'' arguing that ''the rich display outsize political influence, narrowly self-interested motives, and a casual indifference to anyone outside their own rarefied economic bubble'' (Freeland, 2011, p. 46). An analysis of the behavior of CEOs after the ethical lapses of the 1990s contrasted the self-centered behavior of most CEOs with that of Roger Enrico, former CEO of PepsiCo, who donated part of his salary for scholarships for children of employees, and who is the son of an iron worker who needed a scholarship to attend college (Hymowitz, 2002).

These beliefs – that people differ in social class and that social class influences how people act – are consistent with considerable academic scholarship that demonstrates the powerful influence of social class. Research in medicine and epidemiology has found associations between lower social class and poorer health, higher incidence of depression, and higher mortality (Chen, 2004; Gallo & Matthews, 2003; Krieger, Williams, & Moss, 1997; Pappas et al., 1993). Indeed, ''so closely does socioeconomic status correlate with health that it confounds the interpretation of much clinical research'' (Angell, 1993, p. 126). Research in sociology has used social class to predict collective action (Roy, 1984) and, more recently, individual outcomes such as social attitudes and political beliefs (Kohn, Naoi, Scoenbach, Schooler, & Slomczynski, 1990; Weeden & Grusky, 2005). This research has further found that social class acts as an intervening process that connects ethnicity to outcomes such as health (Hayward, Crimmins, Miles, & Yang, 2000). In psychology, social class is ''widely accepted to be one of the most important contributors to a more successful life'' (Roberts, Kuncel, Shiner, Caspi, & Goldberg, 2007, p. 315). Recent research has shown that social class predicts various patterns of action and cognition, contributing to social class becoming a new frontier in social and cultural psychology (Kraus, Piff, & Keltner, 2011).

By contrast, organization science typically ignores social class. A database title search for ''social class,'' ''SES,'' and ''socioeconomic status'' finds four articles published in the *Journal of Applied Psychology*, including one since 1974, and none in *Administrative Science Quarterly*; *Academy of Management Journal*; *Academy of Management Review*; *Organization Science*; *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*; and *Personnel Psychology*. There is a small literature on the effects of economic dependency on work, defined as how much individuals need their jobs to obtain the resources that they need (Brief, Brett, Raskas, & Stein, 1997). Employees with high economic dependency exhibit more involvement with work (Gould & Werbel, 1983) and stronger associations between their salary and their well-being (George & Brief, 1990) and between their commitment to the organization and their job performance (Brett, Cron, & Slocum, 1995). This literature informs research on social class, as economic dependency is stronger within the lower classes (for example, income was negatively correlated with economic dependency in Brief et al., 1997). More typically, however, when organizational scientists have not overlooked social class, ''SES indicators, such as occupational position, education, and income, have usually been treated as nuisance variables whose influence must be excluded'' (Christie & Barling, 2009, pp. 1474–1475).

In this chapter, I propose instead that social class has potent, robust, and distinct effects on how individuals behave in organizations. The goals of this chapter are fourfold. The first goal is to define social class. I list existing definitions of social class in related fields, propose a definition of social class that is tied to a specific theoretical foundation (social psychological theories of the self), offer theoretical and empirical evidence for this definition, and distinguish social class from power and status. The second goal is to describe how social class may shape how people think and act in three illustrative domains of organizational life: social relationships, morality, and judgment and decision-making. The third goal is to document measures and experimental manipulations of social class to guide future research. The final goal is to describe the risks and benefits of studying the role of social class in organizations.

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1. Defining social class

A review of the literature reveals that ''social class is one of the most frequently used and inconsistently defined concepts in the social sciences'' (Evans & Mills, 1998, p. 87). This confusion has led some researchers to avoid defining social class. In an early treatment, Lundberg (1940) wrote:

> As science advances, we find less and less interest in such questions, for example, as ''what'' electricity *is*. Except for certain types of philosophers, children, and other more or less semantically deranged persons (from the scientific point of view), most people find it sufficient to define what electricity *is* in terms of what it *does*. . . . As social science advances, we shall doubtless also find this type of answer adequate for the question as to what socioeconomic status *is*. We shall be content to say that it is *that which* under certain circumstances makes people beg on streets, cringe before the local banker, and behave arrogantly to the janitor (pp. 37–38).

Even today, researchers typically do not define social class. Moreover, the definitions that have been offered are inconsistent.

1.1. Conceptual versus operational definitions of social class

In Table 1, I list representative definitions of social class and socioeconomic status (SES), terms that are often used interchangeably in the literature. I separated the definitions that are conceptual from those that are operational. Conceptual definitions describe the essential properties of a construct (Pedhazur & Schmelkin, 1991). These definitions appear in the top part of Table 1. For instance, Kraus et al. (2011) defined social class as ''a cultural identity constituted via two processes . . . a person's objective social class – or objective resources . . . [and] inferences and perceptions of one's subjective social class rank vis-à-vis others'' (p. 246). By contrast, operational definitions define social class by describing how it is measured (Pedhazur & Schmelkin, 1991). These definitions appear in the bottom part of Table 1. The majority of the definitions of social class are operational. For instance, Adler and Snibbe (2003) wrote that ''SES is a reflection of social position, and is traditionally measured by income, education, and occupation'' (p. 119).

Here, I propose a conceptual definition of social class to facilitate the development of theories of how social class is related to organizational behavior. To develop theory – descriptions of how and why constructs are related (Dubin, 1976; Sutton & Staw, 1995; Whetten, 1989) – a definition that describes the essential features of social class is desirable. Such description will allow theorists to identify the constructs with which social class is connected (and those with which it is not), and to articulate the processes by which social class is related to other constructs. By contrast, operational definitions do not specify the boundaries of a construct, making it difficult to specify which other constructs are connected to social class.

Some of the existing definitions emphasize objective aspects of social class, while others emphasize subjective aspects. The traditional variables that have been used to define social class objectively across the disciplines are income, education, and occupational prestige (Adler & Snibbe, 2003; Goodman et al., 2001; Twenge & Campbell, 2002). According to the objective approach to defining social class, individuals have higher social class to the extent that they have more money, advanced education, and prestigious employment than others. By contrast, subjective definitions emphasize individuals' perceived rank relative to others in society (Kraus, Piff, & Keltner, 2009; Kraus et al., 2011; Storck, 1997). Individuals presumably compare themselves to a sample of other people in a reference group, and assess whether each sampled person possesses more material resources than they do (Boyce, Brown, & Moore, 2010). According to the subjective approach, individuals are of higher social class to the extent that they believe that they rank higher than others, because they perceive that they have more money, have more advanced education, and/or hold more prestigious employment than others. Given suggestions that the objective and subjective components of social class are inter-related parts of a larger concept rather than competing perspectives (Kraus et al., 2011), I integrate them in a definition of social class below.

1.2. Social class as a dimension of the self

One reason why the existing definitions of social class are disparate could be that they are not tied to a strong theory (Liu et al., 2004; Oakes & Rossi, 2003). Here, I tie the definition of social class to theories of the social construction of

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Table 1
Illustrative conceptual and operational definitions of social class.

Reference	Definition	Discipline
Conceptual definitions		
Kohn et al. (1990, p. 965)	"By "classes" we mean groups defined in terms of their relationship to ownership and control of the means of production, and of their control over the labor of others"	Sociology
Storck (1997, p. 334)	"*Psychosocial class* may be defined as: a person's level of education and type of occupation, combined with behaviors, thoughts, and feelings that include expectations and value systems with which a person manages everyday life and his or her relationships with others, in local groups or larger communities and societies"	Clinical psychology
Kraus et al. (2009, p. 992)	"Social class comprises both an individual's material resources and an individual's perceived rank within the social hierarchy … Objective SES refers to the material conditions of life that an individual enjoys … SES captures the individual's perceived place within a resource-based hierarchy"	Social psychology
Lapour and Heppner (2009, p. 447)	"Social class … includes an individual's overall awareness of where he or she falls in the social class hierarchy"	Counseling psychology
Piff et al. (2010, p. 772)	"Social class is a multifaceted construct that is rooted in both objective features of material wealth and access to resources (income, education …) as well as in conceptions of socioeconomic status (SES) rank vis-à-vis others in society (subjective SES …)"	Social psychology
Kraus et al. (2011, p. 246)	"Social class is a cultural identity constituted in two processes … a person's objective social class, or objective resources … [and] … inferences and perceptions of one's subjective social class rank vis-à-vis others … Wealth, education, and occupational prestige are the objective substance of social class"	Social psychology
Operational definitions		
Angell (1993, p. 126)	"Socioeconomic status refers to a mix of factors that shape a person's relative social advantage. It is usually gauged by income, education, profession, or some combination of the three …"	Medicine
Lachman and Weaver (1998, p. 764)	"… *social class differences* (defined as household income or economic status) …"	Social psychology
Goodman et al. (2001, p. 2)	"… income, education, and occupation [are] (the traditional variables used to measure SES) …"	Health psychology
Adler and Snibbe (2003, p. 119)	"SES is a reflection of social position, and is traditionally measured by income, education, and occupation"	Health psychology
Gallo and Matthews (2003, p. 11)	"SES is an aggregate concept defined according to one's level of resources or prestige in relation to others … Resource-based measures assess access to material and social assets, including income, wealth, and educational attainment. Prestige-based measures refer to an individual's rank or status in a social hierarchy, typically evaluated by access to and consumption of goods, services, and knowledge as linked to occupational prestige and education"	Health psychology
Snibbe and Markus (2005, p. 703)	"… we use educational attainment as an indicator of SES … paying special attention to the divide between those who have a college degree (BAs) and those who do not (HSs) …"	Social psychology
Stephens et al. (2007, p. 814)	"American middle-class (MD) contexts … [and] … American working-class (WK) contexts"	Social psychology
Bowman, Kitayama, & Nisbett (2009, p. 881)	"… we define social class in terms of educational attainment"	Social psychology
Christie and Barling (2009, p. 1467)	"SES is a relative ranking based on resources and prestige"	Organizational psychology
Grossman and Varnum (2011, p. 83)	"Educational attainment has been proposed as the key factor that distinguishes different classes …"	Social psychology
Matthews and Gallo (2011, p. 504)	"… [social class] indicators represent access to material and social resources and assets, or rank within a socio-economic hierarchy, or both …"	Health psychology

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the self (Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, & Nisbett, 1998; Greenwald et al., 2002; Markus & Kitayama, 1991, 2003, 2010). The self is an individual's mental representation of his or her attributes, including his or her social roles, social categories, relationships, personality, behavioral tendencies, goals, and physical characteristics (Baumeister, 1998; Greenwald et al., 2002). The self is dynamically shaped by the norms, values, and practices that are prevalent in the socio-cultural contexts that people currently encounter and the contexts that they have encountered in their childhood and throughout their lives (Fiske et al., 1998; Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

Among the various socio-cultural sources of the self, ethnicity has received much research attention. Hofstede (1980) showed that individuals in different countries vary along several dimensions of values, including individualism/collectivism and power distance. For example, practices that have historically been prevalent in the U.S. concern individualism. Americans value independence and freedom, and being a happy and successful self in the U.S. involves being an independent and free agent (Iyengar & Lepper, 1999; Ji, Peng, & Nisbett, 2000; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Theorists have argued that differences in values originate in variations in the geography and history of nations (Gelfand et al., 2011; Nisbett, 2003). Ethnicity, however, is not the only source of the self. Kusserow (1999) called attention to within-country differences in conceptions of the self, noting that ''anthropologists who claim to describe the self of the West are really describing middle-class America'' (p. 221). This suggests that social class may represent another socio-cultural source of the self.

Based on these considerations, and following other researchers (Kraus et al., 2011; Snibbe & Markus, 2005; Stephens, Markus, & Townsend, 2007), I define social class as *a dimension of the self that is rooted in objective material resources (income, education, and occupational prestige) and corresponding subjective perceptions of rank vis-à-vis others*. Social class reflects individuals' mental representations of their attributes, such as their social roles, relationships, behavioral tendencies, and goals that stem from the amount of material resources that they possess. Material conditions shape people's mental representations of who they are, how they should relate to others, and what they should be doing (Kraus et al., 2011; Stephens et al., 2007). These mental representations, in turn, lead to specific patterns of action and cognition. In the following sections, I describe how objective material conditions feed into subjective perceptions of social class, and how objective material resources and subjective perceptions of rank, together, shape the self.

Objective material conditions and subjective perceptions of social class. Access to material resources leads individuals to exhibit certain distinctions, including the neighborhoods where they live, the educational institutions they attend, and their social club memberships, recreational and aesthetic preferences, manners and customs, clothes, language use and accents, and patterns of nonverbal behavior (Kraus & Keltner, 2009; Snibbe & Markus, 2005). For instance, wealthy individuals are more likely to attend expensive and prestigious educational institutions (e.g., in the U.S., Liberal Arts and Ivy League schools) and prefer certain genres of art (e.g., classical music and theatre). Kraus et al. (2011) proposed that individuals rely on these distinctions to form subjective perceptions of their own rank vis-à-vis others and of the rank of others. For example, individuals who learn that a person has attended a prestigious university and enjoys theatre are likely to infer that this person has access to abundant material resources and high social class.

As predicted by this theoretical perspective, the objective and subjective components of social class are related. In one investigation, there were moderate to strong correlations between subjective and objective aspects of social class (Kraus et al., 2009). In another investigation, there were small to moderate correlations between income and perceived financial situation (e.g., whether people believed that they could pay the bills) (Johnson & Krueger, 2006). Also as predicted by this perspective, the objective and subjective aspects of social class exhibit similar relations with outcomes such as health (Adler & Snibbe, 2003), prosocial behavior (Piff, Kraus, Côté, Cheng, & Keltner, 2010), empathic accuracy (Kraus, Côté, & Keltner, 2010), and time pressure (DeVoe & Pfeffer, 2011).

The associations between the objective and subjective aspects of social class, however, are not unity. This suggests that certain factors may influence how much objective material conditions feed into subjective perceptions of class. In many instances, the effects of objective material resources persist over time and across generations. For example, some individuals perceive that they are of high rank because they have ties to prior material resources or prior power or retain the names of powerful families. In other instances, the effects of objective material resources fade, and individuals with ties to previous material resources do not subjectively perceive that they are upper class. Individuals whose parents were wealthy may not necessarily perceive that they currently have high rank.

Distinct factors may influence how much (a) the material resources that one currently possesses, (b) material resources that were once possessed but subsequently lost, and (c) material resources obtained via social ties such as

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family feed into subjective perceptions of social class. How much current material resources shape perceptions of class should depend on how long individuals have had access to these resources. Individuals who have possessed material resources for a long time are more likely to have acquired class-linked distinctions (Kraus et al., 2011). For instance, individuals who have long possessed large sums of money will belong to more exclusive social clubs and have attended more expensive recreational events and, thus, have had more opportunities to acquire the accents and aesthetic preferences that are associated with the upper class, relative to those who have had money for a short period of time. Individuals with wealthy parents, who have had access to material resources throughout their lives, should perceive that they are of higher rank than middle-class entrepreneurs who have suddenly become successful. Thus, current material resources should be more strongly associated with subjective perceptions of class the longer these resources have been possessed.

How much material resources that were once possessed shape perceptions of class should depend on how long the resources have been lost. Individuals who have lost material resources for only a short time are more likely to have retained class-linked distinctions, such as their use of language and the neighborhoods where they live. Over time, individuals who have lost their material resources should increasingly be excluded from contexts where they might interact with upper class individuals. For instance, having lost their resources, individuals may no longer be able to afford memberships in exclusive social clubs, city taxes on large houses in high-income neighborhoods, and tickets for plays and classical music concerts. They should gradually lose upper class distinctions; they may need to move to a different neighborhood and enjoy less expensive forms of art. Thus, material resources that were once possessed should be more strongly associated with subjective perceptions of class the more recently they have been lost.

How much material resources obtained from family and other social connections shape perceptions of social class depends on how easy it is to transfer these resources. Resources that are transferable can easily be given to a member of the family. Parents can give their name, money, and house, and a position in a family business to their children. It is more difficult for a family to give other resources to their children, such as their education, position in a large organization (such as a university), or position in government. Children are more likely to perceive that they are upper class if, for instance, their parents are upper class because they possessed money than if their parents are upper class because they are professors in a prestigious university, because money is easier to transfer. Thus, material resources obtained from family should be more strongly associated with subjective perceptions of class the easier it is to transfer the resources.

Objective and subjective components of social class and the self. Access to material resources and corresponding subjective perceptions of rank should lead individuals to exhibit certain dimensions of the self, such as their social roles, their tendencies to act in certain ways, and the goals that they set (Kraus et al., 2011; Ostrove & Cole, 2003; Snibbe & Markus, 2005; Stephens, Hamedani, Markus, Bergsieker, & Eloul, 2009). Along these lines, sociological theories of social conditioning posit that the objective conditions linked to different class positions transform the interests, values, and patterns of social interaction of individuals via job training, exposure to co-workers who have homogeneous worldviews, and the setting of common goals that must be achieved to succeed in particular organizational contexts (Bourdieu, 1986; Weeden & Grusky, 2005).

Several streams of research support the notion that social class is a socio-cultural source of the self. Like other sources of the self, social class can function as a source of stigma. A series of studies showed that social class is a source of stereotype threat in academic settings, like other dimensions of the self, such as ethnicity and gender (Croizet & Claire, 1998). In another series of studies, the regulatory resources of lower class students at an elite private university became more depleted (as shown by eating more candy and performing worse on a Stroop task), relative to their higher class counterparts, after discussing academic achievements, but not after discussing non-academic achievements (Johnson, Richeson, & Finkel, 2011). These studies reveal the existence of classism, so that individuals associate social class categories with characteristic patterns of action that, in turn, shape the self (Liu et al., 2004; Lott, 2002).

Associations between social class and practices concerning agency also suggest that social class influences aspects of the self. Past research has demonstrated that higher class individuals construe agency as influencing others and the environment, and lower class individuals construe agency as adapting to others and the environment. For instance, an anthropological study showed that child socialization practices in a lower class and particularly violent neighborhood prioritized dealing with and surviving in a tough and dangerous environment (Kusserow, 1999). By contrast, child socialization practices in an upper class and safe neighborhood in the same city emphasized confidence and asserting personal feelings and goals. Psychological research has shown that lower class individuals prefer objects that others

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have chosen and music (country) with lyrics that emphasize self-control, while their higher class counterparts prefer unique objects and music (rock) with lyrics that emphasize influence (Snibbe & Markus, 2005; Stephens et al., 2007). Research in organizational behavior has shown that when crafting their jobs (changing the tasks and relational aspects of jobs), lower class employees try to change the expectations and behaviors of others, while higher class employees change their own expectations and behaviors (Berg, Wrzesniewski, & Dutton, 2010). These studies show that higher- and lower class individuals hold different views on what constitutes good and normative action and, therefore, suggest that social class constitutes a socio-cultural source of the self.

1.3. Distinctions between social class, power, and status

To avoid redundancy and achieve parsimony in theorizing, researchers must confront the distinctiveness of social class from the related concepts of power and status (Anderson & Shirako, 2008; Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003). There are different definition of these concepts, but an authoritative review (Magee & Galinsky, 2008) defined power as ''asymmetric control over valued resources in social relations'' (p. 361) and status as ''the extent to which an individual or group is respected or admired by others'' (p. 359). These definitions invite questions about the added value of investigating the role of social class. Do studies that investigate the effects of social class replicate previous studies on the effects of power or status, or do they represent novel contributions?

There exist cases where social class, power, and status clearly do not correspond. The supervisors of dirty workers (workers whose tasks are physically, socially, or morally tainted, such as correctional officers, exterminators, and exotic entertainers) studied by Ashforth, Kreiner, Clark, and Fugate (2007) have control over resources (e.g., scheduling, rewards, reprimands) that allows them to influence the behavior of subordinates. However, their income, education, and occupational prestige signify lower social class, and they would likely report that they rank lower than most other people in society. In addition, whether these supervisors are respected and admired by their subordinates and, thus, have high status should depend on how well they treat their subordinates. The status of the supervisors may or may not correspond to their power and social class. If supervisors treat employees well, their status and power will be high, but their social class will be low. But, if supervisors treat employees poorly, their power will be high, but both their status and social class will be low.

More generally, there are two broad conceptual differences between social class, power, and status. First, there is a broad conceptual difference in breadth of content. Social class is based on material resources, rather than any valued resource. Thus, social class differs conceptually from power, which focuses more broadly on any valued resource. For instance, a manager's power may entail control over money and also non-material resources such as scheduling and assignments to more versus less interesting projects. Although the supervisors of dirty workers have limited material resources, they have access to other resources that give them more power than subordinates. These supervisors may be of the same or similar social class as their subordinates, yet have more power than subordinates. Social class is also a narrower construct than status, which concerns respect and admiration that is garnered for many reasons, including reasons that do not involve the possession of material resources. How fairly supervisors treat subordinates and how hard supervisors work, for example, are factors that may determine their status that are distinct from their material resources.

These considerations help identify situations in which social class, power, and status are expected to have the same effects, and situations in which they should have different effects on behavior. Power should have stronger effects than social class when individuals have the same access to material resources, but different access to non-material resources such as knowledge, expertise, and social connections. For example, two managers may have the same educational background and salary, but one who has longer tenure with the company may have more power, because that manager has more intimate knowledge of company procedures and more established ties with other members of the organization. Power may predict differences in the behaviors of these managers, but social class may not. By contrast, social class should have stronger effects than power when individuals have different access to material resources, but those with less material resources have access to compensating non-material resources, so that they have as much power as those with more material resources. For example, one employee may have more material resources than another, but the latter may have access to an extensive social network. The two employees have similar levels of power, but the former has higher social class. Social class may predict differences in the behaviors of these managers, but power may not.

The second broad conceptual difference between social class, power, and status pertains to the consistency of their effects across situations. The effects of social class should be more consistent and less dependent on the characteristics

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of interaction partners across situations and relationships than the effects of power and status. Although social class has a subjective component that could depend on one's interaction partner, subjective perceptions of social class stem from current material resources that are relatively stable, material resources possessed in childhood that have shaped the self for many years, and distinctions such as the neighborhood where people live that are stable (Duncan, Ziol-Guest, & Kalil, 2010; Miller et al., 2009; Rowe & Goldin-Meadow, 2009). Thus, individuals should, to some extent, carry social class from relationship to relationship and situation to situation. In contrast, the effects of power and status are relational. Power is asymmetric control over resources (Magee & Galinsky, 2008). Supervisors have more control over resources than their subordinates, but relatively little control over resources relative to their bosses. Further, research on leader–member exchange has shown that managers garner different status (i.e., respect and admiration) from different subordinates (Liden, Sparrowe, & Wayne, 1997). Thus, the effects of social class should be more similar across situations, such as interactions with different work partners, than the effects of power and status, which should depend more on who is involved in the interaction.

Distinguishing social class from power and status may reveal important dynamics in organizations. A manager may have more power yet have lower class than subordinates. For example, employees with lower class backgrounds may emerge as leaders and reach high ranks in organizations. These lower class managers may supervise higher class students in summer internships or higher class individuals who have lost their previous employment and are starting at the bottom of the hierarchy in a new role. In these situations, higher class employees with less power may feel resentment because they perceive that they are entitled to more control. Lower class managers should have difficulty dealing with subordinates who believe that they deserve a higher rank and more control over resources in the organization. Tension and conflict may arise in organizations when social class and power do not correspond, illustrating the importance of differentiating conceptually between these constructs.

Evidence of discriminant validity of social class. The preceding discussion suggests that social class, power, and status should correlate, but not too strongly. In one investigation, there were moderate correlations between a subjective measure of social class and a measure of sense of power (Anderson, John, & Keltner, in press). In another investigation, objectively measured social class (income and education) was not correlated with measures of sense of power and status, except for one small but significant negative correlation showing, counterintuitively, that higher class individuals felt less powerful than their counterparts (Kraus & Horberg, 2011). In another study, an experimental manipulation of power, whereby individuals wrote about a situation in which they either had high or low control over others, influenced their sense of power, but not their subjective perceptions of social class (Kraus et al., 2009, Study 3). These results support the discriminant validity of social class with respect to power and status.

The distinction of social class from power and status also suggests that they have at least some distinct correlates. Past research has found that higher class individuals have more independent self-construals than their lower class counterparts (Grossman & Varnum, 2011). The relation between power and independence, however, is more complicated. In one investigation, implicit high power cues activated more independent self-construals and autonomous perceptions of the self, but explicit high power cues had the opposite effects (Caza, Tiedens, & Lee, 2011). Further, in one study, the trait of extraversion was correlated twice as strongly with sense of power ($r = .59$) than with subjective perceptions of social class ($r = .26$) (Anderson et al., in press, Study 5). This evidence suggests that social class is a distinct construct that may predict behavior over and above power and status.

2. The case for psychological explanations of the influence of social class

Although research in psychology, sociology, medicine, and other disciplines has demonstrated effects of social class, the mechanisms underlying these effects are perplexing (Elo, 2009; Goodman et al., 2001; Hayward et al., 2000). In the introduction of a special issue of the *New England Journal of Medicine* on the connection between social class and health, Angell (1993) wrote that "despite the importance of socioeconomic status to health, no one knows quite how it operates. It is perhaps one of the most mysterious determinants of health" (p. 126).

There is some evidence supporting two broad sets of mechanisms: economic and biological mechanisms. Economic mechanisms posit that higher class individuals have access to more tangible resources such as housing and transportation that provide opportunities to ameliorate their outcomes, relative to their lower class counterparts (Johnson & Krueger, 2006; Wilkinson, 1999). For example, the Wisconsin Model posits that the material resources of children influence the quality of their education, their educational performance, and, in turn, their career success (Sewell & Hauser, 1975). Other theories propose that social class provides access to technologies and innovations,

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such as modern treatments for heart disease and direct deposits of paycheques, that facilitate decision-making, reduce errors, and ultimately contribute to success (Elo, 2009; Bertrand, Mullainathan, & Shafir, 2004).

Biological mechanisms posit that social class affects biological variables that, in turn, influence life and career outcomes. Research has documented relations between social class and physiological markers such as cortisol levels and blood pressure (Wilkinson, 1999). One study showed that perceptions of threat and family chaos among lower social class children increase cortisol levels and, in turn, reduce health (Chen, Cohen, & Miller, 2010). Another study showed that social class affects biological systems in a persistent manner, so that biological changes in childhood that stem from encountering difficult social environments leave a biological residue that increases susceptibility to chronic diseases in adulthood (Miller et al., 2009). Other research has shown that social class predicts affective and physiological reactions to stressors and threat (Adler & Ostrove, 1999; Chen & Matthews, 2001; Gallo & Matthews, 2003; Link, Lennon, & Dohrenwend, 1993).

Notwithstanding the explanatory power of economic and biological mechanisms, evidence suggests that they do not alone explain the effects of social class. In one investigation, subjective perceptions of one's financial situation mediated the effect of objective income on life satisfaction, highlighting the potential importance of the psychological interpretation of one's condition (Johnson & Krueger, 2006). Another study showed that lower class individuals feel more distress than their higher class counterparts even when facing the same stressors in the environment (Kessler & Cleary, 1980). This finding challenges economic models by showing that higher- and lower class individuals respond differently to the same conditions, potentially due to differences in expectations and desires for material wealth (Johnson & Krueger, 2006), perceived control over one's life (Johnson & Krueger, 2006; Kessler & Cleary, 1980), and feelings of self-worth (Kessler & Cleary, 1980).

Another stream of research that suggests that economic and biological mechanisms do not alone explain the effects of social class concerns experimental manipulations of higher- and lower class mindsets. In past research, the temporary activation of higher- versus lower class mindsets (by asking participants to compare themselves to those that are worse off or those that are best off, respectively) showed the same associations with empathic accuracy (Kraus et al., 2010) and generosity (Piff et al., 2010) as objective and subjective measures of social class. These results challenge existing explanations because economic and biological conditions likely do not change when higher- and lower class mindsets are activated in brief experiments.

The preceding discussion suggests that psychological mechanisms may explain some effects of social class. In the following sections, I extend basic psychological findings to describe how social class may shape the behavior of organization members in three illustrative domains of organization: social relationships, morality, and judgment and decision-making.

3. Social class and social relationships

The Academy Award winning documentary *Inside Job* covers events that led up to the financial crisis of 2008–2009 (Marrs & Ferguson, 2010). The movie describes a common pattern of social relations of higher class executives of financial services firms. In particular, Lawrence McDonald, former Vice President of Lehman Brothers, describes former (and final) CEO Richard Fuld's interactions with his employees as follows: ''Fuld never appeared on the trading floor . . . He had his own private elevator. He went out of his way to be disconnected . . . there's only a two or three second window where he has to see people.'' Therapist Jonathan Alpert indicated that in his experience, among executives generally, ''there's just a blatant disregard for the impact that their actions might have on society, on family. They have no problem using a prostitute and going home to their wife.'' These depictions suggest that higher class individuals may have social relationships that are different – more distant, less caring, and less empathic – than their lower class counterparts.

Effects of social class on how individuals approach their social relationships could have important implications for organizational life. Understanding how organization members relate to others – when they are agreeable, provide assistance to others, donate resources to those in need, and show empathy – has become an important goal of organization science (Dutton, Worline, Frost, & Lilius, 2006; Grant & Parker, 2009; Margolis & Walsh, 2003). Here, I review findings that reveal that social class creates differences in levels of social engagement, and also that others act differently towards higher- and lower class individuals. I then theorize about the implications of the influence of social class on social relationships for organizational settings.

Social class and social engagement. Lower and higher social class individuals experience different material and environmental conditions (Kraus et al., 2009, 2011; Piff et al., 2010; Snibbe & Markus, 2005; Stephens, Fryberg, &

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Markus, 2011). The environments of lower class individuals are relatively unstable, challenging, and dangerous, while the environments of higher class individuals are relatively predictable and safe. In encountering troubling circumstances, lower class individuals may experience a reduced sense of control over their own life outcomes, while higher class individuals may develop a sense of control over their relatively benign environments (Lachman & Weaver, 1998; Snibbe & Markus, 2005). Higher class individuals may also value and develop control because higher education teaches an association between action and outcomes (Lachman & Weaver, 1998).

There is evidence that higher class individuals experience more personal control, self-direction, and self-reliance than their lower class counterparts. Research in sociology has shown a link between social class and self-reliance in different countries and political systems (Kohn et al., 1990, 1997). In the U.S., Japan, and Poland, employers and managers are more self-reliant (measured, for example, by reduced conformity to others' ideas) than manual and factory workers (Kohn et al., 1990). In addition, in one study, higher class adolescents believed that whether their hopes would be fulfilled depended more on them and less on external circumstances than lower class adolescents (Lamm, Schmidt, & Trommsdorff, 1976). Another study found that lower class employees experience less personal control at work and, in turn, more health problems, relative to higher class employees (Christie & Barling, 2009).

Different levels of personal control may, in turn, lead to different patterns of social engagement (Kraus et al., 2010). Lower class individuals may rely more heavily on their social bonds and maintain stronger social ties to buffer themselves against threats resulting from life disruptions, limited resources, and little control over outcomes. Lower class individuals should thus be motivated to behave in ways that increase social engagement and connection with others. By contrast, higher class individuals should be less motivated to socially engage and connect with others because they possess considerable material resources.

The effect of lower social class on more social engagement may extend to generosity. Lower class individuals may be more generous because their enhanced social engagement helps them discover more opportunities to help. Because they should more accurately detect emotions like sadness and anxiety that signal that others need help, lower class individuals should be better informed of opportunities to help others. Lower class individuals may also be more willing to extend help when opportunities arise, because they are more closely connected to others (Piff et al., 2010). This reasoning suggests that lower class individuals should generally be more generous than their higher class counterparts.

Research findings on the association between social class and social engagement. In support of this theorizing, psychological research has shown class differences in patterns of social engagement. In past studies, lower class children played and talked in closer physical proximity to each other in a school yard (Scherer, 1974) and were more likely to smile and less likely to show signs of boredom in a classroom environment (Stipek & Ryan, 1997), relative to higher class children. In another study, car advertisements targeted at lower class consumers (i.e., advertisements for cars that are typically purchased by people with limited resources) were more likely to emphasize connection to others, for example, by showing friends in the passenger seats, than advertisements targeted at higher class consumers (Stephens et al., 2007, Study 5).

An extension of this research examined how social class is associated with micro patterns of social engagement and disengagement (Kraus & Keltner, 2009). Students engaged in a get-acquainted interaction in which they described themselves for 5 min. During the interaction, higher class individuals demonstrated more signs of disengagement (i.e., self-grooming, object manipulation, and doodling) and fewer signs of engagement (i.e., heads nods, eyebrow raises, laughter, and gazes) than their lower social class counterparts.

In addition, lower class individuals perceive other people's emotions more accurately. In one study, higher class employees of an organization performed worse on a standard test of empathic accuracy than their lower class counterparts (Kraus et al., 2010, Study 1). A follow-up study showed that this association was explained by greater attention to contextual cues among lower class individuals (Kraus et al., 2010, Study 2). The same difference was also observed when higher- and lower class mindsets were experimentally manipulated. A lower class mindset, induced by asking participants to compare themselves to those who are best off, led to higher scores on a test of empathic accuracy than a higher class mindset, induced by asking participants to compare themselves to those who are worst off (Kraus et al., 2010, Study 3).

Some studies examined class differences in their conceptions of helping, and the conditions in which individuals are particularly likely to help. In an early study, higher class women were more likely to think of helping as a series of exchanges, and lower class women were more likely to be communal in their helping (Muir & Weinstein, 1962). In particular, higher class women were more likely to indicate that they provided help in exchange for favors, and that they would stop helping if others failed to reciprocate help. Berkowitz and Friedman (1967) examined the helping

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behaviors of boys between 13 and 16 years of age from three classes: the entrepreneurial middle class, bureaucratic middle class, and working class (coded with the father's occupation and education). Boys from the entrepreneurial class were particularly likely to think of helping as a series of exchanges. In a more recent investigation, lower class participants (measured subjectively) gave more points that could be translated to cash payouts in a dictator game than their higher class counterparts (Piff et al., 2010, Study 1). An experimentally induced lower class mindset was associated with more charitable attitudes, assessed by asking individuals what percentage of income should be donated to charity (Piff et al., 2010, Study 2). Other studies showed that lower class individuals have more egalitarian values, provide more help to a stranger in distress, and trust others more than their higher class counterparts (Piff et al., 2010).

How can these findings be reconciled with observations that upper class individuals lead active social lives, belong to exclusive social clubs, and attend numerous networking events? Past evidence suggests that although upper class individuals have many social ties, they are less close than the ties of their lower class counterparts. Social networks with many structural holes, which tend to be composed of many weak ties, are associated with faster promotion rates and career progression (Burt, 1992). Thus, upper class members of organizations tend to have many relationships that are not very close. In addition, organization members at high levels of the hierarchy are less accurate at diagnosing informal networks in their own group, relative to their counterparts at lower levels of the hierarchy (Casciaro, 1998). This suggests that upper class individuals may have relatively little interest in the social connections in their social groups. In addition, it is possible that lower class organization members are more motivated and interested in attending networking events and exclusive social clubs, but are excluded from such opportunities to cultivate social connections. Upper class individuals may appear to be more socially engaged because they have more opportunities to network with others. In reality, however, lower class counterparts may be more interested in taking part in networking activities. If they were given the same opportunities, lower class individuals would seem more engaged in all forms of social activity than their higher class counterparts.

Taken together, the past findings suggest that higher class individuals are less socially engaged than their lower class counterparts, and this pattern may explain the generally socially distant behavior of higher class financial executives.

Organizational implications of the association between social class and social engagement. The effect of social class on social engagement may have important consequences for interpersonal coordination in organizations. Interpersonal coordination emerges when the actions, knowledge, and objectives of organization members are integrated and aligned (Rico, Sánchez-Manzanares, Gil, & Gibson, 2008; Zalesny, Salas, & Prince, 1995). Coordination facilitates certain types of organizational performance by reducing inefficiency due to misunderstandings and by ensuring that the members function as an integrated whole (Rico et al., 2008; Wittenbaum, Stasser, & Merry, 1996). Group members who are socially engaged should anticipate and dynamically adjust their behavior to the actions and needs to others, thereby facilitating coordination. In addition, socially engaged group members should be better positioned to engage in complementary behaviors (Orford, 1986) that enhance liking, trust, and coordinated performance (Maddux, Mullen, & Galinsky, 2008; Tiedens & Fragale, 2003).

By contrast, group members who are not socially engaged may miss signals of others' current positions and intentions. Lack of social engagement also limits complementarity. These arguments suggest that groups composed of some higher- and some lower class members may struggle to coordinate their activities, as higher class members may ignore and cause frustration in lower class members, who should be particularly attuned to the fact that their ideas are excluded from the discussion. In addition, if two groups are identical in abilities and personality – but one is composed of higher class members and the other lower class members – the probability may be higher that the group with higher class members will exhibit problems of coordination caused by limited social engagement.

Organizational outcomes that depend on coordination may also be influenced by the social class of organization members. One such outcome is organizational learning, the process of improving collective action by asking questions, experimenting, seeking feedback, and discussing the results of experiments (Edmondson, 1999; Fiol & Lyles, 1985). Groups composed of higher- versus lower class members may exhibit different amounts of learning via different patterns of coordination and empathy. Coordination combined with empathy should facilitate organizational learning because members should feel that they can experiment with new ways of working without fear of sanctions from their colleagues. Group members who take the perspective of others should understand where each other is coming from, offer support to each other, and encourage each other to take chances, experiment, and reflect on the results of experiments. This process should help group members discover why errors occur and make improvements, resulting in learning (Edmondson, 1999). The connection between lower class and higher social engagement and

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coordination suggests that groups composed of lower class members should learn more than groups composed of higher class members, all else equal.

Although the social engagement of lower class individuals may facilitate some types of outcomes in organizations, it may also have drawbacks in certain conditions. Group members often conform to other members' positions because they fear sanctions or potential exclusion from the group (Wilensky & Ladinsky, 1967). This tendency can decrease the quality of group decisions when members hesitate to provide useful information and to challenge the majority (Janis, 1982). Lower class group members may be more likely to subscribe to social norms because they are more socially engaged and, hence, more attuned to others' positions than their upper class counterparts. In past research, lower class individuals in the U.S., Japan, and Poland endorsed conformity to external authority as a guide for behavior to a greater extent than higher class individuals (Kohn et al., 1990). In another investigation, the choices of lower class individuals conformed more to the choices of others, whereas higher class individuals made more choices that helped them stand out (Stephens et al., 2007). Thus, all else equal, groups composed of lower class members should exhibit more conformity, and groups composed of higher class members should emit more diverging opinions during the decision-making process and take more time to arrive at a potentially better solution.

Perceptions and reactions to social class. The previous section concerned the effects of the social class of organization members on how they act towards others. It is also possible that organization members act differently when they interact with partners of different social classes. As a dimension of the self, social class is associated with particular patterns of interaction with the social world (Greenwald et al., 2002; Markus & Kitayama, 1991, 2010). If social class is associated with predictable patterns of behavior, individuals may rely on these patterns to infer others' social class. These inferences may, in turn, guide how individuals act towards others. Organization members may act differently when they perceive that their interaction partner possesses considerable rather than limited material resources.

Research findings on perceptions and reactions to social class. Evidence shows that individuals readily judge the social class of others by considering information about their potential income, education, and occupation. For instance, Himmelfarb and Senn (1969) found evidence that observers mentally average information about income, education, and occupation, even when one piece of information is inconsistent with the other pieces. Kraus and Keltner (2009) extended this early research on how individuals identify others' social class. Observers viewed video-recordings of participants engaged in a get-acquainted interaction. Observers agreed in their independent judgments of participants' social class, and these judgments correlated with participants' objective social class (assessed with parental education and family income) and subjective social class (assessed by asking participants to rank themselves relative to others). Further, observers' judgments of social class were based on participants' engagement and disengagement cues during the interaction. When participants played with objects and doodled, observers (correctly) inferred that they had higher social class, and when participants nodded and looked at their partner, observers (correctly) inferred that they had lower social class.

There is limited research on how individuals act towards others as a result of having perceived their social class. In one study, members of the entrepreneurial social class were particularly likely to think of helping as a series of exchanges (relative to members of the bureaucratic social class and the working class) when their interaction partners had lower class (Berkowitz & Friedman, 1967). Blascovich, Mendes, Hunter, Lickel, and Kowai-Bell (2001) tested the hypothesis that interactions with lower social class others would trigger physiological signs of threat because low social class is a source of stigma and, thus, these interactions are construed as demanding. As expected, participants exhibited stronger physiological threat reactions when interacting with a lower class partner (described as having one absent parent and one parent who is a factory worker, enjoying watching television in her spare time, and working to help the family during the summer) than with a higher class partner (described as having parents who are an international lawyer and a history professor, enjoying shopping in her spare time, and traveling to Europe during the summer). Another investigation showed that inspectors who conduct vehicle emission tests are more lenient towards those with standard vehicles because they feel more empathy for them and envy them less than those with luxury cars (Gino & Pierce, 2010).

Taken together, these findings suggest that individuals perceive the social class of others, in part, by assessing how socially engaged others are. Perceived social class, in turn, may influence how people act towards others. The limited research on this topic suggests that individuals may trust lower class interaction partners less, socially avoid them more, pity them more, and have lower expectations of their future success and performance, relative to higher class interaction partners. These speculative thoughts should be examined in future research.

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Organizational implications of perceptions and reactions to social class. Individuals use heuristics to simplify the world, guide their actions, and make decisions more efficiently (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). To the extent that individuals can reliably identify others' social class (Kraus & Keltner, 2009), they may categorize other organization members, and act differently when interacting with higher- and lower class organization members. For instance, organization members may quickly judge the social class of newcomers and act differently with them, even if they have the same abilities, personality, experience, and training.

Perceptions and reactions to social class may form the basis of self-fulfilling prophecies in organizations. Self-fulfilling prophecies occur when observers hold expectations about the behaviors and outcomes of members of a social group that lead observers to act in ways that create the behaviors and outcomes that they initially expected (Rosenthal, 1991). Meta-analytic research has demonstrated the effects of self-fulfilling prophecies in schools and work organizations (McNatt, 2000). For example, in one study, teachers doing instructional planning for a higher class school favored instruction that was more intellectually oriented, while those planning for a lower class school favored instruction that was more vocationally oriented (Sperry, 1974).

Expectations may lead individuals to treat higher- and lower class others differently in the workplace, forming the basis of self-fulfilling prophecies that produce different outcomes for higher- and lower class organization members. Individuals may specifically expect that higher class organization members will be more confident and dominant, because their access to material resources creates safety and comfort. Individuals may also expect higher class organization members to take more risks, because the threat of losing a job may be a lesser deterrent to those with considerable material resources. In turn, individuals may act more submissively and give in more frequently to their higher class co-workers, facilitating the emergence of higher class members as contributors and leaders in organizations.

By contrast, individuals may expect that lower class organization members will be more diffident and hesitant, because limited resources necessitate a safe approach. Individuals may expect that the threat of job loss from deviating from standard procedures and ''rocking the boat'' should be particularly salient among lower class individuals. Individuals may thus be particularly assertive and domineering with lower class organization members, thereby denying them opportunities to show performance and leadership. In support of this assertion, in one study, lower class participants perceived that others emitted more dominant and controlling behavior than did their higher class counterparts (Gallo, Smith, & Cox, 2006). Thus, if two organization members are identical in abilities, personality, experience, and training – but one is higher class and the other lower class – the higher class organization member may be treated more favorably and, in turn, do better. Over and above other relevant variables at the time of organizational entry, higher class newcomers may obtain more rewards and attain positions of leadership more often and faster than their lower class counterparts.

Self-fulfilling prophecies may more generally contribute to continued inequality between people of different social classes. Lower class organization members may have difficulty emerging as contributors and leaders in their organizations because others expect them to be diffident and hesitant and, in turn, others act particularly assertively with them. Through this process, lower class individuals may be denied access to material resources that could increase their social class. By contrast, higher class organization members may emerge as contributors and leaders relatively easily. Access to additional material resources would help them retain their higher class position. Interventions to limit the effects of self-fulfilling prophecies tied to social class may therefore reduce inequality. In a relevant study, instructors told in a 5-min conversation that low initial scores appreciably underestimate the true potential of paratrooper trainees did not exhibit self-fulfilling prophecy effects (Oz & Eden, 1994). This technique could be adapted to limit how much self-fulfilling prophecies impact the outcomes of higher- and lower class organization members.

4. Social class and morality

The concept of social class invites questions about the ethicality of disparities in wealth within and across nations (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). It is reported in the documentary *Inside Job* that ''In 2009, as employment hit its highest level in 17 years, Morgan Stanley paid its employees over $14 billion and Goldman Sachs paid out over 16 billion. In 2010, bonuses were even higher.'' The movie also documents several instances in which higher class executives displayed questionable morality. During a testimony to a committee investigating the sources of financial crisis of 2008–2009, David Viniar, Executive Vice President and CFO of Goldman Sachs, was asked by U.S. Senator Carl

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Levin: ''When you heard that your own employees in these emails are looking at these deals said 'God what a shitty deal. God what a piece of crap', . . . do you feel anything?'' Viniar responded: ''I think that's very unfortunate to have on email'' (Scheer, 2010). In a related series of events, financier Bernie Madoff lied to investors, including close family friends, about the nature of their investments, as he ran a $65 billion Ponzi scheme that has been labelled the greatest financial crime in history (Markopolos, 2010).

These examples suggest that investigations of social class may increase our understanding of a fundamental problem in organization science: why organization members at times lie, cheat, or undermine others (Gino & Pierce, 2010; Moore, Tetlock, Tanlu, & Bazerman, 2006). Organizational behavior researchers have been interested in why executives, managers and other professionals commit ethical transgressions (Jost et al., 2009; Moore et al., 2006; Brown & Treviño, 2006). The research reviewed above suggests that higher class organization members may often be less ethical, in part, because of their reduced social engagement and generosity. With a reduced need to orient towards others, higher class individuals may make decisions that are less fair and more damaging to others.

Attention to class differences may also reveal more nuanced insights about moral behavior in organizations. Focusing on the ethical decision-making of CEOs, executives, and managers may limit our understanding of how lower class organization members construe morality, as their views of appropriate moral conduct could differ from those of the elite. Here, I consider the possibility that as a dimension of the self, social class shapes what is considered moral behavior. Preliminary findings suggest that higher- and lower class individuals differ in what they consider to be moral action. Class differences in construals of morality may have implications for what individuals do and how they react to the behavior of others in organizations (Brief, in press).

The moral foundations of higher- and lower class individuals. Moral foundations theory posits that current academic conceptions of morality focus too narrowly on fairness and harm, areas of concern to middle-class Westerners (Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009; Haidt & Graham, 2007; Haidt & Joseph, 2004). By considering other areas of morality, researchers may better understand how individuals of different ethnicities, political beliefs, and social class conceive of moral behavior. Past research may have focused on a narrow conception of morality in particular because it defined morality in terms of its contents (e.g., fairness, justice, harm) rather than its functions. To address this issue, Haidt and Kesebir (2010) provided a definition that specified the functions of morality: ''Moral systems are interlocking sets of values, virtues, norms, practices, identities, institutions, technologies, and evolved psychological mechanisms that work together to suppress or regulate selfishness and make social life possible'' (p. 800). This definition allows for the identification of several dimensions of morality, including dimensions that are valued by individuals who are not middle-class Westerners in particular.

Haidt and his colleagues (Graham et al., 2009; Haidt & Graham, 2007; Haidt & Joseph, 2004) specifically identified five dimensions of morality by distilling comprehensive theories of ethics and values (e.g., Shweder, Much, Mahapatra, & Park, 1997). The harm-care dimension of morality concerns protection from physical or psychological suffering (e.g., pain, poverty). Fairness-reciprocity concerns justice and equality between people. Authority-respect pertains to establishing and affirming hierarchy and order. Ingroup-loyalty concerns loyalty to important social groups, such as family and nation. And, purity-sanctity pertains to the sacred aspects of life, such as religion and body.

Moral foundations theory proposes that experiences, narratives, social constructions, and personal constructions shape morality (Graham et al., 2009; Haidt, Graham, & Joseph, 2009; Haidt & Joseph, 2004) through a process akin to the socio-cultural construction of the self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, 2010) and social conditioning (Bourdieu, 1986; Weeden & Grusky, 2005). For example, in past research, the dimensions of morality served to explain differences between liberals and conservatives; liberals place higher importance on harm-care and fairness-reciprocity, and conservatives place higher importance on authority-respect, ingroup-loyalty, and purity-sanctity (Graham et al., 2009).

As a dimension of the self, social class may influence the relevance of the foundations. For instance, impurities (physically dirty environments, diseases) are more prevalent in the environments of lower class individuals, and such exposure may chronically prime the concept of purity (Horberg, Oveis, Keltner, & Cohen, 2009). In addition, because higher class individuals have more freedom and resources and value autonomy more (Kusserow, 1999), they may de-emphasize the importance of purity because it constrains the pursuit of personal goals (Haidt, Koller, & Dias, 1993; Horberg et al., 2009). Thus, the moral foundation of purity-sanctity may be less relevant to higher class individuals.

Research findings on the association between social class and moral foundations. Haidt et al. (1993) interviewed higher- and lower class children of 10–12 years and adults of 19–26 years in three cities: Porto Alegre, a relatively wealthy city in Brazil; Recife, a poor city in Brazil; and Philadelphia, U.S. Higher class individuals were more permissive of actions that are impure yet harmless (e.g., cooking and eating a family dog killed by a car in front of the

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house) than lower class individuals. Higher class individuals were less likely to think that these actions should be stopped or punished, and more likely to think that it is acceptable for countries to differ in these customs than lower class individuals. This suggests that lower class individuals are more likely to include purity-sanctity concerns in their conceptions of what is moral behavior. Further, the justifications of higher class individuals for their judgments of the actions were more likely to reflect the foundations of harm-care and fairness-reciprocity, and less likely to reflect the foundations of ingroup-loyalty and authority-respect, relative to lower class individuals. The authors noted that ''one surprise of the current study was the large difference between social classes, which was in most cases larger than the differences among the cities'' (Haidt et al., 1993, p. 625).

In another investigation, higher class students at a public U.S. university were more permissive of behaviors that violate purity-sanctity (e.g., having sexual intercourse with a dead chicken before cooking and eating it or, more simply, being sexually promiscuous) than lower class students (Horberg et al., 2009). The same investigation found that social class was not associated with judgments of violations of the harm-care and fairness-reciprocity dimensions of morality. In one last study, higher class adults recruited from local Christian congregations showed less concern for the authority-respect and purity-sanctity dimensions than their lower class counterparts, but social class was not related to concerns for harm-care, justice-fairness, and ingroup-loyalty (McAdams et al., 2008).

This research consistently found that lower class individuals are more likely to consider violations of purity-sanctity in their judgments of moral conduct than higher class individuals. In addition, the two studies that examined the foundation of authority-respect found that it was more important to lower class individuals. This finding is consistent with observations that the socialization practices of lower class parents emphasize obedience and respect of authority figures (Kusserow, 1999). How social class is associated with the other domains of morality is less clear. Differences in the conceptions of morality of higher- and lower class individuals may have important organizational implications. These differences reveal that what is known about the moral behavior of CEOs, executives, managers, and other professionals may not generalize to all organization members. The moral behavior of higher- and lower class organization members may depend on which foundations underlie their respective conceptions of morality.

Organizational implications of the association between social class and moral foundations. Social class may affect judgments of morality and reactions to various acts in organizations because members of different classes place different weights on moral foundations. Higher class organization members should be more likely to challenge authority, because respecting authority is less important to their conception of a moral person, relative to their lower class counterparts. It has been observed that disadvantaged group members often hesitate to support progressive policies designed to reduce inequalities and, ultimately, benefit them (Jost, Pelham, & Carvallo, 2002). Prior explanations suggest that lower class individuals may oppose progressive policies, for instance, to satisfy a need to reduce uncertainty, to maintain the illusion that they have control over their environment, or because they fall prey to mass media influences (Jost et al., 2002). The current analysis accords an important role to class differences in the importance of respect for authority as a dimension of morality. Lower class individuals may oppose progressive policies because they believe that challenging current policies supported by leaders undermines authority and is thus an unethical way to act.

This reasoning may also explain why employees often fail to voice opinions in organizations (Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008). Voice is defined as the discretionary expression of challenging but constructive opinions, concerns, or ideas intended to address work-related issues (Detert & Burris, 2007; Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008). Voice helps organizations identify problems, learn how to address problems, and improve decisions (Detert & Burris, 2007; Edmondson, 1999). Despite these advantages, organization members often tend to remain silent (Milliken, Morrison, & Hewlin, 2003; Morrison & Milliken, 2000). Explanations for the lack of voice have emphasized justice climate (Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008), psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999), and the structure of decision-making practices in organizations (Morrison & Milliken, 2000), among other causes. The current analysis offers a novel explanation. Lower class employees may hesitate to express concerns and ideas because these expressions typically challenge the status quo and the leaders who have developed or endorsed the current procedures. Thus, if two members of the same organization are identical in abilities, personality, and demographic characteristics – but one is higher class and the other lower class – the higher class employee may be more likely to voice an opinion, concern, or idea, because respect for authority is less central to being a moral person for that employee.

The different foundations of morality espoused by higher- and lower class organizational members may contribute to interpersonal conflict in organizations. Conflict may arise when higher- and lower class organization members make different moral judgments of the same action because they hold different conceptions of what constitutes moral

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conduct. For instance, one researcher may construe a common colleague's efforts to promote his or her own work as trying to gain an unfair advantage, and another may construe the same behavior as communicating new contributions to knowledge. This suggests that discussions of moral issues between higher- and lower class organization members are more likely to result in conflict than when either higher class or lower class individuals are paired. During an interaction, higher- and lower class individuals may derogate each other because they make moral judgments based on different assumptions about the nature of moral conduct. Similar dynamics may underlie conflict between politically liberal and conservative individuals who rely on different foundations to determine what moral behavior represents (Graham et al., 2009).

Conflict should be particularly intense when an individual judges the behavior of another individual who conceives of morality differently to be unethical. Psychological research has shown that higher class observers, who construed agency as acting on the environment, derogated the lower class residents of New Orleans who chose to stay in the city after Hurricane Katrina, in line with their conception of agency in dealing with the environment (Stephens et al., 2009). Along these lines, individuals of different classes may derogate and undermine each other in the workplace because they hold different construals of moral behavior. Organization members may infer malevolent intentions in each other when, in reality, they share benevolent intentions but hold different views about how to contribute to the common good. For example, a higher class organization member may derogate a lower class colleague who is reluctant to challenge unfair procedures, because the higher class member does not hold respect for authority as a foundation of morality, like the lower class colleague.

5. Social class and judgment and decision-making

The documentary *Inside Job* shows how the behavior of executives of financial services firms was not only socially disengaged and unethical, but it also involved a high degree of risk. The narrator comments that ''regulators, politicians, and businesspeople did not take seriously the threat of financial innovation on the stability of the financial system ... [Using derivatives], bankers can gamble on virtually anything ... the rise or fall of oil prices ... the bankruptcy of a company, even the weather. By the late 1990s derivatives were a 50-trillion dollar unregulated market.'' In an interview, Joseph Cassano, the former CFO of AIG Financial Products famously said: ''It's hard for us, without being flippant, to even see a scenario within any kind of realm of reason that would see us losing $1 on any of these transactions.'' In a television interview, in response to the question: ''What is the worst case scenario if, in fact, we were to see prices come down substantially across the country?'', Ben Bernanke, chair of the U.S. Federal Reserve, replied ''Well I guess I don't buy your premise. It's a pretty unlikely possibility.'' These anecdotes suggest the possibility that social class shapes a number of judgments and decisions of organization members.

Risky decision-making. Social class may influence how much risk individuals are willing to take. Social class, as a dimension of the self that is based on the possession of material resources, is likely to trigger a set of cognitions that influence levels of optimism and worry. Past theory and evidence suggests that how social class influences risky decision-making depends on the favorableness of the conditions. In favorable conditions, higher class individuals are more likely to take risks because they are more optimistic than their lower class counterparts. Because they have abundant material resources, higher class individuals should believe that they are likely to accomplish their goals and achieve successful outcomes than their lower class individuals. When they are optimistic, people hold a more positive view of the future and are more confident that uncertainty will favor them. Thus, optimism should lead higher class individuals to make more risky decisions.

Past theory suggests a different process in unfavorable conditions. In the face of adversity, individuals may resort to different life strategies (Griskevicius, Delton, Robertson, & Tybur, 2011; Griskevicius, Tybur, Delton, & Robertson, 2011). A fast life strategy involves looking for short-term rewards at the expense of long-term gains (for instance, having children early in life at the potential cost of slowing down one's career). A slow life strategy involves the opposite (for example, pursuing advanced studies and focusing on one's career at the potential cost of delaying starting a family). Social class may influence preferences for a fast or slow life strategy in the face of adversity (Griskevicius, Tybur, et al., 2011). In difficult conditions, lower class individuals may shift to a fast and risky strategy because they believe that things are unlikely to get better in the future, or that they cannot control the consequences of adversity and, thus, try to maximize their current situation in life. By contrast, higher class individuals may shift to a slow and safe strategy because they believe that they can control the consequences of adversity and, thus, invest for when circumstances become more favorable.

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Research findings on the association between social class and risky decision-making. There is limited but suggestive evidence linking social class to risky decision-making. There is evidence that social class is associated with how optimistic individuals feel when the conditions are favorable. In past research, higher class adolescents were more likely to think that their hopes would be attained in the future than their lower class counterparts (Lamm et al., 1976). Meta-analytic research reveals that higher class individuals are less prone to hostility and depression (Lorant et al., 2003) and have higher self-esteem (Twenge & Campbell, 2002) than lower class individuals. In turn, optimism and positive affect have been found to increase the amount of risk people take (Lerner & Keltner, 2001). These findings suggest that when the conditions are favorable, such as when the economy is strong, higher class people may make more risky decisions than their lower class counterparts.

There is also some evidence that social class predicts how much risk individuals take when facing adversity. Studies have manipulated the harshness and unpredictability of the environment by having participants read a newspaper article on recent trends towards violence and death in society (Griskevicius, Tybur, et al., 2011). After reading this article, lower class individuals were more likely to prefer a risky gamble (e.g., a 20% chance to get $1000) over a safe payout (e.g., $200 for sure) than higher class participants. Other research has shown that lower class patients are more risky when facing health problems such as diabetes and HIV, in that they comply less with treatment for these problems than higher class patients (Goldman & Smith, 2002). These findings suggest that in the face of adversity, such as when there is a financial crisis, higher class individuals may make safer decisions than lower class individuals.

Organizational implications of the association between social class and risky decision-making. The effects of social class on decision-making may explain why executives and managers make risky decisions in times of economic prosperity. The economic growth of the 2000s may have led higher class decision-makers (with high income, advanced education, and prestigious occupations) to be particularly confident, contributing to the financial crisis of 2008–2009. If two managers in identical positions are making the same decision about a risky investment – but one is higher class and the other lower class – the higher class manager is more likely to choose the risky option than the lower class manager.

Risky decision-making represents an interesting context to study the effects of childhood social class. Childhood social class leaves a biological residue that has long-term consequences (Miller et al., 2009), and it may similarly leave a cognitive residue that explains variations in the decisions of organization members. Bankers have similar current social class (due to similar income, education, and occupation), but they may vary to some extent in their childhood social class, indexed primarily by the income, education, and occupation of their parents. If childhood social class leaves a cognitive residue, bankers with lower class childhoods may be more cautious and make safer investments than those with higher class childhoods, all else – including current social class – equal. The arguments and evidence presented above also suggest that the association between social class and risky decision-making is reversed under adverse conditions. In these conditions, bankers with higher class backgrounds should make safer decisions than their counterparts with lower class backgrounds, all else equal.

Judgments of the causes of behaviors. Social class may also shape attributions – judgments of the causes of other people's behaviors. Because they lack personal control (Christie & Barling, 2009; Lachman & Weaver, 1998), lower class individuals may generally pay more attention to the surrounding context, because looking outward helps them better predict their outcomes (Kraus et al., 2009). In turn, lower class individuals may be more attuned to the situational factors that often shape behavior, and make judgments of the causes of behavior that take into greater account the role of the situation. For instance, ethnographic research has shown that lower class individuals are aware of society's norms and of their own inability to abide by them (Bertrand et al., 2004). By contrast, higher class individuals may pay less attention to the context and often ignore the situational causes of behavior.

Research findings on the association between social class and judgments of the causes of behavior. Kraus et al. (2009) conducted a series of studies to test the proposition that lower class individuals offer more contextual explanations of behavior than their higher class counterparts. Lower class individuals were more likely to endorse contextual explanations and less likely to endorse dispositional explanation for economic disparity than higher class participants, and this difference was mediated by sense of control (Studies 1–3). Lower class participants were also more likely to include information about the emotional context in judging how a person feels than their higher class counterparts (Study 4). This difference was attenuated in a condition in which a high sense of control was experimentally induced, revealing that lower class individuals may pay more attention to the context to compensate for their limited control.

In a related investigation, lower class participants were more likely to rely on contextual factors to inform their decisions about how to allocate money between their partner and themselves after a mock interview, relative to higher

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class participants (Kraus et al., 2010, Study 2). Other studies show that this pattern holds across cultures. In one investigation, lower class students in both the U.S. and Russia were more likely to attribute a person's behavior to features of the environment than to dispositions than their higher class counterparts, and this effect was mediated in both countries by more interdependent self-construals (Grossman & Varnum, 2011). This research suggests that higher class is associated with favoring dispositions as causes of behavior, and lower class is associated with favoring the context as causes of behavior.

Organizational implications of the association between social class and judgments of causes of behaviors. To the extent that they are more attuned to the contextual causes of behavior, lower class individuals may be less likely to commit the fundamental attribution error – the over-reliance on dispositions and under-reliance on context to explain the behaviors of other people (Gilbert & Malone, 1995). This effect may have implications, for example, for how the social class of managers shapes how they interpret and address problems of under-performance. All else equal, lower class managers who observe employee under-performance may be more likely to incorporate contextual factors that could impede performance, such as poor job design (Oldham & Hackman, 1980), in their attributions. To rectify the situation, a lower class manager may be more likely to change the context, for example, by moving the employee to a different project or giving the employee more autonomy. A higher class manager may be more likely to blame under-performance on the personality and abilities of the employee (e.g., low conscientiousness, low cognitive ability). To rectify the situation, a higher class manager may choose to replace the employee.

Conflict may arise when higher- and lower class organization members explain a problem or issue differently because they make different attributions about behavior. A lower class manager who is more prone to attributing under-performance of employees to the context may assume that a higher class counterpart is unfairly blaming the employees. By contrast, a higher class manager who is more prone to attributing under-performance to disposition may assume that a lower class counterpart is trying to unfairly protect the employees.

6. The measurement and manipulation of social class

Researchers interested in testing the effects of social class in organizations can benefit from a list of measures and manipulations from past research. In this section, I describe available tools for two approaches to studying social class. One approach consists of measuring social class and examining whether the measures are associated with outcomes. The other approach consists of priming higher- and lower class mindsets in experiments in which participants are randomly assigned to one condition, and examining the effects of the prime on how people act.

6.1. Measuring social class

Measuring the objective components of social class. Researchers have identified three objective components of social class: income, education, and occupation. In some studies, researchers focus exclusively on one of the three components. For example, sociologists have traditionally prioritized occupational prestige (Duncan, 1961; Weeden & Grusky, 2005) and, in their research on class differences in construals of agency, Stephens et al. (2007, 2009) focused on education. In other studies, researchers measured two or three of the components and examined how they separately relate to criteria within the same study or across studies. For instance, Christie and Barling (2009) explored how income, education, and occupation were related to perceptions of control separately in the same study, and Piff et al. (2010) examined how education and income related to generosity separately across different studies. Finally, researchers have sometimes measured two or three of the components and then standardized and aggregated them into a single index. This approach was used by Adler, Epel, Castellazzo, and Ickovics (2000) to investigate class differences in health.

Education. Measures of education appear in the first part of Table 2. There are two approaches two measuring education. One approach involves a continuous scale. For instance, Grossman and Varnum (2011) used four continuous categories ranging from 1 (high school) to 4 (postgraduate). The second approach consists of creating a dichotomous variable for education, such as bachelor versus some college or less (Kraus et al., 2010, Study 1; Snibbe & Markus, 2005). The rationale for this dichotomy is that a bachelor's degree is ''the modal level of educational attainment'' and, thus, represents a qualitatively different level of education than no bachelor's degree (Snibbe & Markus, 2005, p. 703). Two advantages of using education to index social class are that it remains stable after young adulthood, facilitating causal inference, and is often easily available for research participants (Elo, 2009; Matthews & Gallo, 2011).

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Table 2
Illustrative objective measures of social class.

Reference	Measure	Discipline
Education		
Haidt et al. (1993)	Two groups: (1) has attended or is attending University, (2) has not attended or is not attending University	Social psychology
Adler et al. (2000)	Four continuous categories: (1) high school degree, (2) college degree, (3) master's degree, (4) higher degree (including doctorate and law degree)	Health psychology
Snibbe and Markus (2005, Study 1)	Two groups: (1) high school, some community college, community college, and some college, (2) bachelor's degree or a post-baccalaureate degree.	Social psychology
Christie and Barling (2009)	Five categories: (1) some secondary education, (2) secondary school graduate, (3) some postsecondary school education, (4) college or trade diploma/certificate, (5) university graduate	Organizational psychology
Kraus et al. (2009, Study 3)	Five categories for participants or their mother/father: (1) less than high school, (2) high school or some university, (3) university graduation, (4) masters degree, (5) PhD degree	Social psychology
Grossman and Varnum (2011, Study 1)	Five categories: (1) high school, (2) some college, (3) completed college, (4) postgraduate	Social psychology
Stephens et al. (2011, Study 2)	Two groups: (1) at least one parent has a Bachelor degree, (2) no parent has a Bachelor degree	Social psychology
Occupational prestige		
Duncan (1961)	Duncan Socioeconomic Index (SEI): an index of occupational prestige based on the level of education necessary for a job and the income that a job provides.	Sociology
Featherman and Hauser (1978)	Twelve categories: (1) self-employed professionals, (2) employed professionals, (3) employed managers, (4) self-employed managers, (5) sales workers, (6) clerical workers, (7) craft workers, (8) operatives, (9) service workers, (10) laborers, (11) farmers, (12) farm laborers	Sociology
Kohn et al. (1990)	*U.S.*: Six categories: (1) employers, (2) self-employed, (3) managers, (4) first-line supervisors, (5) nonmanual workers, (6) manual workers *Japan*: Seven categories: (1a) employers who employ five or more nonfamily workers, (1b) employers who employ one to four nonfamily workers, (2) self-employed, (3) managers, (4) first-line supervisors, (5) nonmanual workers, (6) manual workers *Poland*: Six categories: (1) managers, (2) first-line supervisors, (3) nonmanual workers, (4) factory workers, (5) nonproduction manual workers, (6) self-employed	Sociology
Erickson and Goldthorpe (1992)	Seven categories: (1) service workers, (2) routine nonmanuals, (3) petty bourgeoisie, (4) skilled craft workers, (5) unskilled manual workers, (6) farmers, (7) agricultural workers	Sociology
Adler et al. (2000)	Three categories: (1) blue collar or service, (2) clerical/self-employed, (3) professional or managerial	Health psychology
Gallo, Bogart, Vranceanu, and Matthews (2005)	Three categories of occupation based on the Duncan Socioeconomic Index (SEI): (1) service occupations, (2) administrative support occupations, including clerical, (3) executive, administrative, and managerial occupations.	Sociology
Christie and Barling (2009)	Four continuous categories from Human Resources and Social Development Canada's National Occupational Classification Matrix: (1) Skill Level A includes occupations such as engineer, judge, physician, and accountant, (2) Skill Level B includes occupations such as medical technician, plumber, and paralegal, (3) Skill Level C includes occupations such as clerk, sales representative, machine operator, and transit driver, (4) Skill Level D includes occupations such as kitchen helper, cleaner, and primary production laborer.	Organizational psychology

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Table 2 (*Continued*)

Reference	Measure	Discipline
Miller et al. (2009)	Two categories from the United Kingdom's National Statistics Socioeconomic Classification: (1) lower class participants had parents with routine, manual, or lower supervisory occupations during the first 5 years of life, (2) higher class participants had parents with managerial or professional occupations during the first 5 years of life.	Biology
Income		
Lachman and Weaver (1998)	Six continuous categories: (1) less than $10,000, (2) $10,000–14,999, (3) $15,000–19,999, (4) $20,000–24,999, (5) $25,000–34,999, (6) $35,000–49,999, (7) $50,000 or more	Social psychology
Adler et al. (2000)	Four continuous categories: (1) $10,000, (2) $10,001–30,000, (3) $30,001–50,000, (4) $50,000 or more	Health psychology
Christie and Barling (2009)	A six-point scale: (1) 0 to $29,999, (2) $30,000–39,999, (3) $40,000–49,999, (4) $50,000–59,999, (5) $60,000–79,999, (6) $80,000 and above	Organizational psychology
Piff et al. (2010)	Eight continuous categories of current yearly income and income during childhood: (1) under $15,000, (2) $15,001–25,000, (3) $25,001–35,000, (4) $35,001–50,000, (5) $50,001–75,000, (6) $75,001–100,000, (7) $100,001–150,000, (8) over $150,000	Social psychology
Johnson et al. (2011, Study 1).	Five continuous categories: (1) less than $25,000, (2) $25,001–40,000, (3) $40,001–70,000, (4) $70,001–90,000, (5) $90,001 or more	Social psychology
Johnson et al. (2011, Studies 2 and 3)	Two categories for current family household income: (1) under $90,000, (2) over $90,000	Social psychology

Income. Measures of income appear in the second part of Table 2. Most approaches involve continuous scales, but the anchors vary from study to study. Dichotomous variables are rarely created for income, but one study of elite versus non-elite students compared two levels of family income: higher versus lower than $90,000 (Johnson et al., 2011, Study 1).

Occupation. Measures of occupation, which appear in the bottom part of Table 2, are more varied, because occupational prestige depends more on contextual factors such as the country where the study is taking place. In their examination of class differences in self-reliance, Kohn et al. (1990) generated different continuous scales for occupations for the U.S., Japan, and Poland, although the conceptual meaning of social class was the same across countries. A well-known classification scheme for occupations is the Duncan Socioeconomic Index (SEI, Duncan, 1961). This scheme classifies occupations according to the education necessary to achieve the position and the income that the position provides. Some classifications are based on governmental agency ratings. For example, Christie and Barling (2009) used a classification scheme from the Government of Canada. Elo (2009) noted that one limitation of using occupational prestige is the difficulty of assigning a score to non-members of the labor force, such as retirees.

Current versus childhood objective components of social class. In some studies (typically with adult samples), researchers assessed the objective characteristics of participants, and in other studies (typically with student samples), researchers assessed the characteristics of their parents (Matthews & Gallo, 2011). The theoretical basis for measuring parents' characteristics is that social class may influence the self beginning at a young age. Research has shown that childhood social class predicts long-term outcomes such as health, well-being, and crime (Duncan et al., 2010; Miller et al., 2009).

Measures of childhood and current social class will allow researchers to test whether the way organization members reached their social class position influences their behavior. According to one line of reasoning, higher class individuals are more likely to act prosocially, for example, if they grew up in higher class conditions. Social commentators have described the emergence of a new elite that consists of first-generation wealth who have earned their wealth through hard-work (Freeland, 2011). People who started their life in sub-optimal conditions and subsequently earned their resources may be more likely to believe that the world is fair and that people obtain what they deserve. These individuals may be particularly strong believers in meritocracy, which could be used as a rationale to blame victims and give less to others.

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Table 3
Illustrative subjective measures of social class.

Reference	Measure	Discipline
Adler et al. (2000)	Respondents are presented with a drawing of a ladder with 10 rungs. They are asked to think of the ladder as representing where people stand in our society. They are told that at the top of the ladder are the people who are the best off, those who have the most money, most education, and best jobs, and at the bottom are the people who are the worst off, those who have the least money, least education, and worst jobs or no job. Respondents are asked to place an X on the rung that best represents where they think they stand on the ladder.	Health psychology
Chen et al. (2010)	Two questions to the parent about (1) the amount of assets that families could easily convert to cash in an emergency (family savings) and (2) whether the family owned their own home.	Social psychology
Griskevicius, Tybur, et al. (2011, p. 245)	Three-item measure of childhood social class: (1) ''My family usually had enough money for things when I was growing up,'' (2) ''I grew up in a relatively wealthy neighborhood,'' (3) ''I felt relatively wealthy compared to the other kids in my school.'' Three-item measure of current/future social class: (1) ''I have enough money to buy things I want,'' (2) ''I don't need to worry too much about paying my bills,'' (3) ''I don't think I'll have to worry about money too much in the future.''	Social psychology

Another line of reasoning suggests that higher class individuals are more likely to act prosocially if they rose from lower class in childhood to higher class currently. Perspective-taking – the ability to put oneself in the shoes of the other (Preston & de Waal, 2002) – may be a critical ingredient in helping behavior. Individuals who experienced lower class conditions may understand that contextual factors can play a role in causing lower class individuals' conditions, blame them less for their conditions, and help them more. By contrast, those who grew up in higher class conditions, with high-earning and well-educated parents, may have more difficulty understanding the frame of mind of lower class individuals whose resources are much more limited, because they have never experienced this frame of mind. These competing hypotheses can be tested with measures of participants' childhood and current social class.

Measuring the subjective components of social class. Psychological approaches to social class have led to the development of measures that capture perceptions of social class vis-à-vis others (Adler et al., 2000; Goodman et al., 2001; Wilkinson, 1999). These measures appear in Table 3. The most used instrument, the McArthur scale, consists of a drawing of a 10-rung ladder representing people with different levels of education, income, and occupational prestige (Adler et al., 2000; Goodman et al., 2001). Participants are asked to place themselves on the ladder relative to others in society or in their community (as construed by respondents).

Another approach to measuring subjective social class consists of asking respondents to indicate their agreement with statements about their material resources. In one set of measures, respondents evaluated their childhood social class by indicating how much they agreed with items such as ''My family usually had enough money for things when I was growing up,'' and their current and future social class by indicating how much they agreed with items such as ''I have enough money to buy things I want'' (Griskevicius, Delton, et al., 2011, p. 245).

6.2. *Manipulating social class mindsets*

In some studies, higher- and lower class mindsets were experimentally manipulated in ways that are similar to other dimensions of the self. Past research has shown that working selves can be activated by drawing attention to specific concerns and attributes (Markus & Kunda, 1986; Phills, Kawakami, Tabi, Nadolny, & Inzlicht, 2011). For instance, in one study, participants were asked to circle all of the pronouns in a text; the text was the same except that it included independent (e.g., I, mine) or interdependent pronouns (e.g., we, ours) to prime independent or interdependent selves (Gardner, Gabriel, & Lee, 1999). Manipulations of social class may similarly temporarily activate the corresponding cognitions and motivations that arise from having a lower or higher class in society. It is important to note that social class is not manipulated so that those with lower rank suddenly become higher class individuals, and those with higher

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rank become lower class individuals. Instead, higher- and lower class mindsets (e.g., social roles, perceptual tendencies) are temporarily activated, so that the effects of these mindsets on behavior can be examined.

Researchers have manipulated social class mindsets by adapting the ladder measure of subjective social class (Adler et al., 2000) and manipulations of relative deprivation (Callan, Ellard, Shead, & Hodgins, 2008). In these studies (Kraus et al., 2010, Study 3; Piff et al., 2010, Study 2), participants were presented with the image of the ladder with 10 rungs and instructed to think of the ladder as representing where people stand in society or in their community. Participants were then randomly assigned to experience a lower- or higher class mindset by being asked to compare themselves to the people at the very bottom of the ladder (those who have the least money, least education, and least respected jobs), or people at the very top of the ladder (those who have the most money, most education, and most respected jobs). To strengthen the manipulation, participants were also instructed to imagine themselves in a get-acquainted interaction with one of the people they had just thought about, and to think about how the differences between them might impact what they would talk about, how the interaction is likely to go, and what they might say to each other. As noted, in past research, random assignment to higher- and lower class mindset conditions influenced prosocial behavior (Piff et al., 2010, Study 2) and empathic accuracy (Kraus et al., 2010, Study 3).

One advantage of manipulating social class mindsets – especially when combined with correlational studies that measure social class – is that it illuminates issues of causation. Such manipulations can inform whether social class mindsets cause different ways of behaving, rather than vice versa, and whether unobserved characteristics spuriously cause associations between social class and behavior (Elo, 2009).

7. Embracing social class in organizational research

I have presented a case for the importance of incorporating the construct of social class to better understand behavior in organizational settings. Individuals with different social class systematically rely on different assumptions about how to be an agentic and moral person, and exhibit different patterns of social connection and judgment. In turn, social class may explain various patterns of organizational behavior, including beliefs about the fairness of organizations, explanations of the behavior of co-workers and leaders, risky decision-making, and coordination and conflict within dyads and groups.

The nature of social class is such that investigating it entails risks, and these risks may explain why researchers have largely overlooked social class in past organizational research. One risk is that the implications of this research raise ethical and legal concerns. A historically core area of organizational science, human resources or personnel psychology, is particularly interested in identifying the predictors of job performance, so as to inform hiring decisions in organizations (Ones, Dilchert, Viswesvaran, & Judge, 2007; Schmidt & Hunter, 1998). In the past, there has been controversy about the implications of research linking personality and demographic characteristics to performance. For example, findings that the tendency to feel positive affect is associated with higher performance (Staw & Barsade, 1993; Staw, Sutton, & Pelled, 1994) have raised concerns about the ethicality of selecting happy over unhappy applicants (Davis-Blake & Pfeffer, 1989; Gerhart, 2005). Research on how the demographic characteristics that comprise social class are associated with performance is likely to raise similar concerns. Thus, one risk of organizational research on social class is that its applied implications are perceived as troubling.

A second risk of investigating social class is that some results of the research are perceived to be politically incorrect. Research on social class is bound to be provocative, controversial, and infused with ideology. Some research has cast the upper class in a negative light, showing that they are less generous and empathic than their counterparts (Kraus et al., 2010; Piff et al., 2010). Other research has identified weaknesses of lower class individuals. For example, lower class individuals exhibit reduced executive functioning (Noble, Norman, & Farah, 2005). Thus, another risk of organizational research on social class is that it is thought to be politically incorrect because it is seen as perpetuating stereotypes about class.

The discomfort that organizational research on social class may produce, however, may be a sign that it is particularly valuable. Fiske (2003) argued that ‘‘a sure sign that an article has the potential for impact is that it makes readers uncomfortable right away’’ (p. 203). Although research on social class may produce discomfort, this research may provide several benefits to organizations and society, and ignoring social class may carry considerable costs.

One cost of overlooking social class is that researchers may be developing a science *of* middle- to upper class organization members. Participants in most experiments published in organizational journals tend to be individuals from higher classes (University and MBA students). Similarly, participants in many field studies have relatively

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prestigious positions. Plus, when participants are lower class individuals (e.g., factory workers), the research questions tend to be framed by management (Staw, 1984). In contrast, journal editors often wish to know what leaders and managers – but not necessarily other organization members – would do differently on the basis of the results. For instance, the journal *Personnel Psychology* is interested in publishing articles that ''contribute to the improved management of people at work'' (Morgeson, 2011). As a result, there are extensive literatures on the behavior of CEOs and executives (Westphal & Khanna, 2003; Zajac & Westphal, 1998) and other leaders and managers (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009; Judge, Woolf, Hurst, & Livingston, 2008; Liden et al., 1997). By contrast, less is known about the experiences of lower class organization members, such as their needs to take on temporary work, part-time jobs, night jobs, multiple jobs, and under-the-table jobs. Much of what is known – and often implicitly assumed to be universal – about behavior in organizations may be specific to the American and European middle- and upper class.

Organization science may benefit from studying lower class organization members and framing research questions so as to better understand their perspective. The few investigations that have done so suggest practices of which organizational researchers are often unaware. For example, employees performing dirty work must confront the challenge of seeking self-affirmation in jobs that carry stigma (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). To address this challenge, employees in dirty jobs resort to unique strategies. For example, unlike their higher class counterparts, they may resort to normalizing, ''processes by which the extraordinary is rendered seemingly ordinary'' (Ashforth & Kreiner, 2002, p. 217), by condemning those who condemn them and exerting extra effort to infuse their job with positive values (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Ashforth et al., 2007). In addition, hospital cleaners exert unique efforts to become more integrated with the other activities of the organization by extending their tasks and interactions (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). These studies reveal that paying more attention to social class in organizational research will produce a more inclusive science that informs us better about the experiences of lower class members of organizations.

A second cost of overlooking social class is that organizational researchers may be developing a science *by* middle- to upper class organization members. Researchers' own social class may influence their perspectives on behavior in organizations and their choices of research questions, interpretations of findings, and evaluations of others' research. For instance, research showing that higher class individuals favor dispositional explanations of behavior (Grossman & Varnum, 2011; Kraus et al., 2009) may explain academic researchers' interest in personality predictors of job performance (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Ones et al., 2007). Researchers interested in morality and ethical decision-making may have shown particular interest in fairness and harm because these foundations of morality are more important to higher class individuals (Graham et al., 2009; Haidt & Graham, 2007; Haidt & Joseph, 2004). Positive scholars Peterson and Seligman (2003) wrote that researchers must ''avoid studying jobs where ''rate-busting'' and ''whistle-blowing'' are dirty words rather than compliments'' (p. 25) and ''avoid studying individuals in organizations in which ''fitting in'' and ''getting by'' are the watchwords'' (pp. 25–26). These prescriptions are likely to exclude investigations of lower class organization members, given findings that lower class individuals tend to construe agency as fitting in one's environment rather than influencing one's environment (Snibbe & Markus, 2005; Stephens et al., 2007, 2009). Studying social class in organizational behavior should reveal more ways in which the higher class standing of most organizational researchers shapes organizational science. An awareness of these effects may lead researchers to explore a broader set of questions.

The research findings reviewed above suggest that an additional cost of overlooking social class in organization science is a failure to explain several organizational behaviors and outcomes. Research in the disciplines on which organizational behavior draws (psychology, sociology) has shown that social class is a robust predictor of behavior (Kraus et al., 2011; Roberts et al., 2007), which should give organizational scientists confidence that measures of the social class of employees will predict their behavior. Plus, as important as social class explanations of organizational behavior may be today, they should become more important in the future, because inequalities in social class are growing in many countries (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). As the range of social class widens, it may provide even stronger explanations of organizational behavior. Indeed, research has shown that social class inequalities in mortality are increasing over time (Pappas et al., 1993). Thus, incorporating social class should explain more variance in organizational behavior.

One last cost of overlooking social class is that unfair dynamics in organizations may remain unknown and, thus, uncorrected. Findings that social class drives the attainment of leadership positions would reveal that certain organization members have an advantage over others due to the material resources that they possess, independent of abilities and personality. Interventions could be designed and implemented to reduce injustices if such dynamics are discovered. For instance, if research finds that, as theorized, upper class individuals garner power via self-fulfilling

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prophecies because others (sometimes incorrectly) assume that they are highly competent, these dynamics could then potentially be thwarted.

This article is a call for organizational researchers to be willing to face the risks of researching social class to potentially rectify injustices in organizations, better understand organizational processes and causes of performance, and develop a more inclusive science.

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