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# "That's Classy!": A Workshop Exploring the Influence of Social Class

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“THAT’S CLASSY!”: A WORKSHOP EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL CLASS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Psychology

Andrea Denise Poet

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

December 2015

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Title: “That’s Classy!”: A Workshop Exploring the Influence of Social Class

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Social class is often defined as one’s income, occupation status, and education level. This definition fails to examine the culture that is created within each social class background. Class plays an important role in communication style, worldviews, hobbies, rules for interaction, one’s access to valued resources, such as education and medical care, and more. Diversity trainings and the research literature have been criticized for ignoring the diversity of social class, and how these differences influence interpersonal encounters (Ming-Lui, 2011). In addition, when social class is mentioned, it is often referring to those from low-income backgrounds, with little attention towards upper-class individuals (Fiske & Markus, 2012). For this project, the researcher developed a workshop that aimed to increase the visibility of social class as an important form of diversity. The workshop was interactive and focused on issues of social class, including the stereotypes of each class group, meritocracy, and classism. The workshop was administered to 39 undergraduate students at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. The results of the evaluation of the workshop demonstrated that workshop participants (when compared to the control condition) had lower levels of prejudice towards social class groups, increased knowledge about issues of social class, and an increased understanding of their own social class background.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### **The Importance of Social Class**

Social class is a taboo topic. It is often ignored when discussing human behavior, culture, and diversity. Issues of social class receive little attention in the research literature, and have a tendency to only focus on those who come from low-income backgrounds (Fiske & Markus, 2012; hooks, 2000; Ore, 2009; Grusky & Weeden, 2008). Psychologists and other professionals have been criticized for ignoring issues of social class in training programs for helping professionals (Ming-Lui, 2011) and have only recently started talking about social class as an important diversity factor (APA Task Force on Socioeconomic Status, 2007). Despite the more recent efforts to include race, gender, and sexual orientation as part of diversity training, the impact of social class on one's life is often ignored (Ridgeway & Fiske, 2012; Ming-Lui, 2011; Lott & Bullock, 2007).

The topic of *social class* is often associated with income, occupation status, education, wealth, and material possessions. Examining social class as it is related to income, education, and occupational status (Kraus & Stephens, 2012) ignores the importance of the culture that is created within a social class background. One's social class background influences their behavior and ideology by shaping values, attitudes, and beliefs about others and the world. Social class also plays a role in one's language and communication style, interpersonal interactions, access to resources, and even the hobbies one enjoys (Kraus & Keltner, 2009).

A common term found in the research literature and training programs is socioeconomic status (SES). SES includes income, wealth, education level, occupational prestige, and the amount of power and control one has over resources (Diemer, Mistry, Wadsworth, Lopez, &

Reimers, 2013). While it is important to take financial resources into consideration when understanding an individual, SES fails to include how one's social class background shapes peoples' interests, hobbies, language, worldviews, traditions, and interpersonal encounters to name a few (Lott & Bullock, 2007) . Additionally, SES does not examine how social class background influences one's understanding of other social class backgrounds. For example, individuals from working-class might view themselves as the poor, while middle-class individuals may understand the poor as what is shown in the media (e.g. homeless) and have a different perception of the amount of money that is needed to be considered rich or poor.

Social class background influences social class mobility (Gilbert, 2008; Turner-Bowker, 2001). External barriers (e.g. stereotypes, low wages, and impoverished neighborhoods) that decrease one's ability to climb the social class ladder are often ignored, and social class standing is viewed as a result of individual character, such as level of motivation and intelligence (hooks, 2000). This is problematic for members of all social class backgrounds. Those who come from more privileged backgrounds are often viewed as hard-working and deserving of their privilege while individuals who are less privileged are viewed as internally flawed as lazy, unmotivated, and uneducated (Fiske & Markus, 2012). The assumption that by working hard, everyone has equal access to the American Dream (i.e. meritocracy) is inaccurate and damaging at both the societal and individual level.

Social class impacts everything from language, health, child-rearing practices, attitudes toward saving and borrowing money, pro-social behavior, empathic accuracy, and how we interact with others (Ming-Lui, 2011; Ridgeway & Fiske, 2012; Ore, 2009; Kraus & Keltner, 2009; Kraus, Cote, & Keltner, 2010; Anderson, Keltner, & John, 2003 ). Starting at conception, social class influences the quality of prenatal care, diet, education, and exposure to violence and

toxins (Fiske & Markus, 2012). All of these factors influence our health, level of stress, job success, and world views. One's access to important resources, such as medical care and a quality education are largely determined by one's class standing (Ming-Lui, 2011). Those growing up on the "wrong side of the tracks" often lack adequate healthcare, access to healthy foods, and receive poor education. Advantages that are given to higher status groups early on influence outcomes later in life, such as more job success or better quality of health.

Social class also influences how we interact with and treat one another (Fiske & Markus, 2012). Microaggressions are intentional or unintentional verbal or nonverbal insults towards a person based on their membership to a specific group (Sue & Sue, 2008). For example, individuals who make negative comments about trailer parks or call rich people entitled may not realize that their audience is a member of that said class group. Social class background is not always visible like other forms of diversity, such as race or gender. Therefore, microaggressions based on social class may occur without the perpetrator or victim being aware of how social class is operating in the situation.

Social class intersects with race and gender and is often overshadowed by other forms of diversity (Reynolds, 1997). In the United States, there is a common misperception that minorities make up the majority of the poor. It is not uncommon to hear poor white individuals blaming the poor minorities for the economic situation in the United States (e.g. poor minorities are living off welfare and destroying the country; immigrants are taking all the jobs). By focusing on race, rather than social class, the poor are forced to turn against one another giving even more power to those of more privileged backgrounds (hooks, 2000). It is imperative that people start having conversations about social class as a form of diversity. People need to recognize the important

influence social class has on various aspects of the human experience. This knowledge is critical to helping us continue to progress and evolve as a nation.

### **Important Terms**

There is little agreement regarding the definitions and boundaries for social class and social class categories. There are many factors to take into consideration when determining one's class background and/or understanding where we stand in terms of social class (Ming-Lui, 2011; Gilbert, 2008; Mahony & Zmroczek, 1997). Despite disagreement, *social class* is typically defined as relative social rank in terms of income, wealth, education, status, and/or power (DiMaggio, 2012; Lareau & Calarco, 2012). Class can also include one's occupation or job status. This definition lacks, however, the culture, values, attitudes, and lifestyles that are suggestive of and constructed within one's own class background (Ming-Lui, 2011). Social class background, just like any other form of diversity, plays an important role in how we construct reality, understand the world, and how we interact with others.

For the purposes of this project, the model developed by Leondar-Wright (2004) will be used to define social class. Betsy Leondar-Wright is an author, activist, and sociologist. Her work focuses on economic justice and raising social class awareness. She is the project director and senior trainer at Class Action.

According to Leondar-Wright, class is broken down into four groups: Low-income/poor; working-class; middle-class; and upper-class. Leondar-Wright (2004) describes low-income individuals as struggling to obtain an income that is adequate enough to cover basic needs. These individuals tend to live in substandard housing or are homeless. They may also experience high levels of stress and have limited access to resources, such as health care and quality food. Working-class individuals have a lot in common with low-income groups. For instance, they

have little or no college education and work in very physically demanding jobs (e.g. welding or construction). Despite their hard work, wages are often low making it difficult for working-class individuals to enjoy any forms of luxury.

In contrast, middle-class individuals tend to have a college education and work in professional or managerial positions. This classifies them as middle class even if their income is low and family money has been spent (Leondar-Wright, 2004). Members of middle-class typically own their own home, and they have more control in their workplace (e.g. hours worked, vacation time, sick leave). Similar to middle-class, upper-class individuals own more luxuries and are able to travel without hesitation. Upper-class families often inherit large amounts of money, homes, or land. These individuals attend private or elite schools, and may even have the luxury of not having to work to get by (Leondar-Wright, 2004).

Class can also be understood in terms of power (or lack of power) and one's ability to control his or her life (e.g. job, education, access to medical care, etc.) (Stephens, Fryberg, & Markus, 2012). Occupation, education, and income create and maintain social class distinctions by determining the amount of access people have to society's powerful institutions (hooks, 2000). Individuals with higher status have more access to necessary resources creating what is known as *class privilege*.

Class privilege is defined by classism.org as "tangible or intangible unearned advantages of higher-class status, such as personal contacts with employers, good childhood health care, inherited money, and/or speaking with the same dialect/accent as people with institutional power." For example, upper-class individuals have more control over and access to the political and legal institutions, education, financial training/investments, media, and more (Leondar-Wright, 2004). These institutions function to provide or deny resources and privilege to specific

groups (classism.org, Stephens et al., 2012). Those who hold the most power in our society benefit the most from social programs, institutions, and other resources (Leondar-Wright, 2004; hooks, 2000). This unequal access to resources creates a cycle in which those with the most power continue to benefit as those with the least power continue to be pushed further and further down the social class ladder.

Those with more class privilege sometimes engage in *classism*. Classism can be defined as differential treatment based on social class or perceived social class (Leondar-Wright, 2004; Ming-Lui, 2011) or negative attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors directed towards individuals with less power (Lott, 2012). Classism is the systematic oppression of subordinate class groups in order to advantage and strengthen the dominate class groups (classism.org). Classism influences individual attitudes and behaviors. In the United States, policies, created by the more privileged groups, are set in place to benefit the upper-class at the expense of the lower classes (e.g. tax breaks). This results in drastic income and wealth inequality (Gilbert, 2008; Lott & Bullock, 2007).

Classist beliefs are perpetuated by a culture that values people based on their status, family lineage, job status, and level of education (hooks, 2000). The middle class and owning-or ruling class people (dominate group members) are viewed as smarter as and more articulate than working class and poor people (subordinate group) (Bullock, 1995). The dominate group defines for society what is to be considered normal and acceptable in the class hierarchy (Lareau & Calarco, 2012). Psychologists also contribute to the problem by continuing to refer to individuals from poor or working-class backgrounds in articles as the “lower class” (Kraus, Jorberg, Goetz, & Keltner, 2011). These strongly-held beliefs based on one’s perceived social standing can then lead to *internalized classism*.



Internalized classism is the acceptance and justification of classism by working class and poor people (Russel, 1996). Examples include: feelings of inferiority to higher-class people; shame about traditional patterns of class in one's family and a denial of heritage; feelings of superiority to people lower on the class spectrum than oneself; hostility and blame towards other working-class or poor people; and beliefs that classist institutions are fair (Leondar-Wright, 2004). In addition, people who are middle-class and wealthy sometimes internalize the dominant society's beliefs and attitudes toward them. *Internalized superiority* is the acceptance and justification of class privilege by middle-class and wealthy people (classism.org).

*Institutionalized classism* can be defined as the way in which intentional and unintentional classism is manifested in various institutions of our society (Bullock, 1995). For example, academic settings are based on White-middle class values. Individuals from a working class background or first-generation college students may struggle to fit-in on a college campus due to differences in language, values, attitudes, financial resources, extra-curricular activity involvement, and life perspectives (Clancy, 1997).

Institutionalized classism can also lead to a *gateway institution* which is defined as a public organization such as education, workplace, and health institutions that facilitate access to respected life outcomes by which we commonly judge inequality (Ridgeway & Fiske, 2012). These outcomes include good jobs, income, health, power, and social status. Individuals who were raised in a middle-class setting are advantaged given that they have acquired the necessary language, skills, and rules for interaction that may potentially lead to more successful interpersonal interactions when compared to their lower-class counterpart (Ridgeway & Fiske, 2012).

## **Social Class and Interpersonal Encounters**

Interpersonal or cross-class encounters are influenced by one's social class background (Fiske & Markus, 2012; Ridgeway & Fiske, 2012; Miller & Sperry, 2012; Kraus & Keltner, 2012). Social class status is often signaled during social interactions (Fiske & Markus, 2012). Signals of class may include clothing, possession of material items, job status, education and degrees, leisure activities, and the type of home one lives in (Kraus & Mendes, 2014). When first meeting an individual, one can determine social class status simply by asking, "Where do you work", "where did you go to school", or by observing the car one drives or the clothing they wear (e.g. is it name-brand, tailored, or loose-fitting?). Social class can also be signaled through one's knowledge of and use of manners and tastes for food, art, and music (Fiske & Markus, 2012).

Social class is visible through language, interaction style, and the type of communication one engages in. For instance, researchers Miller and Sperry (2012) found that children from low-income families tend to communicate through narratives and story-telling. Social class is also demonstrated by the degree of engaged behaviors during interactions. Research suggests that individuals from lower-class backgrounds tend to demonstrate more engaged behaviors during interactions (e.g. head nods) compared to upper-class individuals (Kraus & Keltner, 2009). Studies also demonstrate that individuals who are lower status tend to express more empathy and are better able to accurately measure other's emotions (Kraus, Cote, & Keltner, 2010; Anderson, Keltner, & John, 2003). Lower-class individuals also engage in more pro-social behaviors; they are more likely than wealthy individuals to donate money to charity (Piff, Kraus, Cheeng, & Keltner, 2010).

Social class background influences how we treat and judge one another during cross-class interactions. Stereotypes about specific class groups (e.g. poor people are lazy; rich people are snobs) influence how we treat people during these encounters (Correll & Ridgeway, 2003; Fiske & Markus, 2010). For example, research suggests that doctors are more likely to provide less quality care to obese individuals from poor backgrounds (Correll & Ridgeway, 2003). The doctor may assume that this individual is lazy, unhealthy, and unmotivated to take care of one's self, whereas if this person were from an upper-class background the doctor may attribute their weight to genetics. In addition, people from low-income backgrounds may be less inclined to see a doctor if they believe that all professionals and upper-class individuals are snobby and self-absorbed.

Research also suggests that social class background plays an important role in one's comfort and success during interpersonal encounters (Fiske & Markus, 2012; Bourdieu, 1985). Gateway institutions, which give middle-class individuals the upper-hand, interfere with lower-class individuals' ability to succeed in occupational and educational settings that would enhance class mobility (Fiske & Markus, 2012). Individuals from working-class backgrounds may hide their class status during cross-class encounters out of fear of judgment and shame for their upbringing (Stuber, 2006). In addition, cross-class encounters can lead to microaggressions and feelings of discomfort (Sue & Sue, 2008).

Ignoring how social class influences interpersonal encounters is problematic. Cross-class encounters are likely to occur through various institutional settings, including a college campus and the workplace. Sometimes, during an interaction, discomfort due to differences in social class background can occur. However, we lack the language and awareness to fully understand

this discomfort. By raising social class awareness and examining how it affects interpersonal relationships, individuals will be prepared to navigate cross-class interactions.

### **“That’s Classy!”: A Social Class Workshop**

The purpose of this workshop was to raise awareness of how social class influences everyday life, including interactions among peers. College students at Indiana University of Pennsylvania come from a diverse range of social class backgrounds and are likely to engage in many cross-class encounters. Situations may arise where differences in social class background cause discomfort during a cross-class interactions. Without awareness of how social class influences interpersonal encounters, students may lack the language and skills necessary to understand these feelings. For example, 32.8% of the students at Indiana University of Pennsylvania are first-generation college students. First-generation college students often struggle to navigate the higher-education system. Therefore, increasing awareness of how social class influences their college experience may lead to increased GPAs and access to resources. As demonstrated by Stephens, Hamedani, and Destin (2014), workshops designed to raise social class awareness lead to increased academic and interpersonal success, especially for low-income and first-generation college students.

The objectives for the workshop include: (a) Participants will become aware of the social class system in the United States; (b) Participants will be able to identify which social class group they belong to; (c) Participants will be able to identify the stereotypes surrounding specific social class groups; (d) Participants will understand how social class influences one’s values, beliefs, attitudes, and perception of the world; (e) Participants will learn how class and classism impact their individual lives, communities, and interactions with others; (f) Participants will demonstrate a decrease in prejudice attitudes towards specific social class groups.

The activities for this workshop were designed based on an extensive review of the literature and examination of prior workshops that have been conducted on social class. This workshop covered three main themes that were designed to raise social class awareness, reduce prejudice towards social class groups, and examine social class mobility. First, the presenter discussed “What is Class”? The presenter prompted the participants to define their own understanding of social class. After the participants listed their ideas, the presenter provided definitions of social class from the research literature. Next, an exercise was used to reveal commonly held stereotypes about the four class groups.

Second, “The Myth of Meritocracy” was discussed. Participants viewed current statistics on the wealth gap, welfare, and poverty. Participants also engaged in a facilitated discussion that focused on the following questions: What is the American dream, who has access to it, and what are some of the barriers to attaining this dream? Participants were asked to think critically about these questions, and the presenter facilitated a discussion based on the participants’ responses.

Third, participants explored how social class operates in our society, including every day interpersonal encounters and microaggressions. Participants viewed images and clips from the media and were asked to identify how social class and classism were operating. At the conclusion of the workshop, participants were given an evaluation measure that examined whether or not the proposed objectives were met.

This workshop focused on the areas of social class that were deemed most relevant for the population (i.e. undergraduate college students). The topics and activities selected for this workshop are supported by the review of literature. Chapter three provides a detailed outline of the workshop, and chapter two, the review of the literature, provides the supporting research for the creation of this workshop.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Models of Social Class**

The way social class is portrayed in the United States is problematic. When politicians, including the President, mention issues of social class, they tend to focus on improving life for the middle-class, while ignoring those in poverty and members of the working-class. The media plays an important role in shaping our perception of social class by characterizing the poor as lazy, unmotivated, and lacking the necessary internal qualities to be successful—never to be down on one’s luck. In addition, the research literature has a tendency to focus more on issues of poverty rather than the upper class. These representations of social class are limited and do not fully grasp the diversity of social class groups.

It is difficult to fully describe specific social class groups because class structure looks different from the perspectives of people at different class levels (Gilbert, 2008). For example, individuals who grew up in a working-class background may describe “rich” differently than someone who comes from extreme poverty (e.g. those in poverty may view the working-class as wealthy), and those who are extremely rich may perceive poverty as something different than someone from middle-class. In order to capture this diversity, several models of social class have been developed (Leondar-Wright, 2004; Morin, 2008; Gilbert, 2008).

In the model developed by Gilbert (2008), the researcher distinguishes between the capitalist class, upper-middle class, middle-class, working-class, working-poor, and the underclass. Dennis Gilbert, Ph.D. attended Cornell University. He is currently a professor and chair of the sociology department at Hamilton College, New York. Gilbert is best known for his series of books entitled, *The American Class Structure*.

According to Gilbert, individuals in the capitalist class make at least \$2.0 million a year and their occupations typically include investors, heirs, and executives. Their income is heavily derived from assets and hold securities such as stocks and bonds. These individuals make up 1% of the population.

The upper-middle class is described as making \$150,000 per year in jobs such as upper-management, professionals, and medium-sized business owners. They are university-educated, and include lawyers, doctors, accountants, and other specialists. The upper-middle class makes up 14% of the population (Gilbert, 2008).

The middle-class makes, on average, \$70,000 per year working as lower managers, semiprofessionals, craftsman, and nonretail salespersons. Occupations may include lower-level managers, insurance agents, teachers, nurses, electricians, and plumbers. The middle-class represents 30% of the population (Gilbert, 2008). According to Gilbert, the middle-class and the working-class make up the majority of the population. Gilbert does not, however, distinguish between blue collar and white collar (manual vs. non-manual) work. He claims that there are blue-collar and white-collar jobs in both the middle and working-class, and rather, these two class groups are differentiated by the level of skill or knowledge and independence associated with the occupation (Gilbert, 2008).

The working poor (13% of the population) make around \$25,000 per year as lowest-paid manual, retail, and service workers. These jobs are often insecure and do not pay benefits. Occupations in this class include fast-food workers, maids and janitors, and construction workers (Gilbert, 2008). The underclass (12% of the population) make less than \$15,000 per year. They are typically unemployed or hold part-time menial jobs, or they are on public assistance. Their

jobs provide some income, but not enough to make ends meet, which causes them to also receive assistance from the government (Gilbert, 2008).

Morin (2008) takes a different perspective on social class. According to Morin the middle-class is best described on a spectrum. The researcher states the American middle-class varies greatly in income and world views. Morin breaks the middle-class into four different categories: the struggling middle, the anxious middle, the satisfied middle, and the top of the class. Each is different from the others in its attitudes, outlook, and financial circumstances.

Morin states that life is difficult for the struggling middle-class. This group makes up 17% of middle-class individuals and is disproportionately composed of women and minorities, but still mostly white members. Members of the struggling class have more in common with the lower-class than they do with those in the other three groups of middle-class. About one-in-six self-identified middle-class Americans fall into the struggling middle. Family incomes average around \$20,000 per year. Not surprisingly, this group reports difficulties paying bills, and are less likely to be employed full-time. They are the only group among middle-class where the majority does not own their own homes.

The anxious middle (Morin, 2008) is characterized by being the most middle of the middle classes. The anxious middle makes up 23% of the middle-class group. On the surface, these individuals appear to be living the American Dream, but this group is most likely to be dissatisfied with the way things are going in this country. Only 16% are highly satisfied with their lives. This group is financially vulnerable, despite their high incomes. More than 7 out of 10 families report an income above \$50,000, and nearly a third earn over \$75,000. About 3 out of 10 are college graduates. About half are women (51%) and about half are men (49%), making them the only class group where one gender does not dominate. The median age for the anxious



middle is 43 years old. They are most likely to be employed full-time (76%) and the least likely to be retired (5%). Eighty-one percent own their own homes.

The satisfied middle includes 25% of the middle-class (Morin, 2008). Retirement-aged adults and individuals in their twenties are overly represented in this group. A third (34%) is 65 and older and about 31% are under the age of thirty. The majority (55%) are women, mostly due to women outnumbering men among older adults. These individuals tend to be generally satisfied with their lives with nearly half of them stating (47%) that they are living comfortably. Over half (57%) of the members in this group own their own homes. Despite their positive outlook on life, these individuals don't earn a lot of money. Half (52%) have family incomes between \$20,000 and \$40,000. This demonstrates how one cannot simply look at the label (i.e middle-class) in order to illustrate one's attitudes and values toward money, materialism, and overall outlook on life. Nearly 9 out of 10 state that they live comfortable lives, with enough money to pay the bills even with little left over (Morin, 2008).

The top of the class consists of 35% of the middle-class members. Life is good for these individuals, and most in this group predict it's only going to get better (Morin, 2008). These individuals are the highest educated among the four middle-class groups, and they have the highest incomes. According to their own reports, they're in the best of health of the four middle-class groups. Four in ten are college graduates and another 29% attended college. Nearly a third have family incomes of at least \$100,000 a year and almost two-thirds earn \$75,000 or more. Three out of four own stocks, bonds, or mutual funds. In addition, 86% have an IRA, 401K, or similar kind of retirement. These members are the most likely to state that they live comfortably (58% vs. 39% of the middle-class as a whole), and are least likely to report struggling to pay bills. Doctors, lawyers, and other professionals are most likely to be found in this group. Almost

a third of these individuals state that they are completely satisfied with their jobs, while 96% state that they are at least mostly satisfied with their jobs. These individuals feel as if they have control over their lives.

Morin's (2008) model demonstrates how one's world views, values, beliefs, and attitudes can shape one's perception of social class. As the satisfied middle demonstrates, people don't necessarily need to make a certain amount of money to consider themselves part of a specific class category. Rather, one's attitude towards money and owning luxuries can greatly influence how they perceive their class standing. Those who practice more humble beliefs are more satisfied with less (or just enough) than those who fall prey to our materialistic society where more is always better. This attitude, more is better, may lead people to never feel satisfied despite their high incomes and wealth.

For the purpose of this workshop, the model explained by Leondar-Wright (2004) will be used. This model was selected based on its simple and easily relatable descriptions. Leondar-Wright's model includes low-income/poor, working-class, middle-class, and upper-class. It is important to note that even these four categories have a large amount of within group variability when discussing one's perception of social class and the impact it has had on his or her life. For instance, low-income people will experience poverty very differently based on geographic location, race, gender, education level, and other factors.

Leondar-Wright (2004) suggests that using the term poor is stigmatizing, and instead the term low-income is more appropriate. Low-income individuals are described as struggling to obtain an income that is sufficient enough to cover all their basic needs. In addition, low-income individuals tend to live in substandard housing or are homeless and utilize long-term use of public benefits, such as welfare, or charity. They also experience chronic unmet needs for health

care, food, or other necessities. They may also have frequent involuntary moves, chaos, and disruption of life. Low-income people vary by race, culture, values, and political beliefs; however, they are disproportionately people of color, women, and children.

Individuals who fall into the working-class group often have little or no college education (e.g. lack Bachelor degrees), low or negative net worth (assets minus debts), rental housing, or a non-luxury home long saved for and lived in for decades, and occupations involving physical work and/or little control in the workplace (Leondar-Wright, 2004).

Lower-middle class families are somewhat more prosperous and secure, but they have more in common with working-class individuals. For example, they have less college than a Bachelor of Arts, and/or less control over their work environment. They may also have fewer assets than professional middle-class families, and if they have a small business, it can only survive by the proprietor's hands-on work. The majority of working-class individuals are White, but when compared with the rest of the population, they are disproportionately people of color and women.

Working-class people are more likely to have strong ethnic and religious identities when compared to middle-class people (Leondar-Wright, 2004). This may be due to the fact that middle and upper-class individuals do not need to be dependent on others for their basic needs. In contrast, low-income groups often depend on family and their community for additional financial and emotional support. In addition, having faith in a religion may help explain the lack of control over their environment and provide them with a sense of security that things happen for a reason and they will persevere.

According to the Leondar-Wright (2004) model, middle-class individuals are college-educated and salaried professionals and managers. The middle-class is disproportionately male

and White families. Other signs of middle class include a 4-year college degree, especially at private and/or residential schools, sometimes professional schools. Middle-class individuals tend to have secure homeownership, often with several moves up to bigger homes in a lifetime. Middle-class people experience more control over their hours and methods of work than working-class people, and/or control over other's work. Also, they have more economic security than working-class people, but are unable to pay bills without working (Leondar-Wright, 2004).

Upper-middle-class families have more in common with owning-class families (upper-class), such as more luxuries and travel, than most middle-class families (Leondar-Wright, 2004). The owning-class consists of investors and their families, who have enough income from assets that they don't have to work to pay the bills. Positions of power or vast wealth places individuals in the ruling class. Signs that one may belong to the owning class include: elite private school and college educations; large inheritances; luxuries and international travel; and owning multiple homes. People who live modestly on investment incomes are also considered to be part of the owning class. Owning class people are disproportionately White (Leondar-Wright, 2004).

As these models demonstrate, social class is not easily characterized and exhibits diversity. Social class background plays an important role in many aspects of one's life. Each social class creates a set of cultural norms that help shape an individuals' language, values, beliefs, hobbies, food preferences, interpersonal encounters, and so much more. Being able to understand the impact of social class is important for understanding various life experiences, such as social class mobility, navigating cross-class situations, and access to life's valued resources, such as education and health care. These and many other examples demonstrate the importance of social class.

## **The Importance of Social Class**

Social class influences everything from our language, health, child-rearing practices, attitudes towards saving/loaning/borrowing money, pro-social behavior, and how engaged we are in our interactions with other people (Lott, 2012; Gilbert, 2008; Leondar-Wright, 2004; Kraus, Piff, & Keltner, 2009). Social class also determines the grocery store one shops at, the car they drive (if they own one), the house one lives in, the neighborhoods they reside, and the foods people eat. Unlike race and gender, social class is less visible, and therefore, is often overlooked as a factor that influences individual difference. The impact of social class cannot be fully grasped in one paper. For the purposes of this dissertation, several areas will be discussed that are important aspects to explore in a time-limited workshop setting.

The influence of social class starts at conception and continues throughout the lifespan. Quality of prenatal care, diet, air pollution, education, violence, and exposure to toxins are all factors predetermined by class and have a major impact on physical and psychological development (Ore, 2009; Fiske, 2010; Ming-Liu, 2011). For example, poor individuals have higher infant mortality rates, poorer actual and self-rated physical health, increased rates of cardiovascular disease, and an increased risk of heart problems and cancer (Fiske & Markus, 2012).

The greater the income inequality in a nation, the more health related problems one will find (Lott & Bullock, 2007). In Montgomery County, Maryland, the life expectancy for poor Black men is only 57 years compared to White, rich men of 76.7 years (Marmot, 2006). Working-class/poor individuals are more likely to be exposed to hazardous and dangerous work that leads to increased risk of fatalities, serious injuries, and debilitation (Young, Meryn, Treadwell, 2008). People in these types of jobs often have poor health coverage, so any type of

medical illness or injury can lead to serious debt. In addition, low-income people are less likely to use mental health services, and have increased levels of functional physical disabilities (Ming-Lui, 2011).

Environmental classism is another consequence of the high rates of income inequality (Ming-Lui, 2011), and influences one's access to valued resources. Neighborhoods in most cities and rural communities are highly segregated by race and social class. Individuals who live in poor communities lack adequate housing, have poorly maintained roads and sidewalks, lack outdoor recreation for children, and are exposed to toxic environments (e.g. power lines, sewage, violence, and pest infestations) (Lott & Bullock, 2007). Poor communities often have a shortage of doctors, grocery stores, job opportunities, and transportation (hooks, 2000). The rural poor are even less visible to the affluent (Lott, 2012). Individuals living in poor, rural communities struggle to find work due to a dearth of businesses and long commutes. Jobs are often located many miles away requiring that the individual have reliable transportation which is another added expense.

Rural and urban poor has fewer supermarkets and more liquor, fast-food, convenience stores, and tobacco outlets (Larson, Story, & Nelson, 2009). In a Baltimore neighborhood, researchers Franco, Brancati, and Diez-Roux (2007) found that convenience stores that carry milk, cereal, and bread were 20% more expensive than in a supermarket many miles away. This specific neighborhood was composed of mostly African American and Latino individuals. Inadequate access to resources has been linked to poorer social networks which increases stress and mental health concerns, leading to poorer health, difficulties in interpersonal relationships, and increased discrimination and prejudice among groups (Ming-Lui, 2011).

Researchers have used the term the “Matthew Effect” to explain that the rich and wealthy, because of their position and privilege, will always benefit more from societal gains than those who are poor (Ming-Lui, 2011). For example, White, affluent, educated professionals have the best health care, yet are the ones who would potentially be able to afford to pay more out of pocket for medical expenses compared to their working-class/poor counterparts. Yet, what we see in the United States is higher premiums, co pays, and deductibles for those lower on the social class ladder (Lott, 2012). Individuals from upper-class backgrounds with high levels of annual income, educational attainment, and occupational prestige have more access to valued material possessions (nutritious foods, home ownership) and elite social institutions (prestigious colleges and universities, social clubs) (Ming-Lui, 2011).

Social class is also related to race and gender. Individuals from minority groups and women are more likely to live in poverty when compared to their white, male counterparts. For example, 27.2% of African Americans live in poverty compared to only 9.7% of Caucasians. In addition, 11% of women and 6.6% of men ages 65 and older live in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Programs that help individuals who live in poverty are insufficient. Checks received on welfare are barely enough for people to live on, yet stereotypes perpetuate the myth that people living on welfare are living better than those working hard for their money (Lott, 2012). Being poor is expensive. For example, a Brookings Institute study found a “ghetto tax” which includes having to pay for cashing a check if the person does not have a bank account, higher interest rates on car loans and insurance, and paying more for food and products at the local grocery store (Eckholm, 2006).

Most people will remain in the same social class group throughout their life (Lott & Bullock, 2007). One’s ability to climb the social class ladder is often contributed to personal

qualities of motivation and determination, rather than institutional structures that hinder one's success, such as oppression and discrimination. This point of view perpetuates the stereotypes that are associated with members of specific class groups, such as the poor are lazy and do not want to work. These stereotypes influence the way in which people are treated and viewed during cross-class encounters. It is important for individuals to understand how their social class background shapes their personal experiences, and how they perceive and treat individuals from another social class background. In order to fully examine how social class influences the development of stereotypes and cross-class encounters, one must first understand how social class impacts his or her life.

### **Stereotypes, Prejudice, and Discrimination**

In her book, *Social Beings: Core Motives of Social Psychology*, Susan Fiske (2010) speaks at length about prejudiced attitudes. Fiske is a professor at University of Princeton and is known for her work in the areas of prejudice, discrimination, and stereotyping during social interactions.

Prejudiced attitudes and discriminatory acts are based on stereotypes. A stereotype can be defined as widely-held beliefs about a person based on his or her membership to a particular group (Fiske & Markus, 2012; Fiske, 2010; Ore, 2009). Stereotypes exist within many categories including race, gender, age, sexual orientation, disability, and social class. For example, stereotypes surrounding poor individuals include that they are lazy, do not value education, speak poorly, are dirty, and are bad parents, just to name a few. In contrast, the wealthy are typically viewed as greedy, selfish, spoiled, arrogant, and possibly that their wealth was inherited, not earned (classism.org). Prejudice, on the other hand, is defined as an overall attitude



(including affect, cognition, and behavioral correlations) towards out-group members (Fiske, 2010).

Discrimination occurs when an individual acts on their prejudiced beliefs. Discrimination can include verbal rejection, avoidance, segregation, physical attack, and extermination (Fiske, 2010). Verbal discrimination and avoidance may not seem like dangerous forms of discrimination. However, verbal slurs, jokes, and insults can create a hostile environment in which even more serious forms of aggression may occur (Fiske, 2010). Intentionally avoiding a particular group due to a prejudiced belief allows people to continue thriving on stereotypic assumptions towards out-group individuals (Lai, Hoffman, & Nosek, 2013). Explicit forms of discrimination are no longer acceptable (Fiske, 2010); instead, prejudice and discrimination are more likely to be expressed in an implicit, subtle, and covert form (Lai et. al., 2013).

According to Fiske, prejudice is functional for many reasons. First, people create biases against one another in order to make sense of intergroup contacts (Fiske, 2010). Social categories, such as age, gender, ethnicity, class, and disability carry specific assumptions that guide peoples' interactions (Tantum, 1997). Using stereotypes makes it easier to process information about other people and make sense of social interactions. Members of the out-group are less familiar than members of the in-group; therefore, people rely on prior beliefs during intergroup encounters as a resource-saving device (Fiske & Taylor, 2008).

Second, people maintain prejudice beliefs towards out-group members in order to strengthen bonds within their in-groups (Fiske, 2010). For example, students are more likely to self-segregate in dining halls and cafeterias (Tantum, 1997). Self-segregating demonstrates an avoidance of out-group discomfort by engaging in comfort that is provided when interacting with the in-group (Fiske, 2010). Out-groups also pose a threat. Out-groups are novel, unfamiliar, and

unpredictable when compared to the in-group (Fiske, 2010). Interacting with the out-group may lead to danger, discomfort, or a situation in which one lacks control, and therefore, may cause an individual to avoid out-group contact (Tantum, 1997; Lai et. al., 2013).

In addition, socially communicated biases build intergroup cohesion (Fiske, 2010). Out-groups are often perceived as inherently different. This belief allows people to justify the inferior treatment of the out-group based on what people believe are objective differences rather than social constructions of difference (Ore, 2009). Groups often share similar stereotypes and prejudiced attitudes because it creates in-group cohesion and a sense of separation from the out-group. Social sharing in groups can be in the form of gossip, rumor, opinions, or stories. When people tell a story that involves stereotypes, the story becomes increasingly stereotypic after several people tell it (Kashima, 2000). This type of bias communication is utilized when the in-group is being threatened (Maas, Ceccarelli, & Rudin, 1996). For example, when upper-class individuals are accused of being greedy, they may quickly resort to blaming welfare recipients for the current economic situation in the United States.

It is important to consider the accuracy of a stereotype. In some situations, stereotypes can be true for a particular person. However, the belief in a stereotype ignores within group variability and the people who do not fit the stereotype (Fiske, 2010). For instance, some people on welfare may be lazy and unwilling to work. However, this is not descriptive of all people on welfare. According to Peter Wason's (1960) confirmation bias, people tend to seek information that confirms their current beliefs. So, if someone endorses the belief that people on welfare spend their money poorly the following situation may occur: Imagine standing in line at a grocery check-out and observing a single mother using her food stamp card to purchase unhealthy food. Based on the welfare stereotypes, this image is more likely to stick out in a

person's mind when compared to seeing a professionally dressed man using his food stamp card to purchase healthy foods.

Society tends to hold more negative beliefs towards people from lower-class backgrounds when compared to the middle-and-upper-class groups. There are many myths and stereotypes that surround people from poverty and working-class backgrounds. These beliefs influence the way in which we treat people from those backgrounds, and how we perceive their lifestyle and current economic situation. Examining stereotypes will allow individuals to better understand misconceptions about these groups. In addition, these misconceptions influence the dynamics of a cross-class encounter. Understanding and being aware of social class stereotypes is an important first step in reducing prejudice and classist attitudes.

### **Myths About the Poor**

Classist discrimination is more likely to occur towards those who hold less power. People who belong to the working-class, the working-poor, and poor are more frequently the target of classist discrimination (Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001). Like other forms of discrimination, classism occurs in institutional and interpersonal settings. This discrimination stems from prejudice and stereotypes that are associated with low-income individuals. Prejudice includes the negative attitudes toward the poor. Classist stereotypes are widely shared and socially sanctioned beliefs about the poor, and classist discrimination includes face-to-face overt behaviors that distance, avoid, and/or exclude the poor (Bullock, 1995).

Social psychologists have been criticized for ignoring issues of social class and asking research questions that pathologize and stigmatize the poor (Harper, 1991). Studies seldom investigate the positive experiences in the lives of the poor. Even when researcher investigate the lives of the poor, it is seldom discussed in their own voices. Instead, the focus is generally on

middle-class attitudes and stereotypes about the poor, particularly welfare recipients, and middle-class attributions for poverty (Brodsky, 2001).

Children as young as five endorse the idea that the harder one works the richer they become, and those who are poor are not working hard enough (Bullock, 1995). Stereotypes about the poor are embedded in, and reinforced by, the popular “culture of poverty” hypothesis. This hypothesis suggests that poor people raise their children with defective behaviors, values, and personality traits (Bullock, 1995). These traits include laziness, an inability to defer gratification, lack of respect for or interest in education, unwillingness to work, dishonesty, and sexual promiscuity as well as apathy or ignorance about birth control (Sharff, 1981). It is also believed that those who obtain public assistance will be dependent on the government for support. Rather than seeing the poor as lacking sufficient opportunities for advancement, the poor are viewed as failing to take advantage of opportunity because they lack motivation and determination (Cozzarelli et al., 2001).

Welfare recipients are viewed as dishonest and as getting a “free ride.” (Bullock, 1995). Women on welfare are often stereotyped as promiscuous and as having many children in order to obtain more benefits. Even though research has shown that welfare benefits do not significantly affect the number of out-of-wedlock births, and have only a minimal impact on divorce rates among single African-American and European-American women (Ellwood & Summers, 1986), almost 60% of a sample of 92 nurses in one study (Desmund, Price, & Eoff, 1989) were found to believe that women become pregnant in order to collect welfare (Bullock, 1995). However, the average woman on welfare has only two children (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012).

According to the U.S. Census, poor people work. In 2010, 91% of welfare benefits went to the elderly, the working-poor, and disabled individuals. Far too many poor people are being

over-worked in multiple low-paying jobs (Ming-Lui, 2011). Despite their hard work, families struggle to pay the bills, pay for childcare, and provide adequate food and nutrition for their children. In addition, children from poor families spend more hours per day without supervision. This is due to their parent's inability to pay for child care and their parents' demanding work schedules (Scarborough, 2001).

These stereotypes influence how we treat and perceive individuals in cross-class encounters (Fiske & Markus, 2012). People tend to generalize these beliefs and assume that everyone who is poor must lack the will-power to bring themselves out of poverty—they must not be working hard enough. External barriers to success are all too often ignored (e.g. lack of opportunity), leading to what is known as the fundamental attribution error.

Lee Ross (1977) defines the fundamental attribution error as a general tendency to over-estimate the importance of personal or dispositional factors relative to environmental influences. People are more likely to explain a person's situation or behavior in terms of his or her personality rather than taking their environment into consideration, despite the fact that often times the situation is what is most influencing. This idea is linked to the myth of meritocracy given that people view those who are least successful in our society as characteristically flawed, and those who are successful as hard-working and determined. People engage in this type of thinking for several reasons, including being unaware of the situational constraints one faces and categorizing situation-appropriate behavior as indicative of the individual (Fiske, 2010).

Stereotypes and assumptions about those at the top and bottom of the social class ladder perpetuate the belief in meritocracy. Meritocracy is the belief that if you work hard enough, you will succeed. People aim to reach the "American Dream." High levels of worth are placed on the rich and the famous. Individuals who have reached the American Dream are idolized. This leads

to the devaluing of those who have not met these standards, and making assumptions about their inability to achieve economic and occupational stability. This dream, however, is unattainable for many due to the external barriers that stand in the way of one's success.

### **The Myth of Meritocracy**

The term "meritocracy" was first introduced by Michael Young (1958) in his book *This Rise of the Meritocracy*. In his book, meritocracy is a pejorative term used to describe a system that develops based on intelligence testing and educational attainment (Lui, 2011). The idea was that institutions should be governed by people chosen based on merit, more specifically their education level and ability, rather than other factors, such as wealth or social class. In a meritocracy, social status becomes increasingly dependent upon an individual's level of education (Lui, 2011). Individuals in this type of system believe that they are deserving of their reward (e.g. power, authority, status, and/or wealth), because it has been the product of their own talent and determination.

The notion that through hard-work and determination, anyone can achieve and create his or her own destiny is central to the American ideology (Johnson, 2006). This ideology assumes an even playing field. American citizens, regardless of the social level from where they begin, should aspire to, and can attain, the highest level of social and economic success described as the American Dream (Kwate & Meyer, 2010). This American Dream reinforces the Protestant work ethic, protects our system of government, and perpetuates the existing class structure, while providing hope among citizens (Wyatt-Nichol, 2011). The American meritocracy is said to liberate its citizens from old-world confines of class and heritage. A great example of this is President Barak Obama: a man in a country with a long history of racism rising from the bottom all the way to President of the United States.

Similarly, the upward mobility bias is the perception and belief that individuals should always be striving for upward social mobility and that having more education, a better job, or a better home is a natural way of being (Liu & Pope-Davis, 2003a). When people do not adhere to the belief that upward social mobility is normal and natural, people may perceive these individuals as deviant or deficient (Lui, 2011). This may also lead to negative stereotypes about people from lower-class backgrounds, and in turn make people less willing to help individuals from lower-class groups. Despite evidence of declining class mobility and structural inequalities, the American Dream is so entrenched within our culture that 71% of Americans continue to believe that personal motivation is more important to class mobility than external barriers (Wyatt-Nichol, 2011).

Meritocracy does not take into consideration the social inequalities that are in place, such as oppression and discrimination against certain groups. The problem is that opportunities are not equally distributed nor are they based on meritocratic criteria (Fiske, 2011). For example, racism serves as a strong barrier to African Americans' success (Sue & Sue, 2008). Some even argue that a belief in meritocracy is detrimental to African American's health and well-being (Kwate & Meyer, 2010). The researchers argue that people who believe in the American Dream believe that people who work hard and play by the rules are rewarded, and those who do not work hard, suffer the consequences. Within this context, African Americans suffer because failure is seen as an individual failure rather than the effects of long-standing racism (Kwate & Meyer, 2010).

Kwate and Meyer (2010) argue that meritocratic ideology imbricates the moral economy—the norms that govern economic activity and society's protection and privileges. Inequalities are often rationalized as the inevitable outcomes of a lack of talent, skill, or work ethic, and therefore, inequalities in wealth and health can be justified as reflecting individual, not

societal failings (Kwate & Meyer, 2010; Fiske, 2011). Thus, meritocratic ideology leads to fewer policies in favor of helping those in need, such as health care and welfare. Ironically, it is more often those who are disadvantage that carry these strong held beliefs of meritocracy (Kwate & Meyer, 2010).

The belief in meritocracy is harmful to those who are unable to reach upward mobility. The assumption that the people who do not achieve a higher-social status, are internally flawed is problematic. It is crucial for individuals to examine the external barriers that are in place, preventing people from reaching the American Dream. Diversity courses and workshops should focus on bringing to light this reality, and challenging the belief in meritocracy.

Meritocracy is based on a model of independence and self-reliance. In the United States, people are motivated to achieve personal success, rather than focusing on the success of the group. We are taught from a young age to work hard, and strive for our goals, and to be careful of those who may stand in our way. This model of independence benefits those in the middle-and-upper-class groups, but can be very detrimental to those in working-class and poor communities.

### **Model of Independence**

The United States thrives on a model of independence. Rather than viewing ourselves as part of the group, Americans tend to seek individual gain and self-centered goals (Kusserow, 2012). Compared to collectivist cultures, where more value is placed on the group, the United States' places more value on individual achievement (i.e. individualistic) (Wade, Tavis, & Garry, 2014). The model of independence can be detrimental for the well-being of members in low-income groups due to the reality of hardships they may face that may require them to seek help from their family, community, or government. The value placed on independence leads



individuals to ignore external constraints to success, and instead, a lack of success is viewed as the individual being internally flawed.

Working-class/poor individuals' engage in more interdependent behaviors, which goes against the independent model of the middle-class (Kusserow, 2012). Individuals who thrive on interdependence may be viewed as weak, dependent, or unable to take care of themselves. For example, in the United States the nuclear family is valued and children are expected to leave home at a certain age. However, in working-class or poor families, it is not uncommon to see extended family members living under the same roof. This type of living situation is frowned upon and often viewed as dysfunctional in the United States (Fiske & Markus, 2012).

Another example is the sharing of resources among working-class and poor families. Sharing money, food, and other resources is common in working-class and poor communities (hooks, 2000). Middle-class individuals may argue that this type of sharing puts people at a disadvantage and only perpetuates one's financial strain—why continue to give away what one does not have?

In a study by Kusserow (2012), the researcher examined two types of individualism that are created in the United States: soft and hard individualism. Soft individualism of the middle-and-upper-middle classes, focuses on the encouragement and expression of unique and personal feelings, thoughts, ideas, and preferences (Kusserow, 2012). This has also been referred to as an emotion-focused style of individualism. In contrast, hard individualism of the working-class and poor is focused on the promotion of self-reliance, perseverance, determination, protectiveness, street smart, stoicism, and toughness (Kusserow, 2012). Kusserow points out that these two types of individualism are by no means rigid boxes. The researcher suggests that people of all social classes can fluidly use each style.

A person's social class status influences their sense of independence. For example, individuals from higher-class backgrounds perceive themselves as having an elevated rank in society which creates a perception that one has the freedom to act independently of the needs and wishes of other individuals (Kraus, Adler, & Chen, 2012). Being able to act freely and independently is a strong, middle-class value in the United States. On the other hand, lower-class individuals perceive themselves as subordinate in social-class rank relative to others which fosters a sense that an individual's outcomes are largely determined by external social forces. Personal motivations and goals are seen as controlled by external forces or by other individuals (Kraus et al., 2012).

History demonstrates that the model of independence has worked well for the middle- and upper-class. However, within the last several decades, the model of independence has hampered the working-class and poor. Those at the top of the social class ladder are continuing to move upwards, while those at the bottom are being pushed further and further down. This mobility (or lack thereof) is largely influenced by policies put in place by the privileged class that benefit those at the top. For example, working-wages are rapidly growing for those at the top of the social class ladder and shrinking for those in lower-status positions (Gilbert, 2008). It is important to understand the changes that have taken place in our nation's history in regards to wages, income, deindustrialization, and the gap between the rich and the poor. Understanding how these variables have changed over time highlights the importance of external barriers to upward mobility and achieving the American Dream.

### **A Changing Class**

Prior to the 1970s, real wages, the amount of money received in relation to the prices people pay for items, increased every decade (Wolfe, 2008). In the 1970s, things started to

change. Real wages stopped going up, and United States' corporations started moving operations abroad to take advantage of lower wages and higher profits; they also began replacing workers with machines, such as computers (Gilbert, 2008). In addition, advanced education became key to success as technology increased the need for engineers, scientists, and technicians which, in turn, reduced the demand for crafts workers, operatives, and laborers (Gilbert, 2008).

Minimum wage is not a living wage (Lott & Bullock, 2007), and the real wages today are less than that of the 1970s. Productivity and the standard of living continues to rise, as wages are dropping. The gap between what employers profit and the amount each worker earns is growing wider and wider causing an increase in income and wealth inequality (Gilbert, 2008). As the gap continues to grow, fewer people are able to obtain upward mobility which leaves fewer individuals in the middle-class (Reich, 2008).

The drop in wages has caused people to start taking on second or third jobs, and the number of hours worked per week has raised 20% since the 1970s (Reich, 2008). More family members started working, especially women, which in turn created a whole new expense for the American family—childcare. Families also started borrowing money from banks. Instead of increasing wages, businesses realized that they could provide the means for increased consumption while earning their own profits through high interest rates (Wolff, 2008).

In what is known as the Age of Growing Inequality, corporations are looking for ways to cut costs by downsizing and outsourcing. Benefits have been eliminated from workers, wages frozen, and a new class of workers including part-timers, temporary workers, second-tier new hires, and leased workers are becoming more common (Gilbert, 2008). Unions are being discouraged and lay-offs and cut-backs have greatly hurt those in lower-status occupations

(Reich, 2008). Meanwhile, corporations still offer generous competitive rewards to those in higher-status positions, such as CEOs.

Furthermore, legislation has weakened the social safety net protecting the poor (Lott & Bullock, 2008). Public policy has become more responsive to the needs of privileged groups and less sympathetic to other classes. Tax policy, for example, has fluctuated since the 1970s, but the net results have been reduced federal taxation of wealthy households (Gilbert, 2008).

Certain sectors of jobs are also losing ground which impacts individuals from the working-class. For example, the steel industry that was once so important to the city of Johnstown, PA is now largely absent. These jobs have been sent abroad allowing the business owners to take advantage of lower-wages overseas. Coal mining towns are also suffering as utility companies are now spending their resources on cleaner, cheaper natural gas. Just a few years ago, coal was used to fuel nearly half of the nation's electricity generation, while natural gas accounted for only 20% (Hargreaves, 2012). But since the drop in price for natural gas, the two sources are now about equal. Thousands of jobs have been lost due to the changes in policy regulation.

Prior to the 1970s, wages were rising as more individuals were able to live comfortably in the middle-class. After the deindustrialization, wages began to decline, and jobs were moved overseas where business owners could take full advantage of the lower wages and higher profits. Regulation is not in place for these types of policies; rather, policies continue to be created that benefit the privileged while leaving more and more people from other classes on the brink of poverty (Gilbert, 2008). These changes have led to what is now the largest wealth gap experienced in the United States.

## **The Wealth Gap**

Wealth is defined as the total value of a family's financial resources minus all debts (Shapiro, 2006). Income, on the other hand, includes earnings from work or other benefits, such as a pension, disability, unemployment insurance, or social assistance. Wealth is about power and resources, such as home ownership, whereas income is basically one's earnings or payments that are used for daily survival (Lott & Bullock, 2008). Assets are one's stock pile of resources that are saved or invested. Assets are special monies used to improve one's quality of life or status in society (e.g. education, owning a boat, etc.).

Income and wealth are often confused in the public eye. Unlike education, jobs, or income, wealth allows families to secure advantages and is often the manner in which inequality is transferred across generations (Hout, 2008). Wealth allows people to secure a "good life" however they define it, typically human capital development, business opportunities, home ownership, community location, health, travel, comfort, or security (Shapiro, 2006). Wealth can also be viewed as a personal safety net, or an unspecified amount of money that is put away in case of emergencies (e.g. unexpected car repairs, job loss, or a health crisis). Two families with similar incomes, but large wealth disparities will not likely share the same life trajectories

How do families accumulate wealth? The common assumption is that wealth is developed through hard work, disciplined consumption, savings and wise investments, and a touch of luck (Shapiro, 2006). This point of view pays little attention to the importance of inheritance, state policies, and institutional practices that impact one's ability to accumulate wealth. For instance, homeownership represents one of the largest reservoirs of wealth for Americans. Roughly 60% of the total wealth among America's middle-class is contributed to homeownership (Gilbert, 2008). Rather than contributing homeownership to hard work,

discipline, and savings, it is also about structured homeownership opportunities, real estate markets, government programs encouraging homeownership, and residential segregation (Shapiro, 2006). For example, federal policies, created by the Federal Housing Administration and GI Bill, helped create mortgage markets with low-interest, long-term loans, and small down payments. However, these programs were systematically denied to Blacks and women based on racist and sexist attitudes during the 1940s (Johnson, 2006).

The gap between the rich and the poor continues to grow. The top one percent of the population holds almost 48% of the wealth in the United States (Fry & Kochhar, 2014), and the top 10% own 2/3 of all the wealth. The richest 40% receive 78% of all incomes. This leaves less than 1/4 of the nation's wealth to be divided among the bottom 60% of the population (Johnson, 2006). In 2013, the median wealth of upper-income families (\$639,400), was 6.6 times higher than that of middle-income families (\$96,500), compared to 1983 in which the gap was only 3.4 times higher (Fry & Kochhar, 2014). And upper-income families are 70 times wealthier than low-income families.

When examining wealth across different racial groups, there is a huge discrepancy (Johnson, 2006). Based on statistics from 2001, if one were to take assets minus all debts and looked at median family income, African American families had a net worth of \$10,700, and White families had a net worth of \$106,400 (almost 10 times that of African American families) (Gilbert, 2008). Less than half of African Americans own their own home, while three out of four White families own their home. Latinos are even worse off having a net worth of only \$3,000 in assets (Lui, 2004).

Economic inequality is typically measured by comparing the incomes of the average white and black families. Research shows that black families own only a dime of wealth for

every dollar owned by a white family (Shapiro, 2006). Even black families in the middle-class only own twenty-five cents for every dollar owned by a white, middle-class family. In addition, a huge racial wealth gap remains when one compares equally achieving whites and blacks (Lui, 2004). Little is known about the net worth of Native Americans due to a lack of data collected; however, their poverty rate is 26% compared to 8% for whites (Johnson, 2006). In addition, little information has been collected on Asian Americans, but their poverty rate is 13%, and 60% of Asians own their own homes, compared to 77% of Whites (Lui, 2004).

Despite the disproportionate rates of minorities who experience poverty, White people actually make up the majority of the poor in the United States (hooks, 2000; Johnson, 2006). However, White poverty is invisible from the mainstream media as minorities are often stereotyped as being the poor. This is due in part to the belief in meritocracy and stereotypes about minorities' internal attributes in general (e.g. lazy, uneducated, violent, etc.) The wealth gap represents the importance of examining institutional practices that promote differential wealth accumulating opportunities, especially when discussing racial inequality (Shapiro, 2006). Individuals who adhere to meritocracy, may falsely assume that those who do not achieve high-status in income, wealth, or occupation, are just not working hard enough. Instead, it is important for people to understand how wealth is accumulated and maintained in our current capitalist nation, specifically the ways which the system hinders upward social mobility for many lower-status groups (e.g. the working-class).

### **Invisibility of White Poverty**

When asked to describe a person living in poverty, more often than not an image of a person of color comes to mind. There is a common assumption in the United States that the poor are made up of mostly minority individuals. While the media portrays the poor as blacks and

other minorities living in urban areas, the vast majority of the poor are white people living in rural, isolated communities.

When the statistics are broken down, of the 37 million living in poverty, 16.2% are white, 9.2% are black, and 9.4% are Hispanic. Sixteen percent of people living in cities are considered poor, 14.1% of suburban families are poor, and 6.9% live in rural areas (Gilbert, 2008). Keep in mind, however, that the poverty line is based on data from 1955, which does not include more contemporary financial needs, such as childcare and transportation. Currently, the poverty line is set at about \$23,000 for a family of four (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012), but a more accurate estimate based on contemporary needs would be above \$35,000 which would double the figures above (Ore, 2009).

Another myth is that poor minorities consume the welfare system. However, the majority of welfare recipients are Caucasian. Twelve million people or 4.1% of the population receive welfare benefits. White people make up 38.8% of these welfare recipients, 37.2% are African American, 15.7% are Hispanic, and 2.8% are Asian (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012).

The terms ghettos, projects, and the hood are associated with poverty. What about trailer parks? There are strong held beliefs that ghettos are dangerous, full of violence, poverty, drugs, and welfare recipients. What people fail to acknowledge, however, is that trailer parks are also full of welfare recipients, poverty, violence, and drugs. Trailer parks do not have the same type of negative connotation that is given to ghettos; this is due to ghettos consisting mostly of people of color while trailer parks are mostly white individuals. The term ghetto was originally developed to identify poor white urban immigrants, but has now become associated with poor black and minority communities (hooks, 2000).



The term white trash was created by rich white folks who viewed poor white people who associated with blacks, lacked concern for their appearance, and the law (hooks, 2000).

Stereotypes that surround white trash include skin ailments, bad dental hygiene and hair texture, dirty, unintelligent, and lazy. The assumption that all poor individuals are black, and that immigrants are the ones responsible for taking away the jobs, leaves poor white folks and people of color at war against one another. Even poor whites recognize their power over blacks (hooks, 2000), and fail to recognize their similarity to poor people of color, which further advantages those at the top of the social ladder.

Wealth and income play an important role in who people come into contact with, and how comfortable people feel during cross-class encounters. Most cross-class encounters take place in the workplace or a college campus. Given that social class is an invisible form of diversity, it can be difficult to identify how a person's unique background influences who they befriend and how they interact with others. Although social class is easily signaled through dress, language, and personal tastes and preferences, other aspects of how social class operates during interpersonal encounters may be more difficult to examine.

### **Interpersonal Encounters**

Interactions between people from different parts of society (e.g. race, gender, social class) play an important role in social stratification and inequality in society (Correll & Ridgeway, 2003; Fiske, 2010). Cross-class encounters (i.e. interacting with individuals from a different class background) are more likely to occur in certain contexts, such as the workplace or in other public oriented institutional contexts (e.g. schools, hospitals) (Fiske & Markus, 2012). However, socially oriented interactions in the United States are remarkably segregated by class and are strongly linked to one's income and neighborhood of residence (Iceland & Wilkes, 2006).

Although not as strong as racial segregation, neighborhood segregation by income has increased substantially over recent decades (Massey, Rothwell, & Domina, 2009). It is important to examine this segregation because area of residence determines the available shops, restaurants, bars, and other public gathering places where the majority of non-work encounters occur.

Given that most cross-class encounters occur within public institutions, these interactions are defined by strict occupational and professional roles (Ridgeway & Fiske, 2012). For instance, consider the interaction between a construction worker and an architect at a building site or the working-class patient interacting with the upper-middle-class physician. A physician may willingly discuss with a plumber about fixing a toilet; however, it is unlikely that the physician will engage in conversation outside of the plumber's occupational role, especially since hiring "help" legitimizes his or her broader status advantage over the plumber (Correll & Ridgeway, 2003).

It is important to recognize, however, that some critical cross-class interactions in public institutions involve organizational roles that are not defined by one's occupation (Ridgeway & Fiske, 2012). These are roles that can be occupied equally by people from any class background. For example, consider student or parent interactions with school officials. In this type of interaction, occupational status and class background may act as a latent, implicit factor that shapes the interaction, but is not explicitly part of the role requirements that organize the encounter (Ridgeway & Fiske, 2012). However, membership to a middle/upper-class group may give the person an advantage over a lower-class individual during these interactions.

Class rules for social interaction develop within each social class group. For example, working-class people may share consensual American values, but resist, to some extent, middle-class claims about the best ways to express those values. For example, working-class individuals

will often argue that college-educated, white-collar workers do not do real work (Gorman, 2000), that professionals have the wrong priorities and do not put family first (Williams, 2010), and that the economically advantaged are less morally impure (Lamont, 2000; Stuber, 2006; Bourdieu 1984). This type of resistance has been labeled *working-class resistance* which is the preservation of a preference for their own class values despite knowledge of social norms, rewards, and status beliefs that do not place value on those ways.

As a consequence of both constrained financial resources and intergroup resistance to middle-class claims, working-class people tend to delay adopting emerging middle-class cultural practices (Fiske & Markus, 2012). Adopting these cultural practices is often expensive and can be viewed as a group betrayal (e.g. college education). However, delaying adoption ends up disadvantaging working-class people at key sites of social achievement in society, like colleges, universities, and workplaces, since these sites are largely dominated by middle-class rules (Bourdieu, 1984). It does so by creating implicit cultural knowledge gaps between working-and middle-class individuals that put the working-class people at a relative disadvantage in gaining the valued outcomes these middle-class dominated gateway sites distribute (Fiske & Markus, 2012).

Social class background plays an important role in shaping peoples' experiences during a cross-class encounter. Individuals from a different class background may feel uncomfortable or out-of-place when interacting with someone who does not come from the same side of the tracks. Social class is not as visible as other forms of diversity, such as race or gender; however, social class rank can be observed through subtle signals, such as language and conversational style (Fiske & Markus, 2012), expressions of empathy and prosocial behavior, personal preferences for food and music (Kraus, Rheinschmidt, & Piff, 2012; Bourdieu, 1985; Snibbe & Markus

2005), and how a person interacts with authority figures (Lareau & Calarco, 2012). Research has demonstrated ways in which social class can be signaled during an interpersonal encounter (Fiske & Markus, 2012). The results of this research suggest that although social class is less visible, its power during cross-class encounters is important to understand and consider when discussing issues of diversity. This is especially important for college students who are exposed to people from various class backgrounds on a regular basis. Feelings of discomfort or uncertainty may arise during a cross-class encounter, yet these individuals may be unaware of the differences operating. By increasing awareness of social class as a diversity factor, individuals may be better equipped to navigate cross-class encounters and their academic experience.

### **Class Signals**

Symbols of social class rank are pervasive and readily observable, and create subjective perceptions of social-class status (Fiske & Markus, 2012) which influence cross-class encounters. As Bourdieu (1984) points out, people are closely attuned to reading one another's class identities from social cues (Kraus & Keltner, 2009). For example, when a person engages in an activity consistent with their social class rank, such as watching NASCAR, one's lower social ranking is signaled to the observer (Kraus & Medes, 2014). Similarly, individuals from higher class backgrounds possess valued material resources, such as fashionable clothing, expensive housing, and/or prestigious degrees. Possessing these resources gives an individual higher status in our society and affords them superior treatment. Individuals from lower-class backgrounds struggle to obtain these valued material resources which creates a social-class identity that one belongs to a lower social rank in society (Kraus & Mendes, 2014), and that one's outcomes and desires are out of one's personal control (Kraus, Piff, and Keltner 2009).

Non-verbal behaviors signal social class status. In order to demonstrate this, Kraus and Keltner (2009) conducted a study where participants, labeled as “judges”, watched videos of interactions between strangers, and were then prompted to guess the social class of the participants. The researchers found that the judges were remarkably accurate in guessing the participants’ social class. Kraus and Keltner found that the judges observed certain behaviors to make their inferences. For example, the judges perceived participants as higher-class if they displayed more disengaged behaviors (e.g. checking a cell phone) and lower-class individuals as displaying more engaged behaviors (e.g. head nods, laughs). The researchers also suggest that clothing and language influenced their decisions.

Some argue that social class can be signaled through one’s participation in leisure activities (Veblen, 1994 as cited in Kraus et al., 2012). Actively engaging in leisure sends the message to others that a person is free from external constraints of a lower-class manual job. Instead, this person is able to use his or her time for leisure or intellectual pursuits (Kraus et. al., 2012).

Tastes also vary by class, especially in regards to food, music, and art. Bourdieu (1985) suggests that people signal upper-class status by displaying their knowledge of manners, tastes, and preference that reflect sophistication (Kraus et al., 2012). For example, researchers Snibbe and Markus (2005) demonstrated how social class can be signaled through music preferences. Their research showed that individuals from working-class backgrounds enjoyed country music which reflects external constraints and struggles with the external environment. In contrast, middle-class Americans prefer rock music because its themes reflect concerns for independence, personal choice, and individual freedom.

Dress and speech can also be used to quickly classify social class (Kraus et al., 2012). Clothing can signal occupations (e.g. blue collar workers often literally wear blue or brown uniforms, such as mechanics, while white collar workers wear white uniforms, such as doctors wearing a lab coat). These differences in dress correspond to differences in treatment. Studies have found that individuals sporting conventional and neat attire receive more help and cooperation from others (Fiske & Markus, 2012).

Speech style signals social class background. Speech is often a primary and almost immediate cue to social class, and can be tied to powerful stereotypes (Fiske & Marcus, 2012). Studies in the United States, Canada, and Australia have found that individuals with higher-status accents are generally thought to be more competent, even by those with a lower-status accent (Argyle, 1994 as cited in Fiske & Markus, 2012). Ethnographic studies find that respondents often use an individual's style of grammar and sentence construction as an indicator of social class (Stuber, 2006).

Perhaps the most consequential way that people implicitly signal and read class differences in interaction is through *class rules for interaction* (Fiske & Markus, 2012). Segregated contexts for socializing, particularly in living contexts, foster the development of class-specific cultural rules or practices for interpersonal relations (Bourdieu, 1984). These class rules determine ways of being in interpersonal relations (e.g. modest or self-assertive) and relations to others (e.g. warmly expressive or diffident) that are normatively expected, valued, and rewarded within that class (Kraus, Cote, & Keltner, 2010). People engross their class rules as unspoken, socially valid practices that are invisible to them until challenged in a different class context. For instance, it has been shown that middle-and-upper classes have more elaborate rules for meals than the lower-class. Sitting in front of the television during mealtime is often

associated with low-class families (Fiske & Markus, 2012). Furthermore, middle/upper-class dinner norms include not starting the meal until everyone is served, talk to the person on either side of you, and don't clear until everyone is finished (DeVault, 1991).

Although class standing may not be directly announced, people can often pick up on several cues based on speech, appearance, and rules for social interaction that indicate membership to a specific class group. Class signals determine the thoughts, attitudes, and behavior towards individuals of that class category. In addition to these cues, social class can be signaled through ways of interacting with authority figures and other members of public institutions. Given that class signals are easily identified and influence our treatment/perception of members in that class background, it is crucial that people are given the language to talk about and identify these differences. Diversity trainings, courses, and workshops should focus on identifying and labeling these class signals in order to reduce prejudice during cross-class encounters.

### **Parents' Interactions With Their Children's School**

Studies have shown that parent's social class background influences how they interact with their children's schools (Lareau & Calarco, 2012). In a study by Lareau (2011), the researcher compared children from middle-class families who were attending a middle-class school to the children from poor-and-working-class families who were attending two different working-class elementary schools. The researchers determined class background by the parent's occupation and educational attainment. In order to be considered middle-class, at least one parent had to be working in a higher-status position, such as management. Working-class families were identified as those who were employed in non-managerial positions, and poor families received public assistance and held no regular job.

From 1993 to 1994, Lareau and a team of graduate students conducted observations at three schools, interviewed several families, and attended family-school events such as parent-teacher conferences. From this study, the researchers found class differences in the ways parents interacted with schools. While working-class parents were very concerned about their students' success in school, they rarely intervened. In contrast, middle-class families had frequent encounters with teachers asking questions and making special requests. Middle-class family interactions were described as informal, probing for student information, and examining alternate education options (Lareau & Calarco, 2012).

Unlike middle-class families, the working-class families knew little about their children's progress as they were generally reluctant to approach teachers for this information. Even when working-class parents knew of their child's struggles, they did not request accommodations for the child. Working-class parents viewed the teachers as having primary responsibility for their child's education while middle-class families felt more of this responsibility on themselves (Lareau & Calarco, 2012). This does not mean, however, that working-class/poor families were never frustrated with their child's schooling.

When working-class parents did intervene, they often found their attempts (often filled with anger which educators found to be inappropriate) to be unsuccessful. Working-class parents were unlikely to push issues further after the initial encounter. On the other hand, middle-class parents, being aware of the wide variety of opportunities for intervention in their children's schooling, felt comfortable asserting their needs and requesting services. Middle-class parents took on a less confrontational, assertive, yet cooperative approach. Middle-class parents were described as joking, smiling, and leaning in to signal that they were listening to the teachers. By



adopting such socio-emotional strategies, middle-class parents were able to gain an advantage by complying with the schools' elaborate and unarticulated expectations (Lareau & Calarco, 2012).

Interestingly, Lareau (2011) discovered that often times middle-class parents would act as cultural mentors for working-class/poor parents. Middle-class parents would provide advice to the working-class/poor families for ways to approach the school. One mother gave another mother specific language to use for making a request, encouraging her not to "demand" specific teachers but rather explain the situation as to why her son "needed" a specific teacher. In another example, a middle-class mother helped a working-class mother write a letter to request services. In sum, Lareau (2011) examined many important social class differences in ways that parents approach their children's education which may ultimately have a significant effect on the quality of their child's education.

In another study by Lareau (2002), the researcher found similar patterns of interaction among working-class and middle-class families while at the pediatricians' office. Lareau observed that by following middle-class rules for self-assertion, the middle-class mother prepped her ten year old son to not only answer the doctor's questions but to ask him questions as well. Once in the office, the son spoke right up. The son established a friendly relationship with the middle-class doctor. In contrast, Lareau describes a working-class mother and her son's interactions with their pediatrician as relatively more cautious, constrained, and uneasy. The mother answered the doctor's questions minimally and seemed to resist revealing detailed information by which she might be judged negatively or that might confirm working-class stereotypes. The son, too, limited his interaction. In the end, the mother received less information about her son's health.

As these studies demonstrate, there are clear differences in the way people from different social class backgrounds interact with members of public institutions. These differences can influence one's ability to successfully navigate situations that are key to success, such as a college or university setting. Individuals from working-class/poor backgrounds may struggle to fit-in with the middle-class culture of academia which may hinder their academic performance and result in fewer job opportunities in the future. A workshop that raises awareness to the differences in interaction styles among social class groups and cross-class encounters may help students from working-class/poor better navigate their college experience. It is also important for middle-and-upper class individuals to recognize their privilege and the diversity among their peers.

Another element to consider is how communication and language are a product of social class background. How one speaks, and what they talk about is influenced by social class. Communication style can influence the way people are treated and perceived (e.g. intelligent or non-intelligent) during cross-class encounters.

### **Social Class and Communication Styles**

There is an old debate that argues that children from low-income and minority families have deficient language abilities or engage in a language style that is just different from the mainstream standard (Miller & Sperry, 2012). This view was first introduced in the 1960s, but many challenged this idea including William Labov who wrote "The Logic of Nonstandard English" which appeared in *Language in the Inner City*. His work demonstrated that Black English is its own distinct dialect with its own grammatical rules that is just as effective and thought provoking as Standard English. Despite the support Labov has received for his work, the notion of language deprivation among low-income and minority groups has not yet disappeared.

In 1995, Hart and Risley studied the language skills of six welfare children and thirteen children of professional parents. The researchers proposed that there is a thirty million word gap between the numbers of words spoken to children in the highest-and-lowest-class families (Miller & Sperry, 2012). Hart and Risley even claimed that this deficit could not be remedied: “By the time children are four years old, intervention programs come too late and can provide too little experience to make up for the past” (Hart & Risley, 1995, p 2 as cited in Miller & Sperry, 2012). Miller and Sperry take issue with this claim pointing out that these types of statements create a dynamic in which people from low-class backgrounds are treated poorly or an inadequately when compared to their middle-class peers. For example, if teachers assume that children from low-income backgrounds are linguistically deficient, their perceptions of the children will be bias and stigmatizing. Repeated face-to-face encounters between teacher and student will eventually lead to negative stereotypes, undermine motivation, and create self-fulfilling prophecies (Miller & Sperry, 2012).

Academic curriculum is highly standardized and based on middle-class values. For example, despite children from low-income groups scoring poorly on verbal assessments, when low-income children are followed in their everyday lives (homes, neighborhoods, and churches) they appear as able language learners, using a variety of verbal skills, including narratives (Miller & Sperry, 2012). Narratives are viewed as complex forms of mental representation, and many working-class communities seem to have a talent for creating narratives. However, in academic settings, children’s ability to form narratives (story telling) is not tested. This puts these children at a disadvantage when compared to their middle-class counterparts, and creates an assumption that low-income children are unintelligent and influences how teachers and other peers interact with and treat these students.

Language is a powerful tool that can influence how we treat and perceive one another. “Proper” English is based on White, middle-and-upper-class criteria; those who do not adhere to the rules and regulations of this standard are viewed as deficient. People may be treated poorly, ignored, or viewed as unintelligent based on their ability to articulate properly. However, it is important to consider how education background, culture, and social class influences the way one speaks, and avoid negative stereotyping based on a person’s language presentation. It is important for society to recognize where this standard comes from, and how some, more than others, do not have access to this valued resource (e.g. education that fosters “proper” language skills). Intellect and ability should not be determined by the way one speaks, instead the ideas behind their words should be what is most important.

### **Social Class and Prosocial Behavior**

Research demonstrates that individuals from lower-class backgrounds exhibit more social engagement and prosocial behavior (Kraus & Keltner, 2009; Kraus, Rheinschmidt, & Piff, 2012). In the study by Kraus and Keltner (2009), the researchers recruited 106 undergraduate students whose families were from upper-or lower-class backgrounds. Participants came to the lab in pairs and were instructed to engage in a brief hypothetical job interview and were told that the aim of the study was to determine effective interview strategies. The researchers observed that in the first 60 seconds of the interaction, lower-class individuals showed more behaviors that reflect social engagement (e.g. head nods, eyebrow raises, laughs) and fewer behaviors showing disinterest or disengagement (e.g. checking a cell phone, self-grooming, drawing during the interaction) than their upper-class counterparts (Kraus & Keltner, 2009). Gender was also related to engagement behavior where women were more likely to display engaged behaviors during social interactions. Kraus and Keltner also instructed naïve observers to determine the social

class status of the participants. The researchers found that the observers were able to predict subjective SES with greater-than-chance accuracy despite only being exposed to the participants during this brief interaction.

Differences in perceived interdependence influences prosocial motivations to be helpful and generous (Kraus, Rheinschmidt, & Piff, 2012). For example, researchers Henrich and colleagues (2001) examined cultural variation in generosity by giving participants from 15 different cultures specific goods (e.g. money) and instructing them to share the goods at their discretion. The researchers found that individuals from more interdependent cultures, where resources are scarce and large-scale cooperation is common, were more likely to share the good with an anonymous stranger (Kraus et al., 2012). Research also suggests that the increased social interdependence of lower-class individuals creates more helping behaviors among lower-class individuals when compared to their upper-class counterparts (Kraus et al., 2012). For example, a large-scale survey found that people with lower incomes donate a higher percentage of their salaries to charities compared to higher income individuals (Toppe, Kirsch, and Michel, 2001). In a study conducted by Independent Sector (2002), households earning under \$25,000 gave 4.2% of their income to charity, whereas households making \$100,000 or more contributed only 2.7% of their income (Piff, Kraus, Cheng, & Keltner, 2010).

A study called the “Dictator Game” conducted by Piff, Kraus, Cheng, and Keltner (2010) also investigated prosocial behavior. Here, participants were paired with an anonymous partner, seated in a different room. Participants were given 10 points and were told that they had to decide how many of these points they wanted to keep for themselves and how many (if any) they wanted to give to their partner. Participants were told that their responses would be anonymous, and that their cash payment at the end of the game would depend on how many points they had

remaining. In the dictator game, higher allocations reflect higher levels of altruism and willingness to put their partner's needs before their own. The results of this study indicated that lower-class participants allocated a larger portion of their points to their partner than did upper-class participants, suggesting that lower-class individuals engage in more prosocial behaviors.

Social class standing, or perceived interdependence, can also be linked to unethical behavior (Dubois, Rucker, & Galinsky, 2015). Research suggests that upper-class individuals are more likely to engage in lying and cheating compared to their lower-class counterparts (Piff, Stancato, Cote, Mendoza-Denton, & Keltner, 2012). However, Dubois and colleagues further investigated this link by examining what drives unethical behaviors. The researchers proposed that both upper-class and lower-class individuals engage in unethical behavior, however, lower-class individuals are motivated to be unethical when the intention is to help another person whereas upper-class individuals engage in unethical behavior when the intention is to benefit themselves. The researchers examined this through a series of studies that examined social class standing, income, education level, and whether or not participants would lie/cheat on a dice game that would ultimately benefit themselves or another person. Dubois and colleagues found that, in fact, upper-class individuals were more likely to cheat during this game and engage in unethical behavior for themselves. On the other hand, lower-class individuals were less likely to cheat, and were more prone to engage in unethical behavior for another person.

This research suggests that lower-class individuals engage in more prosocial behaviors due to their increased ability to empathize with other people (Piff et al., 2010; Dubois et al., 2015; Kraus et al., 2009). How a person experiences emotion during an interaction may be related to differences in perceived independence (Anderson, Keltner, & John, 2003; Kraus et al.,

2012) and sense of power (Anderson, Keltner, & John, 2003). Empathy may also be related to one's ability to connect with the feelings associated with being down on one's luck.

It is important to acknowledge the differences in prosocial behavior and empathy because of the stereotypes that surround people from lower-class backgrounds (e.g. poor people are less kind and generous, than upper-class individuals). This research demonstrates, that in fact, the lower one stands on the social class ladder, the more attuned to human needs they seem to be. Examining this research and educating individuals in this area will allow people to challenge their negative stereotypes and assumptions about people from lower-class backgrounds.

### **Empathy and Understanding Emotion**

Research suggests that lower-class individuals view social outcomes as controlled by their environment and other individuals which in turn makes them particularly aware of and attuned to other's internal states, intentions, and emotions (Kraus, Rheinschmidt, & Piff, 2012; Dubois, Rucker, & Galinsky, 2015). In contrast, upper-class individuals rely less on others for help and tend to be more independent and self-focused (Kraus, Cote, & Keltner, 2010; Dubois et.al, 2015). Because of this, social class has been linked to empathy and accuracy of identifying other's emotions (Kraus et. al., 2010).

Kraus, Cote, and Keltner (2010) examined the link between social class and empathic accuracy by conducting three studies. Empathic accuracy is defined by the researchers as the ability to judge the emotions of others. In the first study, Kraus et al. (2010) recruited 200 full-time employees at a university. The researchers measured social class by dividing the groups into college-educated and non-college educated. The participants completed the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT) which required participants to identify the emotions of human faces in photographs. The results showed that high-school-educated

participants had higher levels of empathic accuracy compared to the college-educated participants.

In the second study, the researchers sought to demonstrate empathic accuracy during interactions. Participants include 168 college students. Participants were paired off and required to engage in a hypothetical job interview, where they were interviewed for a lab manager position. Social class was assessed by having the participants rate themselves on a ladder that had 10 rungs representing where people stood in the university community. Participants were instructed that at the top of the ladder were “those who are best off, have the most education, most money, and most respected jobs” and people at the bottom were “those who are the worst off, have the least education, least money, and least respected jobs or no job.” Participants then rated their own emotions and estimated their partner’s emotions during the hypothetical job interview. The researchers found that participants from high-class backgrounds were less able than lower-class participants to estimate the emotions of their partners. This tendency is explained by lower-class individuals’ greater focus on the external social environment and upper-class individuals’ greater focus on the self (Kraus et al., 2010).

In the third study, the researchers examined how a manipulation of temporary perceptions of social-class rank might influence emotion perception. Eighty-one university students were instructed to imagine an interaction with a person at the very top or bottom of the social-class ladder. The researchers predicted that participants who imagined interacting with a person at the very top would be primed to think about their subordinate rank relative to this upper-ranking partner, and, as a result, would be better able to perceive emotion and vice versa. As predicted, upper-class participants who imagined interacting with a lower-class individual felt higher in



social-class rank and also tended to perform worse on a standard test of emotion recognition (i.e. The Mind in the Eyes Task by Baron-Cohen et al., 2006).

Social class differences in independence may also influence how one experiences emotion during interaction (Anderson, Keltner, & John, 2003). According to Anderson and colleagues, the emotions of upper-class individuals may be relatively unaffected by the emotional experiences of individuals around them given their strong sense of independence (or possible lack of empathy). On the other hand, lower-class individuals, given their elevated perceptions of external influences on their outcomes, are likely to be highly attuned to other individuals' emotions, and as a result, to shift their emotions to match the emotional experiences of others (Kraus et al., 2012).

In another study conducted by Kraus and colleagues (2011), the researchers sought to measure how social class differences influence change in emotions by instructing female students (at a university) to tease one another. The study found that upper-class individuals reported stable levels of hostile emotion throughout the teasing interaction, whereas, the lower-class participants reported shifting their hostile emotions during the interaction to become more similar to the hostile emotions of the upper-class friend. This suggests that lower-class individuals are better able to mimic the emotions of others (Kraus et al., 2012). Kraus and colleagues suggest that these results are reflective of greater emotional reactivity among lower-class individuals.

Physiological responses also reflect similar patterns of reactivity among individuals from lower-class backgrounds. Researchers Page-Gould, Koslov, and Mendes (2011) recruited a sample of adults from the Boston area and had these strangers engage in a social interaction where they were asked to play a board game (e.g. Taboo). While playing the game, their

physiological responses were measured with an electrocardiogram and impedance cardiography. During the interaction, participants from lower-class backgrounds showed physiological responses that paralleled those experienced by their interaction partner. More specifically, lower-social-class participants' pre-ejection period—a measure of cardiac contractility that indexes sympathetic nervous system activation—was significantly associated with the pre-ejection period of their partner from one minute earlier in the interaction (Page-Gould et al., 2011). This physiological attunement was not observed among upper-social-class participants.

The various aspects of social class discussed thus far, such as class signals, rules for interaction, language and communication style, and prosocial behavior are important to consider when examining one's ability to access valued life resources via interpersonal interactions. Cultural capital and class rules for interaction influence upward social mobility through attainment of high-status jobs and education. Despite laws against discrimination based on socioeconomic status, the way in which one experiences discrimination for their social class background is less obvious. For example, knowledge of cultural capital (e.g. being able to talk about the latest trends in middle-class culture) can influence whether or not a person gets the job. These gateway institutions play an important role in one's ability to climb the social class ladder.

### **Gateway Institutions**

Consider two individuals who submit identical resumes to an elite psychological practice. Each individual is invited to a high-end Mediterranean restaurant for a lunch interview for an available position. They have equivalent grades, majors, and extracurricular activities and even attended the same college. They are both Caucasian, tall, and handsome. However, one individual comes from an upper-class background, with both parents working as professionals, while the other individual is from a working-class family whose parents only graduated from

high school. The upper-class interviewee bonds with the interviewer over lacrosse, while the lower-class interviewee struggles to relate with the interviewer and the interviewer struggles to understand his country accent. The lower-class interviewee is also dressed in an inexpensive, untailored suit and struggles to understand the menu, and mispronounces his dinner order. After the interview, the firm decides that the upper-class interviewee is the superior candidate. They describe him as more qualified, more competent, and more likable.

As this example demonstrates, the outcomes of interpersonal encounters are especially important for social inequality when they take place in a gateway institution. A gateway institution is defined as a public organization such as education, workplace, and health institutions that mediate access to valued life outcomes by which we commonly judge inequality (Ridgeway & Fiske, 2012). These outcomes include good jobs, income, health, power, and social status. Most gateway institutions (e.g. schools, workplace offices, medical contexts) operate according to middle-class rules of interaction (hooks, 2000). Positions of authority in these institutions are dominated by people with middle-status occupations (teachers, professors, doctors, and engineers), associated education, and primarily middle-class cultural identity (Lareau & Calarco, 2012).

In these types of contexts, working-class individuals are at a disadvantage. This disadvantage can include a lack of cultural capital (i.e. knowledge of middle-class culture, such as art, music, or specific foods) or similar language that would help them more easily relate to their middle-class peers (Ming-Lui, 2011). Their disadvantage in regards to the rules of interaction is typically not compensated for by any advantage in occupational status or organizational authority (Ridgeway & Fiske, 2012). As a result, working-class individual rules of interaction signal class status and lead to bias and the self-fulfilling prophecy (Ridgeway &

Fiske, 2012). The self-fulfilling prophecy occurs when one internalizes the stereotypical beliefs that surround their background (e.g. women are less competent than men) (Merton, 1948). This self-fulfilling prophecy can lead one to believe that they are less competent or unintelligent based on their lack of understanding for middle-class rules of interaction.

For example, Espenshade and Radford (2010) found that participating in extracurricular activities generally improved the likelihood of being admitted to a 4-year college institution. However, participating in certain activities that are less associated with contemporary middle-class, especially urban middle-class, decreases the odds of admittance. These activities include practices such as ROTC, 4-H club, and Future Farmers of America. Individuals who participated in these activities were seen as less competent.

It is important for individuals, especially college students, to understand how gateway institutions operate. As noted, individuals from a working-class background who struggle to fit in with middle-class values, may not associate their lack of success (in job interviews, for example) to their social class background. Instead, these individuals may assume that they were not intelligent enough, or did not work hard enough to obtain the job (i.e. self-fulfilling prophecy). Educating people, especially from lower-class backgrounds, about gateway institutions may help them successfully navigate middle-and-upper-class institutions.

As noted, overt forms of discrimination based on socioeconomic status are prohibited. However, classist discrimination takes the form of more subtle, covert mechanisms in which the perpetrator may not even be aware of his or her bias. Like racism and sexism, classism is not always “in your face” like it was many years ago. Instead, researchers are now identifying more indirect forms of discrimination called microaggressions that can have harmful effects on one’s esteem and position in society.

## **Microaggressions**

The following section will address microaggressions based on the research provided by Sue & Sue (2008), *Counseling the Culturally Diverse: Theory and Practice*. Derald Wung Sue, Ph.D. is a Professor of Psychology and Education at the Teachers College, Columbia University. He is one of the most cited multicultural scholars in the United States. David Sue, Ph.D. is a Professor of Psychology at the Center for Cross-Cultural Research at Western Washington University. Their work focuses primarily on multicultural issues in the United States.

According to Sue and Sue microaggressions are “brief and commonplace daily verbal or behavioral indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative slights and insults that potentially have a harmful or unpleasant psychological impact on the target person or group” (p. 110). Microaggressions can also occur when individuals are made to feel unwelcome, isolated, unsafe, or alienated due to their membership to a specific group (Sue & Sue, 2008). For example, helping professionals who wear expensive clothing and jewelry while working with low-income groups send the message that “I have money, you don’t” or “we are from very different financial backgrounds.”

Microaggressions tend to be subtle, unintentional, and indirect. They often occur in situations where there are alternative explanations, and they represent unconscious and ingrained biased beliefs and attitudes. They are more likely to occur when people pretend not to notice differences, such as denying that race, gender, or class has anything to do with their actions (Sue & Sue, 2008). People are taught prejudice from a young age, and no individual is immune from these beliefs. Denying and ignoring prejudice prevents an individual from being able to challenge and reframe these beliefs, and therefore are more likely to continue endorsing these beliefs.

Sue and Sue have identified three types of microaggressions: microassaults, microinsult, and microinvalidation. A microassault refers to blatant verbal, nonverbal, or environmental attacks intended to express discriminatory and biased opinions. This includes overt racism, sexism, heterosexism, and classism. Terms such as faggot, or hiring only men for managerial positions are examples of microassaults. People tend to engage in this type of behavior under three conditions: (a) when some degree of anonymity is ensured, (b) when they are in the presence of others who share or tolerate their biased beliefs and actions; and (c) when they lose control of their feelings and actions (Sue & Sue, 2008). Microassaults are most similar to old-fashioned racism, where their meaning and intent to harm is obvious to the target individual or group (Sue & Sue, 2008).

A microinsult is an unintentional behavior or verbal comment that conveys rudeness or thoughtlessness to a person's racial or class background, gender identity, or sexual orientation (Sue & Sue, 2008). Microinsults are outside of one's conscious awareness, but are characterized by an insulting hidden message. For example, when a teacher only calls on male students this sends the message that men are more intelligent than women.

Microinvalidations are verbal comments or behaviors that exclude, negate, or dismiss the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of the target group (Sue & Sue, 2008). This, too, is unintentional and outside of one's conscious awareness, but still holds a powerful message. For example, invalidating one's experience of discrimination by calling it "pulling the race card" or "pulling the poor card" sends the message that one's experience is not valued; rather, the person may be insecure or something is wrong with them. Microaggressions can come in many forms and do not necessarily have to be blatant acts of aggression; instead they are often subtle and hard for the perpetrator and victim to comprehend.

When people openly state that they have no bias (e.g. I'm not a racist), they are ignoring their own prejudice that exists in all of us in one form or another. According to Vygotsky's social construction theory, we create meaning based on our interactions with others. From a young age, we are instilled with different beliefs about certain groups, on a conscious and mostly unconscious level. By denying our natural inclination to experience prejudice, we deny ourselves the opportunity to challenge this bias and create new meaning and evaluate our treatment towards others.

The literature points out that more research is needed on classist microaggressions (Smith & Redington, 2010). While studies have looked at racial, sexist, and heterosexist forms of microaggressions, the research lacks a comprehensive understanding of classist insults. Sue and Sue (2008) have provided some examples of class-based microaggressions. For example, statements which assert that race or gender does not play a role in life success, such as "I believe the most qualified person should get the job" or "Men and women have equal opportunities for achievement" sends the message that the playing field is even, so if women or people of color cannot make it, the problem is with them. Other examples of classist (and racial/gender) microaggressions include mistaking a person of color for a service worker or mistaking a female doctor for a nurse. This sends the message that certain groups (i.e. people of color and women) belong in certain occupations.

Helping professionals, teachers, and anyone in a leadership position has a responsibility to understand the impact of microaggressions, whether it be related to race, gender, sexual orientation, or class. There is evidence that suggests that microaggressions occur frequently in a helping relationship (Sue & Sue, 2008). These experiences impact people in ways that researchers are only beginning to understand. Professionals are in a position to learn from each

other about microaggressions. It is important to encourage individuals to explore their feelings and experiences with microaggressions so that the status quo of silence and invisibility are broken. Sue and Sue provide several ways in which professionals can avoid microaggressions and deal with them when they do occur.

First, professionals must be aware that racial, gender, sexual orientation, and classist microaggressions are a constant reality in the lives of culturally and economically diverse groups (Sue & Sue, 2008). Microaggressions take a psychological toll on those who experience them. Second, professionals must be aware that everyone has, and continues to engage in, unintentional microaggressions (Sue & Sue, 2008). As professionals, these microaggressions may have a big impact on one's work in multicultural/ economically diverse settings. All professionals have a responsibility to evaluate their own biases, prejudices, and stereotypes that may result in microaggressions, and then create ways to minimize the occurrence of these events.

Third, professionals should not invalidate the experiential reality of culturally or economically diverse groups (Sue & Sue, 2008). Treat people as the experts of their own lives; consider that they have a more accurate perception of their experiences with issues of racism, sexism, heterosexism, or classism. Try to understand the individual's point of view, and don't be quick to reject or refute racial, gender, sexual orientation, or classist issues. Fourth, you should not get defensive if someone implies that you have engaged in a microaggression (Sue & Sue, 2008). Try to clarify the situation by encouraging communication, and admitting to your fault. Even simply saying "I'm sorry" and encouraging the person to feel free to raise similar issues will do wonders for the relationship.

In order to reduce the occurrence of microaggressions, becoming aware of your own prejudice is key. As noted, we all hold prejudicial beliefs that influence the way we view and



treat individuals from certain groups. By increasing one's awareness of their own prejudice, it can ultimately decrease or eliminate prejudice towards that group (Sue & Sue, 2008).

### **Reducing Prejudice**

Research indicates that prejudicial beliefs can be changed or reduced (Lai, Hoffman, & Nosek, 2013; Hall, Crisp, & Suen, 2009; Fiske, 2010). Prejudice can be in the form of an explicit or implicit bias. Explicit attitudes are observed at the conscious level, are purposely formed, and are easy for people to acknowledge and self-report (Fiske, 2010). Implicit attitudes, on the other hand, are unconscious, involuntarily formed, and out of the person's awareness (Dovidio, Kawakami, & Gaertner, 2002; Hall et. al., 2009). Implicit and explicit attitudes often times contradict one another and can influence how we perceive and treat another person. For example, imagine someone who outwardly detests racial discrimination and stereotypes (i.e. explicit attitude), however, finds themselves becoming nervous every time they encounter someone from a different racial background than their own (i.e. implicit attitude).

In order to reduce or change prejudice towards specific groups, researchers have used various methods, including intergroup contact (Lai et al., 2013) which is the most well-studied form of reducing explicit prejudice (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Intergroup contact is defined as interactions between individual members of socially distinct groups and has been proven to work well under certain circumstances (Fiske, 2010). For instance, Allport (1954) identifies four conditions which must be present during intergroup contact: (a) equal status of the groups within the context; (b) common goals; (c) cooperation, or at least no competition; and (d) authority sanction for the contact. If groups view themselves as coming together for a common goal, that they need one another, and that those in power want them to get along, intergroup contact works well (Fiske, 2010). The quality and quantity of intergroup contact is also important

(Lai et. al., 2013), and mere exposure to an out-group member is not adequate for reducing implicit prejudice (Tam, Hewstone, Harwood, Voci, & Kenworthy, 2006).

The effects on intergroup contact work best when the environment allows for friendships to form, such as working with someone over a long period of time (Fiske, 2010). For example, in Sherif's (1966) famous summer camp studies, the cooperative contact created between the groups allowed for a reduction of in-group favoritism that had been established. In addition, just knowing about another in-group members' friendship with an out-group member reduces levels of prejudice (Wright, Aron, McLaughlin-Volpe, & Ropp, 1997). Contact works because it gives people the opportunity to know one another outside of stereotyped beliefs. Individuals tend to focus less on the stereotypes and more on individual qualities when interacting with someone of the out-group (Ruscher & Fiske, 1990). Ultimately, contact works best when people are not only tolerant of one another, but instead they are excited about meeting people who differ from them in some aspect (Fiske, 2010).

Other methods also suggest evidence for reducing prejudice, such as exposing individuals to stereotypical information and providing information that disconfirms these beliefs (Kawakami, Dovidio, Moll, Hermsen, & Russin, 2000). In addition, exposure to an outgroup roommate (Shook & Fazio, 2008), imagined contact, and blurring boundaries between the groups (Hall et. al., 2009) have also been effective strategies. Workshops that focus on exposing individuals to the stereotypes and prejudice that surround people from specific groups can help to eliminate prejudice and discrimination. It is important for individuals to expose themselves to people who come from a background other than their own. Additionally, developing an understanding of how social class background influences interpersonal encounters and one's

ability to successfully navigate public institutions is vital to one's academic, occupational, and interpersonal success.

### **Reducing the Social-Class Achievement Gap: A Workshop for College Students**

Often times, diversity is viewed as a source of threat and discussion around diversity issues are ignored out of fear of creating tension among the group. This type of approach encourages conversations that shift attention away from individual difference and frame diversity as an insignificant influence on life outcomes (e.g. stating that you do not see color). Stephens, Hamedani and Destin (2014) argue that cultural differences should not be viewed as a source of threat. Instead, students should embrace these differences and be empowered by giving them an opportunity to learn about different backgrounds in a supportive and constructive manner. By educating students about the ways in which their backgrounds can influence their experience may improve all students' comfort with and ability to navigate individual difference by perceiving their difference as normal rather than stigmatizing (Stephens et al., 2014).

According to Stephens, Hamedani, and Destin (2014) college students who do not have parents with a 4-year college degree (i.e. first-generation students) receive lower grades and drop out at higher rates compared to students who have at least one parent with a 4-year degree (i.e. continuing-generation students). First-generation students may struggle to fit in while navigating the middle-class culture of higher-education. In order to succeed, they need to learn the "rules of the game" such as how to select a major, find an internship, or build their resumes (Stephens et al., 2014). Many first-generation students lack the insight as to why they are struggling and do not understand how students "like them" can improve (Stephens et al., 2014).

In a study conducted by Stephens, Hamedani, and Destin (2014), the researchers created a difference-education intervention program for incoming freshman students at Northwestern

University. The goal of this intervention was to reduce the social-class achievement gap by raising awareness of how social class impacts student's college experience. Students learned about difference and why it matters, especially how social-class backgrounds can affect their college experience.

The researchers had two intervention conditions: the *difference-education group* where students heard stories from a diverse group of junior and senior students that provided participants with an understanding of how their social class background influenced their college experience; and the *standard control condition* where students were exposed to similar stories, but the stories did not convey background-specific information about how social-class influenced their experience.

Participants in this study included 147 students, 66 were first generation students and 81 were continuing generation students. The majority of first-generation students (59.10%) were low-income (i.e. received Pell grants). The participants were exposed to a panel of students who told real-life stories in order to educate the students about how their different backgrounds mattered in college. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two groups (treatment or control group).

Students in the treatment group listened to the panel respond to a variety of questions. For example, the panel was asked "Can you provide an example of an obstacle that you faced when you came to [university name] and how you resolved it." One first-generation panelist answered, "Because my parents didn't go to college, they weren't always able to provide me the advice I needed. So it was sometimes hard to figure out which classes to take and what I wanted to do in the future. But there are other people who can provide that advice, and I learned that I needed to

rely on my adviser more than other students” (Stephans et al., 2014, p 3). Students in the treatment group heard similar stories, but the content was not linked to social-class background.

After the panel concluded, participants completed a short survey and created a video testimonial to give the students a chance to learn through the *saying-is-believing* effect (Yeager & Walton, 2011 as cited in Stephans et al., 2014). The researchers also compared official first-year cumulative GPAs. The results indicated that first-generation students in the difference-education group had higher GPAs than did first-generation students in the standard group. The difference-education group were also more likely to seek out college resources and improved their academic performance.

Stephans et al. conclude that this program reduced the social-class achievement gap among first-generation and continuing-generation college students by 63% at the end of their first year. This program provided students with the insight that people’s different backgrounds matter and that people with backgrounds like theirs can succeed when they use the right tools and strategies (Stephans et al., 2014).

The workshop created for this dissertation was inspired by a desire to make social class a more visible form of diversity. Upon attending graduate school, the researcher discovered how her own working-class background impacted her ability to navigate through the middle-class world of academia. The researcher experienced issues from financial aid concerns to classist microaggressions and a desire to hide her working-class roots. These experiences inspired the creation of this workshop, in hope that students who were also experiencing difficulties, discomfort, and disconnect from peers or professors due to social class would become aware of this diversity issue and be better prepared to successfully navigate their college career, as well as all future life endeavors.

## CHAPTER THREE

### “THAT’S CLASSY!”:

#### A WORKSHOP EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL CLASS

##### **Introduction**

The “That’s Classy!” workshop is designed to raise awareness of social class as a diversity factor. Compared to race and gender, social class is a less visible form of diversity. Yet, social class background influences many aspects of a person’s life, including the way people speak, the foods they eat, where they grocery shop, and even the hobbies they enjoy. Stereotypes about members of specific social class groups (e.g. rich people are snobby) influence people’s perception of and treatment towards those of that class group. Cross-class encounters (i.e. interacting with people from another class background) are common on a college campus, and are shaped by differences in social class background. The purpose of this workshop is to reduce prejudice by enhancing participants’ understanding of the social class groups in the United States, the stereotypes that surround these groups, and how social class background shapes classist attitudes and interpersonal interactions.

The workshop includes three activities that are based on themes related to social class: What is Social Class? The Myth of Meritocracy, and Exploring how Social Class and Classism Operate in Society. The purpose of each activity is to increase the participants’ knowledge of social class groups and reduce prejudice through interactive exploration and personal sharing. Throughout the workshop, participants should be encouraged to participate through sharing of personal experiences, self-reflection, and contributing to facilitated discussions. Active participation and personal sharing will allow students to apply the material to real-world

examples which should enhance their understanding of social class and decrease bias towards specific social class groups.

### **Objectives**

- Participants will become aware of the social class system in the United States.
- Participants will be able to identify which social class group they belong to.
- Participants will be able to identify the stereotypes surrounding specific social class groups.
- Participants will understand how social class influences one's values, beliefs, attitudes, and perception of the world.
- Participants will learn how class and classism impact their individual lives, communities, and interactions with others.
- Participants will have less prejudice towards social class groups.

### **Procedural Outline**

- Introduction to Workshop
- Activity 1: What is Social Class?
  - 1.1: The Definition of Social Class
  - 1.2: Stereotyping Exercise
  - 1.3: Facilitated Discussion/Self-Reflection
- Activity 2: The Myth of Meritocracy
  - 2.1: The American Dream
  - 2.2: The Myth of Meritocracy
  - 2.3: Poverty, Wealth, and Income
- Activity 3: Exploring how Social Class and Classism Operate in Society
  - 3.1: Everyday Classism
  - 3.2: The Media

## **Workshop Activities**

### **Introduction to Workshop**

Participants should be welcomed and thanked for their participation in the researcher's workshop. The researcher, Andrea Poet, should introduce herself as a graduate student in Clinical Psychology, studying social class for her dissertation project. Students should be informed that the information gathered from the workshop will be used for the purposes of her dissertation. Participants will be given the informed consent and asked to review and sign it before participating in the workshop. Participants will also be told that their participation is voluntary, and they are free to leave the workshop at any point if they feel uncomfortable or no longer desire to participate. In addition, participants should be asked to sign-in and reminded of the 2.0 credit hours they would receive for participating in this workshop.

### **Activity 1: What is Social Class?**

Each social class background includes a set of stereotypes and assumptions used to describe members of that specific class group. These assumptions do not accurately represent all members of a specific group, and therefore, the accuracy and origin of these beliefs should be explored. The purpose of this activity is to enhance participants' knowledge of the different social class groups in the United States, and discuss the stereotypes associated with those groups. At the conclusion of this activity, participants should be able to identify the four main categories of class backgrounds, the stereotypes that characterize each group, the source of these stereotypes, and be able to identify their own social class background. Please refer to Appendix D for additional descriptions, information, and the PowerPoint slides for this activity.



1.1: The Definition of Social Class: The term “Social Class” should be introduced and explored.

- a. Participants should be asked to describe their own ideas related to social class.

Participants should be asked to describe what comes to mind when they hear the word “social class”? Responses may include the amount of money someone makes, the type of car they drive, occupation, housing, neighborhoods, material possessions, etc.

- b. The definition of social class, based on the research literature, should be presented:

- i. Social class is defined as relative social rank in terms of income, wealth, education, status, and/or power (classism.org).
- ii. Class can also include occupation or job status (e.g. doctor vs. a car mechanic).

B. The presenter should discuss the problems with the current definition of social class:

- a. The definitions provided in the literature fail to explain the culture that is created within one’s class background, including the values, beliefs, attitudes, world perspectives, traditions, and activities that are valued in that specific class group.

- b. Experiential Discussion: Participants should be prompted to think about the activities or values in rural Pennsylvania. Responses may include 4-wheeling, hunting, camouflage, camping, mudding, fishing, etc. Then, participants should be encouraged to provide examples from their *own* social class background in order to demonstrate how hobbies and values can vary from region to region. The researcher should be prepared to facilitate and guide this discussion in order to encouraged sharing and enhance learning.

## 1.2: Stereotyping Exercise

- A. Participants are placed into four groups. Each group receives a card that says either poor, working-class, middle-class, or upper-class/rich. In their groups, participants are asked to describe the social class group listed on their index card, including personal characteristics of the group, organizations associated with them, places they shop, vacations, housing, family dynamics, and more.
- B. Each group should share their list with the group. At the end of each list sharing, the other participants will be asked to guess the class background being described.
- C. This activity was developed by Maureen McHugh, Ph.D. and utilized during a graduate course for a Clinical Psychology program, “Race, Culture, and Gender.”

## 1.3: Facilitated Discussion/Self-Reflection

- A. After the stereotyping exercise, participants should discuss their reactions to hearing the characteristics described for each social class group. Do they agree or disagree with the lists? Did anything make them angry, or annoyed? In addition, participants should be prompted to add any additional characteristics, beliefs, or ideas to the existing lists.
- B. Participants should then be prompted to discuss where these beliefs come from and how they are created and maintained (e.g. media, families, experience, etc.). In addition, participants should be challenged to explore how these beliefs impact our perception and treatment of members of specific social class groups. For example, participants may suggest that poor people are dirty and lazy. The presenter will challenge the group to discuss where they got this idea from. Did they see a poor

person on the street or at the store that appeared this way? Did they view this stereotype in the media? How does this belief influence the way they treat a poor individual?

- C. It is expected that the participants will be easily able to identify which group is being described as the stereotypes are listed. Some participants may have a strong reaction to the material if say, for example, someone from that class background is offended by a particular stereotype (e.g. rich people are snobs). The presenter should be prepared to have a neutral, safe conversation with the group about these beliefs.

## **Activity 2: The Myth of Meritocracy**

Meritocracy is the belief that if a person works hard enough, they can reach the “American Dream.” However, despite hard work and determination, external barriers, such as oppression and discrimination, stand in the way of many peoples’ success. The purpose of this activity is to demonstrate the importance of opportunity and class background (privileged vs. not privileged) to one’s ability to achieve upward mobility. People commonly attribute one’s success (or lack of success) to internal attributes—they are just not working hard enough. The following facilitated discussion and wealth statistics aim to debunk this myth by demonstrating the importance of external barriers to success. Please refer to Appendix D for additional descriptions, information, and the PowerPoint slides for this activity.

### **2.1: The American Dream**

- A. The presenter should pose the following questions to the group:
  - a. What is the American Dream?
  - b. Who has access to the American Dream?
  - c. What are some barriers to reaching the American Dream?

## B. Facilitated Discussion

- a. The presenter should lead a discussion in response to the participants' answers to each question.
- b. The presenter anticipates that the participants will be able to identify characteristics of the American Dream, such as white picket fences, 2.5 children, stable jobs, luxuries, vacations, and an overall high quality of life. It is also expected that participants will have mixed opinions about the accessibility of the American Dream. Some participants may believe that by working hard everyone has access to the dream, but others will be able to talk about barriers to that dream. For example, individuals who come from lower-class backgrounds may be able to speak about their own experience with their families working hard, yet struggling to pay bills. Additionally, some participants may be able to express how access to resources (e.g. a good education) can influence one's success in life. The presenter should be prepared to guide and facilitate this discussion in order to encourage personal sharing and enhance learning.

## 2.2: Myth of Meritocracy

- A. The Myth of Meritocracy is defined and explained to the participants. The following points should be addressed to illustrate this idea:
  - a. In the United States, there is a common belief that people have equal access to valued resources, such as a quality education, medical care, and upward social mobility—one's ability to move up the social class ladder. Therefore, people who do not live "successful" lives are viewed as having faulty internal

attributes (e.g. lazy, unmotivated, and unintelligent) that are preventing them from meeting their fullest potential.

- b. External barriers to one's success are ignored, such as poor schools, dilapidated neighborhoods, lack of transportation, and poor job prospects that are in place for those at the bottom of the social class ladder. These barriers can be overcome, but this tends to be the exception, not the rule.
- c. Values are important. For example, low-class values tend to place less importance on education and more value on hard-work in the sense of getting a good job and supporting oneself. Working-class individuals who seek a college education may lack support from families; families may feel betrayed or as if that individual is just wasting their time when they could go and get a good factory job. It isn't that hard-work and success are not valued, it is just that these values are different (e.g. education vs. full-time job). It is hard to break away from this mind-set, especially if no other opportunities have ever been presented. For example, at some high-schools, college fairs consist of only two-year technical schools geared towards male applicants, leaving few opportunities for women to further their education.
- d. Upward mobility is the belief that people can easily move from one class group to another. However, external barriers often get in the way of people's ability to climb the social class ladder (e.g. being born into poverty, poor education, and lack of opportunity, oppression, and discrimination).

## 2.3: Poverty, Wealth, and Income

Participants may endorse beliefs such as poor people are lazy and choose not to work, and rich people are motivated and hard-working while ignoring other important aspects, such as inheritance. Furthermore, when people talk about the poor, they often identify single mothers, often African American or other minority groups. In order to challenge these beliefs, the presenter should provide up-to-date statistics on welfare, the income gap, and poverty.

### A. White Poverty

- a. Invisibility of White Poverty: There is a strong assumption in the United States that only minorities are poor. In reality, poor whites make up the majority of poor individuals in the United States (hooks, 2000). Please see Appendix D for statistics.
- b. White people often assume that black individuals make up the majority of welfare recipients when actually the statistics are about even (Department of Commerce, 2013). Please see Appendix D for statistics.

### B. Wealth Statistics

- a. The presenter should provide up-to-date statistics on poverty and the wealth distribution related to race, gender, age, and geographic location. Please see Appendix D for statistics.
- b. Note: It is important to understand that the poverty line is based on data from 1955, which does not include more contemporary financial needs. Currently, the poverty line is set at about \$23,000 for a family of four, but a more accurate estimate based on contemporary needs would be above \$35,000 which would double the current figures (Ore, 2009).

- c. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2011, 46.2 million people, or 15.0 percent of the nation's population live below the official poverty line. Although the poor are primarily children and adults who have not participated in the labor force during that year, 10.4 million individuals were among the "working poor." A working-poor individual is described as someone who works at least 27 weeks in the labor force but whose income still fall below the poverty line.
- d. One must also take into consideration low wages for the working-poor and lack of health benefits (Gilbert, 2008). Making minimum wage, at \$7.25 per hour, only amounts to about \$15,000 for a full year. This is about \$7,000 under the poverty line for that year. In addition, these employers often do not offer full-time positions or health care benefits, making it even more difficult for families to get ahead ([www.bls.gov](http://www.bls.gov)).

### **Activity 3: Exploring how Social Class and Classism Operate in Society**

Social class is less visible when compared to other forms of diversity, yet there are many ways in which social class can be signaled. The purpose of this activity is to help participants become more aware of how social class and classism operate in society, including how the media portrays social class and how social class influences interpersonal interactions. Participants are exposed to several areas in which social class is relevant in our everyday lives. At the end of this section, participants should be more aware of how social class and classism are visible. The presenter should begin this topic by using several examples to demonstrate ways in which social class influences life experiences and interpersonal interactions. Please see Appendix D for more information and the PowerPoint slides for this activity.

### 3.1: Everyday Classism

- A. **Microaggression:** everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership (Sue & Sue, 2008).
- i. Examples: That is so gay; you throw like a girl; That's Classy!; what a bum, I bet your parents bought you that car (when a young person is driving a luxury vehicle), I bet you have never paid for anything and everything has been handed to you (if an individual comes from a wealthy background).
- B. **Language:** Our language is filled with class-based words and indicators. For example, when we meet someone for the first time, we often ask “where are you from”, “where do you work”, or “what college did you attend?” These questions are all indicators of one's social class background. We also have several words in our language that are used to describe people from a specific social class group: Redneck, White trash, Trailer trash, Ghetto, Trashy vs. Classy, Rich Bitch, Hick, Hillbilly, Snob, Blue Collar vs. White Collar.
- C. **Grocery Stores:** Where you can afford to shop depends on your social class. Prices are very different at stores such as Walmart vs. Giant Eagle or Wholefoods. It is also expensive to eat a healthy diet. Fruits and vegetables are expensive when compared to unhealthy choices, such as frozen dinners.
- D. **Gym Membership:** We live in a society that values health and fitness. However, gym memberships are expensive and out of reach for some people.



- E. **Education:** Did you attend a private or a public school? Think about the cost of tuition at a private school. Education plays a large role in one's success—where you get in to college, the jobs you are offered, and one's knowledge base/quality of education.
- F. **Cars:** Ever notice how cars are different depending on what neighborhood you are in? Middle-and-upper-class neighborhoods have expensive, luxury cars while working-class neighborhoods have Chevy Cavalier's and run-down vehicles (generally speaking). The kind of car one drives depends on their social class. Also, whether or not parents can afford to buy their children a car is based on social class.
- G. **Clothing:** Can you afford name brand clothing? What stores do you shop at? Goodwill vs. the mall? The type of clothing you wear and the places you purchase your clothing are based on social class.
- H. **Vacations:** Do you go on vacation with your family? Where do you vacation? How many vacations/year? Have you ever traveled outside of the country? Where you go on vacation and how often you go on vacation is influenced by social class.
- I. **Sports:** Did you play a sport growing up? How did your parents pay for the sport? Some sports are more expensive than others. One's ability to afford sports can be influenced by social class.
- J. **Material Possessions:** Do you own the latest iPhone or iPad? Do you have a flat screen TV? Can you afford cable, HBO, Showtime, or other forms of media? Do you have a lot of fashion accessories? The material items that you own are reflective of social class background.

## 2.2: The Media

- A. The media plays a large role in shaping how we view and understand social class. To demonstrate this, the presenter will show several images from the website. “The People of Walmart,” Participants should be encouraged to talk about their reactions to the images. The presenter should discuss how these images perpetuate the stereotypes of the poor (i.e. dirty, lazy, and unfit for society).
- B. Television shows portray all levels of social class. The presenter should discuss different shows that reflect specific social class groups. For example, shows such as *Roseanne*, *Honey Boo Boo*, and *The Middle* represent people from poor/working-class families. Middle-class shows in the media include *Modern Family*, *2 Broke Girls*, and *Friends*. Upper-class shows include *MTV Cribs*, *The Real Housewives*, *House of Cards*, *Gossip Girl*, and *90210*. Participants should be asked to discuss whether or not they think these shows accurately portray social class backgrounds. For example, although the show *The Middle* is supposed to be descriptive of the middle-class, the family engages in a lifestyle that is more typical of a working-class family.
- C. Participants are shown two video clips and then asked to discuss how social class and classism are operating in each of these videos. The first clip will be from the TV-show, *Honey Boo Boo*. In this clip, June (Honey Boo Boo’s mother) is giving the audience a tour of her home. Throughout the clip, June engages in many stereotypical low-class behaviors (e.g. washing her hair in the sink; eating cheese out of the bag with her hands; urine on the couch). Participants should be asked to discuss areas that demonstrate social class. The presenter anticipates that the participants will be able to understand how the media perpetuates these stereotypes and glorifies these behaviors.

- D. Participants should then watch another clip from the TV-show *Cribs*, featuring Rob Dyrdek. This show allows the rich and famous an opportunity to show off their wealth by allowing viewers an inside tour of their homes. Once again, participants should be asked to identify and discuss ways in which social class and classism are operating in this clip.

### **Evaluation**

At the conclusion of the workshop, participants complete an evaluation that will examine whether or not the stated objectives have been attained. The evaluation focuses on content knowledge gained, as well as attitude change.

### **Conclusion**

After the participants complete the evaluation, they should be given a debriefing form describing the purpose of the workshop. Participants are free to leave after they receive this form.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### EVALUATION

#### **Workshop Overview**

The workshop, “That’s Classy!” was inspired by a desire to increase the visibility of social class as a form of diversity. The purpose of the workshop was to educate undergraduate students about important aspects of social class, in the United States. Current definitions of social class (e.g. income, wealth, education, and job status) do not capture the variance among different social class groups. Each social class background comes with it a culture that has its own rules of interaction, traditions, beliefs, and more. In order to address social class and classism, the researcher utilized experimental activities, facilitated discussions, statistics, and examples from the popular media and everyday interactions to demonstrate how social class operates in the United States.

The workshop centered on three themes: What is Social Class? The Myth of Meritocracy, and How Social Class and Classism Operate in Society. The stated objectives for this workshop include: (a) Participants will become aware of the social class system in the United States; (b) Participants will be able to identify which social class group they belong to; (c) Participants will be able to identify the stereotypes surrounding specific social class groups; (d) Participants will understand how social class influences one’s values, beliefs, attitudes, and worldviews; (e) Participants will learn how class and classism impact their individual lives, communities, and interactions with others; and (f) Participants will have less prejudice towards social class groups.

The researcher anticipated that participants who engaged in the workshop would demonstrate an increased self-awareness of social class background (e.g. which group they came from, how it impacted them, etc.), increased knowledge of social class differences in the United

States (e.g. cultural differences, influence on access to resources, etc.), and reduced prejudice towards social class groups. In order to examine the overall impact of the workshop, participants completed the Standard Workshop Evaluation (Appendix A). Additionally, in order to measure how well the workshop was able to attain the goals, an experimental design was used where a set of participants who did NOT attend the workshop also completed the Social Class Questionnaire (Appendix B) and the responses were compared.

### **Workshop Participants**

Participants for this workshop included 39 undergraduate students who were enrolled in PSYC 101 (General Psychology) at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. Participants were recruited through Indiana University of Pennsylvania subject pool. Three separate workshops were conducted for this dissertation. Each workshop was, on average, 120 minutes in length. Workshop participants received 2.0 credits towards their research requirement credit. The workshops followed the outline described in chapter three. However, each workshop was unique in people's willingness to contribute, individual backgrounds/experiences, and knowledge of social class which led to qualitatively different workshops. These differences are discussed in more detail in the results section (Please see Chapter 5). Table 1 provides demographic information for the workshop participants.

Table 1

*Demographics: Workshop Participants*

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
<b><u>Workshop One</u></b>		
Gender		
Female	7	54
Male	6	46
Race		
Caucasian	11	85
African American	2	15
Asian	0	0
Hispanic	0	0
Bi-racial	0	0
Missing	0	0
<b><u>Workshop Two</u></b>		
Gender		
Female	5	42
Male	7	58
Race		
Caucasian	10	83
African American	0	0
Asian	0	0
Hispanic	0	0
Bi-racial	1	8.3
Missing	1	8.3
<b><u>Workshop Three</u></b>		
Gender		
Female	7	50
Male	7	50
Race		
Caucasian	11	78
African American	2	14
Asian	0	0
Hispanic	1	7
Bi-racial	0	0
Missing	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>100</b>

## **Standard Workshop Evaluation**

In order to evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, and overall impact of the workshop on the participants' learning, the Standard Workshop Evaluation was completed by the participants at the conclusion of the workshop. The evaluation was developed based on an examination of templates, generated from a Google search engine, commonly used to evaluate workshops and training programs. The workshop evaluation measure used at Indiana University of Pennsylvania's Counseling Center was also used as a guide for the development of the evaluation for the "That's Classy!" workshop. The questions for this workshop evaluation were chosen based on the researcher's interests, such as how the workshop could be improved, how students would use this information, and how effective the workshop was at attaining the researcher's goals. The Standard Workshop Evaluation included six open-ended and four Likert scale items. Each item was designed to provide the researcher with an understanding of the workshop's overall effectiveness. In general, the Standard Workshop Evaluation asked: How helpful was the workshop in improving participants understanding of social class? How might the participants use this information in the future? What were the strengths and weaknesses of the workshop? How could the researcher improve the workshop? And how organized was the workshop?

The Standard Workshop Evaluation was examined to provide a more qualitative description of the participants' overall experience of engaging in the workshop, strengths, weaknesses, and future recommendations for the researcher for improving the workshop. The Standard Workshop Evaluation was compared across workshops to examine any significant differences among the three workshop groups. The open-ended questions were examined using a thematic approach. The Likert scale items were averaged and compared among participants in

each of the three workshop groups. Please refer to the results section (Chapter 5) for more details regarding the interpretation of the Standard Workshop Evaluation.

### **Experimental Examination of Outcomes**

In order to examine how well the “That’s Classy!” workshop attained the desired goals, an experimental, between-groups design was also used. Three workshops were provided as the experimental condition. Another group of respondents did not engage in the workshop (i.e. control condition), but completed the Social Class Questionnaire which evaluated social class self-awareness, content knowledge, and prejudicial attitudes. The researcher hypothesized that individuals who participated in the workshop (when compared to the control group) would: (a) Demonstrate higher levels of self-awareness in regards to social class background; (b) Demonstrate lower levels of prejudice towards social class groups; and (c) Demonstrate more knowledge about social class in the United States.

The Social Class Questionnaire was used to evaluate how well the researcher attained the following goals for the workshop: (a) Increase levels of self-awareness in regards to social class background; (b) Decrease levels of prejudice towards social class groups; and (c) Demonstrate more knowledge about social class in the United States. In order to assess the degree to which the workshop met the goals of the researcher, the responses on the Social Class Questionnaire were compared between the participants who attended the workshop and the students who did NOT attend the workshop.

### **Participant Recruitment**

Both workshop participants and comparison group members were recruited from Indiana University of Pennsylvania Subject Pool, were enrolled in PSYC 101, and received credit towards the research credit requirement. Students were given the option to sign up for the online



survey (control condition) and receive 0.5 credits for their participation, or students could sign up for the “That’s Classy!” workshop (experimental condition) which provided students with 2.0 credits for their participation. Student were prohibited from signing up for both conditions (i.e. experimental and control group).

One hundred and twenty-two undergraduate college students participated in this project. Demographic information was collected for both the experimental and control group. One participant left before the completion of the second workshop, and therefore was not included in the analysis of results. The majority of participants self-identified as Caucasian, and there was a relatively equal amount of males and females. Please refer to Table 2 for specific demographic information.

Table 2

*Demographics of all Participants (N= 122)*

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
<b><u>Control Group</u></b>		
Gender		
Female	48	58
Male	35	42
Race		
Caucasian	63	76
African American	9	10.8
Asian	4	4.8
Hispanic	1	1.2
Bi-racial	4	4.8
Missing	2	2.4
<b><u>Treatment Group</u></b>		
Gender		
Female	19	49
Male	20	51
Race		
Caucasian	33	85
African American	4	10.2
Asian	0	0
Hispanic	0	0
Bi-racial	2	5.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>100</b>

### Procedure

Participants in the control group completed the online Social Class Questionnaire through SONA. Students in the control group were able to complete the questionnaire from their personal computers. Upon signing up for the study, control group participants were asked to review the informed consent (Appendix D) and click continue if they agreed to participate in the study. The informed consent notified students that their names would remain anonymous, and that they were able to quit the study by exiting the screen at any point without losing credit for their

participation. Students who agreed to continue then completed the Social Class Questionnaire. Participation in the control group granted each participant .5 research credits towards their overall 6 credit requirement.

For the experimental condition, three separate workshops were conducted. When the students arrived, they were told that they would be learning about social class, and were asked to review and sign the informed consent (Appendix E). Participants were also informed that their names would not be used in the study, and that they were permitted to leave the study at any point without penalizing their research credit participation. Participants were then exposed to the contents of the “That’s Classy!” workshop (please see Chapter Three). At the conclusion of the workshop, participants were asked to complete the Standard Workshop Evaluation, as well as the Social Class Questionnaire. Students were also given the debriefing form (Appendix F). Individuals who participated in the workshop received 2.0 research credits towards their overall required 6.0 credits.

### **Measure**

The 25-item Social Class Questionnaire and the 10-item Standard Workshop Evaluation of the workshop was developed by the researcher. However, five items from the Social Class Questionnaire used to measure prejudice, were modeled after questions from the *Symbolic Racism Scale* (Henry & Sears, 2002). The items used for the Social Class Questionnaire were tailored to meet the needs of examining prejudice towards social class groups. As noted, items used on the Standard Workshop Evaluation were inspired by previously developed templates for workshop evaluations.

The *Symbolic Racism Scale* (SRS) includes 8 items designed to measure implicit forms of racism. The scale was developed based on the idea that traditional forms of racism, such as

segregation, are no longer acceptable in the public eye. However, “ism’s”, including racism, have taken on more subtle forms, such as a belief that racism is no longer an issue preventing Black people from getting ahead (Henry & Sears, 2002). The SRS examines four themes which were developed based on research on Whites’ attitudes towards Blacks: (a) work ethic and responsibility for outcomes; (b) excessive demands; (c) denial of continuing racial discrimination; and (d) undeserved advantages (Henry & Sears, 2002). Internal consistency is highest for White respondents ( $r = .79$ ), but also exhibits moderate alpha coefficients for other ethnic groups (Blacks: .58; Asians, .74, Latinos, .73). A two year national study conducted on individuals age 18-late middle adulthood shows a test-re-test reliability of .68 (Kinder & Sanders, 1996) which demonstrates high stability for this age group (Henry & Sears, 2009). Construct validity ( $r = .96$ ) also demonstrates a high level of validity (Henry & Sears, 2009).

The entire 8-item SRS was not used due to some items being incompatible with issues of social class such that if re-worded, the items would not accurately represent issues of social class. The five items chosen were selected due to their ability to be applicable to measuring prejudice towards social class groups. Table 3 describes the items used, and how they were transformed.

Table 3

*Symbolic Racism Scale*

<i>Symbolic Racism Scale</i>	<i>Social Class Questionnaire</i>
It's really a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if blacks would only try harder they could be just as well off as whites	It's really a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if low-income people would only try harder they could be just as well off as more privileged individuals.
Irish, Italian, Jewish and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same.	Most rich people have overcome prejudice and hardship; therefore low-income people should do the same.
How much of the racial tension that exists in the United States today do you think blacks are responsible for creating?	How responsible are people for their own economic situation?
How much discrimination against blacks do you feel there is in the United States today, limiting their chances to get ahead?	How much discrimination against poor individuals would you say there is in the United States, limiting their chances to get ahead.
Over the past few years, blacks have gotten more economically than they deserve.	Over the past few years, low-income groups have received more economic support than they deserve.
<i>Items Not used from the SRS:</i>	
Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for blacks to work their way out of the lower class.	
Over the past few years, blacks have gotten less than they deserve	
Some say that black leaders have been trying to push too fast. Others feel that they haven't pushed fast enough. What do you think?	

In addition to using the SRS, the researcher developed the majority of questions for the Social Class Questionnaire. These questions were created based on an attempt to measure the following areas: content knowledge of social class in the United States, prejudice towards social

class groups, and self-awareness of one's own social class background. Table 4 illustrates these items with their appropriate theme.

Table 4

*Social Class Questionnaire*

<i>Item</i>	<i>Theme</i>
I am aware of what social class background I come from.	Social Class Self-Awareness
What social class group do you come from?	Social Class Self-Awareness
What is the occupation of your parents?	Social Class Self-Awareness
What was your total household income growing up?	Social Class Self-Awareness
Parents level of education?	Social Class Self-Awareness
Did you attend public or private school?	Social Class Self-Awareness
My social class background has influenced my interests and hobbies.	Content Knowledge
My social class background has influenced my access to resources, such as education or medical care.	Content Knowledge
Without knowing it, social class can be signaled in personal interactions with others.	Content Knowledge
Stereotypes that describe different social class categories impact our interactions and treatment of people in that social class category.	Content Knowledge
There are people in the United States who work hard, but do not make enough money to pay bills and enjoy luxuries.	Content Knowledge
Discrimination based on one's social class background is a problem in the United States.	Prejudice
If you do not go to college, you are not meeting your fullest potential.	Prejudice

People who do not speak proper English should take the time and educate themselves so they speak correctly.	Prejudice
Lawyers go to law school and help people solve legal issues; therefore, they have earned the privilege of making more money than a car mechanic.	Prejudice
Rich people deserve to live in luxury, as they have worked hard for what they have.	Prejudice
People who live in poverty would rather live on welfare than hold a full-time job.	Prejudice
People who are rich are greedy, and should give more to low-income groups.	Prejudice
People in poverty are lazy and do not contribute their part to society.	Prejudice
Individual success is based solely on one's internal attributes, such as motivation, intelligence, and determination.	Prejudice

## CHAPTER FIVE

### RESULTS

#### **Standard Workshop Evaluation Analysis**

In order to evaluate how effective the workshop was at attaining the desired goals, the researcher examined the results of the Standard Workshop Evaluation. The following will describe each item on the questionnaire in more detail.

#### **Likert-Scale Questions**

Four Likert-scale items were used to determine overall effectiveness, organization, previous knowledge and knowledge gained during the workshop. These items are described in more detail:

**How effective was this workshop in helping you understand social class?** The effectiveness of the workshop (in helping participants understand social class) was assessed using a 5 point Likert scale, where 1 was labelled “not effective” and 5 was labeled “very effective.” Group means and standard deviations are presented in Table 5. Overall, the participants felt the workshop was effective at increasing their understanding of social class.

**How organized was the workshop?** The degree to which the workshop was perceived as organized was measured using a 5 point Likert scale. The scale ranged from 1 to 5, where 1 was labeled “very unorganized” and 5 was labelled “very organized.” Table 5 provides the means and standard deviations for this question. The results indicate that the participants found the workshop to be well organized.

**How much of the content of the workshop did you already know?** The degree to which the information presented was known/novel to the participants was assessed. The responses ranged from 1 to 5 with 1 being “I knew *none* of this information” to 5 being “I knew *most* of the



information.” The means and standard deviations for the responses among participants in the three workshop groups are presented in Table 5. The results suggest that participants felt they had a moderate knowledge base prior to participating in the workshop.

**Are you thinking differently about social class as a result of this workshop?** Using a 4 point Likert scale, participants were asked to indicate the degree to which they were thinking differently (about social class) as a result of the workshop. One was labelled “I am not thinking differently” and 4 was labelled “I am thinking very differently.” Table 5 provides the means and standard deviations for the responses among participants in the three workshop groups. The results suggest that participants experienced a moderate change of thinking as a result of this workshop.

Table 5

*Likert-Scale Item Results*

	<b>Effectiveness</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Content</b>	<b>Thinking</b>
<b>Group</b>	<i>Mean(SD)</i>	<i>Mean(SD)</i>	<i>Mean(SD)</i>	<i>Mean(SD)</i>
1	4.08(1.038)	4.69(.480)	4.46(.519)	3.00(.577)
2	4.23(.832)	4.85(.376)	4.31(.480)	2.46(1.050)
3	4.00(1.080)	4.69(.480)	3.92(.760)	3.08(.862)
<b>Total</b>	<b>4.10(.968)</b>	<b>4.74(.442)</b>	<b>4.23(.627)</b>	<b>2.85(.875)</b>

### Comparison of Workshops

In order to determine any significant differences among the participants in the three different presentations of the workshop, participants’ ratings of the four Likert scale items were used in a MANOVA. The results of the MANOVA indicated no significant differences among the three groups, Wilk’s Lambda = .694, ( $F(8,66)=1.651, p=.128$ ). Table 6 provides the MANOVA results. These results suggest, overall, the workshops were consistently viewed as organized and effective at meeting desired goals.

Table 6

*Multivariate Tests-Wilk's Lambda*

<b>Effect</b>	<b>Value</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>DF</b>	<b>DFerror</b>	<b>Sig. (p)</b>
Group	.694	1.651	8	66	.128

**Open-Ended Questions**

A series of open-ended questions was designed to provide a qualitative understanding of the workshop's effectiveness. Responses to each of these questions were subjected to thematic coding. Themes were developed based on a review of all responses. Some participants provided more than one response per question and some participants did not respond to all questions; therefore, coding was organized by number of responses. The number of responses do not add up to 39 (number of participants), instead the percentages include the total number of responses among the 39 participants. The following will present the thematic coding of responses for each of the qualitative questions (Please see Appendix H for thematic coding results).

**In what ways did this workshop impact your understanding of social class?** A description of the themes, example responses, and the number of responses/percentage per theme are presented in Table 7.

Table 7

*Understanding of Social Class Responses by Theme*

Theme	N (%)
No impact on understanding of social class <b>E.g. “I had good prior knowledge so minimal”</b>	1 (2.7)
Understanding the difference between social class groups <b>E.g. “I was not aware that there was a working-class”</b>	11 (29.7)
Self-awareness of social class background <b>E.g. “The workshop made me realize my own personal class”</b>	5 (13.5)
Influence of social class on self and society <b>E.g. “I understand what makes rich stay rich and poor stay poor”</b>	9 (24.3)
Stereotypes about social class groups <b>E.g. “It showed me that not all stereotypes are true, they are just made to look that way”</b>	10 (27.0)
Miscellaneous Items <b>E.g. “It confirmed my beliefs.”</b>	1 (2.7)

Note. Total Responses: 37.

An objective for the workshop was to increase awareness of the differences between the four social class groups. The results from this analysis indicate that 30% of the responses suggest that participants have a better understanding of the different social class groups, including the stereotypes that are associated with each group (27%). Another goal was to increase the participants understanding of how social class influences them and society as a whole (e.g. culture of social class, access to resources, upward mobility, etc.). About 27% of the responses indicated that workshop participants demonstrated a better understanding of how social class influences them personally and/or politically/socially.

**How will you use the information you learned today about social class to guide your interactions with others?** Item themes, example responses, and the number of responses/percentages per theme are provided in Table 8.

Table 8

*How I Will Use This Information Responses by Theme*

Theme	N (%)
Less judgmental towards social class groups <b>E.g. “I will not discriminate based on social class”</b>	23 (62.1)
Understanding the diversity of social class <b>E.g. “Be more mindful of where people come from”</b>	7 (18.9)
Sharing workshop information with peers <b>E.g. “Explain to them the information I learned”</b>	3 (8.1)
Feeling less shame about their social class background <b>E.g. “I will always be who I am”</b>	2 (5.4)
Unsure <b>E.g. “I am not sure”</b>	2 (5.4)

Note. Total Responses: 37.

Two objectives for the workshop included reducing prejudice towards members of social class groups and making social class a more visible form of diversity. About 62% of the responses indicate that the participants will hold less prejudice towards social class groups. In addition, 18.9% of responses suggest that the participants are better able to understand how social class is an important aspect to consider when examining individual diversity.

**In what ways could the researcher improve the workshop?** Table 9 provides a description of the themes, example responses, and the number of responses/percentages per theme.

Table 9

*Workshop Improvement Responses by Theme*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>N (%)</b>
No improvements <b>E.g. “None”</b>	11 (22.9)
Positive Feedback <b>E.g. “Researcher was great”</b>	13 (27.1)
No Response <b>Question was left blank</b>	9 (18.8)
Add more media examples <b>E.g. “Show clips of real events vs. TV shows”</b>	5 (10.4)
Include more activities <b>E.g. “Maybe do another activity”</b>	3 (6.3)
Increase participation <b>E.g. “Maybe ask people more about their own backgrounds”</b>	2 (4.2)
Miscellaneous <b>E.g. “Classroom small, Hard to see TV”</b>	5 (10.4)

Note. Total Responses: 48.

The results of this item demonstrate an overall positive response to the workshop. About 27.1% (N =13) of the responses included a positive comment regarding the workshop. Ten percent of the responses indicated a desire for more media to demonstrate the issues of social class. Media and technology play an important role in today’s generation, and therefore, should be utilized as an educational resource for students to understand issues of social class.

**What were the strengths of the workshops?** The themes, example responses, and the number of responses/percentages per theme are provided in Table 10.

Table 10

*Strengths of the Workshop by Theme*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>N (%)</b>
Media/Activities <b>E.g. “How media creates stereotypes”</b>	14 (36.8)
Group discussion/interaction <b>E.g. “A good amount of interaction”</b>	5 (13.2)
Organization of the workshop <b>E.g. “Very well organized”</b>	4 (10.5)
Presenter Qualities <b>E.g. “How creditable the presenter seemed”</b>	2 (5.2)
Enjoyed the information presented <b>E.g. “Provided a lot of valuable information”</b>	11 (29.0)
Miscellaneous <b>E.g. “Universal”</b>	2 (5.3)

Note. Total Responses: 38.

In general, the groups enjoyed the media presentations as they were able to relate these images and activities to their own lives. As previously noted, education around media and technology should be utilized to increase awareness of social class issues. In addition, 29% of the responses suggest that the information on social class was interesting and important to know, and 13.2% of the responses indicate that the students thought the group discussions added an important perspective on these issues.

**What were the weaknesses of the workshop?** Table 11 provides the themes, an example of a response for each theme, and the number of responses/percentages for each theme described.

Table 11

*Weaknesses of the Workshop by Theme*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>N (%)</b>
Length of the workshop <b>E.g. “Too lengthy”</b>	6 (20.0)
Lack of interest in topic <b>E.g. “Some info was boring”</b>	3 (10.0)
None <b>E.g. “None”</b>	11 (36.7)
Lack of participation among participants <b>E.g. “Not enough participation from some”</b>	4 (13.3)
Problems with information presented <b>E.g. “A little repetitive”</b>	5 (16.7)
Miscellaneous <b>E.g. “By people”</b>	1 (3.3)

Note. Total Responses: 30.

The results from this question indicate that participants thought the workshop was too long (120 minutes). Some participants did not enjoy the information that was being presented, and others felt some of the information was too generalized, repetitive, or confusing. About 13.3% of the responses stated they would have enjoyed more participation and group discussion.

**The most important thing I learned today:** Themes for this question, example responses, and the number of responses/percentages per theme are reported in Table 12

Table 12

*The Most Important Thing I Learned by Theme*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>N (%)</b>
Less judgmental towards social class groups <b>E.g. “Not judge people on their social class”</b>	7 (21.9)
Better understanding of stereotypes associated with the social class groups <b>E.g. “How to tell which stereotypes are for each class”</b>	5 (15.6)
Media influence on perceptions of social class <b>E.g. “How the media portrays social class compared to how they actually are”</b>	3 (9.3)
Increased knowledge of the difference between social class groups <b>E.g. “Working and middle class differ”</b>	12 (37.5)
Myth of meritocracy/barriers to upward mobility <b>E.g. “Hard work and determination can only get you so far”</b>	4 (12.5)
Miscellaneous <b>E.g. “What Rob Dyrdeck’s house looks like”</b>	1 (3.1)

Note. Total Responses: 32

Two main objectives of this workshop were to reduce prejudice and increase participants’ understanding of the difference between the social class groups. Based on the results of this question, 21.9% of the responses suggest a reduction in prejudice or an attempt to be aware of and less judgmental towards members of specific social class groups. Additionally, 37.5% of the responses indicate a better understanding of the four social class groups and how they differ.

### **Social Class Questionnaire Analysis**

#### **Reliability and Validity of the Scales**

Cronbach’s alpha was conducted in order to measure the reliability of two scales from the Social Class Questionnaire: Content Knowledge and Prejudice.



**Content Knowledge Scale.** The researcher used five questions to measure the amount of “Content Knowledge” the participants gained during the workshop. These questions examine whether or not the information presented on social class was retained by the workshop participants. Cronbach’s alpha ( $\alpha = .502$ ) indicates a low/moderate reliability. Table 13 and 14 detail these findings.

Table 13

*Content Knowledge Item Statistics*

	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>N</b>
My social class influences interests and hobbies	3.60	.993	122
My social class influences access to resources	3.93	1.115	122
Social class can be signaled during interpersonal encounters	3.80	.812	122
Hardworking people struggle to pay their bills	4.52	.633	122
Social class stereotypes impact interactions/treatment of people	3.98	.636	122

Table 14

*Content Knowledge Scale Reliability Statistics*

<b>Cronbach’s Alpha</b>	<b>Cronbach’s Alpha Based on Standardized Items</b>	<b>Number of Items</b>
.502	.491	5

**Prejudice Scale.** The scale measuring prejudice, consists of 14 items used to examine the degree of prejudice held towards members of the four social class groups. Cronbach’s alpha ( $\alpha = .600$ ) indicates a moderate reliability. Table 15 and 16 details these findings.

Table 15

*Prejudice Item Statistics*

	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>N</b>
Low-income receiving more support than they deserve	2.94	1.002	122
Social class discrimination is a problem in the U.S.	4.05	.784	122
Low-income people do not try hard enough	3.28	1.027	122
If you don't attend college, you are not meeting potential	3.66	1.061	122
How much discrimination is there against the poor	3.80	.997	122
People need to speak proper English	2.36	1.057	122
Lawyers are more valuable than car mechanics	2.95	1.102	122
Low-income people need to overcome hardship/prejudice	3.13	1.016	122
The rich deserve to live in luxury	2.83	1.108	122
How responsible are people for their economic situation	3.55	.975	122
Poor people would rather live on welfare, instead of working	3.17	1.052	122
Rich people are greedy, and should share wealth with poor	2.93	1.109	122
People in poverty are lazy	3.60	.872	122
Individual success is based on internal attributes	2.35	.981	122

Table 16

*Prejudice Scale Reliability Statistics*

<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items</b>	<b>Number of Items</b>
.600	.598	14

Due to the low correlation between items within each scale, a factor analysis was not conducted to determine the validity of the scales. The questions used to measure each construct are deemed to be independent from one another which may explain the poor relationship between items.

## Significance Testing

In order to measure the differences between the two conditions in regards to social class awareness, content knowledge, and prejudice, several statistical analyses were conducted. Two separate multiple analyses of variances (MANOVAs) were used to examine the differences between the control and experimental condition in regards to content knowledge and prejudice. In order to examine the differences between the control and experimental group on level of social class awareness, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and chi-squared were utilized.

### Multiple Analysis of Variance (MANOVA)

The first MANOVA, using the Content Scale, examined whether or not there was a statistically significant difference between the control and experimental group in regards to the amount of content knowledge known about social class. A one-way MANOVA yielded statistically significant differences between the groups, Wilk's Lambda = .811 ( $F(5,116)=5.404$ ,  $p=.000$ ,  $\eta^2 = .189$ ). Thus, participants exposed to the social class workshop had more content knowledge in regards to social class in the United States when compared to the participants who did not engage in the workshop. Tests of between-subjects effects indicated that univariate main effects were found. The question "My social class background has influenced my interests and hobbies" showed statistically significant group differences ( $F(1)=6.044$ ,  $p=.013$ ,  $\eta^2 = .051$ ). "My social class background has influenced my access to resources, such as education or medical care" ( $F(1)=18.038$ ,  $p=.000$ ,  $\eta^2 = .120$ ), and "Without knowing it, social class can be signaled in personal interactions with others" ( $F(1)= 7.378$ ,  $p=.001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .092$ ) also showed statistically significant group differences. Table 17 and 18 detail these findings.

Table 17

*Content Knowledge Multivariate Tests-Wilk's Lambda*

<b>Effect</b>	<b>Value</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>DF</b>	<b>DFerror</b>	<b>Sig. (p)</b>	<b><math>\eta^2</math></b>
Group	.811	5.404	5	116	.000	.189

Table 18

*Content Knowledge MANOVA Results*

<b>Question</b>	<b><u>Control</u> <u>M(SD)</u></b>	<b><u>Treatment</u> <u>M(SD)</u></b>	<b>F-ratio</b>	<b><i>p</i></b>	<b><math>\eta^2</math></b>
My social class background has influenced my interests and hobbies	3.45(1.039)	3.92(.807)	6.044	.013	.051
My social class background has influenced my access to resources, such as education or medical care.	3.66(1.172)	4.49(.721)	18.038	.000	.120
Without knowing it, social class can be signaled in personal interactions with others.	3.63(.807)	4.15(.709)	7.378	.001	.092
There are people in the United States who work hard, but do not make enough money to pay bills and enjoy luxuries.	4.47(.570)	4.62(.747)	.562	.238	.012
Stereotypes that describe different social class categories impact our interactions and treatment of people in that social class category.	3.90(.655)	4.13(.570)	1.338	.069	.027

The second MANOVA, using the Prejudice Scale, examined the differences between the control and experimental condition in regards to levels of prejudice towards social class groups.

A one-way MANOVA showed significant differences between the groups, Wilk's Lambda= .770 ( $F(14,106)=2.265, p=.010, \eta^2 = .227$ ). This suggests that participants exposed to the social class workshop demonstrated lower levels of prejudice when compared to students who did not participate in the workshop. However, tests of between-subjects effects indicated that univariate main effects were found for only three items. The question "How much discrimination against poor individuals would you say there is in the United States, limiting their chances to get ahead" showed statistically significant group differences ( $F(1)=7.456, p=.007, \eta^2 = .059$ ). "Rich people deserve to live in luxury, as they have worked hard for what they have" showed significant group differences ( $F(1)= 6.987, p=.009, \eta^2 = .055$ ). And the question "People who are rich are greedy, and should give more to low-income groups" showed statistically significant group differences ( $F(1)= 9.085, p= .003, \eta^2 = .071$ ). Table 19 and 20 detail these findings.

Table 19

*Prejudice Multivariate Tests-Wilk's Lambda*

<b>Effect</b>	<b>Value</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>DF</b>	<b>DFerror</b>	<b>Sig. (p)</b>	<b><math>\eta^2</math></b>
Group	.770	2.265	14	106	.010	.227

Table 20

*Prejudice MANOVA Results*

<b>Question</b>	<b><u>Control</u> <i>M(SD)</i></b>	<b><u>Treatment</u> <i>M(SD)</i></b>	<b>F-ratio</b>	<b><i>p</i></b>	<b><math>\eta^2</math></b>
Over the past few years, low-income groups have received more economic support than they deserve	2.87(1.021)	3.11(.953)	1.472	.227	.012

Discrimination based on one's social class background is a problem in the United States	3.99(.773)	4.18(.801)	1.643	.202	.014
There are people in the United States who work hard, but do not Make enough money to pay bills and enjoy luxuries	3.34(1.039)	3.16(1.001)	.795	.374	.010
If you do not go to college, you are not meeting your fullest potential	3.65(1.053)	3.68(1.093)	.026	.872	.000
How much discrimination against Poor individuals would you say there is in the United States, limiting their chances to get ahead	3.64(1.077)	4.16(.679)	7.456	.007	.059
People who do not speak proper English should take the time and educate themselves so they speak correctly	2.24(.945)	2.63(1.239)	3.640	.059	.030
Lawyers go to law school and help people solve legal issues; therefore, they have earned the privilege of making more money than a car mechanic	2.96(1.120)	2.92(1.075)	.039	.844	.000
Most rich people have overcome prejudice and hardship; therefore low-income people should do the same	3.13(1.009)	3.13(1.044)	.000	.996	.000
Rich people deserve to live in luxury, as they have worked hard for what they have	2.65(1.076)	3.21(1.094)	6.987	.009	.055
How responsible are people for their own economic situation	3.65(.903)	3.32(1.093)	3.130	.079	.026
People who live in poverty would rather live on welfare than hold a full-time job	3.05(1.125)	3.42(.826)	3.341	.070	.027
	2.73(1.037)	3.37(1.149)	9.085	.003	.071

People who are rich are greedy, and should give more to low-income groups	3.59(.898)	3.61(.823)	.008	.931	.000
People in poverty are lazy and do not contribute their part to society	2.40(.962)	2.24(1.025)	.699	.405	.006
Individual success is based solely on one's internal attributes, such as motivation, intelligence, and determination					

### **Social Class Awareness Scale**

The Social Class Awareness Scale measures how accurately participants were able to identify/classify their own social class background. The researcher expected that participants who engaged in the workshop would be more accurate at reporting their social class background when compared to participants who did not partake in the workshop. Social class awareness was measured by evaluating the responses from the questions “I am aware of what social class background I come from”, parent’s occupation, household income, parent’s level of education, and private or public school. All participants indicated they attended a public school, so this question was omitted from the analyses.

The researcher developed a system of analysis for each question. Table 21 provides details regarding the question(s) analysis. Parent’s occupation was an open-ended question asking participants to identify their parent’s occupation. Occupation status was coded based on Gilbert’s (2008) scale of lower, middle, and higher prestige jobs. Participants who responded with both parent’s occupation were coded based on the highest status job provided. Participants were given six options for household income. The researcher assigned each income bracket a social class position, which is also based on income evaluations by Gilbert (2008). An income of \$35,001- \$50,000 was considered working-class and/or middle-class depending on the parent

occupation. For example, if a participant reported a parent occupation as a waitress, and making \$35,001-\$50,000, this response was coded as working-class based on Gilbert's occupation codes.

Parent's degree was interpreted as the higher one's degree the more likely the participant belonged to a higher social class group. Participants who reported both parent's degrees were coded based on the highest degree reported.

Table 21

*Social Class Awareness Coding System*

<b>Social Class</b>	<b>Income</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Parent Degree</b>
1- Poor/Low-income	\$0-15,000 <b>Poor</b>	Lower <b>E.g. Barber, Assembly-Line, Cashier, Bus Driver</b>	High School Diploma/GED
2-Working-class	\$15,001-35,000 <b>Working-Class</b>	Middle <b>E.g. Policemen, Bank Teller, Welder, Secretary</b>	2-year college education
3-Middle-class	\$35,001-\$50,000 <b>Working/Middle-Class</b>	High <b>E.g. College Professor, Physician, Lawyer</b>	4- year college education
4-Upper class	\$50,0001-100,000 <b>Middle-Class</b>		
	\$100,001-250,000 <b>Middle-Class</b>		
	Above \$250,000 <b>Upper-Class</b>		

Participants responded to the open-ended question "What social class group do you come from?" Responses ranged from poor, lower-class, working-class, middle-class, and upper-class/wealthy. Given that participants may have inaccurately reported their social class background, the researcher examined follow-up questions to gain a better understanding of the participants' social class: parent's occupation, parent's degree, and household income.



The researcher examined these items in order to determine whether or not the participants' reported social class background was congruent with the researcher's subjective estimate of the participants' social class. If the participant's response to self-identified social class background matched the researcher's classification, the participant's response was considered to be congruent with the researcher's rating and given a score of "1" meaning "confirmed". If the participant's response did not match the researcher's classification, the participants' rating was considered incongruent with the researcher's rating and given a score of "2" meaning "not confirmed."

For example, if a participant indicated they were from a middle-class background, parent's occupation was a manager, household income was \$50,001-\$100,000, and their parent(s) held a 4-year degree, the researcher determined the participant's response was congruent and given the score of 1. On the other hand, if a participant reported they were middle-class, parent occupation was a cashier, household income was \$15,001-\$35,000, and held a high school diploma, the participant's rating was consider incongruent, as the researcher viewed this as working-class status, and given a score of 2.

### **One-Way ANOVA**

In order to determine between group differences regarding accuracy of predicted social class awareness, the researcher utilized a one-way ANOVA. The question "I am aware of what social class background I come from" was analyzed as a single-item to examine whether there were group differences in regards to level of confidence in knowledge of social class standing. A 5-point Likert scale was used to measure this item and ranged from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. The results of this analysis are provided in Table 22.

Table 22

*Social Class Awareness ANOVA Results*

	<b>Sum of Squares</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Mean Square</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
<b>Between Groups</b>	1.219	1	1.219	2.973	.087
<b>Within Groups</b>	48.781	119	.410		
<b>Total</b>	50.000	120			

The results of the one-way ANOVA indicate that there are no statistically significant differences ( $p = .087$ ) between the participants who participated in the workshop and those who did not when considering confidence levels regarding knowledge of social class background. However, the researcher suspects that participants could have inaccurately claimed to have been confident in their understanding of their own social class, thus the further analysis of responses to the following questions: parent occupation, household income, and parent education.

After examining participants' responses to the stated questions, and determining a social class status for each participant, the researcher evaluated the participants' congruency. In order to determine any statistically significant differences between the groups in regards to their congruency of determining their social class background, a chi-square was utilized. The results of the chi-square are provided in Table 23 and 24.

Table 23

*Social Class Accuracy Between Groups*

			Confirm	Not Confirmed	Total
			1	2	
group Control	Count		54	29	83
	Expected Count		58.5	24.5	83.0
	% within group		65.1%	34.9%	100.0%
Exp	Count		32	7	39
	Expected Count		27.5	11.5	39.0
	% within group		82.1%	17.9%	100.0%
Total	Count		86	36	122
	Expected Count		86.0	36.0	122.0
	% within group		70.5%	29.5%	100.0%

Table 24

*Social Class Accuracy: Chi-Square Test*

	<i>Value</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p-value</i>
<b><i>Pearson Chi-Square</i></b>	3.682	1	.055

The results of the chi-square indicated a statistically significant difference between the groups ( $p = .055$ ). Examining the descriptive statistics of this analysis demonstrates that participants in the workshop were more congruent at correctly identifying their social class background. About 82.1% of workshop participants accurately stated their social class background, compared to 65.1% of control participants who accurately stated their social class background.

The distribution of social class backgrounds among the participants in the control and experimental condition was examined in order to ensure social class background was not an extraneous variable influencing the statically significant results. A chi-square was used to determine any statistically significant differences between the groups. The researcher's social class rating for each participant, rather than the participants' rating of social class background was used in this analysis. The results of the chi-square indicate there are no statistically significant differences between the groups ( $p=.061$ ) indicating that social class background was not a contributing factor to group differences. Table 25 and 26 provide more details. Please refer to Table 21 for social class background coding details.

Table 25

*Social Class Background Between Groups*

			Researcher Code				Total
			1	2	3	4	
group	Control	Count	11	16	50	5	84
		Expected Count	8.2	21.2	47.8	4.8	82.0
		% within group	13.4%	19.5%	61.0%	6.1%	100.0%
	Exp	Count	1	15	20	2	38
		Expected Count	3.8	9.8	22.2	2.2	38.0
		% within group	2.6%	39.5%	52.6%	5.3%	100.0%
	Total	Count	12	31	70	7	122
		Expected Count	12.0	31.0	70.0	7.0	122.0
		% within group	10.0%	25.8%	58.3%	5.8%	100.0%

Table 26

*Social Class Background: Chi-Square Test*

	<i>Value</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p-value</i>
<b><i>Pearson Chi-Square</i></b>	7.365	3	.061

In order to examine whether participants' social class background influences their ability to accurately predict their social class background (based on the researcher's prediction of congruency), a chi-square was utilized. The results are provided in Table 27

Table 27

*Social Class Congruency: Chi-Square*

			Confirm		Total
			Confirm	Not Confirmed	
SC Code	0-None	Count	0	4	4
		% within SC Code	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	0.0%	3.3%	3.3%
	1-Poor	Count	6	0	6
		% within SC Code	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	4.9%	0.0%	4.9%
	2-Working	Count	11	0	11
		% within SC Code	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	9.0%	0.0%	9.0%
	3-Middle	Count	64	27	91
		% within SC Code	70.3%	29.7%	100.0%
		% of Total	52.5%	22.1%	74.6%
	4-Upper	Count	5	2	7
		% within SC Code	71.4%	28.6%	100.0%
		% of Total	4.1%	1.6%	5.7%
Total	Count	86	36	122	
	% within SC Code	70.5%	29.5%	100.0%	
	% of Total	70.5%	29.5%	100.0%	

The results of this analysis indicate that 100% of participants from poor and working-class backgrounds reported a social class background that was congruent with the researcher's predicted social class background. On the other hand, 70.3% and 71.4% of middle-class and upper-class participants, respectively, reported a social class background that was congruent with the researcher's predicated social class background. A chi-square test of significance was used to examine statistically significant differences among the social class groups. However, due to a violation of the sample size assumption where several of the contingency cells had less than 5 values, the test could not be interpreted.

## CHAPTER SIX

### DISCUSSION

#### **Findings and Implications**

Social class is often invisible as a form of diversity, and issues of social class receive little attention in the research literature and diversity trainings (Ming-Lui, 2011). While income, occupation, or level of education is commonly acknowledged as an important factor of diversity, the culture that is created within a social class background is infrequently explored. Social class plays an important role in shaping worldviews, values, traditions, hobbies, language, and rules for interaction (Fiske & Markus, 2012). Stereotypes about members of a social class group (e.g. poor people are lazy) influence the way people from that background are perceived and treated, in addition to how political decisions are made. Therefore, making social class a more visible form of diversity and challenging stereotypes and meritocracy are crucial steps in achieving social justice.

Social class rank is less visible when compared to other forms of diversity, such as gender or race. However, social class can be signaled in cross-class encounters through clothing (Fiske & Marcus, 2012), language (Miller & Sperry, 2012), non-verbal behaviors (Kraus & Keltner, 2009), leisure activities (Kraus et al., 2012), music preferences (Snibble & Markus, 2005), and class rules for interaction (Fiske & Markus, 2012). One's perceived social class standing influences the way people are treated, and how people view themselves. For example, social class rank can influence a student's perception of his or her ability to succeed in college (Rheinschmidt & Mendoza-Denton, 2014; Stephans et al., 2014). College students represent an array of diverse social class backgrounds which increases the likelihood of cross-class encounters. Therefore, developing educational programs that provide college students with

information regarding social class may lead to higher levels of academic success and more positive cross-class encounters (Stephans et al., 2014).

The purpose of this project was to examine the effectiveness of a workshop that was created in order to make social class a more visible form of diversity. The “That’s Classy!” workshop sought to increase awareness of social class groups in the United States, reduce prejudice towards social class groups, and help participants better understand external barriers to social class mobility.

The results of the evaluation of this project suggest that the workshop influenced participants’ level of prejudice towards social class groups, participants’ knowledge of social class issues, and increased awareness of one’s own social class background. When asked “How will you use the information you learned today about social class to guide your interactions with others?” 62.1% of the responses indicated that the participants would be less judgmental towards members of social class groups. One activity during the workshop included exploring and challenging the stereotypes that are associated with each social class group. The researcher believes this activity played a significant role in allowing individuals to examine their own prejudice and be more cognizant of their bias.

Individuals who participated in the workshop demonstrated more knowledge of social class issues when compared to the control group. A goal of the workshop was to raise awareness of social class as an aspect of diversity (e.g. the culture of social class). Participants in the workshop were challenged to think about the culture of their own social class background, how social class influences access to valued resources, and how social class background influences upward mobility. Challenging participants to examine social class as related to diversity may



help individuals become more observant of social class issues, and guide them during cross-class encounters.

Workshop participants also demonstrated a greater accuracy at identifying their own social class background. Despite participants in both groups endorsing high levels of confidence in knowing their social class background, workshop participants were more accurate at making this judgment. The researcher attributes this difference to the discussion of the four social class groups and what characterizes each. For example, many workshop participants indicated that they were not aware of the difference between working-class and middle-class. A common theme among control participants was for individuals to label themselves as middle-class when the researcher perceived their background information as working-class. This may have been due to individuals being unaware of the term working-class, or a desire to avoid labeling themselves as working-class due to the stigma that surrounds this group. The working-class is often ignored in the public eye. For example, politicians such as Joe Biden, create programs that aim to help the middle-class (e.g. Middle-Class Task Force), but the problems they are said to face are more descriptive of those in the working-class (e.g. affordable education).

This workshop may have been designed more effectively by utilizing more interactive materials, such as a stimulation game or experiential learning. Resistance is common when trying to teach sociological perspectives on stratification (Brezina, 1996; Davis, 1992) given that people's beliefs are rooted in their own personal experiences that they bring from their own background (which is often middle-class among college students) as well as the American Dream ideology (Norris, 2013). Therefore, Norris (2013) developed a game, "Beat the Bourgeoisie" that incorporated agency, rewards, and three types of capital (economic, social, and cultural) in order to help students overcome thinking structurally about social class inequality,

meritocracy, and mobility. Norris found that this game allowed students to better understand the structural barriers to social mobility and “identify and offer explanations for social inequality” (Norris, 2013, p. 342.). Utilizing an interactive game which would elicit an intellectual as well as an emotional connection to the material may have created a more significant impact.

Experiential learning, the processes of gaining knowledge through self-reflection on personal experiences (Kolb, 1984) has also been shown to be effective at raising social class awareness (Williams & Melchiori, 2013). For example, having participants make a list of social class privileges and evaluating their own social class privileges (especially for participants in higher socioeconomic groups) has been shown to help students better understand privilege at a personal level (Lui, Pickett, & Ivey, 2007). Although service-learning activities (e.g. working in a soup kitchen) are outside the scope of this workshop, this type of experiential learning allows individuals to challenge their beliefs about social class, stereotypes, and privilege (Williams & Melchiori, 2013). A workshop that incorporated interactive materials, experiential learning, and service-learning experiences would be ideal.

### **Limitations**

Each workshop was unique given the diversity among the members and their willingness to share their own experiences. As described in Appendix G, some workshops were viewed by the researcher as more successful than others. Workshops that were considered to be most successful involved high levels of participant enthusiasm, interaction, and an openness to sharing personal backgrounds and experiences. Despite the researchers efforts to ensure consistency across workshops, participants’ willingness to share and prior knowledge led each workshop to its own unique place. Thus, a limitation of the research project was that due to the interpersonal dynamics, topics discussed and insight gained may have varied from one workshop to the next.

Another limitation of the current study is the lack of information gathered from participants regarding their social class status. More specific questions, such as the type of car their parents drove, neighborhood description, as well as breaking the middle-class into three groups (lower, middle, and upper) would have been useful in helping to gain a better understanding of their background. In addition, social class was examined using self-reported questions, such as “What social class background do you come from?” Participants may or may not have had an accurate understanding or knowledge of their social class background. For example, after the workshop, many participants reported that they did not know that “working-class” was a social class category. These self-reported measures may have been inaccurate and therefore, influenced the final results of workshop effectiveness. Future research should utilize non-self-reported measures to better measure social class background.

The measure used to evaluate the workshop’s effectiveness at raising social class awareness, content knowledge, and reducing prejudice was developed by the researcher. After searching the literature, a scale that measured the objectives of this workshop could not be found. A limitation of this method was that the items used to measure each construct were not highly correlated with one another. These low correlations may have been the result of each question being independent of one another despite attempts to measure the same construct. For instance, no two questions were similar (e.g. asking the same question using different wording) in order to be more thorough when measuring a construct. In addition, there may not have been enough items used per scale in order to create reliable results. For example, in order to establish high reliability or validity, it is recommended that the researcher use 10 participants for each question asked (Field, 2005). This format was not utilized in this study.

In addition to the limitations of the structure of the measure, it is difficult to measure latent variables, such as prejudicial attitudes. For example, the broad definition of prejudice can result in less operationalized definitions and indistinct results. Although the results of the MANOVA yielded significant differences between the groups in regards to prejudice, only three of the items on the scale indicated significant differences. This further demonstrates the difficulty of measuring a construct such as prejudice. In this research, the researcher did not fully operationalize prejudice; in the future, utilizing more specific measures, may provide more significant results. The researcher also realizes the difficulties in creating a measure that is applicable to all populations given the intersectionality and diversity of the individual participants. The diversity among participants in knowledge, background, and experiences creates a challenge developing a base line (e.g. prejudice) in which to determine if significant changes were made.

In the future, the evaluation could be improved by narrowing the focus of the construct prejudice. As noted, prejudice is a broad concept, and therefore, should be limited in scope, such as by only focusing on one aspect of prejudice. For example, the researcher would consider focusing on prejudice towards low-income groups or peoples' understanding of upward mobility and meritocracy. In addition, the researcher would improve the evaluation by including more questions that focus on the content of the workshop in order to better evaluate knowledge gained during the workshop.

Time restrictions of the workshop were also a limitation. Attitude change is not an easy feat; two hours may not have been an adequate time period for attitude change to occur. People tend to be resistant to attitude change and often deny barriers to social success (Fiske, 2010). Overcoming this resistance can be a challenge as people do not want to believe we live in an

unjust society. In addition, the time restrictions also impacted the researcher's ability to establish rapport and build trust with the participants. Given that social class can be a sensitive topic, creating a trusting relationship among the researcher and group participants is essential.

Furthermore, social class is a broad topic and cannot be fully covered in two hours. One must understand how social class operates in a system of privilege and oppression, as well as the historical context of how social class evolves overtime (e.g. the American Dream, the wealth gap, intersections with race and gender). Therefore, a series of workshops may have enhanced the results. For instance, research suggests that exposure to individuals from different backgrounds is one of the best ways to reduce prejudice (Hall, Crisp, & Suen, 2009), and interactive games/stimulations are also effective (Brezina, 1996; Davis, 1992; Norris, 2013). A series of workshops that allow for more group interaction, as well as education on systems of privilege and oppression, may enhance the reduction of prejudicial attitudes.

### **Future Considerations**

This workshop may be useful for other groups, including first-generation college students, helping professionals, and the general public. Social class plays a role in peoples' lives in various ways. The majority of cross-class encounters occur in the workplace or a public setting (e.g. doctor's office). Therefore, all people engage in cross-class encounters throughout their lives making education regarding the diversity of social class important for all people to understand. By raising awareness of the diversity among social class backgrounds, people will be better equipped to examine their stereotypes and biases that may influence how they perceive and treat an individual from a specific social class group.

Education about social class can also influence how people perceive themselves and/or their life situation. For example, a college student from a working-class background attains a

college degree which he or she believes will secure them a place in the middle-class. In this situation, the working-class individual may feel out of place once he or she reaches middle-class status given the difference among cultural backgrounds. On the other hand, if this individual fails to reach the financial security of the middle-class after obtaining a degree due to a large amount of loan debt, this individual would benefit from understanding how his or her social class background continues to influence upward mobility. This understanding may allow the individual to avoid internalizing this perceived failure, and instead, attribute his or her struggles to the system of privilege and oppression that surrounds social class.

Education regarding the diversity of social class is important for college students. Traditionally, students from higher-class backgrounds have been overrepresented in higher-education. However, universities are recruiting more students from lower-income backgrounds (Housel & Harvey, 2009) which increases the opportunities for students to engage in cross-class encounters. The students at Indiana University of Pennsylvania represent an array of diverse backgrounds, including individuals from low-income and working-class families. Despite the increase in diversity, colleges and universities continue to operate on middle-and higher class cultural values (Rheinschmidt & Mendoza-Denton, 2014). Therefore, examining the diversity of social class and raising awareness (among students, staff, and faculty) of how social class influences upward mobility, interpersonal encounters, academic achievement, etc. is crucial to students' success.

Research suggests that low-income and first-generation students face many obstacles related to their college success (Rheinschmidt & Mendoza-Denton, 2014; Soria, Weiner, Lu, 2014). Social, cultural, and economic capital influences a student's grade point average, campus involvement, and feelings of inclusion or social isolation (Rubin, 2012; Soria et. al., 2014). Other

opportunities, such as studying abroad, are often out of reach for low-income students giving higher-income students an advantage when applying for jobs. Therefore, workshops that focus on how social class influences student's social class experience are crucial for low-income/first generation college student success. For example, Stephan's et al. (2012) program that focused on social class information reduced the social-class achievement gap among first-generation and continuing-generation college students by 63% at the end of their first year. Programs that target first-generation/low-income students could potentially provide these individuals with the tools, skills, and confidence needed to successfully navigate their college experience.

Professional training programs have been criticized for a lack of diversity training regarding issues of social class (Ming-Lui, 2011). Social class is typically presented as one's income, occupation, and/or level of education (Kraus & Stephens, 2012; Diemer, Mistry, Wadsworth, Lopez, & Reimers, 2013). Cultural differences among social class backgrounds are ignored, and how social class influences interpersonal encounters such as a therapeutic relationship, goes unexamined.

Therapists will often work with clients from a different social class background than their own. For example, (generally speaking) many Clinical Psychology graduate students come from a middle-class background. At Indiana University of Pennsylvania and the surrounding area, many clients come from low-income families. Therefore, without proper training, factors related to social class have the potential to be detrimental to the therapeutic relationship. For example, issues related to class may be important to the therapeutic work. A client who cannot afford to pay bills, feed their children, etc. may need a different type of intervention compared to a middle-class client who does not have to worry about basic needs. Individuals from a middle-class family need to be aware of how their middle-class values influence the therapeutic work,

and to be careful to not instill their own values on the client (e.g. a college education is the best route to personal/financial success). Additionally, therapists from a working-class background may have adopted the values of the middle-class and need to be cognizant of how this operates in the therapeutic context.

Countertransference may also arise when working with a client from another class background. For instance, a therapist who comes from a working-class family may struggle with prejudice and biases towards a client who comes from an upper-class background. The upper-class client's concerns may be perceived as minuscule in comparison to other client concerns the therapist has encountered (e.g. unable to feed children).

In order to tailor this workshop to the helping professionals' work, the helper should be challenged to explore how their own social class background has shaped their values and beliefs. In addition, more emphasis on microaggressions would help professionals understand how their behavior influences cross-class encounters. An example may be how wearing expensive clothing to a job where one will be working with very low-income individuals can influence the clients' comfort level with the helper. Vignettes or role-plays may also be a useful tool to help professionals navigate situations in which social class becomes relevant to the work. Challenging helping professionals to become aware of their own individual bias and stereotyped beliefs about certain groups and how these beliefs influence their work (e.g. perceptions and work with the client) would also be beneficial.

In summary, workshops that focus on making social class a visible form of diversity are important for college students, helping professionals, and the general public. Social class plays an important role in the way in which people communicate with one another, perceive and treat one another, and whether or not someone has a chance of climbing the social class ladder.



Understanding the culture of social class and how it relates to upward social mobility is the next step in achieving social equality.

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## Appendix A

### Standard Workshop Evaluation

How effective was this workshop in helping you understand social class?

- 1-Not effective
- 2-Somewhat Effective
- 3-Moderately Effective
- 4- Effective
- 5- Very Effective

In what ways did this workshop impact your understanding of social class?

How will you use the information you learned today about social class to guide your interactions with others?

In what ways could the researcher improve the workshop?

What were the strengths of the workshop?

What were the weaknesses of the workshop?

How organized was the workshop?

- 5-Very organized
- 4-Oraganized
- 3-Unsure
- 2-Unorganized
- 3-Very unorganized

How much of the content of the workshop did you already know?

- 5-I knew *most* of the information
- 4-I knew *some* of the information
- 3-Unable to judge
- 2-I knew *little* of the information
- 1-I knew *none* of this information

The most important thing I learned today was:

Are you thinking differently about social class as a result of this workshop?

- 4-I am thinking very differently
- 3-I am thinking somewhat differently
- 2-Unsure
- 1-I am not thinking differently

Are you:

- Male
- Female
- Transgender
- Other

What is your race:

- Caucasian
- African American
- Asian
- Hispanic
- Multiracial



## Appendix B

### Social Class Questionnaire

I am aware of what social class background I come from.

- 5-Strongly Agree
- 4-Agree
- 3-Unsure
- 2-Disagree
- 1-Strongly Disagree

What social class group do you come from?

What is the occupation of your parents?

What was your total household income growing up?

- \$0-\$15,000
- \$15,001-\$35,000
- \$35,001-\$50,000
- \$50,001-\$100,000
- \$100,001-\$250,000
- Above \$250,000

Did you attend:

- Private School
- Public School

Did your parents receive a:

- 4-year college degree
- 2-year degree
- High School diploma
- GED

My social class background has influenced my interests and hobbies.

- 5-Strongly Agree
- 4-Agree
- 3-Unsure
- 2-Disagree
- 1-Strongly Disagree

My social class background has influenced my access to resources, such as education or medical care.

- 5-Strongly Agree

- 4-Agree
- 3-Unsure
- 2-Disagree
- 1-Strongly Disagree

Without knowing it, social class can be singled in personal interactions with others.

- 5-Strongly Agree
- 4-Agree
- 3-Unsure
- 2-Disagree
- 1-Strongly Disagree

There are people in the United States who work hard, but do not make enough money to pay bills and enjoy luxuries.

- 5-Strongly Agree
- 4-Agree
- 3-Unsure
- 2-Disagree
- 1-Strongly Disagree

Over the past few years, low-income groups have received more economic support than they deserve.

- 5-Strongly Agree
- 4-Agree
- 3-Unsure
- 2-Disagree
- 1-Strongly Disagree

Discrimination based on one's social class background is a problem in the United States.

- 5-Strongly Agree
- 4-Agree
- 3-Unsure
- 2-Disagree
- 1-Strongly Disagree

It's really a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if low-income people would only try harder they could be just as well off as more privileged individuals.

- 5-Strongly Agree
- 4-Agree
- 3-Unsure
- 2-Disagree
- 1-Strongly Disagree

If you do not go to college, you are not meeting your fullest potential.

- 5-Strongly Agree
- 4-Agree

- 3-Unsure
- 2-Disagree
- 1-Strongly Disagree

How much discrimination against poor individuals would you say there is in the United States, limiting their chances to get ahead.

- 5-A great amount
- 4-A moderate amount
- 3-Unsure
- 2-A small amount
- 1-None

People who do not speak proper English should take the time and educate themselves so they speak correctly.

- 5-Strongly Agree
- 4-Agree
- 3-Unsure
- 2-Disagree
- 1-Strongly Disagree

Lawyers go to law school and help people solve legal issues; therefore, they have earned the privilege of making more money than a car mechanic.

- 5-Strongly Agree
- 4-Agree
- 3-Unsure
- 2-Disagree
- 1-Strongly Disagree

Most rich people have overcome prejudice and hardship; therefore low-income people should do the same.

- 5-Strongly Agree
- 4-Agree
- 3-Unsure
- 2-Disagree
- 1-Strongly Disagree

Rich people deserve to live in luxury, as they have worked hard for what they have.

- 5-Strongly Agree
- 4-Agree
- 3-Unsure
- 2-Disagree
- 1-Strongly Disagree

How responsible are people for their own economic situation?

- 5-Very responsible
- 4-Responsible

- 3-Unsure
- 2-Somewhat responsible
- 1-Not responsible at all

People who live in poverty would rather live on welfare than hold a full-time job.

- 5-Strongly Agree
- 4-Agree
- 3-Unsure
- 2-Disagree
- 1-Strongly Disagree

People who are rich are greedy, and should give more to low-income groups.

- 5-Strongly Agree
- 4-Agree
- 3-Unsure
- 2-Disagree
- 1-Strongly Disagree

People in poverty are lazy and do not contribute their part to society.

- 5-Strongly Agree
- 4-Agree
- 3-Unsure
- 2-Disagree
- 1-Strongly Disagree

Stereotypes that describe different social class categories impact our interactions and treatment of people in that social class category.

- 5-Strongly Agree
- 4-Agree
- 3-Unsure
- 2-Disagree
- 1-Strongly Disagree

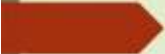
Individual success is based solely on one's internal attributes, such as motivation, intelligence, and determination.

- 5-Strongly Agree
- 4-Agree
- 3-Unsure
- 2-Disagree
- 1-Strongly Disagree

## Appendix C

### PowerPoint Presentation Slides





## Social Class

- Relative social rank in terms of income, wealth, education, status, and/or power (classism.org)
- Class can also include one's occupation or job status (e.g. doctor vs. a mechanic)
- Definition fails to explain the culture created within one's social class

Social class is often defined based on material items, like the car you drive, the house you live in, your occupation, income, wealth, education, and the community you grew up in (suburbs vs. rural/urban)

The definitions provided in the literature fail to explain the culture that is created within one's class background, including the values, beliefs, attitudes, worldviews, traditions, and activities/hobbies that are valued in that specific class group.

(E.g. in rural areas it is not uncommon for people to be interested in guns and hunting; working-class families may value living life in the moment and therefore may not be concerned with saving money, because when you live pay check to pay check, you do not always think about the importance of saving for the future).



## Activity 1

- In your groups, please list the stereotypes or common beliefs or assumptions about members of the following social class groups:
- Poor
- Working-class
- Middle-class
- Upper-class/Rich

**Stereotyping:** Participants will be placed into four groups. Each group will receive a card that says either poor, working-class, middle-class, or upper-class/rich. Participants will be asked to list characteristics of members of the class group listed on their card. Each group will then share their list with the rest of the participants; participants will be asked to guess which class background each group is trying to describe. This activity was developed by Maureen McHugh, Ph.D. and utilized during a graduate course for a Clinical Psychology program, “Race, Culture, and Gender.”

Participants will be encouraged to discuss where/how these ideas (e.g. stereotypes) were created (e.g. media, families, etc.) and maintained, and how this impacts our perception and treatment of people from different social class groups.

Other points to talk about:

- What is the American Dream?
- Who has access to it?
- Is class mobility possible? Easy to attain?

Other topics to bring up if time permits:

In the United States, there is a common belief that people have equal access to resources (education, medical care, upward mobility—easily able to move up the social class ladder). Therefore, people who do not live “successful” lives are viewed as having faulty internal attributes that are preventing them from meeting their fullest potential (e.g. lazy, unmotivated, and unintelligent).

External barriers to one's success are ignored, such as poor schools, dilapidated neighborhoods, lack of transportation, and poor job prospects that are in place for those at the bottom of the social ladder. These barriers can be overcome, but this tends to be the exception, not the rule.

Values are important. For example, lower-class values tend to place less value on education and more value on hard work in the sense of getting a job and supporting oneself. Working-class individuals who seek a college education often lack support from families; families may feel betrayed or as if that individual is just wasting their time when they could go and get a good factory job. It isn't that hard work and success are not valued, it is just that these values are different (e.g. education vs. full-time job). It is hard to break away from this mind-set, especially if no other opportunities have ever been presented. For example, at some rural high-schools, college fairs consist of only two-year technical schools geared towards male applicants, leaving few opportunities for women to further their education.

Upward mobility is the belief that people can easily move from one class group to another. However, external barriers often get in the way of people's ability to climb the social ladder (e.g. being born into poverty, poor education, and lack of opportunity, oppression, and discrimination).



Keep in mind, however, that the poverty line is based on data from 1955, which does not include more contemporary financial needs. Currently, the poverty line is set at about \$23,000 for a family of four, but a more accurate estimate based on contemporary needs would be above \$35,000 which would double the figures above (Ore, 2009).

Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2012—Census Bureau

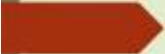


<http://www.census.gov/prod/2013pubs/p60-245.pdf>



US Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Department of Commerce, CATO Institute  
Research Date: 1.1.2014


<http://www.statisticbrain.com/welfare-statistics/>



## The Myth of Meritocracy

- Wealth gap:
  - Richest 10% of U.S. population hold more than 2/3 of all the wealth
    - Including cash, land, business assets, and stocks and bonds
  - Richest 20% of all households receive 56% of all income
  - Richest 40% receive 78% of all income
  - Leaving less than 1% of all income to be divided among the remaining 60% of all households

Allan Johnson, 2011 page 43-44



## Microaggression

- Everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership.

America is based on middle-class values and standards---therefore, anyone who does not meet these expectations are often victims of classist microaggressions

## Social Class and Everyday Life

- In what ways is social class visible?
  - Language
  - Grocery Stores (Walmart vs. Whole Foods)
  - Gym Membership
  - Education (public vs. private school)
  - Cars
  - Clothing (name brand vs. store brand)
  - Vacations
  - Sports
  - Material possessions

Language: see Next Slide

-even when we first meet someone, we ask very class-based questions (where are you from, what is your job/major, where do you go to school, etc.).


Grocery: Walmart is less expensive than even Giant Eagle; the cost of healthy food vs. unhealthy foods

Gym Membership: we have a strong push for health in our society, yet some things are simply out of reach (gym memberships are expensive). In poorer communities, one may find fewer sidewalks, parks, and recreation centers for which fitness could take place.

Education: how has your education influenced your access to jobs? Private vs. Public education

Vacations: ocean city vs. out of the country, or no vacation

Sports: golf—country clubs, skiing, polo, ice hockey, horseback riding, gymnastics, football—fundraising



## Language

- Redneck
- White trash
- Trailer trash
- Ghetto
- Trashy vs. Classy
- Rich Bitch
- Hick
- Hillbilly
- Snob
- Blue Collar vs. White Collar



## Social Class and the Media

The media plays a large role in creating class distinctions

-the media is controlled and run by the rich (just think about how much it costs to even run a commercial during a TV show—Desperate Housewives \$440,000 for 30 seconds); 6 companies own 90% of the media

-Living in a capitalist society, the focus is on becoming rich, and therefore this is what we see in the media

-Shows that are focused on how to make it, or shows that devalue those who are in working class or poor environments

Commercials also help fuel this idea by creating a consumer driven nation

-Why do poor people make financially irresponsible purchases?

The media fuels the idea that anyone can be rich, and a desire for more rather than being humble




These images perpetuate the stereotypes that people who are poor are dirty, fat, lazy, and that their behavior is odd and unfit for society.



## Working-Class and the Media


- The Middle
- Honey Boo Boo
- Roseanne

Honey Boo Boo: House Tour: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yatEoutYoww>  
-How is classism operating here?



## Middle-Class and the Media

- 2 Broke Girls??
- Modern Family
- Friends
- Cosby Show



## Upper-class and the Media

- MTV Cribs
- House of cards
- Real Housewives
- Gossip Girl
- 90210

Rob Dydeck (deerdeck): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=htXlsAPmpJ4>

Appendix D  
Informed Consent (Control)

You are invited to participate in this research study in order to help us learn more about people's understanding of and attitudes towards social class. The following information is provided in order to help you to make an informed decision whether or not to participate. You are eligible to participate because you are student at IUP enrolled in PSYC 101. As part of your course requirement, participation in this study will result in 0.5 credits towards your research requirement. This research has been approved by IUP's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (724.357.7730).

The purpose of this study is to examine the participant's awareness of social class and how it impacts his or her life. Participation in this study will require approximately 30 minutes of your time. You will be asked to complete an online, anonymous survey.

You may find the experience enjoyable or interesting, and it may help increase your awareness of your own beliefs and bias about social class.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you no longer wish to complete the survey, please exit the survey by closing the browser.

If you choose to participate, all information will be held in strict confidence and the data will be kept securely. Your participation will have no bearing on your academic standing or services you receive from the University. The information obtained in the study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings but *your identity will be kept confidential*.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please click through to complete the survey. The researchers contact information is provided if you have any questions or wish to receive results of the study.

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## Appendix E

### Informed Consent Form (Experimental)

You are invited to participate in this research study in order to help us learn more about people's understanding of and attitudes towards social class. The following information is provided in order to help you to make an informed decision whether or not to participate. You are eligible to participate because you are student at IUP enrolled in PSYC 101. As part of your course requirement, participation in this study will result in 2.0 credits towards your research requirement. This research has been approved by IUP's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (724.357.7730).

The purpose of this study is to increase the participant's awareness of social class and how it impacts our lives. Participation in this study will require approximately 120 minutes of your time. In addition to presentation of material, you will be asked to engage in various interactive activities and participate in facilitated discussions related to topics of social class.

You may find the experience enjoyable or interesting, and it may help increase your awareness of your own beliefs and bias about social class. The information gained from this study will increase your cultural sensitivity to the diversity of social class backgrounds. At the end of the workshop, you will be asked to complete an anonymous evaluation of the workshop. We are interested in the impact of the workshop.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with the investigators. If you wish to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher using the contact information below.

If you request to withdraw from the study, all information pertaining to you will be destroyed. If you choose to participate, all information will be held in strict confidence and the data will be kept securely. Your participation will have no bearing on your academic standing or services you receive from the University. The information obtained in the study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings but *your identity will be kept confidential*.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please sign and date below. When you complete the workshop, you will be given an information sheet that will provide additional resources to learn more about social class and the researchers contact information if you have any questions or wish to receive results of the study.

---

Participant's Signature

---

Date

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## Appendix F

### Debriefing Form

The following information is provided to you so that you will know the purpose of the research study:

*Social Class:* Relative social rank in terms of income, wealth, education, status, and/or power (classism.org). Class can also include one's occupation or job status. This definition lacks a reference to the culture, values, attitudes, and lifestyles that are indicative of and constructed within one's own class background.

The purpose of this study is to examine people's awareness of issues that surround social class, such as awareness of how social class impacts people's behaviors, interests, language, dress, education, and world views. For example, social class can often be signaled in interpersonal encounters. Language, dress, and even mannerisms can all be associated with one's social class background.

Perceived social class can influence the way we interact with one another. For instance, individuals who stereotype those who are less privileged as lazy, unmotivated, or uneducated might not be as respectful towards them when compared to someone who appears to come from a more privileged background (e.g. drives a nice car). Even though people may not use overt forms of discrimination, microaggressions (subtle forms of discrimination) are used to signal dislike towards a specific group. This study aims to debunk these stereotypes, and increase one's sensitivity to the diversity of social class.

If you are interested in these topics, we suggest the following books:

*Facing Social Class: How Societal Rank Influences Interaction* by Susan Fiske and Rose

Markus; *where we stand: class matters* by bell hooks; *Nickel and Dimed* by Barbara Ehrenreich

This research project is sponsored by Indiana University of Pennsylvania Department of Psychology. The investigator is Dr. Maureen McHugh, Ph.D. If you have any questions or would like to receive the results of this research when it is completed, please give your name and contact information to the Research Assistant, or call the Psychology Department at 357-2426.

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## Appendix G

### Description of the Workshops

Each workshop had its own unique personality given the different backgrounds of participants and the interpersonal dynamics in the room. The following provides a brief description of the characteristics, topics discussed, and interpersonal processes for each individual workshop.

#### Workshop 1:

Participants included 8 females and 5 males. Two participants identified as African American and the others identified as Caucasian. Two participants were from rural Pennsylvania and another stated they were from a city in Florida. Three of the participants identified as being from working-class, eight from lower-to-upper-middle class, and one from upper-class. One participant was unsure of their social class background. Six participants were particularly active throughout the workshop and were willing to share their own backgrounds and experiences with social class. Four members remained silent throughout the workshop.

The group shared their experiences related to shopping for name brand clothing and the way media influences one's desire to purchase material items. More specifically the group acknowledged the relationship between material items and social status in the United States. They also discussed personal experiences regarding the cost of receiving a college education, such as how money had influenced some of their decisions to attend an in-state vs. out-of-state school. They also discussed the cost of participating in sports during high school. The participants from a rural setting were able to discuss and relate to the example of the different styles of cars depending on the area in which one lives. One participant gave an example of how

his hometown is very different from Indiana, PA where he sees more luxury vehicles which he associated with people working for the University.

This group also discussed the American Dream. They were prompted to describe this idea and possible barriers to accessing their dream. The group was able to talk about quality of education, the importance of having money, power, and accessibility to other institutions such as good health care, as being important to one's success. At the end of the discussion, the group had concluded that meritocracy is a myth, and that there are many factors that influence one's ability to climb the social class ladder.

### Workshop 2:

This workshop consisted of 7 males and 5 females. Eight of the participants were very active throughout the duration of the workshop. However, the other members remained relatively quiet and there was limited sharing of personal social class background and experiences. One male left the workshop after one hour. This member did not participate and did not provide an explanation for why he was choosing to leave. One of the 12 participants identified as multiracial while the remaining members were Caucasian. Three of the participants identified as being from working-class, eight from lower-to-upper-middle class, and one from upper-class. The individual from an upper-class background stated that he grew up in an area near a low-class community, indicating that he was friends with people from various social class backgrounds.

The participants in this group had limited knowledge regarding working-class as a social class group. This was indicated during the stereotype exercise where participants struggled to identify stereotypes associated with members of the working-class. In addition, this group was particularly active during the discussion of the American Dream. The discussion touched on topics such as the importance of our nation's history including the impact of slavery and

segregation on today's African American generation. The group was able to relate these ideas to how one's access to resources is crucial for social class mobility.

This group responded well to the video clip of the TV show "Honey Boo Boo." The group was able to identify various social class stereotypes (e.g. being dirty, having no manners, and even the music playing in the background having a hillbilly tune). They were also able to discuss how the media continues to perpetuate social class stereotypes and how they were unaware of media's influence until it was brought to their attention. The group concluded that they were better equipped with the knowledge necessary to pay close attention to the media's influence on social class stereotypes.

### Workshop 3:

Seven participants were female and seven participants were male. Two of the participants identified as African American, one as Hispanic, and eleven as Caucasian. Three of the participants identified as being from working-class, ten from lower-to-upper-middle class, and one from upper-class. Participation was lacking in this workshop. Four members were actively involved throughout the workshop, however, the majority of the members remained silent and/or spoke infrequently. Few members shared their social class backgrounds, experiences with social class, or opinions regarding the subject. This made discussion rather challenging and limited depth for various topics.

The participants did well with the stereotype exercise with each group developing very descriptive stereotypes for each poor, working-class, middle-class, and upper-class groups. The group was able to discuss where these beliefs come from (i.e. family, community, and the media), and how this impacts how we view and treat members of specific social class groups. This group was able to relate to various class-based microaggression, such as members of the

upper-middle class sharing experiences of being called spoiled or their success being attributed to their family's wealth. The group also discussed the American Dream and were able to identify barriers to one's success as being important to social class mobility.



## Appendix H

### Open-ended Questions: Thematic Coding

#### **How did the Workshop impact your understanding of social class?**

##### ***No impact on understanding of social class-1***

I had good prior knowledge so minimal

##### ***Better understanding of the difference between social class groups-2***

It helped me define the differences between classes

This workshop taught me that there are three levels of social class

It showed me the stats of our countries wealth and class

Made me realize there is a working class

It explained what the different social classes actually are compared to what the media portrays them as

I learned the difference between the middle and working class is

That there is a different level of social class

It helped to break things down and get some glimpse of social classes

How many different classes there were

I wasn't aware of the middle vs. working class

It helped define the social classes more

***Increased awareness of their own social class background-3***

Made it clear which one I am from

It helped open my eyes more about my own class

Made me realize my own personal class

Helped me realize where I might come from

Furthered it, my understanding of my own social class

***How social class impact their own lives and society as a whole-4***

It helped me better understand how social class is important

The statistics we saw opened my eyes

The percentages of minorities and whites—I guess invisibility of white poverty?

More broad understanding

I understand what makes rich stay rich and poor stay poor

It gave me better insight into the effect a lifestyle can impact the look of your social class

It made me have a better understanding of social class

That some students don't get loans because of parent's credit

Gave me a broader understanding of how media influences our social classes

***Better understanding of the stereotypes that are associated with the social class groups-5***

Define stereotypes of social class

It showed me that not all stereotypes are true, they are just made to look that way

Helped understand stereotypes

To better understand stereotypes involved

Stereotypes of difference classes

Understanding the stereotypes

Made me think about the stereotypes

The connotations about social class

Taught me not to always believe stereotypes

Made me aware of how and how not to act

### ***Miscellaneous-6***

Confirmed beliefs

**How will you use the information you learned today about social class to guide your interactions with others?**

### ***Less judgmental towards specific social class groups -1***

I will see everyone as equal

Not judge based on social class

I tend to be blind to social class and interact with people the same regardless of class

I will try not to judge anyone on where they come from/what they look like

I will not judge people for what they have or do not have

Not be so quick to assume things about people

Won't stereotype

Do not always stereotype classes

Give them the benefit of the doubt

Not be so down on poor people

More understanding

Try not to see people according to social class

To be less judgmental

Honestly, I don't like to judge people but sometimes I feel myself doing it anyways so it'll help stop that

By not judging the way they dress or where they come from

Not to be so judgmental because you never know why someone is where they are (what social class)

I will not judge people as hard, and try to understand where they come from

Not be judgmental

Don't judge

I will not discriminate based on social class

Will allow me to not be as prejudice towards those in a different social class

I will keep more of an open mind

I will definitely think of this workshop when I witness class stereotypes

***Recognizing social class as a form of diversity -2***

Be more mindful of where people come from

Give me a better understanding of friends

I can better understand where people come from

I know given the chance people succeed, and if given the proper chances there is bettered chances

Observe and think about social class issues when I see them

Look for social class in the real world

Apply it to life

***Sharing the knowledge with friends and family-3***

Explain to them the information I learned

Talking about what I heard

Share with others

***Less shame about one's social class background -4***

I will always be who I am

I will be able to judge if someone will understand my thoughts about things

***Will not use/unsure-5***

I probably won't

I am not sure

**In what ways could the researcher improve the workshop?**

***None-1***

None

No ways

None

None

N/A

None

None

None

Nothing

None

So not really anything

***Positive Feedback-2***

Good workshop

Was perfect

It was perfect

Great workshop!

She was very thorough

It was a great workshop

Far so good

Seemed good to me

She did a great job

Very effective/attractive

Researcher was great

She was very prepared

Lots of information.

***No Response-3***

No response

No response

No response

No response

No response

No response

No response

No response

No response

#### ***Media-4***

By watching TV

More video clips

News clips/real events vs. TV Shows

Show more video of Floyd Mayweather cribs video

Better equipment and possibly more videos of different classes

#### ***Activities-5***

More activities

Maybe do another activity



Use more examples

***Participation-6***

More people involvement

Maybe ask people more about their own backgrounds

***Miscellaneous-7***

Classroom small, Hard to see TV

A little more entertaining/relatable

Less time

Less description

I don't know

**What were the strengths of the workshops?**

***Use of Media/Activities-1***

Showing stereotypes of different classes on the videos

The powerpoint and video

Use of media and statistics

Activities/examples

Activities

The activities

Activities and clips to show

Videos of and questions

Videos at the end

Videos

Used examples (well-known) from media to help understanding

Videos

The example of how media impacts social class

How media creates stereotypes

### ***Group Discussion-2***

Group work/participation

A good amount of interaction

Interactions

The discussion aspect

Discussing situations in great detail

### ***Organization-3***

Very well organized

Very thorough

Good examples

Good examples

***Presenter qualities-4***

How creditable the presenter seemed

Very positive and asked a lot of thought provoking questions

***Information presented-5***

Explaining hardships of low/working class; showing the spread of wealth

The definitions of social class

Information

Hit every possible topic

The powerpoint had good fact/examples

Examples used help depict social class

Provided a lot of valuable information

Very informative, got a lot of detail, good examples

Very well put together; ideas of social classes well put together

Good facts about poverty

Accurately depicted stereotypes and classes

***Miscellaneous-6***

Everything

University

**What were the weaknesses of the workshop?**

***Length-1***

Long

The length, hard to focus

Long

Too lengthy

Too long

Length, some things did not need to be in study

***Interest-2***

Boring

Some info was boring

A little boring

***None-3***

None

None

I feel there weren't any

Not many

None

There weren't any

None

None

None that I could discern

None

N/A

***Lack of Participation-4***

Lack of participation

The group discussing the issues

Not enough participation from some

Not as much discussion

***Information Presented-5***

Did generalize a few things

A little repetitive

MTV cribs is the most annoying show

Focused mostly on negative

Showing stats, maybe explain what they mean

### ***Miscellaneous-6***

By people

### **The most important thing I learned today:**

### ***Less Judgmental- 1***

Not to be as judgmental

Not to assume things based off social class

Not judge people on their social class

Not to judge people

Not to judge people on their stereotypes

Not to judge people or stereotype

Social class doesn't make a person

### ***Stereotypes-2***

How many stereotypes there are

Stereotypes of the different social classes

Being aware of the stereotypes

Stereotypes about all social class groups

How to tell which stereotypes are for each class

### ***Media Influence- 3***

Media is very powerful over perception

Media is important on displaying social class

How the media portrays social class compared to how they actually are

### ***Social Class Differences- 4***

Working and Middle class differ

Middle/working class difference

Working vs. middle class

Difference between social class groups

Different level of social class

That politicians use the middle class term for a reason

There are four social classes (not three)

The statistics for each class

Stats for the social classes

How social class differs and why that is

Working class is a class

The percentages on social class

### ***Meritocracy and Upward Mobility- 5***

Not everyone shares the rat race evenly

The change in the American Dream

Hard work and determination can only get you so far

How history and family plays a role in social class

### ***Miscellaneous- 6***

What Rob Dyrdek's house looks like