

CHAPTER

5

Socialization, Association, Lifestyles, and Values

*Let me tell you about the rich. They are different
from you and me.*

F. Scott Fitzgerald

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The title of this chapter might have been “So Does Class Matter?” We have examined the distribution of income and wealth, the occupational structure, and conceptions of the class structure. But, aside from a hint here or there, we have not shown that class really matters in our everyday lives. In this chapter, we demonstrate that class shapes our experience, through the life cycle, from early childhood to mature adulthood. We will find that class position affects some of the most intimate aspects of our lives.

We will follow up on our earlier discussions of Max Weber’s ideas about status communities, Lloyd Warner’s description of social life in Yankee City, and the Lynds’ account of the emergence of the wealthy X clan in Middletown. These authors noted that people with similar class positions tend to draw together. They live in the same neighborhoods, develop friendships, spend leisure time together, and join the same clubs and churches. Their children go to the same schools, form social cliques, become teammates, develop romantic attachments, and grow up to marry one another. Gradually, shared experiences become the basis for a distinctive lifestyle and common set of values, which parents pass on to their young. They develop, in other words, a self-perpetuating class subculture.

Our discussion emphasizes two of the basic variables we mentioned in Chapter 1: **socialization**, the learning process that prepares new members of society for social life; and **association**, social patterning of human relationships. We will, for example, be looking at class differences in child rearing and the influence of class position on the selection of friends and mates.

Bourdieu: The Varieties of Capital

The work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1986) on class reproduction and the varieties of capital will help us understand the larger significance of the material covered in this chapter. Capital may be defined as value accumulated over time and capable of yielding future benefits. We are accustomed to thinking of capital as another name for financial wealth. But Bourdieu extends the concept. He distinguishes three forms of capital: **economic capital**, the basic monetary form, institutionalized as property rights; **cultural capital**, knowledge in its broadest sense, institutionalized as educational credentials, but encompassing such matters as table manners and how to swing a tennis racket; and **social capital**, mutual obligations embodied in social networks such as kinship, friendship, and group membership.

Bourdieu emphasizes that the value of each of these forms of capital is enhanced by its capacity for transformation into one of the others. For example, before he entered politics, George W. Bush took advantage of his social capital—the extensive social connections he had developed growing up in a prominent upper-class family—to gather economic capital for a series of business ventures (Kelly 2004). Generations of novelists have won readers with characters who strive to develop cultural and social capital to further their personal ambitions.

From Bourdieu’s perspective, the sum of the various forms of capital they hold is the cumulative advantage of the privileged classes. It is a key to the reproduction of the class system by transmission from generation to

generation. As several of the authors we examine in this chapter confirm, the class advantages or disadvantages that a child inherits are not just economic, but also, as Bourdieu would have it, cultural and social.

Children's Conception of Social Class

As they grow up, children absorb from their elders increasingly sophisticated notions about social class. An early study of primary school students in a New England town of 15,000 showed that by the sixth grade, children understood the class significance of items such as an English riding habit, an elegantly furnished room, tattered clothing, and different occupational activities, all presented to them in pictures. And when they were asked to place their classmates in one of three classes, the sixth graders agreed 70 percent of the time with adults who rated parents from the same households (Stendler 1949).

Simmons and Rosenberg (1971) demonstrated that young children have a clear conception of occupational prestige differences. Even the third graders in their sample from the Baltimore city schools ordered 15 occupations from the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) list in a way that correlated almost perfectly with the rankings in a national survey of adults.

Subsequent studies have concentrated on the development of conceptions of class distinctions as children grow up. Tutor (1991) showed first, fourth, and sixth graders photographs of upper-, middle-, and lower-class people. She asked the children to group the adults and children depicted into families and match them with the corresponding pictures of cars and houses. The first graders did substantially better than chance at this task, the sixth graders produced near-perfect scores, and the fourth graders were not far behind.

Leahy (1981, 1983) probed the developing conceptions of “poor people” and “rich people” held by children ages 7 to 17. He found that young children conceive of the rich and the poor in overt, physical terms, while older children think in terms of psychological characteristics of individuals and their positions in the society. Here are some of their observations.

Joe, age 6:

[Poor people have] no food. They won't have no Thanksgiving. They don't have nothing. . . . [R]ich people have crazy outfits and poor people have no outfits.

Mary, age 6:

[People can become rich by going] to the store and they give you money. . . . [Or] if your husband gives you money, and your grandmother or your grandfather.

Pete, age 10:

[People are rich] because they save their money and they earn it. They work as hard as they can and don't just go around and buy whatever they want.

Dean, age 12:

I think that [rich and poor people] should all be the same, each have the same amount of money because then the rich people won't think they are so big.

In general, these studies show that even preschool children are aware of class differences. They suggest that as children grow older, their ideas about stratification become more consistent, abstract, and "accurate." By the time they reach 12 years of age, children are not very different from adults in their thinking about class.

Kohn: Class and Socialization

While studies such as those just reviewed approach socialization through the child's developing conception of the social world, a separate research tradition focuses on the child-rearing practices of parents. For decades, studies of the latter type have recorded class differences in the way people raise their children (Bronfenbrenner 1966; Gecas 1979). Annette Lareau, whose research we examine in the next section, and Melvin Kohn have made intriguing contributions to this literature.

Kohn studied class differences in the values parents impart to their children. He wanted to understand exactly why such differences exist and how they contribute to the perpetuation of the class system. In a series of surveys in the United States and abroad, Kohn and his associates asked parents to select from a list of characteristics those they considered most desirable for a child of the same age and sex as their own child (Kohn 1969, 1976, 1977; Kohn and Schooler 1983).

Here are a few examples:

That he is a good student.

That he is popular with other children.

That he has good manners.

That he is curious about things.

That he is happy (Kohn 1969:218).

Although the studies found consensus across class levels about the importance of some values (parents of all classes wanted their children to be happy), there was less agreement about others. For example, parents at higher class levels were more likely to choose "curiosity," and those at lower-class levels were more likely to select "obedience." The top panel (A) of Table 5.1 compares the values characteristically cited by parents in the upper or the lower halves of the class structure (for convenience, labeled middle class and working class). Parental views were varied at every class level, but the values we are calling working class become increasingly common at lower-class levels and those we have labeled middle class become more common at successively higher class levels.

Families were assigned to classes on the basis of the father's occupation. The researchers found that mothers' value preferences for children reflected

Table 5.1 Typical Class Patterns in Parental Values and Occupational Experience

Middle-Class Pattern	Working-Class Pattern
A. Parents' Values for Children	
Self-control	Obedience
Consideration of others	Manners
Curiosity	"Good student"
Happiness	Neatness, cleanliness
B. Parents' Own Value Orientations	
Tolerance of nonconformity	Strong punishment of deviant behavior
Open to innovation	Stuck to old ways
People basically good	People not trustworthy
Value self-direction	Believe in strict leadership
C. Job Characteristics	
Work independently	Close supervision
Varied tasks	Repetitive work
Work with people or data	Work with things

their husbands' occupations. But they also observed that the class patterning of parental values could be strengthened or diluted according to the occupations of employed mothers. For example, among women married to working-class men, mothers with manual jobs were much more likely to conform to the working-class value pattern than were mothers with white-collar jobs.

Kohn interpreted the class patterns of parental values for children as follows: The middle-class parents who stress the values of self-control, curiosity, and consideration are cultivating capacities for self-direction and empathetic understanding of others in their children. The working-class parents who focus on obedience, neatness, and good manners are instilling behavioral conformity. The middle-class pattern—particularly in the emphasis laid on happiness, curiosity, and consideration—is oriented toward the *internal* dynamics of the person, both the child and others. The working-class pattern, on the other hand, assumes fixed *external* standards of behavior. This general difference is neatly illustrated in the top panel (A) of Table 5.1 by four pairs of contrasting values, beginning with "self-control" and "obedience." In each case, the first (middle class) choice favors internal development, and the second (working class) emphasizes conformity to external rules or authority.

An additional finding substantiates this interpretation. Parents were asked about the specific sorts of misbehavior for which they would discipline their children. Their responses revealed that middle-class parents were

more likely to punish a child for the *intent* of his or her behavior, in contrast with working-class mothers, who were more likely to discipline for the *consequences* of behavior. For example, a middle-class mother might penalize her child for throwing a temper tantrum, while a working-class mother penalizes for boisterous play. The first suggests a loss of internal control, the second a violation of external standards.

Kohn labeled the two underlying patterns *self-direction* and *conformity*. At successively higher class levels, he concluded, parents value self-direction more and conformity to external standards less. But what are the roots of these class differences? Kohn hypothesized that they reflect generalized value orientations that develop out of a specific aspect of social class: occupational experience. He reasoned, for example, that people who hold professional and managerial jobs, which are relatively unsupervised and require considerable exercise of individual judgment and initiative, are more likely to value self-direction than those who work at highly routinized, blue-collar jobs. In brief, self-direction at work should produce self-direction in values.

Evidence from the surveys supported these ideas. They showed, for example, that parents' general judgments about authority, deviance, and the goodness of human nature are related to social class (Table 5.1, Panel B). In particular, Kohn noted that "authoritarian attitudes" stressing "conformance to the dictates of authority and intolerance of nonconformity" become more frequent at lower-class levels (Kohn 1969:79).

Finally, the surveys demonstrated that these general attitudes are systematically related to the character of respondents' occupational experience. Men whose work is (1) closely supervised, (2) repetitive, and (3) oriented toward things rather than people or data are the most likely to subscribe to authoritarian values and to judge jobs on their extrinsic qualities. Of course, what are ordinarily considered working-class jobs are most likely to fit this occupational pattern—though some (plumber) do not fit it as well as certain menial office jobs (data entry operator). Kohn also notes that the wives of men who share this occupational experience tend to hold similar values.

The results and interpretative logic of Kohn's research are summarized in Table 5.1. Remember that the middle-class side of this chart represents patterns that are increasingly frequent at higher class levels, and the working-class side describes patterns that become more frequent at lower-class levels. (We are dealing with statistical tendencies here, not absolute contrasts between classes.) Reading the table from the bottom up on the middle-class side, we find that parents at higher class levels are more likely to work at jobs requiring intellectual flexibility and independent judgment (Panel C), more open to innovation and tolerant of nonconformity (Panel B), and more likely to encourage self-direction in their children (Panel A). The parallel finding on the working-class side is that parents at lower-class levels are more subject to authority and routinization at work, more authoritarian in their judgments, and more likely to favor conformity in their children. These two contrasting patterns fit the causal chain that Kohn had anticipated to explain the relationship between social class and socialization patterns: Occupational experience gives rise to general value orientations, which in turn shape parental value preferences for children.

Further scrutiny of the data revealed that a second aspect of social class, level of education, exercises an independent influence on parental value

orientations and value preferences for children and thus reinforces the class patterning of socialization. Kohn observed that education appears to “provide the intellectual flexibility and breadth of perspective that are essential for self-directed values” (1969:186). Kohn found that education and occupational conditions have independent impacts on parental values, although the effect of occupational conditions is substantially stronger.

Kohn’s research on class differences in the socialization of children has important implications for our understanding of the class system as a whole. Since Marx, sociologists have been aware that life experience, especially occupational experience, shapes social values. Kohn (1969) observed that “the essence of higher class position is the expectation that one’s decisions and actions can be consequential; the essence of lower-class position is the belief that one is at the mercy of forces and people beyond one’s control, often, beyond one’s understanding” (p. 189). If this is true, we should expect people in top positions to learn to value self-direction and those at the bottom to learn to value conformity to authority. We might also anticipate that they will teach these values to their children.

At this point, the larger significance of Kohn’s work becomes clear. When parents inculcate values that reflect their experience of the class system, they are preparing their children to assume a class position similar to their own and, by so doing, are contributing to the long-term maintenance of the class system. Kohn explicitly rejects the notion that these outcomes reflect the conscious intentions of parents. Annette Lareau’s research, which we turn to next, reaches a different conclusion. She shows that upper-middle-class parents are quite conscious of the career-enhancing objective of their child-rearing practices.

Lareau: Child Rearing Observed

Like Kohn, Lareau (2003) was interested in class differences in socialization. But Lareau went one step beyond Kohn. In addition to interviewing parents, she and a team of research assistants spent hundreds of hours observing parents and their 9- or 10-year-old children—usually at home, but also during routine activities outside the home. Such “naturalistic observation” is rare because it is expensive and time-consuming. It has the methodological disadvantage of generalization from an inevitably small sample (the team interviewed 88 families and observed 12). But observation can also be enormously rewarding, as it was for Lareau, because it yields information unfiltered by respondents and exposes researchers to important aspects of social life they may not have thought to ask about. Lareau’s team asked families they observed not to treat them as guests, but to carry on their normal daily lives. They hoped to be as inconspicuous and taken for granted “as the family dog,” and they seem, by and large, to have succeeded.

The study focused on families at three class levels, which Lareau labels middle class, working class, and poor. Her sample includes both black and white families at all three class levels. Judging from the high incomes and managerial or professional jobs she reports for the first group of families, Lareau’s middle class could better be described as *upper-middle class*. Her working-class families seem to be a mix of what we would call working class and working poor. There is, then, a considerable economic gap separating

Lareau's top class and the other two classes in this study. Perhaps it is not surprising that Lareau finds a corresponding gap in child-rearing practices.

Generalizing from rich observational data, Lareau describes two basic approaches to child rearing, which we can label *cultivated growth* and *natural growth*.¹ Parents who take the first approach hover over their children, scheduling their activities, fostering their talents, reasoning with them, and intervening on their behalf. Parents who take the second want to provide a safe and stable environment within which they expect the child to develop naturally; they guide their children with clear directives but allow them considerable autonomy in their everyday activities. Lareau reports that the upper-middle-class families she observed practice cultivated growth, while both the working class and poor families practice the natural growth pattern of child rearing.

Lareau's observations cluster around three facets of children's lives: the organization of daily activities, the use of language, and relations with institutions such as schools.

Daily Activities. The upper-middle class 9- and 10-year-olds Lareau studied spend much of their time with adults or in activities organized by adults. The monthly calendar on the refrigerator door records a hectically scheduled life, with times for soccer practice, piano lessons, swim team, church choir, school play rehearsal, Girl Scouts, gymnastics, and violin lessons. There are scheduled play dates. One boy complains, "My mother signs me up for everything!" but says his activities make him feel "special" and admits he would be "bored" without them. On their own, these upper-middle-class children are not sure how to use the limited free time they have.

Working-class and poor children, Lareau finds, lead slower, less structured lives. Much of their time is their own, and unlike their upper-middle-class peers, they have no trouble entertaining themselves—generally in informal play with neighborhood children and cousins. Their parents do not, by and large, involve them in organized activities. Often, parents lack the prerequisite resources of time, money, and transportation. But many do not see the value of such activities, which upper-middle-class parents regard as character building. Lareau finds that working-class and poor parents regard the child's world and the adult world as distinct realms. Other than providing for their children's safety, they take only limited interest in the former.

Language. Lareau's interest in language extends more generally to the way that parents interact with children. Upper-middle-class parents, she finds, engage in almost continual conversation with their children when they are together. They are intent on cultivating their child's facility with language. They teach children to express their own views and to believe that their opinions matter. They encourage them to ask questions of other adults and people in authority like teachers and doctors. In upper-middle-class families, language is the main mechanism of discipline. Parents reason with children. Even when issuing directives,

¹ We have substituted these simplified labels for Lareau's more cumbersome "concerted cultivation" and "accomplishment of natural growth."

they attach reasons to them. And children learn to negotiate with their parents for what they want. When negotiation is, from the children's viewpoint, unsuccessful, they often resort to whining, a tendency that the researchers did not observe with children at lower class levels.

Conversation between parents and children in the working-class and poor homes was much less extensive. These parents and children were often silent in each other's company. Working-class and poor parents regard it as their responsibility to shelter, feed, and clothe their children; teach them right from wrong; and comfort them. In these matters, Lareau reports, "language plays an important, practical role" (2003:139). But the parents did not focus on developing their children's language skills. They did not draw out their opinions or expect to be challenged by them. They disciplined their children with short, clear directives—sometimes coupled with physical punishment—which children generally accepted without complaint.

Institutions. Upper-middle-class parents, Lareau finds, confidently engage institutions, and they teach their children to do the same. They are at ease with teachers, doctors, and others in authority, feeling free to ask questions and make demands, and they expect institutions to respond to their child's individual needs. In preparation for a wellness exam, an upper-middle-class mother encourages her child to think of questions he wants to ask the doctor. "Don't be shy," she urges him, and he is not (p. 124). When another mother learned that her daughter had narrowly missed out on her school's gifted program, she sought advice from a network of well-informed friends, arranged to have her daughter retested, and prevailed on the school to assign her to the program. (Lareau found that high percentages of upper-middle-class respondents, but few working-class or poor respondents, know people who are doctors, lawyers, and psychologists [pp. 171, 285].)

Working-class and poor parents are, according to Lareau, intimidated by institutions and the professionals who represent them. Mothers who have no difficulty making loud demands on the cable company are subdued in the presence of their child's teacher or doctor. They may not understand the words professionals use and do not feel competent to challenge their expertise. One mother whose fourth grader cannot read gets contradictory explanations from her child's teachers. But she makes no demands, leaving her daughter's education to the school's presumed experts. At the same time, passivity often masks an underlying resentment and distrust of middle-class institutions, which working-class parents openly share with their children. They feel that such institutions operate according to an alien set of values. The parents of a fourth grader involved in playground conflicts encourage him to hit back, in defiance of the school's rules; the child is suspended. Working-class and poor parents, who use physical punishment, fear having their children removed from the home if the school reports them to welfare authorities for child abuse.

Summarizing, Lareau suggests that the cultivated growth pattern encourages a sense of *entitlement* in upper-middle-class children. Having been encouraged

to participate in challenging organized activities, to speak freely with adults, to express their own opinions, to ask questions, to negotiate for what they want, and to expect institutions to respond to their needs, these children grow up with an enhanced sense of self-worth. They can be expected to deal confidently with institutions, which they see as sharing their own values.

In contrast, the natural growth pattern leads toward what Lareau characterizes as a sense of *constraint* in working-class and poor children. They have not been encouraged to cultivate formal language skills, to express their own opinions, or to question, challenge, or negotiate with adults. They have less experience than more privileged children with institutions, which they have been taught to regard with distrust.

Lareau sees her research as demonstrating the power of class to shape young lives. On the other hand, she concludes that race matters little, for children at this age, on the key dimensions of daily life, language, and relations with institutions. While the black parents in the study were inevitably concerned with the effects of racism on their young children, they differed little from white parents of the same class in their approach to child rearing.

To Lareau's surprise, the only class distinction that mattered was the one separating the child-rearing practices of the upper-middle class from those of the two lower classes. Although she detected some differences between working-class and poor families, she found that they raised their children according to the same natural growth pattern. Perhaps a larger sample and the inclusion of families from the intermediate lower-middle class would have yielded a more complicated picture.

Bourdieu, whom Lareau cites as an inspiration for her work, would say that the upper-middle-class children she studied were developing valuable cultural capital, which will serve them well as they move through the education system and into professional and managerial careers beyond. Kohn might add that the very character of upper-middle-class occupations supports the cultivated growth pattern of child rearing, with its self-confident values. Both would agree that class differences in socialization support the reproduction of the class system.

Patterns of Association in Early Life

The class differences in patterns of socialization are reinforced by the tendency of children and adolescents to associate with others of like class background as they are growing up. Because neighborhoods tend to group people of similar economic means, the kids on the block are likely to be of the same social class. Local schools reproduce the class patterns of the neighborhoods they serve. Many upper-class and upper-middle-class families make sure that their children's classmates will be from similar households by buying homes in "better" school districts or sending their children to private schools. As Lareau's research shows, the upper-middle-class pattern of scheduled activities outside of school reinforces class segregation.

Large public high schools in some communities bring together students of diverse backgrounds, but they do not necessarily mix freely. Often class differentiation within the school is institutionalized through curricula that separate students on the basis of their academic ability or postgraduation

aspirations, which tend to be correlated with social class (Colclough and Beck 1986; Oakes 1985).

Students' own preferences contribute to the class patterning of association. A series of somewhat dated studies of adolescent cliques and friendships shows that students are inclined, though by no means certain, to choose friends who share their own class backgrounds (Cohen 1979; Duncan, Haller, and Portes 1968; Hollingshead 1949).

From 1988 to 2007, we surveyed groups of students at a selective college regarding their associations in high school. Approximately 180 students were asked the occupations of the parents of their three best friends and most significant romantic interest in high school. Students also provided information on the occupations and incomes of their own parents. Families were stratified according to the Gilbert-Kahl model introduced in Chapter 1. The results are summarized in Table 5.2, which shows that the high school associations of this relatively privileged group of students were largely restricted to people with class backgrounds similar to their own but quite different from the class distribution of Americans generally. The first column shows the class distribution of all American households: Most (55 percent) are working class or below in our schema; relatively few (15 percent) are upper-middle class or higher. As the second column indicates, the class distribution of students bound for an elite college is almost the reverse, with the large majority (71 percent) concentrated in the top classes. The third and fourth columns reveal that the students have usually formed friendships and romantic relationships with people who fit their own privileged class profiles. The strong pattern of class segregation among these generally affluent teenagers is, as we will see later in the chapter, consistent with the highly restricted association patterns of upper-middle-class adults.

Like friendship, mate selection is influenced by social class. Sociologist Martin K. Whyte (1990) confirmed this conclusion from earlier studies in a survey of women in the Detroit metropolitan area. Whyte asked the respondents about the class positions of their parents and in-laws, at the time the women and their husbands were in high school. Given a choice of five classes, 58 percent of the respondents placed their parents and in-laws in the same class.

Table 5.2 Association Patterns of High School Students Bound for a Selective College

	Class Distribution (percent)			
	U.S. National	Students Surveyed	Students' Best Friends	Students' Best Dates
Capitalist/Upper-Middle	15	71	62	57
Middle	30	22	26	30
Working and Below	55	7	12	13
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: Cumulative surveys of approximately 180 college students enrolled in social stratification course, 1989 to 2007.

Research on educational homogamy (marriage between educational equals) also suggests the influence of class on marital choices. Education is a useful class indicator, which is correlated with both family background and earning potential. In 2000, 65 percent of young wives with college degrees and 50 percent of young wives with high school diplomas were married to similarly educated men. Both figures are well beyond what would be expected if cupid were indifferent to relative education. Moreover, educational homogamy has been increasing. In 1960, the odds of having a spouse with the same level of education were 3 times greater than pure chance. By 2003, the odds of educational equality were 4 times greater than chance (Schwartz and Mare 2005).² In practice, this meant that the executive who might have married his secretary or the doctor who might have married the nurse, are now more likely to marry high earning professionals like themselves.

Social class not only influences whom we marry, but also the character of marital relationships and, as we will see later in this chapter, whether we marry and stay married.

Marriage Styles

Sociological studies of husbands and wives have long found clearer sex-role distinctions at lower class levels and greater intimacy, equality, and companionship at higher class levels. A classic study conducted by Lee Rainwater (1965) supports this view.

Rainwater analyzed the marital role relationships of several hundred couples and distinguished three types of relationships, on a continuum: joint, intermediate, and segregated. **Joint marital relationships** focus on companionship and deemphasize the sexual division of labor. Husbands and wives with joint role relationships share the planning of family affairs, carry out many household duties interchangeably, and value common leisure activities. Even when responsibilities are parceled out by gender (wife-homemaker, husband-breadwinner), each partner is expected to take a sympathetic interest in the concerns of the other. In **segregated marital relationships**, there is clear differentiation of concerns and responsibilities, which minimizes the husband's involvement with household matters and the wife's with the world of (the husband's) work. Husband and wife are likely to have distinct leisure pursuits and separate sets of friends. Intermediate marital relationships fall between these two poles.

Based on answers to questions about family decision-making, duties of husbands and wives, interests and activities of the partners, and the general character of the relationship, Rainwater placed each couple in one of the three categories. Of course, all couples were in some sense "intermediate." So the ratings were based on relative differences. When Rainwater compared the distributions of these three types of role relationships at four class levels, unmistakable differences emerged (Table 5.3). Joint relationships predominate in the upper-middle class (88 percent) and segregated relationships in

² All figures refer to couples with wives age 18 to 40. Odds are net of changes in the distribution of husbands' and wives' education.

Table 5.3 Social Class and Conjugal Role Relationships

Class	Role Relationships (percent)				
	Number	Joint	Intermediate	Segregated	Total
Upper-middle class	(32)	88	12	–	100
Lower-middle class	(31)	42	58	–	100
Upper-lower class	(26)	19	58	23	100
Lower-lower class	(25)	4	24	72	100

Source: *Family Design: Marital Sexuality, Family Size, and Contraception*, by Lee Rainwater. Chicago, IL: Aldine. Reprinted by permission of Lee Rainwater.

the lower-lower class (72 percent), while the classes between them exhibit a neat gradient.

The relationship between social class and marital role types is more than a matter of academic curiosity. Reported marital happiness increases with class level, especially for women (Bradburn 1969:156), and this phenomenon is tied to the character of the organization of marital roles. In Rainwater's study, middle-class couples reported greater sexual satisfaction than lower-class couples, but the difference was largely a function of the level of role segregation. For example, most lower-class wives in segregated relationships evaluated their sexual experience in marriage negatively, but the minority of lower-class wives in intermediate relationships were generally positive in their evaluation (Rainwater 1965:28). In national surveys, companionship in marriage (which would appear to be similar to joint organization) is positively correlated with social class and with marital happiness (Bradburn 1969:163).

Let's take a closer look at conjugal role types by examining how they function in upper-middle class and working-class families (L. Rubin 1976; Sussman and Steinmetz 1987:226–231). In important ways, the very character of upper-middle-class life lends itself to the joint role relationship. College life, generally a prologue to upper-middle-class careers, delays marriage and encourages informal, relatively egalitarian association between men and women. High rates of social and geographic mobility are typical of this class. Husbands and wives are isolated from kin and removed from successive sets of friends as they move from community to community and up the career ladder. They must look to each other for support and companionship. Together, they are drawn into the career-oriented social life, such as entertaining clients or associates at home, that is one of the keys to success for ambitious executives and professionals.

Upper-middle-class wives are expected to be "gracious, charming hostesses and social creatures, supporting their husbands' careers and motivating their achievements" (Kanter 1977:108). The traditional result has been the "two-person career" that links a husband's advancement to his wife's unpaid efforts. A more recent phenomenon, typical of younger couples, is the dual-career family,

in which both spouses pursue demanding professional or managerial careers. A survey of 1,000 working-age women in Chicago (Lopata et al. 1980) found that dual-career couples are as likely as single-career couples to mix social and professional life. About 60 percent of wives employed as managers or professionals reported that their husbands helped them with career-related entertaining at home. Husbands with professional or managerial jobs were somewhat more likely to receive such help from their wives. (It made little difference whether the wife was employed.) On the other hand, women employed in blue-collar jobs or married to blue-collar men reported little job-related entertaining.

As the Chicago study suggests, the career-oriented social life that becomes a shared endeavor for upper-middle-class couples has no working-class equivalent. Working-class men and women do develop social ties on the job, but these tend to segregate rather than join husbands and wives. For example, many of the workers in a New Jersey chemical plant studied by David Halle (1984) drank together after work and joined coworkers on fishing trips and at sports events. Working-class occupations are less likely to require geographic mobility. Remarkably, most of Halle's chemical workers were born within two miles of the plant where they worked (p. 303). Under such circumstances, it is easier for spouses to maintain ties with kin and friends from adolescence and early adult years. Dependency on the couple's parents is intensified by the economic insecurity that is especially typical of young working-class families. These social ties tend to draw husband and wife to separate sources of support and companionship outside the marriage.

Bott's (1964) work in England showed that couples who come to a marriage with separate, tight-knit networks of friends and kin and maintain these ties are the most likely to develop segregated marital relationships. Her data suggest that social networks of that sort are least typical of professionals and most typical of manual workers.

We have dealt with the origins of joint and segregated role relationships in experiences typical of the top and bottom of the class order. What can we say about the mix of marriage types Rainwater found in the middle of the class structure (Table 5.3)? Two social factors seem relevant. One is social mobility: People moving up or down in the class structure may carry with them lifestyles acquired in their class of origin. Thus, the upper-middle-class origins of many lower-middle-class couples (especially younger couples) can help explain the predominance of joint relationships among them. An analogous argument can be made for the spread of segregated relationships upward. The second factor is cultural: the tendency of upper-middle-class lifestyles to become generally fashionable models and filter downward. Through these processes, couples are exposed to conflicting influences, which may be reflected in intermediate role relationships.

Sex-role socialization is another source of class differences in marital role organization. Kohn's research (1969), which we touched on earlier in this chapter, found that working-class parents are more likely than middle-class parents to hold separate sets of expectations for boys and girls. A study of college-age women (Vanfossen 1977) found that college-age daughters of working-class fathers are more likely than their middle-class peers to subscribe to traditional sex-role values as expressed in questionnaire items such as, "A woman should not expect to go to exactly the same places or have the same freedom as a man." Such women are the most likely to find the segregated marital role acceptable.

Boys of all classes have traditionally been taught to be more controlled, more instrumental, less emotional, and less empathetic than their sisters, but the distinction is made much more emphatically in blue-collar families. Lillian Rubin (1976), a sociologist and psychotherapist who conducted lengthy interviews with working-class and upper-middle-class couples, noted big differences in the behavior of their sons:

Not once in a professional middle-class home did I see a young boy shake his father's hand in a well-taught "manly" gesture as he bid him good night. Not once did I hear a middle-class parent scornfully—or even sympathetically—call a crying boy a sissy or in any way reprimand him for his tears. Yet, these were not uncommon observations in the working-class homes I visited. Indeed, I was impressed with the fact that, even as young as six or seven, the working-class boys seemed more emotionally controlled—more like miniature men—than those in the middle-class families. (p. 126)

Boys who are taught to be "manly" in this way are less likely as adults to feel comfortable with joint role relationships in marriage.

Blue-Collar Marriages and Middle-Class Models

Two studies of intimate working-class life, Rubin's book and another by E. E. LeMasters (1975), published about the same time, cast further light on the differences between working- and middle-class marriages. Rubin, who interviewed young parents in their Northern California homes, and LeMasters, who spent 5 years getting to know the somewhat older patrons of the Oasis, a "family-type" working-class tavern in Wisconsin, reached surprisingly similar conclusions. Both found that marital norms filtering down from the upper-middle class were creating enormous strains in blue-collar marriages.

One of LeMasters' (1975) informants, a woman married for 30 years, bitterly described the traditional pattern of segregated blue-collar marriages:

The men go to work while the wife stays home with the kids—it's a long day with no other adult to talk to. That's what drives mothers to the soap operas—stupid as they are.

Then the husband stops at some tavern to have a few with his buddies from the job—not having seen them since they left to drive home 10 minutes ago. The poor guy is lonely and thirsty and needs to relax before the rigors of another evening before the television set. Meanwhile the little woman has supper ready and is trying to hold the kids off "until Daddy gets home so we can all eat together." After a while, she gives up this little dream and eats with the kids while the food is still eatable. About 7 o'clock, Daddy rolls in, feeling no pain, eats a few bites of the overcooked food, sits down in front of the TV set, and falls asleep.

This little drama is repeated several thousand times until they have their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary and then everybody tells them how happy they have been. And you know what? By now they are both so damn punch drunk neither one of them knows whether their marriage has been a success or not. (p. 42)

Such dissatisfaction was probably nothing new, but as the tone of her comment suggests, expectations were changing. By the 1970s, the traditional pattern was being challenged by notions of intimacy, companionship, sharing, and equality received from above. The problem was and still is that these ideals do not appeal equally to wives and husbands. Women were prepared for them by their socialization and in many cases by contact with a middle-class world through white-collar employment and exposure to popular media. Men, LeMasters found, were satisfied with established role relationships, which they had long regarded as part of the natural order of things. The traditional women's role was, according to one of LeMasters' informants, "natural for them so they don't mind it" (p. 105). Men sensed, of course, that many women did "mind it," but they were inclined to think that women's complaints are groundless. At the Oasis, a construction worker asks LeMasters,

What the hell are they complaining about? My wife has an automatic washer in the kitchen, a dryer, a dishwasher, a garbage disposal, a car of her own—hell, I even bought her a portable TV so she can watch the goddamn soap operas right in the kitchen. What more can she want? (p. 85)

But behind the bluff, there is fear. From the less "macho" setting of his living room, one of Rubin's (1976) informants phrased the problem differently:

I swear I don't know what she wants. She keeps saying that we have to talk, and when we do, it always turns out I'm saying the wrong thing. I get scared sometimes. I always thought I had to think things to myself; you know, not tell her about it. Now she says that's not good. But it's hard. You know, I think it comes down to that I like things the way they are, and I'm afraid I'll say or do something that'll really shake things up. So I get worried about it, and I don't say anything. (p. 121)

For their part, working-class women in these studies were very dissatisfied but also frightened and confused and occasionally given to wondering whether asking a man to be more than a conscientious provider is indeed asking too much.

I'm not sure what I want. I keep talking to him about communication, and he says, "Okay, so we're talking, now what do you want?" And I don't know what to say then, but I know it's not what I mean. I sometimes get worried because I think maybe I want too much. He's a good husband; he works hard; he takes care

of me and the kids. He could go out and find another woman who would be very happy to have a man like that and who wouldn't be all the time complaining at him because he doesn't feel things and get close. (Rubin 1976:120)

A second aspect of blue-collar marriage was under strain in the 1970s: sexual adjustment. Problems in this area were not new. For instance, husbands and wives had long clashed over the desirable frequency of sexual intercourse. LeMasters (1975) heard this complaint among patrons of the Oasis (p. 101). However, difficulties of more recent origin, deriving from the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, were evident in the comments of the younger couples interviewed by Rubin. In the 1970s, working-class sexual behavior was moving closer to middle-class norms. For example, working-class couples had nearly caught up with middle-class couples in their willingness to engage in once-exotic sexual variants such as cunnilingus and fellatio; working-class men had become similar to middle-class men in their concern for their wives' sexual satisfaction (Rubin 1976:134–135, 137–148). But change had psychological costs. Again, differential receptivity to new standards was creating stress for working-class marriages. In this case, men were more open to change. The blue-collar workers Rubin interviewed wanted freer, more expressive, more mutually satisfying sexual relationships with their wives, as their remarks show:

I think sex should be that you enjoy each other's bodies. Judy doesn't care for touching and feeling each other, though. She thinks there's just one right position and one right way—in the dark with her eyes closed tight. Anything that varies from that makes her upset. It's just not enjoyable if she doesn't have a climax, too. She says she doesn't mind, but I do. (p. 136)

Rubin and LeMasters portrayed the powerful, contradictory impact of upper-middle-class models on working-class marriages in the 1970s. Two subsequent studies of working-class life, Halle's (1984) book on chemical plant workers referred to earlier and a later book by Rubin (1994), traced the influence of these new conceptions of marriage into the 1980s and 1990s. They describe a changing world in which notions of gender equality, companionship in marriage, and mutually fulfilling sexuality were becoming more current among working-class husbands and wives—though there was generally a wide gap between professed ideals and everyday behavior. But still missing in the lives of these working-class couples were influences that encourage companionate marriage for the upper-middle class—in particular the gender-egalitarian college experience, the less authoritarian character of the upper-middle-class jobs, and the mixing of social and professional life that requires spouses to be partners.

The most obvious change for working-class couples in the 1980s and 1990s was economic. Wives were much more likely to work and to do so full time. The idea that working men could and should support their families by themselves and that women's wages were merely supplementary had become untenable. Rubin found that the teenage daughters of the working-class women she had originally interviewed in the 1970s were

in no rush to marry. Their mothers had typically wed right out of high school. The daughters told Rubin that they expected to marry “someday,” but first they wanted to work, to live on their own, to travel, and experience the world. As we will see later on in this chapter, the domestic lives of their generation of working-class women would be very different from the experiences of their mothers and their own, upper-middle-class contemporaries.

Social Class and Domestic Violence

In *The Unknown City: The Lives of Poor and Working-Class Young Adults*, sociologists Michelle Fine and Lois Weis (1998) deal at length with a topic that is often slighted in the literature on class and family life: domestic violence. Fine and Weiss conducted in-depth interviews in the early 1990s with an ethnically diverse group of young men and women (ages 25 to 35) in Buffalo, New York, and Jersey City, New Jersey. Most of their respondents would seem to fit into our “working poor” and “underclass” categories. Living in two deindustrialized cities in a period of high unemployment and low wages for less-educated workers, they are very much the victims of the Age of Growing Inequality.

Domestic violence is a persistent theme in the researchers’ interviews with the young women—white, black, and Hispanic—in their sample. One respondent recalls her childhood as follows:

[T]here was blood in our house just about every day. Somebody was always wacked with something. And dinner, to this day, I don’t sit and eat dinner with my kids. We eat in the parlor in front of the TV, or whatever. Because every time we sat and ate. . . a fight broke out, and you couldn’t leave the kitchen. So you had to sit there and listen to it. (Fine and Weis 1998:143)

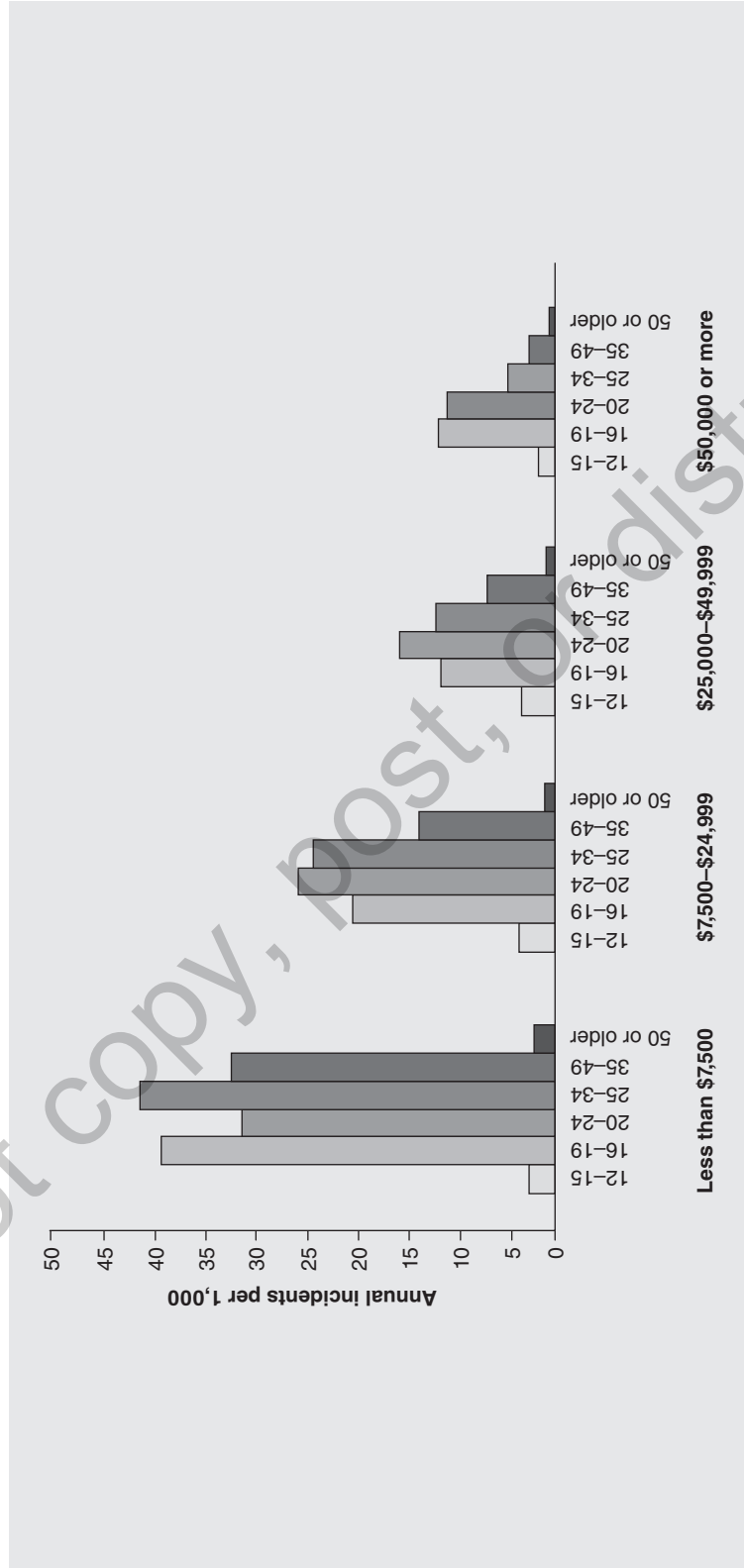
Another young woman describes a brutal, chaotic relationship with a boyfriend who would beat her regularly and then claim,

It was my fault. I made him do it because I yelled at him and he couldn’t handle it. . . . I’d block the door and he’d kick the door right in. . . . And this went on for a year. I told him the next time you hit me, don’t sleep here, ‘cause I will chop you up. I sat in a chair with an ax in my hand and said I was gonna chop him up that night. (p. 151)

In such lives, “not getting beat up” is one mark of a good relationship. A 21-year-old mother offers this assessment of her current relationship with her fiancé, the father of her son:

It’s good; I mean, he’s there for me. It’s good. I don’t know what to say (laughs). . . . He listens to me. He’s a friend. I don’t know, I guess I got all the conveniences of a nice relationship. . . . I don’t get beat up; I don’t get put down. (pp. 153–154)

Figure 5.1 Social Class and Violence Against Women by Intimate Partners



Source: U.S. Department of Justice 2001.

Fine and Weis (1998) observed that domestic violence can be found in all social classes, but they emphasized the high rates and intergenerational character of family violence at lower-class levels. The lives of poor and working-class women, they write, “are saturated with domestic terror” (p. 134). It is possible that these young adults in Buffalo and Jersey City, drawn from the poor and, it appears, the lower fringe of the working class, during a period of high unemployment, represent an extreme. Young adults are the most prone to violence in relationships and especially so in difficult economic times.

Rubin did the research for her second book (1994) during the same period, with a sample that was, on average, probably a little better off than the Buffalo and Jersey City respondents. Fourteen percent of her families acknowledged domestic violence, but the true figure could be higher, she writes, since “this is one of the most closely guarded secrets in family life” (p. 116). A teenage boy Rubin interviewed refused to join the conspiracy of silence: “I bet they didn’t tell you he beats my mother up, did they? Nobody is allowed to talk about it; we’re supposed to pretend like it doesn’t exist” (p. 116).

Rubin (1994) found that men were especially likely to become abusive in periods of unemployment. One respondent, who said he had not abused his wife but feared he might, shared his feelings with Rubin:

It’s hard enough being out of work, but then my wife gets on my case, yakking all the time about how we’re going to be out on the street if I don’t get off my butt, like it’s my fault or something that there’s no work out there. When she starts out like that I swear I want to hit her, anything to shut her mouth. (pp. 115–116)

We can gain a more systematic picture of class patterns in domestic violence by looking at statistics on violence against women by “intimate partners” drawn from the Justice Department’s National Crime Victimization Survey (U.S. Department of Justice 2001). “Intimate partners” as defined by the survey includes current and former husbands and boyfriends.³ The great advantage of this survey is that it collects data anonymously and includes both crimes reported and not reported to the police.

Figure 5.1 reports annual rates of intimate partner violence by age and income level. Two facts stand out in sharp relief. First, victimization is most frequent between the ages of 16 and 49, especially between 16 and 34. Second, there are enormous differences by income level. Women between 16 and 35 at the lowest income level are 3 to 5 times more likely to be victims of intimate partner violence than their peers in the top income category. These data support the claims of Fine and Weis, among others, that domestic abuse is much more common at lower-class levels.

The Marriage Gap

Today, social class not only influences whom we marry and the character of our marriages, but, more generally, what might be called our romantic careers.

³Violent “intimate partners” may also be females, but it is unlikely that there are enough offenders in this category to affect the statistics. The crimes covered include simple and aggravated assault, sexual assault, rape, robbery, and murder (U.S. Department of Justice 2001).

People at mid-to-lower class levels are now more likely to cohabit, divorce, and have children out of wedlock than are their higher class peers. Most people of all classes get married sooner or later, but upper-middle-class couples have more enduring marriages, especially if they have children. Studies using education as a class indicator find that a widening “marriage gap” is developing between the well-educated upper-middle class and the rest of the population. The college educated are much more likely than other Americans to live in “a traditional, 1950s style family” with husband, wife, and one or more children. In 1960, there was little class difference on these dimensions (Lundberg et al. 2016; Pew Research Center 2010:12; Wilcox 2010).

The large class differences today are evident in Table 5.4, which compares the marital status of women at the likely “mothering” ages of 25 to 44. The right-hand column refers to women who are raising children. The table shows that college-educated women are more likely to be married and, most notably, that college-educated *mothers* are at least 20 percent more likely to be married than mothers at lower levels of education. There is remarkably little difference among women with “less than high school,” “high school,” “some college.” The college degree obviously marks a critical boundary.

The class marriage gap reflects rising rates of out-of-wedlock births, cohabitation, and divorce that have disproportionately affected people without college degrees. Births to unwed mothers were rare in 1960. They accounted for over 40 percent of all births by 2010, but the proportion of such births among college graduates remained in the single digits. The divorce rate climbed in the 1960s and 1970s and then declined somewhat, especially for the college educated. A 2010 study of middle-age adults found that 58 percent of people with less than high school, 48 percent of high school graduates, but only 30 percent of college graduates were divorced. Cohabitation has become increasingly common, most notably among high school graduates. College grads are less likely to cohabit, more likely to transition from cohabitation to marriage, and much less likely to have children

Table 5.4 Marital Status by Education for Women, Ages 25–44

Education	Percent Married	
	All	With Children
Less than high school	54	60
High school	56	64
Some college	57	66
College +	66	86
(N)	(41,175)	(27,054)

Source: Calculated from Current Population Survey data for years 2007–2009, using Census Bureau Table Calculator (http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/cpstc/cps_table_creator.html).

Note: Married = “married with spouse present.” Children = “related children” under 18.

within cohabiting unions (Cherlin 2014:140; Lundberg et al. 2016:84–85; Solomon-Fears 2014).

Cherlin: The Disappearing Working-Class Family

As a result of the trends just described, the working-class family is threatened with extinction. That, at least, is the conclusion of a recent book by sociologist Andrew Cherlin (2014). Cherlin first focuses on the traditional working-class family that Rubin and LeMasters described in the 1970s: a married couple and children, with the husband employed as a skilled or semi-skilled worker in manufacturing, construction, or some related sector, and the wife wholly or largely devoted to home and family. This kind of breadwinner-homemaker family was the predominant domestic form among working-class people during the postwar years we have called the Age of Shared Prosperity. It had not been, Cherlin shows, in earlier periods, and it would not be in subsequent decades, when a widening gulf separated the domestic arrangements of working-class and upper-middle-class households.

Cherlin attributes the decline of the working-class family to a combination of economic and cultural factors. The key economic element is the shrinking number of blue-collar jobs, especially in manufacturing, that would allow a high school graduate with limited skills to support a family. Jobs in the service sector where many unskilled young men find employment today, are typically low paid, subject to frequent layoffs, provide few benefits, and offer limited opportunities for advancement. Cherlin finds that men in such positions are unlikely to be married. Among white men 25 to 49, approximately 30 percent of service workers were married in 2010, compared to 45 percent of blue-collar workers, and 60 percent of professionals and managers. The numbers for African American men were lower, but the pattern of occupational disparities in marriage was the same (p. 17).

The obvious cultural factor is the broad shift in attitudes surrounding gender roles, extra-marital childbirth, and cohabitation, which Cherlin confirms with opinion surveys going back to the 1970s. Most Americans no longer think, as they once did, that the breadwinner-homemaker model is ideal. They no longer believe that out-of-wedlock childbirth or cohabitation are shameful. Ironically, the one thing that has not changed is the high value young adults at all class levels place on marriage. For working-class men and women, especially, marriage is a capstone event, an ultimate life accomplishment. It requires, they believe, a strong emotional bond and a secure economic base. But they also want children and are unwilling to delay childbearing until marriage as they envision it is possible. And they do not see pregnancy as a sufficient reason for getting married. So-called “shotgun” weddings were once common. Nearly half of the working-class women Rubin interviewed in the 1970s were pregnant at the time of their weddings (Rubin 1976:60). Today, as a working-class man insists, “You need to have a way better reason than having a kid to get married.” A working-class woman, similarly skeptical of shotgun unions, explains, “I want this to be because you are marrying me, not because you’re marrying because I’m pregnant” (Cherlin 2014:139; Strassler and Miller 2011).

“Neither cultural change nor economic change,” Cherlin concludes, “is sufficient by itself to produce a group of non-college educated young adults who now have the majority of their children outside of marriage” (p. 147). Their college educated peers have, of course, been exposed to the same cultural shift and have absorbed similar attitudes, but they only rarely have children outside of marriage. The difference, obviously, is privileged position of the college educated minority within the postindustrial economy, which allows them to contemplate both marriage and childbearing from a more secure perspective. (Currently about 30 percent of adults hold college degrees.)

Cherlin is not making a moral argument about sex and marriage. And he denies any feeling of nostalgia for the often conflict-ridden working-class family of the postwar decades. His concern is with the fragile domestic arrangements which have replaced the traditional family for a large part of the population without college degrees. The proportion of children who are living with an unmarried mother has risen steeply since 1980, except among the children of college educated women (p. 136). In many cases, unmarried mothers without college degrees are in cohabiting relationships, but these unions often began with pregnancy and prove to be short-lived. These relationships may be followed by new consensual unions, so that children growing up may see a succession of “parents, parents’ partners, and stepparents enter and exit their homes” (p. 22). Cherlin points to an extensive literature showing that children living with this kind of domestic instability are prone to problem behaviors and cognitive deficiencies (p. 167). In contrast, children of the college-educated upper-middle class are usually growing up in a more stable domestic environment, which has changed little since 1980. Here again the Age of Growing Inequality favors the upper-middle class over those at lower-class levels.

Informal Association Among Adults

Warner, whose classic Yankee City study we examined in Chapter 2, considered patterns of association so critical to understanding the class system that he sometimes appeared to define class in terms of association. A social class, he suggested, is a group of people who belong to the same social cliques, intermarry, dine in each other’s homes, and belong to the same organizations.

Warner defined a **social clique** as “an intimate nonkin group,” with no more than 30 members. Warner’s research team collected elaborate data on the clique membership of families in Yankee City. They found that most cliques brought together people of the same or adjacent classes (Warner and Lunt 1941:110–111, 350–355).

The notion that social class is about “who you hang out with” is widely shared. Asked to discuss the basis of social class differences, almost half of the skilled blue-collar workers and two thirds of the white-collar workers in a Providence, Rhode Island, study referred to patterns of association. Their comments suggest that people belong to the same class if they “run around together”; intermarry; “belong to the same churches, clubs, organizations”; “live in the same neighborhoods”; or send their kids to the same schools (Mackenzie 1973:148).

Numerous studies suggest that patterns of association are shaped by social class—though association is also influenced by factors that cut across class lines, including gender, race, age, religion, and shared interests. Earlier in this chapter, we saw that adolescent friendships and mate selection reflect class backgrounds. Adult friendships are also patterned by class, according to surveys done in Providence, the Boston area, and metropolitan Detroit (Allan 1989; Argyle 1994:66–92; Laumann 1966, 1973; Mackenzie 1973; Smith and Macaulay 1980).

Social class, then, channels friendship choices. Research shows that it also influences the extent and character of informal association. The literature suggests that people at higher class levels (1) have more friends and more active social lives; (2) are less likely to preserve friendships from their youth; (3) spend proportionately less time with relatives; (4) are more likely to entertain friends at home and, in particular, to host dinner parties; (5) are more inclined toward couple-oriented social activities; (6) are more likely to develop (nonromantic) cross-sex friendships; and (7) are more likely to mix career and social life.⁴ From Bourdieu's perspective, these generalizations, taken together, suggest that people at higher class levels accumulate greater social capital.

How can we explain the class patterning of informal association? Why do people tend to marry and maintain friendships with class peers? What accounts for the class differences in the character of social life? Two obvious but powerful factors are money and propinquity (physical or social proximity). Dinner parties can be costly affairs, and guests are expected to reciprocate in kind. Skiing and sailing are more expensive than bowling. These price-of-admission differences segregate leisure activities and the people who engage in them by ability to pay. In everyday life, people tend to encounter others who are close to them in status. They live in neighborhoods and send their children to neighborhood schools that are relatively homogeneous in household income. Their coworkers have similar jobs—except for their bosses, whose authority places them at a social distance. In short, daily life is structured in ways that limit the opportunities to develop social ties across class boundaries.

Beyond money and propinquity are a series of more subtle factors—matters of prestige, style, interests, values, and comfort level, which Bourdieu would place under the broader heading of cultural capital. Their influence on patterns of informal association is suggested by some of the comments of respondents to an early Boston-area study of the friendships of adult men. One man indicates that he has “nothing in common” with people in lower occupations, another characterizes factory workers as “rough,” and a third complains about the “uppity” attitudes of a relative who is a successful executive (Laumann 1966:28–29). These men seem uncomfortable with disparities in social prestige. But their attitudes also reflect objective differences in areas including education and occupational experience. Education produces contrasts in language usage, attitudes, and personal interests. Adults with limited education are likely to be uneasy in

⁴ Allan 1989; Argyle 1994:66–92; Curtis and Jackson 1977:169; Dotson 1950; Kahl 1957:138; Kanter 1977; Rubin 1976, 1994; Shostak and Gomberg 1964; Whyte 1952.

the presence of the well-educated. Different experiences at work, as Kohn's studies of socialization demonstrate, contribute to class differences in values. Halle (1984) emphasizes that working-class people typically have dull "jobs," while upper-middle-class people have engaging "careers." The former are inevitably less interested in conversations that revolve around work and generally less inclined to mix work and leisure.

Formal Associations

Like informal ties, participation in formal associations is patterned by social class.⁵ Formal associations are large groups or organizations with explicit purposes and rules of membership, including the YMCA, the neighborhood swim club, the Teamsters union, the Burning Tree Country Club, and the Boy Scouts. From its beginnings, the United States has been characterized by observers as a nation of joiners. Today, this generalization is somewhat less than half true. Most working- and lower-class Americans have little or no participation in formal associations. Even the participation of the lower-middle class is modest. The true joiners are members of the upper-middle and upper classes, who are especially likely to participate in civic and charity organizations.

Members of these top classes are not just the most likely joiners. They are also the most active participants in organizations and, even when organizational membership cuts across classes, the most likely to serve in leadership positions. The reasons for this phenomenon are not hard to imagine. These managers and professionals enjoy the prestige attached to high-class position. They have more education. At work, they develop organizational skills and confidence as leaders. Finally, many see active participation in community organizations as a way to bolster their careers.

Associations often draw their membership from a limited range in the class structure. Country clubs and exclusive social clubs such as New York's Links or Boston's Sommerset draw from the upper and upper-middle classes. Service organizations such as Rotary or Lions, fraternal orders like the Elks Club, and patriotic organizations like the Veterans of Foreign Wars recruit members from successively lower class levels.

Even churches—institutions supposedly rejoicing in our common humanity—are class typed. People of higher status are likely to attend churches of the Protestant denominations that feature services of quiet dignity and restrained emotion, such as the Episcopal or Unitarian groups. Middle-status people are more often seen at the Methodist, Mormon, and Lutheran churches. Lower status individuals are most likely to join revivalist and fundamentalist churches, such as the Pentecostals. The class level of Catholic congregations seems to vary with the ethnicity of the congregation, reflecting the timing of their immigration to the United States.⁶

⁵Hodges 1964:105–115; Mackenzie 1973:81–84; Smith and Macaulay 1980; Warner et al. 1949a.

⁶Demerath 1965; Kosman and Lachman 1993:257–269; Laumann 1966:55; Smith and Macaulay 1980:514.

Separate Lives

Americans are increasingly segregated by social class. No one has made this point more vividly than Tom Wolfe in his novel *Bonfire of the Vanities* (1987). The novel's protagonist, Sherman McCoy, is a smug, young Wall Street trader with a \$3 million Park Avenue apartment and few redeeming qualities.

Driving into the city in his Mercedes one evening, accompanied by his mistress, Sherman blunders into an impoverished ghetto neighborhood, where he is involved in a fatal hit-and-run accident. Subsequently, McCoy finds himself locked up in a courthouse holding cell in the unwanted company of dozens of tough young men—poor and dark-skinned like the victim of his Mercedes. These events initiate a downward spiral in McCoy's life. By the end of the novel, a year after the accident, McCoy is separated from his wife, his mistress, his money, and his lawyer, who has resigned from the case because McCoy is broke.

The action of *Bonfire of the Vanities* is driven by its satisfying but improbable premise: Sherman McCoy has smashed through the wall that normally separates privileged people like the McCoyes from people like the accident victim and Sherman's cellmates—or for that matter, from the \$36,000-a-year assistant D.A. who prosecutes the case. "If you want to live in New York," a friend once advised McCoy, "you've got to insulate, insulate, insulate" (Wolfe 1987:55). Before the accident, McCoy used his money to do just that. His world was as insulated from the grimy reality of the city as the posh cabin of his Mercedes from the asphalt below.

Wolfe's novel reflects the growing disparities of the current era. It portrays a society whose members, divided by class and race, live in increasing isolation from one another; they no longer share (despite McCoy's strange fate) a common destiny. Journalist Mickey Kaus develops this theme in *The End of Equality* (1992), arguing that rising economic inequality has been accompanied by rising social inequality. Money, fear of the poor, and an inflated sense of their own superiority are motivating prosperous Americans to develop separate lives. "An especially precious type of equality—equality not of money but in the way we treat each other and live our lives—seems to be disappearing" (p. 5).

Kaus (1992) looks back at the post-World War II era as (with the "evil" exception of race) "a golden age of social equality." The war, perhaps more than any event in our history, provided Americans with a common experience and a sense of shared destiny. Wealthy 26-year-old John F. Kennedy served on a small PT boat in the South Pacific with men who had been machinists, factory workers, truck drivers, and night school students. Seventy percent of able-bodied young men, most of them drafted, served in the military (Kaus 1992:50). Some, like Kennedy's brother Joe, did not survive. Those who returned brought with them a network of friendships, forged under the threat of death, with little regard for class differences.

After the war, the GI Bill, passed by Congress and signed by President Roosevelt, offered all veterans scholarships, low-cost home mortgages, and other benefits. In the midst of the shared prosperity of the 1950s, there was a sense that the social distance between Americans of different classes was shrinking. Today, it appears to Kaus that just the opposite is happening. Against a backdrop of growing economic inequality, Americans worry about

the emergence of what they take to be a permanent underclass. The opulent lives and social pretenses of the rich—objects of ridicule in a more egalitarian age—inspire fawning articles in glossy magazines aimed at upper-middle-class readers in search of role models. Professionals with merely comfortable incomes see themselves as “not just richer, but more civilized, better educated, wittier, smarter, cleaner, prettier” than the average American (Kaus 1992:27).

“Who killed social equality?” asks Kaus. Oddly, he rejects the most obvious suspect, rising economic inequality, and insists that the guilty party is “the decline of the public sphere.” What he has in mind is the reduction of the social realm where Americans of different classes meet on more or less equal terms. He points to the end of the draft and the replacement of a broad-based citizen military with a volunteer force, which recruits few soldiers from the upper end of the class structure. But most of his examples revolve around residential segregation by class. As the rich and relatively rich retreat to exclusive suburbs (sometimes even to “gated private communities”), they separate themselves from the less privileged. Here, public spaces—the mall, the supermarket, the drugstore, the coffee shop—are largely inhabited by other members of the privileged classes. There is no place like the bar portrayed in the 1980s TV sitcom *Cheers*, a democratic setting where the postman and the psychiatrist meet informally. Above all, children attend school with others of the same class, even if they do not enroll in private academies. And, not surprisingly, upper-middle-class parents, who may support budget-slashing politicians, do not hesitate to vote for local school taxes. They know their own kids will benefit.

Residential Segregation

There is good recent evidence of the class-segregating trend that novelist Wolfe and journalist Kaus describe. Since the 1970s, according to analyses of U.S. census data, the proportion of families living in distinctively lower income or higher income neighborhoods has increased, as the proportion in middle-income neighborhoods has sunk. The general pattern is evident in Figure 5.2, based on a study by Reardon and Bischoff (2011) of the 117 metropolitan areas in the United States with populations over 500,000. They range from New York City to Chattanooga, Tennessee. As the bar chart indicates, in 1970, about two thirds of families lived in middle-income neighborhoods. By the 2000s, the proportion living in such neighborhoods had sunk to a little over 40 percent, as the proportions in higher and lower income neighborhoods expanded.

Using a sophisticated income-segregation measure, Reardon and Bischoff determined the extent to which population groups are isolated in neighborhoods that are homogeneous and distinct from the general population.⁷ They found that isolation by income level grew most rapidly in the

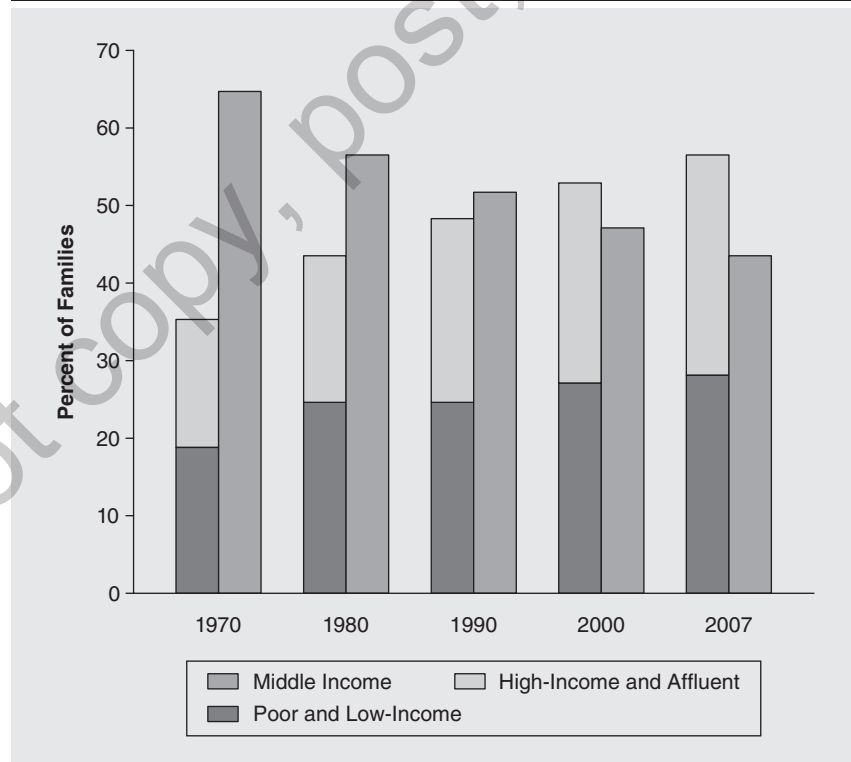
⁷ This measure, with the cumbersome name “rank-order information theory index,” is designed to get around a significant methodological problem. Income segregation as indicated in Figure 5.2 may increase simply because income inequality is increasing, even if the distribution of people among neighborhoods is constant. The index measures change in segregation beyond that caused by the increased income inequality.

1980s and 2000s, and that the top 10 percent and bottom 10 percent of income-earning families were notably and increasingly isolated from others. The isolation of the top 10 percent was especially high. It appears that even Americans of relatively modest affluence are heeding the advice of Sherman McCoy's friend in *Bonfire of the Vanities*: "Insulate, insulate."

The authors also looked separately at isolation *among* blacks and *among* Hispanics. Given the increasing occupational differentiation among African Americans noted in Chapter 3, we should not be surprised to learn that residential separation by income has also increased. A similar pattern holds for Hispanics. Both of these groups are much more income-segregated among themselves than are whites.

Does sorting people into neighborhoods by income matter? Yes, it does. Higher income neighborhoods are likely to have better schools, safer streets, stronger civic organizations, and superior amenities from parks to well-stocked supermarkets. Reardon and Bischoff refer to research demonstrating that living in higher or lower income neighborhoods affects people in ways that go beyond simply being richer or poorer. It matters who your neighbors are. They influence important life outcomes in areas such as health, education, and career prospects. Thus, increasing income segregation is likely to reinforce the growing inequality in American society.

Figure 5.2 Residential Segregation by Income, 1970–2007



Source: Derived from Table A1 in Reardon & Bischoff, 2011:28.

Note: 2007 is average for 2007 to 2009.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the social implications of class structure, emphasizing socialization and association. The life cycle has served as a guiding thread. We learned that children are precociously aware of class distinctions and that they are socialized according to patterns that reflect the class position of their parents. Adolescents tend to form friendships and romantic ties with others who share their class background. Young adults typically marry class equals or near equals. Adult friendships, romantic relationships, marital styles, residential distribution, organizational activities, and even church membership are all patterned by social class.

These observations bring us back to Max Weber's idea that prestige classes (or "status groups," as he called them) are social "communities," characterized by distinctive lifestyles and values. To a remarkable extent, our social lives and outlooks are molded by class position. Consider the typical differences we have found between the upper-middle and working classes. Members of the upper-middle class generally share the life-shaping experiences of college, geographic mobility, and a career-oriented social life. More likely to have stable marriages and to raise children within a marriage, they are drawn to a joint model of marriage and to values of self-direction and tolerance, which they stress for their children. Their child-rearing practices inculcate formal language skills, confidence in dealing with institutions, and a general sense of entitlement. Their exclusive choices of friends and mates suggest that this class is relatively isolated from the rest of the population. In contrast, members of the working class are more likely to cohabit and to have children out of wedlock. In marriage, they develop segregated relationships and separate social and work life. They have higher divorce rates. Their child-rearing practices convey a sense of constraint to their sons and daughters.

These differences reinforce Bourdieu's conclusion that the advantages of the privileged classes extend beyond economic capital to cultural and social capital. The upper-middle-class child who grows up with superior command of the English language and has learned to deal confidently with people in authority has accumulated valuable cultural capital. Upper-middle-class parents, whose friends and relatives typically include doctors, psychologists, lawyers, and other professionals, possess valuable social capital they can tap when they need advice or a new job.

We should expect these social differences to widen as economic differences grow. We know, in particular, that marriage differences and residential segregation by class are increasing. (In many other important areas, unfortunately, we do not have recent studies that permit us to talk about trends.) But the American class system is still far from becoming an archipelago of discrete class cultures. The differences we have described in this chapter are statistical tendencies, not absolute contrasts. College-educated mothers are *more likely* to be married, but some are not; and over half of mothers with high school diplomas are married. Americans of all classes are influenced by a national culture and share many key values. They are exposed to many of the same ideas and lifestyles in pervasive mass media. At the same time, the diversity of American society and continuing social mobility (as we see in the next chapter) guarantee that the membership of any social class will be quite varied.

KEY TERMS DEFINED IN THE GLOSSARY

association	joint marital relationships	social capital (see capital)
cultural capital (see capital)	segregated marital relationships	social clique
economic capital (see capital)		socialization

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