

## Poor Expression: Concealing Social Class Stigma

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Three studies found that people from lower-class backgrounds are less expressive toward interaction partners from upper-class backgrounds except in contexts where they share minority status on another dimension. In Study 1, White lower-class dyad members behaved less expressively than their upper-class interaction partners, while in African American and Latino dyads, upper- and lower-class individuals were similarly expressive. In Study 2, lower-class White participants reported feeling generally less comfortable about interacting with an upper-class partner but not when they shared numerical minority status of being residents of the same state traveling away from home. Finally, Study 3 revealed that lower-class individuals intentionally act differently with upper-class individuals but not with lower-class ones. Upper-class individuals act the same with lower- and upper-class partners alike.

Whether it is Eliza Doolittle or Jay Gatsby, Fanny Price or Little Orphan Annie, literature and popular culture are replete with characters from poor backgrounds who find themselves immersed in a world of wealth and privilege. Their stories are dramatically compelling because social interactions between upper- and lower-class individuals can be fraught with difficulty. Social class – a variable often overlooked by social psychologists – is an important dimension of social life. It confers status in interactions (Brown, 1965) and is often a component of how people define their identities (Frable, 1993, 1997; Ostrove & Cole, 2003; Wentworth & Peterson, 2001). The current research examines interactions between people from lower- and upper-class backgrounds, focusing on their expressive behavior. It also considers how people's behavior in these mixed-class interactions changes in contexts where their class identities are less salient due to shared numerical minority status on another dimension.

### Status, Stigma, and Expressive Behavior

It is a well established finding that people in low status roles perceive their high status interaction partners more accurately and in more detail than do people in high status roles interacting with a low status partner (e.g., Fiske, 1993; Garcia, Darley, & Robinson, 2001; Keltner & Robinson, 1996, 1997; LaFrance & Henley, 1994; Neuberg & Fiske, 1987; Robinson & Keltner, 1996). Some explanations have considered perceivers' motivation to attend to someone with a different level of social power (e.g., LaFrance & Henley, 1994), but there is stronger evidence that this finding is explained by differences in expressive behavior. Specifically, people in low status roles interacting with people in higher status roles behave in ways that are more difficult for their partners to "read." In other words, their behavior conveys less clear information about themselves and their affective state (Hall, Rosip, Smith LeBeau, Horgan, & Carter, 2006; Snodgrass, Hecht, & Ploutz-Snyder, 1998).

This conclusion is based on a procedure developed by Snodgrass et al. (1998) that has external judges rate video-clips of dyadic interactions in order to discern

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the extent to which perceptivity (i.e., the ability to read one's partner's cues) and expressivity (i.e., giving off cues that one's partner can read) account for the degree of accuracy among dyad members. The rationale is that if external judges are able to form an accurate impression of someone whose interaction partner could not perceive accurately, then the partner must have failed to pick up the information that was evident in the person's behavior. However, if external judges form similarly inaccurate impressions as the interaction partner, then the person's expressive behavior must not have conveyed clear or accurate information. Using existing clips of mixed status dyads (Snodgrass, 1992), Snodgrass et al. (1998) found low status dyad members were perceived less accurately both by their high status partners and external judges. This suggests that the low-status dyad members were judged less accurately because their expressive behavior was less informative, rather than because their high status partners were somehow less perceptive, a finding that has been replicated in other research using a similar methodology (Hall et al., 2006).

It remains unclear why people in low status roles inhibit their expressive behavior when interacting with someone with higher status. Disparities in power and the behavioral expectations associated with status roles may certainly influence expressive behavior. For example, Hecht and LaFrance (1998) found people in a low-power role smile at high-power interaction partners regardless of their own affective states. However, in the context of status that derives from wealth and social class, we contend that the prism of stigma may help to explain how status influences interpersonal behavior (Entwisle & Astone, 1994; Goffman, 1963; Gottfried, 1985). People readily form negative stereotypes on the basis of income and social class (Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001; Evans, 1993; Johannesen-Schmidt & Eagly, 2002; Kirby, 1999) and often view lower-class status as a social stigma (Frable, Platt, & Hoey, 1998; Goffman, 1963; Jones et al., 1984; Lott, 2002). A person aware that his or her lower-class background will likely be viewed negatively by others, may attempt to "pass" or conceal their class standing from their interaction partners (e.g., Goffman, 1963; Granfield, 1991; Stewart & Ostrove, 1993).

Indeed, people who possess a stigmatized attribute that is not immediately conspicuous often devote substantial effort to control expressions that might reveal their condition to others (Frable, Blackstone, & Scherbaum, 1990; Smart & Wegner, 1999; Quinn, 2006). Stigmatized individuals may curtail self-disclosure or even misrepresent themselves to keep an invisible stigma hidden (e.g., DePaulo, Blank, Swains, & Hairfield, 1992; Jones et al., 1984). For example, the hearing-impaired sometimes feign to understand conversation (Higgins, 1980). Thus, we predict that lower-class

individuals in cross-class interactions may manage their expressive behavior, making it more difficult for their upper-class partners to perceive them. Because this prediction relies on the assumption that lower-class persons are conscious of their class stigma (Pinel, 1999), we next consider moderators that might influence the degree to which social class is salient.

### When is Lower-Class Standing Less Salient?

According to *distinctiveness theory* (McGuire & Padawer-Singer, 1976), "we notice any aspect (or dimension) of ourselves to the extent that our characteristic on that dimension is peculiar in our social milieu" (p. 744). Such attributes may include a temporary, ad hoc group, such as being the only person of one's gender in an experimental group (Cota & Dion, 1986).

Additionally, students with proportionately more opposite sex family members are more likely to describe themselves in terms of gender (McGuire, McGuire, & Winton, 1979), and nontraditional (i.e., older) college students are more likely than traditional ones to describe themselves in terms of age (Kite, 1992).

Race and ethnicity are also more salient and more important components of identity for statistical minority groups than majority ones (Shelton & Sellers, 2000). For example, White students' (in White schools) spontaneous self-descriptions mentioned their race or ethnicity less frequently than African American or Latino students (McGuire, McGuire, Child, & Fujioka, 1978). Similarly, Turkish children living in the Netherlands described themselves in terms of ethnicity to a greater degree than did native Dutch children (Kinket & Verkuyten, 1997; Verkuyten, 1990). Pollak and Niemann (1998) further differentiated between *chronic distinctiveness* and *acute distinctiveness*. Whereas race can be chronically distinctive among ethnic minority groups, residents of Michigan, for example, could experience the acute distinctiveness of state residency when taking road trips across state lines. Indeed, Lord and Saenz (1985) clearly capture how being a statistical minority makes salient the acute distinctiveness of one's social category membership and its implications for memory deficits.

### Hypotheses

Accordingly, we predict that lower-class individuals in cross-class interactions will manage their expression in order to conceal their class stigma from their upper-class counterparts. However, when the dyad members share distinctive minority status, whether chronic or acute, in cross-class interactions, the lower-class individuals will express themselves more naturally. To test these predictions, Study 1 used an interpersonal sensitivity

analysis of dyadic interactions while Studies 2 and 3 used a scenario-based methodology. We used income level (Study 1) and self-descriptions (Studies 2 and 3) to gauge social class (Jackman & Jackman, 1973).

### STUDY 1

Study 1 used self-other agreement measures (see Kruglanski, 1989) on personality traits to capture differences in expressive behavior. Our hypothesis is that people with lower-class backgrounds, because of their lower-class stigma, will tend to be “difficult to read” compared to upper-class interaction partners. To establish a difference in social class standing (Johannesen-Schmidt & Eagly, 2002), we compared people whose parents had a very low income level to people whose parents had a very high income level in cross-class dyadic interactions. We also compared African American and Latino dyads to White dyads to test the prediction that numerical minority status would moderate this effect. Thus, the prediction was that lower-class people would be less legible than upper-class counterparts in cross-class interactions among White dyads but equally expressive among African American and Latino dyads.

#### Participants

The participants were 53 male Stanford undergraduates who ranged in age from 18 to 24. On the basis of self-reported combined parental income, 28 participants were classified as being from low-income households (mean = \$19,151; range \$0–\$35,000) and 25 from high-income households (mean = \$109,640; range \$60,000–\$340,000). In relation to the U.S. household income distribution at that time, the low-income participants’ average fell just below the second quintile’s mean (\$19,224) and the high-income participants’ average fell just above the highest quintile’s mean (\$105,945). Participants were contacted by telephone and tactfully screened for race and income. Those who expressed interest were recruited if they indicated household income either above \$80,000 or below \$30,000.<sup>1</sup> Participants received \$5, \$7, or \$11 depending on the number of interactions completed.

There were 16 African American (8 low, 8 high), 21 Latino (12 low, 9 high), and 16 White (8 low, 8 high) participants. Table 1 shows average household income and parental education by the participants’ race and income level. Average household income did not differ significantly by race, nor was there a significant race by income level interaction.

<sup>1</sup>Some participants later reported income between \$30,000 and \$80,000.

TABLE 1  
Household Income and Parental Education by Race and Income Level

Race	Household Income		Parental Education Level <sup>a</sup>	
	Low	High	Low	High
African American	\$23,998	\$107,125	4.38	5.75
Latino	\$17,883	\$121,000	2.08	5.78
White	\$15,786	\$99,375	5.71	6.75
Overall	\$19,151	\$109,640	3.70	6.08

<sup>a</sup>Parental education was measured on a 7-point scale on which 1 = elementary school, 2 = some high school, 3 = high school graduate, 4 = some college, 5 = college graduate, 6 = some graduate school, and 7 = graduate or professional degree.

#### Design

Participants were assigned to four-person blocks on the basis of race and income level. All block members were the same race and each block produced dyads representing only one of three possible income combinations: two high-income participants (HH), two low-income participants (LL), or one high-income and one low-income participant (HL or mixed). Altogether there were nine types of blocks defined by three levels of race (African American, Latino, and White) crossed by the three income combinations (HH, LL, and HL). The HH and LL blocks produced six dyadic interactions; all block members interacted with each other in a round robin manner. The HL blocks produced four dyadic interactions; each participant of a given income level interacted with both participants from the other income level.

#### Procedure

Four same race participants were scheduled for each session. They were told that the research examined social interaction. Upon arrival, participants individually completed a consent form and rated themselves on a 9-point scale on 19 descriptive adjectives: *warm, angry, enthusiastic, frustrated, optimistic, likable, supportive, dominant, attentive, honest, competent, confident, nervous, aloof, happy, aggressive, concerned, depressed, and careless*. Participants were then introduced to the session members. To coordinate the multiple interactions in each block, block members were assigned a letter based on their order of arrival; that is, the first person to arrive was labeled *A*, the next person to arrive was labeled *B* and so on. In the HH and LL blocks, *A* interacted with *B* and *C* interacted with *D* at Time 1, *A* interacted with *C* and *B* interacted with *D* at Time 2, and *A* interacted with *D* and *B* interacted with *C* at Time 3. The HL blocks were similar except for the constraint that people of the same-income level did not

interact, thus producing two rounds of interaction rather than three.

For each dyadic interaction, two participants were seated facing each other and asked to converse for 3–4 minutes in an unstructured interaction in which they were free to discuss any topic or ask each other any questions. After this, they rated their partners on the same 19 descriptive adjectives on which they previously had rated themselves. After this they performed a joint drawing task for 4 minutes and then rated each other again on the same 19 adjectives. Finally, they completed another drawing task which was followed by a third set of partner ratings. All interactions were videotaped.

### External Judges and Video Clip Ratings

A video clip of the entire introduction phase (approximately 3–5 minutes) was extracted from each of the 26 cross-class (HL) dyadic interactions. The clips were randomly arranged on a master videotape that was shown to external judges. Each participant in a complete cross-class block engaged in two dyadic interactions. However, because three blocks were incomplete, 23 original participants appeared in two dyadic interactions and 6 appeared in a single interaction.

The external judges were 8 male undergraduates from Princeton University who were comparable to the original participants in age, gender, and education. They received \$20 for a 2 hour rating session, which involved viewing excerpts with sound taken at or toward the end of each interaction and rating one dyadic partner from each clip on the same 19 adjectives. Four judges rated participants seated on the left-hand side of the screen and the other four rated the right. Information about the targets' identities or income levels was not revealed.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

*Self-partner agreement*, or the degree to which the participant's perception of his partner was similar to the partner's self-perception, is the correlation between a participant's ratings of his partner on the 19 descriptive adjectives and the partner's self-ratings. A Fisher's  $z$ -transformation was applied to these correlations for statistical analyses but then transformed back to Pearson's  $r$  for reporting aggregate results. Each participant rated his partner three times, first after the unstructured interaction and then after each of the joint tasks. The average levels of self-partner agreement were similar across these three ratings (Time 1  $r = .60$ , Time 2  $r = .56$ , Time 3  $r = .58$ ). Because of the strong consistency, we averaged each participant's three self-partner agreement correlations to obtain a single measure of

TABLE 2  
Self-Partner Agreement by Race and Dyad Type

Dyad Type	Race			Overall
	African American	Latino	White	
High-high	.70	.48	.44	.55
Low-low	.54	.65	.58	.59
Mixed	.63	.65	.43	.59
Overall	.63	.61	.48	.58

the extent to which he perceived his partner similarly to how the partner perceived himself ( $\alpha = .92$ ).

### Overall Differences by Dyad Race and Dyad Type

The average level of self-partner agreement<sup>2</sup> was relatively higher in African American dyads ( $M = .63$ ) and Latino dyads ( $M = .61$ ) than it was in White dyads ( $M = .48$ ), (see Table 2). A contrast comparing the African American and Latino dyads to the White dyads was statistically significant,  $F(1, 33) = 6.70$ ,  $p = .01$ ,  $r = .41$ . The overall dyadic level of self-partner agreement was nearly identical across the HH, LL and HL dyads,  $F(2, 33) = 0.23$ ,  $p = .79$ ,  $\eta^2 = .12$ , and there was a marginally significant interaction of race and dyad type,  $F(4, 33) = 2.21$ ,  $p = .09$ ,  $\eta^2 = .46$ . Although there were no a priori predictions for this interaction, much of the interaction variance was due to the relatively high levels of self-partner agreement in the HH African American dyads and the relatively low levels in the HH Latino dyads.

### Differences Within Cross-Class Dyads

The cross-class dyads are most pertinent to our central hypothesis (see Table 3). As predicted, self-partner agreement in the White dyads was much lower for high-income members judging their low-income partners ( $M = .10$ ) than for low-income members judging their high-income partners ( $M = .67$ ), a significant difference,  $t(5) = 4.03$ ,  $p = .01$ ,  $r = .87$ . However, in both African American and Latino dyads, all differences between the high and low-income dyad members were small and not statistically significant. A contrast testing our

<sup>2</sup>For data with a round robin structure, we cannot assume that dyads within a block will have homogenous variance and correlation. We applied Li's procedure (1995; Li, Hallahan, & Rosenthal, 1997) to decompose a round robin block's error variance into these two distinct components. For these data, the within-block error variance attributable to dyads that do not share a common member was similar to the between-block error variance, so these two sources of variance were pooled (Green & Tukey, 1960) to serve as the error term for hypothesis tests involving the fixed between-block factors race and income. For more information, contact Mark Hallahan (mhallaha@holycross.edu).

TABLE 3  
Mixed Dyads Only: Self-Partner Agreement by Race and Individual Income Level

Rater-Target	Race			Overall
	African American	Latino	White	
High-Low	.67	.62	.10	.51
Low-High	.60	.68	.67	.66

prediction that the income difference would be relatively larger in White dyads than in African American and Latino dyads was significant,  $F(1, 5) = 10.64, p = .02, r = .82$ . Thus, the pattern of these interpersonal sensitivity scores is consistent with the central hypothesis, as levels of self-partner agreement substantially differed by income level in the White cross-class dyads but not in African American and Latino dyads.

### External Judge Results

We first examined the extent to which the external judges' ratings agreed with each other. For each dyadic interaction, four judges rated each dyad member. In general, there was a high degree of consistency among the judges' ratings (average  $r = .41$ , median  $r = .45$ ).

The Fisher  $z$ -transformed correlation between an external judge's rating of a dyad member on the adjectives and the dyad member's self-rating on those same adjectives provided a measure of self-judge agreement. The four self-judge agreement correlations generated for each member of each dyadic interaction were averaged to obtain a single measure of the degree to which the external judges' perception of a dyad member were similar to the dyad member's self-perception. Data analysis followed the two-part approach suggested by Snodgrass et al. (1998): (a) the self-judge agreement correlations were subjected to the same analysis as was done with the self-partner agreement correlations and (b) the combined self-judge and self-partner agreement data were analyzed using the original independent variable plus a variable called perceiver, which indicates whether an agreement correlation was based on ratings made by an interaction partner or external judge.

The pattern of the self-judge agreement is remarkably consistent with levels of self-partner agreement from the original participants (See Table 4). Similar to the original participants' ratings, the judges' ratings corresponded much less with the low-income White dyad members' self-ratings than they did with the high-income White dyad members' self-ratings. However, the judges' ratings of the African American and Latino dyad members corresponded similarly well with both the high-income and low-income dyad members' self-ratings. This pattern in the interaction of target race

TABLE 4  
Mixed Dyads Only: Self-Judge Agreement by Target Race and Income Level

Target Income	Target Race			Overall
	African American	Latino	White	
Low	.49	.46	.09	.37
High	.39	.51	.49	.47

and income level is exactly what the expressivity hypothesis predicts for the self-judge agreement data; a contrast expressing this prediction was significant ( $F(1, 15) = 5.08, p = .04, r = .50$ ). Moreover, this pattern in target race and income level occurred similarly whether agreement was based on external judges' or experimental participants' ratings. This similarity was evidenced by the smaller effect size and lack of statistical significance for the relevant contrast in the three-way interaction of perceiver, target race, and target income level ( $F(1, 15) = 1.35, p = .26, r = .29$ ).

Because the ratings of the judges and those of the actual participants were virtually identical, the differences in self-partner agreement most likely reflect differences attributable to expressive behavior (e.g., Snodgrass et al., 1998). The low-income participants concealed themselves, or at least manipulated their expressions, rendering themselves "difficult to read" in the eyes of their high-income partners and the judges. This finding is also consistent with the notion that individuals with concealable stigmas, like low-income status, may conceal or strategically present themselves in ways that belie their stigma (Frable et al., 1990; Goffman, 1963; Jones et al., 1984). Moreover, these results show that low-income individuals in cross-class interactions are only less expressive when they do not share numerical minority status with their counterparts. When numerical minority status is shared in cross-class interactions, as in the African American and Latino dyads, lower-class individuals begin to express themselves more openly.

### STUDY 2

While Study 1 suggests that lower-class individuals are less legible than their upper-class counterparts in cross-class interactions, these differences only occurred in White dyads and not in the African American or Latino dyads, in which interactants shared numerical minority status. Still, a possible alternative explanation is that these results are not a function of sharing *numerical* minority status per se but rather *racial* minority status in particular. For example, there is evidence that the meaning and relative importance of social class as a dimension for social categorization varies for White

and African American individuals (Weeks & Lupfer, 2004). Such differences may have led White lower-class dyad members to inhibit their expressive behavior more extremely because they viewed their lower-class status as being more stigmatizing or more important to conceal. Thus, Study 2 focuses on social categories unrelated to race in order to test the prediction that lower-class Whites will become more expressive with their upper-class counterparts in cross-class interactions in a context where they share numerical minority status with upper-class counterparts. In addition, instead of asking for people's income as in Study 1, Study 2 simply asked individuals to identify their upbringing as having been "blue" or "white collar" to establish a social class differential.

### Participants

A total of 35 undergraduates (21 female and 14 male) were recruited from a technical college in the state of Michigan because it was a venue with students from predominantly blue collar families. All participants were White and confirmed that they were from blue collar families.

### Procedure

We manipulated numerical minority status salience by having participants imagine running into an upper-class person in either the state of Michigan (*control condition*) or Wyoming (*minority status condition*). In a between-subjects design, participants read, "Imagine you were on a road-trip, and you stopped at a fast-food place to eat somewhere in Michigan [Wyoming]. Imagine further that a well-dressed stranger, who got out of a Mercedes with Michigan plates, said 'hi' to you, as this individual got in line behind you." At this point, we measured willingness to express one's usual self through a dependent variable on comfort: "To what extent would you feel comfortable having a conversation with this individual?" (1 = *not comfortable*, 7 = *very comfortable*). Participants also indicated their gender and social class, "Generally speaking, how would you describe your childhood upbringing?" (Blue Collar Family or White Collar Family).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As predicted, White Michigan residents from blue collar backgrounds reported to feel significantly more comfortable about conversing with an upper-class stranger in Wyoming, a context where they share minority status ( $M = 5.53$ ,  $SD = 1.33$ ), than in Michigan ( $M = 4.33$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ),  $F(1, 33) = 8.22$ ,

$p = .007$ ,  $r = .45$ ). There was no significant gender by condition interaction ( $p = .36$ ). As in Study 1, where lower-class participants were only expressive when sharing ethnic minority status with upper-class counterparts, indicates that lower-class Whites also feel more comfortable expressing themselves when they share statistical minority status with an upper-class interaction partner. However, one potential confound might exist here because it is unclear how traveling in an unfamiliar location may affect people's general sense of comfort in other ways. Although one could argue the anonymity of being out-of-state may make people more comfortable expressing themselves (e.g., Zimbardo, 1970), there also may be some degree of conspicuousness and discomfort as an outsider whose out-of-state license plates would make one "pop out" of the visual field (Treisman & Gelade, 1980) of a fast-food parking lot.

## STUDY 3

Studies 1 and 2 together suggest that lower-class individuals can become less legible and feel less comfortable expressing themselves in cross-class interactions when they do not share numerical minority status with their upper-class counterparts. However, we have yet to demonstrate that the extent to which lower-class individuals intentionally express themselves differently in their interactions. Study 3 thus tested the prediction that lower-class individuals intentionally behave differently when interacting with upper-class counterparts relative to lower-class ones. On the other hand, we predicted that upper-class individuals, who are unmarked by class stigma, do not act any differently with lower-class individuals as they do with upper-class ones.

### Participants

A total of 50 (28 female and 22 male) White undergraduates from a university in Michigan completed a short questionnaire at the campus library.

### Procedure

In a within-subjects design, participants read: "Imagine that you were interacting with a stranger who was around your age, and you were just making some small talk . . ." At this point, all participants responded to two questions presented in a random order: "If this stranger was from a (working class/wealthy) family, to what extent would you act differently than your usual self? (1 = *No Change*, 7 = *Change*). As in Study 2, participants reported their social class (33 blue collar, 17 white collar).

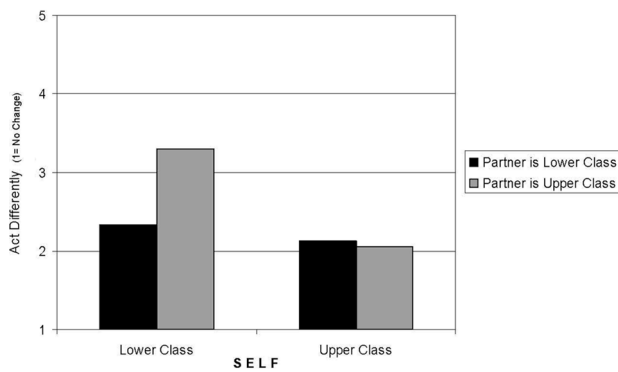


FIGURE 1 Acting differently than one's usual self by social class standing of self and conversation partner.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As predicted, participants from blue collar families reported that they would change their behavior more with a wealthy stranger ( $M = 3.30$ ,  $SD = 1.88$ ) than a working class one ( $M = 2.33$ ,  $SD = 1.43$ ), while those from white collar families would behave similarly with wealthy ( $M = 2.06$ ,  $SD = 1.30$ ) and working class ( $M = 2.12$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ ) interaction partners. In a repeated measures ANOVA, the interaction of participants' class background (Blue/White Collar Family) and the class background of their imagined interaction partner (working class/wealthy) was significant,  $F(1, 48) = 7.31$ ,  $p = .009$ ,  $r = .36$ . There were no significant interactions involving gender. Follow up tests indicated significant differences in reported behavior associated with the interaction partner's social class for blue collar participants,  $t(32) = 4.04$ ,  $p = .0003$ ,  $r = .58$ , but not for white collar participants,  $t(16) = .24$ ,  $p = .81$ ,  $r = .06$ . See Figure 1. Lower-class individuals, aware of their class stigma, thus reported that they would intentionally change their behavior with upper-class interaction partners. This within-subjects design is particularly compelling because it suggests that lower-class individuals were deliberate in their expressing themselves differently in cross-class interactions. Upper-class individuals, on the other hand, reported that they would act the same regardless of whether their counterpart is lower- or upper-class.

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

Lower-class individuals express themselves differently in cross-class interactions, except when they share numerical minority status with upper-class counterparts in cross-class interactions. Study 1 found support for this hypothesis in live social interactions. According to the expressivity analysis (Snodgrass et al., 1998), lower-class

participants were less legible in cross-class interactions among White dyads but not among African American or Latino dyads, where class stigma was trumped by the shared minority status. Study 2 similarly found support for the moderating effect of shared minority status, as lower-class individuals from the state of Michigan indicated they would feel more comfortable interacting with an upper-class Michigander in the state of Wyoming than in the state of Michigan. Finally, Study 3 showed that lower-class individuals intentionally make changes to their normal behavior when interacting with upper-class counterparts than with lower-class ones. On the other hand, upper-class individuals, who lack such stigma, tend to behave the same way with lower- and upper-class individuals alike. Although each individual study might be open to alternative explanations, the three studies together provide fairly compelling support for our hypotheses.

## Implications for Social Capital

The present analysis also sheds light on the formation of social capital (e.g., Putnam, 2000), which refers to the material and inherent value of social networks. Our analysis underscores the unique difficulty that lower-class individuals face in building social capital. Lower-class individuals must work especially hard to make social connections with upper-class counterparts and their networks, as they pay an extra tax associated with expressing themselves differently – a slightly uncomfortable and perhaps even cognitively depleting interaction (Lord & Saenz, 1985).

## Limitations and Future Directions

Stigmatized individuals have a keen awareness of the social environment (Frable et al., 1990) and appear especially sensitive to the subtle cues of similar stigmatized others. While the present analysis focuses on expressive behavior (e.g., Snodgrass et al., 1998), an ancillary yet interesting question for future research pertains to the specific nonverbal or “telltale” cues (e.g., Ambady, Hallahan, & Conner, 1999). Our findings suggest that people from lower-class backgrounds express themselves differently in cross-class versus same-class interactions but how is it that lower-class individuals can detect that they are interacting with an upper-class counterpart? A series of experiments could address the process by which social class cues are subtly given.

It would also be interesting to examine cross-class interactions at the intergroup level. Perhaps groups of lower-class individuals would also express themselves differently with a group of upper-class individuals. However, when a shared social category is made salient (e.g., Hogg & Abrams, 1993; Hogg & Sunderland, 1991;

Oakes, 1987; Tajfel, 1978), perhaps lower-class individuals would then begin to express themselves more naturally. For example, class differences would arguably attenuate among students at a college football game or Americans on the 4th of July.

## Conclusion

Whereas upper-class individuals behave the same way with upper- and lower-class individuals alike, lower-class individuals in cross-class interactions express themselves differently with upper-class counterparts, except when they share numerical minority status with them. While lower-class individuals are quite intentional in their hiding behind expression, the remaining and arguably more sobering question is whether such masquerades are ultimately advantageous.

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