

## Abstract

Employees from working-class backgrounds experience worse work outcomes than their middle- and upper-class counterparts. We propose that one key source of these disparities is the *cultural mismatch* between the independent norms promoted by white-collar workplaces and the interdependent norms of people from working-class backgrounds. Though modern workplaces increasingly offer employees the opportunity to enact interdependent behavior (e.g., collaboration), they do not often affirm such behavior as part of being a “good” employee. We theorize that employees from working-class backgrounds will only experience a cultural match and its benefits (e.g., sense of fit) when interdependent behaviors are *both* enacted and affirmed. In contrast, when interdependent behaviors are enacted but not affirmed, employees from working-class backgrounds will experience a cultural mismatch. Furthermore, we anticipate that this pattern will be unique to employees from working-class backgrounds. Two survey studies and two experiments with college-educated employees (Total  $N = 2584$ ) support our theorizing and suggest that affirming enacted interdependent behavior may reduce workplace social class disparities.

*Keywords:* social class background; cultural norms; interdependent behavior; inequality

From 'Team' Talk to Teamwork: Interdependent Behavior Only Benefits Employees from  
Working-Class Backgrounds When it is Both Enacted and Affirmed

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From ‘Team’ Talk to Teamwork: Interdependent Behavior Only Benefits Employees from Working-Class Backgrounds When it is Both Enacted and Affirmed

In white-collar jobs, college-educated employees from working-class backgrounds<sup>1</sup> face unique obstacles that often lead them to experience worse outcomes at work (e.g., Barling & Weatherhead, 2016; Bartik & Hershbein, 2018; Crawford et al., 2016; Friedman & Laurison, 2020; Laurison & Friedman, 2016; Sharps & Anderson, 2021; Torche, 2011). For example, employees from working-class backgrounds are less likely to attain management positions (Barling & Weatherhead, 2016; Ingram & Oh, 2021) and earn 17% less, on average, than their counterparts from middle- and upper-class backgrounds (Bartik & Hershbein, 2018; Laurison & Friedman, 2016). These class-based disparities in workplace outcomes (e.g., earnings, career advancement) arise not only from structural factors including overt discrimination and unequal access to enrichment opportunities (e.g., Corak, 2013; Kallschmidt & Eaton, 2019; Rivera, 2016; Rivera & Tilcsik, 2016), but also from hidden cultural obstacles (Côté, 2011; Martin & Côté, 2019). Specifically, we propose that one key source of these disparities is the *cultural mismatch* between the independent norms promoted by white-collar workplaces and the interdependent cultural norms common among people from working-class backgrounds (Stephens, Fryberg et al., 2012; Stephens, Townsend et al., 2012). By *cultural norms*, we mean understandings of how to think, feel, and act as a person in the world (Markus & Kitayama, 2010; Cross & Madson, 1997; Phillips, Martin et al., 2020; Plaut & Markus, 2005; Stephens et al., 2014; Stephens et al., 2019). We further propose that this cultural mismatch is

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout, to incorporate diverse literatures on social class, we use the term *working-class backgrounds* to represent individuals who were raised in contexts on the lower half of the social class divide: contexts where most people have less than a 4-year college degree and have blue-collar jobs and lower incomes. We contrast this with the term *middle-class backgrounds*, which represents individuals who were raised in contexts on the top half of the social class divide: where most people have at least a 4-year college degree and have white-collar jobs and higher incomes.

unlikely to impact employees from middle-class backgrounds, who are more likely to be guided by independent cultural norms (Ostrove & Long, 2007; Phillips, Stephens et al., 2020).

Previous research documents the influence of this cultural mismatch in higher education contexts (Stephens, Fryberg et al., 2012; Stephens, Townsend et al., 2012). Specifically, in institutions of higher education, independent behavior tends to be both *enacted* and *affirmed*, which is more aligned with the norms of middle- and upper-class contexts but less aligned with the interdependent norms common in working-class contexts, producing a cultural mismatch. By *enacted*, we mean the extent to which people regularly engage in interdependent behavior like teamwork or collaboration (Anteby et al., 2016; Bourne & Jenkins, 2013; Hamedani & Markus, 2019; Pamphile & Ruttan, 2022; Rousseau et al., 2006; Saavedra et al., 1993). By *affirmed*, we mean whether institutional ideals include engaging in interdependent behavior as part of being a “good” or “successful” person (Bourne et al., 2019; Chan & Anteby, 2016; Hamedani & Markus, 2019; Pamphile & Ruttan, 2022). This prior work has focused on how *either* enacting or affirming independent (vs. interdependent) behavior can create a cultural mismatch, but has investigated each separately (Dittmann et al., 2020; Stephens et al., 2012). A cultural mismatch of either type has been shown to produce a range of negative consequences for people from working-class backgrounds—i.e., enhanced stress, reduced sense of fit<sup>2</sup>, and worse performance (Phillips et al., 2020; Stephens, Fryberg et al., 2012; Stephens, Townsend et al., 2012).

The current research goes beyond institutions of higher education to examine whether and how cultural mismatch might occur in white-collar workplaces. In institutions of higher education, college students have a high degree of control over their time and highly

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<sup>2</sup>Following social and cultural psychological and organizational behavior theories of person-environment fit, we use the term sense of fit to refer to subjective experiences that arise from having self-concept, goal, and social fit with one’s workplace (Edwards et al., 2006; Edwards, 2008; Schmader & Sedikides, 2018).

individualized experiences, so shifting either enacted behavior or affirmed behavior to reflect interdependence may be sufficient to create a cultural match (Azmitia et al., 2013; Babcock & Marks, 2011). In contrast, in white-collar workplaces, employees are subject to many more forms of organizational control, suggesting that *enacting* interdependent behavior alone may not be sufficient to create a cultural match (Adler et al., 2008; Amis et al., 2020; Singh & Jayanti, 2013; Sitkin et al., 2020). Accordingly, we examine the consequences of a cultural mismatch looking simultaneously at whether interdependent behavior is both enacted and affirmed. This is a practically-relevant and timely question because modern white-collar jobs increasingly offer employees opportunities to enact interdependent behavior (e.g., teamwork and collaboration; Cross et al., 2016). However, organizations frequently fail to affirm this behavior as part of what it means to be a “good” or “successful” employee (Bourne et al., 2019; Cha & Edmondson, 2006; Howell et al., 2012; Lencioni, 2002; Pamphile & Ruttan, 2022; Simons, 2002).

This disconnect points to an important theoretical question: Is affording employees the opportunity to *enact* interdependent behavior enough to create a cultural match for employees from working-class backgrounds? We argue that it is not. Instead, we propose that enacting interdependent behavior alone will not be sufficient to create a cultural match for employees from working-class backgrounds – it must also be affirmed as part of what it means to be a “good” employee. In contrast, we theorize that when interdependent behavior is enacted but *not* affirmed, employees from working-class backgrounds will experience a cultural mismatch. Finally, we propose that employees from middle-class backgrounds will be relatively unaffected regardless of whether interdependent behavior is enacted or affirmed because they are less likely to be guided by interdependent norms than their working-class counterparts.

In the present research, we make key contributions to both the organizational behavior and cultural mismatch literature by delineating when employees from working-class backgrounds will experience a cultural match at work: when interdependent behavior is both enacted and affirmed. In understanding the impact of a cultural mismatch in white-collar workplaces, we distinguish between behaviors that are *enacted* at work and those that are *affirmed* as being part of a “good” employee. Akin to research on “office housework,” it is possible for employees to enact certain behaviors frequently at work, but nevertheless feel as though these behaviors are not affirmed as important in the broader organizational context (Chan & Anteby, 2016; Dover et al., 2020; Eagly & Steffen, 1984; Fletcher, 2001; Jost & Kay, 2005; Rudman & Glick, 2001; Williams & Dempsey, 2014). Our work reveals that it is not enough to separately examine whether interdependent behavior is enacted *or* affirmed by organizations, we must look at them in tandem to delineate when employees from underrepresented working-class backgrounds will be most likely to experience the benefits of a cultural match (i.e., greater sense of fit) at work. We also document that enacted and affirmed interdependent behavior is more influential for the sense of fit of employees from working-class backgrounds than employees from middle-class backgrounds, highlighting that discrepancies between enacted and affirmed interdependent behavior may contribute to social class disparities at work.

In the sections that follow, we outline the logic underlying our central prediction: that employees from working-class backgrounds will only experience the benefits of a cultural match (i.e., greater sense of fit) at organizations where interdependent behavior is both enacted and affirmed. First, to illuminate why cultural mismatch theory is better equipped to examine workplace social class disparities than theories of person-organization fit, we differentiate between these theories. Second, to explain why we expect employees’ social class backgrounds

to shape norms of interdependence, we provide an overview of research documenting how social class contexts shape people's norms and tend to persist even when people enter different social class contexts (i.e., experience upward mobility by completing college). Third, to explain when we theorize that the experience of cultural (mis)match will occur at work, we integrate psychological research on cultural mismatch theory with management research documenting that employees' organizational experiences are affected by both the types of behaviors they enact at work and by whether the organization affirms these behaviors as important. Finally, we explain why we theorize that experiencing greater sense of fit will serve as a process linking enacted and affirmed interdependent behavior to greater retention intentions.

### **From Person-Organization Fit to Cultural Mismatch Theory**

Throughout this paper, for two reasons, we rely on the theoretical framework of cultural mismatch theory, rather than person-organization fit. First, we seek to build on prior work on social class in educational institutions and reveal the conditions under which mismatch extends to white-collar workplaces. Second, while both theories of person-organization fit and cultural mismatch theory posit that the experience of alignment is important for peoples' experiences in institutions, they lead to differing predictions and results. Person-organization fit focuses exclusively on perceived alignment between personal and organizational values, and does not consider the *source* of these values, and how that source might contribute to chronic differences in the likelihood of experiencing alignment (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; O'Reilly et al., 1991). In contrast, cultural mismatch theory reveals that neither personal nor organizational values are idiosyncratic, and are instead shaped by important social group memberships – in particular, social class background. Employees' personal cultural norms are shaped by the social class contexts in which they grow up: people from working-class contexts are more likely to develop

interdependent norms than their middle- and upper-class counterparts. Similarly, the cultural norms reflected in mainstream U.S. institutions are not neutral, and instead are disproportionately likely to reflect those of the dominant group in the setting – in this case, the norms of independence common in middle- and upper-class contexts.

Consider how these key differences in the theories would lead to distinct predictions. A person-organization fit approach presumes that *all* employees – regardless of social class background – will be similarly affected by perceived alignment between personal and organizational values (Edwards et al., 2006; Edwards & Cable, 2009; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; O'Reilly et al., 1991). In contrast, a cultural mismatch approach would predict that mismatch will be particularly influential for employees from working-class backgrounds, because they are more likely to chronically contend with the experience that their cultural norms are not included in mainstream institutions (Stephens et al., 2017; Stephens et al., 2019). Mismatch will be less influential for employees from middle-class backgrounds, because they are more likely to chronically experience that their norms are included in these institutions (Heine et al., 2002; Kitayama, 2002; Miller, 2002; Peng et al., 1997).

Where possible, we test person-organization fit in supplemental analyses to compare between the two theories. However, we find cultural mismatch theory better explains our data (see supplemental material). Taken together, a cultural mismatch approach – rather than a person-organization fit approach – is better equipped to study social class disparities in white-collar workplaces.

### **Employees' Social Class Backgrounds Shape Their Cultural Models of Self**

The first step to adopting a cultural mismatch approach to examining workplace social class disparities is to understand how participating in different social class contexts over time

leads people to develop divergent cultural norms (Markus & Kitayama, 2010; Cross & Madson, 1997; Phillips, Martin et al., 2020; Plaut & Markus, 2005; Stephens et al., 2014; Stephens et al., 2019). Specifically, we anticipate that employees' social class backgrounds, the social class contexts in which they grew up will continue to contribute to the extent to which they are guided by interdependent norms later in life.

Middle-class contexts in the U.S. tend to afford the development of relatively more *independent* norms compared to working-class contexts in the U.S. They tend to foster independent norms because they provide greater financial resources, fewer environmental constraints, higher power and status, and offer ample opportunities for choice, influence, and control (Day & Newburger, 2002; Kohn, 1969; Pattillo-McCoy, 1999; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1991). To be effective in middle-class contexts, people must express themselves, take charge of the situation, stand out from others, and influence others and the social context (Lareau, 2003; Miller et al., 2005; Stephens et al., 2007). These independent norms continue to be reinforced as people navigate through middle-class institutions (e.g., throughout college and in professional workplaces; Cheryan & Markus, 2020; Phillips, Stephens et al., 2020; Stephens et al., 2014).

In contrast, working-class contexts in the U.S. tend to afford the development of relatively more *interdependent* norms compared to middle-class contexts in the U.S. They tend to foster interdependent norms because they provide fewer financial resources, greater environmental constraints, lower power and status, and offer limited opportunities for choice, influence, and control (Chen & Matthews, 2001; Lachman & Weaver, 1998; Reay et al., 2001). Given these material and social conditions, to be effective in working-class contexts, people must be responsive to others, defer to authority figures, be part of a group, and rely on and work

together with others to (Fiske & Markus, 2012; Kusserow, 1999; Lamont, 2000; Piff et al., 2010).

Early work on cultural mismatch in higher education shows that, at the beginning of college, students from different social class backgrounds differentially endorse independent vs. interdependent norms (Stephens, Fryberg et al., 2012; Stephens, Townsend et al., 2012). Indeed, during the college transition, students from working-class (vs. middle-class) backgrounds endorse more interdependent norms (e.g., attending college to give back to my community). In contrast, students from middle-class (vs. working-class) backgrounds endorse more independent norms (e.g., attending college to develop my personal interests). Although early cultural mismatch research documents that social class background shapes both independent and interdependent norms early on in college, research conducted more recently with students at the end of college has only obtained social class differences in *interdependent* norms (Phillips, Stephens et al., 2020). Phillips et al. (2020) theorized that they only observed differences in interdependence—not independence—because societal cultural norms may have shifted over time, leading even people from working-class backgrounds to endorse more independent cultural norms than they would have in previous generations when earlier cultural mismatch research was conducted (Eagan et al., 2017; Tibbetts et al., 2016; Tibbetts et al., 2018). Importantly, though, this prior work also found that differences in *interdependent* norms are sufficient to drive social class differences in students' sense of fit at the end of college, regardless of students' endorsement of independent norms.

Building on this prior cultural mismatch research (Phillips, Stephens et al., 2020), we expect that this pattern of endorsement observed at the end of college—i.e., social class differences only in interdependent norms—will persist as college-educated employees transition

to the workplace. In contrast, given the lack of differences in independent norms observed at the end of college (Phillips, Stephens et al., 2020), we anticipate comparable endorsement of independent norms among employees from working-class vs. higher class backgrounds.

Accordingly, we propose the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 1: Employees from working-class backgrounds will endorse more interdependent norms (e.g., focused on helping and giving back to others at work) than employees from middle-class backgrounds.*

### **Cultural Mismatch at Work: Why Enacting Interdependent Behavior is Not Enough**

Given that we predict social class differences in interdependent but *not* independent norms, we focus on a type of interdependent behavior that has been previously shown to help create a cultural match for people from working-class contexts – working together (Dittmann et al., 2020). Here, we focus on two important but distinguishable aspects of working together: whether it is *enacted* and whether it is *affirmed* (Chatman, 1991; Cheryan & Markus, 2020; Lencioni, 2002; O’Reilly et al., 1991; Pamphile & Ruttan, 2022; Schmader & Sedikides, 2018).

Although teamwork and collaboration are on the rise in modern white-collar jobs (Hopp et al., 2009), many organizations continue to affirm and prioritize individual achievement, thereby signaling to their employees that interdependent behavior is devalued (Bourne et al., 2019; Cha & Edmondson, 2006; Howell et al., 2012; Lencioni, 2002; Pamphile & Ruttan, 2022; Simons, 2002). Indeed, only 23% of U.S. employees believe that their day-to-day work reflects their organization’s values (Dvorak & Nelson, 2016). If employees’ enacted interdependent behavior at the organization is not affirmed, this signals that though interdependent work might be part of an employee’s daily work experiences, it is not an important part of being a “good” employee at the organization. In contrast, when employees’ interdependent behavior is affirmed

by the organization's broader norms (e.g., mission statements emphasizing working together), it signals that working together with others is an important part of being a "good" employee at the organization.

### **Enacted and Affirmed Interdependent Behavior Matters More for Employees from Working-Class (vs. Middle-Class) Backgrounds**

Integrating previous research on enacted and affirmed interdependent behavior (Bourne & Jenkins, 2013; Bourne et al., 2019; Cha & Edmondson, 2006; Lencioni, 2002; Pamphile & Ruttan, 2022; Rousseau et al., 2006) with the importance of cultural match for people from underrepresented working-class backgrounds (Cheryan & Markus, 2020; Schmader & Sedikides, 2018), we theorize that only organizations where interdependent behavior is both enacted *and* affirmed will lead employees from working-class backgrounds to experience the benefits of a cultural match (i.e., greater sense of fit). Experiencing a greater sense of fit, in turn, will lead to more positive downstream consequences in terms of retention intentions. If employees from working-class backgrounds enact interdependent behavior but it is not affirmed by the organization, we theorize that this will instead reflect a cultural mismatch and employees will experience a lower sense of fit (Edwards & Cable, 2009; Cross et al., 2016; Dover et al., 2020; Lencioni, 2002; Marques, 2010; Pamphile & Ruttan, 2022).

In contrast, the experience of cultural (mis)match is far less consequential for people from middle-class backgrounds. Prior research in higher education has documented that students from middle-class backgrounds have similarly positive experiences and performance regardless of whether they are exposed to enacted and affirmed interdependent or independent behavior (Dittmann et al., 2020; Stephens, Fryberg et al., 2012; Stephens, Townsend et al., 2012). Building on this work, we theorize that (mis)match will also matter less for employees from

middle-class backgrounds: whether they enact interdependent behavior and whether that interdependent behavior is affirmed will matter less for their sense of fit. We suggest that it will matter less because employees from middle-class backgrounds are often well-represented in white-collar workplaces (Sharps & Anderson, 2021) and are, therefore, often likely to assume they are the “default” social group identity in white-collar workplaces. As a result of this default status, they may assume that their group’s norms are and will be included (e.g., Cheryan & Markus, 2020; Johnson et al., 2011; Ostrove & Long, 2007; Phillips, Stephens et al., 2020; Redford & Hoyer, 2017; Rivera, 2016; Schmader & Sedikides, 2018). Thus, even if they encounter enacted and/or affirmed interdependent behavior, they will be unlikely to interpret this as threatening or as a sign that they are not included in the organization.

To index the experience of cultural match, we examine one of the primary benefits arising from experiencing a match – the degree to which employees experience a *sense of fit*.<sup>3</sup> As in previous research, we use the term *sense of fit* to refer to the extent to which people feel self-concept, goal, and social fit with their environment (Schmader & Sedikides, 2018; see also Phillips, Stephens et al., 2020; Stephens et al., 2015; Stephens, Fryberg et al., 2012). Though sharing a similar term, this approach differs from person-organization fit approaches, which typically index “fit” by asking people to report how aligned they perceive their values to be with those of their organization (Kristof-Brown & Billsberry, 2013).

Here, we examine sense of fit in terms of self-concept fit (i.e., ease and comfort), goal fit (i.e., belief that one can perform well), and social fit (i.e., feeling of belonging and acceptance) because this construct was specifically developed to address how people’s important social group

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<sup>3</sup>While we focus on sense of fit in the current research, we do anticipate that our predicted effects would extend to other related constructs that index positive work experiences, e.g., job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and even job performance.

identities shape their chronic experiences in institutions (Schmader & Sedikides, 2018). Sense of fit, rather than the perceived alignment between personal and organizational values, is better equipped to capture social class disparities in workplace experiences (Hecht et al., 2021; Phillips et al., 2020; Reay et al., 2010; Stephens et al., 2015; Stephens, Fryberg, et al., 2012; Stephens, Townsend, et al., 2012; Tibbetts et al., 2018). Accordingly, we theorize that feeling a strong sense of fit with one's organization will arise from experiencing a cultural match. Stated formally:

*Hypothesis 2: When people engage in interdependent behavior at work, whether that interdependent behavior is also affirmed as part of being a “good” or “successful” employee will differentially shape whether employees from different social class backgrounds experience the benefits of a cultural match (i.e., sense of fit). More specifically:*

*Hypothesis 2a: Only organizations where interdependent behaviors are both enacted and affirmed will lead employees from working-class backgrounds to feel a high sense of fit.*

*Hypothesis 2b: Whether interdependent behavior is enacted or affirmed will be less influential for the sense of fit of employees from middle-class backgrounds.*

### **The Mediating Role of Sense of Fit on Retention Intentions**

We further suggest that employees' sense of fit will serve as a process through which enacted and affirmed interdependent behavior leads to a better downstream workplace outcome: retention intentions. Indeed, prior research has shown that fit serves as a mechanism linking institutional cultural norms to people's outcomes in those institutions (Cable & DeRue, 2002; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Schneider, 1987; Stephens, Fryberg et al., 2012; Stephens, Townsend

et al., 2012). For example, cultural mismatch work has shown that students' sense of fit in college serves as a mechanism linking social class background to their performance in college (i.e., cumulative GPA; e.g., Stephens, Fryberg et al., 2012). Similarly, person-organization fit work reveals that perceived alignment between personal and organizational values leads to greater actual and intended retention with the organization (e.g., Kristof-Brown et al., 2005).

While prior work on cultural mismatch in higher education has focused on the impact of (mis)match for performance, here we focus on retention intentions, given its relevance to the workplace context. Retention is critical for both organizations and employees from working-class backgrounds. For organizations, retention is highly consequential because losing valued employees due to turnover leads not only to the loss of intellectual capital, but also to significant costs to hire and train new employees (Allen et al., 2010; Hom et al. 2017; Podsakoff, et al., 2007). For employees from working-class backgrounds, retention is especially important because gaining access to white-collar work is a necessary but not sufficient step on their path to upward mobility. White-collar work settings offer greater access to high wages and more opportunities for career advancement (Autor, 2010; Binder & Bound, 2019), but to realize these benefits, employees must feel at ease and persist in these settings long-term (Schwerdt et al., 2010; Townsend & Truong, 2017). Building on this idea, we expected that feeling a sense of fit would, in turn, lead employees from working-class backgrounds to feel a stronger desire to stay with their organization.

*Hypothesis 3: Sense of fit will serve as a mechanism linking enacted and affirmed interdependent behavior to greater retention intentions in employees from working-class backgrounds.*

### **The Current Research**

In the current research, to test these hypotheses, we conducted two large-scale surveys and two experiments. In these studies, we utilized four diverse samples of U.S. employees: an online sample of employees, a large-scale, nationally-representative survey of college-educated employed U.S. adults, and two separate online samples of college-educated employed U.S. adults from working-class backgrounds.<sup>4</sup>

First, in Study 1, we examined whether employees from working-class backgrounds continue to endorse more interdependent norms, compared to their middle-class counterparts. We also conducted our first test of H2: whether employees from working-class backgrounds will only experience the benefits of a cultural match when interdependent behavior is both enacted and affirmed by measuring both (a) enacted interdependent behavior via the amount of time employees spent *working together* at work and (b) affirmed interdependent behavior via the interdependent language in externally-sourced company missions statements. We examined whether enacted and affirmed interdependent behavior is associated with greater sense of fit and retention intentions for employees from working-class backgrounds, but has less of an effect on employees from middle-class backgrounds.

Then, in Study 2, we tested whether enacted and affirmed interdependent behavior would have a causal effect on the sense of fit and retention intentions of employees from working-class backgrounds. Given that Study 1 (and Supplemental Study 1B) revealed that employees from middle-class backgrounds did not differ in response to enacted and affirmed interdependent behavior, we focus this experiment specifically on our key population of interest: employees from working-class backgrounds. In so doing, we provide causal evidence that only enacted *and*

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<sup>4</sup>We place one of our large-scale surveys in the supplemental material because it replicates the findings of Study 1 using exclusively self-report measures. See Supplemental Study 1B.

affirmed interdependent behavior leads employees from working-class backgrounds to report more anticipated sense of fit and higher anticipated retention.

Finally, in Study 3, we utilized a paradigm that employed simulated workplace interactions between participants from working-class backgrounds and a research assistant trained as a confederate. In this study, we replicate and extend the findings from Study 2 to a sample of participants who first read an ostensible company mission statement that either affirmed interdependent behavior or did not, and then actually engaged in interdependent (vs. independent) behavior firsthand.

### Study 1

Study 1 offered an initial correlational test of Hypotheses 1-3. First, we predicted that employees from working-class backgrounds would report significantly greater interdependent norms than their middle-class counterparts. Second, we predicted that enacted and affirmed interdependent behavior would be associated with the benefits of a cultural match for employees from working-class backgrounds (i.e., their sense of fit and retention intentions at the organization), but would be less influential for employees from middle-class backgrounds. To capture *enacted* interdependent behavior, we asked participants to report how frequently they worked together with others at their organization. To capture *affirmed* interdependent behavior, we asked participants to report the website of their organization, and we then obtained the organizational culture statement of their organization. Finally, participants then reported on their sense of fit and retention intentions at their organization.

### Method

**Participants.** Participants were 986 college-educated white-collar employees who were recruited via SSI to complete an online survey about their experiences working. For analyses

assessing Hypothesis 1 about self-reported motives for work, we utilize the full sample of  $N = 986$  participants. For analyses assessing interdependent organizational values (i.e., Hypotheses 2-3), we rely on the  $n = 257$  individuals who (a) provided their organization's website (75% of the full sample), and (b) for whom research assistants were able to find culture content online (35% of those who provided a website;  $M_{\text{age}} = 42.29$ ,  $SD_{\text{age}} = 12.27$ ; 59% female; 14% underrepresented minorities). Importantly, those who were included vs. not included in the valid website culture content subsample did not differ on a number of key demographic variables including gender ( $\chi^2(2, N = 986) = 0.431, p = .806$ ), race ( $\chi^2(1, N = 986) = .016, p = .915$ ), and age,  $F(1, 984) = 0.10, p = .749$ . A post-hoc sensitivity analysis suggested we were adequately powered to detect a small effect of  $d = 0.02$  at 80% power for analyses utilizing the  $N = 986$  sample. For analyses utilizing the  $n = 257$  sample, we were adequately powered to detect a medium effect of  $d = 0.35$  at 80% power. We assessed participants' social class backgrounds using parental/guardian educational attainment. In the sample, 52% participants were categorized as from a working-class background (i.e., neither of their parents had attained a 4-year bachelor's degree), and 48% were categorized as from a middle-class background (i.e., at least one of their parents had attained a 4-year bachelor's degree or more).

**Measures.** After obtaining informed consent, participants reported the website of their organization, and completed a series of dependent measures assessing how often they worked together with others in the organization, as well as their experiences at the organization. We include a subset of the most relevant measures in the main text (i.e., sense of fit and retention intentions). We include a complete list of all measures in the SOM. See Table 1 for means, standard deviations, and inter-correlations among all key variables in the full sample and Table 2 for means, standard deviations, and inter-correlations among all key variables in the

organizational website coding subsample.

[INSERT TABLES 1 AND 2 ABOUT HERE]

***Independent and interdependent norms.*** We assessed individuals' interdependent and independent norms via a 12-item scale adapted from previous research on norms in college (Stephens, Fryberg, et al., 2012a): Six items captured interdependent norms and six items captured independent norms. The six items designed to measure interdependent norms included items such as: "Bring honor to my family" and "Give back to my community." The six items designed to measure independent norms included items such as "Become an independent thinker" and "Learn more about my interests" (1 = *Strongly disagree*, 7 = *Strongly agree*;  $\alpha_{\text{Interdependent}} = .85$ ;  $\alpha_{\text{Independent}} = .94$ ).

***Enacted and affirmed interdependent behaviors.*** In contrast to person-organization fit approaches, which assume that people have conscious access to their values, the cultural mismatch approach builds on the cultural psychological insight that the contextually afforded norms and values that guide people's behavior are not necessarily consciously accessible (Kitayama, 2002; Markus & Kitayama, 2010; Miller, 2002; Wilson, 2002). Moreover, employees who are not the "default" or majority social group identity in a setting may not be comfortable explicitly acknowledging that they do not value the cultural ideal to the same extent as those who are the default or majority. As such, throughout the studies presented here, we do not rely on employees explicitly identifying their values, and instead directly examine enacted and affirmed interdependent behavior to index when employees from working-class backgrounds will vs. will not experience a cultural match.

***Enacted interdependent behaviors.*** We assessed the number of hours per week that people reported working together with others per week, as well as the number of hours that

people reported working individually. To assess the extent to which people enacted interdependent behavior *more than* independent behavior, we created a difference score (*working together – working individually*), such that positive scores reflect an individual who enacts interdependent behavior *more than* independent behavior, and negative scores reflect an individual who enacts independent behavior *more than* interdependent behavior.

***Affirmed interdependent behaviors.*** A research assistant trained on a standardized web search procedure aggregated the organizational culture webpage content for each participant for whom content was available. We then utilized Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC; Pennebaker et al., 2007) software loaded with independent and interdependent dictionaries validated in previous research (Tibbetts et al., 2016) to analyze the independence and interdependence of the culture website content. We standardized the independence and interdependence dimensions (Pennebaker et al., 1997). To assess the overall interdependence *vs.* independence of the organization's culture, we created a difference score (*interdependence – independence*), such that positive scores reflect an organization that is perceived to affirm interdependence *more than* independence, and negative scores reflect an organization that is perceived to affirm independence *more than* interdependence. We then dichotomized the measure to reflect whether the organization was perceived to affirm interdependence more than independence (i.e., scores  $> 0$ ), or independence more than interdependence (i.e., scores  $\leq 0$ ). This dichotomous measure more clearly maps onto our theorizing regarding *interdependence vs. independence* because it better captures the extent to which an organization affirms interdependence *more so* than independence. While organizations may affirm both independence and interdependence, to send a clear signal that interdependent behavior is important, organizations must affirm interdependent behavior *more so* than independent behavior. The

presence of independence in an institution's culture, even when there are low levels of interdependence present, has been previously shown to create a cultural mismatch in people from working-class backgrounds, undermining their experiences and outcomes (Stephens, Fryberg et al., 2012a). As such, ensuring that we captured the subset of organizations that affirmed interdependence more than independence theoretically maps onto those organizations that would be most likely to create a cultural match with employees from working-class backgrounds.<sup>5</sup>

***Sense of fit at organization.*** We assessed individuals' sense of fit at their organization. Drawing on previous research (Stephens, Fryberg, et al., 2012a), the seven items designed to measure fit included items like: "I feel like I belong as a member of my current organization" and "It feels natural to me to work in this organization" (1 = *Not at all*, 7 = *Very much*). We conducted a factor analysis to determine whether all the items tapped into a single overarching construct of participants' sense of fit at their organization, following current theorizing on fit (Schmader & Sedikides, 2018). The factor analysis revealed that all seven items loaded onto a single factor accounting for 77% of the total variance. All items loaded highly onto this factor (all loadings  $\geq 0.627$ ). Due to both theoretical accounts of the multifaceted nature of fit (Schmader & Sedikides, 2018) and the results of this factor analysis, we averaged and combined these items to form an index of sense of fit at the organization ( $\alpha = .95$ ).

***Retention intentions.*** Participants' *retention intentions* were assessed using a 4-item scale adapted from previous research (e.g., "If you have your own way, will you be working for your current organization three years from now?"; 1 = *Definitely not*, 7 = *Definitely yes*; and "To what extent have you thought seriously about changing organizations since beginning to work at

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<sup>5</sup>Results utilizing a continuous interdependence – independence difference score revealed similar patterns but failed to reach conventional levels of significance, further evidencing that affirming interdependent behavior *more so* than independent behavior is the most critical distinction. See supplemental material.

your current organization?" (reverse-scored); 1 = *Not at all*, 7 = *Extremely*; Chatman, 1989; Chatman & Barsade, 1995;  $\alpha = .82$ ).

**Control variables.** Finally, we conducted analyses both with and without a number of key control variables. We included potentially relevant demographic characteristics that could also affect employees' sense of fit (i.e., age, gender, race/ethnicity, years at organization, total years of work experience, number of organizations employees had worked for in total, supervisor status, and number of promotions).

**Analysis Strategy.** Moderation regression analyses were conducted using the PROCESS Macro in SPSS (Hayes, 2017), both with and without key covariates. Specifically, we tested the effect of enacted interdependent behavior (*time spent working together*), affirmed interdependent behavior (*interdependent vs. independent language*), and individual social class background (*working- vs. middle-class background*) on (a) sense of fit at the organization and (b) retention intentions. In our model, we included all main effects, two-way interactions, and the three-way interaction between enacted and affirmed interdependent behavior, and individual social class background. We then conducted simple slopes analysis to test whether enacted and affirmed interdependent behavior is most likely to be associated with the benefits of a cultural match (i.e., greater sense of fit) for employees from working-class backgrounds. See supplemental material for additional simple effects.

## Results

***Social class background predicts endorsement of interdependent norms.*** There was a significant main effect of social class background on interdependent norms,  $b = 0.21$ ,  $t(982) = 2.24$ ,  $p = .025$ . This suggests that employees from working-class backgrounds reported significantly greater interdependent norms, in support of Hypothesis 1. In contrast, there was no

significant effect of social class background on independent norms,  $b = 0.075$ ,  $t(982) = 0.89$ ,  $p = .372$ . This suggests that employees from working-class (vs. middle-class) backgrounds did not significantly differ in terms of their independent norms.

***Sense of fit at organization.*** We utilized the *lavaan* package in R (Rosseel, 2012) to calculate fit indices for our models. We entered all predictors, their interactions, and our key covariates. Overall, the fit indices indicated that our model fit the data well: comparative fit index (CFI) = [.97]; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = [.054], 90% CI [.000, .185]; SRMR = [0.006].

There was a significant main effect of affirmed interdependent behavior,  $b = -0.82$ ,  $t(241) = -2.26$ ,  $p = .025$ , 95% CI [-1.519, -0.104],  $d = 0.28$ . There was also a positive significant main effect of enacted interdependent behavior,  $b = 0.022$ ,  $t(241) = 2.03$ ,  $p = .044$ , 95% CI [0.001, 0.045],  $d = 0.22$ . There was also a significant main effect of social class background,  $b = -0.695$ ,  $t(241) = -2.06$ ,  $p = .040$ , 95% CI [-1.359, -0.031],  $d = 0.26$ . These main effects were qualified by a significant two-way interaction between affirmed interdependent behavior  $\times$  social class background,  $b = 1.31$ ,  $t(241) = 2.74$ ,  $p = .007$ , 95% CI [0.366, 2.248],  $d = 0.35$ . There was also a significant two-way interaction between enacted interdependent behavior  $\times$  social class background,  $b = -0.28$ ,  $t(241) = -2.00$ ,  $p = .047$ , 95% CI [-0.055, -0.000],  $d = 0.26$ . No other significant two-way interactions emerged. Importantly, though, supporting Hypothesis 2, the predicted three-way interaction between affirmed behavior  $\times$  enacted behavior  $\times$  social class background was also significant,  $b = 0.060$ ,  $t(241) = 3.13$ ,  $p = .002$ , 95% CI [0.022, 0.098],  $d = 0.40$  (see Figure 1).

Using the PROCESS macro in SPSS (Hayes, 2017), we obtained the simple effects of social class for this three-way interaction. For employees at organizations where enacted

interdependent behaviors (+1 *SD*) were *not* affirmed, there was a significant social class gap in sense of fit: employees from working-class backgrounds reported significantly lower fit than employees from middle-class backgrounds,  $b = -0.748$ ,  $t(241) = -2.10$ ,  $p = .037$ , 95% CI [-1.449, -0.047],  $d = 0.27$ . No other significant social class gaps emerged,  $p$ 's  $\geq .060$ .

We next decomposed the interaction to investigate the simple slopes by social class background. Consistent with Hypothesis 2a, among those employees from working-class backgrounds who worked at organizations that *affirmed* interdependent behavior, *enacting* more interdependent behavior was significantly positively associated with sense of fit at the organization,  $b = 0.027$ ,  $t(241) = 3.00$ ,  $p = .003$ , 95% CI [0.009, 0.044],  $d = 0.39$ . Among those employees from working-class backgrounds who worked at organizations that did *not* affirm interdependent behavior, *enacting* more interdependent behavior was not significantly associated with sense of fit at the organization,  $b = -0.005$ ,  $t(241) = -0.61$ ,  $p = .540$ , 95% CI [-0.0221, 0.011],  $d = 0.08$ .

In contrast, and in support of Hypothesis 2b, among those employees from middle-class backgrounds working at organizations that *affirmed* interdependent behavior, *enacting* more interdependent behavior was not associated with sense of fit at the organization,  $b = -0.006$ ,  $t(241) = -0.59$ ,  $p = .556$ , 95% CI [-0.24, 0.013],  $d = 0.08$ . In contrast, among those employees from middle-class backgrounds working at organizations that did *not* affirm interdependent behavior, the association between *enacting* more interdependent behavior and sense of fit at the organization was positive and significant,  $b = 0.023$ ,  $t(241) = 2.03$ ,  $p = .044$ , 95% CI [0.007, 0.045],  $d = 0.26$ . Taken together, these results reveal that only organizations where interdependent behavior is *both* enacted and affirmed are associated with greater sense of fit among employees from working-class backgrounds. In contrast, whether interdependent

behavior is enacted or affirmed matters less for the sense of fit of employees from middle-class backgrounds.

**[INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]**

***Retention intentions at organization.*** We utilized the *lavaan* package in R (Rosseel, 2012) to calculate fit indices for our models. We entered all predictors, their interactions, and our key covariates. Overall, the fit indices indicated that our model fit the data well: comparative fit index (CFI) = [.87]; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = [.13], 90% CI [.038, .245]; SRMR = [0.009].

There was a significant main effect of affirmed interdependent behavior,  $b = -0.87$ ,  $t(241) = -2.02$ ,  $p = .045$ , 95% CI [-1.729, -0.020],  $d = 0.26$ . No other significant main effects or two-way interactions emerged. Importantly, and in further support of Hypothesis 2, the predicted three-way interaction between affirmed behavior  $\times$  enacted behavior  $\times$  social class background was positive and significant,  $b = 0.52$ ,  $t(241) = 2.26$ ,  $p = .025$ , 95% CI [0.007, 0.098],  $d = 0.29$ .

Using the PROCESS macro in SPSS (Hayes, 2017), we obtained the simple effects of social class for this three-way interaction. No significant social class gaps emerged,  $p$ 's  $\geq .10$ .

We next decomposed the interaction to investigate the simple slopes by social class background. Consistent with Hypothesis 2a, among those employees from working-class backgrounds who worked at organizations that *affirmed* interdependent behavior, *enacting* more interdependent behavior was significantly positively associated with retention at the organization,  $b = 0.022$ ,  $t(241) = 2.03$ ,  $p = .043$ , 95% CI [0.002, 0.043],  $d = 0.26$ . Among those employees from working-class backgrounds who worked at organizations that did *not* affirm interdependent behavior, *enacting* more interdependent behavior was not significantly associated

with retention at the organization,  $b = -0.004$ ,  $t(241) = -0.42$ ,  $p = .671$ , 95% CI [-0.024, 0.015],  $d = 0.05$ .

In contrast, and in support of Hypothesis 2b, among those employees from middle-class backgrounds working at organizations that *affirmed* interdependent behavior, *enacting* more interdependent behavior was not associated with retention at the organization,  $b = -0.006$ ,  $t(241) = -0.55$ ,  $p = .582$ , 95% CI [-0.029, 0.016],  $d = 0.07$ . Similarly, among those employees from middle-class backgrounds working at organizations that did *not* affirm interdependent behavior, the association between *enacting* more interdependent behavior and sense of fit at the organization was nonsignificant,  $b = 0.020$ ,  $t(241) = 1.48$ ,  $p = .142$ , 95% CI [-0.007, 0.047],  $d = 0.19$ . Taken together, these results reveal that only organizations where interdependent behavior is *both* enacted and affirmed are associated with greater retention among employees from working-class backgrounds. In contrast, whether interdependent behavior is enacted or affirmed matters less for the retention of employees from middle-class backgrounds.

**Moderated mediation.** To the extent that employees report experiencing a high sense of fit at their organization, they are also more likely to desire to stay with that organization (O'Reilly et al., 1991). As such, we next conducted a moderated mediation analysis to provide an initial test of Hypothesis 3. Given that employees from working-class (vs. middle-class) contexts reported experiencing significantly greater sense of fit at organizations when interdependent behavior was both enacted and affirmed, we next sought to test whether sense of fit might serve as a mediator linking employee social class background and enacted and affirmed interdependent behavior to retention intentions. To do so, we entered social class background as the predictor, enacted and affirmed interdependent behavior as moderators, retention intentions as the outcome, and sense of fit as the putative mediator. Moderated mediation analyses indicated that sense of fit

mediated the observed relationship between social class background, enacted and affirmed interdependent behavior, and retention intentions. Specifically, the analysis yielded a point estimate of 0.050 and a 95% bias-corrected CI of [0.015, 0.089]. This interval did not include zero, suggesting that the indirect effect of social class background  $\times$  enacted  $\times$  affirmed on retention intentions through sense of fit was significant.

Decomposing the moderated mediation, among employees at organizations where interdependent behavior was enacted, the index of conditional moderated mediation yielded a point estimate of 1.195, and a 95% bias-corrected CI of [0.366, 2.114]. This interval did not include zero, suggesting that there was a positive indirect effect of sense of fit on retention intentions through social class background  $\times$  affirmed interdependent behavior. In contrast, among employees at organizations that did *not* enact interdependent behavior, the index of conditional moderated mediation yielded a point estimate of -0.718, and a 95% bias-corrected CI of [-1.689, 0.195]. This interval included zero, suggesting that the indirect effect of sense of fit on retention intentions through social class background  $\times$  affirmed interdependent behavior was not significant. Taken together, these moderated mediation results suggest that employees from working-class (vs. middle-class) backgrounds experienced greater sense of fit at organizations where interdependent behavior was both enacted *and* affirmed, which, in turn, led them to have a stronger intention to stay with the organization.

## **Discussion**

In Study 1, we were able to provide initial correlational evidence in support of Hypotheses 1-3. First, we obtained evidence that employees from working-class backgrounds endorse more interdependent norms than their middle-class counterparts, in support of Hypothesis 1. Even after obtaining a four-year college degree and gaining experience in white-

collar jobs, employees from working-class backgrounds continue to be guided by relatively interdependent norms, compared to their middle-class counterparts. Interestingly, employees from working- and middle-class backgrounds reported similar levels of independent norms, pointing to the possibility that, while employees from working-class backgrounds retain their interdependent norms, they may also develop and gain access to more independent norms via exposure to middle- and upper-class institutions over time (i.e., institutions of higher education and white-collar workplaces). We also obtained evidence in support of Hypotheses 2-3 using an externally-rated source of whether interdependent behavior was affirmed: the culture statements from the websites of employees' organizations.

However, there were still several limitations in Study 1. First, the measures of affirmed interdependent (vs. independent) behavior were very broad (Edwards, 1994). By broad, we mean that they relied on relatively few items and were relatively indirect proxies of the overarching broad concepts of independence and interdependence. Indeed, previous cultural psychology research has documented that there are multiple components within the broad constructs of independence and interdependence (Vignoles et al., 2016). For example, one dimension highlights being different to vs. similar to others – with a focus on being different than others reflecting independence, and a focus on being similar to others reflecting interdependence. To more systematically take into account these different components of independence and interdependence, in the next study we utilized a more nuanced measure of independence vs. interdependence in organizational cultures that focused more specifically on the working together vs. individually dimension of interdependence/independence, a dimension that has previously been shown to be meaningful in the experience of cultural mismatch for people from working-class backgrounds (Dittmann et al., 2020). Second, only a subset of participants

reported on their organization's website, and only some of these websites included culture content. As such, despite the fact that there were no meaningful differences between participants for whom we could obtain culture webpage content compared to those for whom we could not, our effective sample size was relatively small.

Third, we provided correlational evidence supportive of our theorizing, but not causal. Finally, the measure of organizational practices in Study 1 only measured amount of interaction that employees experienced regularly at work, and did not precisely capture whether the interaction actually involved interdependent processes (e.g., coordinating, collaborating, information sharing, and/or soliciting each other's thoughts and opinions to come to joint solutions). As such, in Studies 2-3, we utilized two different experimental paradigms, manipulating both enacted and affirmed interdependent behavior to provide causal evidence in support of our hypotheses. We also developed manipulations of enacted interdependent behavior that held constant the fact that the participant was part of a group, and only varied the group processes that were utilized by the team. The interdependent behavior manipulations in both studies explicitly included descriptions (in the case of Study 2) or firsthand experiences (in Study 3) of interdependent behaviors like coordinating, collaborating, and synthesizing ideas to come to a joint solution, to ensure that participants were truly exposed to enacted interdependent behaviors (Rousseau et al., 2006). In sum, the experiments we conducted next enabled us to test the causal effect of enacting and affirming interdependent behavior on the sense of fit and retention intentions of employees from working-class backgrounds.

## **Study 2**

By randomly assigning participants to experience working for a hypothetical organization where they enacted interdependent (vs. independent) behavior and that affirmed interdependent

(vs. independent) behavior, Study 2 sought to provide causal evidence to support our theorizing. Furthermore, in contrast to Study 1 where we examined employees' current organizations to exploit natural variation in organizations that enacted and affirmed interdependent (vs. independent) behavior, Study 2 held constant the content to which participants were exposed to enact and affirm interdependent (vs. independent) behavior, ensuring that participants were all experiencing and responding to content that closely aligned with our operationalizations of enacted and affirmed interdependent behavior. Additionally, to focus in on our key theorizing, and because we observed little change in the sense of fit and retention of employees from middle-class backgrounds in response to enacted and affirmed interdependent (vs. independent) behavior in Study 1, we limited our sample to employees from working-class backgrounds. These two design characteristics enabled us to more directly test our hypothesis that only enacted *and* affirmed interdependent behavior will causally improve the sense of fit and retention intentions of employees from working-class backgrounds.

## **Method**

**Participants.** We pre-registered our study on OSF ([https://osf.io/qhynp/?view\\_only=6d145512d39a477bb8292b3a378b07b7](https://osf.io/qhynp/?view_only=6d145512d39a477bb8292b3a378b07b7)). We computed our sample size *a priori* to have 80% power to detect a small effect similar to the average of those obtained in Study 1 and Supplemental Study 1B ( $d = 0.20$ ). As such, we sought to obtain a final sample size of approximately 350 participants. To obtain a final sample of approximately 350 college-educated, full-time employed participants from working-class backgrounds currently working in a white-collar job, we recruited 3000 U.S. adults to complete a 1-minute eligibility screening questionnaire via Prolific Academic in exchange for \$0.15. We then invited the 654 eligible participants to complete a second 10-15 minute study on Organizational Culture

Perceptions. We obtained complete data from 425 participants. Following our pre-registration, we excluded 3 individuals who failed an embedded attention check item, 35 individuals who scored less than 80% on a Captcha screener item, and 12 individuals who spent less than four minutes on the entire study – a study that was pretested to take approximately 10 minutes on average.<sup>6</sup> We were therefore left with a final sample of  $N = 375$  ( $M_{\text{age}} = 37.69$ ,  $SD_{\text{age}} = 10.52$ , 39% female, 0.3% nonbinary, 13% underrepresented racial minorities). A post-hoc sensitivity analysis indicated that the remaining sample size provided us with 80% power to detect a small effect of  $d = 0.29$  ( $f = .15$ ).

**Procedure.** Upon entering the Time 1 eligibility survey, participants completed an initial questionnaire that included our measure of social class background (i.e., parental educational attainment) and measure of workplace type (i.e., white-collar vs. blue-collar workplace) embedded in a series of distractor demographic items (e.g., age, gender, race/ethnicity).

In the second study, participants were randomly assigned to conditions in a 2 (Affirmed Behavior: Interdependent vs. Independent)  $\times$  2 (Enacted Behavior: Interdependent vs. Independent) between-subjects design. All participants were told that they would be reading through the organizational culture website of an organization, Advanced Products. They were also instructed to imagine that they were an employee at Advanced Products when they read through the website. Next, participants read through a website that was similar in content, except that it varied in terms of whether it affirmed *interdependent* vs. *independent* behavior. Specifically, participants in the affirmed interdependent condition read a version of the website that highlighted the importance of teams and collaboration to the culture of Advanced Products. For example, participants read that “We at Advanced Products believe that employees should

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<sup>6</sup> Importantly, results reveal similar but weakened effects when including the full sample with no exclusions. See supplemental material for details of these analyses.

coordinate their efforts with their coworkers to achieve the organization's goals. To do this, employees jointly work on team projects, integrate their ideas, and come to shared agreement about the best strategies to complete projects" (see supplemental material for full text of manipulation). In contrast, participants in the affirmed independent condition read through a website that was similar in content, except that it instead highlighted the importance of individual work to the culture of Advanced Products. For example, participants read that "We at Advanced Products believe that employees should work to their unique strengths, and take ownership over key components of their projects to achieve the organization's goals. To do this, employees work individually on team projects, reflect on their own ideas, and decide what the best strategies are to complete their portions of projects." The manipulation was adapted from previous research on organizational culture that has manipulated interdependent vs. independent organizational norms (Chatman & Barsade, 1995).

Next, all participants were informed that they would be experiencing "a day in the life at Advanced Products," and that they would be lead through a scenario that happened at Advanced Products. They were instructed to think about the scenario as if it was actually happening to them. Then, participants read through a vignette about the experience of working on a team project at Advanced Products. In both conditions, the outcome of the project was held constant (i.e., was successful), but we varied the approach that the team took to completing the team project. The vignettes were developed based on actual prior responses from a separate sample of Prolific participants ( $N = 90$ ) to a prompt asking participants to recall and describe a recent time at work that they had worked together vs. divided and conquered a team project. This ensured that the vignettes were believable and relevant to our sample population. Specifically, participants in the enacted interdependent condition read a vignette where the team worked

together in an interdependent manner. For example, participants read that “You and your team had to collaborate to come up with a good solution. You had a team meeting, and discussed how you all could accomplish the goals of the project. The team bounced ideas off of each other, and built on each others’ ideas until you all had a workable solution” (see supplemental material for full text of manipulation). In contrast, participants in the enacted independent condition read through a vignette that was similar in content, except that the team divided up the parts of the project and worked on them individually. For example, participants read that “You and your team had to split up the parts to come up with a good solution. You all worked on your pieces separately, by individually using the overall strategy and objectives to guide each of you in the right direction.”

After reading through the two manipulations, participants completed a survey including our key dependent measures, as well as additional demographic variables beyond those that we collected in the eligibility survey (e.g., years of work experience, years at current organization, and organization industry). Finally, participants were thanked and paid \$2.50 in exchange for their participation.

### **Measures.**

***Anticipated Sense of Fit.*** We utilized a similar measure of sense of fit as in Study 1 and Supplemental Study 1B, except that the items were adapted to reflect *anticipated* sense of fit at Advanced Products, rather than their actual sense of fit at their current organization ( $\alpha = .81$ ). Similar to Study 1, a factor analysis revealed that the 10 items loaded onto a single factor that accounted for 72% of the variance, and that each item loaded highly (loadings  $\geq 0.55$ ).

***Anticipated Retention Intentions.*** We utilized the same measure of retention intentions as in Study 1 and Supplemental Study 1B, except that the items were adapted to reflect

*anticipated* retention at Advanced Products, rather than their actual retention at their current organization ( $\alpha = .92$ ).

**Control variables.** We also included the same key demographic and organizational control variables that had the potential to affect responses, as in Study 1: age, gender, underrepresented minority status, personal education, years of work experience, years of experience at their current organization, organization size, supervisor status, number of promotions received at current organization, and industry dummy codes. We include control variables in all analyses for consistency, but results are similar but weakened when not including these control variables (see supplemental material). Additional simple effects are reported in the supplemental material.

## Results

**Anticipated Sense of Fit.** Neither the main effect of *enacted* behavior ( $p = .890$ ) nor the main effect of *affirmed* behavior ( $p = .118$ ) was significant. However, central to Hypothesis 2a, we obtained a significant enacted (*interdependent* vs. *independent*)  $\times$  affirmed (*interdependent* vs. *independent*) condition interaction,  $F(1, 343) = 4.30, p = .039, \eta^2 = .012$  (see Figure 2). We decomposed the interaction to compare the simple effects of affirming interdependent behavior by enacted interdependent behavior. Among those in the enacted interdependent condition, participants who were also exposed to affirmed interdependent behavior reported significantly higher anticipated sense of fit ( $M = 5.63, SE = 0.13$ ) than those exposed to affirmed *independent* behavior ( $M = 5.15, SE = 0.13$ ),  $F(1, 343) = 6.81, p = .009, \eta^2 = .019$ . In contrast, among those in the enacted *independent* behavior condition, participants who were also exposed to affirmed *independent* behavior did not differ in their anticipated sense of fit ( $M = 5.44, SE = 0.14$ ) compared to those exposed to affirmed *interdependent* behavior ( $M = 5.37, SE = 0.13$ ),  $F(1, 343)$

= 0.118,  $p = .732$ ,  $\eta^2 < .001$ . This finding is consistent with our theorizing that, to confer benefits to employees from working-class backgrounds, *interdependent behavior* must also be affirmed. Enacted interdependent behavior that is *not* affirmed leads to relatively lower fit among employees from working-class backgrounds.

**[INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]**

**Anticipated Retention Intentions.** Neither the main effect of *affirmed* behavior ( $p = .342$ ) nor the main effect of *enacted* behavior ( $p = .829$ ) was significant. However, in further support of Hypothesis 2a and consistent with the pattern of results for sense of fit, we obtained a significant affirmed (*interdependent* vs. *independent*)  $\times$  enacted (*interdependent* vs. *independent*) condition interaction on retention intentions,  $F(1, 343) = 4.56$ ,  $p = .033$ ,  $\eta^2 = .013$  (see Figure 3). Decomposing the interaction, we compared the simple effects of affirming interdependent behavior by enacted interdependent behavior. Supporting Hypothesis 2a, among those in the enacted interdependent condition, those participants who were also exposed to *affirmed* interdependent behavior reported significantly higher retention intentions ( $M = 4.84$ ,  $SE = 0.16$ ) than those exposed to affirmed *independent* behavior ( $M = 4.35$ ,  $SE = 0.16$ ),  $F(1, 343) = 4.88$ ,  $p = .028$ ,  $\eta^2 = .014$ . In contrast, among those in the enacted independent condition, participants who were also exposed to affirmed independent behavior did not differ in their retention intentions ( $M = 4.65$ ,  $SE = 0.16$ ) compared to those exposed to affirmed interdependent behavior ( $M = 4.47$ ,  $SE = 0.16$ ),  $F(1, 343) = 0.67$ ,  $p = .416$ ,  $\eta^2 = .002$ . This finding is consistent with our theorizing that only organizations where interdependent behavior is enacted and affirmed lead employees from working-class backgrounds to experience greater retention intentions. No other combination of enacted and affirmed behavior leads to the same benefit.

**[INSERT FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE]**

**Moderated mediation.** We next conducted a moderated mediation analysis to provide another test of Hypothesis 3. Given that participants reported significantly higher anticipated sense of fit at the organization when interdependent behavior was enacted and affirmed, we next sought to test whether anticipated fit might help to statistically explain why participants reported significantly higher retention intentions at the organization when interdependent behavior was both enacted and affirmed. To do so, we entered enacted behavior as the predictor, affirmed behavior as the moderator, anticipated retention intentions as the outcome, and anticipated sense of fit as the putative mediator. In support of Hypothesis 3 and replicating the results from Study 1, moderated mediation analyses indicated that anticipated sense of fit mediated the observed relationship between enacted and affirmed behavior and anticipated retention. Specifically, the analysis yielded a point estimate of 0.516 and a 95% bias-corrected CI of [0.002, 1.016]. This interval did not include zero, suggesting that the indirect effect of enacted and affirmed interdependent behavior on anticipated retention intentions through anticipated sense of fit was significant. We next looked at the conditional indirect effect of affirming interdependent behavior within the enacted interdependent (vs. independent) behavior conditions. For those in the enacted *independent* behavior condition, there was a point estimate of -0.061 and a 95% bias-corrected CI of [-0.420, 0.324]. This interval includes zero and suggests that anticipated sense of fit did not mediate the effect of affirming interdependent behavior on retention intentions for those in the enacted *independent* condition. In contrast, for those in the enacted *interdependent* condition, there was a point estimate of 0.454 and a 95% bias-corrected CI of [0.121, 0.790]. This interval did not include zero and suggests that anticipated sense of fit did mediate the effect of affirming interdependent behavior on retention intentions for those in the enacted *interdependent* condition. Taken together, this suggests that participants anticipated experiencing

greater sense of fit at organizations where interdependent behavior was enacted *and* affirmed, which, in turn, led them to anticipate having stronger intentions to stay with the organization (see Figure 4).

**[INSERT FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE]**

## **Discussion**

While Study 1 provided correlational evidence consistent with our hypotheses, it did not allow us to examine causation, nor to hold constant the content to which participants were responding. In this experiment, by randomly assigning people to a 2 (Enacted Behavior: Interdependent vs. Independent)  $\times$  2 (Affirmed Behavior: Interdependent vs. Independent) condition design, we were able to provide causal evidence in support of Hypothesis 2a: only organizations where interdependent behavior is enacted *and* affirm improve the retention intentions and sense of fit of employees from working-class backgrounds. We further provided causal evidence in support of Hypothesis 3: that sense of fit serves as a mechanism linking enacted and affirmed interdependent behavior to retention intentions for employees from working-class backgrounds. Indeed, the design of this study served as a fairly conservative test of our hypotheses, given that in both enacted conditions, participants were participating in a team project – and we only varied the strategies and approach that the team used (i.e., working together vs. dividing and conquering).

Nevertheless, though this experiment provided initial supportive causal evidence, it relied on a hypothetical scenario, and did not enable participants to directly experience enacting interdependent vs. independent behavior firsthand. As such, we next sought to replicate the key findings from this study with a more immersive experimental design: participants from working-class backgrounds actually worked together on ostensible work tasks with a research assistant

confederate who was trained to enact either interdependent or independent behaviors to work with the participant.

### Study 3

The main purpose of Study 3 was to replicate and extend the key findings from Study 2 to a sample of participants who completed a work simulation with a “coworker,” who in reality was a research assistant trained as a confederate.

#### Method

**Participants.** We computed our sample size *a priori* to obtain a final sample of at least 50 participants per cell. As such, we sought to obtain a sample size of approximately 225 participants. To obtain a final sample of approximately 225 college-educated, employed participants from working-class backgrounds currently working in a white-collar job, we recruited eligible U.S. adults from a Midwestern university’s lab community sample, MTurk, and Prolific Academic. We obtained complete data from 210 participants. We excluded 16 individuals who failed embedded attention and manipulation check items and 3 individuals who indicated that they were not employed when they took the study even though we had limited our recruitment to participants who were employed. We were therefore left with a final sample of  $N = 191$  ( $M_{\text{age}} = 40.85$ ,  $SD_{\text{age}} = 12.24$ , 51% female, 19% underrepresented racial minorities). A post-hoc sensitivity analysis indicated that the remaining sample size provided us with 80% power to detect a moderate effect of  $d = 0.38$  ( $f = .19$ ).

**Procedure.** Participants were recruited based on their prior responses to a prescreen questionnaire administered to all participants included in the samples maintained by the lab that included our measure of social class background (i.e., parental educational attainment) and personal education (i.e., at least a four-year college degree).

In our study, participants were randomly assigned to conditions in a 2 (Enacted Behavior: Interdependent vs. Independent)  $\times$  2 (Affirmed Behavior: Interdependent vs. Independent) between-subjects design. As in Study 2, all participants were told that they would be reading through the organizational culture website of an organization, Advanced Products. They were also instructed that they would be working as an employee at Advanced Products in the study. Next, participants read through the organizational culture website manipulation as in Study 2.

Next, all participants were informed that they would be working on some tasks (adapted from Kilduff et al., 2016) for Advanced Products with a coworker via online chat utilizing the Smartriqs platform (Molnar, 2019). In reality, all participants were matched with a trained research assistant who engaged with participants in one of two ways. Specifically, for participants randomly assigned to the enacted interdependent condition, the research assistant initiated the interaction by saying, “Hi! I’m excited to work with you on this task! Mind if we brainstorm together? :)” (see supplemental material for full text of manipulation). In contrast, for participants randomly assigned to the enacted independent condition, the research assistant initiated the interaction by saying, “Hi! I’m excited to work with you on this task! Mind if we divide and conquer? :)” In support of the efficacy of this manipulation, we analyzed the transcripts of these interactions by behavior condition utilizing the Natural Language Processing (NLP) package *politeness* in R (Yeomans et al., 2019), and found that there were more interdependent language features present in the conversations of those in the working together (vs. individually) condition (i.e., coordination, cooperation, and information exchange): asking questions, building on each other’s ideas by starting sentences with conjunctions (e.g., “And that’s a great idea because...”), and utilizing more first person plural pronouns like “we,” and “ours” (see supplemental material for details of these analyses).

Accordingly, when taking into account the content of these two manipulations together, participants could be categorized into organizational experiences that map onto our theorizing. Specifically, roughly 25% of participants were randomly assigned to organizations where interdependent behavior was enacted and affirmed, 25% of participants were randomly assigned to organizations where independent behavior was enacted and affirmed, 25% of participants were randomly assigned to organizations where interdependent behavior was enacted but *not* affirmed, and 25% of participants were randomly assigned to organizations where independent behavior was enacted but *not* affirmed.

After reading through the website manipulation and completing the 12-minute work task with the confederate, participants completed a survey including our key dependent measures, as well as additional demographic variables beyond those that we collected in the eligibility survey (e.g., years of work experience, years at current organization, and organization industry). Research assistant confederates also completed a survey about their perceptions of their partner, and the extent to which the partner followed the practices condition to which they were assigned. Finally, participants were thanked and paid \$7.50-\$10 in exchange for their participation, based on the platform from where they had been recruited (community sample and Prolific participants received \$10, while MTurk participants received \$9).

**Measures.**

***Sense of Fit.*** We utilized the same measure of sense of fit as in Study 2 ( $\alpha = .81$ ).

***Retention Intentions.*** We utilized the same measure of retention intentions as in Study 2 ( $\alpha = .92$ ).

***Control variables.*** We also included the same key demographic and organizational control variables that had the potential to affect responses, as in Studies 1-2: age, gender,

underrepresented minority status, personal education, years of work experience, years of experience at their current organization, organization size, supervisor status, number of promotions received at current organization, and industry dummy codes. Finally, we also included dummy codes reflecting participant source, given the multi-source nature of our data. We include control variables in all analyses for consistency.

## Results

**Sense of Fit.** Neither the main effect of *enacted* behavior ( $p = .469$ ), nor the main effect of *affirmed* behavior ( $p = .080$ ) was significant. Importantly, and similar to the patterns of results for Study 2, we obtained a marginally significant affirmed (*interdependent* vs. *independent*)  $\times$  enacted (*interdependent* vs. *independent*) behavior condition interaction,  $F(1, 155) = 3.82, p = .052, \eta^2 = .024$ . We decomposed the interaction to compare the simple effect of *affirming* interdependent (vs. independent) behavior by enacted behavior. Among those in the enacted interdependent condition, participants who were also exposed to affirmed interdependent behavior reported significantly higher anticipated sense of fit ( $M = 5.89, SE = 0.22$ ) than those exposed to affirmed *independent* behavior ( $M = 5.06, SE = 0.24$ ),  $F(1, 155) = 6.70, p = .011, \eta^2 = .041$ . In contrast, among those in the enacted *independent* condition, participants who were also exposed to affirmed *independent* behavior did not differ in their anticipated sense of fit ( $M = 5.31, SE = 0.23$ ) than those exposed to affirmed *interdependent* behavior ( $M = 5.26, SE = 0.22$ ),  $F(1, 155) = 0.030, p = .863, \eta^2 < .001$ . This finding is consistent with our theorizing that, to confer benefits to employees from working-class backgrounds, interdependent behaviors must be enacted *and* affirmed. When interdependent behavior is enacted but *not* affirmed—which is less of a match—employees from working-class backgrounds report lower anticipated sense of fit.

**Retention Intentions.** Neither the main effect of *affirmed* behavior ( $p = .084$ ) nor the main effect of *enacted* behavior ( $p = .570$ ) was significant. However, replicating Study 2 and in further support of Hypothesis 2, we obtained a significant *affirmed* (*interdependent* vs. *independent*)  $\times$  *enacted* (*interdependent* vs. *independent*) behavior condition interaction on retention intentions,  $F(1, 155) = 5.12, p = .025, \eta^2 = .032$  (see Figure 5). Decomposing the interaction, we compared the simple effects of *affirming* *interdependent* (vs. *independent*) behavior by *enacted* behavior. Supporting Hypothesis 2a, among those in the *enacted* *interdependent* condition, those participants who were also exposed to *affirmed* *interdependent* behavior reported significantly higher retention intentions ( $M = 5.06, SE = 0.26$ ) than those exposed to *affirmed* *independent* behavior ( $M = 4.02, SE = 0.28$ ),  $F(1, 155) = 7.78, p = .006, \eta^2 = .048$ . In contrast, among those in the *enacted* *independent* condition, participants who were also exposed to *affirmed* *independent* behavior did not differ in their retention intentions ( $M = 4.44, SE = 0.27$ ) than those exposed to *affirmed* *interdependent* behavior ( $M = 4.29, SE = 0.26$ ),  $F(1, 155) = 0.17, p = .680, \eta^2 = .001$ . This finding is consistent with our theorizing that enacting *interdependent* behaviors only creates a match with the more *interdependent* norms of employees from working-class backgrounds when they are also affirmed by the organization as important, leading to stronger retention intentions. When *interdependent* behavior is *not* affirmed (i.e., *independence* is instead affirmed)—which is less of a match—employees from working-class backgrounds report lower retention intentions.

[INSERT FIGURE 5 ABOUT HERE]

**Moderated mediation.** We next conducted a moderated mediation analysis to provide another test of Hypothesis 3. Given that participants reported higher anticipated sense of fit at organizations where *interdependent* behavior was enacted and affirmed, we next sought to test

whether anticipated sense of fit might help to statistically explain why participants reported significantly higher retention intentions at organizations where interdependent behavior was enacted and affirmed. To do so, we entered enacted behavior as the predictor, affirmed behavior as the moderator, anticipated retention intentions as the outcome, and anticipated sense of fit as the putative mediator. The analysis yielded a point estimate of 0.856 and a 95% bias-corrected CI of [-0.069, 1.835]. This interval did include zero, suggesting that the conditional indirect effects in the two conditions were not significantly different from one another. However, given our theorizing regarding whether interdependent behavior was both enacted and affirmed, we nevertheless next examined the conditional indirect effect within enacted behavior conditions. For those in the enacted *independent* behavior condition, there was a point estimate of -0.050 and a 95% bias-corrected CI of [-0.703, 0.614]. This interval includes zero and suggests that sense of fit did not mediate the effect of affirmed interdependent behavior on retention intentions for those in the enacted *independent* behavior condition. In contrast, for those in the enacted *interdependent* behavior condition, there was a point estimate of 0.806 and a 95% bias-corrected CI of [0.197, 1.457]. This interval did not include zero and suggests that sense of fit did mediate the effect of affirmed interdependent behavior on retention intentions for those in the enacted *interdependent* behavior condition. Taken together, though not conclusive, this suggests that participants may have anticipated experiencing greater sense of fit at organizations where interdependent behavior was both enacted *and* affirmed which, in turn, led them to anticipate having stronger intentions to stay with the organization (however, of note, indirect effects were significant when instead using manipulation check items as predictor and moderator, rather than condition to which participants were assigned, see supplemental material).

## **Discussion**

In this experiment, we were able to provide further causal evidence in support of Hypothesis 2, and we were able to do so with an immersive workplace simulation. We also obtained consistent but nonsignificant evidence in support of Hypothesis 3: there was a significant conditional indirect effect of sense of fit on retention for employees at organizations where interdependent behavior was enacted and affirmed (vs. those at organizations where interdependent behavior was enacted but *not* affirmed). However, the overall index of moderated mediation failed to reach significance. We believe this could be for two reasons. First, we had a relatively small final usable sample. College-educated, white-collar employees from working-class backgrounds are a hard-to-reach sample, and recruiting a large enough sample to be adequately powered to detect our effects was extremely time-intensive, even when recruiting from multiple samples simultaneously (i.e., the university behavioral lab community sample and two online platforms). Second, there may be components of the actual conversation and task experience that we were not able to account for in the control variables to which we had access. In support of this proposition, analyses utilizing participants' responses to the manipulation check items assessing enacted and affirmed behavior, instead of condition assignment, all yielded significant effects (see supplemental material for details of these analyses). This indicates that, to the extent that participants actually internalized our manipulations of enacted and affirmed behavior, as indexed by their responses to the manipulation check items, our predicted indirect effects emerged (Yeager & Walton, 2011). Overall, though, similar to Study 2, the design of this study served as a fairly conservative test of our hypotheses, given that in both enacted behavior conditions, participants were participating in a team project – and we only varied the strategies and approach that the team used (i.e., working together vs. dividing and conquering).

### **Internal Meta-Analysis**

Given the similar hypothesizing and measures available across the studies presented here and in the supplemental material, we meta-analyzed the central findings utilizing a fixed-effects approach across the four studies (three in main text, one in supplemental) to determine the robustness of the observed effects (Goh et al., 2016). In particular, across studies, we examined all simple effects. For effects regarding employees from working-class backgrounds, we have four studies. For effects regarding employees from middle-class backgrounds, we have two studies. Our key results on the benefit of enacting *and* affirming interdependent behavior on the sense of fit and retention of employees from working-class backgrounds was robust when meta-analyzed across the four studies. Specifically, for employees from working-class backgrounds who enacted interdependent behavior, organizations that also affirmed that behavior (vs. did not) reliably reported significantly (a) greater sense of fit, and (b) greater retention intentions. In contrast, effects for employees from middle-class backgrounds were largely nonsignificant. For full results of our internal meta-analysis, see Tables 3-4.

### **General Discussion**

Across four diverse samples of college-educated, white-collar employees, and using both correlational and experimental approaches, we examined whether enacting interdependent behavior only leads employees from working-class backgrounds to experience the benefits of a cultural match (i.e., greater sense of fit) when it is also affirmed as part of being a “good” employee. We also documented that sense of fit serves as a mechanism linking enacted and affirmed interdependent behaviors to a consequential downstream workplace outcome—greater retention intentions—for employees from working-class backgrounds. In contrast, we found that

whether interdependent behavior is enacted or affirmed matters less for the sense of fit and retention of employees from middle- and upper-class backgrounds.

Extending a cultural mismatch approach to the workplace, our findings document that employees' social class backgrounds continue to shape the extent to which they endorse interdependent motives for work even after they have graduated from college and gained entry to white-collar jobs. These employees from working-class backgrounds who have successfully navigated through college and gained access to a white-collar job can still confront the difficulties of a cultural mismatch at work (i.e., lower sense of fit) when they enact interdependent behaviors at work, but those behaviors are not affirmed as an important part of being a "good" or "successful" employee.

We obtained evidence consistent with this theorizing across four studies—two large-scale surveys and two experiments with samples of college-educated adults currently employed in diverse white-collar occupations. First, in Study 1, we provide evidence that employees from working-class backgrounds continue to endorse more interdependent motives for work than their middle-class counterparts, but that employees from both lower- and middle-class backgrounds endorse comparable levels of independent motives. We also show in Study 1 that both values stated in company websites and practices of working together contribute to the experience of (mis)match for employees from working-class backgrounds, as indexed by their sense of fit with their organization. Sense of fit, in turn, is associated with greater retention intentions. In Supplemental Study 1B, we replicate the findings from Study 1 in a pre-registered, large, nationally-representative survey of college-educated adults working in diverse white-collar organizations (see supplemental material). Finally, in two experiments – one utilizing a vignette paradigm and the other using a simulated workplace interaction— we provide causal evidence

that interdependent behavior only lead employees from working-class backgrounds to experience greater sense of fit and retention intentions when it is both enacted *and* affirmed. Together, these studies provide important evidence that enacting interdependent behavior is not enough to combat the experience of cultural mismatch for employees from working-class backgrounds: this enacted interdependent behavior must also be *affirmed* as part of what it means to be a “good” employee at the organization to create a cultural match.

### **Theoretical Contributions**

The current findings are among the first to delineate the organizational conditions that contribute to the experience of cultural (mis)match for employees from working-class backgrounds (but see Sharps & Anderson, 2021 and Belmi et al., 2020 for two notable exceptions). Furthermore, in extending cultural mismatch beyond higher education and to white-collar workplaces (Stephens, Fryberg et al., 2012; Stephens, Townsend et al., 2012), the current findings also provide evidence that, in organizational settings, two aspects of interdependent behavior work in tandem to produce the experience of (mis)match: whether interdependent behavior is enacted *and* affirmed. In other words, simply engaging in interdependent behaviors (i.e., working together) is not sufficient to create a cultural match for employees from working-class backgrounds—organizations must also affirm that enacting interdependent behavior is part of being a “good” or “successful” employee in their broader culture. Only when interdependent behavior is both enacted and affirmed will organizations truly signal that the interdependent selves of employees from working-class backgrounds are included. Organizations where employees work together but the organization does not affirm that behavior fall short of aligning with the interdependent norms of employees from working-class backgrounds.

The work presented here also contributes to the small but growing body of organizational behavior research on the role of employee social class background in organizations (Barling & Weatherhead, 2016; Côté, 2011; Kallschmidt & Eaton, 2019; Kish-Gephart & Campbell, 2015; Martin & Côté, 2019; Martin et al., 2016; Phillips, Martin et al., 2020; Rivera, 2016; Sharps & Anderson, 2021). This body of work shows that social class background matters in terms of discrimination, but we know relatively little about how employees from different social class backgrounds experience white-collar work firsthand. As such, our work adds to our understanding of how enacted and affirmed behavior shapes the experiences and outcomes of employees from working-class backgrounds in white-collar workplaces.

The research presented here also complements our understanding of person-organization fit theories (Cable & Judge, 1996; Kristof, 1996; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; O'Reilly et al., 1991). While research on person-organization fit has previously shown that employees who experience alignment between their own values and the values of their organization are important, this research has largely been agnostic to the *source* of these values. Cultural mismatch theory complements person-organization fit approaches to reveal that the social class contexts in which employees grow up matter for the types of cultural norms that they are likely to bring with them to the workplace. Importantly, the specific cultural norms—interdependence vs. independence—that become elaborated in different social class contexts are not neutral, and tend to be differentially included in mainstream institutions (i.e., higher education and white-collar workplaces). When employees enact interdependent behavior but it is not affirmed by the organization, this can lead people from working-class backgrounds to experience mismatches that contribute to difficulties achieving upward mobility (Markus & Conner, 2014; Markus & Kitayama, 2010). As such, our results reveal that ensuring that enacted interdependent behavior

is also affirmed as important is more influential for employees from working-class (vs. middle-class) backgrounds. Indeed, our results reveal that regardless of whether interdependent behavior is enacted or affirmed, employees from middle-class backgrounds feel similar levels of fit. In contrast, employees from working-class backgrounds *only* feel a sense of fit when they can enact interdependent behavior *and* this behavior is affirmed by the broader organization. To fully understand the impact of a cultural (mis)match, research must take into account people's social group memberships and whether their group reflects the "default" in the organizational context.

### **Practical Implications**

Beyond their theoretical implications, the current findings also have important practical implications. At a high level, these findings reveal that it is not enough for an organization to simply require teamwork—they must also affirm this behavior as important. Our work also reveals the potential downsides of requiring but failing to affirm collaboration, a finding that is also complementary to the concept of "office housework" that has previously been studied in the context of gender disparities at work (Chan and Anteby, 2016; Eagly & Steffen, 1984; Fletcher, 2001; Jost & Kay, 2005; Rudman & Glick, 2001; Williams & Dempsey, 2014). Some tasks that are required parts of employees' work are devalued and perceived as detracting from career advancement. These tasks may be work, like teamwork, that is particularly important for employees from groups that are already underrepresented in white-collar workplaces (i.e., employees from working-class backgrounds). Furthermore, another practical implication is that despite the frequent emphasis on collaboration in many organizations, it is rare that employees both enact interdependent behavior and that it is affirmed by the organization: Indeed, when examining the combination of enacted and affirmed interdependent behavior in Supplemental

Study 1B, only a minority of employees – 30% – actually reported experiencing both enacted and affirmed interdependent behavior at work.

This finding has implications for existing work that has documented social class disparities in white-collar workplaces in general. These results reveal that most white-collar organizations are not the types of organizations that would provide a cultural match and therefore afford employees from working-class backgrounds an equal opportunity to succeed at work as their counterparts from middle-class backgrounds. Indeed, even if employees from working-class backgrounds feel they have unique strengths, few organizations reflect the combination of enacted and affirmed interdependent behavior required to create a cultural match with their more interdependent cultural norms. This may help explain, in part, why employees from working-class backgrounds still experience worse outcomes in the workplace compared to their more advantaged middle- and upper-class counterparts.

Critically, the negative consequences of this cultural mismatch may have implications not only for employees from working-class backgrounds, but also for organizations and society more broadly. For white-collar workplaces, these consequences include potentially losing out on the interdependent skills and abilities of employees from working-class backgrounds—skills which have previously been shown to help groups and teams function effectively (Dittmann et al., 2020). For society, these consequences include potentially hindering upward social mobility on a large scale (Lubrano, 2004).

Prior work on social identity group differences and workplace inclusion (e.g., Cheryan & Markus, 2020) has advocated for a more balanced culture (i.e., including values of both majority and minority group members) as one way to create a maximally inclusive approach for all employees. Our work complements this proposition and adds further nuance to it: a balanced

approach is only likely to work if organizations can find genuine ways to include independence and interdependence in *both* the types of behaviors employees enact as well as the types of behaviors they affirm as important – and that affirmations of independent behavior cannot contaminate or overtake affirmations of interdependent behavior. On the other hand, our work also suggests that, if possible, it may be more beneficial to intentionally affirm the cultural norms of the underrepresented group (i.e., employees from working-class backgrounds) to a greater extent than the cultural norms of the well-represented group (i.e., employees from middle-class backgrounds). This is because underrepresented groups tend to be more sensitive to cues that signal whether their norms are included in the setting than people from well-represented groups (Schmader & Sedikides, 2018). Indeed, in further support of this idea, we found that enacting and affirming interdependent (vs. independent) behavior had relatively little effect on the sense of fit and retention of employees from well-represented middle-class backgrounds. Since these cues seem to affect employees from middle-class backgrounds less overall, it may be beneficial to affirm interdependent behavior *more so* than independent behavior, at least until employees from working-class backgrounds are more well-represented in the population of white-collar workers.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

Across the four studies presented here, we find both correlational and experimental evidence across multiple distinct samples that only enacted and affirmed interdependent behavior is associated with the benefits of a cultural match for employees from working-class backgrounds (i.e., greater sense of fit). However, these findings are not without their limitations, and there are several promising directions for future research.

First, though we obtained consistent and robust effects across the four studies presented here, the effects we observed across studies were relatively small in magnitude. Despite these small effect sizes, it does seem as though cultural mismatch effects account for a small but meaningful portion of employees' sense of fit and retention intentions at work. Nevertheless, future studies should seek to more systematically adjudicate between the possible set of inputs into employees' experiences of fit and retention to determine the relative strength of cultural (mis)match effects compared to other previously-identified individual and organizational inputs (e.g., biodata, pre-hire dispositions and attitudes; Barrick & Zimmerman, 2005). Similarly, though we obtained consistent patterns across all four studies utilizing diverse methodologies, a few of our observed effects did not reach conventional levels of significance (i.e.,  $p < .05$ ). We believe this could have occurred for two reasons. First, this may be due to variance in unobserved characteristics. While we sought to include the most relevant control variables grounded in the organizational behavior and social class literatures, and recruit large samples, it is possible that other factors that we did not capture in our studies could be adding unobserved noise to our results. Future research should seek to replicate the findings obtained here utilizing additional methods and designs (e.g., longitudinal approaches).

Second, while extant work on cultural value congruence (e.g., Pamphile & Ruttan, 2022) indicates that organizational values are relatively stable over time, the current work was cross-sectional in nature – we do not test the durability of organizations' affirmation of interdependent vs. independent behavior with a longitudinal design. Future work should administer measures of enacted and affirmed *interdependent* (vs. *independent*) behavior to a sample of employees, and then follow up with those employees at a second timepoint and re-administer measure to determine how stable vs. variable these perceptions are. Some research suggests that

organizational cultures are likely to be fairly stable over time (Hatch, 2004), but it would nonetheless be worthwhile to confirm whether affirming *interdependent* vs. *independent* behavior is, in fact stable over time. If, instead these affirmations are relatively variable, it would also be interesting to determine whether employees' experiences and outcomes at the organization also covary with these perceptions (i.e., if affirmations of interdependent (vs. independent) behavior dynamically change, do employees from working-class backgrounds then report having better experiences and outcomes?).

Finally, we focused on two key workplace outcomes that were both theoretically and practically important: sense of fit and retention intentions. However, these constructs and measures reflect predominantly subjective perceptions, and do not capture employees' behavior (e.g., actual quitting behavior). While perceptual and attitudinal measures have been shown to meaningfully predict behavioral outcomes in previous cultural mismatch work (e.g., sense of fit predicted students' GPAs; Phillips, Stephens et al., 2020), it remains to be seen whether this attitude-behavior link exists in the workplace context. As such, future studies should seek to explicitly test the link between perceptual measures of sense of fit and retention and observable behaviors like job performance and quitting.

## **Conclusion**

We find evidence that cultural (mis)match, a critical but often-overlooked cultural obstacle, contributes to social class disparities in white-collar organizations. In the studies presented here, we document that only when interdependent behavior is *both* enacted and affirmed do employees from working-class backgrounds experience the benefits of a cultural match (i.e., greater sense of fit), in turn, leading to greater retention intentions. These findings indicate that it is not enough for organizations to simply require teamwork, they must also ensure

that interdependent behavior is affirmed as part of being a “good” or “successful” employee at the organization to truly benefit employees from working-class backgrounds. In so doing, organizations will ensure that employees from working-class backgrounds have an equal opportunity to succeed at work – and organizations themselves will also likely benefit from the interdependent norms that these employees bring with them to the workplace.

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## Tables and Figures

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations in full sample in Study 1.

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Social class background (1 = lower, 0 = higher)	0.46	0.50										
2. Interdependent Motives	4.79	1.49	.068*									
3. Independent Motives	5.45	1.34	.016	.562***								
4. Age	42.83	13.34	.038	-.05	-.145***							
5. Gender (1 = female, 0 = male)	0.59	0.49	-.03	-.048	.033	-.184***						
6. Underrepresented minority status (1 = URM, 0 = non-URM)	0.13	0.34	.049	.143***	.130***	-.122***	.077*					
7. Tenure	8.72	12.98	-.017	.046	-.039	.361***	-.104**	-.037				
8. Years of Full-Time Work Experience	19.30	12.73	.06	-.051	-.164***	.860***	-.214***	-.099**	.345***			
9. Number of Organizations Worked for	3.35	2.10	-.03	-.094**	-.072*	.408***	-.079*	-.044	-.03	.417***		
10. Supervisor Status (1 = supervisor, 0 = non-supervisor)	0.38	0.48	-.002	.169***	.109***	.105***	-.127***	.055	.168***	.103**	-.005	
11. Promotions	3.29	1.73	-.014	.143***	.104**	.073*	-.042	.021	.226***	.125***	-.146***	.232***

Note. \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$   
 $N = 986$

Table 2. Means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations in organizational website subsample in Study 1.

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Social class background (1 = lower, 0 = higher)	0.52	0.50												
2. Interdependent Values	0.51	0.50	-.012											
3. Working Together Time	-17.07	18.99	.021	-.021										
4. Sense of Fit	5.30	1.46	-.019	-.124*	.149*									
5. Retention Intentions	4.34	1.76	.064	-.150*	.123*	.716***								
6. Age	42.63	12.14	.108	-.041	.011	.177**	.215***							
7. Gender (1 = female, 0 = male)	1.59	0.49	-.107	-.006	-.076	-.04	-.136*	-.197**						
8. Underrepresented minority status (1 = URM, 0 = non-URM)	0.14	0.34	-.006	.007	-.119	-.099	-.184**	-.069	.102					
9. Tenure	8.80	20.97	-.059	.061	.111	.103	.145*	.183**	-.095	-.014				
10. Years of Full-Time Work Experience	19.07	11.92	.149*	-.02	.033	.133*	.200**	.878***	-.283**	-.059	.165**			
11. Number of Organizations Worked for	3.37	2.19	.057	-.03	.022	.02	-.032	.379***	-.146*	-.063	.039	.406***		
12. Supervisor status (1 = supervisor, 0 = non-supervisor)	0.35	0.48	.009	-.033	.062	.209***	.112	.144*	-.107	.086	.160*	.150*	.007	
13. Promotions	3.35	1.69	.037	.002	.156*	.177**	.142*	.037	.019	-.002	.122*	.101	-.126*	.228***

Note. \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$   
*N* = 257

Table 3. Internal Meta-Analysis of Sense of Fit Effects Across Studies.

Effects		Studies	Stouffer <i>Z</i>	<i>p</i>	Meta <i>r</i>
Working-Class Simple Effects	Working-Class: Effect of Affirming Interdependent (vs. Independent) Behavior when Interdependent Behavior is Enacted	4	5.66	<.001	.14
	Working-Class: Effect of Affirming Interdependent (vs. Independent) Behavior when Independent Behavior is Enacted	4	1.11	.27	.03
	Working-Class: Effect of Enacting Interdependent (vs. Independent) Behavior when Interdependent Behavior is Affirmed	4	4.50	<.001	.10
	Working-Class: Effect of Enacting Interdependent (vs. Independent) Behavior when Independent Behavior is Affirmed	4	-1.92	.05	-.04
Middle-Class Simple Effects	Middle-Class: Effect of Affirming Interdependent (vs. Independent) Behavior when Interdependent Behavior is Enacted	2	-0.81	.42	-.01
	Middle-Class: Effect of Affirming Interdependent (vs. Independent) Behavior when Independent Behavior is Enacted	2	1.67	.09	.07
	Middle-Class: Effect of Enacting Interdependent (vs. Independent) Behavior when Interdependent Behavior is Affirmed	2	0.78	.44	.03
	Middle-Class: Effect of Enacting Interdependent (vs. Independent) Behavior when Independent Behavior is Affirmed	2	2.36	.02	.06
Social Class Gaps	Effect of Working-Class (vs. Middle-Class) when Interdependent Behavior is Both Enacted and Affirmed	2	2.25	.02	.06
	Effect of Working-Class (vs. Middle-Class) when Interdependent Behavior is Enacted but Not Affirmed	2	-3.37	<.001	-.09
	Effect of Working-Class (vs. Middle-Class) when Independent Behavior is Enacted but Not Affirmed	2	-1.12	.26	-.03
	Effect of Working-Class (vs. Middle-Class) when Independent Behavior is Both Enacted and Affirmed	2	0.00	.99	.00

Table 4. Internal Meta-Analysis of Retention Intention Effects Across Studies.

Effects	Studies	Stouffer <i>Z</i>	<i>p</i>	Meta <i>r</i>	
Working-Class Simple Effects	Working-Class: Effect of Affirming Interdependent (vs. Independent) Behavior when Interdependent Behavior is Enacted	4	3.79	<.001	.09
	Working-Class: Effect of Affirming Interdependent (vs. Independent) Behavior when Independent Behavior is Enacted	4	-1.16	.25	-.02
	Working-Class: Effect of Enacting Interdependent (vs. Independent) Behavior when Interdependent Behavior is Affirmed	4	3.47	<.001	.08
	Working-Class: Effect of Enacting Interdependent (vs. Independent) Behavior when Independent Behavior is Affirmed	4	-1.33	.18	-.03
Middle-Class Simple Effects	Middle-Class: Effect of Affirming Interdependent (vs. Independent) Behavior when Interdependent Behavior is Enacted	2	-1.37	.17	-.02
	Middle-Class: Effect of Affirming Interdependent (vs. Independent) Behavior when Independent Behavior is Enacted	2	1.89	.06	.07
	Middle-Class: Effect of Enacting Interdependent (vs. Independent) Behavior when Interdependent Behavior is Affirmed	2	-0.79	.43	-.02
	Middle-Class: Effect of Enacting Interdependent (vs. Independent) Behavior when Independent Behavior is Affirmed	2	1.91	.06	.05
Social Class Gaps	Effect of Working-Class (vs. Middle-Class) when Interdependent Behavior is Both Enacted and Affirmed	2	2.25	.02	.06
	Effect of Working-Class (vs. Middle-Class) when Interdependent Behavior is Enacted but Not Affirmed	2	-1.46	.14	-.04
	Effect of Working-Class (vs. Middle-Class) when Independent Behavior is Enacted but Not Affirmed	2	-1.23	.22	-.04
	Effect of Working-Class (vs. Middle-Class) when Independent Behavior is Both Enacted and Affirmed	2	0.68	.50	.02

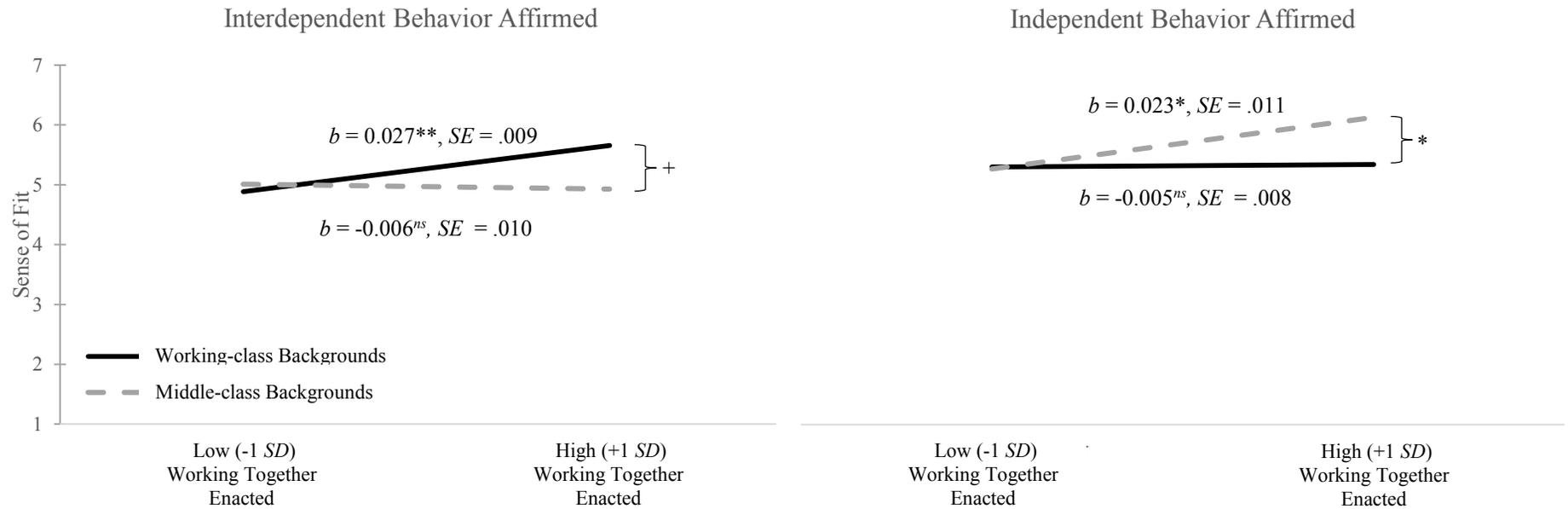


Figure 1. Effect of enacted and affirmed interdependent behavior, and social class background on sense of fit in Study 1.  
 Note: +  $p < 0.10$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

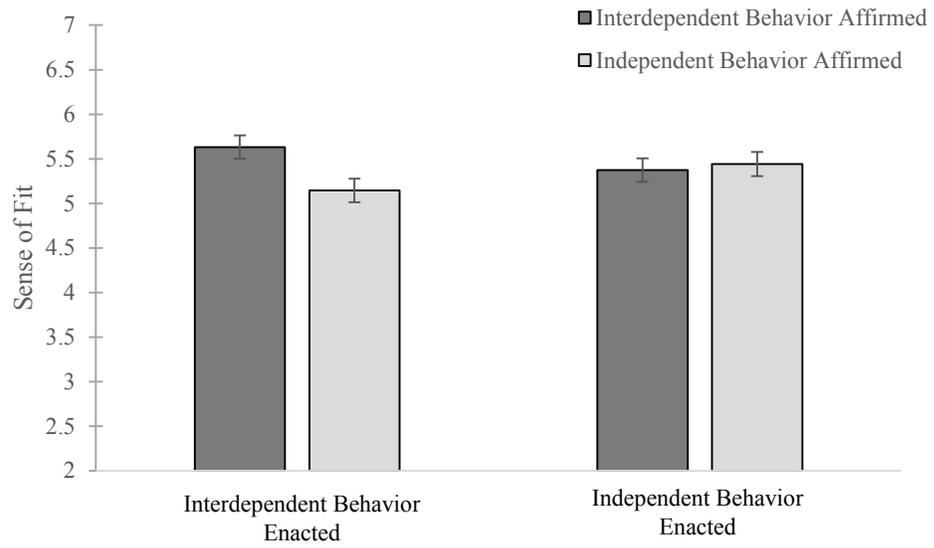


Figure 2. Anticipated sense of fit by affirmed and enacted interdependent behavior in Study 2 among employees from working-class backgrounds (Error bars represent  $\pm 1$  SE).

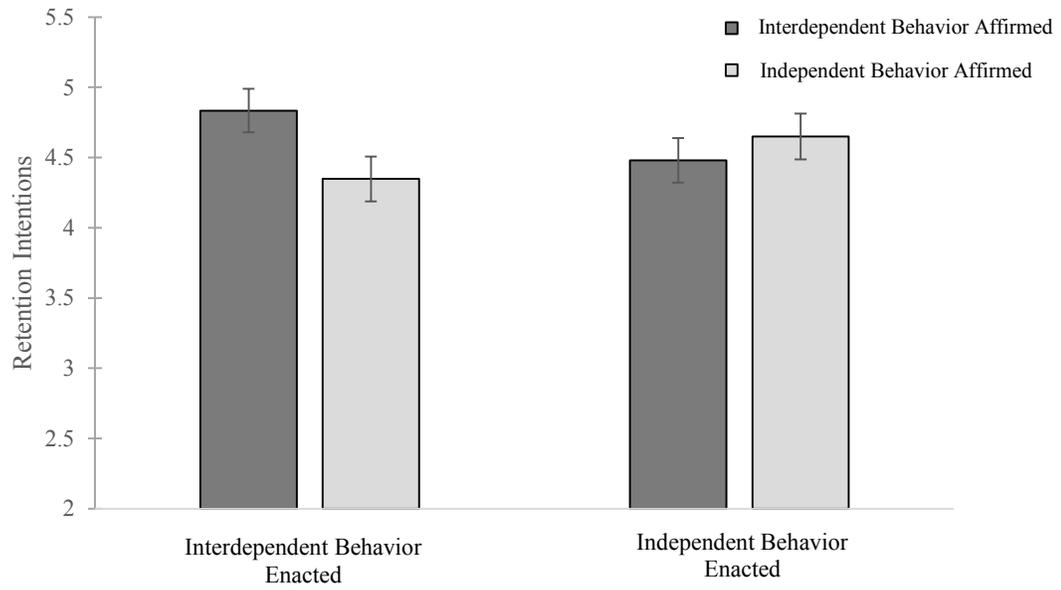
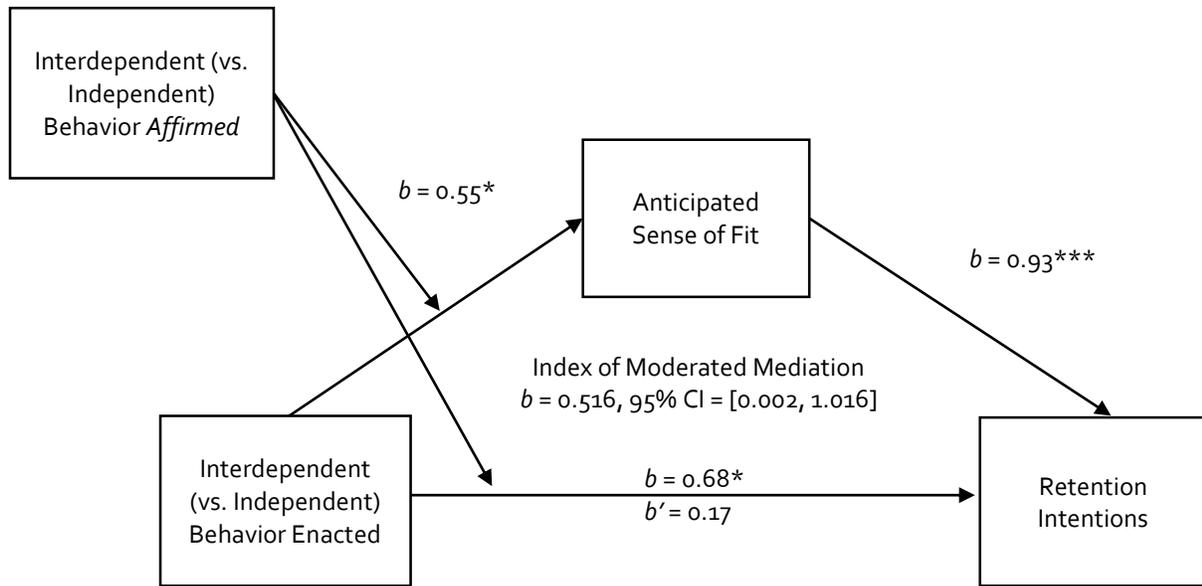


Figure 3. *Anticipated retention intentions by enacted and affirmed interdependent behavior in Study 2 among employees from working-class backgrounds (Error bars represent  $\pm 1$  SE).*



Note. \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Figure 4. Moderated mediation model in Study 2 linking enacted and affirmed interdependent behavior to retention intentions via anticipated sense of fit at the organization. Results are robust to inclusion or exclusion of key demographic and organizational covariates. Sample consists of employees from working-class backgrounds.

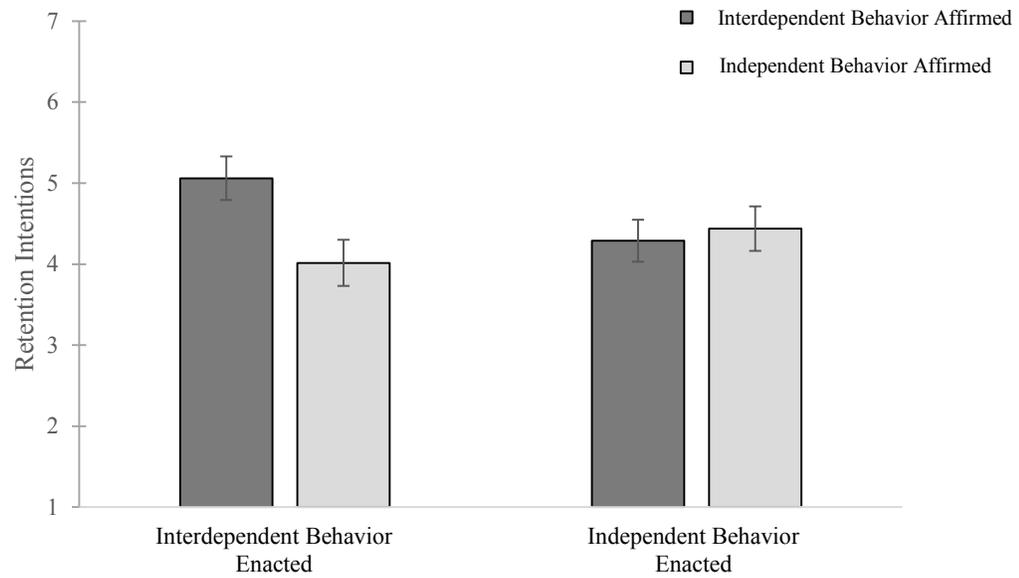


Figure 5. Anticipated retention intentions by enacted and affirmed interdependent behavior in Study 3 among employees from working-class backgrounds (Error bars represent  $\pm 1$  SE).

CRedit author statement

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