

From ‘Team’ Talk to Teamwork:

Authentic Interdependent Values Benefit Employees from Lower-Class Backgrounds

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Abstract

Employees from lower-class backgrounds face unique obstacles at work compared to their higher-class counterparts (e.g., lower earnings). These disparities are driven not only by structural factors (e.g., discrimination), but also by cultural obstacles: specifically, contending with the experience of *cultural mismatch* (i.e., not having their models of self included in white-collar organizational cultures)—an obstacle their higher-class counterparts are less likely to face. Two large-scale studies with employees in diverse white-collar occupations (Total $N = 6915$) support our theorizing that employees from lower-class backgrounds will instead experience a cultural match (e.g., feel like they fit) when organizations authentically value interdependence: Authentic (vs. inauthentic) interdependent values bolster the sense of fit and retention intentions of employees from lower-class backgrounds. In contrast, authentic (vs. inauthentic) interdependent values matter less for employees from higher-class backgrounds. Our findings suggest that authentic interdependent values may have the potential to reduce social class disparities at work.

Keywords: social class background; cultural models of self; organizational values; authenticity; inequality

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Employees from lower-class backgrounds¹ face unique obstacles compared to their counterparts from higher-class backgrounds in white-collar organizations, which prevent them from having an equal opportunity to succeed at work (e.g., Barling & Weatherhead, 2016; Bartik & Hershbein, 2018; Crawford, Gregg, Macmillan, Vignoles, & Wyness, 2016; Laurison & Friedman, 2016; Torche, 2011). Visible class-based disparities in workplace outcomes are driven not only by structural factors including overt discrimination and unequal access to enrichment opportunities (e.g., Corak, 2013; Rivera, 2016; Rivera & Tilcsik, 2016), but also by hidden cultural obstacles. Specifically, employees from lower-class backgrounds must navigate mainstream white-collar organizational cultures while contending with the experience that their cultural models of self are not included, what has been termed a *cultural mismatch* (Stephens, Fryberg et al., 2012; Stephens, Townsend et al., 2012). This mismatch constitutes an obstacle that their higher-class counterparts are less likely to face (Ostrove & Long, 2007; Phillips et al., 2020).

Building on research documenting the deleterious consequences of cultural mismatch for students from lower-class backgrounds in college—enhanced stress, reduced sense of fit, and thwarted ability to perform up to their potential (Stephens, Fryberg et al., 2012; Stephens, Townsend et al., 2012)—we theorize that the experience of cultural mismatch is likely to undermine the fit and retention of employees from lower-class backgrounds in white-collar

¹ Throughout, to incorporate diverse literatures on social class, we use the term *lower-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 *higher-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.

organizations. Critically, the negative consequences of cultural mismatch may have implications not only for employees from lower-class backgrounds, but also for organizations and society more broadly. For white-collar organizations, these consequences include potentially losing out on the interdependent skills and abilities of employees from lower-class backgrounds—skills which have previously been shown to help groups and teams function effectively (Dittmann, Stephens, & Townsend, 2020). For society, these consequences include potentially hindering upward social mobility on a large scale (Lubrano, 2004). What aspects of white-collar organizations' cultures will instead be inclusive of employees from lower-class backgrounds, leading them to experience a cultural match?

The studies presented here integrate theory on cultural mismatch and organizational value authenticity to answer this question. Specifically, we theorize that employees from lower-class backgrounds will feel the most fit and be most engaged when there is a complete match between their more interdependent selves and the values that are both espoused and enacted by the organization. We refer to those organizational values that are both espoused and enacted as *authentic* values (cf. Lencioni, 2002; Pamphile & Ruttan, 2017). Experiencing a complete cultural match at work should, in turn, lead employees from lower-class backgrounds to feel a sense of fit, and ultimately, a greater desire to stay with the organization (i.e., higher retention intentions). In contrast, we theorize that authentic (vs. inauthentic) interdependent organizational values will matter less for employees from higher-class backgrounds because they are assumed to be the “default” social identity in white-collar organizations and, accordingly, tend to feel included and at ease in these organizations more generally (Cheryan & Markus, 2020; Johnson, Richeson, & Finkel, 2011; Ostrove & Long, 2007; Phillips, Stephens, Townsend, & Goudeau, 2020; Redford & Hoyer, 2017; Rivera, 2016; Schmader & Sedikides, 2018).

In this article, we will outline the logic underlying our central prediction: that authentic (vs. inauthentic) interdependent values will be associated with a greater sense of fit and higher retention intentions for employees from lower-class backgrounds. First, to explain why interdependent (vs. independent) values will contribute to the experience of match, we provide an overview of previous research documenting how growing up in different social class contexts shapes people's cultural models of self, and how these cultural models of self tend to persist even when people experience upward mobility (i.e., complete college). Second, to reveal why we theorize that interdependent organizational values must also be authentic to create a complete cultural match for employees from lower-class backgrounds, we draw upon research documenting how organizational value authenticity shapes employees' organizational experiences. Finally, integrating these literatures, we describe our theorizing about how authentic interdependent values will be most likely to create a complete match with the selves of employees from lower-class backgrounds, leading them to experience the strongest sense of fit and retention intentions. We also explain why we anticipate that authentic (vs. inauthentic) interdependent values will be less influential for the experiences of employees from higher-class backgrounds.

Employees' Social Class Backgrounds Shape Their Cultural Models of Self

To understand why interdependent organizational values will contribute to the experience of cultural match for employees from lower-class backgrounds, it is first necessary to understand how participating in different social class contexts growing up leads people to develop divergent *cultural models of self* (Markus & Kitayama, 2010; Cross & Madson, 1997). By cultural models of self, we mean normative understandings of how to think, feel, and act as a person in the world. A large body of research has documented that the different social class contexts in which people

are raised (e.g., their home environments) ultimately lead to the development of distinct cultural *models of self* because they vary substantially in their material and social conditions, and thus require different actions to be effective (Markus & Kitayama, 2010; Phillips, Martin, & Belmi, 2020; Plaut & Markus, 2005; Stephens, Markus, & Phillips, 2014; Stephens, Townsend, & Dittmann, 2019).

Higher-class contexts in the U.S. tend to afford an *independent* model of self. They foster independence 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 higher-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, Cho, & Bracey, 2005; Stephens, Markus, & Townsend, 2007). These independent models continue to be reinforced as people navigate through middle-class institutions (e.g., throughout college; Phillips et al., 2020; Stephens et al., 2014). Thus, people from higher-class backgrounds are likely to bring *independent* models of self with them when they enter white-collar workplaces.

In contrast, lower-class contexts in the U.S. tend to afford an *interdependent* model of self. They foster interdependence 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, Davies, David, & Ball, 2001). 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 secure material assistance and support (Fiske & Markus, 2012; Kusserow, 1999; Lamont, 2000; Piff, Kraus, Côté, Cheng, & Keltner, 2010). These interdependent models have been shown to

persist even after accessing and gaining experience in middle-class institutions (e.g., throughout college; Phillips et al., 2020). Thus, people from lower-class backgrounds are likely to bring *interdependent* models of self with them when they enter white-collar organizations.

Importantly, employees from lower-class backgrounds in white-collar organizations are less likely to assume they are the “default” social identity, in contrast to their higher-class counterparts. As a result, they will be more affected by cues that signal whether their interdependent selves are included. In white-collar workplaces, organizational values serve as one important signal of the types of people who fit and can be successful at the organization (Chatman, 1991; O'Reilly, Chatman, & Caldwell, 1991; Schmader & Sedikides, 2018). When an organization's values emphasize interdependence (e.g., working together), employees from lower-class backgrounds will be more likely to feel as though their interdependent selves are included, leading them to feel a sense of fit and desire to stay with the organization. In contrast, if an organization's values instead emphasize independence (e.g., working individually), employees from lower-class backgrounds will be less likely to feel as though their interdependent selves are included. In contrast, for employees from higher class backgrounds, whether an organization's values emphasize interdependence (vs. independence) will matter less because they are more likely to assume their selves reflect the “default” in white-collar organizations (Cheryan & Markus, 2002; Schmader & Sedikides, 2018).

In sum, we theorize that the values that organizations promote will have greater impact on the fit and retention intentions of employees from lower-class backgrounds, but will have less of an impact on employees from higher class-backgrounds. However, for employees from lower-class backgrounds, we theorize that simply *espousing* interdependent values is not enough to

benefit them; instead, as we explain in the section below, we theorize that interdependent values must also be *authentic*.

Espoused-Enacted Organizational Values and Authenticity

Organizational values are manifested in a number of ways: they can both be *espoused* in broader norms and beliefs (e.g., mission statements emphasizing the value of working together), and *enacted* in daily practices (e.g., dedicating time for employees to work together in teams). Importantly, however, espoused values are not always enacted, and enacted values are not always espoused – we refer to those organizational values where there is incongruence between what is espoused and what is enacted as *inauthentic* values. For example, organizations whose mission statements emphasize teamwork, but whose employees rarely work in teams, espouse the value of teamwork but do not enact it, and so would be considered to inauthentically value teamwork (Pamphile & Ruttan, 2017).

Value authenticity will be a particularly important signal of inclusion for employees from lower-class backgrounds, who likely feel more uncertainty about whether their cultural norms are included in white-collar organizational contexts than do their higher-class counterparts. Organizational values that are inauthentic (i.e., are only espoused or enacted) will not be sufficient to benefit employees from lower-class backgrounds, in part because they may interpret these values as “window dressing” lacking real substance (Dover, Kaiser, & Major, 2020; Marques, 2010). Only interdependent organizational values that are authentic (i.e., are both espoused and enacted) can create benefit employees from lower-class backgrounds, in part because by “walking their talk,” authentic values can serve as an unambiguous signal that interdependence is truly included and valued. As mentioned previously, interdependent values overall will matter less for the sense of fit and retention of employees from higher-class

backgrounds, and accordingly, whether interdependent values are authentic should also matter less to them. Next, we outline how we operationalize espoused vs. enacted interdependent values in this investigation.

Espoused and Enacted Interdependent Values. In the current investigation, we examine both espoused and enacted interdependent values. To measure *espoused* interdependent values, we examine employees' own perceptions of whether their organization values interdependence (O'Reilly et al., 1991). To measure *enacted* interdependent values, we examine employees' own experiences of interdependence in their organization (e.g., time spent working collaboratively in teams). Interdependent organizational experiences can take on many forms. Here, we focus on two forms that are likely to afford interdependent organizational experiences: (a) one that is more indirect and reflects an initial proxy— one's organizational role, and (b) more directly, the frequency with which an employee works together with others at their organization. First, in terms of organizational role, we utilize supervisor status as an indirect proxy for the extent to which an employee is likely to have interdependent organizational experiences (Hill, 2007, 2003). While being a supervisor (vs. not) comprises a number of different experiences, some of which are unrelated to interdependence (e.g., being higher-status), the role of a supervisor is, by definition, more interdependent than that of a non-supervisor. For example, managers are responsible not solely for their own individual performance, but also for overseeing the performance of multiple employees. Furthermore, the outcomes of these employees are often tied to those of their supervisor (Hill, 2007, 2003).

Moving beyond the relatively indirect proxy of supervisor status, we next look at the frequency with which an employee works together with others, which more directly reflects interdependent organizational experiences. Indeed, many of the behaviors that are required when

working together (e.g., turn taking, information sharing) can be characterized as interdependent (Hildreth & Anderson, 2016). For example, for team members to share information effectively, they must first attend to each other and solicit each other's opinions. They then must coordinate to take the disparate information from each team member and integrate it into the best collective solution, all of which reflect interdependent behaviors. Thus, the more frequently an employee is working together with others, the more often they are likely to be having interdependent organizational experiences.

In the next section, we integrate theory about organizational value authenticity with cultural mismatch theory to outline our central theorizing as to why employees from lower-class backgrounds will only experience a complete cultural match if they feel as though the organization's authentic values include interdependence.

Authentic Organizational Values and Employees' Cultural Models of Self

Integrating previous research on authentic organizational values and the importance of fit for employees from underrepresented social identity groups (Cheryan & Markus, 2020; Pamphile & Ruttan, 2017; Schamder & Sedikides, 2018), we theorize that authentic (vs. inauthentic) interdependent values will bolster the sense of fit and retention intentions of employees from lower-class backgrounds. Interdependent values are central to the models of self of employees from lower-class backgrounds, and, as such, only organizations with *authentic* interdependent values will affirm that their cultural models of self are included, and be associated with benefits for these employees in terms of fit and retention. Neither organizations with *independent* values nor organizations with *inauthentic* interdependent values will benefit employees from lower-class backgrounds. On the one hand, if an organization has *independent* values that are either authentic or inauthentic, we theorize that this will send a clear signal to employees from lower-

class backgrounds that their more interdependent selves do not fit with the organization's values. On the other hand, if an organization has interdependent values that are *inauthentic*, we theorize that this incongruence will also likely backfire and undermine their experiences and outcomes (Lencioni, 2002; Pamphile & Ruttan, 2017).

In contrast, for employees from higher-class backgrounds, we theorize that the authenticity of interdependent (vs. independent) values will matter less for their organizational experiences and outcomes. Indeed, research shows that employees from higher-status groups (e.g., higher social class, male, white) are more likely to assume they are the “default” social group identity in white-collar organizations, leading them to generally feel at ease and as though their selves are included (e.g., Cheryan & Markus, 2020). As such, the experiences and outcomes of employees from higher-class backgrounds will be less affected regardless of whether organizations have authentic or inauthentic interdependent or independent values.

Here, we examine two consequential and beneficial workplace outcomes that are likely to result from having one's cultural models of self included in the organization's authentic values: *sense of fit* and *retention intentions*. Akin to previous research, we use the term *sense of fit* to refer to a subjective experience of ease and comfort (see Stephens, Brannon, Markus, & Nelson, 2015; Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson, & Covarrubias, 2012a). To the extent that employees feel as though their cultural models of self are authentically included in an organization's values, they should also feel more at ease and comfortable in that organization (Schmader & Sedikides, 2018; Stephens, Fryberg et al., 2012a). Feeling a greater sense of fit with one's organization, in turn, will contribute to experiencing a greater desire to stay with the organization (i.e., retention intentions; Chatman & Barsade, 1995; O'Reilly et al., 1991; Stephens, Brannon et al., 2015). Retention intentions are a particularly consequential outcome not only for individual employees,

who can minimize any potential switching costs of changing organizations by staying with their current employer, but also for organizations themselves, who can save considerable funds by retaining current employees vs. undertaking costly applicant search and hiring processes (Park & Shaw, 2013).

Accordingly, we propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Authentic (vs. inauthentic) interdependent values will differentially shape whether employees from different social class backgrounds have positive organizational experiences (i.e., fit and retention). More specifically:

Hypothesis 1a: Authentic (vs. inauthentic) interdependent values will be most likely to be associated with higher fit and retention for employees from lower-class backgrounds.

Hypothesis 1b: Authentic (vs. inauthentic) interdependent values will be less influential for the fit and retention of employees from higher-class backgrounds.

Hypothesis 2: Sense of fit will serve as a mechanism linking authentic interdependent values to greater retention intentions in employees from lower-class backgrounds.

The Current Research

In the current research, to test these hypotheses, we conducted two large survey studies with college-educated employees currently working in white-collar organizations with diverse employees. These surveys measured whether employees from different social class backgrounds (a) perceive their organization's values to include interdependence, and (b) whether these values are authentic (i.e., coupled with opportunities to enact interdependent practices). We operationalize value authenticity by looking at the interaction between these two factors: for perceived interdependent organizational values to be authentic, employees must both perceive

that their organization has interdependent values, *and* that their daily experiences in the organization –in terms of their role or work practices— include opportunities to enact interdependence. These studies tested our predictions across two samples of white-collar employees: a sample of MBA alumni and a large-scale, nationally-representative survey of college-educated employed U.S. adults.

In Study 1, we examined whether authentic interdependent organizational values benefit employees from lower-class backgrounds by measuring both (a) perceived interdependent organizational values, using a preexisting validated measure from the organizational behavior literature (O'Reilly, Chatman et al., 1991), and (b) interdependent organizational experiences via employees' organizational role as a supervisor (vs. not). We examined whether congruence (vs. incongruence) in terms of perceived interdependent values and organizational role is associated with better organizational experiences and outcomes for employees from lower-class backgrounds. In contrast, we expected that this (in)congruence would have less of an effect on the organizational experiences and outcomes of employees from higher-class backgrounds.

Then, in Study 2 we examined the effect of interdependent value authenticity along one specific dimension of interdependence – that of *working together*, a dimension of interdependence that has previously been shown to have an important influence on whether people from lower-class contexts feel a cultural match (Dittmann et al., 2020). In a nationally-representative survey of college-educated employed U.S. adults currently working in diverse white-collar occupations, we measure both (a) perceived organizational values of working together and (b) frequency of daily practices of working together in the organization. Focusing specifically on the working together dimension of interdependence enables us to more directly

test the effect of congruence between stated values of working together and lived experiences of working together in the organization.

Study 1: Survey with MBA Alumni

Study 1 offered an initial correlational test of Hypotheses 1-2. We predicted that perceived values of interdependence (vs. independence) would benefit employees from lower-class backgrounds in terms of their experiences at the organization. In contrast, we predicted that perceived values of independence (vs. interdependence) would be less influential for the experiences of employees from higher-class backgrounds. Participants completed a previously validated measure of organizational culture that assesses the broad construct of perceived *independence* vs. *interdependence*. Participants then reported on their subjective experiences at their organization.

Study 1 also offered an initial test of whether having an interdependent *role* (i.e., a supervisor vs. not), beyond working at an organization that was perceived to have interdependent (vs. independent) *values*, would further afford benefits to employees from lower-class backgrounds.

Method

Participants. Participants were 5852 alumni of an elite business school in the Midwest who were recruited via email to complete an online survey about their experiences working after graduating from their MBA. Of the full sample, 1542 indicated that they were not currently full-time employed, and so were excluded from the sample as our key hypotheses pertained to the organizational experiences of current employees. Of the remaining 4310 respondents, 787 did not complete all of the key measures required to test this study's hypotheses (i.e., parental educational attainment, supervisor status, and perceptions of organizational culture). Importantly,

those who did not complete these measures did not differ on a number of key demographic variables including gender ($X^2 (2, N = 4285) = 3.72, p = .16$) and race ($X^2 (1, N = 4246) = 1.76, p = .18$). Thus, the final sample consisted of 3523 individuals ($M_{age} = 44.40, SD_{age} = 10.19$; 28% female; 15% underrepresented minorities). A sensitivity analysis suggested we were adequately powered to detect a small effect of $d = 0.01$ at 95% power. We assessed participants' social class backgrounds using parental/guardian educational attainment, a previously validated measure of this construct (cf. Covarrubias, Gallimore, & Okagaki, 2018; Covarrubias, Valle, Laiduc, & Azmitia, 2018; Ostrove & Long, 2007; Stephens, Fryberg et al., 2012a; Stephens, Townsend, et al., 2012b). Specifically, we categorized participants as from a lower-class background if neither of their parents had attained a 4-year bachelor's degree (19%), and as from a higher-class background if at least one of their parents had attained a 4-year bachelor's degree or more (81%).

Measures. After obtaining informed consent, participants completed a series of dependent measures regarding their perceptions of the extent to which their current organization valued interdependence, their role 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., perceptions of organizational values, subjective experiences at the organization, and retention intentions). We include a complete list of all measures, and the inter-correlations among all key variables for all studies in the SOM.

Perceived organizational values. Participants responded to three items, one that assessed the perceived independence ("To what extent does your current organization value and promote autonomy?") and two that assessed the perceived interdependence of their organization's values, adapted from previous research ("To what extent does your current organization value and promote collaboration?", "To what extent does your current organization value and promote

teamwork?”; 1 = *Not at all*, 7 = *Very much so*; O’Reilly et al., 1991). The two perceived interdependence items were strongly correlated and were combined to form an index of perceived interdependence, $r(3521) = .86, p < .001$. 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 promote interdependence *more than* independence, and negative scores reflect an organization that is perceived to promote independence *more than* interdependence. We then dichotomized the measure to reflect whether the organization was perceived to value interdependence more than independence (i.e., scores > 0), or independence more than interdependence (i.e., scores ≤ 0). This dichotomous measure more clearly maps onto our theorizing regarding *interdependence* vs. *independence*, because it better captures the extent to which an organization was perceived to value interdependence *more so* than independence. While organizations may value both independence and interdependence, to be aligned with the interdependent models of self of employees from lower-class backgrounds, it is important for organizations to be interdependent *more so* than independent. The presence of independent values in an institution’s culture, even when there are low levels of interdependent values present, has been previously shown to create a cultural mismatch in people from lower-class backgrounds, undermining their experiences and outcomes (Stephens, Fryberg et al., 2012a). As such, ensuring that we captured the subset of organizations that valued interdependence more than independence theoretically maps onto those organizations that would be most likely to create a cultural match with employees from lower-class backgrounds.

Interdependent organizational experiences: Supervisor status. Supervisory status served as our proxy of interdependent practices in this study. Participants responded to a single

binary item that assessed whether they supervised other employees in their position at their current organization (1 = yes; 0 = no). 75% of participants indicated that they were currently employed in a supervisory position.

Subjective experience at organization. We originally intended to measure two distinct constructs: individuals' sense of fit with their organization, and individuals' sense of how much social and cultural capital they felt they had at their organization. Drawing on previous research (Stephens, Fryberg, et al., 2012a), the five items designed to measure sense of 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*; $\alpha = .95$). We created four items meant to measure perceived social and cultural capital at the organization. These items were created to tap into the constructs of social and cultural capital in the workplace, based on the themes that emerged in previous qualitative research (Dittmann, 2020): two items assessed social capital ("I have the skills to build an effective professional network" and "I have the necessary connections in my professional network to advance my career"), while the other two items broadly assessed cultural capital ("I understand what it takes to be successful at work" and "Beyond technical skills, I am equipped with the 'right' skills to be successful at work"; $\alpha = .81$).

However, given that these two constructs were conceptually related (i.e., both assessed participants' subjective experience at their organization), we conducted a factor analysis to determine whether all of the items tapped into a single overarching construct of participants' subjective experience at their organization. The factor analysis revealed that all eight items loaded onto a single factor accounting for 53% of the total variance². Due to the results of the

² The two measures showed the similar patterns of results when analyzed separately. Results of this analysis are available in the SOM.

factor analysis, I averaged and combined these items to form an index of subjective experience at the organization ($\alpha = .87$).

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 your current organization?" (reverse-scored); 1 = *Not at all*, 7 = *Extremely*; $\alpha = .82$; Chatman, 1991; Chatman & Barsade, 1995).

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' subjective experiences (i.e., age, gender, race/ethnicity, years since earning MBA, U.S. citizenship status). Because organizational characteristics could also impact employees' subjective experiences, we also included relevant organizational controls (i.e., industry dummy codes).

Analysis Strategy. Moderation regression analyses were conducted using the PROCESS Macro in SPSS (Hayes, 2016), both with and without key covariates (age, gender, underrepresented minority status, years since receiving MBA, U.S. citizenship status, and industry dummy codes). Specifically, we tested the effect of perceived organizational values (*interdependent* vs. *independent*), interdependent organizational role (*supervisor* vs. *non-supervisor*), and individual social class (*lower* vs. *higher-class background*) on (a) individual subjective experience at the organization and (b) retention intentions. In our model, we included all main effects, two-way interactions, and the three-way interaction between perceived organizational values, interdependent organizational role, and individual social class background.

We then conducted simple slopes analysis to test whether authentic interdependent values are most likely to be associated with benefits for employees from lower-class backgrounds.

Results

Subjective experience at organization. There was a significant main effect of supervisor status, $b = 0.383$, $t(3353) = 5.10$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.192, 0.431]. There was also a significant two-way interaction between perceived values \times social class background, $b = -0.357$, $t(3353) = -1.99$, $p = .047$, 95% CI [-0.710, -0.005] and a marginal two-way interaction between supervisor status \times social class background, $b = -0.265$, $t(3353) = -1.90$, $p = .057$, 95% CI [-0.537, -0.008]. No other significant main effects or two-way interactions emerged. Importantly, though, supporting Hypothesis 1, the predicted three-way interaction between perceived values \times supervisor status \times social class background was also significant, $b = 0.569$, $t(3353) = 2.80$, $p = .005$, 95% CI [0.170, 0.967] (see Table 1).

We next decomposed the interaction to investigate the simple slopes by social class background. Consistent with Hypothesis 1a, among those employees from lower-class backgrounds who were supervisors, working at interdependent (vs. independent) organizations was significantly positively associated with subjective experience at the organization, $b = 0.177$, $t(3353) = 2.06$, $p = .039$, 95% CI [0.009, 0.344]. Among those employees from lower-class backgrounds who were not supervisors, though nonsignificant, working at interdependent (vs. independent) organizations was associated with directionally worse subjective experience at the organization, $b = -0.267$, $t(3353) = -1.64$, $p = .102$, 95% CI [-0.586, 0.053].

In contrast, and in support of Hypothesis 1b, among those employees from higher-class backgrounds who were supervisors, they reported having a similarly positive experience at their organization regardless of whether they were at interdependent (vs. independent) organizations,

$b = -0.035, t(3353) = -0.85, p = .396, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.115, 0.046]$. Similarly, among those employees from higher-class backgrounds who were not supervisors, they also reported having a similarly positive experience at their organization regardless of whether they were at interdependent (vs. independent) organizations, $b = 0.091, t(3353) = 1.18, p = .238, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.060, 0.242]$.

Taken together, these results reveal that working at an organization that is perceived to *value* interdependence is associated with having a better experience at the organization for employees from lower-class backgrounds, but only when they also hold an interdependent role at the organization (i.e., are supervisors). In contrast, interdependence in terms of both organizational values and organizational role are less influential in shaping the experiences of employees from higher-class backgrounds.

[INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Retention intentions with organization. There was a significant main effect of supervisor status, $b = 0.270, t(3352) = 2.27, p = .024, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.036, 0.505]$ ³. There was also a significant two-way interaction between perceived values \times social class background, $b = -0.702, t(3352) = -1.99, p = .047, 95\% \text{ CI } [-1.394, -0.010]$ and a marginal two-way interaction between supervisor status \times social class background, $b = -0.494, t(3352) = -1.82, p = .069, 95\% \text{ CI } [-1.027, 0.038]$. No other significant main or two-way interaction effects emerged. Importantly, however, and in further support of Hypothesis 1, the predicted three-way interaction between perceived values \times supervisor status \times social class background was significant, $b = 1.15, t(3352) = 2.90, p = .004, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.372, 1.934]$ (see Table 2).

³ We retain as many participants as possible for each analysis across studies, so degrees of freedom differ slightly for analyses involving retention intentions vs. sense of fit in Study 1. This is due to $n = 1$ respondent completing the subjective experience measure, but not the retention intentions measure.

We next decomposed the interaction to investigate the simple slopes by social class background. Similar to the results regarding subjective experience, and consistent with Hypothesis 1a, among those employees from lower-class backgrounds who were supervisors, they reported significantly higher retention intentions when they were at organizations perceived to value *interdependence* (vs. *independence*), $b = 0.408$, $t(3352) = 2.44$, $p = .015$, 95% CI [0.081, 0.736]. Among those employees from lower-class backgrounds who were not supervisors, working at interdependent (vs. independent) organizations was associated with marginally worse subjective experience at the organization, $b = -0.554$, $t(3352) = -1.73$, $p = .083$, 95% CI [-1.180, 0.072].

In contrast, similar to the results regarding subjective experience and in further support of Hypothesis 1b, among those employees from higher-class backgrounds who were supervisors, they did not significantly differ in their retention intentions regardless of whether they were at an organization perceived to value *interdependence* or *independence*, $b = -0.043$, $t(3352) = -0.54$, $p = .591$, 95% CI [-0.200, 0.114]. Similarly, among those employees from higher-class backgrounds who were not supervisors, they also reported having a similarly positive experience at their organization regardless of whether they were at interdependent (vs. independent) organizations, $b = 0.148$, $t(3352) = 0.98$, $p = .325$, 95% CI [-0.147, 0.443].

Taken together, these results reveal that working at an organization that is perceived to *value* interdependence is associated with higher retention intentions for employees from lower-class backgrounds, but only when they also hold an interdependent role at the organization (i.e., are supervisors). In contrast, interdependence in terms of both organizational values and organizational role are less influential in shaping the retention intentions of employees from higher-class backgrounds.

[INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Moderated mediation. To the extent that employees report having positive experiences 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 2. Given that employees from lower-class (vs. higher-class) contexts reported having a significantly more positive experience at organizations with authentic (vs. inauthentic) interdependent values, we next sought to test whether subjective experience might help to statistically explain why employees from lower-class (vs. higher-class) contexts reported experiencing significantly greater retention intentions at organizations with authentic (vs. inauthentic) interdependent values. To do so, we entered social class as the predictor, perceived interdependent values and interdependent practices (i.e., supervisor status) as moderators, retention as the outcome, and subjective experience as the putative mediator. Moderated mediation analyses indicated that subjective experience mediated the observed relationship between social class, values, practices and retention. Specifically, the analysis yielded a point estimate of 0.566 and a 95% bias-corrected CI of [0.164, 0.986]. This interval did not include zero, suggesting that the indirect effect of social class \times values \times practices on retention intentions through subjective experience was significant.

Decomposing the moderated mediation, among employees at organizations with *interdependent* values, there was a point estimate of 0.296, and a 95% bias-corrected CI of [0.018, 0.0592]. This interval did not include zero, suggesting that subjective experience significantly mediated the relationship between the interaction of supervisor status and social class background and retention intentions.

In contrast, among employees at organizations with *independent* values, there was a point estimate of -0.270, and a 95% bias-corrected CI of [-0.570, 0.026]. This interval includes zero, suggesting that subjective experience did not significantly mediate the relationship between the interaction of supervisor status and social class background and retention intentions.

Taken together, these moderated mediation results suggest that employees from lower-class (vs. higher-class) backgrounds felt a greater sense of fit at organizations with authentic (vs. inauthentic) interdependent values, which, in turn, led them to have a stronger intention to stay with the organization.

Discussion

In Study 1, utilizing a large sample of MBA alumni, we find initial correlational evidence in support of the idea that authentic (vs. inauthentic) interdependent values differentially shape the organizational experiences and outcomes of employees from different social class backgrounds. More specifically, in support of Hypothesis 1a, we find suggestive evidence that authentic (vs. inauthentic) *interdependent* values are beneficial to the subjective experience and retention intentions of employees from lower-class backgrounds. In contrast, and in support of Hypothesis 1b, authentic (vs. inauthentic) *interdependent* values are less influential for the experiences and outcomes of employees from higher-class backgrounds.

However, one key limitation of Study 1 was the specificity of the measures we had available to us. The survey was part of a larger data collection effort in partnership with the business school administration, so we were somewhat limited in the measures we were able to include. First, the measures of the constructs of *independence* vs. *interdependence* 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, a focus on *being different than others*, which is a component of independence vs. *being similar to others*, which is a component of 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. Second, we also utilized a somewhat indirect proxy of interdependent *practices*: supervisor status. While definitionally, the supervisor role requires more interdependence than a non-supervisor role, there are also a number of other differences between these two types of positions. While we did control for some of these other differences, like differences in occupational prestige (e.g., income), that might have also influenced employees' experiences and outcomes, we nevertheless next sought to test our hypotheses utilizing a more direct measure of interdependent organizational experiences in Study 2: we directly measured the frequency with which employees worked together at their organization.

We next sought to provide additional evidence of our hypotheses and test whether authentic interdependent values are beneficial to employees from lower-class backgrounds in a separate sample using a validated measure of organizational values that emphasizes a specific dimension of interdependence that is particularly relevant to the workplace: working together vs. individually (Dittmann et al., 2020). To do so, we conducted a large-scale nationally-representative survey of college-educated employed adults and had participants complete the working together vs. individually organizational values measure, a measure of how frequently they worked together at their organization, and the same key measures of workplace experiences

(i.e., subjective experience at the organization) and outcomes (i.e., retention intentions) as in Study 1.

Study 2: Nationally-Representative Survey

Study 2 had two main goals. First, we sought to conduct a pre-registered replication of our effects from Study 1 using more direct measures of interdependent values and organizational practices. Second, we sought to examine our hypotheses in a nationally-representative sample to show that our effects are not limited to the elite, high-status managerial occupations that were represented in Study 1. To do so, we conducted a nationally-representative survey of college-educated white-collar employees from different social class backgrounds. Participants completed a survey about their perceptions of their current organization's culture in terms of both its *values* as well as their daily *practices*. They then completed a series of measures about their perceived experiences and outcomes at the organization.

Method

Participants. We preregistered our study on OSF (https://osf.io/7qe4b/?view_only=30e9e3e137954e26b375c89562aaf060). Participants were recruited via the National Opinion Research Center's (NORC) AmeriSpeak® panel (Montgomery, Dennis, & Ganesh, 2016). Funded and operated by NORC at the University of Chicago, AmeriSpeak® is a probability-based panel designed to be representative of the US household population. Randomly selected US households are sampled using area probability and address-based sampling, with a known, non-zero probability of selection from the NORC National Sample Frame. These sampled households are then contacted by US mail, telephone, and field interviewers (face to face). The panel provides sample coverage of approximately 97% of the U.S. household population. Those excluded from the sample include people with P.O. Box

only addresses, some addresses not listed in the USPS Delivery Sequence File, and some newly constructed dwellings. While most AmeriSpeak households participate in surveys by web, non-internet households can participate in AmeriSpeak surveys by telephone. Households without conventional internet access but having web access via smartphones are allowed to participate in AmeriSpeak surveys by web. AmeriSpeak panelists participate in NORC studies or studies conducted by NORC on behalf of governmental agencies, academic researchers, and media and commercial organizations.

Of the 1,124 AmeriSpeak panelists that were eligible for the survey (i.e., were college-educated and employed at an organization with >1 employee), $N = 1,063$ completed the survey (94.6% completion rate). Of these, $N = 1,032$ completed the key variables to identify their social class background and could be included in the final sample ($M_{age} = 42.00$ $SD_{age} = 10.04$; 49% female, 71% non-Hispanic White). A sensitivity analysis suggested we were adequately powered to detect a small effect of $d = 0.03$ at 95% power. As in Study 1, participants' social class backgrounds were assessed using parental/guardian educational attainment. Specifically, individuals were classified as coming from a *lower-class* context if both of their parents/guardians had attained less than a four-year college degree (30%). Those individuals with at least one parent/guardian with a four-year college degree were classified as coming from a *higher-class* context (70%).

Procedure. Participants were recruited to complete an “Organizational Culture Survey” online via AmeriSpeak. After obtaining informed consent, participants completed our survey and were then paid, debriefed, and thanked for their participation.

Measures.

Perceived organizational values. Participants responded to a thirteen-item binary forced-choice scale developed in prior research (Dittmann et al., 2020) that assesses whether employees perceive that their organization values different components of *interdependence* versus *independence*. For the current study, we focus on one of the two specific dimensions that emerged: the *working together* versus *individually* dimension. We do so due to previous research that has documented the importance of *working together* vs. *individually* for the experiences and outcomes of people from lower-class backgrounds (Dittmann et al., 2020). This dimension included items such as: “Divvy up tasks so that employees can work separately OR Share tasks so that employees can work collaboratively,” and “Rely on themselves to get the job done OR Rely on others to help them get the job done.” 61% of participants were characterized as working at organizations that valued *working together*, while 39% worked at organizations that valued *working individually*.

Organizational practices. Participants responded to a single item that directly assessed the percentage of time that they spent working together, on average, at their organization: “*Estimate on average what percentage of your total time you spend coordinating with other people at work to complete collective tasks or achieve collective goals*” ($M = 42\%$, $SD = 26\%$).

Importantly, this measure was significantly positively correlated with self-reported supervisor status ($r(1030) = 0.25$, $p < .001$), providing evidence that supervisor status served as an adequate proxy of interdependent practices in Study 1. As such, we utilized our more direct organizational practices measure as our measure of interdependent practices in this study, but report results utilizing supervisor status, which yield similar effects, in the SOM.

Subjective experience. As in Study 1, participants responded to items assessing their *sense of fit* with their organization and *perceived skills* that we averaged and combined to create

our subjective experience index, a 4-item version of the index in Study 1 (items: “I feel like I fit in as a member of my current organization,” “I feel comfortable working in my current organization,” “I understand what it takes to be successful at work,” and “Beyond technical skills, I am equipped with the ‘right’ skills to be successful at work”; 1 = *Not at all*, 7 = *Very much*; $\alpha = .92$).

Retention intentions. Participants’ *retention intentions* were assessed using a 2-item version of the scale utilized in Study 1 (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 your current organization?” (reverse-scored); 1 = *Not at all*, 7 = *Extremely*; $\alpha = .88$; Chatman & Barsade, 1995).⁴

Control variables. Finally, as in Study 1, we used a number of key control variables. We included potentially relevant demographic characteristics that could also affect employees’ sense of fit and retention intentions (i.e., age, gender, race/ethnicity, tenure, personal educational attainment). Employees’ experiences may also be affected by the type of organization at which they are employed, so we also included a number of organizational characteristics (i.e., organization size, industry (dummy coded), and region (dummy coded)).

Results

Analyses. We conducted multiple linear regressions of organizational values, practices, and social class background on our key dependent measures. Specifically, we tested the effect of perceived values (*working individually vs. together*), organizational practices (proportion of time

⁴For concision, we report the results for sense of fit and retention intentions in the main text. Importantly, though, results are largely equivalent for other key outcomes including organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and chances for advancement (see SOM).

spent working together), and individual social class background (from *lower-class* vs. *higher-class background*) on participants' (1) sense of fit and (2) retention intentions. We then conducted simple slopes analyses to reveal when values and practices are most likely to afford benefits to employees from lower-class backgrounds. In all tables, Model 1 includes the main effects of the primary independent variables only. Model 2 adds the relevant interaction terms: all two-way interactions, and the three-way interaction between perceived values, practices, and individual social class background. Model 3 adds control variables. Importantly, the key three-way interaction between values, practices, and social class remains significant on both dependent variables with control variables included (i.e., Model 3).

Subjective experience. There was a main effect of perceived values, $b = 0.307$, $t(968) = 2.89$, $p = .004$, 95% CI [0.099, 0.515], but no other significant main effects emerged. There was also a significant two-way perceived values \times social class background interaction, $b = 0.396$, $t(968) = 2.10$, $p = .036$, 95% CI [0.025, 0.766] and a marginally significant two-way practices \times social class interaction, $b = 0.008$, $t(968) = 1.76$, $p = .080$, 95% CI [-0.001, 0.016].

Importantly, in support of Hypothesis 1 that authentic (vs. inauthentic) interdependent values would be differentially associated with benefits for employees from different social class backgrounds, the two-way interactions were further qualified by a significant three-way interaction between values, practices, and social class, $b = 0.021$, $t(968) = 2.96$, $p = .003$, 95% CI [0.007, 0.035] (see Table 3 and Figure 1).

Using the PROCESS macro in SPSS (Hayes, 2017), we obtained the simple slopes of social class for this three-way interaction. We first looked at the simple slopes for employees from lower-class backgrounds by perceived values of working together vs. individually. For employees from lower-class backgrounds at organizations with perceived values of *working*

together, the simple slope of *working together* practices was positive and significant, $b = 0.011$, $t(968) = 3.07$, $p = .002$, 95% CI [0.004, 0.019] (see Figure 1; left panel, solid line). This supports Hypothesis 1a that authentic (vs. inauthentic) interdependent values are associated with greater subjective experience for employees from lower-class backgrounds.

In contrast, for employees from lower-class backgrounds at *working individually* organizations, the simple slope of working together practices was negative and marginally significant, $b = -0.007$, $t(968) = -1.73$, $p = .084$, 95% CI [-0.016, 0.001] (see Figure 1; left panel, dotted line). This result indicates that, inauthentic interdependent values may actually produce negative outcomes in employees from lower-class backgrounds. It also reveals that employees from lower-class backgrounds only feel a greater sense of fit when they are at organizations with authentic interdependent values – no other combination of organizational practices and values is associated with the same benefit.

Next, we looked at the simple slopes for employees from higher-class backgrounds by perceived values. For employees from higher-class backgrounds at *working together* organizations, the simple slope of *working together* practices was positive and nonsignificant, $b = 0.004$, $t(968) = 1.58$, $p = .113$, 95% CI [-0.001, 0.008] (see Figure 1; right panel, solid line). Similarly, for employees from higher-class backgrounds at *working individually* organizations, the simple slope of *working together* practices was also positive and nonsignificant, $b = 0.005$, $t(968) = 1.39$, $p = .164$, 95% CI [-0.002, 0.011] (see Figure 1; right panel, dotted line). These two findings are consistent with Hypothesis 1b that authentic (vs. inauthentic) interdependent values will be less influential for the sense of fit for employees from higher-class backgrounds.

[INSERT TABLE 3 AND FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Retention intentions. Similar to the results regarding subjective experience, there was a main effect of perceived values, $b = 0.394$, $t(969) = 2.62$, $p = .009$, 95% CI [0.098, 0.689], but no other significant main effects emerged⁵. There was also a significant two-way interaction practices \times social class interaction, $b = 0.014$, $t(969) = 2.21$, $p = .027$, 95% CI [0.002, 0.026]. Importantly, mirroring the results regarding subjective experience and in further support of Hypothesis 1 that authentic (vs. inauthentic) interdependent values would be differentially associated with benefits for employees from different social class backgrounds, these two-way interactions were qualified by a significant three-way interaction between values, practices, and individual social class background, $b = 0.025$, $t(969) = 2.52$, $p = .012$, 95% CI [0.006, 0.045] (see Table 4 and Figure 2).

Again, using the PROCESS macro in SPSS (Hayes, 2017), we obtained the simple slopes of social class background for this three-way interaction. We first looked at the simple slopes for employees from lower-class backgrounds by perceived values of working together vs. individually. For employees from lower-class backgrounds at *working together* organizations, the simple slope of *working together* practices was positive and marginally significant, $b = 0.010$, $t(969) = 1.87$, $p = .061$, 95% CI [-0.001, 0.020] (see Figure 2; left panel, solid line). This provides further support for Hypothesis 1a that authentic (vs. inauthentic) interdependent values are associated with greater retention intentions for employees from lower-class backgrounds.

In contrast, for employees from lower-class backgrounds at *working individually* organizations, the simple slope of working together practices was negative and nonsignificant, $b = -0.005$, $t(969) = -0.78$, $p = .438$, 95% CI [-0.016, 0.007] (see Figure 2; left panel, dotted line).

⁵We retain as many participants as possible for each analysis, so degrees of freedom differ slightly for analyses involving retention intentions vs. subjective experience in Study 2. This is due to $n = 1$ respondent completing the retention intentions measure, but not completing the subjective experience measure.

Similar to the results regarding sense of fit, this result indicates that, if anything, *inauthentic* interdependent values may actually produce negative outcomes in employees from lower-class backgrounds. It also reveals that employees from lower-class backgrounds only feel greater retention intentions when they are at organizations with authentic interdependent values – no other combination of practices and values is associated with the same benefit.

Next, we looked at the simple slopes for employees from higher-class backgrounds by perceived values. For employees from higher-class backgrounds at *working together* organizations, the simple slope of *working together* practices was negative and nonsignificant, $b = -0.003$, $t(969) = -1.00$, $p = .316$, 95% CI [-0.010, 0.003] (see Figure 2; right panel, solid line). In contrast, for employees from higher-class backgrounds at *working individually* organizations, the simple slope of *working together* practices was positive and nonsignificant, $b = 0.008$, $t(969) = 1.60$, $p = .110$, 95% CI [-0.002, 0.017] (see Figure 2; right panel, dotted line). This provides additional evidence consistent with Hypothesis 1b that authentic (vs. inauthentic) interdependent values will be less influential for the retention intentions of employees from higher-class backgrounds.

[INSERT TABLE 4 AND FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Moderated mediation. We next conducted a moderated mediation analysis to provide another test of Hypothesis 2. Given that employees from lower-class (vs. higher-class) contexts reported having a significantly more positive experience at organizations with authentic (vs. inauthentic) interdependent values, we next sought to test whether sense of fit might help to statistically explain why people from lower-class (vs. higher-class) contexts reported experiencing significantly greater retention intentions at organizations with authentic (vs. inauthentic) interdependent values. To do so, we entered social class as the predictor, perceived

values and practices as moderators, retention as the outcome, and sense of fit as the putative mediator. In support of Hypothesis 2 and replicating the results from Study 1, moderated mediation analyses indicated that sense of fit mediated the observed relationship between social class, values, practices and retention. Specifically, the analysis yielded a point estimate of 0.014 and a 95% bias-corrected CI of [0.004, 0.025]. This interval did not include zero, suggesting that the indirect effect of social class \times values \times practices on retention intentions through sense of fit was significant. This suggests that employees from lower-class (vs. higher-class) backgrounds felt a greater sense of fit at organizations with authentic (vs. inauthentic) interdependent values, which, in turn, led them to have a stronger intention to stay with the organization (see Figure 3).

[INSERT FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE]

Discussion

In a nationally-representative sample, utilizing more direct measures of (a) values of working together (vs. individually) and (b) practices of working together, we find additional evidence consistent with Hypothesis 1: authentic (vs. inauthentic) interdependent values are differentially associated with the experiences and outcomes of employees from different social class backgrounds. Specifically, authentic (vs. inauthentic) interdependent values are uniquely associated with benefits for employees from lower-class backgrounds in terms of their sense of fit with the organization, and their retention intentions. In contrast, and in further support of Hypothesis 1b, authentic (vs. inauthentic) interdependent values are less influential for the experiences and outcomes of employees from higher-class backgrounds. We further find evidence consistent with the idea that sense of fit serves as a mechanism linking perceived values and practices to greater retention intentions in employees from lower-class backgrounds. Finally, we observed additional evidence in support of Hypothesis 2 that subjective experience would

serve as a mechanism that would help to explain why employees from lower-class backgrounds would report higher retention intentions at organizations with authentic (vs. inauthentic) interdependent values.

General Discussion

The aim of this investigation was to test whether authentic (vs. inauthentic) interdependent values are associated with more beneficial organizational experiences and outcomes for employees from lower-class backgrounds. We also sought to reveal that authentic (vs. inauthentic) interdependent values would matter less for the organizational experiences and outcomes of employees from higher-class backgrounds. While research has previously shown that experiencing a fit between one's own values and that of the organization are important, this research has largely been agnostic to the distribution of these values across employees (i.e., focusing on congruence between any given value an individual might have and whether or not it is reflected in the broader organizational culture).

The current findings are the first to demonstrate that the values of white-collar employees are not randomly distributed: employees' social class backgrounds powerfully shape the cultural values that become normative and preferred from an early age – and these values persist into white-collar workplace settings. Furthermore, building on previous research on cultural mismatch in college (Stephens, Fryberg et al., 2012a; Stephens, Townsend et al., 2012b), the current findings also provide evidence that the values of white-collar workplaces are not neutral: both organizations with independent values and organizations with *inauthentic* interdependent values have the potential to systematically disadvantage employees from lower-class backgrounds. In contrast, organizations with authentic interdependent values can benefit employees from lower-class backgrounds, and help them realize their full potential at work.

We obtained evidence consistent with this theorizing across two large-scale studies with samples of adults currently employed in diverse white-collar occupations. The first study enabled us to test the effect of authentic (vs. inauthentic) interdependent values by looking at the interaction between perceived organizational values and employees' role in the organization. We find that employees from lower-class backgrounds who perceive their organization to value interdependence, and who are also employed in a supervisor position are most likely to report having positive subjective experiences at the organization, and have high retention intentions. Next, in a large, nationally-representative survey of college-educated adults working in diverse white-collar organizations, we more directly test the effect of authentic (vs. inauthentic) interdependent values by looking at the interaction between perceived values of *working together* (vs. *individually*), coupled with organizational practices of *working together*. We find additional support for our two key hypotheses. Together, these studies provide important evidence about how the authenticity of interdependent organizational values differentially shapes whether employees from lower-class backgrounds have an equal opportunity to succeed at work.

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 state that it values interdependence, these values must also be authentic—reflecting employees' lived experiences at the organization. Furthermore, organizations with authentic interdependent values are not the norm: Indeed, when examining espoused-enacted interdependent values in Study 2, only a minority of employees –30%—actually reported working at organizations with authentic interdependent values (i.e., organizations that both espouse and enact values of working together).

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 afford employees from lower-class backgrounds an equal opportunity to succeed at work as their counterparts from higher-class backgrounds. Indeed, even if employees from lower-class backgrounds feel they have unique strengths, they might nonetheless, on average, still experience worse outcomes in the workplace compared to their more advantaged higher-class counterparts if they are less likely to be employed at organizations with authentic interdependent values.

Limitations and Future Directions

Across the two studies presented here, we find robust correlational evidence across multiple distinct samples that authentic interdependent values are associated with benefits for employees from lower-class backgrounds in terms of both their experiences and retention intentions at work. However, these findings are not without their limitations, and there are several promising directions for future research.

While extant work on cultural values (e.g., Ruttan & Pamphile, 2017) indicates that organizational values are relatively stable over time, the current work was cross-sectional in nature – we do not test the durability of interdependent vs. independent organizational values with a longitudinal design. Future work should administer a measure of *interdependence* vs. *independence* 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 *interdependence* vs. *independence* is, in fact stable over time. If, instead these values 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 values dynamically change from independence to interdependence, do employees from lower-class backgrounds then report having better experiences and outcomes?).

Similarly, while we provide robust correlational evidence in support of our hypotheses, we do not test the causality of these findings (i.e., with experiments). The key benefit of the correlational approach that we undertook is its external validity: these are the experiences of real employees reporting on the organizations where they are actually employed (vs. the hypothetical or artificial experiences that would result from online experiments or lab studies). However, to begin to address this, in ongoing research, we are testing whether these effects can be replicated experimentally. Initial pilot results suggest that simply manipulating perceived *values* of working together vs. individually are not sufficient to produce the benefits observed for people from lower-class backgrounds in the studies presented here: participants from lower-class backgrounds anticipate that they will have similar experiences and outcomes regardless of whether the organization they read about is said to value *working together* or *working individually*. Instead, initial pilot experiment results suggest that manipulating both *values* of working together and *practices* of working together may causally confer benefits to people from lower-class backgrounds.

Third, the pattern of results in Study 2 provides evidence that the benefits of working together are not simply due to being part of a group, which might reduce belonging threat (e.g., Walton & Cohen, 2007). If they were, we would expect that, regardless of whether broader organizational values promoted interdependence vs. independence, higher working together practices would be associated with greater sense of fit for employees from lower-class

backgrounds. Nevertheless, future research could seek to more specifically and directly rule out this alternative possibility using an experimental paradigm that manipulated both practices of working together vs. individually, and broader values of working together vs. individually.

Conclusion

Social class disparities in white-collar organizations are not driven exclusively by differential access to resources or enrichment opportunities – cultural (mis)match, a critical but often-overlooked cultural obstacle, also contributes to these disparities. In the studies presented here, we document that whether an organization values interdependence, and does so authentically, powerfully shapes the fit and retention intentions of employees from lower-class backgrounds. These findings indicate that it is not enough for organizations to simply promote interdependence in their espoused values, they must also ensure these values are enacted in employees' lived experiences in the organization. In so doing, organizations will ensure that employees from lower-class backgrounds have an equal opportunity to succeed at work – and organizations themselves will also likely benefit from the interdependent selves that these employees bring with them to the workplace.

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Tables and Figures

Table 1. *Regression results on subjective experience in Study 1.*

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Perceived Values:			
Interdependence (vs. Independence)	0.025 (0.033)	0.041 (0.077)	0.091 (0.077)
Organizational Practices:			
Supervisor Status	0.383*** (0.040)	0.397*** (0.060)	0.312*** (0.061)
Social Class Background	-0.031 (0.042)	0.059 (0.120)	0.100 (0.121)
Values × Practices		-0.039 (0.088)	-0.126 (0.087)
Values × Social Class Background		-0.262 (0.181)	-0.357* (0.180)
Social Class Background × Practices		-0.173 (0.138)	-0.265+ (0.139)
Values × Practices × Social Class Background		0.432* (0.205)	0.569** (0.203)
Constant	5.278*** (0.039)	5.275*** (0.052)	4.822*** (0.149)
Observations	3523	3523	3390
R-Squared	0.027	0.028	0.094
Control Variables	No	No	Yes

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses+ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 2. Regression results on retention intentions in Study 1.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Perceived Values:			
Interdependence (vs. Independence)	0.060 (0.063)	0.118 (0.149)	0.148 (0.150)
Organizational Practices:			
Supervisor Status	0.358*** (0.076)	0.408*** (0.116)	0.270* (0.119)
Social Class Background	-0.133 (0.081)	0.106 (0.230)	0.123 (0.237)
Values × Practices		-0.116 (0.169)	-0.191 (0.170)
Values × Social Class Background		-0.622+ (0.350)	-0.702* (0.353)
Social Class Background × Practices		-0.437 (0.266)	-0.494+ (0.272)
Values × Practices × Social Class Background	4.328*** (0.074)	1.012* (0.394)	3.861*** (0.398)
Constant		4.307*** (0.100)	
Observations	3523	3523	3389
R-Squared	0.007	0.010	0.050
Control Variables	No	No	Yes

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses

+ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 3. *Regression results on sense of fit in Study 2.*

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Perceived Values:	0.442***	0.333**	0.307**
Working Together (vs. Individually)	(0.088)	(0.104)	(0.106)
Organizational Practices:	0.004*	0.004	0.004
Time Spent Working Together	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Social Class Background	-0.012 (0.088)	0.089 (0.115)	0.077 (0.117)
Values × Practices		-0.001 (0.004)	-0.001 (0.004)
Values × Social Class Background		0.381* (0.185)	0.396* (0.189)
Social Class Background × Practices		0.008+ (0.004)	0.008+ (0.004)
Values × Practices × Social Class Background		0.020** (0.007)	0.021** (0.007)
Constant	5.651*** (0.058)	5.613*** (0.062)	5.714*** (0.843)
Observations	1032	1032	1015
R-Squared	0.040	0.053	0.125
Control Variables	No	No	Yes

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses+ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

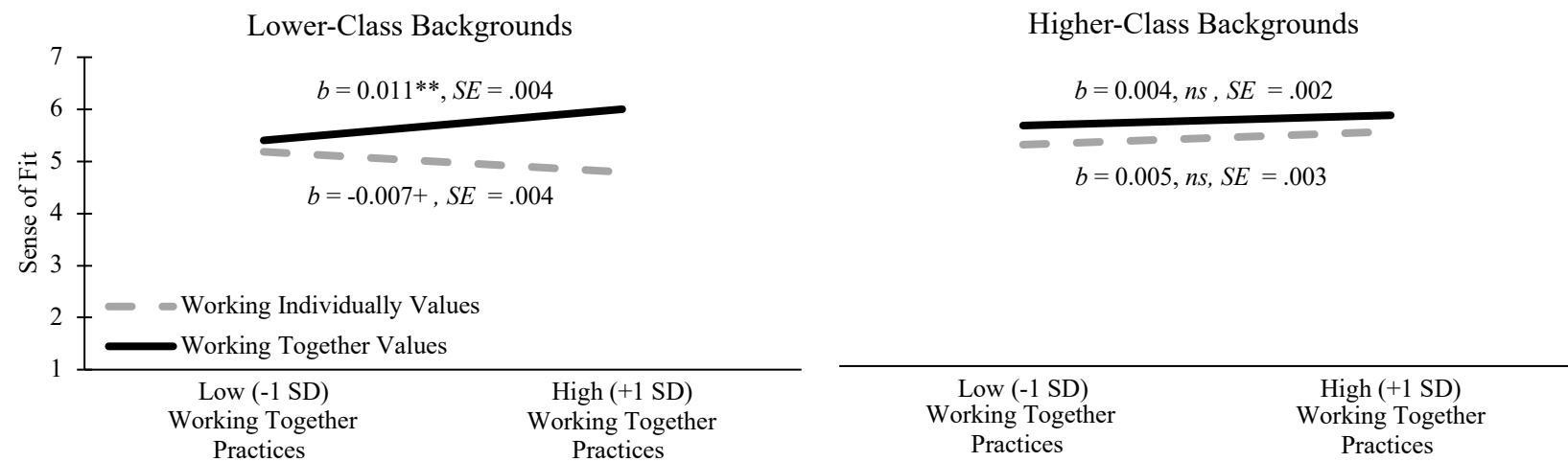
Table 4. *Regression results on retention intentions in Study 2.*

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Perceived Values:			
Working Together (vs. Individually)	0.508*** (0.119)	0.406** (0.146)	0.394** (0.151)
Organizational Practices:			
Time Spent Working Together	0.001 (0.002)	-0.003 (0.003)	-0.002 (0.003)
Social Class Background	0.030 (0.122)	0.053 (0.161)	-0.025 (0.166)
Values × Practices		-0.011+ (0.006)	-0.009 (0.006)
Values × Social Class Background		0.259 (0.258)	0.195 (0.268)
Social Class Background × Practices		0.013* (0.006)	0.014* (0.006)
Values × Practices × Social Class Background		0.025* (0.010)	0.025* (0.010)
Constant	4.547*** (0.081)	4.552*** (0.087)	4.688*** (1.196)
Observations	1032	1032	1016
R-Squared	0.021	0.028	0.072
Control Variables	No	No	Yes

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses

+ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

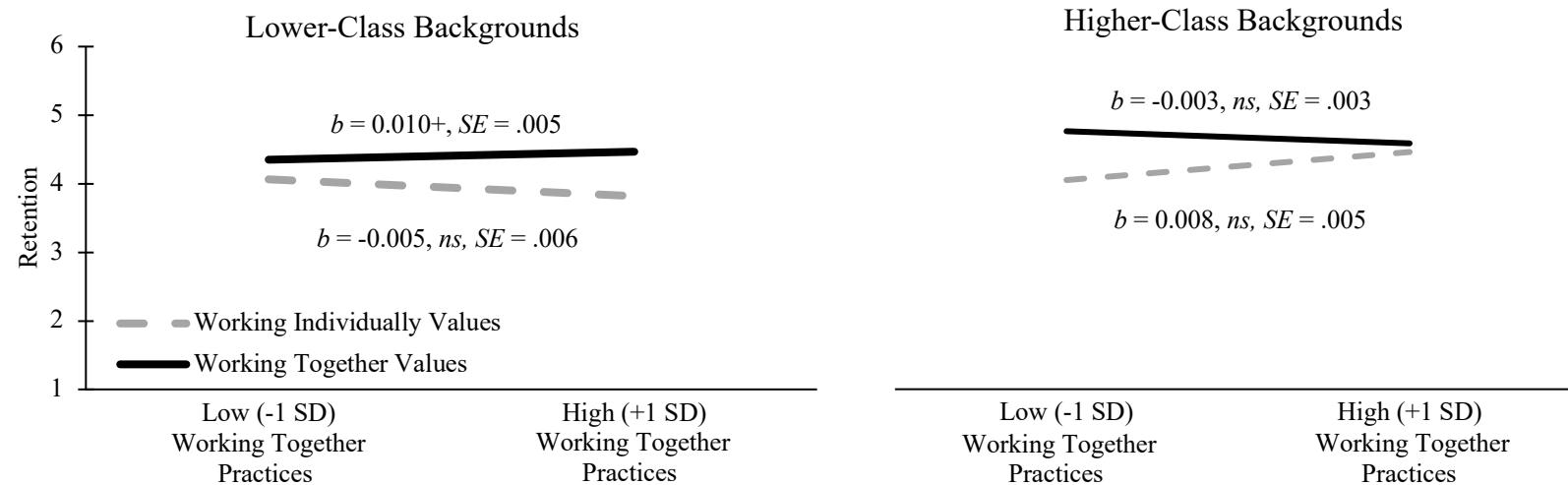
AUTHENTIC INTERDEPENDENT VALUES



Note: + $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

Figure 1. *Effect of perceived values, practices, and social class on sense of fit with organization in Study 2.*

AUTHENTIC INTERDEPENDENT VALUES



Note: + $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

Figure 2. Effect of perceived values, practices, and social class on retention intentions in Study 2.

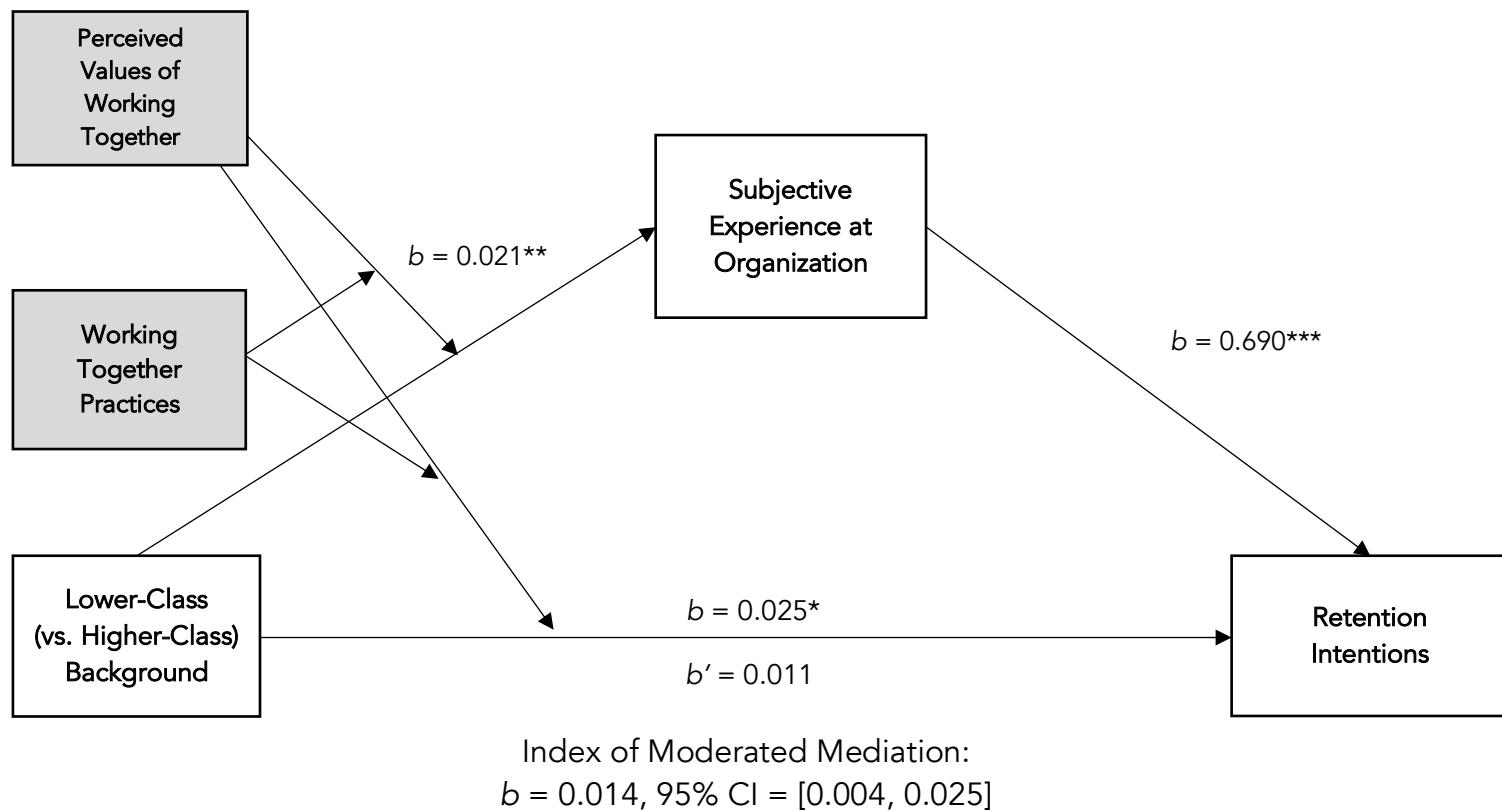


Figure 3. *Moderated mediation of perceived values, practices, and social class background on retention intentions via subjective experience at organization in Study 2.* Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.