

### Abstract

Social class disparities are pervasive in American society. In higher education, one critical driver of these disparities is the cultural mismatch between the interdependent norms of people from working-class backgrounds and the independent norms that pervade higher education. However, after graduating from college and entering white-collar workplaces, people from working-class backgrounds have frequent opportunities to collaborate in teams—that is, to enact *interdependent* behavior (e.g., collaboration). Do these opportunities reduce cultural mismatch for people from working-class backgrounds? Across two survey studies and two experiments with college-educated U.S. employees (Total  $N = 2,584$ ), we find that they do not. We theorize and document that this is because there is often a decoupling between *enacting* interdependent behavior and whether such behavior is *valued* as part of being a “good” employee. We find that employees from working-class backgrounds only experience a cultural match and its benefits (e.g., sense of fit, high retention intentions) when interdependent behaviors are both enacted and valued. In contrast, when interdependent behaviors are enacted but not valued, employees from working-class backgrounds experience a cultural mismatch. Furthermore, we find that this pattern is unique to employees from working-class backgrounds: employees from middle-class backgrounds report similar fit and retention regardless of whether there is a coupling of enacted and valued interdependent behavior. Taken together, our results suggest that it is critical to examine multiple elements of culture simultaneously (e.g., both *enacted* and *valued* behavior) to fully understand and predict the consequences of cultural (mis)match.

*Keywords:* social class, cultural mismatch, inequality, sense of fit, values and behavior

### **Statement of Relevance**

This research highlights how multiple elements of institutions' cultures interact to shape whether underrepresented employees from working-class backgrounds have an equal opportunity to succeed at work. If employees work together but working together is not valued as part of being a "good" employee at the organization, employees from working-class backgrounds feel a lower sense of fit and desire to stay with the organization. However, if working together is both enacted and valued, employees from working-class backgrounds feel a high sense of fit and desire to stay with the organization. These findings highlight a path that organizations can take to ensure all of their employees feel included and able to perform up to their potential: by ensuring that behaviors of working together are also valued.

## **Interdependent Behavior Only Benefits Employees from Working-Class Backgrounds When it is Both Enacted and Valued**

Social class disparities are pervasive in American society. Research in the context of higher education has documented that one critical driver of these disparities in college is the experience of a *cultural mismatch*: the divergence between the more *interdependent* norms common in working-class contexts (e.g., preferring to be part of a group) and the *independent* norms that pervade higher education (e.g., the expectation to pave one's own path and work independently; Phillips, Stephens et al., 2020; Stephens, Fryberg et al., 2012). Throughout college, experiencing a cultural mismatch produces a range of negative consequences for people from working-class backgrounds (i.e., first-generation college students) including reduced sense of fit<sup>1</sup> and worsened academic performance (Stephens, Fryberg et al., 2012). However, after graduating from college and entering white-collar workplaces<sup>2</sup>, people from working-class backgrounds have frequent opportunities to collaborate in teams—that is, to enact *interdependent* behavior (Cross et al., 2016). If opportunities to enact interdependent behavior reflect that the organization *values* interdependence (e.g., Duffy & Feltovich, 2000; Wegner & Gilbert, 2001), these opportunities may reduce cultural mismatch for people from working-class backgrounds.

Nevertheless, frequent opportunities to enact interdependent behavior may not reflect an organization's actual or authentic values. Indeed, many white-collar workplaces value and prioritize independence as the ideal way of being a “good” employee (e.g., in company mission statements; Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Groysberg, 2010; Sitkin et al., 2020; Stephens et al.,

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<sup>1</sup>Following social and cultural psychological of 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 (cf. Schmader & Sedikides, 2018).

<sup>2</sup>Following prior research, we use the term white-collar workplaces to refer to the type of workplace where most employees who have completed at least a 4-year college degree would secure employment (cf. Barry, 1961; Crinò, 2010; Stephens et al., 2014; Rao & Tobias Neely, 2019).

2017). This suggests that many modern workplaces may fail to “talk their walk”: they may not value the interdependent behaviors in which their employees frequently engage (Simons, 2002; Weick, 1995). We propose that this potential disconnect between the behavior that is *enacted* by people in a setting and the behavior that is *valued* in that setting requires examining both simultaneously to understand and predict the consequences of cultural (mis)match. Thus, in contrast to prior cultural mismatch theory and research that has primarily focused on perceptions of an institution’s culture in general (Stephens, Fryberg, et al., 2012; Stephens, Townsend, et al., 2012), in the current research, we examine how both *enacted* and *valued* behavior interact to produce the experience of cultural (mis)match for people from working-class backgrounds (Anteby et al., 2016; Bourne et al., 2019; Bourne & Jenkins, 2013; Chan & Anteby, 2016; Deeds Pamphile & Ruttan, 2022; Hamedani & Markus, 2019; Saavedra et al., 1993).

In the present research, we contribute to multiple areas of psychology by bridging the social- and cultural-psychological literature on cultural mismatch with organizational psychological insights on the signals that can be conveyed by separate components of an organization’s culture: enacted and valued behavior. Specifically, we make the theoretical distinction between the behaviors that are *enacted* in an institution and those that are *valued*, and examine for the first time whether both interactively contribute to the experience of cultural mismatch. Our research also contributes to the broader psychological literature on the origins and maintenance of social class inequality (Leung et al., 2020; Shaw & Olson, 2013, 2012): we investigate whether the experience of mismatch persists for people from working-class backgrounds (i.e., social class “transitioners”; Martin & Côté, 2019) later in their lifespan—beyond graduating from institutions of higher education and after entering the workplace.

In the sections that follow, we outline the logic underlying our theorizing that the experience of cultural (mis)match among employees from working-class backgrounds will depend on both enacted and valued interdependent behavior. First, to explain why we expect white-collar employees' social class backgrounds to shape their endorsement of cultural norms of interdependence (vs. independence), we describe research documenting how people's social class backgrounds shape norms that persist even when people complete a college degree. Second, we explain our theorizing as to whether and when the experience of cultural (mis)match will occur in white-collar workplaces. To do so, we integrate social psychological research on cultural mismatch theory with organizational psychology research on diversity and inequality that distinguishes between enacted and valued behaviors at work. Finally, extending previous theory and research on cultural mismatch, we explain why we theorize that enacted and valued interdependent behavior will affect the experience of cultural (mis)match among employees from working-class backgrounds, but will not affect employees from middle-class backgrounds.

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

The first step to adopting a cultural mismatch approach to examining social class disparities at work is to understand how different social class backgrounds reflect and promote divergent cultural norms (Cross & Madson, 1997; Markus & Kitayama, 2010; Phillips, Martin, et al., 2020; Plaut & Markus, 2005; Stephens et al., 2014, 2019). By social class backgrounds, we mean the social class contexts in which people grow up. Social class background is typically operationalized via one of three objective indicators: parental education, occupation, or income. Here, we use parental educational attainment as our indicator of social class background because parents who have completed college are able to pass on tacit cultural knowledge and norms required to effectively navigate middle- and upper-class contexts like white-collar workplaces

(Ridgeway & Fisk, 2012; Stephens et al., 2023). Following prior research on social class and cultural mismatch, we use the term “people from working-class backgrounds” to refer to individuals raised in contexts where neither parent/guardian had attained a 4-year college degree. We contrast this with the term “people from middle-class backgrounds,” which we use to refer to individuals raised in contexts where at least one of their parents/guardians had attained a 4-year college degree (Dittmann et al., 2020; Phillips, Stephens, et al., 2020; Stephens, Fryberg, et al., 2012; Stephens, Townsend, et al., 2012; Stephens et al., 2023). We use this term to refer to people from both middle- and upper-class backgrounds, but use the term “middle-class” to be concise. Importantly, prior work has documented how people’s social class backgrounds shape their endorsement of interdependent (vs. independent) norms over time.

In the U.S., middle-class contexts tend to afford the development of relatively *independent* norms compared to working-class contexts (Day & Newburger, 2002; Kohn & Schooler, 1969; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Pattillo, 2013). 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- and upper-class institutions (e.g., throughout college and in white-collar 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 *interdependent* norms compared to middle-class contexts in the U.S. (Chen & Matthews, 2001; Lachman & Weaver, 1998; Reay et al., 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 (Fiske & Markus, 2012; Kusserow, 1999; Lamont, 2000;

Piff et al., 2012). As people engage in these behaviors over time, they develop more interdependent norms for how to think, feel, and act (e.g., Stephens et al., 2007).

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). Students from middle-class (vs. working-class) backgrounds endorse more independent norms (e.g., attending college to develop my personal interests). In contrast, students from working-class (vs. middle-class) backgrounds endorse more interdependent norms (e.g., attending college to give back to my community). Research with students at the end of college has only obtained social class differences in *interdependent* norms. Importantly, however, this work also finds that differences in these 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 (Phillips, Stephens et al., 2020).

Building on this prior cultural mismatch research (Phillips, Stephens et al., 2020), we propose that this pattern of endorsement observed at the end of college—i.e., social class differences only in interdependent norms, not independent norms—will persist among college-educated employees. 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 Examining One Element of Culture is Not Enough**

Prior cultural mismatch research conducted in institutions of higher education has primarily manipulated perceptions of an institution's culture in general, rather than systematically distinguishing between different elements of culture (Stephens, Fryberg, et al.,

2012; Stephens, Townsend, et al., 2012). In this next phase of research on cultural mismatch, we distinguish between two separate elements of culture—enacted and valued behavior—because research suggests that a decoupling between values and behavior can have important consequences for people’s experiences and outcomes (Boer & Fischer, 2013; Ponizovskiy et al., 2019). Moreover, empirically there is evidence to suggest that enacted behavior need not always signal valued behavior in a given context (Fischer, 2017; Sagiv & Roccas, 2021), and that this decoupling of behavior and values may be common in white-collar workplaces (Deeds Pamphile & Ruttan, 2022). Consistent with this idea, only 23% of U.S. employees believe that their day-to-day work reflects their organization’s values (Dvorak & Nelson, 2016).

Importantly for our work, research on modern white-collar workplaces suggests that there is likely a behavior-values decoupling for a type of behavior central to the experience of cultural (mis)match: interdependent behavior. When considering the types of behaviors that are *enacted* in modern white-collar workplaces, interdependent behavior is ubiquitous. These workplaces increasingly require employees to enact teamwork and collaboration (Cross et al., 2016; Hopp et al., 2009), and since the 1980s, working in teams has become the “prominent organizational paradigm” (Hadley & Mortensen, 2022; Kozlowski & Bell, 2013). Supporting this notion, most white-collar employees report being part of at least one team, and even after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, 72% of employees reported being part of two or more teams (Hadley & Mortensen, 2020). These statistics all point to the idea that modern, white-collar workplaces provide people from working-class backgrounds with the opportunity to *enact* interdependent behaviors that should be aligned with their more interdependent cultural norms.

Despite the increased prevalence of teamwork in modern white-collar workplaces, research on the types of behaviors that are actually valued paints a very different picture. A large



body of work suggests that many organizations still tend to primarily value independent work and achievement (Dittmann et al., 2020; Groysberg, 2010; Kirkman et al., 2000; Lencioni, 2002; Sanchez-Burks, 2004; Wageman, 1997), and many U.S. employees believe that the primary pathway to achieving success in organizations is through engaging in self-enhancing, independent behavior (e.g., emphasizing personal uniqueness; Belmi & Laurin, 2016). Confirming this belief, hiring managers and the corporate elite also tend to value and prefer applicants and employees who display independent behaviors, like behaving assertively, than those who exhibit interdependent behaviors, like behaving deferentially (Lee et al., 2021; Sharps & Anderson, 2021). Taken together, research suggests that, even though employees have frequent opportunities to enact interdependent behavior, independent behavior still tends to be more highly valued in modern white-collar organizations. Next, we explain why we theorize that this behavior-values decoupling will matter more for people from working-class backgrounds than those from middle-class backgrounds.

### **Both Enacted and Valued Behavior Will Contribute to Cultural Mismatch**

Our theorizing rests on how the enacted and valued behavior elements of culture might interact to produce the experience of cultural mismatch. Specifically, integrating previous research on discrepancies between enacted and valued behavior (Deeds Pamphile & Ruttan, 2022; Fischer, 2017; Sagiv & Roccas, 2021) with the importance of cultural (mis)match for people from underrepresented working-class backgrounds (Cheryan & Markus, 2020; Schmader & Sedikides, 2018; Stephens et al., 2019), we theorize that only organizations where interdependent behavior is both enacted *and* valued will lead employees from working-class backgrounds to experience the benefits of a cultural match (i.e., greater sense of fit, higher retention intentions). When people engage in interdependent behavior and it is also valued by the

organization, this coupling of enacted and valued interdependent behavior signals that their normative ways of being are an important part of being a “good” employee at the organization, creating a sense of fit. Experiencing a greater sense of fit, in turn, should lead to more positive downstream consequences in terms of employees’ *retention intentions* (i.e., desire to stay at the organization moving forward; Matschke et al., 2023).

If employees from working-class backgrounds enact interdependent behavior but it is not valued by the organization, we theorize that this will instead reflect a cultural mismatch, leading employees from working-class backgrounds to experience a lower sense of fit. Specifically, when people from working-class backgrounds engage in interdependent behavior, but it is not valued by the organization, this signals that their normative ways of being are not considered an important part of being a “good” employee at the organization, undermining their sense of fit. Reduced fit, in turn, should reduce their retention intentions.

In contrast, for employees from middle-class backgrounds, we suggest that a values-behavior decoupling will be far less consequential. More specifically, we theorize that the sense of fit and retention intentions of employees from middle-class will be similar regardless of whether there is a coupling of enacted and valued interdependent behavior. This theorizing is based on two key factors. First, in the context of higher education, cultural mismatch theory suggests that students from middle-class backgrounds are less likely to be affected by a mismatch because they are overrepresented in higher education and therefore have greater confidence in their belonging. Indeed, research in this area documents that the experience of a mismatch does not significantly impact the experiences and outcomes of college students from middle-class backgrounds (Dittmann et al., 2020; Stephens, Fryberg et al., 2012; Stephens, Townsend et al., 2012). Second, research and theory on belonging at work suggests that

employees from middle-class backgrounds are often well-represented in white-collar workplaces (Sharps & Anderson, 2021) and are therefore likely to assume they are the “default” social group identity (Cheryan & Markus, 2020). As a result, they may assume that their group’s norms are and will be included regardless of the information communicated by cultural signals (e.g., Cheryan & Markus, 2020; Johnson et al., 2011; Laurin et al., 2019; Ostrove & Long, 2007; Phillips, Stephens, et al., 2020; Schmader & Sedikides, 2018). Thus, regardless of whether the behavior they enact is also valued by the organization, they will be unlikely to interpret this as a sign that they are not included in the organization.

To index the experience of cultural match, we examine the degree to which employees experience a *sense of fit*. 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 (Phillips, Stephens, et al., 2020; Schmader & Sedikides, 2018; Stephens et al., 2015). We also measure employees’ expected retention intentions in the future as a downstream consequence.

Accordingly, we hypothesize the following:

*Hypothesis 2: When people engage in interdependent behavior at work, whether that interdependent behavior is also valued will differentially shape whether employees from different social class backgrounds experience the benefits of a cultural match (i.e., sense of fit and retention intentions). More specifically:*

*Hypothesis 2a: When interdependent behavior is enacted, employees from working-class backgrounds will only experience the benefits of a cultural match (i.e., a high sense of fit and retention intentions) when interdependent behavior is also valued.*

*Hypothesis 2b: When interdependent behavior is enacted, the fit and retention of employees from middle-class backgrounds will be similar regardless of whether interdependent behavior is valued.*

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

### **The Current Research**

To test these hypotheses, we conducted two large-scale surveys and two experiments, utilizing 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. First, in Study 1A, a survey examined whether employees from working-class backgrounds continue to endorse more interdependent norms after graduating from college, compared to their middle-class counterparts (Hypothesis 1). Next, in Pilot Study 1B, using a sub-sample of the participants from Study 1A, we conducted an initial test to examine whether employees from working-class backgrounds will only experience the benefits of a cultural match when interdependent behavior is both enacted and valued (Hypothesis 2), and if fit serves as a mechanism driving retention intentions (Hypothesis 3). In Study 2, we replicated our findings using a nationally-representative sample of college-educated adults. Next, in Study 3, an experiment tested whether enacted and valued interdependent behavior would have a causal effect on the self-reported sense of fit and retention intentions of employees from working-class backgrounds. Finally, in Study 4, an experiment designed to simulate workplace interactions sought to replicate and extend these findings using a more immersive design.

### Study 1A

Study 1A provided a test of Hypothesis 1: we predicted that white-collar employees from working-class backgrounds would endorse interdependent norms to a greater extent than their middle-class counterparts.

#### Method

**Participants.** Participants were 986 college-educated white-collar employees who were recruited via Survey Sampling International (SSI) to complete an online survey about their work experiences ( $M_{\text{age}} = 42.29$ ,  $SD_{\text{age}} = 12.27$ ; 59% female; 41% male; 10% Asian/Asian-American, 9% Black/African-American, 7% Hispanic or Latino, 75% White, 2% Other; numbers may add up to more than 100% as participants could check all racial groups that applied). We report how we determined our sample size, all data exclusions, all manipulations, and all measures in the study. 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. We assessed participants' social class backgrounds using parental/guardian educational attainment (Stephens et al., 2023). 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).

**Transparency and Openness.** Study materials and data are available via the Open Science Framework (OSF).

**Measures.** After obtaining informed consent, participants reported on their experiences at the organization. We include a subset of the measures that are most relevant to our theorizing and hypotheses in the main text (i.e., independent and interdependent motives). We include a

complete list of all measures in the supplemental online material (SOM). See Table S1 for means, standard deviations, and inter-correlations among all key variables.

***Personal 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., 2012): 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*;  $\alpha_{\text{Interdependent}} = .85$ ;  $\alpha_{\text{Independent}} = .94$ ).

***Covariates.*** We conducted analyses with and without key covariates. We included relevant demographic characteristics that could also affect employees' motives (i.e., age, gender, race/ethnicity, personal educational attainment, and number of promotions; e.g., North & Fiske, 2016; Schmader & Sedikides, 2018). Results are equivalent without covariates (see SOM).

## **Results**

***Social class background predicts endorsement of interdependent norms.*** There was a significant main effect of social class background on interdependent norms,  $b = 0.167$ ,  $t(976) = 2.65$ ,  $p = .008$ , 95% CI [0.043, 0.291],  $d = 0.17$ . This finding reveals 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,  $b = 0.059$ ,  $t(976) = 0.94$ ,  $p = .350$ , 95% CI [-0.064, 0.182]. This finding provides evidence that employees from working-class (vs. middle-class) backgrounds did not significantly differ in terms of their independent norms.

### Pilot Study 1B

Pilot Study 1B offered an initial correlational test of Hypotheses 2-3. Specifically, we predicted that enacted and valued 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 that employees from middle-class backgrounds would report similar fit and retention regardless of whether there was a coupling of enacted and valued interdependent behavior. To capture *enacted* interdependent behavior, we asked participants to report how frequently they worked together with others at their organization. To capture *valued* interdependent behavior, we asked participants to report the website of their organization, which we then used to obtain their employer's organizational culture statement to conduct text analyses. Finally, participants then reported on their sense of fit and retention.

### Method

**Participants.** Participants were a subset of the college-educated white-collar employees who were recruited via Survey Sampling International (SSI) to complete an online survey about their work experiences in Study 1A ( $N = 257$ ). We report how we determined our sample size, all data exclusions, all manipulations, and all measures in the study. Here, 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;  $M_{\text{age}} = 42.63$ ,  $SD_{\text{age}} = 12.13$ ; 59% female; 41% male; 9% Asian/Asian-American, 9% Black/African-American, 7% Hispanic or Latino, 79% White, 1% Other; numbers may add up to more than 100% as participants could check all racial groups that applied). Importantly, those who were included in the valid website culture content subsample did not differ from the full sample of Study 1A on a number of key demographic variables including gender ( $X^2(2, N = 986)$

= 0.431,  $p = .806$ ), race ( $X^2(1, N = 986) = .016, p = .899$ ), and age,  $F(1, 984) = 0.10, p = .749$ . A post-hoc sensitivity analysis suggested we were adequately powered to detect a medium effect of  $d = 0.35$  at 80% power.

**Transparency and Openness.** Study materials and data are available via OSF.

**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 measures that are most relevant to our theorizing and hypotheses 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 S2 for means, standard deviations, and inter-correlations among all key variables in the organizational website coding subsample.

**Organizational enacted and valued behaviors.** Building 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, 2004), throughout, we do not directly ask people about their norms and values. Instead, we utilize reports on enacted and valued 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, as well as the number of hours per week 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. For example, an employee with a score of +2 would indicate spending two more hours per week working together than working individually. In contrast, an employee with a score of -2 would indicate spending two fewer hours per week working together than working individually.

***Valued 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 software (LIWC-22; Boyd et al., 2022) 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*). 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  $\leq 0$ ). Empirically, a score  $> 0$  reflects an organization whose culture webpage content included more interdependent language than independent language. In contrast, a score  $< 0$  reflects an organization whose culture webpage content included less interdependent language than independent language.

This dichotomous measure (as opposed to a continuous measure) more clearly maps onto our theorizing regarding valuing *interdependence vs. independence*: it better captures the extent to which an organization values interdependence *more than* independence. To send a clear signal that interdependent behavior is important, organizations need to value interdependent behavior *more than* independent behavior. The presence of independence in an institution's culture, even

when there are low levels of interdependence present, has previously been shown to create a cultural mismatch in people from working-class backgrounds, undermining their experiences and outcomes (Stephens, Fryberg et al., 2012). 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 for employees from working-class backgrounds.

***Sense of fit at organization.*** We assessed individuals' sense of fit at their organization. Drawing on previous research (Schmader & Sedikides, 2018; Stephens, Fryberg, et al., 2012), 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 identities shape their chronic experiences in institutions. In this study, the four items designed to measure fit included items like: "I feel like I belong as a member of my current organization" and "My current organization is a place for people like me" (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 four items loaded onto a single factor accounted for 87% of the total variance. All items loaded highly onto this factor (all loadings  $\geq$  0.91). 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 ( $\alpha = .95$ ). See SOM Table S4 for details of all fit measures across studies and their factor loadings.

**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*; (Chatman, 1989; Chatman & Barsade, 1995;  $\alpha = .82$ ).

**Covariates.** Finally, we conducted analyses utilizing the same set of covariates as in Study 1A (i.e., age, gender, race/ethnicity, years at organization, personal educational attainment, and number of promotions; e.g., North & Fiske, 2016; Schmader & Sedikides, 2018). Results are statistically equivalent regardless of whether covariates are included (see SOM).

**Analysis Strategy.** Moderation regression analyses were conducted using the PROCESS Macro in R (Hayes, 2022). Specifically, we tested the effect of enacted interdependent behavior (*time spent working together*), valued 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 valued interdependent behavior, and individual social class background. We then decomposed the interaction by social class background to test whether enacted and valued 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. Finally, we conducted moderated mediation analyses to test Hypothesis 3. See SOM for additional simple effects.

## Results

***Sense of fit at organization.*** There was a significant main effect of valued interdependent behavior,  $b = -0.81$ ,  $t(244) = -2.17$ ,  $p = .031$ , 95% CI [-1.543, -0.067],  $d = 0.28$ . There was also a positive significant main effect of enacted interdependent behavior,  $b = 0.025$ ,  $t(244) = 2.14$ ,  $p = .033$ , 95% CI [0.002, 0.048],  $d = 0.27$ . There was also a negative significant main effect of social class background,  $b = -0.730$ ,  $t(244) = -2.03$ ,  $p = .043$ , 95% CI [-1.437, -0.022],  $d = 0.26$ . These main effects were qualified by a significant two-way interaction between valued interdependent behavior  $\times$  social class background,  $b = 1.16$ ,  $t(244) = 2.30$ ,  $p = .022$ , 95% CI [0.168, 2.149],  $d = 0.30$ . No other significant two-way interactions emerged. Importantly, though, providing initial support for Hypothesis 2, the predicted three-way interaction between enacted behavior  $\times$  valued behavior  $\times$  social class background was also significant,  $b = 0.056$ ,  $t(244) = 2.79$ ,  $p = .006$ , 95% CI [0.017, 0.097],  $d = 0.36$ .

Using the PROCESS macro in R (Hayes, 2022), we obtained the simple effects of social class for this three-way interaction. For employees at organizations where frequent enacted interdependent behaviors (i.e., +1 *SD*) were *not* valued, 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,  $b = -0.776$ ,  $t(244) = -2.05$ ,  $p = .042$ , 95% CI [-1.521, -0.030],  $d = 0.26$ . Employees from working-class backgrounds also reported significantly lower fit than employees from middle-class backgrounds when interdependent behavior was valued, but interdependent behaviors were not frequent (i.e., -1 *SD*),  $b = -0.747$ ,  $t(244) = -2.09$ ,  $p = .038$ , 95% CI [-1.450, -0.043],  $d = 0.27$ . No other significant social class gaps emerged,  $p$ 's  $\geq .19$ . These results provide initial evidence consistent with Hypothesis 2 – that employees from working-class backgrounds experience a cultural mismatch when interdependent behavior is enacted but not valued.

***Retention intentions at organization.*** There was a significant main effect of valued interdependent behavior,  $b = -1.07$ ,  $t(244) = -2.53$ ,  $p = .012$ , 95% CI [-1.907, -0.236],  $d = 0.32$ . There was also a positive significant main effect of enacted interdependent behavior,  $b = 0.027$ ,  $t(244) = 2.02$ ,  $p = .045$ , 95% CI [0.001, 0.053],  $d = 0.26$ . No other significant main effects or two-way interactions emerged. Importantly, and in further support of Hypothesis 2, the predicted three-way interaction between enacted behavior  $\times$  valued behavior  $\times$  social class background was positive and significant,  $b = 0.055$ ,  $t(244) = 2.39$ ,  $p = .018$ , 95% CI [0.010, 0.100],  $d = 0.31$ . These results tentatively suggest that employees from working-class backgrounds are differentially affected by a decoupling of enacted and valued interdependent behavior.

Using the PROCESS macro in R (Hayes, 2022), we obtained the simple effects of social class for this three-way interaction. No significant social class gaps emerged,  $p$ 's  $\geq .18$ .

***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 valued, we next sought to test whether sense of fit might serve as a mediator linking employee social class background and enacted and valued interdependent behavior to retention intentions. To do so, we entered social class background as the predictor, enacted and valued 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 valued interdependent behavior, and retention intentions. Specifically, the analysis yielded a point

estimate of 0.043 and a 95% bias-corrected CI of [0.009, 0.077]. This interval did not include zero, suggesting that the indirect effect of social class background  $\times$  enacted  $\times$  valued interdependent behavior on retention intentions through sense of fit was significant.

Decomposing the moderated mediation, among employees from working-class backgrounds, the index of conditional moderated mediation yielded a point estimate of 0.022, and a 95% bias-corrected CI of [0.001, 0.042]. This interval did not include zero, suggesting that there was a positive indirect effect of sense of fit on retention intentions through enacted  $\times$  valued interdependent behavior. In contrast, among employees from middle-class backgrounds, the index of conditional moderated mediation yielded a point estimate of -0.021, and a 95% bias-corrected CI of [-0.047, 0.004]. This interval included zero, suggesting that the indirect effect of sense of fit on retention intentions through enacted  $\times$  valued interdependent behavior was not significant. Taken together, these moderated mediation results provide preliminary evidence that employees from working-class backgrounds experienced greater sense of fit at organizations where interdependent behavior was both enacted *and* valued, which, in turn, led them to have a stronger intention to stay with the organization—and this pattern was unique to employees from working-class backgrounds.

## **Discussion**

In Studies 1A-B, we were able to provide initial correlational evidence in support of Hypotheses 1-3. First, in Study 1A, 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, 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 endorsed independent norms similarly. This points to the possibility that employees from working-class backgrounds may also develop and gain access to more independent norms via exposure to middle- and upper-class institutions over time (i.e., higher education and white-collar workplaces; Herrmann & Varnum, 2018; Newcomb, 1943; Stewart & Ostrove, 1993).

The results of Pilot Study 1B indicate that though the vast majority of college-educated employees have opportunities to work together regularly at work, *enacting* interdependent behavior is not sufficient to create a cultural match for those from working-class backgrounds. Instead, in initial support of Hypotheses 2-3, employees from working-class backgrounds only experience the benefits of a cultural match when the interdependent behavior they enact is also *valued* by their organization as part of being a “good” employee. In contrast, we do not observe social class gaps when employees are infrequently enacting interdependent behavior and independent behavior is valued. Given the lack of differences we observed in independent motives, this may further suggest that employees from working-class backgrounds have adapted somewhat to the independent expectations and cultural defaults prevalent in U.S. gateway institutions through their extended experiences in these institutions.

Interestingly, across both sense of fit and retention, the pattern of results was unique to employees from working-class backgrounds: there were no backlash effects when there was a decoupling of enacted and valued interdependent behavior for employees from middle-class backgrounds. These results further suggest that employees from middle-class backgrounds are less sensitive to cultural cues than their working-class counterparts, consistent with prior cultural mismatch theory and research (e.g., Stephens, Fryberg et al., 2012). As the dominant, well-represented group in white-collar organizations, employees from middle-class backgrounds appear to be less attentive to cultural cues that signal whether their norms are valued as part

of what it means to be a “good” employee – they report a high level of fit and retention regardless of these cues (Schmader & Sedikides, 2018).

However, though we obtained initial pilot evidence for our hypotheses using an externally-rated source of whether interdependent behavior was valued—the culture statements from the websites of employees’ organizations—there were still several limitations in Pilot Study 1B. First, these data relied on a convenience sample of college-educated employees and cannot systematically confirm that the patterns we observed are generalizable to U.S. college-educated adults in general. Moreover, only a subset of participants reported on their organization’s website, and only some of these websites included culture content. Our analyses revealed that there were no meaningful differences between participants for whom we have (vs. do not have) website content based on age, gender, or race. Nevertheless, our effective sample size was relatively small. As such, we next sought to replicate our findings in a large, nationally-representative sample of college-educated employees.

Second, our measures of *valued* interdependent (vs. independent) behavior were very broad (i.e., amount of interdependent vs. independent language in general). By broad, we mean that they relied on 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 specifically home in on the component of interdependence most relevant to our context (i.e., working together vs. individually), in the next study we utilized a measure of independence vs. interdependence in



organizational cultures that focused more specifically on the working together vs. individually dimension of interdependence/independence (Dittmann, 2020).

## Study 2

In Study 2 we sought to replicate the effects of enacted and valued interdependent behavior from Study 1 in a large, pre-registered, nationally-representative survey of college-educated employed U.S. adults currently working in diverse white-collar occupations. To do so, participants completed measures of both (a) the frequency with which they enact working together behaviors, and (b) whether working together is valued. They then completed a series of measures about their sense of fit and retention intentions at the organization.

### Method

**Participants.** We preregistered our study on OSF ([https://osf.io/7qe4b/?view\\_only=30e9e3e137954e26b375c89562aaf060](https://osf.io/7qe4b/?view_only=30e9e3e137954e26b375c89562aaf060)). Participants were recruited via the National Opinion Research Center's (NORC) AmeriSpeak® panel (Montgomery et al., 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. We report how we determined our sample size, all data exclusions, all manipulations, and all measures in the study.

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; 51% male; 7% Asian; 10% Black; 7% Hispanic; 71% non-Hispanic White; 3% Multiracial; 2% Other). A sensitivity analysis suggested we were adequately powered to detect a small effect of  $d = 0.03$  at 95% power. Following prior research and as in Study 1, participants' social class backgrounds were assessed using parental/guardian educational attainment (Stephens et al., 2023). Specifically, individuals were classified as coming from a *working-class* background 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 *middle-class* background (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.

**Transparency and Openness.** Study materials and data are available via OSF.

**Measures.** See Table S3 for means, standard deviations, and inter-correlations among all key variables in Study 2.

**Valued behavior.** Participants responded to a thirteen-item binary forced-choice scale developed in prior research that assesses whether employees perceive that their organization values different components of *interdependence* versus *independence* (Dittmann et al., 2020). For the current study, we focus on one of the three specific dimensions that emerged: the valuing *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 working-class backgrounds (Dittmann et al., 2020;  $\alpha = .67$ ). Participants were instructed: “Read each set of two options below and mark the ONE option that more closely reflects your organization’s expectations for employees.” The full set of working together items are listed below (see SOM for items on other dimensions):

1. Value personal accomplishments OR Value relationships with coworkers
2. Work independently OR Work together with others
3. Prioritize working on their own to achieve individual goals OR Prioritize working with others to achieve group goals
4. Divvy up tasks so that employees can work separately OR Share tasks so that employees can work collaboratively

As in Pilot Study 1B, we then dichotomized participants into those who were working at organizations that valued working together vs. individually. 61% of participants were characterized as working at organizations that valued *working together* (i.e., >2 working together options selected), while 39% worked at organizations that valued *working individually*.

**Enacted interdependent behavior.** Participants responded to a single item that directly assessed the percentage of time that they spent working together interdependently, 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” ( $M = 42\%$ ,  $SD = 26\%$ ; cf. Bedwell et al., 2012).

***Sense of fit.*** Participants responded to a shortened 3-item version of the Study 1 measure assessing their *sense of fit* with their organization (items: “I feel like I fit in as a member of 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*). We utilized a shortened measure due to space constraints to recruit this large, nationally-representative sample. We again conducted a factor analysis to determine whether all the items tapped into a single overarching construct of participants’ sense of fit at their organization. The factor analysis revealed that all four items loaded onto a single factor accounted for 78% of the total variance. All items loaded highly onto this factor (all loadings  $\geq 0.86$ ). As in Study 1, due to theorizing about sense of fit (Schmader & Sedikides, 2018) and the results of this factor analysis, we averaged and combined these items to form an index of social fit at the organization ( $\alpha = .85$ ). See SOM for more details of fit measures across studies.

***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).

***Covariates.*** Finally, as in Studies 1A-B, we assessed key covariates (we refer to these as our “standard covariates” in subsequent studies; i.e., age, gender, race/ethnicity, personal educational attainment, and number of promotions received). Employees’ experiences may also

be affected by the type of organization at which they are employed, so we also included organizational characteristics (i.e., organization size, industry (dummy coded), and geographic region (dummy coded). Results are statistically equivalent whether these covariates are included (see Table 1).

## Results

**Analyses.** We conducted multiple linear regressions of valued and enacted interdependent behavior, and social class background on our key dependent measures. Specifically, we tested the effect of valued behavior (*working individually vs. together*), enacted interdependent behavior (*proportion of time spent working together*), and individual social class background (from *working-class vs. middle-class background*) on participants' (1) sense of fit and (2) retention intentions. We then conducted simple slopes analyses to reveal when enacted interdependent behaviors are most likely to afford the benefits of a cultural match to employees from working-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 valued behavior, enacted behavior, and individual social class background. Model 3 adds control variables. Importantly, the key three-way interaction between valued behavior, enacted behavior, and social class background remains significant on both dependent variables with control variables included (i.e., Model 3).

**Sense of fit.** Replicating Pilot Study 1B and in further support of Hypothesis 2 that enacted and valued interdependent behavior would be differentially associated with the sense of fit of employees from different social class backgrounds, we obtained a significant three-way interaction between valued behavior, enacted behavior, and social class background,  $b = 0.020$ ,  $t(975) = 2.80$ ,  $p = .005$ , 95% CI [0.006, 0.033],  $d = 0.18$  (see Table 1 and Figure 1).

Using the PROCESS macro in R (Hayes, 2022), we obtained the simple effects of social class for this three-way interaction. For employees at organizations where frequent enacted interdependent behaviors (+1 *SD*) were not valued, there was a significant social class gap in sense of fit,  $b = -0.594$ ,  $t(975) = -2.55$ ,  $p = .011$ , 95% CI [-1.051, -0.137],  $d = 0.16$ . No other significant social class gaps emerged,  $p$ 's  $\geq .056$ . Replicating Pilot Study 1B, this provides evidence of a cultural mismatch for employees from working-class backgrounds.

We next looked at the simple effects of valued behavior for this three-way interaction. For employees from working-class backgrounds who enacted working together behaviors frequently (+1 *SD*), the effect of valuing working together (vs. individually) was positive and significant,  $b = 1.11$ ,  $t(975) = 4.97$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [0.671, 1.545],  $d = 0.32$ . In contrast, for employees who enacted working together behavior infrequently (-1 *SD*), the effect of valuing working together (vs. individually) was nonsignificant,  $b = 0.14$ ,  $t(975) = 0.68$ ,  $p = .497$ , 95% CI [-0.265, 0.545],  $d = 0.04$ . This further suggests that only enacted *and* valued interdependent behavior is associated with greater sense of fit in employees from working-class backgrounds.

In contrast, for employees from middle-class backgrounds who enacted working together behavior frequently (+1 *SD*), the effect of valuing working together (vs. individually) was nonsignificant,  $b = 0.28$ ,  $t(975) = 1.73$ ,  $p = .083$ , 95% CI [-0.037, 0.599],  $d = 0.11$ . In contrast, among those who enacted working together infrequently (-1 *SD*), the effect of valuing interdependent (vs. independent) behavior was positive and significant,  $b = 0.34$ ,  $t(975) = 2.57$ ,  $p = .010$ , 95% CI [0.081, 0.605],  $d = 0.16$ . This further suggests that the sense of fit of employees from middle-class backgrounds is relatively consistent regardless of whether there is a coupling of enacted and valued interdependent behavior.

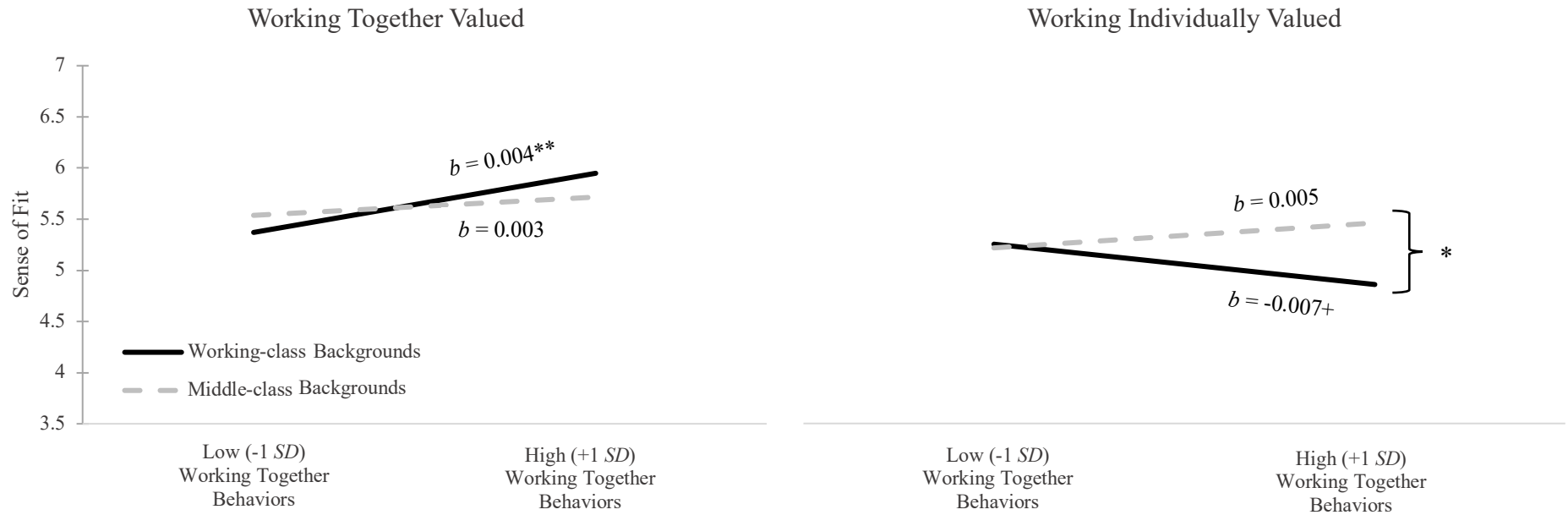
**Table 1***Regression Results on Sense of Fit in Study 2*

	<b>Model 1</b>	<b>Model 2</b>	<b>Model 3</b>
Valued Behavior:	0.416***	0.380*	0.361**
Working Together (vs. Individually)	(0.085)	(0.180)	(0.180)
Enacted Behavior:	0.004*	0.004	0.003
Time Spent Working Together	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Social Class Background	0.030	0.279	0.283
	(0.087)	(0.230)	(0.233)
Valued × Enacted		0.002	0.001
		(0.004)	(0.004)
Valued × Social Class Background		0.519	0.500
		(0.323)	(0.325)
Social Class Background × Enacted		0.008+	0.008
		(0.004)	(0.004)
Valued × Enacted × Social Class Background		0.022**	0.020**
		(0.007)	(0.007)
Constant	5.488***	5.459***	4.571***
	(0.094)	(0.126)	(0.812)
Observations	1031	1031	1016
R-Squared	0.035	0.054	0.102
Control Variables	No	No	Yes

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

**Figure 1**

*Effect of Social Class Background, Enacted, and Valued Interdependent Behavior on Sense of Fit in Study 2*



Note: +  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ .



**Retention intentions.** Mirroring the results regarding sense of fit and in further support of Hypothesis 2 that enacted and valued interdependent behavior would be differentially associated with the retention intentions of employees from different social class backgrounds, there was a significant three-way interaction between valued behavior, enacted behavior, and individual social class background,  $b = 0.024$ ,  $t(951) = 2.36$ ,  $p = .019$ , 95% CI [0.004, 0.044],  $d = 0.16$  (see Table 2).

Again, using the PROCESS macro in R (Hayes, 2022), we obtained the simple effect of social class background for this three-way interaction. No significant social class gaps emerged,  $p$ 's  $\geq .146$ .

We next looked at the simple effects of valued behavior for this three-way interaction. For employees from working-class backgrounds who enacted working together frequently (+1 *SD*), the effect of valuing working together (vs. individually) was positive and significant,  $b = 0.85$ ,  $t(977) = 2.65$ ,  $p = .008$ , 95% CI [0.220, 1.481],  $d = 0.17$ . In contrast, among those who enacted working together infrequently (-1 *SD*), the effect of valuing working together (vs. individually) was nonsignificant,  $b = 0.18$ ,  $t(977) = 0.60$ ,  $p = .549$ , 95% CI [-0.405, 0.762],  $d = 0.04$ . This further suggests that only enacted and valued interdependent behavior benefits the retention intentions of employees from working-class backgrounds.

In contrast, for employees from middle-class backgrounds who enacted working together frequently (+1 *SD*), the effect of valuing working together (vs. individually) was nonsignificant,  $b = 0.19$ ,  $t(977) = 0.80$ ,  $p = .425$ , 95% CI [-0.272, 0.646],  $d = 0.05$ . In contrast, among those who enacted working together infrequently (-1 *SD*), the effect of valuing working together (vs. individually) was positive and significant,  $b = 0.69$ ,  $t(977) = 3.57$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [0.309, 1.064],  $d = 0.23$ . This further suggests that employees from middle-class backgrounds report

similar retention intentions regardless of whether there is a coupling of valued and enacted interdependent behavior.

**Table 2**

*Regression Results on Retention Intentions in Study 2*

	<b>Model 1</b>	<b>Model 2</b>	<b>Model 3</b>
Valued Behavior: Working Together (vs. Individually)	0.508*** (0.119)	0.852*** (0.253)	0.830** (0.259)
Enacted Behavior: Time Spent Working Together	0.001 (0.002)	-0.003 (0.003)	-0.003 (0.003)
Social Class Background	0.030 (0.122)	-0.485 (0.3243)	-0.561+ (0.336)
Valued × Enacted		-0.011+ (0.006)	-0.010 (0.006)
Valued × Social Class Background		0.784+ (0.455)	0.846 (0.468)
Social Class Background × Enacted		0.013* (0.006)	0.013* (0.006)
Valued × Enacted × Social Class Background		0.025* (0.010)	0.022* (0.010)
Constant	4.499*** (0.132)	4.687*** (0.178)	4.101*** (1.170)
Observations	1033	1033	1018
R-Squared	0.018	0.028	0.062
Control Variables	No	No	Yes

*Notes:* Standard errors in parentheses

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

**Moderated mediation.** We next conducted a moderated mediation analysis to provide another test of Hypothesis 3. In support of Hypothesis 3 and replicating the results from Pilot Study 1B, moderated mediation analyses indicated that sense of fit mediated the observed relationship between social class background, valued behavior, enacted behavior, and retention. Specifically, the analysis yielded a point estimate of 0.013 and a 95% bias-corrected CI of [0.003, 0.023]. This interval did not include zero, suggesting that the indirect effect of social

class background  $\times$  valued behavior  $\times$  enacted behavior on retention intentions through sense of fit was significant. This suggests that employees from working-class (vs. middle-class) backgrounds felt a greater sense of fit when interdependent behavior was both enacted and valued, which, in turn, led them to have a stronger intention to stay with the organization.

Decomposing the moderated mediation, among employees from working-class backgrounds, the index of conditional moderated mediation yielded a point estimate of 0.012, and a 95% bias-corrected CI of [0.004, 0.020]. This interval did not include zero, suggesting that there was a positive indirect effect of sense of fit on retention intentions through enacted  $\times$  valued interdependent behavior. In contrast, among employees from middle-class backgrounds, the index of conditional moderated mediation yielded a point estimate of 0.001, and a 95% bias-corrected CI of [-0.007, 0.005]. This interval included zero, suggesting that the indirect effect of sense of fit on retention intentions through enacted  $\times$  valued interdependent behavior was not significant. Taken together, these moderated mediation results provide additional evidence that employees from working-class (vs. middle-class) backgrounds experienced greater sense of fit at organizations where interdependent behavior was both enacted *and* valued, which, in turn, led them to have a stronger intention to stay with the organization.

## **Discussion**

In Study 2, in a nationally-representative sample of college-educated U.S. employees, we replicated the key findings from Pilot Study 1B: employees from working-class backgrounds only experience a high sense of fit and retention intentions when interdependent behavior is both enacted and valued. Nonetheless, there are still at least two limitations to Study 2 that we sought to address in Studies 3-4. First, across Pilot Study 1B and Study 2, we provided correlational – but not causal – evidence supportive of our theorizing. Second, the measures of enacted and

valued interdependent behavior in Pilot Study 1B and Study 2 did not precisely control the stimuli that employees were exposed to so that we could ensure they were not only part of a group, but also involved interdependent behaviors within that group (e.g., coordinating, collaborating, information sharing, and/or soliciting each other's thoughts and opinions to come to joint solutions). As such, in Studies 3-4, we utilized two different experimental paradigms, manipulating both enacted and valued 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 utilized by the team. The interdependent behavior manipulations in both studies explicitly included descriptions (in the case of Study 3) or firsthand experiences (in Study 4) of interdependent behaviors like coordinating, collaborating, and synthesizing ideas to come to a joint solution, to ensure that participants were exposed to enacted interdependent behaviors (Rousseau et al., 2006). In sum, the next two experiments enable us to more precisely test the causal effect of enacting and valuing interdependent behavior on the sense of fit and retention intentions of employees from working-class backgrounds.

### **Study 3**

By randomly assigning participants to experience working for a hypothetical organization where they enacted interdependent (vs. independent) behavior and that valued interdependent (vs. independent) behavior, Study 3 sought to provide causal evidence to support our theorizing. Furthermore, in contrast to Pilot Study 1B and Study 2 where we examined employees' current organizations to exploit natural variation in organizations that enacted and valued interdependent (vs. independent) behavior, Study 3 held constant the content to which participants were exposed to, ensuring that participants were all experiencing and responding to content that closely aligned

with our operationalizations of enacted and valued interdependent behavior. Additionally, we limited our sample to employees from working-class backgrounds. This is because we observed no effects of mismatch in Studies 1-2 for employees from middle-class backgrounds, supporting our theorizing about the unique effects for employees from working-class backgrounds.

Therefore, recruiting only working-class participants enabled us to focus on testing our key theorizing about the negative impact of cultural mismatch for employees from working-class backgrounds in white-collar workplaces.

## **Method**

**Participants.** We pre-registered our study on OSF ([https://osf.io/qhypn/?view\\_only=6d145512d39a477bb8292b3a378b07b7](https://osf.io/qhypn/?view_only=6d145512d39a477bb8292b3a378b07b7)). We report how we determined our sample size, all data exclusions, all manipulations, and all measures in the study. We computed our sample size *a priori* to have 80% power to detect a small effect similar to the average of those obtained in Pilot Study 1B and Study 2. 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 3,000 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 three 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 4 minutes on the entire study – a study that was pretested to take approximately 10 minutes on

average.<sup>3</sup> We were therefore left with a final sample of  $N = 375$  ( $M_{\text{age}} = 37.69$ ,  $SD_{\text{age}} = 10.52$ , 39% female, 61% male, 0.3% nonbinary; 1% Arab or Middle-Eastern; 17% Asian/Asian-American, 5% Black or African-American, 9% Hispanic or Latino, 1% Native American, 72% White, 0.25% Other). A post-hoc sensitivity analysis indicated that the remaining sample size provided us with 80% power to detect a small-to-medium 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 Time 2 survey, participants were randomly assigned to conditions in a 2 (Valued 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 *interdependent* vs. *independent* behavior was valued. Specifically, participants in the valued interdependent behavior 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 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

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<sup>3</sup>Importantly, results reveal similar but weakened effects when including the full sample with no exclusions. See SOM for details of these analyses.

agreement about the best strategies to complete projects” (see SOM for full text of manipulation). In contrast, participants in the valued independent behavior 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 values in general (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 led 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 complete 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 when 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 SOM 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.

**Transparency and Openness.** Study materials and data are available via OSF.

### **Measures.**

*Anticipated Sense of Fit.* We utilized a similar measure of sense of fit as in prior studies, except that the 7 items were adapted to reflect *anticipated* sense of fit at Advanced Products, rather than their actual sense of fit at their current organization (e.g., "I feel like I would belong as a member of Advanced Products", "Beyond technical skills, I am equipped with the 'right' skills to be successful at Advanced Products";  $\alpha = .94$ ). As in prior studies, a factor analysis revealed that the 7 items loaded onto a single factor that accounted for 73% of the variance, and that each item loaded highly (loadings  $\geq 0.60$ ). The fit measured utilized in this study and Study 4 includes items that tap into goal fit whereas the measure in Pilot Study 1B only includes items that tap into self-concept and social fit. This is because four years elapsed between when we



collected the data for Pilot Study 1B (i.e., in 2017) and when we collected the data for Studies 3-4 (i.e., in 2021). In the intervening time period, our own theorizing and those of others (e.g., Schmader & Sedikides, 2018) developed to conceptualize fit more broadly.

***Anticipated Retention Intentions.*** We utilized the same 4-item measure of retention intentions as in Pilot Study 1B, except that the items were adapted to reflect *anticipated* retention at Advanced Products, rather than their actual retention at their current organization (e.g., “If you had your own way, would you be working at Advanced Products three years from now?”; 1 = *Definitely no*, 7 = *Definitely yes*;  $\alpha = .92$ ).

***Covariates.*** We included our standard demographic and organizational covariates. We include covariates in all analyses for consistency, but results are similar but weakened when not including these control variables (see SOM for results without covariates). Additional simple effects are reported in the SOM.

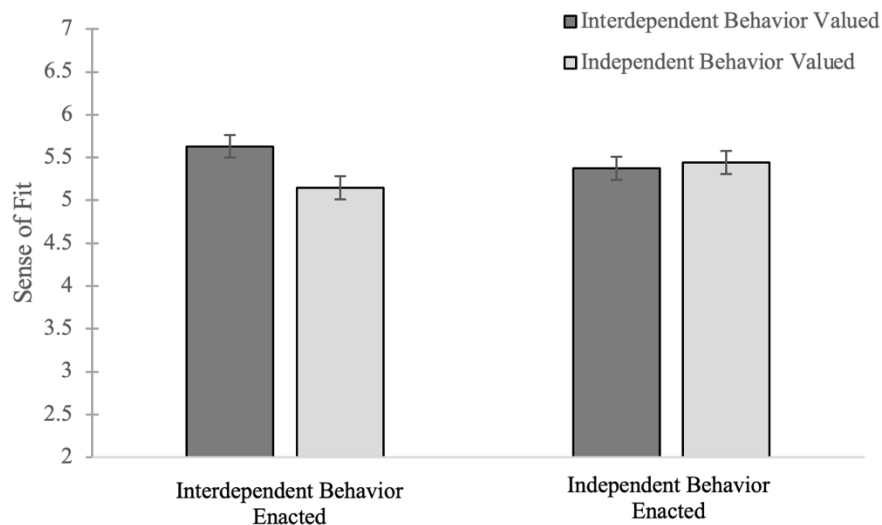
## Results

***Anticipated Sense of Fit.*** Neither the main effect of *enacted* behavior ( $p = .936$ ) nor the main effect of *valued* behavior ( $p = .077$ ) was significant. However, central to Hypothesis 2a and replicating Studies 1B-2, we obtained a significant enacted (*interdependent* vs. *independent*)  $\times$  valued (*interdependent* vs. *independent*) condition interaction,  $F(1, 345) = 3.94, p = .048, \eta^2 = .011$  (see Figure 2). We decomposed the interaction to compare the simple effects of valuing interdependent behavior by enacted interdependent behavior. Among those in the enacted interdependent condition, participants who were also exposed to valued interdependent behavior reported significantly higher anticipated sense of fit ( $M = 5.62, SE = 0.13$ ) than those exposed to valued independent behavior ( $M = 5.13, SE = 0.13$ ),  $t(345) = 2.61, p = .010, d = .28$ . In contrast, among those in the enacted *independent* behavior condition, participants who were also exposed

to valued *independent* behavior did not differ in their anticipated sense of fit ( $M = 5.43$ ,  $SE = 0.14$ ) compared to those exposed to valued *interdependent* behavior ( $M = 5.39$ ,  $SE = 0.13$ ),  $t(345) = -0.22$ ,  $p = .825$ ,  $d = .02$ . This finding is consistent with our theorizing that, to confer benefits to employees from working-class backgrounds, enacted interdependent behavior must also be valued. In contrast, when independent behavior is enacted, the type of behavior that is valued matters less for the sense of fit of employees from working-class backgrounds.

## Figure 2

*Anticipated Sense of Fit by Enacted and Valued Interdependent Behavior in Study 3 Among Employees From Working-Class Backgrounds*



Note. Error bars represent  $\pm 1$  SE.

**Anticipated Retention Intentions.** Neither the main effect of *enacted* behavior ( $p = .681$ ) nor the main effect of *valued* behavior ( $p = .257$ ) was significant. However, in further support of Hypothesis 2a and consistent with the pattern of results for sense of fit, we obtained a significant valued (*interdependent* vs. *independent*)  $\times$  enacted (*interdependent* vs. *independent*) condition interaction on retention intentions,  $F(1, 345) = 4.22$ ,  $p = .041$ ,  $\eta^2 = .012$ . Decomposing

the interaction, we compared the simple effects of valuing interdependent behavior by enacted interdependent behavior. Supporting Hypothesis 2a and replicating the pattern of results of Studies 1-2, among those in the enacted interdependent condition, those participants who were also exposed to *valued* interdependent behavior reported significantly higher retention intentions ( $M = 4.83, SE = 0.16$ ) than those exposed to valued independent behavior ( $M = 4.33, SE = 0.16$ ),  $t(345) = 2.23, p = .026, d = .24$ . In contrast, among those in the enacted independent behavior condition, participants who were also exposed to valued independent behavior did not differ in their retention intentions ( $M = 4.65, SE = 0.16$ ) compared to those exposed to valued interdependent behavior ( $M = 4.49, SE = 0.16$ ),  $t(345) = -0.68, p = .496, d = .02$ . This finding is consistent with our theorizing that only when interdependent behavior is both enacted and valued will employees from working-class backgrounds experience greater retention intentions. No other combination of enacted and valued behavior leads to the same benefit.

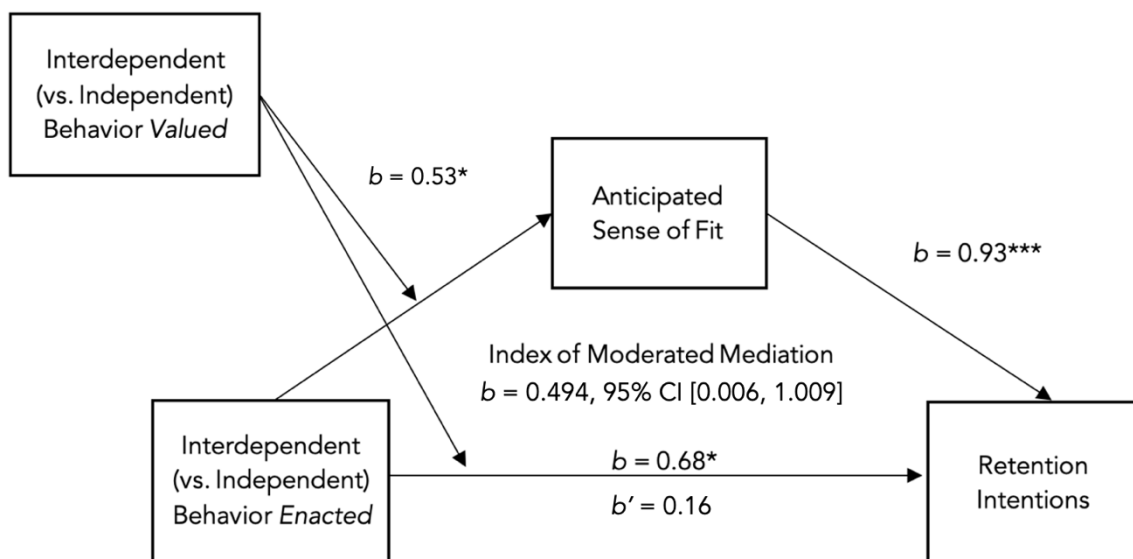
**Moderated mediation.** We next conducted a moderated mediation analysis to provide another test of Hypothesis 3 (see Figure 3). In support of Hypothesis 3 and replicating the pattern of results from Pilot Study 1B and Study 2, moderated mediation analyses indicated that anticipated sense of fit mediated the observed relationship between enacted and valued behavior and anticipated retention. Specifically, the analysis yielded a point estimate of 0.494 and a 95% bias-corrected CI of [0.006, 1.009]. This interval did not include zero, suggesting that the indirect effect of enacted and valued interdependent behavior on anticipated retention intentions through anticipated sense of fit was significant.

We next looked at the conditional indirect effect of valuing interdependent behavior within the enacted interdependent (vs. independent) behavior conditions. For those in the enacted *interdependent* condition, there was a point estimate of 0.455 and a 95% bias-corrected CI of

[0.118, 0.791]. This interval did not include zero and suggests that anticipated sense of fit did mediate the effect of valuing interdependent behavior on retention intentions for those in the enacted *interdependent* condition. In contrast, for those in the enacted *independent* behavior condition, there was a point estimate of -0.040 and a 95% bias-corrected CI of [-0.412, 0.318]. This interval includes zero and suggests that anticipated sense of fit did not mediate the effect of valuing interdependent behavior on retention intentions for those in the enacted *independent* condition. Taken together, this suggests that participants anticipated experiencing greater sense of fit at organizations where interdependent behavior was enacted *and* valued, which, in turn, led them to anticipate having stronger intentions to stay with the organization (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3**

*Moderated Mediation Model in Study 3 Linking Enacted and Valued Interdependent Behavior to Retention Intentions via Anticipated Sense of Fit at the Organization*



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

Results are robust to inclusion or exclusion of key demographic and organizational covariates. Sample consists of employees from working-class backgrounds.

## Discussion

While Pilot Study 1B and Study 2 provided correlational evidence consistent with our hypotheses, they 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 (Valued 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* valued 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 valued interdependent behavior to retention intentions for employees from working-class backgrounds. Moreover, participants were responding to consistent stimuli. Indeed, 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 interdependence of the strategies that the team used (i.e., working together vs. dividing and conquering).

Nevertheless, though this experiment provided initial supportive causal evidence, it relied on participants imagining working for a hypothetical organization, 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 4

The main purpose of Study 4 was to replicate and extend the key findings from Study 3 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 report how we determined our sample size, all data exclusions, all manipulations, and all measures in the study. 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, expecting to have to exclude some attention check failures. 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 three 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, 49% male; 12% Asian/Asian-American, 11% Black or African-American, 9% Hispanic or Latino, 1% Native American, 67% White). 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 (Valued Behavior: Interdependent vs. Independent) between-subjects design. As in Study 3, 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. Participants read through the organizational culture website manipulation as in Study 3.

Next, all participants were informed that they would be working on 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 began by saying, “Hi! I’m excited to work with you on this task! Mind if we brainstorm together? :)” (see SOM for full text of manipulation). In contrast, for participants randomly assigned to the enacted independent condition, the research assistant began by saying, “Hi! I’m excited to work with you on this task! Mind if we divide and conquer? :)”.

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 enacted behavior condition to which they were assigned. Finally, participants were thanked and paid \$9-\$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).

**Transparency and Openness.** Study materials and data are available via OSF.

**Measures.**

***Sense of Fit.*** We utilized the same measure of sense of fit as in Study 3 ( $\alpha = .96$ ).

***Retention Intentions.*** We utilized the same measure of retention intentions as in Study 3 ( $\alpha = .92$ ).

***Covariates.*** We also included our standard demographic and organizational covariates. Finally, we also included dummy codes reflecting participant source, given the multi-source nature of our data. We include covariates in all analyses for consistency.

**Results**

**Sense of Fit.** The main effect of *enacted* behavior ( $p = .079$ ) was not significant. There was a significant main effect of *valued* behavior  $F(1, 160) = 5.58, p = .019, \eta^2 = .022$ . Importantly, and similar to the patterns of results for Study 3, we obtained significant valued (*interdependent* vs. *independent*)  $\times$  enacted (*interdependent* vs. *independent*) behavior condition interaction,  $F(1, 160) = 4.27, p = .040, \eta^2 = .026$ . We decomposed the interaction to compare the simple effect of *valuing* interdependent (vs. independent) behavior by enacted behavior. Among those in the enacted interdependent behavior condition, participants who were also exposed to valued interdependent behavior reported significantly higher anticipated sense of fit ( $M = 5.97, SE = 0.22$ ) than those exposed to valued *independent* behavior ( $M = 5.22, SE = 0.24$ ),  $t(186) = 2.58, p = .011, d = .38$ . In contrast, among those in the enacted *independent* condition, participants who were also exposed to valued *independent* behavior did not differ in their anticipated sense of fit ( $M = 5.17, SE = 0.23$ ) than those exposed to valued *interdependent*

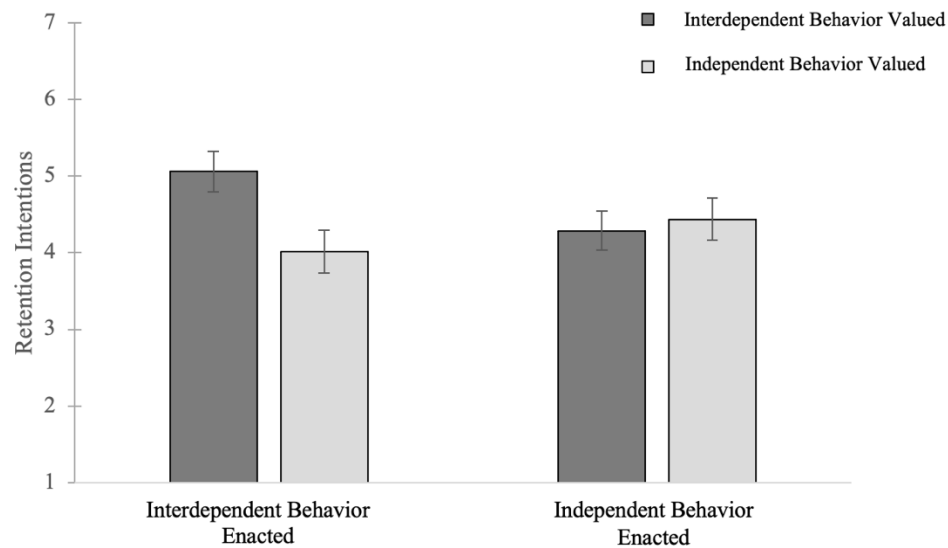


behavior ( $M = 5.35$ ,  $SE = 0.22$ ),  $t(186) = 0.63$ ,  $p = .528$ ,  $d = .09$ . This finding is consistent with our theorizing that, to confer benefits to employees from working-class backgrounds, interdependent behaviors must be enacted *and* valued. When interdependent behavior is enacted but *not* valued—which is less of a match—employees from working-class backgrounds report lower anticipated sense of fit.

**Retention Intentions.** Neither the main effect of *enacted* behavior ( $p = .240$ ) nor the main effect of *valued* behavior ( $p = .061$ ) was significant. However, replicating Study 3 and in further support of Hypothesis 2, we obtained a significant valued (*interdependent vs. independent*)  $\times$  enacted (*interdependent vs. independent*) behavior condition interaction on retention intentions,  $F(1, 160) = 4.78$ ,  $p = .030$ ,  $\eta^2 = .029$  (see Figure 4). Decomposing the interaction, we compared the simple effects of valuing interdependent (vs. independent) behavior by enacted behavior. Supporting Hypothesis 2a, among those in the enacted interdependent condition, those participants who were also exposed to valued interdependent behavior reported significantly higher retention intentions ( $M = 4.98$ ,  $SE = 0.26$ ) than those exposed to valued *independent* behavior ( $M = 3.99$ ,  $SE = 0.28$ ),  $t(186) = 2.73$ ,  $p = .007$ ,  $d = .40$ . In contrast, among those in the enacted independent condition, participants who were also exposed to valued independent behavior did not differ in their retention intentions ( $M = 4.48$ ,  $SE = 0.27$ ) than those exposed to valued interdependent behavior ( $M = 4.35$ ,  $SE = 0.26$ ),  $t(186) = -0.37$ ,  $p = .712$ ,  $d = .05$ . 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 valued by the organization as important, leading to stronger retention intentions. When interdependent behavior is *not* valued—which is less of a match—employees from working-class backgrounds report lower retention intentions.

**Figure 4**

*Anticipated Retention Intentions by Enacted and Valued Interdependent Behavior in Study 4 Among Employees From Working-Class Backgrounds*



*Note.* Error bars represent  $\pm 1$  SE.

**Moderated mediation.** We next conducted a moderated mediation analysis to provide another test of Hypothesis 3. The analysis yielded a point estimate of 0.875 and a 95% bias-corrected CI of [0.001, 1.782]. This interval did not include zero, suggesting that the conditional indirect effects in the two conditions were significantly different from one another. We next examined the conditional indirect effect within enacted behavior conditions. For those in the enacted *interdependent* behavior condition, there was a point estimate of 0.843 and a 95% bias-corrected CI of [0.250, 1.445]. This interval did not include zero and suggests that sense of fit did mediate the effect of valued interdependent behavior on retention intentions for those in the enacted *interdependent* behavior condition. In contrast, for those in the enacted *independent* behavior condition, there was a point estimate of -0.032 and a 95% bias-corrected CI of [-0.660, 0.584]. This interval includes zero and suggests that sense of fit did not mediate the effect of

valued interdependent behavior on retention intentions for those in the enacted *independent* behavior condition. Taken together this suggests that participants anticipated experiencing greater sense of fit at organizations where interdependent behavior was both enacted *and* valued which, in turn, led them to anticipate having stronger intentions to stay with the organization.

## **Discussion**

In this experiment, we provided further causal evidence in support of Hypotheses 2-3, and we were able to do so with an immersive workplace simulation. There was a significant conditional indirect effect of sense of fit on retention for employees at organizations where interdependent behavior was enacted and valued (vs. those at organizations where interdependent behavior was enacted but *not* valued).

### **Internal Meta-Analysis**

Given the similar hypothesizing and measures available across the studies presented here, we meta-analyzed the central findings utilizing a fixed-effects approach across the four studies to determine the robustness of the observed effects (Goh et al., 2016). In particular, across studies, we examined all decomposed simple effects of the focal three-way interactions on sense of fit and retention. 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 how enacting *and* valuing interdependent behavior benefit 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, if they were at organizations that also valued that behavior (vs. did not), they reliably reported significantly greater (a) sense of fit ( $Z = 5.94, p < .001, r = 0.15$ ), and (b) retention intentions ( $Z = 3.89, p < .001, r = 0.09$ ). In contrast, effects for employees from middle-

class backgrounds were smaller and less consistent. 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, for the first time we examined whether enacting interdependent behavior is sufficient to create a cultural match for employees from working-class backgrounds. Our studies suggest that it is not. Breaking down culture into distinct elements, we found that the benefits of a cultural match (i.e., greater sense of fit) are afforded only when there is a coupling of enacted and valued interdependent behavior. We further documented that sense of fit served as a mechanism linking coupled enacted and valued interdependent behaviors to a consequential downstream outcome in the workplace—greater retention intentions. In contrast, we found that employees from middle-class backgrounds reported similar fit and retention regardless of whether enacted and valued interdependent behavior are coupled.

Extending a cultural mismatch approach to later in the lifespan (i.e., workplace experiences), 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 can still confront the difficulties of a cultural mismatch at work (i.e., lower sense of fit) when they enact interdependent behaviors that are not valued as an important part of being a “good” or “successful” employee. Together, the studies presented here bridge cultural and social psychological theories on cultural mismatch (Stephens et al., 2007, 2012) with organizational psychology insights about the signals conveyed by multiple components of organizations' cultures (Bourne & Jenkins, 2013; Deeds Pamphile & Ruttan, 2022)—literatures not typically in

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

Effects	Studies	Stouffer Z	<i>p</i>	Meta <i>r</i>	
Working-Class Simple Effects	Working-Class: Effect of Valuing Interdependent (vs. Independent) Behavior when Interdependent Behavior is Enacted	4	5.94	<.001***	.15
	Working-Class: Effect of Valuing Interdependent (vs. Independent) Behavior when Independent Behavior is Enacted	4	-1.52	.13	-.03
	Working-Class: Effect of Enacting Interdependent (vs. Independent) Behavior when Interdependent Behavior is Valued	4	4.82	<.001***	.11
	Working-Class: Effect of Enacting Interdependent (vs. Independent) Behavior when Independent Behavior is Valued	4	-2.11	.04*	-.05
Middle-Class Simple Effects	Middle-Class: Effect of Valuing Interdependent (vs. Independent) Behavior when Interdependent Behavior is Enacted	2	-0.33	.75	.02
	Middle-Class: Effect of Valuing Interdependent (vs. Independent) Behavior when Independent Behavior is Enacted	2	2.14	.03*	.07
	Middle-Class: Effect of Enacting Interdependent (vs. Independent) Behavior when Interdependent Behavior is Valued	2	0.87	.38	.03
	Middle-Class: Effect of Enacting Interdependent (vs. Independent) Behavior when Independent Behavior is Valued	2	2.52	.01*	.06
Social Class Gaps	Effect of Working-Class (vs. Middle-Class) when Interdependent Behavior is Both Enacted and Valued	2	2.07	.04*	.06
	Effect of Working-Class (vs. Middle-Class) when Interdependent Behavior is Enacted but Not Valued	2	-3.31	<.001***	-.09
	Effect of Working-Class (vs. Middle-Class) when Independent Behavior is Enacted but Not Valued	2	-2.18	.03*	-.05
	Effect of Working-Class (vs. Middle-Class) when Independent Behavior is Both Enacted and Valued	2	0.39	.70	.01

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

Effects	Studies	Stouffer Z	p	Meta r	
Working-Class Simple Effects	Working-Class: Effect of Valuing Interdependent (vs. Independent) Behavior when Interdependent Behavior is Enacted	4	3.89	<.001***	.09
	Working-Class: Effect of Valuing Interdependent (vs. Independent) Behavior when Independent Behavior is Enacted	4	-1.39	.16	-.02
	Working-Class: Effect of Enacting Interdependent (vs. Independent) Behavior when Interdependent Behavior is Valued	4	3.64	<.001***	.08
	Working-Class: Effect of Enacting Interdependent (vs. Independent) Behavior when Independent Behavior is Valued	4	-1.77	.08	-.04
Middle-Class Simple Effects	Middle-Class: Effect of Valuing Interdependent (vs. Independent) Behavior when Interdependent Behavior is Enacted	2	-1.24	.22	-.01
	Middle-Class: Effect of Valuing Interdependent (vs. Independent) Behavior when Independent Behavior is Enacted	2	2.71	.007**	.09
	Middle-Class: Effect of Enacting Interdependent (vs. Independent) Behavior when Interdependent Behavior is Valued	2	-0.23	.82	-.01
	Middle-Class: Effect of Enacting Interdependent (vs. Independent) Behavior when Independent Behavior is Valued	2	2.46	.01*	.06
Social Class Gaps	Effect of Working-Class (vs. Middle-Class) when Interdependent Behavior is Both Enacted and Valued	2	2.01	.04*	.05
	Effect of Working-Class (vs. Middle-Class) when Interdependent Behavior is Enacted but Not Valued	2	-1.61	.11	-.04
	Effect of Working-Class (vs. Middle-Class) when Independent Behavior is Enacted but Not Valued	2	-1.75	.08	-.05
	Effect of Working-Class (vs. Middle-Class) when Independent Behavior is Both Enacted and Valued	2	1.39	.16	.03

conversation with one another. In so doing, we provide correlational and experimental evidence indicating that *enacting* interdependent behavior is not enough to combat the experience of cultural mismatch for employees from working-class backgrounds: it must also be valued as part of what it means to be a “good” employee at the organization to create a cultural match.

### **Theoretical Contributions**

Our results reveal the importance of examining enacted *and* valued interdependent behavior in tandem to delineate when employees from underrepresented working-class backgrounds will be most likely to experience the benefits of a cultural match at work (i.e., greater sense of fit). A decoupling between enacted behavior and values appears to be particularly consequential for members of historically underrepresented groups, like people from working-class backgrounds, and may reflect another subtle way in which inequality is reproduced and maintained in organizations. In this way, our results contribute to research on “office housework” that has previously been studied in the context of gender disparities at work (Chan & Anteby, 2016; Eagly & Steffen, 1984; Fletcher, 2001; Jost & Kay, 2005; Rudman & Glick, 2001; Williams & Dempsey, 2020). This prior work has documented that some tasks that are required parts of employees’ work are devalued and perceived as detracting from career advancement, helping to explain workplace gender disparities. Our work reveals that interdependent behavior may be a form of office housework – required, but not viewed as contributing to career advancement.

The work presented here also contributes to the small but growing body of psychological and organizational research on the role of employee social class background in organizations and the experiences of social class transitioners—i.e., employees from working-class backgrounds who have successfully pursued upward mobility (Barling & Weatherhead, 2016; Côté, 2022;

Kallschmidt & Eaton, 2019; Martin & Côté, 2019b; Martin & Harrison, 2022; Phillips, Martin, et al., 2020; Rivera, 2016; Sharps & Anderson, 2021). This body of work has previously documented that social class background matters for hiring, pay, career choice, and discrimination. However, we know relatively little about how employees' social class backgrounds shape their experiences of white-collar work, nor how social class transitioners specifically experience white-collar workplaces (see Fang & Saks, 2021; Martin & Harrison, 2022 for notable exceptions). While we did not observe evidence of social class differences in independent motives, potentially providing evidence of cultural change amongst social class transitioners (Phillips, Martin, et al., 2020), we also document that employees from working-class backgrounds continue to be guided by more interdependent norms than their middle- and upper-class counterparts. Our results further suggest that these social class differences in interdependent motives are sufficient to produce cultural mismatch when there is a decoupling between enacted and valued interdependent behavior (Phillips, Martin, et al., 2020; Phillips, Stephens, et al., 2020). As such, our work adds to our understanding of how distinct elements of an institution's culture affect the experiences and outcomes of employees from working-class backgrounds.

Finally, our results contribute to the cultural mismatch literature by documenting that two elements of culture work in tandem to produce the experience of (mis)match: the types of behavior that are enacted *and* those that are valued. Rather than observing that different elements of culture substitute for one another, or that one element of culture dominates other elements, we instead observe that valued and enacted behavior have interactive effects on the experience of cultural (mis)match. These findings add nuance to prior cultural mismatch research which has not disentangled different elements of culture. This prior work has been conducted primarily in



institutions of higher education rather than in organizational contexts. As such, our results cannot speak to whether the enacted and valued elements of culture are relevant only in workplaces, or if they also matter in higher education. Future work can seek to systematically examine enacted vs. valued interdependent behavior in both higher education and white-collar workplaces to determine whether it is similarly important in both settings.

### **Practical Implications**

Beyond their theoretical implications, the current findings also have important practical implications for inequality in organizations and society more broadly. Though opportunities for teamwork and collaboration are prevalent in modern organizations (Cross et al., 2016), our findings reveal that providing these opportunities is not enough to mitigate social class disparities—organizations must also value these interdependent behaviors. Our data also reveals that experiencing a coupling of enacted and valued interdependent behavior is relatively rare: Indeed, when examining the combination of enacted and valued interdependent behavior in Study 2 (a nationally-representative sample), only 30% of employees actually reported experiencing both enacted and valued interdependent behavior at work. These results reveal that the majority of white-collar organizations are not the types of workplaces that would provide a cultural match and therefore afford employees from working-class backgrounds an equal opportunity to succeed at work. Indeed, even if employees from working-class backgrounds feel they have unique interdependent strengths (Silverman et al., 2023), few organizations reflect the coupling of enacted and valued 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 (e.g., lower earnings and reduced

likelihood of ascending to leadership positions in organizations; Ingram & Oh, 2020; Laurison & Friedman, 2016).

Prior work on social 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 value – and that valuing independent behavior cannot contaminate or overtake valuing interdependent behavior. On the other hand, given that underrepresented groups are more sensitive to cultural cues of belonging, our work also suggests that it may be more beneficial to value the cultural norms of the underrepresented group (i.e., employees from working-class backgrounds) to a greater extent than the cultural norms of the overrepresented group (i.e., employees from middle-class backgrounds).

### **Constraints on Generality**

Using both correlational data and experimental methods, the four studies reported here provide clear and consistent evidence that the benefits of a cultural match (i.e., greater sense of fit) for employees from working-class backgrounds only emerge when interdependent behavior is both enacted and valued. Nevertheless, these findings have some limitations that can be addressed in future research. First, though we obtained consistent patterns across all four studies utilizing diverse methodologies and robust effects when meta-analyzing across our studies, a few of our observed effects did not reach conventional levels of significance (i.e.,  $p < .05$ ). Future

research should seek to replicate the findings obtained here utilizing additional methods and designs (e.g., longitudinal approaches).

Second, we focused the decomposition of our simple effects on the effect of valuing interdependent (vs. independent) behavior when employees are also enacting interdependent behavior. These effects are the most relevant to our theorizing and their practical implications. Nevertheless, when meta-analyzed, there also appears to be a benefit of enacting interdependent behavior more frequently when at an organization that also values interdependent behavior. This finding is consistent with prior work that has documented benefits of working together for people from working-class backgrounds in non-organizational contexts (Dittmann et al., 2020). While beyond the scope of the current investigation, future research could unpack more specifically the relationship between enacting interdependent behavior more frequently to examine other routes to creating cultural (mis)matches.

Finally, we included samples that comprised both employees from working- and middle-class backgrounds in Studies 1A-2. These studies focused on employees' own firsthand experiences at their organization and shed light on the unique effect that enacted and valued interdependent behavior has on employees from working-class –but not middle-class – backgrounds. Due to this empirical finding and our theorizing on the importance of cultural mismatch specifically for underrepresented employees from working-class backgrounds, we focused our experimental studies exclusively on employees from working-class backgrounds. Nevertheless, future research should seek to replicate and extend our findings to shed more light on the experiences of employees from middle-class backgrounds, and explore why they are less affected by a decoupling of values and behaviors at work.

## **Conclusion**

In the studies presented here, we document that simply providing opportunities for teamwork is not enough to create a cultural match for people from working-class backgrounds. Employees from working-class backgrounds only experience the benefits of a cultural match (i.e., greater sense of fit and retention) when interdependent behavior is *both* enacted and valued. These findings indicate that it is critical to examine both the behavior and the values of institutions to fully understand the experience of cultural (mis)match. Moreover, organizations should seek to ensure that enacted interdependent behavior is also valued to truly unlock the full potential of employees from working-class backgrounds. In so doing, organizations will ensure that employees from working-class backgrounds have a more equal opportunity to succeed at work – and organizations themselves will also likely benefit from the interdependent skills that these employees bring with them to the workplace.

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