

Social Class Disparities in Higher Education and Professional Workplaces:

The Role of Cultural Mismatch

Nicole M. Stephens*

Kellogg School of Management, Northwestern University

Sarah S. M. Townsend

Marshall School of Business, University of Southern California

Andrea G. Dittmann

Kellogg School of Management, Northwestern University

*Corresponding Author: Nicole M. Stephens, Kellogg School of Management, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL, 60208; Phone: +1 8474675993; Email: nstephens@kellogg.northwestern.edu

Abstract

Differences in structural resources and individual skills both contribute to social class disparities in U.S. gateway institutions of higher education and professional workplaces. People from working-class contexts also experience cultural barriers that maintain these disparities. In this article, we focus on one critical cultural barrier—the *cultural mismatch* between the independent cultural norms prevalent in middle-class contexts and U.S. institutions and the interdependent norms common in working-class contexts. In particular, we explain how cultural mismatch fuels social class disparities in higher education and professional workplaces. First, we explain how different social class contexts tend to reflect and foster different cultural models of self. Second, we outline how higher education and professional workplaces often prioritize independence as the cultural ideal. Finally, we describe two key sites of cultural mismatch—norms for understanding the self and interacting with others—and explain their consequences for working-class people’s access to and performance in gateway institutions. (151 words)

Keywords: Social class, inequality, cultural mismatch, higher education, workplaces

One of the hallmarks of U.S. society is the promise of the American Dream—the idea that with enough hard work, everyone will have an opportunity to succeed, irrespective of social class background. Yet, social science research finds that individuals’ social class backgrounds impact their access to and performance in the key gateway institutions that would promote upward social mobility: higher education and professional workplaces (Stephens, Markus, & Phillips, 2014). Indeed, compared to their peers from middle-class contexts,¹ students from working-class contexts gain access to higher education at far lower rates (Bailey & Dynarski, 2011), and, after gaining admission, receive lower GPAs and more often drop out (Sirin, 2005). Likewise, upon college graduation, students from working-class contexts less often gain access to high-status occupations (Rivera, 2012; Rivera & Tilscik, 2016), and when they do, confront a persistent “class pay gap” (Laurison & Friedman, 2016).

Importantly, in these gateway institutions, both structural and individual factors fuel social class disparities. In higher education, students from working- compared to middle-class contexts often attend lower quality high schools, and as a result, may develop fewer academic skills (e.g., advanced math) in critical areas that would help them gain access to and perform well in college (Crook & Evans, 2014). Likewise, after enrolling in college, they less often have the material and social resources that would enable them to obtain the unpaid, high-status internships that lead to elite job opportunities (Rivera & Tilscik, 2016). Beyond differences in structural resources and individual skills, people from working-class contexts also experience cultural barriers that maintain social class disparities. We focus here on one critical cultural

¹ By the term *working-class contexts*, we refer to contexts where most people do not have four-year college degrees, have relatively low incomes, and/or relatively low status occupations. In contrast, by *middle-class contexts*, we refer to contexts where most people have four-year college degrees, have relatively high incomes, and/or relatively high status occupations.

barrier—the *cultural mismatch* between the independent norms prevalent in middle-class contexts and U.S. institutions and the interdependent norms common in working-class contexts.

The current article provides an overview of how cultural mismatch fuels social class disparities in the gateway institutions of higher education and professional workplaces. First, we explain how different social class contexts in the U.S. tend to reflect and foster different *cultural models of self*, or culture-specific understandings of what it means to be a good or appropriate person in the world (Markus & Kitayama, 2010). Second, we outline how U.S. gateway institutions often prioritize independence as the cultural ideal. Finally, we describe two key sites of mismatch—norms for understanding the self and interacting with others—and outline their consequences for working-class people’s access to and performance in gateway institutions.

Social Class Contexts Shape Cultural Models of Self

Understanding how social class shapes cultural models of self requires an analysis of available material (e.g., income) and social resources (e.g., relationships). These conditions shape models of self by informing how people are able to think, feel, and act in the world, as well as the ways of being that are most likely to be effective and become normative and preferred. The models of self that are prevalent in a context are important because they guide people’s norms for understanding themselves and interacting with others.

Working-class contexts in the U.S. tend to afford an understanding of the self and behavior as relatively *interdependent* with others and the social context.² They foster interdependence because they provide fewer financial resources, greater environmental constraints, lower power and status, and fewer opportunities for choice, control, and influence than middle-class contexts (Kraus, Piff, Mendoza-Denton, Rehinschmidt, & Keltner, 2012;

² Importantly, these models of self are not mutually exclusive: people have access to both independent and interdependent models. However, depending on people’s chronic experiences, including their experiences in different social class contexts, one model tends to become more highly elaborated and guide behavior.

Stephens, Markus, et al., 2014). To be effective in these contexts, people often develop and enact interdependent models of self: they must learn to adjust to others and the social context, show awareness of their position in the social hierarchy, and rely on and work together with others for material assistance and support (Lareau 2003).

In contrast, middle-class contexts in the U.S. tend to promote an understanding of the self and behavior as relatively *independent* from others and the social context. They foster independence because they provide greater access to economic capital, fewer environmental constraints, higher power and status, and greater opportunities for choice, influence, and control than do working-class contexts (Kraus et al., 2012; Stephens, Markus, & Fryberg, 2012). To be effective in these contexts, people often develop and enact independent models of self: they must learn to influence others and the social context, challenge the status quo, and develop and express their own personal interests.

U.S. Gateway Institutions Prioritize Independence as the Cultural Ideal

Although both independent and interdependent models of self can be highly functional and adaptive, U.S. gateway institutions tend to prioritize independence as the cultural ideal (e.g., Markus & Conner, 2013). In higher education, an independent model of self often guides administrators' and educators' assumptions about how students should be motivated, learn, and interact with others (Stephens, Markus, et al., 2014). A survey with administrators revealed that a majority characterize their university cultures as independent: students are expected to pave their own paths, challenge norms and rules, and express their personal preferences (Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson, & Covarrubias, 2012). For example, class participation—i.e., expressing one's own thoughts and opinions—is often a key component of students' grades (Kim, 2002).

An independent model of self also guides managers' and coworkers' assumptions about how employees should be motivated and behave in professional organizations. These organizations tend to expect employees to take charge and influence the situation, display autonomy, and confidently express their ideas (Kennedy, Anderson, & Moore, 2013; Van Kleef, Homan, Finkenauer, Gündemir, & Stamkou, 2011). For example, at the time we conducted our research, the website of the investment bank Morgan Stanley emphasized: "This is a great environment for the self-starter, someone who relishes a lot of autonomy, and seeks to do things the way they think is best" (Stephens, Dittmann, & Townsend, 2017).

Sites of Cultural Mismatch

Institutions that prioritize independence can create a cultural mismatch for people from working-class contexts, who are often guided by a relatively interdependent model of self (Stephens, Markus, & Townsend, 2007; Stephens, Fryberg, et al., 2012). This mismatch can emerge when people from working-class contexts do not enact *independent* norms valued by institutions, or when they do enact *interdependent* norms that are relatively less valued. In this section, we provide an overview of two key sites of cultural mismatch. Specifically, because models of self powerfully shape norms for understanding the self and interacting with others, we focus on how cultural mismatch can arise in these two sites.

Self-Understanding. Institutions expect students and employees to understand and present themselves in an independent manner—to showcase a highly positive view of the self and project confidence (Markus & Conner, 2013). Yet, people from working-class contexts less often understand and present themselves in line with this independent cultural ideal (Kraus et al., 2012). People in working- compared to middle-class contexts report less positive self-regard and

lower levels of self-esteem and confidence (Kraus & Park, 2014; Twenge & Campbell, 2002).³ For example, Varnum (2015) found that people in working- compared to middle-class contexts were less likely to think they were above average on a range of skills, abilities, and attributes. In another investigation, Grossman and Varnum (2011) found that people in working- compared to middle-class contexts represented themselves as closer in size to their friends, showing less self-inflation. Instead, in working-class contexts, different interdependent understandings of the self, focusing on solidarity, loyalty, and connection to close others, often take precedence (Markus, Ryff, Curhan, & Palmersheim, 2004).

Reflecting these different understandings, people in working- compared to middle-class contexts less often present themselves as confident, distinguish themselves from others, and seek to stand out. Instead, they more often present themselves as humble, showcase similarity and connection to others, and seek to be part of groups (Stephens et al., 2007; see also, Na, McDonough, Chan, & Park, 2016). For example, Kraus and Keltner (2009) found that observers rated people from working- compared to middle-class contexts as displaying more engagement cues in their social interactions (e.g., more head nods and gazes toward their interaction partner), highlighting an increased tendency to present themselves as relational and connected. In another study, Stephens and colleagues (2007) presented participants with a vignette, in which a close friend purchased the exact same car as the participant, highlighting the similarity of their choices. While middle-class MBA students viewed this decision as a threat to their preference for presenting themselves as unique, working-class firefighters felt affirmed by this decision, as it aligned with their preference for presenting themselves as similar to others, often exclaiming, “We should start a car club!”

³ We do not mean to suggest that people from working-class contexts have more negative self-views or lack confidence; rather, they likely express self-esteem or confidence differently (e.g., in an interdependent fashion).

Interactions with Others. Institutions also expect people to interact with others in an independent style—by using relationships strategically, promoting their own interests, and advocating for themselves (Grant & Ashford, 2008). Yet, people from working-class contexts are less likely to understand relationships in this way, and be guided by this independent style of enacting relationships (Belmi & Laurin, 2016). For example, Carey and Markus (2017) show that while people in middle-class contexts often view relationships as an individual choice (e.g., connections can be severed if they are not beneficial), people in working-class contexts often reject this strategic understanding of relationships and instead view relationships as an enduring part of who they are. Indeed, in working-class contexts where people are often guided by an interdependent style of interpersonal interaction, using relationships strategically for personal gain would be seen as distasteful or inauthentic (Williams, 2017).

Reflecting these different understandings of relationships, people in working- compared to middle-class contexts less often use relationships to advance personal interests and instead more often focus on, attend to, and defer to others' needs (Dietze & Knowles, 2016; Markus & Conner, 2013). In many working-class contexts, interdependent norms such as deference to authority figures often take precedence over self-promotion or self-advocacy. For example, ethnographic studies find that parents in working- compared to middle-class contexts are less likely to promote their children's own self-interest with authority figures such as teachers or doctors (Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau, 2003; Lareau, 2003). Similarly, Calarco (2011) finds that children from working- compared to middle-class contexts are less likely to advocate for themselves (i.e., proactively seek help) with teachers.

Consequences of Cultural Mismatch in Higher Education and Professional Workplaces

On the path to upward mobility, these sites of cultural mismatch can have important consequences for people from working-class contexts—both in terms of gaining access to and performing up to their potential in gateway institutions.

Gaining access. The experience of cultural mismatch can lead people from working-class contexts to feel less comfortable enacting the independent behaviors that are required to gain access to gateway institutions, and this divergence can also lead educators or managers to evaluate them less positively.

People from working- compared to middle-class contexts are less likely to feel comfortable enacting the independent behaviors required to gain access to gateway institutions. Even the most high-achieving students from working-class contexts are unlikely to apply to selective universities (Hoxby & Avery, 2012) in part because they are often uncomfortable separating themselves from their families or communities (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015). Further reflecting this discomfort enacting the independent behaviors required to gain access to institutions, Belmi and Laurin (2016) find that people from working- compared to middle-class contexts are more reluctant to pursue paths to organizational power when doing so requires self-interested behavior (e.g., using connections for self-gain).

Research also suggests that, when students or employees diverge from institutions' cultural norms, evaluators tend to view them less positively and are less likely to admit them (Rivera, 2012). Given that the cultural ideal is to recruit students and employees who enact independent norms (Stephens et al., 2017), college recruiters and hiring managers should therefore be less likely to admit or hire people who diverge from this cultural ideal (Rivera, 2012). For example, evaluators should respond less positively to students or employees who do not present themselves with confidence or positive self-regard, or who do not effectively

advocate for themselves. Supporting this suggestion, people rate job applicants who have independent (i.e., agentic) skills as more competent and are more likely to hire them compared to applicants who have more interdependent (i.e., communal) skills (Rudman & Glick, 1999).

Performance. Even when students and employees from working-class contexts defy the odds and gain admission to higher education or professional workplaces, they still confront a cultural mismatch that can undermine their opportunity to succeed. Specifically, experiencing mismatch can inhibit their performance by reducing their comfort in these settings, and by leading educators and managers to evaluate them less positively.

When people do not see their cultural norms included in institutions, they tend to feel uncomfortable and less often perform up to their potential (Brannon, Markus, & Taylor, 2015; Stephens, Fryberg, et al., 2012; Stephens, Townsend, Markus, & Phillips, 2012). For example, when university welcome messages frame the culture as independent (e.g., expecting “bold students who assert their own ideas”), students from working-class contexts experience tasks as more difficult, show higher levels of stress, and perform less well compared to when universities frame the culture as interdependent (e.g., expecting students to be part of a community; Stephens, Fryberg, et al., 2012; Stephens, Townsend, et al., 2012). These negative performance consequences of cultural mismatch persist from college entry to college graduation four years later (Phillips, Stephens, Townsend, & Goudeau, 2018).

Moreover, when people from working- compared to middle-class contexts less often display valued independent behaviors (e.g., confidence) and more often display devalued interdependent behaviors (e.g., humility), their performance is likely to be evaluated less positively. For example, when people present themselves in an independent way by displaying confidence, observers often mistake their confidence for competence or skill and offer them

significant advantages (e.g., status attainment, performance evaluations; Kennedy et al., 2013; Sims et al., 2017). In addition, people who enact an independent style of interpersonal interaction—for example, by advocating for their own interests—are better able to gain access to valuable resources and opportunities for advancement (e.g., better grades, promotions; Grant & Ashford, 2008; Lareau, 2003).

Conclusion

Despite U.S. society's unwavering belief in the American Dream, many gateway institutions fail to achieve this ideal. One reason for this failure is because institutions are not neutral, but instead organized by taken-for-granted, middle-class norms about how to be an appropriate person. The divergence between the independent cultural ideal prevalent in these institutions and the interdependent norms common in working-class contexts can create sites of cultural mismatch in norms for understanding the self and interacting with others. Experiencing mismatch can produce discomfort for people from working-class contexts, and lead educators or managers to evaluate them less positively. People from working-class contexts may therefore be less likely to gain access to and perform up to their potential in these gateway institutions.

Although cultural mismatch plays an important role in fueling inequality, it can be reduced (Stephens, Hamedani, & Destin, 2014). Just as individuals have the capacity to learn new cultural norms and ways of being a self, so too do institutions have the capacity to integrate more diverse norms into the ideas and practices that make up their cultures. When institutions diversify their cultures in this way, they should be able to reduce the experience of cultural mismatch for people from working-class contexts, and instead provide a more inclusive experience in which a broader range of students or employees can thrive. In doing so, they will be one step closer to serving their purpose as engines of social mobility.

References

- Bailey, M.J., & Dynarski, S.M. (2011) Gains and gaps: a historical perspective on inequality in college entry and completion. In G. Duncan, & R. Murnane (Eds.), *Whither Opportunity? Rising Inequality, Schools, and Children's Life Chances* (pp. 117-132). New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Belmi, P., & Laurin, K. (2016). Who wants to get to the top? Class and lay theories about power. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 111*(4), 505-529. doi: 10.1037/pspi0000060.
- Brannon, T. N., Markus, H. R., & Taylor, V. J. (2015). "Two souls, two thoughts," two self-schemas: Double consciousness can have positive academic consequences for African Americans. *Journal of personality and social psychology, 108*(4), 586-609. doi: 10.1037/a0038992
- Calarco, J. M. (2011). "I need help!" Social class and children's help-seeking in elementary school. *American Sociological Review, 76*(6), 862-882. doi: 10.1177/0003122411427177
- Carey, R. M., & Markus, H. R. (2017). Social class shapes the form and function of relationships and selves. *Current Opinion in Psychology, 18*, 123-130. doi: 10.1016/j.copsyc.2017.08.031
- Covarrubias, R., & Fryberg, S. A. (2015). Movin' on up (to college): First-generation college students' experiences with family achievement guilt. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 21*(3), 420-429. doi: 10.1037/a0037844
- Crook, S. R., & Evans, G. W. (2014). The role of planning skills in the income-achievement gap. *Child Development, 85*(2), 405-411. doi: 10.1111/cdev.12129

- Dietze, P., & Knowles, E. D. (2016). Social class and the motivational relevance of other human beings: Evidence from visual attention. *Psychological Science*, 27(11), 1517-1527. doi: 10.1177/0956797616667721
- Grant, A. M., & Ashford, S. J. (2008). The dynamics of proactivity at work. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 28, 3-34. doi: 10.1016/j.riob.2008.04.002
- Grossmann, I., & Varnum, M. E. W. (2011). Social class, culture, and cognition. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 2, 81-89. doi: 10.1177/1948550610377119
- Horvat, E. M., Weininger, E. B., & Lareau, A. (2003). From social ties to social capital: Class differences in the relations between schools and parent networks. *American Educational Research Journal*, 40(2), 319-351. doi: 10.3102/00028312040002319
- Hoxby, C. M., & Avery, C. (2012). *The missing "one-offs": The hidden supply of high-achieving, low income students* (No. w18586). National Bureau of Economic Research.
- Kennedy, J. A., Anderson, C., & Moore, D. A. (2013). When overconfidence is revealed to others: Testing the status-enhancement theory of overconfidence. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 122(2), 266-279. doi: 10.1016/j.obhdp.2013.08.005
- Kim, H. S. (2002). We talk, therefore we think? A cultural analysis of the effect of talking on thinking. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 83(4), 828-842. doi: 10.1037//0022-3514.83.4.828
- Kraus, M. W., & Keltner, D. (2009). Signs of socioeconomic status: A thin-slicing approach. *Psychological Science*, 20(1), 99-106. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-9280.2008.02251.x
- Kraus, M. W., & Park, J. W. (2014). The undervalued self: Social class and self-evaluation. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 5, 1404. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2014.01404

- Kraus, M. W., Piff, P. K., Mendoza-Denton, R., Rheinschmidt, M. L., & Keltner, D. (2012). Social class, solipsism, and contextualism: How the rich are different from the poor. *Psychological Review*, *119*(3), 546-572. doi: 10.1037/a0028756
- Lareau, A. (2003). *Unequal childhoods: Race, class and family life*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Laurison, D., & Friedman, S. (2016). The class pay gap in higher professional and managerial occupations. *American Sociological Review*, *81*(4), 668-695. doi: 10.1177/0003122416653602
- Markus, H. R., & Conner, A. (2013). *Clash! 8 cultural conflicts that make us who we are*. New York, NY: Penguin Group.
- Markus, H. R., & Kitayama, S. (2010). Cultures and selves: A cycle of mutual constitution. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, *5*(4), 420-430.
- Markus, H. R., Ryff, C. D., Curhan, K. B., & Palmersheim, K. A. (2004). In their own words: Well-being at midlife among high school-educated and college-educated adults. In O. G. Brim, C. D. Ryff, & R. C. Kessler (Eds.), *The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur foundation series on mental health and development. Studies on successful midlife development. How healthy are we: A national study of well-being at midlife* (pp. 273-319). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Na, J., McDonough, I. M., Chan, M. Y., & Park, D. C. (2016). Social-class differences in consumer choices: Working-class individuals are more sensitive to choices of others than middle-class individuals. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *42*(4), 430-443. doi: 10.1177/0146167216634043
- Phillips, L.T., Stephens, N.M., Townsend, S.S.M., & Goudeau, S. (2018). Access is not

enough: Cultural mismatch persists to limit first-generation students' opportunities for achievement throughout college. *Manuscript submitted for publication.*

Rivera, L. A. (2012). Hiring as cultural matching: The case of elite professional service firms.

American Sociological Review, 77(6), 999-1022. doi: 10.1177/0003122412463213

Rivera, L. A., & Tilcsik, A. (2016). Class advantage, commitment penalty: The gendered effect

of social class signals in an elite labor market. *American Sociological Review*, 81(6),

1097-1131. doi: 10.1177/0003122416668154

Rudman, L. A., & Glick, P. (1999). Feminized management and backlash toward agentic

women: The hidden costs to women of a kinder, gentler image of middle managers.

Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 77(5), 1004-1010. doi: 10.1037/0022-

3514.77.5.1004

Sims, T., Koopmann-Holm, B., Young, H. R., Jiang, D., Fung, H., & Tsai, J. L. (2017). Asian

Americans respond less favorably to excitement (vs. calm)-focused physicians

compared to European Americans. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology.*

Advance online publication. doi: 10.1037/cdp0000171.

Sirin, S. R. (2005). Socioeconomic status and academic achievement: A meta-analytic review of

research. *Review of Educational Research*, 75(3), 417-453. doi:

10.3102/00346543075003417

Stephens, N. M., Dittmann, A. G., & Townsend, S. S. (2017). Social class and models of

competence: How gateway institutions disadvantage working-class Americans and how

to intervene. In A. J. Elliot, C. S. Dweck, & D. S. Yeager (Eds.), *Handbook of*

competence and motivation: Theory and application (pp. 512-528). New York, NY: The

Guildford Press.

Stephens, N. M., Fryberg, S. A., Markus, H. R., Johnson, C. S., & Covarrubias, R. (2012).

Unseen disadvantage: How American universities' focus on independence undermines the academic performance of first-generation college students. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *102*(6), 1178-1197. doi: 10.1037/a0027143

Stephens, N. M., Hamedani, M. G., & Destin, M. (2014). Closing the social-class achievement

gap: A difference-education intervention improves first-generation students' academic performance and all students' college transition. *Psychological Science*, *25*(4), 943-953.

Stephens, N. M., Markus, H. R., & Fryberg, S. A. (2012). Social class disparities in health and

education: Reducing inequality by applying a sociocultural self model of behavior. *Psychological Review*, *119*(4), 723-744. doi: 10.1037/a0029028

Stephens, N. M., Markus, H. R., & Phillips, L. T. (2014). Social class culture cycles: How three

gateway contexts shape selves and fuel inequality. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *65*, 611-634.

Stephens, N. M., Markus, H. R., & Townsend, S. S. (2007). Choice as an act of meaning: The

case of social class. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *93*(5), 814-830. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.93.5.814

Stephens, N. M., Townsend, S. S., Markus, H. R., & Phillips, L. T. (2012). A cultural

mismatch: Independent cultural norms produce greater increases in cortisol and more negative emotions among first-generation college students. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *48*(6), 1389-1393. doi: 10.1016/j.jesp.2012.07.008

Van Kleef, G. A., Homan, A. C., Finkenauer, C., Gündemir, S., & Stamkou, E. (2011).

Breaking the rules to rise to power: How norm violators gain power in the eyes of

others. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 2(5), 500-507. doi:

10.1177/1948550611398416

Varnum, M. E. (2015). Higher in status, (even) better-than-average. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 6,

496. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2015.00496

Williams, J. C. (2017). *White working class: Overcoming class cluelessness in America*.

Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press.

Recommended Readings

Kraus, M. W., Piff, P. K., Mendoza-Denton, R., Rheinschmidt, M. L., & Keltner, D. (2012).

Social class, solipsism, and contextualism: How the rich are different from the poor. *Psychological Review*, *119*(3), 546-572. doi: 10.1037/a0028756. Theoretical review outlining ways in which the differing material conditions and perceptions of rank vis-à-vis others of people from different social classes influences their psychological experiences and behavior.

Rivera, L. A. (2012). Hiring as cultural matching: The case of elite professional service firms.

American Sociological Review, *77*(6), 999-1022. doi: 10.1177/0003122412463213.

Research documenting how applicants' perceived cultural fit with the culture of elite professional firms influences hiring decisions, and how perceived cultural fit varies as a function of applicants' social class backgrounds.

Stephens, N. M., Fryberg, S. A., Markus, H. R., Johnson, C. S., & Covarrubias, R. (2012).

Unseen disadvantage: How American universities' focus on independence undermines the academic performance of first-generation college students. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *102*(6), 1178-1197. doi: 10.1037/a0027143. Research documenting how universities' prioritization of independence as the cultural ideal undermines fit and performance of students from working- compared to middle-class backgrounds, and the role that this unseen disadvantage has in the production and maintenance of inequality.

Stephens, N. M., Markus, H. R., & Fryberg, S. A. (2012). Social class disparities in health and

education: Reducing inequality by applying a sociocultural self model of behavior. *Psychological Review*, *119*(4), 723-744. doi: 10.1037/a0029028. Theoretical review that explains how social class disparities in the domains of both health and

education can arise not just from individual or structural factors, but also from the mutual constitution of individuals and structures, i.e., the sociocultural self.

Stephens, N. M., Markus, H. R., & Phillips, L. T. (2014). Social class culture cycles: How three gateway contexts shape selves and fuel inequality. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 65, 611-634. Theoretical review that outlines how American gateway institutions tend to prioritize independence as the cultural ideal, which, in turn, tends to create mismatches for people from working- compared to middle-class contexts in these institutions, and how this resulting social class culture cycle creates and fuels inequality.