

# Journal of Contemporary Ethnography

<http://jce.sagepub.com/>

---

## **Social Class And Structures Of Feeling In Women's Childhood Memories Of Clothing, Food, And Leisure**

Sandi Kawecka Nenga

*Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 2003 32: 167

DOI: 10.1177/0891241602250884

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://jce.sagepub.com/content/32/2/167>

---

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

**Additional services and information for *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* can be found at:**

**Email Alerts:** <http://jce.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

**Subscriptions:** <http://jce.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

**Reprints:** <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

**Permissions:** <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

**Citations:** <http://jce.sagepub.com/content/32/2/167.refs.html>

“Unlike the  
working-class  
respondents who  
remembered  
violating their  
peers’ clothing  
norms, middle-  
class women told  
stories of  
violating their  
mother’s clothing  
”  
norms.

**SOCIAL CLASS AND  
STRUCTURES OF  
FEELING IN WOMEN’S  
CHILDHOOD MEMORIES  
OF CLOTHING,  
FOOD, AND LEISURE**

SANDI KAWECKA NENGA  
*Indiana University*

*SANDI KAWECKA NENGA is a doctoral candidate in sociology at Indiana University. Currently, she is completing her dissertation on youth, volunteer work, and community building. She is also working out a method for using science fiction novels to generate sociological insight.*

*Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, Vol. 32 No. 2, April 2003 167-199  
DOI: 10.1177/0891241602250884  
© 2003 Sage Publications

*Sociological and autobiographical accounts of working-class life suggest that emotions are one important component of social class identification. In this article, the author invokes Raymond Williams' concept, "structures of feeling," to explain how something as private and individual as emotions can be linked to one collective identity, social class. She examines the childhood memories of twenty-seven women from working-class and middle-class backgrounds for evidence of structures of feeling. Women's childhood memories of clothing norm violations, encountering new food, and threatening situations revealed patterned emotional responses that varied by social class. The author argues that these patterns are evidence of class-based structures of feeling manifesting on an individual level.*

**Keywords:** *social class; structures of feeling; emotions; women; childhood memories*

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, several academics from working-class backgrounds published autobiographical accounts detailing complex relationships to social class identities (Steedman 1987; Marshall 1991; Tokarczyk and Fay 1993; Dews and Law 1995; Kuhn 1995; Zandy 1995; Mahony and Zmroczek 1997; Wray and Newitz 1997). Several of these authors noted that despite their professional middle-class educations and occupations, they still *felt* working-class. Although most Americans use occupation, education, and income to determine their own subjective social class identifications (Davis and Robinson 1998), these working-class academics suggest that emotions also play a key role in subjective social class identification. In this article, I discuss the link between social class identities and emotions. To explain how something as private and individual as emotions can be linked to collective social identities like social class, I invoke Raymond Williams's concept, "structures of feeling." Specifically, I examine the childhood memories of twenty-seven women from working-class and middle-class backgrounds for evidence of structures of feeling. To uncover this evidence, I analyze the emotional responses generated by particular experiences and examine how those sets of emotions differ by social class.

*AUTHOR'S NOTE:* An early version of this article was presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, Chicago, IL, August 1999. For their helpful comments, I gratefully acknowledge Donna Eder, Emily Kolker, Jenny Stuber, Katy Hadley, Brian Powell, Robyn Ryle, Erin Maher, and Shari Woodbury.

## EMOTIONS AND SOCIAL CLASS

From the “hidden injuries of class” to working-class “worlds of pain,” sociological portrayals of working-class life have included discussions of emotions (Sennett and Cobb 1972; Rubin 1976). Sociologists have documented the rage, anxiety, insecurity, and shame experienced by working-class adults (Sennett and Cobb 1972; Luttrell 1989; Skeggs 1997). Even professional and managerial-class adults who spent their childhoods in the working class report feelings of fraudulence, insecurity, vulnerability, anxiety, and shock (Karp 1986; Morris and Grimes 1996). The importance of emotions to defining class experience extends to the middle class as well, where adults experience insecurity, vulnerability, and fear of “falling” into the working class (Ehrenreich 1989).

Numerous autobiographical accounts about social class affirm the link between emotions and social class identity noted in the sociological literature. Autobiographical accounts have been penned by academics trying to puzzle out what it means to spend a childhood in the working class and an adulthood in the professional middle class (Steedman 1987; Marshall 1991; Tokarczyk and Fay 1993; Dews and Law 1995; Kuhn 1995; Zandy 1995; Mahony and Zmroczek 1997; Wray and Newitz 1997), and authored by gays, lesbians, and bisexuals as members of heterogeneous class communities (Allison 1994; Penelope 1994b; Raffo 1997). Typically, these authors comb through childhood experiences looking for the origins of class-linked behaviors, skills, beliefs, and values. These childhood experiences often revolve around clothing, food, and leisure (e.g., Penelope 1994a; Horn 1995; McDaniel 1995). Such accounts are suffused with negative emotions like anger, anxiety, fear, and shame, as well as positive emotions such as pride, love, and happiness.

Academic research has also observed links between clothing, food, leisure, and social class. Scholars of fashion and dress have noted that people use clothing to express class identities and to allow others to decode their placement in the class hierarchy (Kaiser 1985; Roach-Higgins, Eicher, and Johnson 1995). Individuals may dress up or dress down in order to communicate their ambivalence about class identity or make subversive statements about social class (Davis 1992; Crane 2000). Food can also serve to mark class identities and symbolize class culture (Landor 1988; Inness 2001). Social class organizes the context in which people obtain, prepare, and consume food (DeVault 1991) as

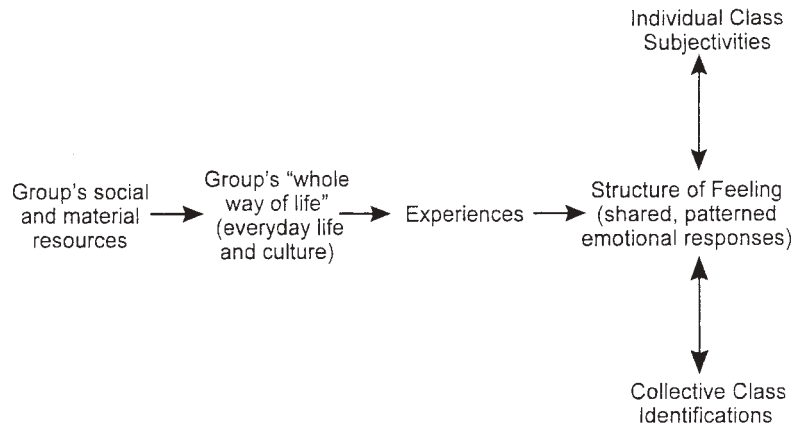
well as the rules individuals follow to determine what types and amounts of food to eat (Counihan 1992). Similarly, leisure is another arena in which individuals enact class identities (Griffin 1985) and where activities are organized differently by social class (Lareau 2000). These scholars assume that social class identities precede the expression and organization of clothing, food, and leisure, whereas the authors of the autobiographical accounts mentioned above look to childhood experiences of clothing, food, and leisure as resources for the creation and understanding of social class identities.

To date, academic research has neglected to investigate the role childhood experiences of clothing, food, and leisure play in the construction and maintenance of class identities. Both sociological and autobiographical literatures suggest that childhood experiences of clothing, food, and leisure are suffused with emotion and that emotions are related to social class. However, it remains unclear *which* experiences and emotions contribute to the creation and maintenance of social class identities and *how* those processes occur.

## STRUCTURES OF FEELING

Raymond Williams's concept "structures of feeling" suggests one way emotions could be linked to social class identities. Initially, Williams developed "structures of feeling" to explain how aesthetics of different art forms, such as the novel, shifted from generation to generation. He argued that daily life and lived experience produce patterns of thought and emotion that run deep beneath each generation, and that these patterns constitute the structure of feeling. Since artists unconsciously draw upon these patterns of thought and emotion while producing art, their artwork reflects the particular tone and flavor of their generation's structure of feeling (Williams 1961). Later, Williams (1977) suggested that structures of feeling may be related to different social classes as well as generations.

Although Williams himself never provided a succinct definition of the term, other scholars have labored to do so. Structures of feeling have been defined as a "shared set of ways of thinking and feeling which, displaying a patterned regularity, form and are formed by the 'whole way of life' which comprises the 'lived culture' of a particular epoch, class or group" (Bennett 1981, 26). Cultural theorists have argued that individuals



**FIGURE 1: Model of the Relationship between Culture and Social Class Identities, Based on Williams (1961, 1977) and Hetherington (1998)**

draw on structures of feeling to create not just artwork but individual and group identities as well (Hetherington 1998).

In terms of social class, then, the social and material resources of a social class shape that group's everyday life and culture. The group's everyday life and culture engender particular experiences, to which individuals respond emotionally. When members of a social class share emotional responses, those patterned emotional responses constitute a class-based structure of feeling. This class-based structure of feeling is expressed through individual class subjectivities. Set against the term identity—which carries connotations of being fixed, coherent, and stable over time—the term subjectivity refers to “the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world . . . which is precarious, contradictory and in process, constantly being reconstituted in discourse each time we think or speak” (Weedon 1987, 32-3). In addition to individual subjectivities, class-based structures of feeling are expressed in group identities or collective class identifications.<sup>1</sup> These individual class subjectivities and collective class identifications then work to reconstitute the class-based structure of feeling (see Figure 1).

Williams's structures of feeling map an intriguing but vague link between emotions and class subjectivities. Although many scholars have noted the presence of structures of feeling, few if any have presented detailed descriptions of how structures of feeling manifest at the

individual level. To date, we do not know which experiences are important or which emotions are shared by different social classes. The lack of empirical detail also raises questions about how the processes linking resources, experiences, and emotions unfold; whether they always unfold in the same way; and when these processes might be blocked or cross-cut by other identities.

In this article, I seek to uncover evidence that structures of feeling do in fact manifest at the individual level. I search for evidence of two components of class-based structures of feeling: experiences and patterns of emotional responses. Although I focus on just two components of the full theoretical model here, I will speculate on the remaining components in the discussion section. First I ask what are some of the experiences that give rise to the emotional responses underpinning a class-based structure of feeling? Second, what are the patterned emotional responses arising from these experiences for each social class?

To investigate these questions, I interviewed twenty-seven women from working-class and middle-class backgrounds about their childhood memories of clothing, food, and leisure. This route of investigation is suitable for a number of reasons. First, social class can be difficult to discuss in the United States (Penelope 1994a; Zandy 1996). Of those scholars who discuss social class, the majority are female, working-class academics (Walkerdine 1996). I chose to interview women because they may be more comfortable than men talking about social class in the United States. Second, I focus on childhood memories of clothing, food, and leisure because the literature indicates that women use these memories to understand social class. Finally, most of the sociological and autobiographical literature focuses on women with working-class backgrounds. This article adds to the literature on women and social class by including women from both the working *and* middle classes. Through my analyses, I identify three sets of experiences and the attendant groups of emotional responses that partially constitute and reveal working-class and middle-class structures of feeling.

## METHOD

In the summer and fall of 1998, I interviewed twenty-seven women living in a Midwestern university community. I recruited study

participants by advertising in the community and subsequently snowballing. Women responded to study advertisements placed in laundromats (five), the public library (four), grocery stores (four), an arts center (two), an e-mail list serving women in technical occupations (two), a nursing home (one), a church (one), and a café (one). An additional seven women were recruited through snowballing; these women were not significantly different from the women recruited through study advertisements. During recruitment, I stressed my interest in understanding the cultural side of social class and asked each woman to bring a few pictures of herself as a child to the interview.

### THE INTERVIEWS

All interviews were open-ended and conducted face-to-face in a café, a semi-private room at the public library, or in a private room at the university. On average, interviews lasted seventy minutes. After obtaining background information about each woman's childhood, I asked her to describe the photographs of herself as a child that she brought to the interview and to tell me what she remembered about the photograph. If a woman had not brought photographs, I asked her to describe a few that she knew existed. Discussing the photographs allowed me to actually see some of the clothes women wore as children, facilitated recall of childhood memories, and prompted women to recount stories surrounding the photograph. Then I asked women about clothing, food, and leisure activities during the first half of childhood (usually defined as up to age ten) and during the later part of childhood (usually defined as ten to eighteen years old). Defining "leisure activities" for children can be difficult, since some children experience a great deal of free time and others spend a lot of time working on farms or at jobs. To be as inclusive as possible, I considered school to be the "work" of childhood and defined leisure time as time spent outside of school. To facilitate recall, I first asked women to describe what a typical meal, outfit, and time outside of school might look like in each period. Then I asked women to relate a more specific memory of an incident, a day, or an event that somehow related to food, clothing, and time outside of school.

All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. I then sent each woman a copy of the transcript to read over and edit as she desired. Excerpts from interviews that appear in this article are edited to reflect



the women's desire that repetitions, "ums," and "uhs" be removed. All names here are pseudonyms. Participants were not paid. However, I offered each woman a copy of her corrected transcript as well as a copy of the audiotape, noting that these served to document aspects of her childhood and that she might wish to pass these on to relatives. Several women accepted, stating that they wished to give the transcript or tape to their children. To verify that I accurately represented the women's memories, I sent an early draft of this paper to twelve women who agreed to read it. No one provided feedback specifically on the paper, although one woman did write to me about general issues facing women.

The narratives embedded in the interviews constitute retrospective data and, particularly for the older women in the study, may be recalled from a period as long as seventy years ago. While the conventional concern with retrospective data is the quality and accuracy of such data, I argue that this is not a significant concern for this study. I understand the women's childhood memories to be tools they use to understand, construct, and present their experiences during childhood. As tools, these memories do not lie dormant in each woman's mind until activated by a research interview years later. These memories tend to be recalled and mulled over again and again by women seeking to make sense of their own lives. Indeed, several women framed the telling of a memory by noting instances in which she had discussed the memory with others. As tools, I am not interested in the accuracy of the memories, but the meanings, emotions, and understandings the memories convey.

## THE SAMPLE

The childhood characteristics of the sample reveal a diverse group. The women's childhoods spanned seven decades, from the 1920s to the 1980s. At the time of the interview, the women ranged in age from twenty-one to seventy-nine with a mean age of forty-four years. The women in this sample were raised in rural, suburban, and urban areas in fifteen states and two foreign countries. They were raised primarily in the southern, eastern, and midwestern regions of the United States. Women reported being raised as Protestant (fourteen), Catholic (three), Jewish (two), or a mix of religions (four); four women reported no religious affiliation in childhood.

The adult characteristics of the women in the sample clearly reflect the composition of the university community from which the sample was drawn. Although no woman was currently an undergraduate of traditional age and no women were tenure-track professors, many women had some connection with the local university. The women currently worked as a recreational therapist, a waitress, a technical writer, an office manager, a day care center owner, an after-school program coordinator, an academic adviser, an Americorps volunteer, a journalist, health aides (three), computer support specialists (two), secretaries (two), and lecturers (two). In addition, three women were graduate students and six were retired or had no occupation. As a group, the women were highly educated: eight had attended some college, five had completed their bachelor's degrees, and thirteen had some graduate education or a graduate degree. One woman did not state her educational history. All of the women are white, except one who is African American.

In the interview, I allowed women to choose their own terms to describe their childhood social class, and asked them to explain why they chose the label they did. Women identified their childhood social class as poor, lower class, working class, lower middle class, academic, middle class, and upper middle class. For the purposes of analysis, I then grouped women's childhood social classes into two groups: working-class and middle-class. With the exception of Nicole (explained below), I have followed the women's choice of childhood social class.

The working-class group is composed of thirteen women. Ten women labeled their own childhood families as poor or working-class. In addition, this group includes three women with mobile childhoods. For the first ten years of her life, Eryn (twenty-eight years old) described her family as lower class because they were often on welfare and did not have a car. After her mother married a bus driver when she was ten, Eryn described her family as "perhaps lower middle class" and noted that her family went back on public assistance whenever her stepfather was on strike. Because Eryn's stepfather was a union bus driver who often experienced strikes, I include her in the working-class group. Although Nicole (twenty-one years old) described herself as "lower middle class" and her mother worked in a white-collar job, she described several periods in her early childhood when the utilities were cut off and her family went without food. During early adolescence, her family became financially stable for two years until her father lost his job as a forklift driver when she was in high school and finances became

tight again. I include Nicole in the working-class group because of the continual financial uncertainty in her family. Abby (twenty-nine years old) described an upper-middle-class childhood until her parents divorced when she was seven. After age seven, Abby describes her family as "poverty-stricken." I include Abby in the working-class group because her strongest memories are of the period after age seven.

The middle-class group is composed of fourteen women. Three women described their childhoods as lower middle-class, seven as middle-class, and two as upper middle-class. This group also includes two women who described class positions of high social and cultural capital but lower economic capital. Dara (forty years old) is the daughter of a professor who describes her family's class status as "academic." She describes her family as having less money than most of her childhood friends' families, but notes that her family was able to travel abroad and socialize with others who engaged in intellectual pursuits because of her father's career. Gail (thirty-six years old) is a minister's daughter who describes her childhood family as both middle-class and as not poor "but we probably were just one step above." Gail admits that her family never worried about money and that her father's position as a minister gained the family access to economic resources beyond her father's salary, such as the church-owned houses in which they lived. Because neither Dara nor Gail experienced financial insecurity and because their fathers' lower salaries were augmented by other economic resources, I include them in the middle-class group.

## DATA ANALYSIS

I extracted 385 narrative memories—those that told some kind of story—from the interview transcripts. A few women related visual memories, such as Judith's image of her childhood kitchen: "I have this memory of a roast beef on a rotisserie in the kitchen. . . . We had a gray Formica table on the end, black phone on the wall. I do good with visuals" (forty-four years old, working-class<sup>2</sup>). Since I was interested in coding emotions, and emotions were not easily discerned in visual memories, I excluded visual memories from the analysis. I coded each narrative memory according to whether the story was about clothing, food, and/or time outside of school.

Because the analytical focus on emotions developed after the end of data collection, I did not always ask each respondent how an incident had made her feel. I used a two-part strategy to code the emotions present in each narrative memory. First, I began by identifying emotions that the women explicitly named as they told their stories. Words like “ticked off” signaled anger, “mortified” and “embarrassed” marked shame, “exciting” and “neat” revealed happiness, and so on. Second, I relied on facial expressions, body language, laughter, vocal tone, and word choice as evidence for the presence of emotions other than those that the women explicitly named. For example, I took a screwed up face and the use of the words “weird,” “awful,” “terrible,” and “ugh” as signs of disgust when Spring, Rachel, and Kara talked about food, even though they did not use the word disgust explicitly. I coded all memories for the presence of the following emotions: anger, anxiety, disgust, envy, fear, happiness, hope, interest, loneliness, pride, relief, sadness, shame, surprise, and no emotion. Finally, I examined the clothing, food, and leisure memories for common themes and events, and analyzed the patterns of emotions in these memories.

## RESULTS

The theoretical model for structures of feeling suggests that the experiences of working- and middle-class girls should give rise to different sets of emotional responses by class. Because I am interested in determining whether there are different sets of emotional responses by social class, I chose to analyze experiences that are at least nominally shared by working- and middle-class girls. When asked to recount a memory that had “something to do with clothing,” both working- and middle-class women recounted experiences with clothing norm violations. Similarly, women from both classes commonly described memories of encountering new food when asked for a memory that had “something to do with food” and threatening situations when asked for something “that happened outside of school.” Although these types of experiences are similar in their broadest outlines, the actors, sequences of events, and sets of emotional responses differ by social class.

## CLOTHING NORM VIOLATIONS

### Working Class

Of the thirteen working-class respondents, eleven recounted stories of how their clothing violated norms. In these stories, working-class women reported feeling shame, anger, and anxiety. In a few cases where working-class women remembered being able to meet clothing norms, they experienced happiness.

Most working-class women recounted stories about violating their peers' clothing norms. In these memories, working-class women most commonly reported feeling shame. For example, Beth normally wore anklets and saddle shoes to school, but on field trip days the girls were allowed to wear nylons and flats. She remembered showing up to school for a field trip wearing her anklets and saddle shoes as "the most mortifying experience of my whole life" (fifty-two years old).

Although Beth realized her norm violation as soon as she saw the other girls, many working-class women were not even aware of their norm violations until a peer pointed them out. Kerry's story illustrates the basic structure of many norm violation stories told by working-class girls.

I wore this horrible suit one day when I was twelve, to seventh grade. Somebody had given me this bright royal purple shiny stretch jumpsuit that was sleeveless. So I put this thing on and over the top of it I put these shorts that were pretty short shorts and they were purple and white striped about a half inch, vertical, all the way around. And then for a shirt, I put on (laugh) this shirt that was like a light lavender purple and it had like a v front and back for the bottom hemline and the front panel of it was this lavender color and all the rest of it was like this white lace stuff. (Laugh)

*[What happened? Did the kids, other kids, or teacher say anything?]*

Yeah, all the kids laughed at me. At the time, you know I'm not sure even now if they were laughing like "oh my gosh that's so funny" or "oh my gosh look at that girl." You know but at the time I thought they were laughing at me in a jovial way, so I'm just going to try and remember it that way. And one person really got snotty with me about it. I never understood that but I mean I didn't know how to dress. I was like, "what did I do to you?" She just went off on me. (twenty-one years old)

Kerry was clearly unaware that her outfit would violate her peers' norms when she put the outfit together. Kerry's laughter and her animated voice signaled her pride in her creativity and her delight in strong color. Once she went to school, her peers' laughter notified her that her outfit violated clothing norms. Kerry's emotional responses to her peers' laughter were complex and spanned several years. Initially, Kerry reported feeling angry about the "snotty" girl's verbal attack, and her sense of hurt came through in the tone of her voice as she described her defense of herself: "what did I do to you?" Kerry indicated her sense of shame emanating from this incident later in the interview. In high school, Kerry actively campaigned to get away from that "purple image girl" by wearing lots of blue jeans, white t-shirts, and black blazers. As an adult reflecting on the experience, Kerry asserts that she is trying to remember the incident as if they were laughing jovially. The use of the word "try" suggested that Kerry is still actively reinterpreting the incident to minimize shame and embarrassment.

While Kerry's norm violation was not specifically due to her family's inability to provide expensive clothes, many working-class women reported being unable to wear current fashions because of lack of money. Abby (twenty-nine years old), for example, remembered being embarrassed when the rich kids at boarding school saw her hand-me-downs and flea market clothing in her locker. Maryla (thirty-nine years old) recalled wearing her brother's hand-me-down dress clothes to the first day of high school. Even twenty-five years later, Maryla was so ashamed of that outfit she refused to describe it to me. Eryn noted that, after this incident in sixth grade, she was so ashamed that she refused to use a bookbag until she was in college:

I really didn't realize that I was different in any way until one day in sixth grade, which was the final grade at the elementary school. And I felt important somehow because I was a sixth grader you know. I was walking through the hall in the morning and I overheard a younger student make a comment about how strange I was. At the time I had some kind of little bookbag, you know the type that have the fold over flap and the little twist buttons. And it was probably some cheap, Hills type of thing and it had a rainbow and a brush on it. And it was something like "Paint my world with rainbows." But I thought it was cute. And this same student who said you know, "she's kind of strange" made a comment about that bag. About you know "oh that's really stupid" or something like that. And I just remember ever since that, I would not use that bag. And I

really, it's the strangest thing, I didn't use a backpack again until, probably college, I think (laugh). It really affected me that much. So I think it was at that point that I really began to realize that, yeah, you know you are kind of different. I looked different, I spoke differently, acted differently, different expectations, everything. (twenty-eight years old)

Once working-class women became aware of the clothing norms that they could not or did not meet, they reported working to either meet clothing norms or hide the fact that their clothes did not meet the norms. These stories were characterized by a great deal of anxiety. Olive, who wore hand-me-downs until she began sewing her own clothes, recalled how anxiously she tried to follow fashion: "I can remember after I started sewing that I was so particular about the colors and whatever was in. Your purse, your gloves, your shoes were supposed to match. And so I was affected of [*sic*] the way that I dressed and the way the other people was dressing around me" (seventy-five years old). After the bookbag incident recounted above, Eryn told multiple stories where she anxiously strategized to hide the name of the store where she bought her shoes and clothing, and altered clothes bought at stores like Hills to make them look like clothes from more expensive stores. In junior high and early high school, Carmen also lied to hide the Kmart and thrift store origins of her clothes: "Oh, if people asked me where I got an outfit I wouldn't tell them where. You know I would just skirt around it or if I'd lie, I'd tell a little lie or something" (twenty-four years old).

The few working-class women who recounted instances where they were able to meet their peers' norms and wear more expensive clothing remembered feeling happy. Julia remembered going shopping in a nice department store with a friend. There, she used the money that her mother had given her to buy a number of clothes for just one expensive outfit with which she "was really thrilled" (forty-one years old). After recounting how she could not hide her thrift store clothes in the boarding school lockers, Abby grew animated while remembering a trip to a factory outlet mall where she was able to purchase a pair of designer jeans for fifteen dollars. Abby said, "I was just so excited I couldn't see straight, you know?" (twenty-nine years old). Lise recalled how pleased she was by some expensive clothes and how odd it seemed to wear them:

One of the teachers in high school had a niece who had beautiful clothes and she brought me a whole box full of them one day. And they fit me just

the way they were. They were beautiful, expensive clothes. And I've always thought, "What a contrast." Such an economically poor girl and here I had all of these clothes. (seventy-nine years old)

In sum, working-class women remembered peers who notified them of a clothing norm violation because their clothing was different or inexpensive. Working-class women reported feelings of shame and anger in these memories. Once a woman was aware of clothing norms, she recalled anxiety during her attempts to meet the norms of fashionable and more expensive clothing. In the few cases where working-class women recounted being able to wear more expensive clothing, working-class women's accounts were characterized by happiness.

### **Middle Class**

Of the fourteen middle-class respondents, ten women told stories about clothing norm violations. Unlike the working-class respondents who remembered violating their peers' clothing norms, middle-class women told stories of violating their *mothers'* clothing norms. Middle-class women were well aware of their mother's clothing norms, and they reported feelings of envy in reaction to these norms. When middle-class women recalled violating their mothers' clothing norms, their stories were characterized primarily by feelings of anger and pride.

Many of the middle-class women remembered their mothers insisting on plain, sensible, and moderately priced clothing. In response to this clothing norm, many of the women remembered envying fancy and expensive clothes or shoes. Dara (forty years old) reported fantasizing about "insane, ludicrous shoes" rather than the oxfords her mother made her wear. Eleanor also recalled envying expensive shoes:

My clothing was not as expensive as I would liked for it to have been. But my sensible consistent parents did not indulge me that way. . . . So I always had what I needed and I had perfectly nice clothes, but I didn't have the little Capezio shoes that a lot of the girls were wearing then. I remember that because they were expensive. And my mother thought they weren't very sensible shoes anyway. (sixty-four years old)

Although Chloe's father made a very good salary, she reported that her parents often made poor spending decisions, and as a result, her family had to be very frugal. On family shopping trips with an aunt and



cousin, Chloe remembered envying the expensive clothes her cousin was able to purchase: "I remember always following my cousin Denise around and wanting what she wanted but knew, because I was frugal, that I couldn't get the items that she got" (twenty-six years old).

When middle-class women told stories where their mothers actually gave notice that they were violating the norms of plain and sensible clothing, middle-class women reported feeling anger as well as envy. Cheryl (twenty-nine years old) told multiple stories about wanting to wear fancy ballgowns to her pageants and photo shoots; her mother continually angered Cheryl by insisting that she wear childlike pedalpushers and "plain Jane" dresses instead. Meredith and Helen recalled angry fights with parents when they wanted to wear clothes that were decidedly not plain and sensible. In high school, Meredith recalled that her mother wanted her to wear preppy, tailored clothes and that instead she wore revealing shirts and short dresses "just to piss off my mother at the time" (forty-one years old). Helen recounted a particularly hurtful fight with her mother:

I was coping some attitude about clothes. And I knew that my mother had gone to boarding school and that in her boarding school they had to wear uniforms. And I think she was telling my grandmother how particular I had become about clothes and how my taste had become, as she said, 'Fifth Avenue.' And she said, "Well, you know when I was in school we had to wear uniforms every day." And I said something like "If I had to wear a uniform I would die of embarrassment." And just a really snotty thing to say. (thirty-three years old)

Although Helen is embarrassed about her behavior now, which she indicates by describing her comment as "snotty," as a teenager she was clearly angry about her mother's comments that her taste for expensive clothes had exceeded the norm of plain, sensible clothing.

In addition to feeling angry at their mothers for flagging clothing norm violations, middle-class girls often asserted their pride in their own abilities to meet their peers' clothing norms. Cheryl's story about her desire to purchase a sweater in the men's department is representative:

My mother takes me shopping and we're at Ayres department store and big sweaters like Benetton sweaters were really in. I said "Ma, I'm going to get a sweater here." We look in the female department and I don't see

any sweater I like. I'm about to go over to the men's department and check out the sweaters, you know because they were like big fluffy sweaters. [My mother said] "Oh my god. Why are you going over to the men's department for a sweater? Are you weird or something?" And she made me feel so ashamed. So that really ticked me off. I started to rebel about clothing because you know they kept telling me "We don't really want you in that." And I myself have a lot of pride and I would never wear anything that I thought was inappropriate. (twenty-nine years old)

In these stories, middle-class women were generally trying to meet the norms of their peers when mothers pointed out they were violating norms of femininity and/or appropriateness by trying to wear clothes that were too masculine, expensive, or sexy. In Cheryl's case, she was shopping for a sweater that was "really in" with her peers when her mother pointed out that buying a man's sweater would violate the norms of femininity. Typically in these stories, following the mother's guidance often meant that the middle-class girl would have violated her peers' norms. By insisting that she buy a woman's sweater, Cheryl's mother prevented her from meeting her peers' norm of wearing big fluffy sweaters. The middle-class women responded to their mothers' notice of a norm violation with anger toward their mothers, and assertions of their pride and competence in meeting both their peers' and mother's norms. Cheryl was one of the few middle-class women who reported feeling shame. But like the other middle-class women, she was "ticked off" and asserted her pride in her ability to identify appropriate clothing.

Only two middle-class women remembered being unable to meet their peers' clothing norms, and both expressed a very mild sense of shame at being unable to do so. Eleanor (sixty-four years old) remembered being embarrassed when she had to shop in the "Chubbettes" section of the department store when she was in late elementary school because she had put on weight. "I did not like that," she laughed. Allison, who was the oldest in a family of eight, remembered being elected cheerleader in sixth grade:

I remember that the cheerleaders all got together and decided what their uniforms would be. And part of the uniform was a white sweater. And I didn't want to go home and ask my parents, and in fact I never did, for the money to buy that white sweater. I wore a white blouse all the time. . . .

But it was just like I knew, you know, that, that there wasn't the money for that. (forty-eight years old)

Neither of these middle-class women refused to describe outfits or worked hard to change their image at school, as did working-class women. Compared with the shame and anxiety of the working-class women who could not meet their peers' clothing norms, the dislike and resignation here seem muted.

In sum, most middle-class women were well aware that their mothers thought clothing should be plain and sensible. In reaction to this, many middle-class women envied fancy, expensive clothing. When mothers notified daughters that their taste in clothes was too expensive, too masculine, or too risqué, middle-class daughters felt anger toward their mothers and pride in their own ability to meet their peers' clothing norms.

## ENCOUNTERING NEW FOOD

### Working Class

Of the thirteen working-class respondents, eight women told stories of encountering new food and their subsequent feelings of happiness and surprise.

Working-class women remembered encounters with new food producing feelings of happiness, delight, and pleasure. Evelyn (sixty-one years old), whose farming family was unable to buy soda pop, told me how much she enjoyed the soda at 4-H meetings. Emma (sixty-two years old) recalled with pleasure her father's Sunday trips to the market to buy dessert, and how he returned with exotic fruits like prickly pear and fig. One Mother's Day, Julia's father made a meal with baked potatoes and sour cream. Since her mother never used sour cream, Julia recalled thinking "That was so great . . . that seemed real, you know fancy and exotic to have sour cream" (forty-one years old). Nicole (twenty-one years old) remembers enjoying her grandfather's Polish cooking and being pleased to be connected to her ethnic heritage. Working-class women remembered eating these foods because they were either prohibitively expensive or because they were a relatively inexpensive way to make an occasion special. In both cases, women reported feeling pleasure and happiness.

Working-class women reported encountering the food of relatively wealthier people for the first time with surprise. After years of eating sparse meals composed of cheap organic food like homemade tofu and vegetables from the garden, Abby (twenty-nine years old) remembered encountering food in a boarding school cafeteria. While she reported being relieved to eat “three squares a day,” she was surprised by the food served in her elite boarding school: turkey roll, apple crisp, broiled chicken, and canned vegetables. Abby recalled concluding “Well, it [boarding school food] must be regular food.” Clearly, Abby decided that her family’s organic way of eating was deviant, and the boiled and canned food at school was the norm. Maryla’s (thirty-nine years old) poignant story of her exposure to rich people’s food begins with surprise and is tied to longstanding attitudes about food:

One time when she [my mother] was shopping, she noticed that somebody had marked macadamia nuts incorrectly. And so rather than being ten dollars a jar, they were like a dollar a jar. And so she brought them home and she gave them to us and she said, “These are macadamia nuts. They’re what rich people eat and so you can all taste them because they were inadequately marked.” And so I still have this attitude that there are certain foods that are the foods that rich people eat and that if I am eating them or if anybody else around me is eating them they’re doing it to cop an attitude. And that those foods are not necessarily any better than the foods that I can afford. And that memory is made stronger by the fact that my mother cleaned rich people’s houses. . . . And she was exposed to that all the time because you know she might be cleaning their kitchen and when I was a little kid, when I got sick, and I didn’t go to school, she would take me with her to these people’s houses, and I would sneak into their kitchens and taste their food. And it didn’t necessarily taste better, it did taste different. (thirty-nine years old)

Maryla’s account weaves together two stories of encounters with rich people’s foods that taught her about food snobbery and class differences. When she recalled sneaking into kitchens to taste rich people’s foods while her mother cleaned, she exclaimed “It didn’t necessarily taste better,” as if she had expected the food to be superior and was surprised that it was merely different. The first encounter in Maryla’s narrative, when her mother provided an introduction to macadamia nuts, suggested that Maryla’s mother actively taught her daughter to resist the notion that rich people’s foods are superior. As a result, Maryla

noted that she “still” thinks people who eat rich people’s food do so because it is a status symbol rather than because of its high quality. In these memories, working-class women encountered other people’s food and were surprised either by its taste or by what it revealed about wealthier people.

In sum, working-class women remembered encountering new foods with pleasure and surprise. Working-class women reported pleasure when eating food their families could not afford to buy at home or eating inexpensive food which made an occasion special. Working-class women reported surprise when they ate the food of those from higher class backgrounds.

### **Middle Class**

Of the fourteen middle-class respondents, ten women told stories of encountering new food, and the feelings of disgust and pleasure these experiences provoked.

Middle-class women reported several encounters with new food that generated feelings of disgust. For example, both Spring and Rachel were subjected to parental attempts to introduce “Chinese” food. After Spring’s father received a wok for Christmas, Spring said her father would “do stir-fry vegetables and stuff that we weren’t used to, and it was just like ‘ugh’” (thirty years old). Rachel reported her mother “kept trying to cook this Chinese thing that was totally awful. She kept thinking in order for it to be Chinese you’ve got to get it out of a can” (forty-seven years old). Middle-class women also remembered being disgusted by new “white trash” food. Kara was alternately disgusted and amused as she told the story of her parents’ awkward attempt to socialize by going to dinner at another couple’s house:

And they, the woman made dinner and she made like this tater tot casserole. And this thing’s like so white trash. It’s so funny. But I guess that’s like 70s food, you know, or, yeah 70s, 70s food. But tater tot casserole and like hamburger and like creamed green beans and like those weird crunchy onions you know on top. Terrible. And then white bread, you know, wonder bread with butter. (twenty-eight years old)

Here Kara marks tater tot casserole as the food of poor people by labeling it “white trash.” Her disgust is evident in her evaluation of the

food as “terrible” and “weird.” Encountering new food produced feelings of disgust in middle-class women, particularly when the new food was presented as ethnic food or perceived as the food of poor people.

Disgust was evident in only one working-class woman’s story of encountering new food, although the story Eryn related occurred during an upwardly mobile period in her childhood that she labeled “perhaps lower middle class.” During that time, Eryn remembered how much she disliked eating dinner with her friend.

I hated everything her mother made (laugh). Her mother would make things like pepper steak and I hated peppers and, and they would always have summer sausage, you know that, maybe school kids would sell that. Oh they would love to cut that up and eat it and I just, oh I just hated that (laugh). (twenty-eight years old)

The small winces that accompanied Eryn’s repeated statement that she hated the food signaled her disgust, although her disgust seemed mild compared to Spring, Rachel, and Kara’s liberal use of adjectives like “awful” and “terrible.” While Spring, Rachel, and Kara clearly identified the new food they encountered as ethnic or poor, Eryn did not mark the pepper steak and summer sausage as ethnic or class-based. It is possible that Eryn’s working-class background tempered her disgust for her lower middle-class friend’s food.

Encountering new food did not always produce feelings of disgust in middle-class women. For some, new food provoked feelings of pleasure, surprise, and happiness. Meredith (forty-one years old) vividly recalled how much she enjoyed lobster when her grandparents introduced her to it at age five. Allison reported relishing the strawberry jam her wealthy grandparents ate. Because her parents relied on large jars of grape jelly to feed her large, lower-middle-class family, Allison mused, “To me, wealth was having that strawberry jam” (forty-eight years old). Claudia, forced to spend the day with her father and his business friends rather than hiking with her mother and brother, still recalls how good the prepackaged ice cream cone was that her father bought her. Although she had never had one before, she noted “I guess it was special because my dad did it for me, and he just wasn’t around much. . . . That was a neat, it was a very good ice cream cone” (thirty-seven years old). Eve remembered the excitement she and her family felt when

In the summer some of the farm women would bring in new, fresh, baked goods, and chicken and noodle dinner or just fresh noodles. And that was pretty exciting and I mean we all thought that was pretty neat. Going downtown on Saturdays to this place that "helped out these women from the country," as we called it. (seventy-five years old)

In many of these memories, encountering new food was pleasurable because it either was food someone of the middle class might be expected to eat or because it was linked to a discourse of charity.

In sum, middle-class women who encountered new food remembered feelings of disgust or pleasure. Middle-class women commonly remembered feeling disgust when introduced to new food that was associated with ethnic groups or poor people. Unlike working-class women who decided that the food of others was different but not necessarily better, middle-class women's encounters seemed to solidify the idea that the food of poor and ethnic others was inferior and hence disgusting. Pleasure was more commonly associated with new food when a middle-class woman might be expected to eat it or when it was linked to a discourse of helping the poor.

### THREATENING SITUATIONS<sup>3</sup>

#### Working Class

Of the thirteen working-class respondents, twelve told stories of dangerous or threatening situations that occurred outside of school. Their stories of threatening situations were characterized primarily by anger and sometimes fear.

Several working-class women related memories about family members posing a threat to them and the anger this provoked. Threats ranged from abuse to discipline. Carmen's voice shook with anger as she describes finding threatening letters her alcoholic and abusive father wrote to her mother in which he says all these "really horrible things" about Carmen and her mother. She concluded her story by stating, "I can't believe I'm connected to this person and I hated him" (twenty-four years old). Emma (sixty-two years old) related the anger, fear, and sadness she felt growing up with an alcoholic father who fought loudly with her mother and whose alcoholic ravings would make mealtimes extremely uncomfortable. Discipline also provoked feelings of anger.

Lise recalled how her father spanked her when she was four and noted that "I hated him for that" (seventy-nine years old). Evelyn's anger at her family was also touched off when they would discipline her:

When I tried to do things to get attention I felt like I got punished every time I turned around. And I felt like that's not fair. Or I would try to talk at the dinner table. Everybody else would be talking and I would try to talk and it was like they didn't want to hear what I had to say. It was only like they listened to what the others had to say. I felt like I was always being shushed, told to be quiet or something, or everybody else talked better than I did or something. They made themselves seen and heard, more than I did. (sixty-one years old)

Evelyn's voice grew louder as she described the injustice of this silencing, and her claim that it was unfair signals her anger as well. These situations were threatening because of insults, a parent's alcoholism, discipline, or silencing, and all generated anger.

A few working-class women remembered being in situations where someone close to them was threatened because they were different. Emma remembered that when her four-foot six-inch tall mother took walks in the neighborhood, children would either stare or make comments about her stature. Emma recalled feeling angry and walking with her mother to protect her (sixty-two years old). Carmen, whose mother was disabled, remembered that she was hurt and angry when the kids at school taunted her about her mother's disability. In high school, Carmen realized that she loved her mother and began to defend her (twenty-four years old). Julia recalled spending her senior year of high school with two male friends driving to the home of a local gay man. They would sit outside and discuss the gay man "in this sort of 'ooh' kind of way, you know?" Julia's phrase "ooh kind of way" implied that her friends were both afraid of and fascinated by the local gay man. Julia was puzzled by their behavior until the next fall, when both of Julia's friends came out as gay (forty-one years old). In all three of these instances, working-class women were close to those who were different and as a consequence they either experienced or participated in episodes of harassment, taunting, and staring. They remembered feeling angry and puzzled at first, and then being protective or accepting later.

In sum, working-class women remembered family members posing a threat, and these stories were characterized primarily by anger. Working-class women also remembered feeling angry and puzzled in



threatening situations that revolved around difference, and later feeling protective or accepting.

### **Middle Class**

Of the fourteen middle-class women, twelve told stories of dangerous or threatening situations that occurred outside of school. These stories were characterized primarily by fear and anxiety. Unlike the working-class women, middle-class women rarely told a story where a family member threatened them. Instead, middle-class women recalled situations where peers or strangers posed a threat.

Threats to end friendships elicited some of the most intense feelings of fear and anxiety. When she was eleven, Allison knew her family was moving to another town after the school year finished. As the time to move approached, Allison remembered how her friends began whispering behind her back. Allison described the anxiety this whispering caused: "I hadn't a clue what was going on. You know I was just really upset, and finally [one friend] broke down and told me that they were planning a surprise going away party for me. So, you know, which eased my mind considerably (laugh)" (forty-eight years old). Helen experienced a great deal of anxiety and fear when one of her friendships actually ended. After a falling out with a friend, the friend turned other kids in the neighborhood against Helen. The ostracism and harassment were so great in the neighborhood that Helen remembered devising elaborate plans to avoid even riding the bus with these kids. "I would desperately, desperately want to avoid that school bus. So I would plead with my mom, you know, could I get a ride, could she pick me up from school? You know, I wanted to ride home on another bus and then walk home or be picked up from [another neighborhood]" (thirty-three years old). Allison's and Helen's stories suggest that the threat or the end of friendships can lead to fear and anxiety.

Conversely, Eleanor's story suggested that avoiding the threatened end of friendships can be one of the sweetest victories:

I've thought of this before. I was three years old (laugh). And I was with this big group of kids outside in my yard. Right at the edge of my backyard was a big tree that kids could climb in. And I think I was a little bit too small to climb at that point but some of the older kids around were climbing in the tree and I was kind of close and somebody kicked me. I think it was unintentional. And I jumped back and one of these kids said

to me “Look she doesn’t know whether to laugh or cry.” And I remember making a decision that I will laugh (laugh). And I laughed (laugh) because I wasn’t going to cry and go in the house or you know anything like that. It was real important to me to stay with this group and not be a baby in that group. (sixty-four years old)

Eleanor was clearly aware that if she cried and went in the house, her ties to the group would be at least temporarily severed. Anxiety, however, is notably absent from Eleanor’s account. I suggest that her sense of triumph was so great that it overshadowed any anxiety she might remember.

Middle-class women sometimes told stories of being threatened by strangers—particularly poor strangers—and the feelings of fear and distress these situations provoked. On a weekend visit to her grandmother, Chloe went with her grandmother to deliver Meals on Wheels. Although she was initially afraid of the older, poor people they visited, Chloe’s grandmother encouraged her to interact with them. Chloe’s fear changed to happiness, and she said “I liked it so much that I asked her ‘Can you do that when I come back?’ (Laugh)” (twenty-six years old). Cheryl remembered driving to a northern city on a family vacation when she was fourteen or fifteen:

And there was so many homeless people on the streets. And that really bothered me because I thought that was very upsetting. Uh you know that a pretty wealthy country you know that they just had people outright living on the street. But that, that, I didn’t like that. I don’t, I don’t like going to poor areas you know. (twenty-nine years old)

Cheryl expressed the intense discomfort she felt encountering homeless people for the first time. Even as she started to critique the inequality that makes homelessness possible, Cheryl’s final sentence expressed her fear of poor people and her refusal to go into areas populated by the poor. Chloe’s and Cheryl’s stories suggest that some middle-class girls are afraid of those who are different and poorer. When they have the chance to interact with those who are different and poorer, middle-class girls may overcome their fear.

In sum, middle-class women rarely recalled family members posing a threat. Their strongest emotions were provoked when peers threatened to end friendships, and these experiences generated feelings of fear and anxiety. When they encountered those who were different

because they were older or poorer, middle-class girls experienced fear and discomfort, which was sometimes alleviated.

## DISCUSSION

The analyses presented here detail a few ways in which structures of feeling manifest at the individual level. In the context of an investigation into the cultural side of social class, women offered salient childhood memories of encountering new food, clothing norm violations, and threatening situations. The detail and vigor with which women recounted these kinds of stories suggests that these experiences are widely shared and important to understanding the experience of social class. Indeed, the strength of these patterns is notable given that I only asked women to tell me a memory that was "somehow related to" food, clothing, and leisure, and not specifically about encountering new food, clothing norm violations, or threatening situations. These experiences, while similar on a nominal level, contained different actors, different sequences of events, and most importantly, different emotional responses by social class.

Stories of clothing norm violations often generated shame and anxiety in working-class women, but they rarely did so for middle-class women. Working-class women remembered feeling ashamed and angry at their peers when peers notified them of clothing norm violations because their clothing was different or inexpensive. Some working-class women remembered feeling anxiety as they subsequently tried to meet their peers' clothing norms, and happiness when they were able to meet those norms. In contrast, middle-class women were notified by mothers, rather than peers, that they had violated their mothers' norms of plain and sensible clothing. Middle-class women responded with feelings of anger toward their mothers and pride in their own abilities to meet their peers' clothing norms.

Different emotions colored the memories of both groups when they encountered food belonging to other groups. Working-class women usually reported surprise when they ate the food of those from higher-class backgrounds, but middle-class women more often reported disgust when they ate new foods associated with ethnic groups or poor people. Under different conditions, encountering new food generated feelings of pleasure and happiness in both working-class and middle-

class women. Working-class women reported pleasure when eating food their families could not afford to buy at home or eating inexpensive food which made an occasion special. Middle-class women recalled feeling pleasure when they ate food a middle-class woman might be expected to eat.

Again, threatening situations provoked different sets of emotions for working-class and middle-class women. It was more common for working-class women to remember times when they felt angry because family members posed a threat. When they experienced a threatening situation because of someone's difference, working-class women felt angry, puzzled, protective, and accepting. Middle-class women, on the other hand, recalled times when peers posed threats and remembered the fear and anxiety these experiences generated. Specifically, threats from peers to end friendships provoked the strongest feelings. In addition, when some middle-class women remembered feeling threatened by the poor, they recalled feeling fear and discomfort.

Each of these experiences generated different sets of emotional responses by social class. It would not be accurate to claim that individual emotions are unique to any particular social class; in the memories described above, women of both social classes described anger, anxiety, fear, happiness, and so on. Moreover, it would be inaccurate to argue that working-class and middle-class women never share an emotional response to a particular experience. Middle-class women encountering new food often experienced disgust, but so did one of the working-class women. Working-class women felt shame when they were unable to meet their peers' clothing norms, but so did three of the middle-class women. Sharing an emotional response was more likely to occur when a woman had experienced class mobility, or when her middle-class status was mitigated by a large family or credit trouble. This suggests that a more nuanced analysis of class status than can be accomplished here is necessary to fully understand how structures of feeling develop. In this analysis, however, there are clear trends in the emotions women used to describe each type of experience and those trends varied by class. I suggest that these different sets of emotional responses constitute evidence of structures of feeling manifesting at the individual level.

In the memories of clothing norm violations, what might explain why working-class women report shame, anger, anxiety, and happiness while middle-class women report anger and pride? Working-class girls,

as a group, had fewer material resources with which to buy relatively expensive clothing that was fashionable. Abby, Maryla, Carmen, Olive, Eryn, and other working-class women in this study reported wearing secondhand clothing and clothes bought at discount department stores. Certainly, this lack of material resources can facilitate an inability to meet peers' clothing norms. However, it does not explain why the experience of violating peers' clothing norms generates specific emotions, nor can it explain why working-class girls like Julia and Beth who had the financial resources to meet peers' clothing norms also described feeling shame when they violated peers' clothing norms.

In their research on working-class women in the United Kingdom, Skeggs (1997) and Steedman (1987) noted that the working classes are subject to greater surveillance, more rules, and more regulations, particularly as working-class people come into contact with charities, government agencies, and schools. Skeggs (1997) argued that the adult working-class women she studied had developed a sophisticated awareness of rules and a deep sense of "getting it right." Indeed, this concern with following the rules resonates with Kohn's (1969) finding that working-class parenting styles emphasize obedience. Thus, the everyday life and culture of a class subject to greater surveillance and the social resources imparted in working-class parenting styles may result in a drive to get it right and follow the rules. Carmen, Olive, and Eryn all anxiously strategized to get their clothing right and follow their peers' clothing rules. In turn, this concern with "getting it right" may account for the shame and anxiety working-class women in this study reported when they "got it wrong" and failed to meet a clothing norm.

Middle-class women, on the other hand, were generally confident about their ability to get it right and follow the rules, as evidenced by their assertions of competence and pride in meeting their peers' clothing norms. Their confidence may be due in part to their financial resources. Undoubtedly, the middle-class women in this study generally had the money necessary to meet their peers' clothing norms. In addition, Kohn's (1969) research indicates that middle-class children are taught to think for themselves, and middle-class women like Cheryl were able to identify their peers' clothing norms and find ways to meet those norms independently. However, the middle-class mothers described in this study were—consciously or unconsciously—socializing their daughters to a class-based clothing aesthetic. The plain and sensible clothing on which these mothers insisted echoes the middle-

class aesthetic of clean lines and minimal decorations portrayed by clothing retailers like *Banana Republic* and *J. Crew* and found in middle-class living rooms (Halle 1993). The financial resources available to these middle-class women and the social resources imparted by middle-class parenting styles may account for their outraged assertions of pride and competence. For those who did not have the financial resources to meet their peers' clothing norms, like Allison and Chloe, the social resources mothers imparted may have mitigated the shame they felt.

Why might most working-class women describe surprise when they encounter the food of the relatively wealthier and some middle-class women describe disgust when they encounter food associated with ethnic groups and poor people? And why might some working-class women be more likely to be angry and puzzled in threatening situations revolving around difference while middle-class women reported fear and discomfort? I speculate that this reflects the more socially homogeneous worlds of the middle-class women in this study. In fact, the middle-class women told far fewer stories about contact with racial and cultural others than did the working-class women in this sample. Given the social homogeneity of the middle class, middle-class girls might not view new food as a way of learning about their neighbors and friends. Middle-class mothers may introduce a variety of foods as part of a general cultural education and a safe way of exploring other cultures without having to interact directly with people of that culture. Some critics have dubbed this use of food "culinary tourism" (Inness 2001). The social distance afforded by the homogeneity of middle-class life might facilitate some middle-class girls' willingness to judge and feel disgust. Similarly, the social homogeneity of middle-class life may leave some middle-class girls unskilled at interacting with people who are different from themselves. Working-class girls, on the other hand, reported that new food gave them insight into the middle and upper classes. I speculate that this reflects the fact that they were actually interacting with members of the group whose food they were eating. Maryla and Abby, in particular, seemed to view eating the food of the wealthy as a way of learning about their parents' employers and schoolmates. The lack of social distance may account for their feelings of surprise, rather than disgust. In addition, the working-class girls' responses to differences like height, disability, and sexual orientation may reflect their greater familiarity with socially diverse networks and schools, and the skills they use to exist in a heterogeneous social world.

In addition to having more socially homogenous worlds, the relatively smaller size of middle-class families (Bachu 1995) may account for the different types of threatening situations and the different emotional responses. Middle-class women's memories revealed that they felt the greatest fear and anxiety when their friendships were threatened. Without large family networks nearby, most middle-class girls in this study relied heavily on friendships with peers for socializing. Working-class girls, on the other hand, expressed their anger and outrage when a family member threatened them. Because working-class families in this study were on average larger and more geographically concentrated, it may be that these working-class girls felt less dependent on any one person in particular for social support and socializing and thus reacted in anger rather than anxiety.

As an exploratory study, this research points to several directions for future research. Because all of my respondents were highly educated women and only one woman was African American, it remains to be seen whether the patterns will hold when women of color, men, and less highly educated adults are interviewed. I did not specifically ask each woman about encountering new food, clothing norm violations, and threatening situations, and so future research might determine how widespread these experiences are by asking about them in particular. In addition, future research could build on the patterns presented here to investigate more fully the roles of class mobility, different childhood class statuses, adult social class, and longitudinal changes in childhood memories in producing structures of feeling.

In her book *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination*, Annette Kuhn argues that "telling stories about the past, our past, is a key moment in the making of our selves" (1995, 2). As the twenty-seven women in this study sat across from me and related childhood memories, they relived and recreated key moments in the making of their classed selves. Some of their memories were colored with only the palest shades of feeling, but many were painted with bright, bold slashes of emotion. As the women recalled their childhood memories, their voices quivered with rage, sunk into the low tones of shame, and pealed with laughter. I argue that the depth and intensity of the emotions accompanying these childhood memories explain why childhood experiences of social class reach into adulthood to affect women's behaviors, skills, beliefs, values, sense of self, and adult class subjectivity. These emotional experiences also help explain the puzzle of how



academics from the working class can still *feel* working class. Working-class academics may feel that the emotions they carry with them from childhood class experiences are so powerful that they weigh equally with adult class experiences. Developing a better understanding of class-based structures of feeling will increase our understanding of how the sociological trinity of education, occupation, and income is transformed into a lasting social class identity.

## NOTES

1. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that emotions are just one component of class subjectivities. Other forces—including memory, discourse, adult class experiences, and structural factors—are also at work in the creation and maintenance of class subjectivities.

2. In this article, when I name a woman as middle class or working class, it should be understood that I am referring to her childhood social class, and not her class status as an adult.

3. When asked to tell me a memory about “something that happened outside of school,” some (mostly middle-class) women told stories of memorable vacations and enjoyable games. However, most women responded with stories of threatening situations. Although this draws the analysis away from the pleasurable and relaxing aspects of leisure, focusing on a widely shared experience allowed me to compare sets of emotional responses generated by one type of experience.

## REFERENCES

- Allison, Dorothy. 1994. *Skin: Talking about sex, class & literature*. Ithaca, NY: Firebrand Books.
- Bachu, Amara. 1995. Fertility of American women, 1994. In *Current population survey*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.
- Bennett, Tony. 1981. *Popular culture: Themes and issues (2): Unit 3: Popular culture: History and theory*. Milton Keynes, UK: Open University Press.
- Counihan, Carole M. 1992. Food rules in the United States: Individualism, control and hierarchy. *Anthropological Quarterly* 65 (2): 55-66.
- Crane, Diana. 2000. *Fashion and its social agendas: Class, gender, and identity in clothing*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Davis, Fred. 1992. *Fashion, culture and identity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Davis, Nancy J., and Robert V. Robinson. 1998. Do wives matter? Class identities of husbands and wives in the United States, 1974-1994. *Social Forces* 76:1063-86.
- DeVault, Marjorie L. 1991. *Feeding the family: The social organization of caring as gendered work*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.



- Dews, C. L. Barney, and Carolyn Leste Law, eds. 1995. *This fine place so far from home: Voices of academics from the working class*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Ehrenreich, Barbara. 1989. *Fear of falling: The inner life of the middle class*. New York: HarperPerennial.
- Griffin, Christine. 1985. *Typical girls? Young women from school to the job market*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Halle, David. 1993. *Inside culture: Art and class in the American home*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Hetherington, Kevin. 1998. *Expressions of identity: Space, performance, politics*. London: Sage.
- Horn, Barbara. 1995. Ruth in August. *Women's Studies Quarterly: Working Class Studies* 23:25-33.
- Inness, Sherrie A. 2001. Introduction: Eating ethnic. In *Pilaf, pozole, and pad thai: American women and ethnic food*, edited by S. A. Inness, 1-13. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Kaiser, Susan B. 1985. *The social psychology of clothing*. New York: Macmillan.
- Karp, David A. 1986. 'You can take the boy out of Dorchester, but you can't take Dorchester out of the boy:' Toward a social psychology of social mobility. *Symbolic Interaction* 9 (1): 19-36.
- Kohn, Melvin. 1969. *Class and conformity: A study in values*. Homewood, IL: Dorsey.
- Kuhn, Annette. 1995. *Family secrets: Acts of memory and imagination*. London: Verso.
- Landor, Liliane. 1988. From the Caribbean to the Arab world: The odyssey of one Dolores Quintero: Or, how do you write about food? In *Charting the journey: Writings by black and Third World women*, edited by S. Grewal, 198-203. London: Sheba Feminist.
- Lareau, Annette. 2000. Social class and the daily lives of children: A study from the United States. *Childhood* 7 (2): 155-71.
- Luttrell, Wendy. 1989. Working-class women's ways of knowing: Effects of gender, race and class. *Sociology of Education* 62:33-46.
- Mahony, Pat, and Christine Zmroczek, eds. 1997. *Class matters: 'Working-class' women's perspectives on social class*. London: Taylor & Francis.
- Marshall, Nancy L. 1991. Personal reflections on crossing the class line. Wellesley, MA: Center for Research on Women, Wellesley College.
- McDaniel, Wilma Elizabeth. 1995. School clothes. *Women's Studies Quarterly: Working Class Studies* 23:7-11.
- Morris, Joan M., and Michael D. Grimes. 1996. Contradictions in the childhood socialization of sociologists from the working class. *Race, Gender & Class* 4 (1): 63-81.
- Penelope, Julia. 1994a. Class and consciousness. In *Out of the class closet: Lesbians speak*, edited by J. Penelope, 13-98. Freedom, CA: Crossing Press.
- . ed. 1994b. *Out of the class closet: Lesbians speak*. Freedom, CA: Crossing Press.
- Raffo, Susan, ed. 1997. *Queerly classed*. Boston, MA: South End Press.
- Roach-Higgins, Mary Ellen, Joanne B. Eicher, and Kim K. P. Johnson, eds. 1995. *Dress and identity*. New York: Fairchild.

- Rubin, Lillian B. 1976. *Worlds of pain: Life in the working-class family*. New York: Basic Books.
- Sennett, Richard, and Jonathan Cobb. 1972. *The hidden injuries of class*. New York: Vintage.
- Skeggs, Beverley. 1997. *Formations of class and gender: Becoming respectable*. London: Sage.
- Steedman, Carolyn. 1987. *Landscape for a good woman: A story of two lives*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Tokarczyk, Michelle M., and Elizabeth A. Fay, eds. 1993. *Working-class women in the academy: Laborers in the knowledge factory*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Walkerdine, Valerie. 1996. Subjectivity and social class: New directions for feminist psychology. *Feminism & Psychology* 6 (3): 355-60.
- Weedon, Chris. 1987. *Feminist practice and poststructuralist theory*. Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell.
- Williams, Raymond. 1961. *The long revolution*. London: Chatto & Windus.
- . 1977. *Marxism and literature*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Wray, Matt, and Annalee Newitz, eds. 1997. *White trash: Race and class in America*. New York: Routledge.
- Zandy, Janet. 1995. *Liberating memory: Our work and our working-class consciousness*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- . 1996. Decloaking class: Why class identity and consciousness count. *Race, Gender & Class* 4 (1): 7-23.